

Mapping the edge :  
a practice-led exploration of the  
poetics of the northern coastline

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by

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## Abstract

This thesis challenges the idea of writing a non-inflected poetry of place. I explore language as a form of cartographic gesture which is analogous to the construction of place through language in the process of making poetry. I explore the selectivity and subjectivity of the originating voice, and discuss how the poem-map might be understood to have a form of objectivity as a record of the human process of place-making.

Language bridges the gap between private and public space. I draw on anthropological and ethnographic thinking to interpret the renewal of meaning as an embodied, grounded process through which self and place are co-constructed. This process is particularly apparent in poetry's concentrated, experimental manipulation of meaning and form. I liken poetic form to the cartographic act of framing, in which, even while employing strategies to submerge their own affect, the originator is fundamentally implicated in the provocational strategy of their work.

This enquiry is deeply contextualised, and deeply practice-led. The northern coastline is understood as an unstable and hybrid zone which is being constantly re-embodied and remade, and so is essentially beyond the reach of the cartographic coloniser. The collection *Summer Ferry* demonstrates my own ongoing rethinking of and retreat from the imposition of final meaning onto the coastal landscape.

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## Prologue : mapping the edge

For centuries, trade and migration routes evolved around the North Sea's coastlines and archipelagos, with bays and inlets providing meeting points for the exchange of goods, language, culture and political ideas (Strachura, 2015). Increasingly, historians and archaeologists place evidence from coastal sites in a European context (Van de Noort, 2012; Carver, 2016) or link them to Scandinavian and Baltic histories (Westerdahl, 2015; Reeploeg, 2016), presenting these communities as part of wider ideological trends as well as local economic, climatological and demographic shifts.

But the coastline is not a distinct, clearly demarcated zone. We are on land - just - but are affected temporally, materially and imaginatively by the proximity of the ocean - a vast, unstable space. Emotionally, its significance is both private and social. Isaac Land, proposing coastal history as a field of study separate from oceanic or land studies, describes these sites as 'messy, intermediate places':

In their diversity, and in their ever-changing nature, coasts parallel the diverse experiences of human beings in their confrontation with water, and each other [...] The coastal continuum admits many fine gradations and strata of experience that "oceanic" history threatens to wash away. (2007:740)

Of the North Sea, the division between sea and land further dissolves as fishing trawlers and oil exploration vessels bring up evidence of hunter-gatherer colonisation of land that is now lies just beneath the surface (Amkreutz et al., 2018:22).

Robert Van der Noort, in his critical review of archaeological reconstructions at maritime sites, suggests that these locations are more prone to misinterpretation due to our anachronistic addition of a post-Enlightenment divide between Nature and Culture (2012:2). The sociohistorical construction of the sea, he argues, has relied on the implicit assumption that coastal sites were understood by their inhabitants as continuous with dry land, with the settled, inhabited landscape (2012:15). For this reason researchers have been inclined to understand ritual depositions near the sea's

edge as gestures towards what lies outside the boundaries of this lived space. Meaning is created out of a local phenomenology in response to the community's understanding of itself as living adjacent to an unpredictable, unstable and frequently chaotic zone (2012:26).

Van der Noort proposes an alternative conceptual model. The coastline should be thought of as a hybrid landscape, as an extension of that community's encultured



Figure 1. The Roos Carr boat. Image © Hull and East Riding Museum, Hull Culture and Leisure Ltd.

space. John Wylie defines a hybrid landscape as ‘an encounter, a “contact zone”, an exchange and transformation [...] no longer the preserve of either coloniser or colonised’ (2007:136). ‘People lived with the North Sea in a hybrid relationship, with both parties exercising agency’, says Van der Noort (2012:69). He draws on Tim Ingold’s idea of the ‘taskscape’ (Ingold, 1993:153) to present this hybrid coastal landscape as meaningful in multiple simultaneous and interconnected ways - symbolic, emotional, kinaesthetic, epistemological. By this thinking, archaeological evidence found at North Sea coastal sites can be understood as deliberate site-specific gestures from within this inconstant, fertile but radically unstable environment.

The idea of hybrid landscape allows us to examine the whole phenomenology of place, and how this is expressed. In this thesis, I explore the coastline not as a border at which categorical opposites (nature/culture, human/nonhuman) meet and clash, where we glimpse the meaningless beyond; but rather as a point where we mediate and manage the unstable edges of our lived world. I understand 'place' as referring to our culturally mediated understanding of the space we inhabit, an understanding which is laid over but also bound up with the physical terrain itself. Yi-Fu Tuan described how we give meaning to specific areas in an intimate and direct way, through our multi-sensory knowledge of our close surroundings along with conceptual ideas of their significance, including as this is mediated and expressed by symbolic and artistic framings (Tuan, 1977:6). Tuan's distinction between 'space' and 'place' is firmly rooted in his examination of the complex nature of human experience, from inchoate feeling to explicit conceptual framing. 'The human endowment contains

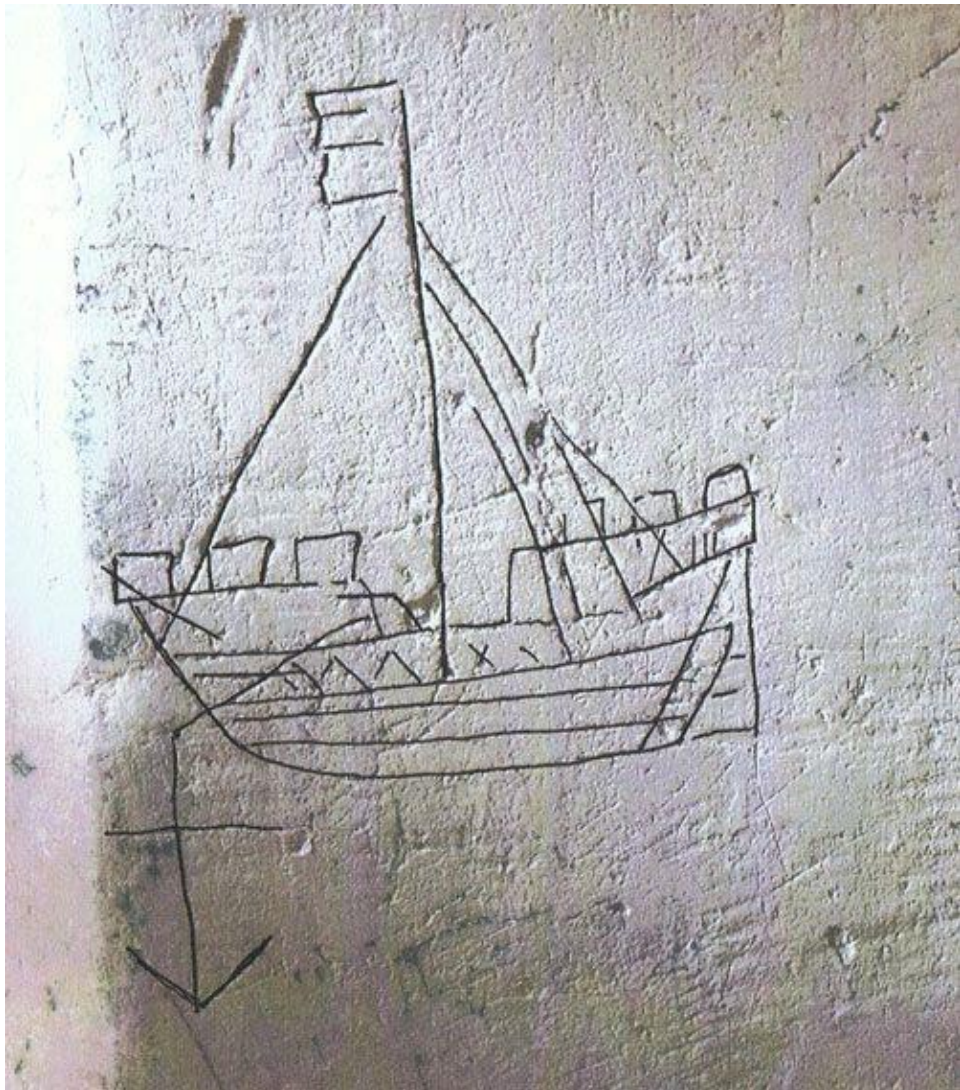


Figure 2. Graffito from Cley next the Sea. Image © Norfolk Mediaeval Graffiti Survey.



sensory organs similar to those of other primates', says Tuan, 'but it is capped by an exceptionally refined capacity for symbolization' (1977:5). The 'human endowment' is therefore a constant negotiation between the private and the cultural. In the prologue to culture, Tuan says, there is a movement from 'space' to 'place' as an undifferentiated terrain becomes known through our different modes of experience - 'sensorimotor, tactile, visual, conceptual' (1977:6-7) - and endowed with value. The defining quality of place therefore is that it orders and focusses human intention and experience.

Tuan also notes how this part private, part shared world can resist ready communication, and the value and perceptivity of the artistic response in recording the intricate world of 'humanistic insight' (1977:7). In this thesis I explore how, round the northern coastline of the North Sea and the nearby North Atlantic, our phenomenology of place, and therefore our language of place, reflects this interrelationship of symbolic framings, patterns of occupation and the terrain itself. My own poetry of place grows out of this synthesis of the physical and the cultural, a process which, I argue, is part of the ongoing human process of making oneself *at home* in our surroundings. The language and techniques of poetry, I will argue, can articulate this constant negotiation between the private and the cultural; this ongoing synthesising of all our ways of knowing to create the place where we live.

In this thesis I understand the northern coastline as a hybrid, embodied environment, constantly in flux. In Van der Noort's archaeological reconstructions, the ritual objects and graffiti that have been deliberately placed here represent acknowledgement of and interaction with the sea as agency. He cites as an example the Roos Carr boat in Hull's West Riding Museum (Figure 1); it is highly stylised, and seems to have been deliberately hidden. Other examples, I believe, are the votive ships hung inside and carved into the walls of churches round the Baltic and North Sea coasts (Westerdahl, 2013:344; Norfolk Mediaeval Graffiti Survey, 2018). These objects and drawings are often stylised representations rather than actual models of boats (as in, for example, Figure 2). Their dimensions and details take into account the viewer's location below them inside the church; they are gestures made for and in this exact spot (Westerdahl, 2013:339). The poem, too, I argue, can be understood as a site-specific gesture by which the phenomenology of place is negotiated and expressed.

Using Van der Noort's theory, these gestures - concrete or verbal - can be understood as intended not simply to enculture or fix the makers' surroundings, but to enact and renew an interrelationship within this liminal zone.

This thesis is a poetic exploration of this hybrid landscape: a zone which is constantly becoming, which we must constantly reinterpret so that we can locate ourselves in it, continually reorganising what and how we know with what we find. This process is dramatically illustrated in poetry - 'the most concentrated form of verbal expression' (Pound, 1991:36). Its concision of form and language, and the selectivity and subjectivity of the originating voice, foreground the process of meaning-making. A study of the poetics of the coastline allows us to examine poetry as a condensed mode of expression which reveals and records this enactment. In poetry's manipulation of form and metaphor, and of the given rules of language itself, I argue, we can glimpse how the world it words is constructed and tested.

I understand the process of languaging the coastline as a form of cartographic activity in which the landscape is (temporarily) stabilised. Roger Starling describes the cartographic map as a 'dream of presence', the product of our intentional structuring of space, our 'will-to-figure' (1998:108). Yet, says Starling, there is no actual world that corresponds 'in a relationship of homiosis or *adequatio* [...] to the image thus presented, outside the performance itself'. Maps have 'an ontological status poised somewhere between fact and fiction, illusion and reality (assuming for the moment that the distinction is a valid one)' (1998:107). The process of mapping out a landscape - material, fictive, poetic - requires us to draw on critical evaluations, social inscriptions, relations of power. We create 'land marks', investing them with significance: we select, edit, ignore, foreground, emphasise and symbolically encode this topography so that we can re-present it for a particular audience. Its symbolic codes and structural devices only bear meaning when they are recognised and knowingly enacted. The map is a cultural enactment of this place for that audience.

This action of our 'will-to-figure' in mapping out a landscape is all the more visible in poetry, in which restrictions of form and language yield a more concentrated form of plotting out. To engage with the cartographic map, says Starling, is to engage with a performative enactment of an imagined world. In this thesis, I argue that this

imaginative engagement is analogous with the process of engaging with the representation of place through language.

This project is deeply contextualised, and deeply practice-led: its research questions and the development of the poetry collection *Summer Ferry* reflect my own long-term interests in the ways that people have made place along this part of the northern coastline. As an enquiry this thesis open-ended: the poems in the collection *Summer Ferry* enact an ongoing rhetorical play of ideas, moving back and forth between the different strands of this theme, matching them against each other. The cross-disciplinary interests of this thesis have grown out of practical, immersive research, of testing out ideas by putting myself *here*. Angus is a quiet, seaward sloping landscape located at the southern temperate edge of a much larger, sub-polar world. There is evidence of local arrival and settlement stretching back for almost four thousand years.

In my poetry, the northern coastline is both subject and idea. Around the northern North Sea rim, the landscape is constantly being made and unmade by vast systems and currents that begin thousands of miles away in the North Atlantic (Doody et al., 1993). From the clifftop village of Auchmithie, one can watch these weather systems coming in from behind the horizon, and see how they are funnelled by the rise of land round the Forth and Tay estuaries and the Montrose Basin. The presence of these weather fronts and water movement can be felt far inland as storms or sea fogs are trapped in river valleys or held in the wide estuaries; our nearness to the edge of the sea is felt even if unseen. Particularly after a storm, in the tidewrack and in the damage wrought on land, we find the detritus of a real and unpredictable intermingling of narratives and categories, both material and abstract. In this heightened multisensory zone, the real-time processes of self-orientation and self-location, of giving meaning and scale to this shifting, unstable environment, become all the more visible.

The proposition that this thesis tests is that the northern coastline must be understood as an embodied, hybrid and unstable space which is liminal and therefore beyond the reach of the cartographic coloniser. Here, the structures and concepts we have used to stabilise our world are tested to the point of crisis; our encodings of the

past and present start to disintegrate. Gestures of enculturation, of negotiating and revising our different ways of knowing, become visible in our (re)linguaging of this place. In this thesis, the less domesticated, less inhabited northern coastline stands for that zone in which we are forced to confront and actively renegotiate the fluid edges of our lived world as a continuous, almost conscious process: 'the north as metaphor, almost as metaphysics' (White, 2006:85).

Yet the idea of the destabilised viewpoint, now enshrined in postmodernist thinking, challenges this fundamental linking of voice and discrete, unfragmented self. The poem-world becomes ontologically unstable once the link between voice and self is loosened, an instability that is echoed in the physical instability of the coastal environment. Language performs the cartographic process of stabilising and ordering, bridging the gap between private and public space as it reveals and performs our intentional structuring of our shared, lived world. Meaning-making becomes a collusive, creative process of reordering voices and narratives, of synthesising ways of knowing, in which speaker and audience are equally implicated. In investigating language's cartographic function, attention thus shifts to the stabilising, appropriative nature of language itself.

## Chapter 1. A poetics of home: Niedecker, Burnside, Graham

'What's intimate?' asks Gary Snyder:

The feet and hands, one's confection of thoughts, knowledges, and memories; the kitchen and the bedding. And there is one's language. How wonderful to be born to become a Native Speaker, to be truly native of something.

*(No Nature 1992:v)*

The late 20<sup>th</sup> century turn to a reflexive ethical examination of our poetics of place is intrinsically bound up in contemporary post-pastoral cultural and environmental concerns (Bristow, 2015:1; Gifford, 2012:5). In the work of Gary Snyder, Charles Olson and others, John Wrighton finds a self-conscious attention to 'an ethical responsibility in the representation and social production of space' (2010:53). We construct our identity within the relations of exchange that language signifies, he says, and therefore we have an inescapably assigned moral responsibility:

Language is dependent on relationships and as such, immediately inscribes ethical terms [...] Its central terms, the verb "to be" and the pronoun "I", for example, are thus revealed as in fact moral terms. (2010:4-5)

Language is so deeply inhabited, Wrighton holds, that the very act of languaging implicates the self at the deepest level. The result is a 'traumatised semiotics': the language we use is intrinsically self-orientated, revealing 'the phenomenological prioritisation of the self'. This says Wrighton, is the primary challenge in the development of a 'poethical' praxis (2010:7).

This chapter is concerned with the unity and coherence of the poetic voice and the transference of this coherence to the poet's environment. I examine the ecology of place in the poem-worlds of Lorine Niedecker and John Burnside, both of whom have had a formative influence on my own efforts to position myself as observer and

speaking voice in my own poems. Through the meta-poetics of W.S. Graham, I then discuss how poetic language can continue to construct or signal its environment even while the referential function of language is put under stress.

My interest in this issue began with both the desire as a poet to develop an outward-looking poetry of place, and a philosophical and technical interest in the issue itself. To what extent is poetry always a poetry of the self? As Wrighton pointed out, the issue of appropriation of what we describe is not just an ethical matter but a conceptual and phenomenological problem. But where our medium is language, can the poet minimise - or at least manage - their own presence in the field of the poem? This issue has become central in representations of place:

Is language something we always point to outside of ourselves, in the material world, or something that arises within us? How can references to borders between outside and inside, the skin that keeps us in shape, be further tested in poetic processes? (Davidson, 2013:14)

Ian Davidson surveys contemporary experiments in site-specific performance and location of poetry, in which poets and poems are not 'outsiders', moving in 'destructive' ways, but where performance and placing aim to be 'ecologically sensitive' to the setting and to the histories of the people who live there. This idea of maintaining the ecology of the poem's setting suggests that there can be a distinction between our lived-in world and how we speak of it. Yet this contradicts the postmodern idea of language as a generative and innovative process, in which meaning produces and is produced within a constantly evolving interpersonal, cultural setting: 'its determination is never certain or saturated' (Derrida in Kamuf, 1991:84). Once we accept the essential link between meaning and socio-historical context - that semantic meaning is ultimately transactional - it becomes impossible to think of the poetic field as a separate, non-personal space into which a poem, as a language-object, is placed.

The Objectivist experiment of the early/mid 20<sup>th</sup> century was an historical moment at which concern with an authentic form of representation became a debate over how to manage the voice and inflected presence of the poet within the poem. Though the poets of the Objectivist movement gained little attention at the time, their

writing has been revisited and revised thematically as interest has grown in the poetics of linguistic materiality and the reader's role in creating meaning from text (Scroggins, 2013:26). Preoccupation with the accuracy of utterance continued to evolve through Charles Olson's insistence on fidelity to both the world as encountered and the sources of the poem's language; as did the idea of an objectivity that can arise from an authentic poetic form. Olson's projective ('projectile, percussive, prospective' (1997:239)) poetics has been drawn into subsequent mainstream poetic practice (Scroggins, 2013:14; Davidson, 2013:6; Wrighton, 2010:26). Mark Scroggins describes how Olson's essay *Projective Verse* is a foundational document for various postmodern concerns such as the focussing of attention on the poem's textuality, and the poetic possibilities of physically manipulating word, phrase and source text (2013:24). 'The Objectivist 'nexus' proved to have a tenacious and highly influential half-life' (Scroggins, 2013:16).

Elizabeth Willis describes the poetry of Zukofsky, Niedecker and Olson as a product of their age, imbued with a progressive leftist politics and a modernist attention to the processes of making (2008:xvii). Their writing is intimately rooted in and turned towards its place and time, explicitly inspired by the drive towards an authentic engagement with and poetic representation of a common experience 'that of itself will speak to all men' (Zukofsky, 1981:3). The poet is 'both observer and instrument' (Zukofsky, 1981:6). Thus, an examination of the role of the poet in generating this universally meaningful poetic field, and the transparency of presence they can achieve, are key issues. The selectivity and subjectivity of the organising voice must necessarily come under scrutiny.

One common theme in Objectivist-influenced writing was the virtue of economy of form and phrasing. Scroggins describes Louis Zukofsky's minimalist form as 'a kind of hygiene or askesis of composition', a 'fidelity to both the objects of the poet's perceptions and the words with which the poet deals' (2013:17). This hinges on Zukofsky's idea of

the entirety of the single word which is itself a relation, an implied metaphor, an arrangement and a harmony [...] the combined letters -

the words - are absolute symbols for objects, states, acts, interrelations, thoughts about them. (Zukofsky, 1931b:279)

The 'rested totality' that the poet must strive for depends on this clarity of shared insight, on there being a recognisable, direct, unambiguous connection between the word as used by the poet and its meaning for the reader. The entire project thus becomes 'a sustained analogue for the representation of the material condition of objects and persons in the world' (Scroggins, 2013:19).

A second theme in Objectivist poetics is the linking of the poet's voice to the bodily act of utterance, and the idea the word-object has its own cargo of associations and multiple meanings which are intrinsically linked to word-sound and which are automatically invoked when the word is spoken. In Zukofsky's aesthetic, says Robert Creely, 'poetry is always a premise of sounds' (Creely, 2011:xi); sound and syllabics draw our ear, shaping meaning and beginning our process of immersion in it.

Lorine Niedecker is of particular interest to me as she too felt herself to be intrinsically of and in her home territory, the floodplains of Fort Atkinson, Southern Wisconsin, also a fluid and sometimes catastrophically unstable zone. In her writing career she repeatedly returned to the matter of how to acknowledge her own presence in the poem, both as a thing among other things in this landscape and for her own act of noticing as the necessary circumstances for the poem. She was uniquely aware of the sound of her own voice, and of regional accent and phrasings. She also paid particular attention to poetic form, as well as language, as a presencing device.

Niedecker was deeply influenced by Zukofsky's 1931 edition of *Poetry* and its call for authentic representation via a stringent paring down of form and attention to the word-as-spoken (Dent, 1983:35; Willis, 2008:xiv). In her correspondence with Louis Zukofsky she describes her desire to minimise her own presence and signature - to write a poetry unmarked by ego, but which allows her to be personally present, observing and attending to 'the already existing, splendidly adequate fact' (Niedecker in Penberthy, 1993:32). Yet this is a reflexive form of attention; all the while she is aware of her active noticing as that which binds these things into a whole. In her sequence 'Traces of Living Things' (published in her 1968 collection *North Central*) we



see how she shifts across locations, moving between the physical and the psychological, between reverie and intense, local attention:

*TV*

See it explained -  
compound interest  
and the compound eye  
of the insect

the wave-line  
on shell, sand, wall  
and the forehead of the one  
who speaks

We are what the seas  
have made us

longingly immense

the very veery  
on the fence (1996:70)

Her bare, haiku-like five-line form was developed, she told Zukofsky, as an unobtrusive means of recording the event of her speaking voice, of indicating her presence as the one who notices (Niedecker in Penberthy, 1993:243). Her phrasing - described by Scroggins as 'a concise but oblique American "folk" voice' (2013:20) - aims to echo 'the quiet intimacies', the hesitations and cadences, of unrhetorical speech (Niedecker in Penberthy, 1993:230), and '[t]he subconscious and the presence of the folk, always there' (Niedecker in Dent, 1983:36). These poems aim to be autobiographical though not confessional: her aim is to make herself ordinary, a thing of this environment.

Yet at the same time she understands herself as a creature deeply immersed in both the sounds, texture and textuality of language, and who announces herself through it. Of a draft sent by Zukofsky of one of his poems, she said: 'I love it because I feel that I think this way, not thought but everything in a movement of words' (Niedecker in Penberthy, 1993:84-85). In the poem 'Paeon to Place' (1996:79-87), also from the collection *North Central*, the flooding river landscape of her home in Wisconsin becomes the immersive medium in which, and through which, she writes:

I was the solitary plover  
a pencil  
for a wing-bone  
From the secret notes  
I must tilt  
  
upon the pressure  
execute and adjust  
In us sea-air rhythm  
'We live by the urgent wave  
of the verse' (106-115)

Again the poem's field is expansive, reaching from the poet-plover's ground site to its mythically charged migration route. In the extensive pre-reading she undertook as preparation for writing, she immersed herself in a wide range of texts including reference books and technical journals. Her poetic subjectivity is a product of this broad engagement with other voices and with popular and literary culture and global issues, as suffused through her critical sense of regional identity, her local vernacular and her attendance to ordinary detail. In 'Poet's Work' she describes the writing process as a 'condensery' (1996:60). In a letter to Kenneth Cox she said: 'all I could do was fill up the subconscious and let it lie and fish it up later' (in Penberthy, 1993:89).

As her poetics developed, Niedecker moved further away from a strict adherence to 'what is objectively perfect' (Zukofsky, 1931a:45), finding greater need in her poetry to recognise an essential fluidity in the movements of the mind, and a

reflective 'awareness of everything influencing everything' (quoted in DuPlessis, 2005:397). Her correspondence contains numerous references to how she found she had superseded Zukofsky's first ideas: 'I went to school to Objectivism but now I often say *There is something more*' (in DuPlessis, 2005:396). However she continued to rely on the visual and technical discipline of bare poetic form as a strategy of self-conscious self-control by which excesses of feeling or elaboration were pared off, leaving only what was absolutely necessary to her meaning. The allusions in 'Paeon to Place' (1996:79-87) to Yeats' poem 'Brown Penny' ('Roped not 'looped / in the loop / of her hair' (88-90)) and to Shelley at work appear alongside all the other things of her 'floating life', as one continuous phenomenal world for the poet:

Maples to swing from  
Pewee-glissando  
          sublime  
                  slime-  
song  
  
Grew riding the river  
Books  
          at home-pier  
                  Shelley could steer  
as he read (96-105)

In chains of end-rhymes and half-rhymes, the words - 'swing', 'sublime', 'slime', 'song' - are semi-isolated in white space almost as landmarks in this fluid, sonorous poem-world. This echoes Zukofsky's idea of the poem 'direct[ed] along a line of melody' (1931b:273), the ear leading the mind. '[S]he doesn't select words but yields to their specific weight,' says Jonathan Skinner, 'following the grain of their own highly variable trajectories, their snags and turns' (2008:50).

'Paeon to Place' was written when Niedecker was in her sixties and is one of her last works. It reveals the extent of her negotiation with other schools of thought, such as the 'surréalistes'. For Niedecker, these ideas - the movement of the mind by

association, dreams, a sense of absurdity in the everyday - formed a natural synthesis that enhanced her allegiance to a rigor of form and expression (Dent, 1983:35-36). Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes 'Paeon to Place' as:

a selective autobiography of the growth of a poet's mind, an American mini-*Prelude* [...] the "I" of the poem emerges by a second, self-conscious, waterlogged birth into her social place, her fiercely secular humanist attitudes, her anticonsumerist ethos, and her strong sense of material conditions and social class. (2005:403)

The poem is a concentrated montage arranged in a non-narrative, loosely chronological sequence. It builds meaning by the cut and juxtaposition of its fragments, and by the intense focus that the form brings to both what is present and what is implied. The poem unfolds her phenomenological and intellectual encounter with the texts and textures of her world: 'a both/both ideology' (DuPlessis, 2005:404), a movement through and around ideas and encounters rather than a hard and fast dualism of poet and place, or poet and poem. The river, which has risen and fallen throughout the poem, has multiple identities. It is, of course, the river she grew up alongside and whose flood cycle has dominated her life. It is also herself in this fluid and immersive poetics of place:

I grew in green  
slide and slant  
of shore and shade  
Child-time - wade  
thru weeds (91-95)

The river is also the work of the poet. 'I possessed / the high word' (186-187), she says: she stands apart, looking down at this floodscape. But it is also the poem itself as an ongoing process of consolidation and configuring, a process she calls herself to be attentive to while she performs it:

On this stream  
my moonnight memory

washed of hardships  
manoeuvres barges  
thru the mouth (191-195)

The Objectivist desire to find a proper place for the poet began with the idea of the poet sustaining a non-partial, non-ego-inflected gaze which thereby allowed them to act as both voice and conduit of a universally meaningful experience. Niedecker challenged this position of non-partiality by aiming to presence herself as an indigenous thing in a landscape of things, and by accepting language as intrinsic to her way of being. In this way her positioning of the poet as simultaneously conduit and voice exceeded Zukofsky's: Niedecker is both protagonist of this liminal, generative world and inextricable from it. In the language of the poem, this world is continually being thought out and thought into existence.

These issues are to the fore in John Burnside's collection *The Asylum Dance* (2000). These poems of the Fife coastline enact the centrality and identity of the poet-narrator in this world as it is mediated, synthesised and inhabited. This poem-world is constantly becoming. Burnside is particularly relevant in this enquiry as he has a specific interest in northern landscapes and the northern coastal margins, understanding his home in Fife as geographically and phenomenologically at the temperate edge of the sub-arctic north (Dósa, 2009:113). Travelling in upland Scandinavia, Burnside described his sudden sense 'of being suddenly and uniquely at home' as 'utter and immediate' (2012:23); a theme he goes on to develop in later collections. In these earlier poems, his attention to the local and his sense of the shifting, ontologically unstable, actively mediated landscape match my own understanding of this part of the northern coastline as being constantly (re)negotiated and (re)stabilised, and contiguous and continuous, geographically and culturally, with territories farther north. For these reasons, Burnside's idea of dwelling as a process of self-orientation within interwoven layers of interwoven layers of symbolic meaning, reference and scale have been influential in framing the issues this thesis examines, and in my own development of a poetry of place.

The transitory ecology of home is the subject of *The Asylum Dance* (2000). Written while he lived in the fishing village of St Monans, it records his arrival and his

active process of self-orientation within its residual, felt layers of occupation as he begins to make his home. The collection is prefaced by a quotation from Heidegger's *Poetry, language, thought*:

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? (2013:159)

This continuous search is enacted in the long form of these poems. Extended phrases run on between stanzas and between poems, enacting Heidegger's idea of the process of continuous poetic creation 'which lets us dwell'; of active self-realisation through language using the layers and accretions of text and symbol, all triggered by and anchored in the physical landscape itself. The poems, overlapping in theme and often form, come to rest not at points of ontological or spiritual resolution, but at moments within the collection's long cadence where he finds, or pragmatically resolves to make, a peace with the contingency of dwelling, with its essential condition of non-resolution: 'poetry as a letting-dwell, as a - perhaps even *the* - distinctive kind of building' (Heidegger, 2013:213).

In *Ports* (2000:1-8), as in other poems, layers of human presence are stirred by the narrator's arrival. Observations, empirical data, local knowledge and local history, a felt residuum of settlement, trades and dialects, the fragmented continuity of ancient settlements, local weather patterns, private and collective memory - the whole aftermath of centuries of human occupation - are synthesised to create a tangible and spiritual place of arrival. The impossibility - philosophical and practical - of arriving at a resolution of this Heideggerian plight is signalled by Burnside's repeated use of phrases such as 'something like' or 'more felt than understood', and by using simile to point to, rather than describing directly. Tom Bristow has described this as a disclosure of self-in-world, a 'negative poetics' which reveals the displacement of world around self by which the poet 'pierces through the critical meditations on how things are "fixed" or "held"', and so can create a new ecology of self-in-world (2011:151). Yet the overriding effect of this continual withholding of resolution is to

make us conscious of ourselves in this as-yet-unresolved, and intrinsically unresolvable, space.

Burnside uses the open field poetics of breath as line, linking form to the spoken voice through the deployment of enjambment and white space, and of word-sound ('gun', 'gulls'; 'wynd', 'whenever'; 'name', 'rain') to create the sonorous space of this poem-world, and to generate the succession of ideas from which it is built. In this ancient/ageless space, time is compressed or expands; the bus will wait 'for minutes'; daylight and darkness intermingle. This is a testing of self in language: normative human framing is displaced in favour of a much wider historical, temporal, cultural scale of reference against which the self must constantly search for bearings. This technique also builds time into the form itself. By interspersing the familiar with the strange or uncanny, and by drawing the reader in through the use of 'we', and 'you', the reader comes to actively collude in the process 'dwelling' as it unfolds; in building this intimate, liminal world.

Heidegger's idea of authentic dwelling denies the dualism of self and/in place: 'world and things do not subsist alongside one another. They penetrate each other [...] Things bear world. World grants things' (Heidegger, 2013: 199). Burnside's enactment of this process reveals the moment of realisation of not-yet-belonging, of the plight of the gap between the self and home. In 'Geese' (2000:9-11) it is in his instinctive alignment with the migrating geese. In 'Fields' (2000:35-44) it is in his empathy with the partially present 'Gude Man', never quite seen but familiar and poignantly ordinary, 'wifeless and quiet, lacking in conversation' (194). In 'Adam and Eve' (2000:20-22) it is the realisation that there is always 'something more to learn [...] our bodies / half inhabited' (52, 55-56).

In 'Adam and Eve', their first acts of *poiesis* also trigger the processes of decay in their paradisiacal environment:

the meadows they had laced with given names  
muffled in snow  
the net of birdsong  
gone. (14-17)

The act of naming is significant throughout this collection, from the naming of the yacht in 'Ports' (2000:8), to the closed empiricism of the schoolroom science class in 'Sense Data', to the nick-names given to the 'Gude Man' which charm him into being. The pure speech act of *poiesis* is a 'letting-dwell' (Heidegger, 2013:213). 'Poetry first of all admits man's dwelling into its very nature, its presencing being. Poetry is the original admission of dwelling' (2013: 225). Yet the relationship between ourselves and our language quickly becomes inverted, says Heidegger; language becomes merely 'the means of expression', its formulae and customs becoming and enabling 'the master of man' so that we are distanced from original, generative meaning, from language's truth-telling origin (Heidegger, 2013:213). This process is likened by Burnside in 'Adam and Eve' to the blank stillness of snow fall:

the gardens we remember in our sleep  
filling with snow all day  
as we come to require

this white-out

this  
sufficiency of names. (61-66)

For Burnside, the quest for an adequate poetic expression thus becomes a process of sorting and sifting through everyday ways of knowing and describing, to excavate an original moment of clarity. In his page-wide poetic forms, his fragmented phrasing and his postponed resolutions, we see not only the reproduction of the hesitations of human speech, but also a real-time asserting and then undoing of the certainties language implies. As with Niedecker, in the process of creating the poem, place is continually being thought out and thought into existence.

W.S. Graham's reputation and influence have grown significantly in recent years, with a number of anthologies of Graham-inspired poetry and prose published in



2018 to mark his centenary<sup>1</sup>. Douglas Dunn describes him as ‘a poet of place, or, rather, places - Greenock, Cornwall, and imaginary or “constructed” spaces’ (2005:xv); yet his poems are not located in these landscapes, but are constructed in the intersubjective space, the porous border between the private and the cultural. His work is important to this thesis for its direct engagement with the textuality of place and of the speaking voice. As with Niedecker and Burnside, the process of writing the poem creates the place that the poem is ‘about’. His vast body of work is a sustained exploration of the materiality of language: his poems are public spaces in which the reader is co-opted by the knowing ‘I’ who simultaneously engages them in the tussle with language itself (Pollard, 2012:22). As with Niedecker and Burnside, Graham relies on direct address, familiarity of reference, the coherence of the speaking voice and the musicality of language in his self-conscious, reflexive positioning of himself-as-poet whose task is to point to and navigate the signalling of meaning in utterance. Graham explores how language continues to construct or signal this space, even while the unity and coherence of meaning is put under stress. He uses forms which appear conventional on the page, with consistent stanza lengths and left justifications. However he subverts the expectations these set up by consistently stretching the link between signifier and signified until the reader’s active, almost effortful participation in maintaining this link becomes self-conscious. For Graham, the speaking subject inhabits and performs the language of the poem, but also exists apart from it, and is aware of the gap between language and self. ‘This is a public space / Achieved against subjective odds’ (‘The Constructed Space’ (2005:161)).

Graham set out his stall early in his career. In *Notes on a Poetry of Release* (first published in 1946) he stated:

A poem is made of words. It is words in a certain order, good or bad by the significance of its addition to life [...] Each word is touched by and filled with the activity of every speaker. Each word changes every time it is brought to life. (1999:380)

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<sup>1</sup> For example Boast, R., Ching, A. & Hamilton, N. (eds) (2018) *The caught habits of language*. Bristol: Donut Press; Graham, W.S. & Hofmann, M. (2018) *W.S. Graham*. New York: NYRB; Buchan-Watts, S. & Singer, L. (eds) (in press) *Try to be better*. Norwich: Test Centre.

Its power of 'release' lies in the poem's independent existence after the poet has written it. 'The poem itself is dumb', said Graham. 'The poem itself is not a handing out of the same packet to everyone [...] It is the reader's involuntary reply' (1999:381). For Graham, says Matthew Francis, '[t]he condition of textuality makes every poem an elegy' (2004:17).

In *The White Threshold* (2005:92), for example, Graham's phrasings are deliberately and elaborately unconventional, but we are drawn (or 'released') into the poem by its lulling sounds and rhythms and by the seemingly half-formed images and allusions, for which we begin to imagine meanings. The long sentences which break at the end of the stanza are followed by the short one-line restatements, echoing the rhythms of waves on the shore. Recurring end-rhymes ('water', 'farers', 'here', 'air', 'ladders') and dramatic words at the beginning and end of lines ('drowned', 'stormed', 'always', 'away') implant a sense of conscious, willed forward movement so that the reader is carried through and over the strange word order:

Let me all the ways from the deep heart  
Drowned under behind my brow so ever  
Stormed with other wandering, speak  
Up famous fathoms well over strongly  
The pacing whitehaired kingdoms of the sea. (1-5)

Phrases such as 'So ever bell worth my exile' and 'maiden-headed foamthatch' invite us to imagine meanings: Graham is drawing our attention to the sonorous, performative qualities of language which are essential to meaning-making in poetry. Peter Riley describes Graham's project as the possibility of poetry as a meta-language, in which:

the figures of language, while retaining traces of their representative function, become themselves objects of attention, performing their own acts and creating their own theatre without becoming fixed as symbols.  
(Riley, 2004)

The 'white threshold' might simultaneously be the breaking waves at the sea edge, or the white space around the poem itself which isolates it and which we must cross to enter its 'public space', or the blank intersubjective space in which we encounter each other via language itself. The single line between each five-line stanza positions and confronts the 'you' and 'I' in this 'drowning saving' (44) space.

Graham also uses marginal, ontologically unstable landscapes to dramatise the tenuous, provisional stability, and the textual construction, of our language-world. Of 'Malcolm Mooney's Land' (2005:153-157), Francis says: 'Mooney's hallucinations provide [Graham] with temporary and insubstantial versions of everything he has lost by being part of the textual wasteland' (2004:113). Graham understands the poem as a relic of a gesture of self-location through language; of an act of triangulation in an essentially languaged landscape. Graham's late poem 'Five Verses Beginning with the Word Language' (2005:331-333) summarises this life-long confrontation with, and self-orientation within, this organic and seamless entanglement of gestures of speech. His mission is to define the self, the 'I', that is revealed through the language which performs it: 'to plot the place / I speak from. I am at the jungle face // Which is my home' (7-9).

This intertextuality is explored to the full in 'The Nightfishing' (2005:105-120), in the extended metaphor of the deep-sea trawl. At first, the speaking voice of the narrator steers the course of the poem, working to keep to a five-syllable line and to position repetitions and rhymes at the ends of adjacent lines. Occasionally its movement needs conscious correction:

I'm come to this place  
(Come to this place)  
Which I'll not pass  
Though one shall pass  
Wearing seemingly  
This look I move as. (7-12)

As we reach deeper water, there is a loosening of form: repetitions and end-rhymes give way to less structured aural patterns. Meaning shifts and slides across the surface while the deeper rhythm of this language is sustained, carrying us forward:

With its rough smithers, and those swells lengthening  
Easy on us, outstride us in a slow follow  
From stern to stem. (119-121)

Sentences build up from single to polysyllabic words, then subside. Assonance and alliteration are key to the music of Graham's poetry, as is his manipulation of how stresses fall. These poems are deeply oral.

'These words take place' (104). Graham examines the act of speaking as an intersubjective gesture that announces the self. For Graham, this speaking self is performed by language, which creates his identity in the public space - his 'ghostly constant' (223). The words that are spoken are formed to fit the context in which they are spoken:

In those words through which I move, leaving a cry  
Formed in exact degree and set dead at  
The mingling flood, I am put forward onto  
Live water (124-127).

The 'mingling flood' of texts, past and present, spoken and written, is the medium in which the 'I' of the poet moves. As they haul the fish in, Graham's grammatically altered sentences integrate seamlessly and authentically with the rhythms and idioms of the fishermen's speech. Rhymes and half rhymes ('hull, 'levels'; 'lessens', 'stern') and the shifting of stresses between the back and front syllable suggest the levelling action of the boat, and our - the reader's and the poet's - constant process of balance and adjustment through this 'mingling flood'.

At this farthest point of his journey, he finds his role as a poet, reading in 'light more specially gendered and / Ambitioned by all eyes that wide have been / Me once'. The literary tradition is the context which has produced him and in which he is writing,

and which is also continually recreated through him; his voice as a poet is formed from all those whom he has read. At the end of the poem, now at his writing desk, these voices echo through his own:

The eye reads forward as the memory reads back.

At this last word all words change.

All words change in acknowledgement of the last [...]

This is myself (but who ill resembles me) (421-423, 425)

He has a reflexive stance towards the texture and textuality of language: language performs itself through him, and the poem he writes is thus a relic - 'It is this instant written dead' (220) - of this self, this who has come to locate themselves within it. 'My ghostly constant is articulated' (223).

In this chapter I have explored how Niedecker, Burnside and Graham use the poet's inflected presence to create a coherent ecology of place. For all three poets, language itself generates a phenomenology of place; its sonorous, performative qualities enhance the idea of a unified, immersive poem-world. For each of these poets, the continuous 'I' of the speaking voice sustains the poem-world. Language, albeit temporarily, stabilises and structures this shared world long enough for us to talk about it. Graham's poetic exploration of the speaking voice as generating principle points to the ontological gap between voice and place; a gap that is bridged once we accept the poetic voice as an authentic mediator of place. Language - our primary means of expressing our navigation between the private and the cultural - is a form of temporary stabilisation, of place construction. In discussing the poetic strategies each of these poets has used in their performative and inclusive enactment of these places, I have described how the extent and characteristics of these poem-worlds are created and conveyed.

Each of these poets is aware of the action of language as a presencing device, and each uses the inflections and phrasings of their own speaking voice to generate an intimacy of address by which the reader is lulled into accepting the poetic voice as an authentic and effective mediator of place. Yet of course the accents, dialects and turns of phrase of Niedecker's Wisconsin, Graham's Greenock and Burnside's Fife are very

different. In the next chapter I examine assumptions about the idea of an authentic, indigenous voice of place, and consider whether particular forms of language can have a deeper representative or referential function which the poet can deploy to signal and map out their surroundings in a poetry of place.

## Chapter 2. A language of place: Finlay, Hadfield

In the case, for example, of a signifying practice such as “poetic language”, the *semiotic disposition* will be the various deviations from the grammatical rules of the language: articulatory effects which shift the phonemative system back to its articulatory, phonetic base [...] Identifying the semiotic disposition means in fact identifying the shift in the speaking subject, his capacity for renewing the order in which he is inescapably caught up; and that capacity is, for the *subject*, the capacity for enjoyment.

Julia Kristeva, *The System and the Speaking Subject* (in Moi, 1986:38-39)

The role of language in the construction of place lies at the heart of this thesis. In this chapter I examine the idea that language can anchor us to a landscape; and, conversely, that a landscape can generate its own poetry and poetics. This chapter therefore continues to explore aspects of the idea of a ‘native speaker’. I consider whether particular kinds of language do preserve a more direct bond with the speaker’s surroundings, allowing the possibility of a ‘native’ rather than a colonising voice. I discuss the intimate linking of word, voice and coastline in recent work by Alec Finlay and Jen Hadfield, both of whom use dialect in their poetry of the northern coastline as a means of anchoring text to place. I demonstrate my understanding of poetry as an essentially aural gesture, albeit orchestrated or organised by a visual (printed) form.

In the early twentieth century, as debate over the transactional, dialectic nature of human cognition and human knowledge grew, so did speculation over the stability of meaning as language mediates the gap between self and world. Meaning in language came to be understood as lying not in direct reference to things outside language, but rather growing out of the characteristic experiences of its use that enable us to understand how particular words or phrases gain meaning. ‘Every sign *by itself* seems dead. *What gives it life?—In use it is alive*’ (Wittgenstein, 1986:128).

It is this essentially animate quality of language that Julia Kristeva sought to account for in her semiotic theory. Kristeva draws attention to the knowing production of meaning for a listening audience: she shows how our everyday language is used tentatively and creatively, how we collude to test out meanings. Once Derrida had demonstrated the performative nature of all utterances (Derrida in Kamuf, 1991:98-100), the language phenomenon could be understood as including at its core qualities such as intonation, accent, elaboration and the spontaneous generation of allusion and synonym. Thus, meaning becomes a function of context, which it both presupposes and then transforms. All utterances are essentially ritual, their 'iterability' (Derrida in Kamuf, 1991:101) depending on these performative aspects to make them meaningful in each new context.

Kristeva studied under Roland Barthes; her early work *La révolution du langage poétique* (1974) was published within a year of Barthes' *Le plaisir du texte*, and by the same publisher. In *La Révolution du langage poétique* Julia Kristeva describes the reflexivity of the speaking subject within their evolving historical and ethnographic environment. Language is essentially articulated, onomatopoeic, embodied and performative: these attributes are intrinsic to it as a transactional process and to the evolution and negotiation of meaning - the 'flashes, ruptures and sudden displacements' (Kristeva, 1989:288) which disrupt patterns and rituals of use, and which we recognise and transgress knowingly for our audience. It is in the 'semiotic', Kristeva argues, that we see language as a knowingly affective process of 'play' in its use of rhythm and timbre, repetition, tautology, allusion. This allows room for pleasure in word-play as part of meaning - for refusal of 'the total constraint of "symbolic law", of fixed, normative meanings' (Lechte, 1990:142).

Kristeva's intention was to dissolve the false Cartesian distinction between the individual who speaks and the production of meaning. In *The System and the Speaking Subject* (published in 1973), she set out her theory of language as not a sign-system but a signifying process, in which those generative drives constrained by a community's social code, yet not reducible to its language system, are articulated and released (in Moi, 1986:38). She distinguishes between 'genotext' and 'phenotext'; that is, between the semio-logical system of words and grammar, and the contextualised, interpersonal web of communication as performed, 'as it presents itself to



phenomenological intuition'. Meaning is generated and renovated in the intersubjective 'play' with these; that is, in our knowing adherence to and transgression of the spoken and unspoken rules of a shared language. This capacity for transgressing and renewing order is intrinsic to us as language users. The moment of transgression is key: it reveals the speaker's reflexive self-positioning within the mesh of language rules and codes, which they now challenge to renovate or generate meaning. Thus transgression becomes a 'will-to-figure' (Starling), a performative restructuring and enactment of the shared language-world. The primary processes of poetic language, says Kristeva - displacement, condensation, metonymy, metaphor, and also the desire for pattern and repetition and the implied context of socio-cultural relationships - cut across the 'logico-symbolic processes' of the model of language as a system of signs (in Moi, 1986:39). Without this disruption there would be no possibility of genesis or renewal of meaning - 'contemplation adrift' (in Moi, 1986:17).

'Play' hinges on sound production, on our performative use of speech. For Kristeva, meaning-making has its genesis in our language's articulatory, phonetic base. She warns against the 'over-determination of a lexeme'; that is, the determination of the meaning of a word or phrase from an accrual or distillation of its usage in multiple contexts, rather than from its adaptation to new contexts. Kristeva's inheritance is Barthes' 'zero degree' of modernist literature in which poetic language, no longer purely representative, is 'an act without immediate past, without environment'; each reader must construct their own meaning from the 'dense shadow of reflexes from all the sources which are associated with it' (Barthes, 1968:47-48). For Kristeva, says Barthes, the text is 'the site of bliss' (1975:64).

This immediately raises the question of whether meaning can be purely performative, entirely unanchored; and whether there are points at which language might have a significance beyond the relative circumstances of its utterance so that it links to the world outside itself. Of onomatopoeia, for example, we assume that there is an acoustic resemblance between word and thing; that these words contain something of the presence of the thing they refer to. Hugh Bredin explores this assumption of resemblance. He defines onomatopoeic words as those which rely on prosodic features - voice, nasality, plosiveness, pitch, loudness, duration and so on - which, in combination, generate the word, when spoken, as a sound we take to mimic

a quality or behaviour of the thing itself in a 'mimetic or enactive mode': 'one constituent of our consciousness as language users is an awareness of the fit between sound and meaning. Onomatopoeia is one species of such a fit' (1992:566).

This is the idea that I dramatise in my poem 'Birds of the North Sea'. The poem presents itself as an aural map of the North Sea rim; the bird names are from local languages and dialects. Within the concentrated space of the poem, the meaning-bearing role of individual words is thrown into focus, along with the weight of assumptions they carry, especially when these words are used in short or one-word lines. I rely on reader and audience recognising some of these names as onomatopoeic so that, reading along the line, the names and (we imagine) their calls alter slightly but remain familiar as we follow each bird along its migration route. Accepting this acoustic resemblance between bird name and bird call seems to evoke or recreate something of our experience of these wild coastal places. With the added-value of our performance of them, the words themselves seem to become enactive.

But Bredin demonstrates that what we assume is acoustic resemblance is ultimately a conventional association. 'Bubble' or 'whip' seem to suggest the sounds that these things might actually make, yet Bredin finds very different-sounding words in other languages for these same things (1992:560). We agree the word *whisper* mimics whispering, not *sister*; *slither* and *hurly burly* can acquire an associative onomatopoeia through both the context and manner of utterance (1992:558-559). The fitness of *ritto*, *tirrick*, *kría* and *kyst* for the call of the arctic tern relies on local consensus that this is the word for its sound. We collude in evoking what is taken to be a common sound memory. '[S]ound does matter in language', concludes Bredin: we have a 'deep-seated need to co-ordinate words with things ... it is as if we want language to be onomatopoeic' (1992:566).

This 'deep-seated need' is also the motive behind Robert Macfarlane's *Landmarks* project, in which Macfarlane calls for the restoration of reams of forgotten land-related vocabulary to everyday use. The falling out of use of these words is an impoverishment of our ways of describing, and thereby of thinking about our surroundings. *Landmarks* is therefore a project of 're-wonderment' (2015:25). He claims for these place-words a 'referential exactitude' in their minute attention to

detail, which has grown out of everyday need (2015:2). They have 'a kind of word magic, the power that certain terms possess to enchant our relations with nature and place' (2015:4).

Macfarlane falls back on the Emersonian idea of an instinctive poetic wording, by which, when used, these words 'function as topograms - tiny poems that conjure scenes' (2015:6). Their power to evoke lies in our acceptance of this intrinsic connection between word and landscape, which is either aural/onomatopoeic ('euphonious' (2015:4)) or related to some deeper recognition: '[s]ome of the words collected here are eldritch, acknowledging a sense of our landscapes not as settled but as unsettling' (2015:7). These words are 'peculiar in their particularity, but recognizable in that they name something conceivable, if not instantly locatable' (2015:4). Language guides and constrains thinking, Macfarlane holds: once we are given back the vocabulary, we will notice our surroundings all the more carefully with a 'precision of utterance [that is] both a form of lyricism and a species of attention' (2015:11).

His arrangement is thematic rather than regional. As we scan down the words he lists to describe a sudden wind, for example - *aigrish, flan, gurl, gussock, huffling, osag* - their lack of consensus of sound makes any claim of acoustic resemblance difficult. His criterion for inclusion seems rather to be a kind of Barthian sumptuousness which other, more familiar words such as *path, lane, burn* or *beck* presumably lack. Yet in isolating them from the cultural/linguistic context in which their whole meaning is embedded and renewed, he denies these words their ontic, generative power. Instead these words are simultaneously romanticised and trivialised; their 'peculiar particularity' relies on, and further entrenches, a categorical divide between the rich, 'eldritch' landscape that these words belong to and can call into being, and the author's own semi-urban world.

Word sound is also fundamental to Alec Finlay's '*minnsmouth*' sequence. Finlay wants place-names to serve as both title and ancho (2016:4). This is an attempt to locate poetry as sound-object in a landscape, in a way that is 'ecologically sensitive' (Davidson) to its setting and to the histories and culture of the people who have lived there. Finlay's artwork and concrete poetry often take the form of material,

contextualised temporary interventions in the landscape. ‘minnmouth’ can be understood as an aural artistic intervention in their landscape; the poems, says Finlay, are built from sonic elements of their settings.

Each poem is a riff on the sound of a place-name from the northern North Sea coast: Finlay uses a creative ‘phonetic synthesis’ (2016:4) of local British dialects and languages to create what might have been the sound-world of these coastal communities - a local tongue intermingled with other languages and dialects. The sequence is largely in Anglo-Saxon diplodic meter: the stressed alliteration often falls on soft consonants, further enhancing the lulling effect of the poem’s recitation:

**Banna Min    Tether Mouth**

Burra teddirt    byðā sandy rib ] [sic]

puckerin ða lip    skoarin ða bod

soonsa mooth    nmmas ða childers

murmurashen    needfu fir mynnye (2016:8)

He provides a translation:

**Banna Minn (for Jen Hadfield)**

Burra, tethered by a sandy tombolo, puckering the lip,  
[scornfully] imitating the waves - sound is a mouth, and amma is  
the children’s discontented murmuring, needful for their mum,  
minn (2016:9)

Immediately there is a puzzle as to why, if we can glean meaning from sound, the poems require a translation. Shetland poet Christine de Luca, for example, writes in both Shetlandic and modern English, and though sometimes there is a brief glossary for her Shetlandic poems, she relies on the half-familiarity of her language and her audience’s creative inference: ‘[m]y experience from reading dialect poems to English-speaking audiences over twenty-five years or so is, that while they generally find the poems incomprehensible on the page, they find the spoken version much more

accessible' (De Luca, 2010:108). Michael Strachura describes her technique of mixing like or related words from Shetlandic, Scots, English and other Norse languages to create a 'spatial defamiliarization', generating a parataxis through this multilingualism by which the reader is no longer fixed to one geographical location, but is in a broad northern discursive world (2015:160). In Finlay's first version of 'Banna Minn', the half-familiarity of many words allows us to infer or imagine the meaning of others.

The second puzzle is why the translation should be written as prose, when the dipodic form of the original is so flexible, and so central to its aurality. Finlay's 'translations' are deliberately clumsy:

shippn out    suffn deep    in th blue O

becomes 'shipping out something deep in the blue O [the sweep of the sea's horizon]' (2016:8-9). His introductory essay 'Tidal Poetics' is a diatribe against the political centralisation of cultural power and the deadening effect of what he perceives as the growing sameness of language that this has produced.

Much more interesting is the explanation he gives in an email:

I wanted to convey that in translation one of the main problems is the way language is a locally adapted technology, rich in specifics, which General English sometimes lacks [...] I found it fascinating to write [sic] these poems in dialects I could hardly speak (hear), gradually absorbing them into a kind of inner personal Tom Leonard voice. Somehow that made it harder to access any English poet in me, so prose seemed best [...] It feels like a very experimental book, where the concept, the poems and the notes are each pointing at some broader remote sea culture, or memory. (2017)

Describing language as a 'locally adapted technology' highlights the Barthesian idea of 'writing aloud (which is nothing like speech)':

the art of guiding one's body [...] language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat [...] the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not of meaning, but of language. (Barthes, 1975:66-67)

This 'whole presence of the human muzzle', says Barthes, 'shift[s] the signified a great distance', instead bringing 'the anonymous body of the actor into my ear' (1975:67). Understood this way, Finlay's idea of one tongue blocking out another, as it were, when writing this deeply oral, mouthed poetry, makes sense.

Finlay wants the language of these poems, including the names of these places, to be 'a kind of beyonsense [sic] language in folk speech'. He reaches for an essential (and archaic) link in the coining of the word to their site of origin, so that the words gesture towards the place, 'lending it ears for sound over sense' (2016:4). Finlay's poems rely heavily on this form of sound symbolism of long vowels and soft consonants to invoke these fluid estuary landscapes.

Finlay's collection is dedicated to and modelled on Bill Griffiths' *Fishing and folk: life and dialect on the North Sea coast* (2008). Griffiths, an archivist and sound poet, understood place-names as contextualised pragmatic, vernacular gestures towards a lived environment, often arising from chance and circumstance (2008:2). As a poet, his understanding of the role of sound as the foundation for rhyme scheme and poetic form was bound up in his sense of the political overtones and power structures implicit in established poetic traditions and conventions (1999:126). These traditions are refuted in *The Poetry Escape*. 'There is no such thing as human. There is no such thing as language'. His experimentation with a poetry of sound was, he said, a strategy for removing the 'poet-as-cultural-emissary' at the centre: '[t]he poet asserts the role of single agent, but not necessarily significant individual'. In looking to create a poetry of utterance rather than of form, Griffiths sought to demonstrate 'the impossible range of the human, of renewing the human, of inventing the human' (1999:127). In this way Griffiths' project exceeds Finlay's essentially revisionist poetics: while Finlay seeks to reveal and restore something ancient through an aesthetics of word-sound and word-play, Griffiths focuses on the production of meaning, rather than the presentation of meaning-to-be-thought. Finlay relies heavily on the listener making an imaginative connection between the aural and seeming onomatopoeic qualities of his

long vowels and soft consonants and the unstable interconnected estuary bays with their shallow fluvial sands and transitory layers of occupation. He wants there to be a trace in our language of this physical landscape, of these layers of settlement and movement; for the self to disappear into place. Griffith's poems used the space of the page to challenge the fixity of form and meaning; Allan Halsey describes how his early poems were frequently revised and reissued in loosely bound short-run mimeo pamphlets, the format of which, and the possibility for complete authorial freedom, challenged the normative influence of commercial publishing formats and editorial control (2014:41-42). For Griffiths, rather than locating and reflecting our position in a quasi-historical world, or within a projected cultural (and therefore political) set of norms and values, the reader must work to follow the movements of words and themes between sections and sequences. The reader is active as originator in the fluid production of meaning.

Encountering language in its geographical context, in the otherness of the Shetland landscape, is a recurring theme in Jen Hadfield's poetry. *Byssus* (2014) records her slow immersion in its language and landscape as she gradually becomes 'of' it. In 'In Memoriam' (2014:41), dedicated to her friend and mentor Iain Crichton Smith, she considers language, particularly poetic language, for the possibilities it offers for describing '[t]his unspeakable', which 'is not *like* / anything' (4-5):

a poem or diddle collies no particle  
of it for us to fank  
in mouths and minds.

A noun's a nickname  
and makes it *reestit*

adjectives salt, parch, and wizen it. (6-11)

Here, language is a tool by which we (temporarily) bring things to rest. All ways of speaking - scientific vocabulary, the Shetlandic dialect, her mother-tongue English - are

equally available and can be drawn on if apt to purpose. Yet Crichton Smith's absence remains other than, and greater than, the reach of these words:

Language abdicates ...

Already I can only noun  
about its shores and surfaces

nym the brinks of this squilly thing

where congregates stuff  
that can be likened (21-26).

Metaphor operates only at the edges ('the brinks') of this thing. The poem 'collies', or works at it like a sheepdog; it 'fanks' (or fails to 'fank') the strangeness of his absence. This recalls Pound's idea of the word as thing-in-relation rather than thing-in-itself. In this syntactical interchange of noun and verb, the object now becomes a thing-in-process. Pound was heavily influenced by Ernest Fenollosa's poetics of the ideogram: 'A true noun, an isolated thing, does not exist in nature [...] The eye sees noun and verb as one - things in motion, motion in things' (Fenollosa, 2010:46). Pound was calling for poetry to concern itself with the science of examining particulars (1991:20). Through noun-as-verb, he argued, it was possible to create active instances of the thing: 'language written in this way simply HAD TO STAY POETIC' (1991:22). In 'In Memoriam', the thing Hadfield is describing - the felt absence of poet Iain Crichton Smith - is present and knowable, even while it is impossible to name it directly.

'The March Springs' (2014:7-8) is an open field poem followed by three prose poems which together conjure the eruption of sounds, words, ideas and sense data that is brought on by the sudden glare of Spring sunshine:

It's impossible to think of any one thing - Spring a hybrid  
God, Gosh or Gum: dewlap bulging, bugling with glory;  
spring-steam rolling off the whale-backed hill. (13-15)



This is a poem about being a poet. Again she addresses the absent Crichton Smith:

if I tried to describe the  
smell of the air, I'd have to hood the vowels with hyphens,  
the gods being in the vowels. Are you hereabouts in your  
stocking feet? Look at the state of me [...]

Trying to be everywhere at once. (21-24, 26)

There is a contrast between this intentional, rather forced attention and her gradual absorption of, or into, her surroundings in the haiku-like poems of 'Hairst' (2014:57-59). In this sequence, her poem-making grows more naturally out of herself-in-place:

The sun reaches the back wall.  
My sparrow nib tosses aside  
wet leaves of shadow. (7-9)

To know your place:  
a doorstep amongst the floating  
islands (31-33)

As with Niedecker this is a fluid and reflexive form of attention to the phenomenology and texture of the landscape through which she writes. In these first-person poems, Hadfield's gesture is with language; a truth that she draws attention to repeatedly in her testing out a range of poetic forms for the re-presentation of her voice, from the narrative poem 'In Memoriam' to the prose poems of 'Definitions'. Here, meaning grows from a synthesis of sound and shared, often autobiographical association. Her attention is to the texture and presence of words and voices, including her own. In the prose poem 'Died', book-ended by the blunt *d* consonant, this short, blunt word becomes a landform:

It's a cliff-sided stack: sheer, almost an island. (2014:35)

Her negotiation and manipulation of language is also the process of her gradually becoming *of* this place. Shetlandic words are as available to her as are scientific vocabulary and place-names; they are used for their sound value within the poem as well as for what the meanings they import, as in the onomatopoeic 'drummie-bee' in 'Hairst', and the 'squilly' bog in 'In Memoriam'. Hadfield's use of language in these poems is both generative and deeply aural. Hadfield offers a short glossary at the end of the book, but within the music and forward momentum of each poem we glean and generate meaning from context to carry us through, to resolve an overall meaning of the poem.

This discussion of dialect and word sound in poetic language is important to this thesis because it prompted me to re-examine my own use of Angus dialect, and my assumptions of its having an immediate authenticity, an intrinsic - or extrinsic - link to place. The issue of the use of Scots - and other - dialects alongside 'standard' English has been thoroughly discussed for many years (for example Dósa, 2009; Bohata and Lumsden, 2018), to the extent that it is no longer acceptable to position these dialects and voices as peripheral: 'there's something going on linguistically in this country that does not conform to standard English, irrespective of how you feel about that,' says James Robertson. 'To have Scots in your toolbox as a human being - regardless of whether you are a writer or not - [is] to be articulate in different languages' (2010). Edwin Morgan sees this multilingualism as operating on a much broader human scale:

I know it's an ordered system in the sense that we can all use it and understand each other; but in writing, particularly in poetry, I see [language] as a very extensible and explorable system [...] Hugh MacDiarmid used to speak about the human brain being largely unused. I'm sure that's quite true, and I think language is like that too.

(quoted in Nicholson, 2002:60)

Morgan, a multilinguist as well as a poet and translator, playfully experimented with creating meaning from word-sound. All language, including zaum sound-sense, place-names and his own Glaswegian dialect, was available as a deep pool from which he could draw. In his poem 'Zaum' (1997:87), Morgan makes the case for an

acknowledgement of the multiple, multiplying, generative resonances of each word: 'not what it cannot, please, but what it can // is your criterion for its board and keep' (3-4).

This thesis is a philosophical and practical investigation into the cartographic role of poetic language and technique in the demarcation and stabilisation of place, a project that was inspired by my desire as a poet to develop a non-autobiographical, outward-looking poetry of the Angus landscape. In this chapter I have examined the idea that language can be intrinsically connected to something beyond itself; that it can anchor us in and to our surroundings. I have explored the link between word and physical environment as a process of cultural colonisation - the 'mapping' - of those surroundings. Bredin's analysis of onomatopoeia demonstrates the essentially associative link between word-sound and thing; yet nevertheless, as he acknowledges, this is a link that we want to exist. This same desire manifests itself in the generation of meaning in W.S. Graham's loosely referential but deeply musical poetic language, and in our imagining a moment of *poiesis* at which place-names were coined along the estuaries of the North Sea coastline. Kristeva's idea of semiotic 'play' describes this generation of meaning as integral to poetic language, and to the function of language in its entirety. The 'whole presence of the human muzzle' (Barthes) is deployed in the generation, transmission and performance of meaning, as Finlay, Griffiths, Hadfield and Morgan demonstrate in their minute attention to the sound-value of both their own everyday language, the words they reach for outwith the ordinary, and the genesis of new words which, having no clear referent, nonetheless gain meaning and bear us forward through the poem. Kristeva's idea of transgression as generating, confirming and renovating meaning can be interpreted as a gesture of our 'will-to-figure', of our ongoing private and intersubjective restructuring and reconfiguring of our lived space, and of our need to re-orientate and relocate ourselves within it as it is (continually) transgressed. In this way, we make it 'reestit'.

As a means of offering a direct, unmediated depiction of this place, however, dialect and word-sound are insufficient in themselves. To rely on a word enacting something beyond itself is to presume a fixed bank of collectively understood associations and experiences; a model which separates the speaker from language itself, in all its creativity and richness of expression. To rely on sound enacting

meaning is to depend on speaker and listener belonging to the broader community of language users - which is for Bill Griffiths the entire human race - with its innate habits and musicalities of speech. Yet this too is undermined by an acquired associative onomatopoeia by which meaning is linked to both context and manner of utterance. As a form of cartographic practice by which a place is demarcated and represented, the language features of dialect and word-sound continue to locate the process of selection, framing and investing our surroundings with meaning within the cultural world within which these utterances are made.

### CHAPTER 3. Poetry as cartography: mapping the island of Eday

A consideration of the relation of poetry to place opens up the question of poetry as event, the practice and nature of its taking place [...] It is sometimes difficult to articulate what the action of the poetry brings about, except a sustained and exploratory mode of attention *to*.

Carol Watts, *Zeta Landscape: poetry, place, pastoral* (2013:281)

As a poet, my overall aim is to develop an outward-looking poetry of place that, as far as is possible, is not mediated by my own inflected gaze. In this thesis I understand the gesture of language as a form of cartographic activity in which the landscape is (temporarily) stabilised. In Chapter 2 I examined the idea that language can anchor us to landscape. Conversely, in this chapter, I examine the idea that a landscape can generate its own distinctive poetics. I understand the poem-map as the outcome of 'a sustained and exploratory mode of attention *to*'.

I draw on the literary geographer's understanding of the essentially non-mimetic nature of the map as a creative entanglement of exploration and presentation - put simply, that 'maps presuppose narratives, which in turn may function as maps' (Skelly, 2014:1) - and of space as 'necessarily embedded with narratives' (Skelly, 2014:2). Roger Starling describes the cultural investment embedded in the structuring and symbolic coding of the cartographic map, and the unstable play of representation through which we map our positions in the world. Mapping, he says, is bound up in the production of 'notional space' (1988:106). The collection *Summer Ferry*, and particularly the central poem 'Summer Ferry', demonstrates how our cultural investment and our negotiation with the unstable play of representation is under constant revision. This lack of final meaning can be brought to the fore by poetry's wide-ranging play with language's possibilities: 'not what it cannot, please, but what it can' (Morgan).

As stated earlier, this enquiry is a deeply contextualised and deeply practice-led. The thinking through of these ideas and the writing of the poems grew from immersion in sites around the North Sea and North Atlantic coastlines. In this chapter I

describe the process which produced the Eday poem-map 'Summer Ferry', and discuss whether the situated gesture can carry with it a greater intimacy with its subject; in this case, the landscape of Eday. I lived on the Orkney island of Eday for two years from 2008 to 2010 and have returned many times since. In making my own poem-maps I hoped to capture the moment of ordering and focussing intention - the movement from 'space' to 'place' (Tuan). In this chapter, in reflecting on the writing of the sequence 'Summer Ferry', I examine whether experimentation with poetic form allows us to disrupt language's essential subjectivity, thereby escaping the confines of the textual construct, and thus coming closer to a non-inflected response to and representation of our surroundings.

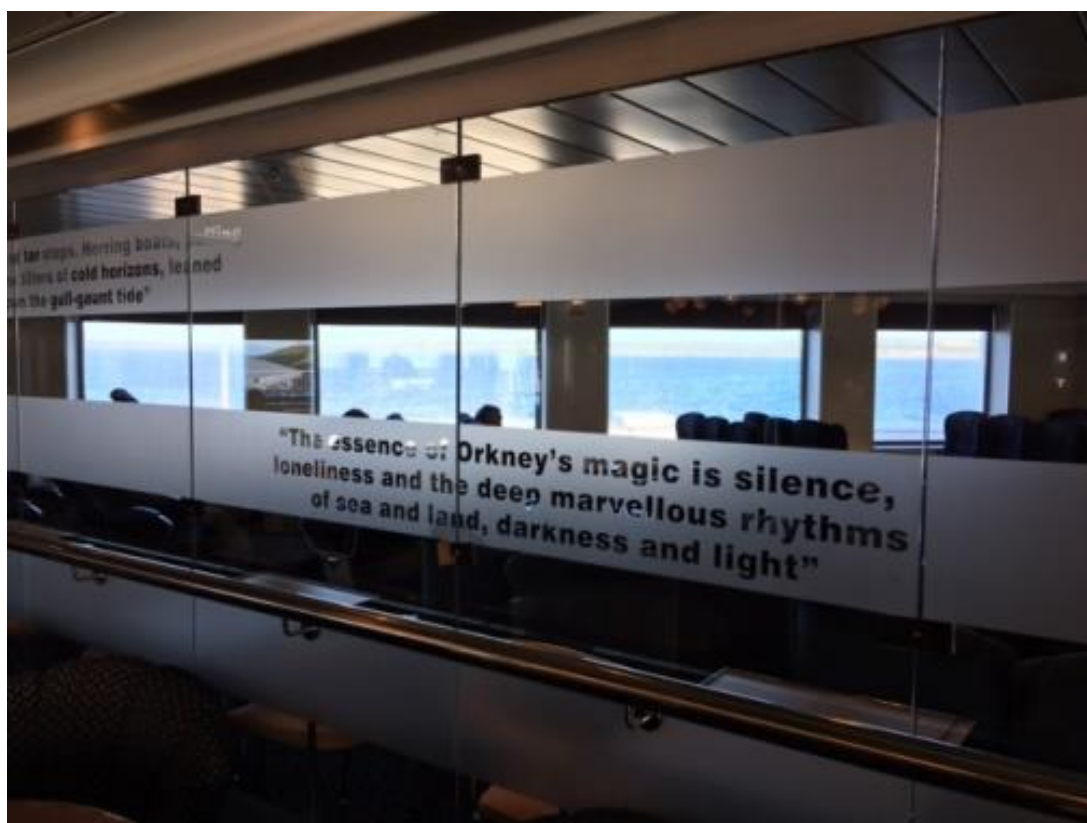


Figure 3. *'The essence of Orkney's magic is silence, loneliness and the deep, marvellous rhythms of sea and land, darkness and light'*. The passenger lounge, MV Hamnavoe. Image © A. Peebles.

The Northlink ferry links mainland Scotland to Stromness, Orkney. The glass partitions of the passenger lounges are etched with quotes from the writings of George Mackay Brown, invoking a magical, semi-mystical, semi-ancient place (Figures 3 & 4). As the ferry draws closer, we look out through Brown's marvelling lens at the Orkney landscape. We disembark into this island world.

George Mackay Brown is both celebrated and criticised for his portrayal of the Orkney Isles as places of northern isolation (Hall, 2010:126). The themes of ancient spiritual purity and lament for the passing of an older Orkney recur in his poetry and prose, which is undoubtedly nostalgic and which make his writing doubly effective in marketing the islands to visitors. But this does not do justice to the complexity of his writing, in particular with his engagement with the theme of time. Timothy C. Baker, for example, interprets Brown's classic novel *Greenvoe* as an anti-modernist study of the failure, or fragmentation, of community in a secular, technical age (2009:30). Yet *Greenvoe* is at no level a realist novel: it is a fable in which a conflict between two opposing metanarratives, one fabular, one secular modernist, is played out. Brown was deeply influenced by Edwin Muir's idea of there being two worlds between which we negotiate: the 'story', or our mundane, everyday world, and the 'fable', the realm of symbolic meaning, dream and epiphany (Hall, 2010:154). The story of *Greenvoe* does not progress through the dramatic conflict between characters, but through the absorption of temporal, industrial/economic change into a much broader narrative and symbolic framework which gives meaning to the novel's flow of events as they continue to unfold from an ancient, semi-mythic era into an undefined, unknowable future. Simon Hall describes Brown's writing as 'political in the broadest sense' for his narrative meaning-making which begins in, and gives symbolic value to, the community around him (2010:158). Nonetheless, the isolated pre-industrial tableau that Brown enshrines in the deeply poetic prose of *Greenvoe* is hugely appealing. This place is literally out-of-time; the characters, like the weather, are unchanging.

In their review of the island in contemporary fiction narratives, Katrin Dautel and Kathrin Schödel describe the traditional construct of the island as ontologically opposite to the mainland: as peripheral, disconnected from change or the normal passage of time, representing a prior, more authentic stage of social or natural development (2017:229-231). Often there is a 'temporal otherness' that defines them against this age of communication and globalised consumerism. These 'places of longing' are 'paradigmatic sites', historically prior, and ecologically unspoilt. The fact that we must make a (possibly arduous) journey over water to get there encourages us to imagine this place as deeply apart from and separate to the outside world, ontologically complete in itself. Edna Longley sees similar dualist oppositions -

utopia/dystopia, isolation/connection, ancient/modern - in the symbolic value of the island in much Irish and Scottish poetry. 'Its mythic force is provided by [...] the fertile antinomies to which it lends itself' (2010:144). In Jen Hadfield's *Shetland*, I would argue, it is its geographic remoteness from Hadfield's own cultural base, as well as the oddness of landscape and language, that makes the archipelago so credible as a fragment of something other. Defined by separateness and boundedness, says Longley, 'islands seem made for the coordinates of the lyric poem', their dimensions matching 'what MacDiarmid called 'one's sense of the biological limitations of the human individual' - the world on a human scale' (2010:143). The poet 'consciously establish[es] island co-ordinates ... 'islandness' is everywhere and nowhere' (2010:142).

To get to Eday, we take a second, smaller ferry.

Since moving away from the island, my imagining of Eday had become increasingly nostalgic. The ferry crossing, its predictable lack of change, its emblematic Orkney landscape of sea and low islands - 'darkness and light' - and the felt sense of northern isolation are all key to its allure. The Orkney of my imagination has always been heavily coloured by the writing of George Mackay Brown, and I find myself rereading his work in anticipation of each return visit. This is why the island of Eday is, for me, an appropriate landscape in which to examine the practical process of (de)constructing my own meaning-laden representations of place, and of the instability, or contingency, of the poem-map itself.

Eday lies in the heart of Orkney's North Isles. It is very sparsely occupied due to long-term population drift to other parts of Orkney and a high turnover of incomers. In a projected analysis of future stability, Eday has been classed as amongst Orkney's most threatened communities (Hall Aitken, 2009:6). Recently a test site for renewable technologies has put Eday on the global map, creating a small, steady flux of temporary visitors, though only 1.5 longer-term jobs.

The island is small enough to walk in a day. Walking creates its own natural duration, governed by attention due to each animal, each ditch, each rise in the road. Moving on foot creates an intense engagement with the material detail of landscape. The island becomes kinaesthetic: cold and heat accumulate in tiny local microclimates, weather and birds have time to collect and dissipate. Distances and perspectives



slowly alter. In such a bare and thinly occupied landscape, changes and movement are very noticeable - the presence and movement of a new wind turbine, the bustle round the boat once a day, an unfamiliar car driving up the island's only road. The long patterns of birds and tides become more visible. Immersion in this closed-off world brings about a sense of lived, rather than metered, time, such as the amount of daylight it takes to walk from one point to another, or the unnumbered minutes while the ferry manoeuvres itself to tie up at the pier. Locally, the distance between Eday and the other North Isles is thought of in days - the time taken to get there and back on the once-a-day boat via Kirkwall, including necessary overnight stays 'in town'.

In stark contrast is the busyness of modern technologies and their fixed metering of time and distance. Sea buoys flash and turbines turn at a steady beat; their continuous signals are recorded using perfect, infinitely repeatable units of measurement at sites far beyond the visible horizon. Eday's prototype tidal turbine is monitored remotely in Stromness, with its data processed (at the moment) in France, Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden. The environmental impact assessment that preceded its installation required the positing of a steady state in wildlife populations, a baseline 'both empirical and mythical' (Nafus and Watts, 2013). The abstract geometric forms of these structures themselves, and the grid and graph lines on which their activity is plotted, contrasts with the moving, flowing lines of their surroundings, including vernacular architecture: in the Orcadian landscape, traditional dwellings are built against a slope, below the wind.

In his exploration of the anthropological concept of the pedestrian, Jo Vergunst begins from de Certeau's description of walking as a tactical process which 'affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc, the trajectories it "speaks"' (de Certeau, 1984:99). Vergunst understands pedestrian expression, the bodily process of walking in/through place, as analogous to the trajectory of speech as 'a way in which rhetoric, expression and gesture are directed along a path' (2017:21). (To this I would also add the impulse towards silence - in response to our surroundings, and in recognising the silence of other walkers.) To distinguish between walking and speech as 'embodied' and 'disembodied' forms of enactment is false, Vergunst argues. His focus is on 'embodied and grounded' walking (2017:7), the ordinary activity by which we enact and realise our environment, and thus our sense of self in place. The pedestrian is the

agent who enunciates this space, and is therefore by definition mobile. The body itself *is* movement, not a static screen (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008:8). Walking, that is, thinking in and as movement, is fundamental to the body (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008:9). For Vergunst, walking, speaking and written language are all generative processes; they do not only enunciate spatial relations and enact embedded ways of moving within fields of discourse and power, but actively create new ones as part of the process of inhabitation (2017:14). The varieties of linguistic expression (personal, vernacular, dialect) and the interplay of speech and silence that are stirred up while walking are the same gestures of enactment as the will to follow a path, or to forge a new route. This idea of language and walking as interlinked ‘embodied and grounded’ processes suggests a more direct, enactive link between the construction of the poem-map and the landscape in which it is produced. Vergunst quotes de Certeau’s comment on what is absent in cartographic maps: these surveys ‘miss what was: the act itself of passing by’ (de Certeau, 1984:97).

The poem-map ‘Summer Ferry’ was written from notes made while out walking. Originally I had planned the sequence as an overlay for my tattered Ordnance Survey map - to lay my imagined Eday on the actual island. However this would be to imply there was a distinction between the two, with one prior to the other. As Starling pointed out, the process of mapping out a landscape - material, fictive, poetic - requires us to draw on critical evaluations, social inscriptions and relations of power, creating a symbolic enactment of place which the audience re-enacts when they engage with it. In ‘Summer Ferry’, this process is explicit in the juxtapositions and rehearsal of symbolic interpretations of the poem ‘the sky is warmth, ringing from within’ in which I list descriptions of the sunset gathered from my own notes and other texts. In my attempts at more direct, documentary descriptions, metaphor and subjective association are embedded, as in for example the thrush ‘countersinging’ against the wind turbine at Newbigging, and the construction of the Circular Walk. I weigh the associative value of local weather words and of phrases from BBC Radio Orkney’s weather forecast. I look at other ways of structuring and describing, and try to see the immediate landscape through them, as in the OS grid map of Greentoft and a gestural drawing of the arrival of a flock of birds. Decontextualised, they become aesthetic objects. My printout of a study of the impact of renewable energy

installations falls to pieces in the wind and rain. Ultimately the wind turbine takes on the behaviour and presence of a bird.

The poem-map itself is a sequence of short poems, each written at a point where I stopped and paid 'attention to' (Watts). In a sense, the white space between represents periods of entropy or a lack of attention, time 'lost' in the absent-minded labour of



Figure 4. The Northlink ferry terminal, Scrabster. Image © A Pebbles.

walking from one point to the next. The variation of poetic forms and interjection of graphic and textual images reproduces my reaching for ways by which to define and capture what I see in all its evocative materiality, affectivity and nostalgia. Truncated line lengths and short stanza forms reflect my desire to create an objectivity rooted in Objectivist-inspired poetics - to attend to the world as encountered, and allow this to generate poetic form. Yet afterwards, in preparing the text for print, I found myself attending to syllabics and altering phrasings to accentuate slant rhymes, and editing the ordering of the poems slightly so that there was an arc which began and ended with my arrival and departure by ferry. I also found an underlying self-consciousness of rhyme and phrasing - my own voicing was detectable in the notes I had made.

As a form of mapping, 'Summer Ferry' records my own negotiation with an unstable play of representation as a real-time process of effortful self-location. The poem-map records the creative process by which my own meaning-laden island-world

- in all its sensuality, affectivity, materiality and boredoms - is sustained. The poems are anchored in these places round the island, but they also create them. In the poem-map, each site is viewed from within: I self-consciously position myself to describe and record, but also refer back to the maps and texts that bolster my island world which is then enacted or 'discovered' as I walk through. Throughout 'Summer Ferry', my own process of renovation of meaning and cultural re-investment is radically exposed in the continual re-framing and re-presentation of this place. My invested presence shapes what I see and how I see it. The Eday of this map is a sustained autobiographical process of self-realisation in place, and of place as an extension of self.

As a cartographic gesture, the world that this poem-map charts is transitory. 'Because the body that constructs the world is always moving, the world itself becomes incapable of any final representation' (Davidson, 2013:1-2). The poem - the spoken or written item - is an artefact of this movement. Carol Watts describes how 'the "placing" of poetry may come some way down the line, as a reflection or reconceptualization folding back on what has occurred, a form of afterwardness' (2013:281). Even familiar landscapes, she continues, can be destabilised, 'subject to the forces and flows of homelessness and belonging, curious nonlocalities [...] The process of writing in concerted relation to place might be seen as a continuously unfinished form of commitment' (2013:282).

The idea of the poem as 'continuously unfinished' is, in this project, particularly relevant, for two reasons. The first is technical: as an enquiry this project is open-ended, the poems in the collection enacting the rhetorical play of ideas in this critical discussion, and the process of mapping itself in its search for resolution, for a way to frame and fix an environment which is inherently unstable, and constantly becoming. Language is a form of cartographic activity in which the landscape is (temporarily) stabilised. As the self is always moving, so the place in which we find ourselves must be constantly mapped anew. Eday as a 'place' (in Tuan's sense) is unfixed, in that it is continually being culturally mediated and modified, and recreated in the experience of re-reading the poem in the renewed textual environment.

The other is ethical. In Chapter 1 I referred to Wrighton's discussion of the phenomenological prioritisation of the self and therefore our ethical responsibility in

the representation and social production of space. Reflecting on the notes for poems I was making during my visit, I became aware of how heavily their imagery and the framing of the poems themselves reflected Dautel and Schödel's iconography of the colonising narrative of islandness, for example as a place which is unspoilt and unchanging rather than which is side-lined and economically impoverished. I therefore felt it particularly important to challenge my nostalgic projection of the qualities of isolation, timelessness and peripherality. These were qualities which made it attractive as a holiday destination, but this isolation, whether real or imagined, continues to present significant barriers for the islanders themselves.

UNESCO describes intangible cultural heritage as including 'representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces', which are transmitted from generation to generation and are 'constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history' (McCleery et al., 2008:7). It comes under threat at the point at which it is no longer in and for the community, but is 'transformed into something outward facing and intended primarily for the 'tourist gaze'' (McCleery et al., 2008:4); at which point the community is forced to define itself against another, more powerful outside colonising narrative.

One concerted local effort to reverse the internalisation of a sense of inwardness and periphery and replace it with a broad, inclusive sense of centre is the booklet *Orkney futures: a handbook* (Peebles and Watts, 2009). The editors invited a diverse range of Orcadian and non-Orcadian contributors - poets, politicians, scientists, tourists, locals and exiles - to speculate imaginatively on the archipelago's evolving future. A recurring theme is the interweaving of elements of Orkney's ancient past with a projected, creative use of energy generation from wind and waves: '[t]he future is imagined and made by us in heritage strategy, in timetables, in roadmaps, in schematics, in prototypes of new technologies' (Watts, 2010:47). This absorption of present into past, and the establishment of a meaningful symbolic trajectory of past, present and future, is important to the islanders' own cultural understanding of themselves as self-defining, rather than as subject to other colonising narratives.

Dautel and Schödel propose an alternative understanding of the ontology of the island-world using Lefebvre's concept of the processual constitution of spaces, by which the island is conceptualised as a 'constantly re-created space with changing boundaries and inscriptions' (2017:232). This perhaps offers a more empirically accurate picture of Orkney's 'islandness', and its role in ancient cultural, political and economic networks (for example Heerma Van Voss, 1996; Reeploeg, 2016). The spatial metaphor of the archipelago, says Jos Smith, with its 'fluid and neutral polycentrism' (2013:10), can also be extended to describe the sparsely populated northern coastline, as a web of semi-isolated island and mainland settlements which shared a sense of interconnectedness and commonality. Thought of in this way, says Smith, the fact that an island is surrounded with water is irrelevant. 'All places are, in a sense, like islands' (2013:14).

The idea of the right to self-definition and the local ownership of cultural heritage significantly influenced my thinking in the creation of the poem-map 'Summer Ferry', and pervades the whole collection of poems. The northern coastline that the collection describes is continuously unfinished. The arc of the collection, as with the arc of 'Summer Ferry', belies my own desire to hold on to a narrative structure - to present this other northern world as complete. The sequence and the collection record a continual disruption of scope and scale which thwarts the imposition of a single conceptual framework. My process of reflexive (re)positioning, of consciously giving 'attention to', generates the collection as a sequence of discrete units rather than one long unfolding. For this reason, the world that each poem maps out is transitory, existing only as a function of the poem-object itself. This relationship between poem and landscape comes closer to Davidson's idea of 'placing' poems in an 'ecologically sensitive' way which sustains the setting of the poem and the histories of the people who live there.

The overall aim of this project was to develop an outward-looking, non-inflected poetic response to place, as far as this is possible. I therefore began to experiment with other forms of recording to try to escape the confines of the textual construct; that is, to find a form of gesture which does not primarily refer to its own process, but which points to something outside itself.

In the process of walking and making notes, I became aware that there was something gestural in my note-taking, in the way I made marks on the page and left white space around and between. I first explored the connection between wording and other forms of gesture in *Ecstatics: a language of birds* (2011), a collaboration with Orkney artist Laura Drever. Our shared purpose was to see how closely we could describe the way that birds inhabit the Orkney landscape, myself through poetry and Laura through drawing (Figure 5). Independently we wrote/drew outdoors, giving in to the actuality of the birds as they moved and settled round about finding pockets of heat and shelter. For me this was an early experiment in non-predatory writing, and an opportunity to reflect on the poem as a mimetic gesture.

At face value, the drawings seemed self-contained, referring only to the movement of the birds and their embodiment in three-dimensional space; yet even in

blackbird

ecstatics.

they sing a full song.

they are a garden of song.

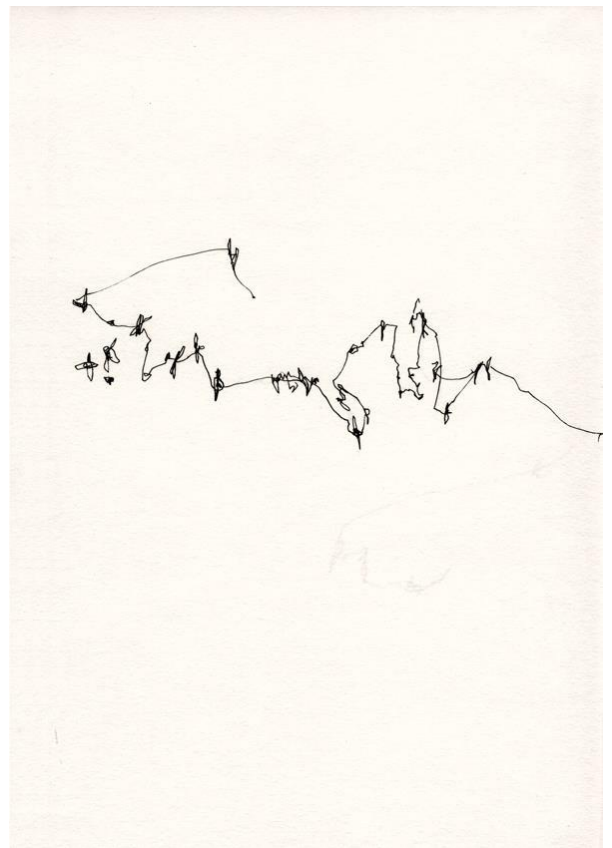


Figure 5. Extract from *Ecstatics: a language of birds*. © L. Drever and L. Harrison.

the bare language of these poems I still rely on metaphor and quotation, and on all that each word imaginatively imports, to open up meaning. The use of language as a medium initially seemed to reflect an additional stage of reflexive self-awareness,

whereas with the graphic image there seemed to be an implied immediacy. We see it all at once - there is no linear decoding, no language-as-barrier to be overcome. Yet we still require prior knowledge of the conventions of graphic representation in order to interpret it.

Nicolas Barker, in his study of the historical development of poetic form as an outcome of the development of printing and typography, describes how poetry evolved from an aural into a physical medium. Poetic form, he says, and in particular graphically inspired forms of experimentation such as concrete poetry were (in some instances at least) ideologically as well as conceptually driven. Concrete and graphic forms are felt to employ a universally understood language of the visual (Barker, 2016:157). Graphic forms of expression were thought to be possible to overcome the limitations of a single language, or of language as a whole. Peter Barry describes the 'antithetical opposition of text and image and the prioritising of the written word' as the result of their separate treatment as the technology of printing developed, so that word and image have come to be seen as 'natural antagonists' rather than natural allies (2013:38). As a genre of poetry which bridges the gulf between text and image, Barry offers asemic texts, in which we glean narrative or semantic meaning but which contain no words:

the text behaves like a code - for instance, it has discernible patterns, repetitions of elements, alignments, paralleling, regularities of line and shape, and so on. All that is lacking is pre-supplied meaning [...] so it has to be supplied by the reader, and what is supplied has to be sustained and systemic. (Barry, 2013:20)

In this way, says Barry, the asemic text would seem to bridge the gap between image and language: the asemic text, by definition, refers to no prior symbolic system, and so the reader has to encode it, to read meaning into its marks. Barry also discusses the role of white space between discrete parts of the composition, and how it implies and guides a temporal, processual interpretation of the work (2013:23-24). Barry's understanding of the act of reading is as a progressive decoding, albeit not along a line.



Meaning arises, he says, from 'salient juxtapositioning', by which 'items cast mutual exegetical light upon each other' (2013:38).

However the complete absence of a frame of reference renders any meaning we attribute to these texts to be entirely notional. Interpretation of the graphic gesture is mediated through the reader's own cultural context; in this way do these marks conjure meaning. Moreover, it is impossible to see which poems have no features of the concrete or asemic text, as every poem has a visual form which affects our expectations and which precedes and foreshadows our interpretation. The shape the poem makes on the page contributes at an ontological level to our sense of the poem's meaning, and creates a shadow of the poet's voice (Wheatley, 2016:129). Aesthetic features such as the visual impact of typeface and the juxtaposition of text and white space create an expectation for the reader, predisposing them towards its meaning: we 'read' the poem as a visual image before we start to decode the words. Barry's own examples all have titles, which suggest that there is a meaning to be uncovered, albeit deeply contestable.

During the process of walking and writing, I became aware of how often I used visual representations such as maps and graphs. The grid is intended to preclude the need for a worded explanatory text; yet removed from its epistemological contexts, as a structural device it is meaningless. As a Modernist aesthetic device, says Rosalind Krauss, it denies organic narrative - it is 'a refusal of speech':

The absolute stasis of the grid, its lack of hierarchy, of center, of inflection, emphasizes not only its antireferential character, but - more importantly - its hostility to narrative. (Krauss, 1986:158)

Its implied infinite extension lends it the aura of a pure (empirical) impartiality. As a cartographic device, it collapses the actual multi-dimensional, multi-sensory, meaning-laden terrain, creating and representing for the reader an impossible panoptic gaze in which every part of the island is equally visible, equally present. This is the antithesis of the 'embodied and grounded' textured, visceral, evocative map of narrative links.

Yet both the cartographic grid and the poetic form are arbitrators of conceptual, symbolic space. Both arrange juxtapositions and linkings of elements; both permit and manage our engagement with the (conceptual) world each represents. The sequence 'Summer Ferry' rehearses and revisits various methods, graphic and worded, of the intentional structuring of space. The reader must understand and participate in each of their systems of encoding meaning in order to decode them as text, and to realise and enter the places they purport to describe.

In describing his own attempt to write in direct response to his surroundings, John Kinsella arrives at an understanding of his poetic practice as a 'means of tracking meaning' (2013:173). Kinsella's aim is to create a poetry of place in which his prosody of expression is a direct outcome of the process of observation (2013:169); yet as the project continues, he becomes less and less convinced of the possibility of a non-inflected, non-mediated response. His project is to record and describe the behaviour of a flock of thornbills around his house. However he finds his own inflected presence deeply embedded in his note-taking, and in the process of observing itself. The poetics of recording, he says, at the most basic level, are shaped by his own way of thinking, by his own ingrained, distinctive habits of expression, which generate subjective 'prejudices of form' (2013:175).

This is unavoidable, he realises. Poetic form is a function of 'the centre-edge effect': that is, the instinctive search for 'a central theme, the opening, middle, end approach' by which we create a coherent, organised unit of meaning (2013:175). The conflict for Kinsella arises because this 'centre-edge effect' does not match the habits or organisation of the birds whose behaviour he wants to describe. Kinsella finds conflict between a spontaneous, unreflective state of 'attention to' and the 'afterwardness' (Watts) that is inherent in the process of recording.

As a possible solution, he strives to sustain a plain, 'prosodic' style of language that might generate a less language-inflected, more unselfconscious mode of attention. However traces of 'poetic' expression - 'metrics, slant rhyme' - slip through so that, unwittingly, the piece 'default[s] to 'open form'' (2013:175). Even this most non-prescriptive of forms, he realises, fails as a means to represent the movement and behaviour of the birds, in that there is still an implied and perceived thematic and

structural principle which shapes the poem's unfolding. There is no corresponding shaping in the territoriality, no observable 'centre-edge' self-organisation among the thornbills in their collective territorial behaviour. Even in the conceiving of the idea for the poem, Kinsella realises, the poet-as-witness is inevitably positioned at the centre. Postmodernist strategies of multiple and destabilised viewpoints still require for their interpretation the reader's performative engagement with the greater originating idea: '[e]vasiveness, the reader filling in the blanks, the torment of allusiveness, all in the end beg for attention' (2013:172). His finished poem, 'The Way of Thornbills' (2013:180-181), is a sequence of four unrhymed poems worded as short, mainly observational phrases, all left-justified. Adopting the convention of left-justified stanzas perhaps offers a form of transparency, by which the reader is not distracted by an unorthodox layout, so paying greater attention to the language itself.

In this chapter I have discussed the practical process of creating the poem-map, and compared the process and product with cartographic mapping as a performative enactment of place. In this I counter the notion that a landscape can generate its own poetics; that a place can give rise to its own depiction that is not inflected with the gaze of the observer. Mapping in all its forms is a process of creative entanglement of exploration and presentation, in which the map-maker is culturally (and autobiographically) invested. Walking, an embodied and grounded activity, is analogous to speech as a human process by which we realise our environment (*Vergunst*). Mapping by *moving through* creates actual associative and inhabited links within and between these points on the ground. These links are 'enunciated' in the pedestrian process of affirming, testing, transgressing and respecting (*Vergunst*). John Kinsella's poem-map of the territorial behaviour of thornbills and my own poem-map 'Summer Ferry' both reveal this intentional (re)structuring of space. An open field poetics of form and language - of accuracy to the process of utterance, and fidelity to the phenomenology of world as encountered - records and reveals how form itself is intrinsically affective, reflecting 'the shadow of the poet's voice' (Wheatley) and contributing at an ontological level to the representation and construction of place.

I have also showed how the gestures of writing, drawing and note-making *in situ* all occur and are interpreted within and reflect the context of the maker's own cultural context as well as their physical and self-conscious self-positioning. It is

impossible, as Kinsella says, to isolate the witnessing self from the record of what has been witnessed. Even while experimenting with poetic form, the self as witness frames and priorities what is to be recorded, and how it is represented. For this reason the gesture of recording does not escape the confines of a textual construct: it is made within, and must be interpreted within, a symbolic, cultural, textual, and perhaps significantly autobiographical framework. The primary human act of framing, of bringing 'attention to', means that it retains an essential subjectivity.

## CHAPTER 4. Embodied space: mapping the bay at Skagaströnd

Embi: Whether the world has been created or is still in the process of being created, must we not, since we are here, whistle at one another in that strange dissonance called human speech? Or should we be silent?

Halldór Laxness, *Under the Glacier* (2005:78)

The northern coastline that this thesis explores is both real and imaginary. Geographically, it is the very edge of the/my lived world. As we move north beyond the temperate zone, the most basic structures of this familiar, domestic world start to alter. The diurnal rhythm collapses. Cold becomes a corrosive, physically destructive presence; weather systems are unpredictable, and on a planetary scale. Our deepest sense of certainty, of *at homeness* in our surroundings, is challenged. My understanding of the northern coastline is as the very limit of hybrid, embodied space, of the territory created and demarcated in the constant negotiation between the private and the cultural (Tuan). At its farthest edge, the process of stabilising through language is exposed. Recognition of this instability, and the physical and philosophical confrontation with this 'beyond', is a recurring theme in my writing. In this chapter I explore ways in which poetry can point beyond the edges of encultured space - beyond the world which has been mapped out verbally, graphically, experientially, conceptually.

Skagaströnd is a fishing port on the north coast of Iceland (Figure 6). Here in the North Atlantic are the beginnings of the massive currents and weather systems whose aftermath affects the northern coastlines of the North Sea (Doody et al., 1993). For the month of December 2016 I was writer-in-residence at Nes Arts, a cultural foundation initiated by and embedded in the local community<sup>2</sup>. My project was to experiment with ways of recording the phenomenology of this landscape in real time. Moving on foot creates an intense kinaesthetic engagement with the material detail of

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<sup>2</sup> <https://neslist.is/about-nes/>



Figure 6. The bay and town of Skagaströnd. Image © L Harrison.

our surroundings. Through immersion in this radically unfamiliar landscape, I hoped to interrupt old habits of expression and produce a poetry of place which relies less on projected autobiographical meaning or allusions to imported historical/cultural contexts, but instead pays close attention to the phenomenology of these surroundings - the northern Icelandic coast in winter. In this way I hoped to reveal this feeling of physical and ontological instability, anterior to or at the limit of my own process of enculturing.

Tomas Tranströmer's career as a psychologist influenced his idea of our interior space, and how the conscious and unconscious create its topography (Jones, 2015:385). For Tranströmer, this psychic space becomes visible in the appearance and juxtaposition of categories, and in movement across their apparent boundaries and oppositions which exist only to fall away. In Tranströmer's poetry, this is the thinking world which the speaking voice inhabits. Even while the self is dispersed and decentralised, it is never removed; it is the perceiving, self-conscious agency which continually creates this space. In Tranströmer's writing, the infusion of outer and inner, moments of intense paradox, and the diffusion of the self across these multiple

framings generates a dynamic, multi-layered and multi-symbolic poem-world in which the speaking self constantly and consciously orientates itself. 'Whether the setting is outdoors or an interior, the edge of the unknown is always present' (Jones, 2015:391). His early collection *17 Poems* (published in 1954) received critical acclaim for its sharp and unorthodox imagery which creates a tangible, experiential poem-world, a trait which evolved to define his poetics throughout his career (Fulton, 2011:11)<sup>3</sup>. The poems in this early collection also reveal his creative and his professional interest in borders, between sleep and wakefulness, between the ordinary, everyday world and the other world outside it which our habits of thinking and language suppress.

Tranströmer locates many poems in the northern landscapes of Sweden, which provide both context and inspiration. The poem 'Sailor's Yarn' (2011:4) juxtaposes familiar anecdotal and folkloric ideas of the north, which compete here to provide structure and meaning for this space. In the field of this poem, the storyteller constantly revises meaning and scale. In multiple, overlapping metaphors, their arbitrary stability is revealed:

There are bare winter days when the sea is kin  
to mountain country, crouching in gray plumage,  
a brief minute blue, long hours with waves like pale  
lynxes vainly seeking hold in the beach-gravel.

On such a day wrecks might come from the sea searching  
for their owners, settling in the town's din, and drowned  
crews blow landward, thinner than pipe-smoke.

The narrator seems to be telling us a story, but the story never unfolds. Narrative meaning is continually unresolved. In this vivid, multi-symbolic interior zone, structural and categorical divisions - day/night, north/south, sea/land, dead/alive - dissolve in this surreal, unstable world in which we struggle to establish scale and find our footing.

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<sup>3</sup> In this thesis I refer to Robin Fulton's translations of Tranströmer's poems.

The second two stanzas seem to offer a more direct knowledge:

(The real lynxes are in the north, with sharpened claws  
and dreaming eyes. In the north, where day  
lives in a mine both day and night.

Where the sole survivor may sit  
at the borealis stove and listen  
to the music of those frozen to death.)

Yet this 'real' north no more reaches resolution than does the first. The poem roams between the worlds of Sami myth (the origin of the aurora borealis), fantasy (the caricature of the lynxes) and experiential logic (the mine, where the diurnal rhythm of day and night is absent) in the effort to fix and frame.

'Sailor's Yarn' dramatises the symbolic construction of place, with its accumulated layers of culturally mediated meanings and interpretation, and the reader's proactive process of meaning-making and self-orientation within it. This juxtaposition and testing out of 'frozen' meanings draws attention to the historical/cultural processes of their making, and to the reader's expectations of these as devices which will generate context and give narrative meaning to, and thereby stabilise, the poem-world. In their jostling for space, Tranströmer's symbolic framings point only to themselves, while the 'real north' of the second stanza remains beyond language's reach. The poem-world which the poem superficially aspires to map exists as a creative negotiation between the private and the public (Tuan). It is deeply unstable and continually revised, and can only be pointed to indirectly, by previous cultural reference and figurative language, themselves 'a form of afterwardness' (Watts). In this way the space beyond can be invoked even while it remains still unworded, and unwordable. The experiencing self, whose world this poem maps, is revealed in its reflexive navigation and forced reconceptualisation.

Tranströmer's poem dramatises the contemporary understanding of metaphor as having a primary ontological function. Tranströmer is important to this thesis both for his technical mastery and for his use of bare northern landscapes as context and



symbol as he explores how our local landscape is interiorised in the continual human construction of and relocation in our surroundings. In 'Sailor's Yarn', this process is dramatised in the unresolved/unresolvable yarn of the sailor, whose voice only is present, whose narrative tropes imply structure and stability, even while this is confounded by the mishmash of metaphor and reference.

The traditional understanding of metaphor as a linguistic device hinges on the idea of there being a clear distinction between literal and metaphorical language use, and the association of metaphor with an indeterminacy of meaning (Johnson, 1995:158). The idea of a literal use of language is rooted in the idea of language having a primary referential value. Karsten Harries, for example, offered the idea of the broken metaphor to point to a proposed primary ontological function of spoken language (1979:72). Harries' focus was what he saw as an emerging trend of unorthodox, intentionally absurd use of metaphor among contemporary poets, creating a 'collision of images' which disrupts our unthinking reliance on the stability and assumed transparency of the referential function. This, in Harries' thinking, reduces language itself to a Heideggerian 'poetic material' (1979:81).

Mark Johnson describes how the understanding of symbolic language has been superseded by advances in cognitive science research into language use, particularly into the mapping of concepts in imaginative and figurative forms of language such as metaphor. The metaphorical use of language reveals the 'conceptual and experiential process that structures our world'; 'our conceptual system and all forms of symbolic interaction are grounded in our bodily experience and yet imaginatively structured' (1995:157). This imaginative framing governs and describes both *what* and *how* we know, and is the process which generates 'not merely a cognitive principle but an ontological principle or structure' (1995:161). L. David Ritchie further refines this understanding by extending relevance theory to explain the essential meaning-making role of these apparently non-referential uses of language as part of the semantic processing of speech:

*Relevance* is defined as the capacity of an input, such as an utterance or gesture, to yield positive cognitive effects, to alter the individual's

representation of the world in a way and to an extent that justifies the effort required to process the input. Relevance theory assumes that human cognition has evolved to maximize relevance. (2009:249)

The cognitive impact of what Ritchie calls 'loose' language, or language which seems not immediately relevant or transparent, comes from a perceived conflict between context and possible interpretation (2009:260). In processing these forms of language use for their relevance to context, we identify, interpret and create meaning.

This fits well with Kristeva's understanding of the poetic function of language in which we self-consciously and creatively test out and generate meaning. In these departures, meaning is renovated and new meaning is formed. This is an everyday property of language use. The poetic use of metaphor and figuration are enhanced uses of this creative play with the organic conceptual structures of our shared language, as it constrains and enhances our reasoning. Metaphor and metonymy operate at the edges of language, functioning to maintain the language we use as a meaningful semantic system which is relevant to our needs: the language and dramatic emphasis with which we express these constructs attests to the continuous process of poetic thinking. '[W]e humans are metaphORIZING animals' (Johnson, 1995:159). Tranströmer's sailor, in his sorting through these various metaphorical framings, points to the moment before experience is worded and fixed. This individual psychic space outside the encultured place of the narrative is characterised as an alien, unbordered and unintelligible zone.

Tranströmer's long poem 'Baltics' (2011:105-114) was published in 1974, twenty years after *17 Poems*. In this largely autobiographical poem, the narrative thread moves seamlessly between locations and times, between a social and private world, between the literal, symbolic and metaphorical, and between the physical, embodied world and the world of his imaginings, all of which, in the long working of his mind on this place, have become unfixed: 'People, beasts, ornaments. / There is no landscape. Ornaments.' (105-106). As with 'Sailor's Yarn', his subject is the individual's synthesising navigation of this fluid, multi-temporal landscape, a process dramatised in his grandfather's navigating by thinking through the fog-bound archipelago, with 'that feeling of we're just here which must be kept, like carrying / a brimful pail without

spilling a drop' (24-25). Tranströmer's subject is not a description of a singular stable Baltic landscape, but the action of his thinking self in the textual interweaving of numerous co-existing 'Baltics' by which this place is brought into consciousness.

In Part II, the poet is with his mother on her island home:

The wind is in the pine forest. Sighing heavily and lightly.  
The Baltic is sighing in the middle of the island also, far within the  
forest you are out on the open sea. (30-32)

Any divisions between real and imagined, between then and now, between poet and mother and between poet and reader, fall away:

But she heard something else as well in the sighing, as I do, we are kin.  
(We are walking together. She's been dead for thirty years.) (36-37)

This gliding between sea, forest, memory (his and others') and reverie is stirred and perpetuated by his actually being in the forest. This immediacy of its sounds and senses prompts new insights and new turns in the sequence, as do the words themselves, and the association of ideas that occurs as he gives voice to them:

You go on, listening, and then reach a point where the frontiers open  
or rather  
everything becomes a frontier. An open place sunk in darkness.  
The people stream out from the faintly lit buildings round about.  
Murmuring. (43-47).

This flow is anchored in his kinaesthetic, 'embodied and grounded' sensitivity, which triggers the periodic return of his attention to the present: 'A new breath of wind and the place lies desolate and silent again' (48).

Understood as a poetry of place, this poem is striking for the sense of contingency Tranströmer attaches to his sense of *at homeness*, even while he is speaking from a place where he is 'at home'. Unlike much, possibly most, poetry of

place, 'Baltics' does not aim primarily to confirm his claim to belong (a position complicated by ideas of definitive, appropriative understandings and representations). His childhood landscape appears intermittently, and is inextricably linked with threads of histories from other times and places - unnamed locations 'where citizens are under control', mine-sweeping in 1915, sea shells from the West Indies, the Jewish ghetto in Prague. In plotting out this Baltic world, the poet constantly interrupts his own narrative thread with these other narratives. Yet he is always within the ontological world of textual re-presentation; narrative is displaced only by other kinds of wording.

The theme of the proximity of the dangerous, ever-present border recurs throughout, as in for example in Part II in the spatial confusion of sea and forest, and in the presence of the dead woman who continues to lament her own dead children. This felt ontological instability of categories and order generates a sense of apprehension - 'Nowhere lee. Everywhere at risk' (98) - which recurs in, for example, his sudden attention, mid anecdote, to the reader: '(who are you?)' (216). As he walks on the beach, even the border between himself and others and between himself and the world around him becomes insubstantial:

you have thin walls.

Each thing has acquired a new shadow behind the usual shadow  
and you hear it trailing along even in total darkness. (133-135)

Tranströmer links this new self-shadow to remote global monitoring systems and then to catastrophic plagues of locusts. These unending chains of events and meanings, in which one slips into the next, are experienced as a continual 'wind' or flow in which it is impossible to identify a beginning or end, or the boundaries of the self.

Throughout 'Baltics', Tranströmer uses water to represent silence. It is the 'brimful pail' of the blank space between islands of the archipelago, the 'no-man's water' of the present which breaks along the shore where he walks, the space around the self. This silence is also the pre-worded, or unwordable 'something [which] wants to be said', which we try and fail to express through language; as with the jellyfish which appear 'like flowers after a sea-burial' and which, while alive, evade description:

if you take them out of the  
water all their form vanishes, as when an indescribable truth  
is lifted out of silence and formulated to an inert mass, but they  
are untranslatable, and must stay in their own element. (184-187)

Death is form of crossing over water (269).

On the one hand, Tranströmer's constant cross-referencing suggests a universalism, of the island existing in the midst of a geopolitical and cultural interconnectedness as well as being simultaneously private and shared. Yet he is located simultaneously in these multiple narratives and times, which are stirred up and displaced by his own autobiographical enactment of this place - 'the images stronger in memory than when seen direct' (96). In this enactment, there is a direct causal relationship between the material presence of water, wind and landscape and his kinaesthetic experience of this place, and his imagined landscape - the flow of memory (his and others'), historical interconnections and invested symbolic meaning. Tranströmer's movement through this (actual and imagined) site stirs up a fluid phenomenology of place in all its transitory and half-forgotten historical, social, public and private meanings. In this way, as a poem-map of the archipelago, it extends beyond any geographical or temporal framing; and by making the poet one of many voices, it is simultaneously a poetry of place and a poetry of the self. The poem-world mapped by 'Baltics' extends far beyond Tranströmer's own direct experience and his own life span, even while the whole is infused with, and prompted by, his actual presence in the Baltic archipelago.

'Baltics' was the work of several years. In the original Swedish, says Samuel Charters, it is 'unrhymed [and] rhythmically rather free', though the Swedish 'has a harder sound' than English, 'more abrupt' (2012:11). In creating his own translation of 'Baltics', Charters describes how, when debating with the poet which English word might suit best, Tranströmer would sometimes return to the actual site to try them out (2012:12). This, for me as a poet, is a very interesting affirmation of the feeling that there is still a link between language and landscape, a fitness of word to context, even while it evades analysis. Tranströmer's open form, which is reproduced in both Charters' and Fulton's translations, enacts the text as spoken, with the line as unit of

meaning, though these lines often have slightly fewer syllables in Fulton's translation, and an austerity which adds to its directness of meaning.

This extended examination of 'Baltics' is also useful to me as a means of depicting a fragmented, semi-autobiographical continuously undefined and undefinable place in which the speaker's inflected self is not prioritised over other narratives and identities, including that of the reader. As a depiction of the archipelago, *Baltics* appears to belong to, and emanates from, no one voice in particular. Tranströmer as poet is the medium of this place, but the place itself extends far beyond his own autobiographical reach. 'Baltics' thus provides a model writing about place in which the place remains essentially beyond the reach of the cartographic coloniser.

In exploring Tranströmer's poem-world, particularly in how and where he locates the speaking self, the anthropological theory of embodied space has been very useful. Setha M. Low defines embodied space as the experiential, cognitive and emotional intersection of body, space and culture - 'the location where human experience and consciousness takes on a material and spatial form' (2003:9). The body is both a physical entity and a centre of agency, 'a location for speaking and acting on the world' (2003:10). The idea of embodiment blends the multiplicity of primary identities - corporeal, social, political, linguistic - providing a meeting point for, on the one hand, an understanding of the primacy of perception and the synthesis of phenomenological experience and the symbols and structures with which we make sense of our primary experience; and, on the other hand, feminist theory which posits the positionality of the body as the defining feature of body-space (2003:11). Our embodied space is a physical and conceptual extension of the self; it is a contracting and expanding world in which orientation and reorientation, movement and language are essential and defining features.

Thinking about the body's entire range of experience and affect - the sum of all the ways we know the world and have agency in it - enables us to go on to examine how the poem maps this space, and how the poet or the speaking voice is located within it. In the form and progression of 'Baltics', these various identities and narrative framings are anchored in and triggered by the anterior process of actual bodily self-in-

place, of kinaesthetic self-regulation. This, says Low, underpins our internalisation of any concept of self-in-place. Yet to prioritise the kinaesthetic self over the social self, giving primacy to the body in place-making, admits the possibility of there being fundamental cultural differences between us at the most profound level (Low, 2003:14). Low therefore promotes a model of our conceptual space as a fluid, constantly renewing inter-relationship of the private, social and spatial, of a continuity from inner to outer with no firm line between the 'subjective' and the 'objective', nor between our thinking self and the physical/social space in which the self is located. This idea of embodied space confirms the interconnectedness of self and place not as an ethically compromised form of self-projection, but as an essentially human process in which the self extends into place.

Our presence in and engagement with the world - material, social, historical, phenomenological - hinge, Low says, on spatial orientation and movement (2014:20). She refers to Tim Ingold's model of perception not as a static process, but as an embodiment of space which grows out of our being continually and fluently responsive to the physical environment of texture and sensation that we move through. The constant conceptual reorientation and retuning that this requires is a form of bodily intelligence, says Ingold; the landscape emerges as 'a relational field'; its paths, textures and contours are incorporated into our own embodied capacities of movement, awareness and response (2004:333). In this almost Heideggerian enactment of place, the ontology of our lived world hinges on our mobility.

As with 'Summer Ferry', the poem sequence 'Skagaströnd' was written from notes made while walking round the shoreline of the town. My intention was to record a phenomenology of place which, unlike Eday, was uncomplicated by long personal association and a burden of prior textual layers. In mapping the island of Eday, I found that the materiality of place was constantly submerged under imported, projected meanings, and that the idea of Eday that I wanted to sustain was in fact deeply textual, and deeply autobiographical. This in itself restricted the parameters of the poem-map. At Skagaströnd I hoped to produce an 'embodied and grounded' form of writing, especially given the greater physical effort required to move on foot through this physically unfamiliar and more extreme winter environment. Tranströmer allowed the materiality and texture of place to lead the flow of

associations and voices which chart the borderless world of his Baltic landscape. Within my overarching aim to write an outward-looking poetry of place, I hoped to produce writing which was stirred up by and had a more immediate, unmediated connection to its actual physical surroundings, which did not rely on other figurative ways of framing; a writing which began literally and metaphorically with a blank page.

I also wanted to explore this far northern place as an actual site at which my idea of an intrinsically unstable place might be experienced; where the affective impact of weather and landscape exceeds linguistic and symbolic appropriation, and which, in its unfamiliarity and unpredictability, is impossible to define figuratively - 'the north as metaphor, almost as metaphysics' (White). As stated at the beginning of this thesis, my interest in the issue of whether poetry of place must always be a poetry of the self is both philosophical and technical. In 'Summer Ferry' I explored some of the narratives and conceptual frameworks from which I had drawn to create and sustain my idea of the island. In 'Skagaströnd' I wanted to return to the Objectivist idea of insistence on fidelity to the world as encountered.

The bay at Skagaströnd is around two miles from end to end and is sheltered by a low promontory from the worst of the weather coming off the Greenland Sea. Most of the shoreline is occupied by the local fishing industry, though this was largely on hold in December. The poems reflect this temporary inactivity and the complete lack of people in this dominant, heavily organised workspace. There is also the constant larger presence of the polar ocean just beyond the hill. In their form and the urgency of their 'attention to', the poems also reflect the practical business of making notes in northern Iceland outdoors in December: I wrote these poems in the lee of buildings, while daylight held. They have not been edited, other than to exclude any that felt unfinished. My avoidance of a contextualising narrative framework, the poems' pared down forms and phrasings and the isolation of each act of noticing reflect my striving towards a 'rested totality' (Zukofsky), a clarity of shared insight that comes from identity of word and thing. However, the thinness of daylight - often only a twilight of storm clouds - the volatility of the weather and the perpetual onset of another twenty hours of darkness generated a feelings of uncertainty and apprehension, and a desire to stay within sight of the last house. This also adds to an uneasy sense of reprieve, which permeates the whole sequence.



The sequence 'Skagaströnd' emerged as a series of poems in the familiar, Objectivist-inflected form of two- or three-line stanzas, with a consciously pared-back language and line form. As Niedecker managed her own necessary, facilitating presence in remaking the flood-worlds of Wisconsin, so at several points I also located my autobiographical self in this place; as in, for example, my 'walking through a mirror' of dense, still air, and the 'agnostic' piece of ice. Yet even while trying to attend only to the phenomenology of place and the ideas it stirred, I found there were what Kinsella called 'prejudices of form': the language I used is shaped by my own speaking voice, and the notes themselves reveal an awareness of syllabic rhythms and internal half- and slant-rhymes, which all locate the whole firmly in my own voice. I also found myself discovering new onomatopoeic qualities in, for example, the words 'pattern' and 'pandemonium' to recreate the sound of rain on the roof; yet the associative resemblance that links the aural qualities of these words with the sound of the rain is peculiar to my own accent and performance of these words.

In Part V of 'Baltics' Tranströmer describes his task as a poet as to work within the medium of language to describe that which lies outside it:

August 2<sup>nd</sup>. Something wants to be said but the words don't agree.  
Something which can't be said,  
*aphasia*,  
there are no words but perhaps a style ... (188-191)

One striking theme in my encounter with the landscape around Skagaströnd was that any form of language - aural, textual, graphic - was conspicuous as an addition. Dialogue, signs and notices, books and radio were all a secondary, superimposed stratum of texture and symbolic meaning to be reckoned with, materially and intellectually. Tuan recognised the importance of the artistic response as perhaps the only means of describing this pre-encultured, pre-languaged state. Tranströmer understands his role, or plight, as a poet to navigate it. Through language, he says, we reach for direct meaning but constantly fall short: 'we express something through our lives / in the humming chorus full of mistaken words' (212-213). For Tranströmer, there is a gap between our affected embodiment and the textual construct. In

Skagaströnd itself, this idea was weirdly summed up by the two large murals made in 2013 by Australian artist Guido van Helten (Figure 7). Each is a portrait of an Icelandic fisherman he met that day at the dock. They watch without speaking.

In her recent collection *Fast* (2017), Jorie Graham continues her exploration of the action and affect of language, in particular the language of mass communication, as it both locates and restricts the speaking self. I read these poems in conjunction with visits to BioPol, the marine biotechnology research station at Skagaströnd<sup>4</sup>. One



Figure 7. Skagaströnd mural by Guido van Helten. Image © L Harrison.

of their projects is the tagging of lumpfish which come inshore briefly in Spring to spawn and then return to the deepest parts of the Greenlandic Ocean beyond the continental shelf, and far beyond the range of current tracking technology.

Jorie Graham's recent writing reveals an increasingly personal concern with the interrelationship between language and environment, and the action of language in constructing and destroying our habitat at both a global and personal level. A close examination of Jorie Graham's poetry is useful for its relevance to several themes I explore in this thesis and in my own poetry. Graham explores the poetic possibilities

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<sup>4</sup> <https://biopol.is/efni/english>

of the reflexive speaking voice. Her radical experimentation with poetic form makes explicit the truth that the poem is 'read' visually before the words are decoded. Her original and contemporary use of poetic form and the iconography of print is a radical development in open field poetics. Her long lines and breathy, urgent phrases emphasise the primacy of spoken language. Graham is also deeply occupied with the relationship between self and place.

Among the issues which shape her most recent poetry is an 'increasingly desperate sense of myself as a member of a species - a species deeply implicated in the extinction of other species', and at the same time an 'increasingly thin sense of my "singular individuality"'. More than ever, says Graham, 'the confrontation of poetry, the encounter with a *subject*' is 'a crisis of accountability' (in Graham and Howe, 2017). This recalls Wrighton's statement of the essential problem of 'poethical practice' as language's action of phenomenological and practical self-prioritisation, as a result of which, for both Wrighton and Graham, it is intrinsically bound up with consumer politics:

Language has become the medium of market-orientated self-identification, and it is in this ontological abuse that we can identify the transmogrification of language as a "traumatised semiotics".  
(Wrighton, 2010:4)

For Graham, the act of making poetry is ethically implicated in that the relationships formed in the self-conscious process of *attention to*, and the colonising nature of the medium itself, make us immediately and doubly accountable to the subject we confront.

In *Fast*, Graham explores the possibilities and boundaries of the lyric voice - 'personal human voice - meditative voice - interiority, subjectivity' (Graham and Howe, 2017) - in the construction of the identity of the speaker and in the action of the speaking voice on the more-than-human world. In particular, in her poems 'Deep Water Trawling' and 'Self Portrait at Three Degrees', the edges of the self within the textual and material environment of language are tested. The momentum of these long poems bears us forward toward the very edges of our body of language, where it

starts to fray. At this point, the ad-hoc nature of its structural edifice and its all-absorbing consuming action become visible.

'Deep Water Trawling' (2017:6-7) has a first-person narrator, though this 'I' is deliberately mobile and appears only intermittently, and the 'you' the poem addresses is variously the reflexive speaking self, the fish, the reader, the consumer and the broad population. The speaking voice questions the division between 'you' and 'I' ('the cut of you') and the way that language appropriates the other - 'no—not own—we all mean to live to the end' (3). Read as an exploration of the domain of the lyric voice, in this poem the indiscriminate sweep of the deep sea trawl represents language's imposition of a total world, and its absorption of everything into itself:

—am I human we don't  
know that—just because I have this way of transmitting—call it voice—a threat—  
communal actually—the pelagic midwater nets like walls closing round us—starting  
in the far distance where they just look to us like distance—distance coming  
closer—hear it—eliminating background—is all foreground—you in it—the only  
ground—not even punishment—

(3-8)

The omnipresence of language and the over-saturation of our lived world with speech ('discards can reach 90% of the catch' (13)) is performed in the poetic re-enactment of the trawl. The poem talks simultaneously and interchangeably about the danger of irreversible ecological degradation caused by trawling and the total submersion of the self in the formulaic patterns of everyday speech:

am I—the habitat crushed  
and flattened—net of your listening and my speaking we can no longer tell them  
apart—the atmosphere between us turbid—no place to hide—no place to rest—

(13-15)

Graham moves seamlessly in and out of metaphor, and in doing so raises the question of whether there is any distinction between them. The trawl is both metaphor and metonym for the ontological sweep of language as a form of consumerist politics.

Beyond the net is the deep sea bed. Now there is a reprieve; in these double-spaced lines, phrases are radically truncated as language thins out:

Ask us anything. How deep is the sea. You couldn't go down  
there. Pressure would crush you. Light disappears at 6000 feet. Ask  
another question: Can you hear me? No. Who are you. I am. (30-32)

Here Graham directly confronts the issue of appropriation and commodification of the other: 'I have self-interest. Things / are not me' (34-35). In this middle section, in these foreshortened utterances by the speaking voice to a 'you' that is both the listener and the reflexive speaking self, Graham's concern with our 'increasingly thin sense of [our] 'singular individuality'', and the soft boundary between self and other, is set out:

Your entity is fragile. You are an object you own. At least  
you were given it to own. You have to figure out what ownership  
is. You thought you knew. You were wrong. It was wrong. There was  
wrongness in the mix. It turns out you are a first impression. (43-46).

In her interview with Sarah Howe, Graham describes the ways in which she feels her 'singular individuality' is being increasingly challenged:

The truly anxious question, it seems to me, concerns how singular we are, or remain, or should remain, in relation to our communal predicament—our communal creation of this [contemporary ecological] nightmare. There is no place to step out of it. We are totally interlinked

in ways far less beautiful or spiritually advanced than we had imagined.  
This question underpins every other question. Ecologically,  
economically, technologically. (in Graham and Howe, 2017)

The phrase 'Who are you. I am.' (32) states the fundamental distinction between self and other, an equality that is thrown out of balance as soon as the 'net' finds them again. Now phrases are joined with programming arrows rather than hyphens, a visual spur which increases the pace and urgency of the poem as well as drawing attention to the irreversibility of this process of ecological degradation. In the final, squashed lines, language itself starts to unspool:

he says→she says→who is this speaking to me→I am the upwelling→I am the  
disappearing→hold on→just a minute please→hold on→there is a call for you  
(53-54)

In its imagery, its play with poetic form and its textural manipulation of language, 'Deep Water Trawling' performs the idea of the colonising action of language as it both locates and restricts the speaking self. The poem demonstrates her understanding of the link between our physical environment and our ecology of language as direct, almost causal; the linguistic action of place-making acts dramatically on its site of origin. The poem maps a world that is irreducibly and potentially catastrophically restricted by its medium.

'Self Portrait at Three Degrees' (2017:8-9) continues to explore this interlinking, though this time there is a more direct tone of advocacy, and some hope of redemption. The title alludes to the projected increase in mean ocean temperature, and the tipping point at which climate change will become irreversible. It also hints at the popular idea of the 'degrees of separation' by which everyone in the world is connected to everyone else. Language is again both medium and matter - it simultaneously reveals and obscures. The speaking 'I' is glimpsed in the ever-present, all-consuming volume of mass media dialogue, undifferentiated technical data and scraps of text from popular culture ('I am a growth possibility', 'this was my song to you'). Reader and speaker move from phrase to phrase in search of stable ground.

The presence behind the speaking 'I' is revealed in its effort to assert itself against this massive, ceaseless flow of speech. Again Graham uses truncated phrases and programming arrows to accelerate the poem to the point of crisis:

suddenness its own rule → surprise. Not chaos. If I listen: everything: chant of.  
(31)

The last stanza is a summons which, as it sorts through this morass of fractured, fragmented speech, arrives at a Heideggerian call to authentic dwelling: 'Define anthropos. Define human. Where do you find yourself' (32-33). The poem ends with the single-word command: 'Dwell'.

In the interview with Howe, Graham describes her concern over the effect of mass media and social technology on the erosion of empathy, which she defines as a fellow-feeling that extends to our environment and other species:

The whole condition of empathy is much more complex and bodily and inchoate than the language we have for speaking of it. I like to try to stick with neurologists and how they study it - as a much more ancient and bodily state. Something the body "reads" in itself. (Graham and Howe, 2017)

The particular role of poetry, for Graham, is the interconnecting of the human past and the human present to consolidate and to draw attention to the communal memory and the embodied awareness that links us to our environment. For Graham, our embodied, affective space extends far beyond the boundary of the self.

For Graham, language performs identity - in these poems the intermingling, overlapping identities which constitute the speaking self. This underpins her double sense of the poet's 'poetical' responsibility: firstly, in the relationships that are formed in our 'attention to'; and second, in the colonising nature of our medium. We are therefore, says Graham, immediately and doubly accountable to the subject we confront. In her use of found text, she assembles a cohesive, coherent, speaking voice even while the self it belongs to is persistently unstable; so demonstrating the

ontological gap between language and that which it languages. In these poems, the speaking voice struggles to define and express itself within and against the mass of commodified language and available semantic structures and texts.

In 'Deep Water Trawling', the idea of the individual as a 'first impression' also rejects the categorical superiority of the human and the idea of 'ownership' and mastery of the environment. This evokes recent ecocritical ideas of the poetics of kin-making, and the idea of evolutionary time by which a species (including the human being) is understood as not finally fixed in its nature and genetic manifestation but as continually, imperceptibly *in process*. David Farrier describes the rise of multispecies ethics in Anthropocenic thinking, and its categorical rejection of 'the problematically monolithic "we"' - the individual, completed self at the centre, the figure in the landscape which gives it scale and meaning. Set in the timeframe of species evolution, it also forces revision of ideas of 'the stability of the lyric "I"' and 'the special "now" of lyric articulation' (2019:5). Embodied place becomes a dense ecology of symbiotic relationships:

cultivating a sense of kinship with multispecies familiars is the most pressing obligation in an era of hemorrhaging biodiversity. But a turn toward the animal must also acknowledge and accommodate the fact that the animal other turns away. (Farrier, 2019:89)

Graham's idea of empathy, as explored in her poetry, is a recognition of this otherness, and an 'inclining toward the reality of shared concerns and collaborative world-making even while the animal other turns away from any fixed shape' (Farrier, 2019:98). In her poetics of kin-making, the speaking voice implicates the whole human species in its vast timescale of evolution. Farrier also argues for the special possibilities within poetic practice for signalling the ontological magnitude of the Anthropocenic crisis, 'an event that challenges our sense of what an event might mean (2019:7).

In this chapter I have explored how the language of poetry can point beyond the edges of our hybrid, encultured space. At its farthest edges, in the constant renegotiation of the private and the cultural (Tuan), the process of stabilising through language is challenged. Through the work of Tomas Tranströmer I have explored



contemporary understandings of metaphor and figurative language as the means by which semantic meaning is confirmed and/or renovated. Relevance theory, when applied to semantic meaning-making, sees our negotiation with metaphorical language as intrinsic to the ordinary semantic processing of speech. Metaphor and metonymy thus operate at the edges of language, functioning to maintain it as relevant to our needs as we renew our shared and private understandings of self-in-place. For Tranströmer, the blank, uncharted/unchartable northern landscape represents the interior psychic space in which the self navigates and synthesises narrative meaning.

Tranströmer also provides a model of how to write an outward-looking poetry of place in his fusion of voices and framings, within which his own autobiographical self is often submerged. 'Baltics' maps out an inhabited, embodied landscape which far exceeds the range of ways in which he can have personal, direct knowledge of it; and which, in its interweaving of narrative, historical and personal threads, is borderless and continuous. Setha Low's concept of embodied space is useful for its explanation of how this space is both physical and conceptual. Fundamental to its continual rethinking is the progress of the 'embodied and grounded' self as it moves through, or over, this terrain. Our embodied space is thus a physical and conceptual extension of the self, a contracting and expanding world in which orientation and reorientation, movement and language are essential and defining features. Its realisation hinges on our mobility. This underpins my idea of the poem-map as growing out of our enactment of place by 'moving through'. Tranströmer's long poem 'Baltics' offers a model of this process; in it he allows the materiality and texture of place to lead the flow of associations and voices which chart the ultimately borderless world of this Baltic landscape. Another model is to return to the Objectivist ethic of fidelity to the world as encountered. The poem-sequence 'Skagaströnd' is a practical testing out of this idea. It records my self-conscious refocussing on specific sites as points along the shoreline, both as a cartographic strategy and in response to the weather and levels of daylight while mapping.

In Jorie Graham's work, I find another way in which there might be a material link between language and place, even while this place is by definition incomplete or not wholly available. By locating the action of language in the politics of consumerism, Graham presents the poet, the generator of the speaking voice, as ethically implicated

in the relationships formed by our 'attention to', and in the colonising nature of the medium itself. For Graham, the redemptive function that poetry can perform is to draw attention to the communal and embodied memory, or 'empathy', which links us as a species to, and embeds us, in our environment. As with Burnside, she uses the Heideggerian idea of enactive dwelling, a process which is realised as it is languaged but which, as an embodied, affective space, extends far beyond the boundary of the individual self and the conceptual and material boundaries of language itself. Both Tranströmer and Graham look for ways in which poetry of place can escape the limitations imposed by the single speaking self and 'the special "now" of lyric articulation' (Farrier). Graham goes further: in her poetry, she explores the deeply unstable, fragmenting edges of the territory framed by the monolithic 'we'.

## CHAPTER 5. Poethical representation of the other.

[M]y focus is on the way ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories, and legends. It is also the case that [...] theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society [...] the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004:23)

This thesis is a reflexive examination of the ideas and practical processes which led to the writing of the poetry collection *Summer Ferry*. Critical engagement with the ideas explored in this thesis has grown out of my desire as a poet to clarify my own idea of place. Intrinsic to this idea, and fundamental in the framing of this enquiry, is my recognition of the ‘social imaginary’ of the small, tightly knit coastal village where I stay. My poems of the northern coastline are a recognition of and a response to this *at homeness*. As with Burnside and Tranströmer, I am deeply aware of its multiple, continuous and contiguous layers of occupation, and of how I stir up and add to these layers both as a member of this community and in my own creative response.

In Chapter 1 I examined how the unity and coherence of the poetic voice transferred coherence to the poem-world. In Chapter 2 I examined the role of language in the construction of place, and the imagined enactive link between particular forms of language and their environment. In Chapters 3 and 4 I explored the process of languaging our environment as an embodied space, in which the ontology of place hinges on our mobility, and in which the ‘whole presence of the human muzzle’ (Barthes) is deployed in the generation, transmission and performance of meaning. In this chapter I explore the creative engagement with and deployment of other voices and texts, both from an ethical point-of-view and as a strategy to try to

preserve and bring forward the original narrator and their creation of place, rather than as a performative projection of the poet. This is a return to the question of whether I as a poet can produce a non-mediated, non-inflected response to these texts, and to the voices embedded in them.

In writing my poem-map of Skagaströnd, I found that I defaulted to a short form of left-justified stanzas of between 15 and 20 syllables. This, along with slant rhymes and traces of familiar syllabic rhythm, imposed my own speaking voice as the generator of the form of the poem, and thereby made me personally present in this poem-world. By radically disrupting my own 'prejudices of form' (Kinsella), I hoped to decentre my own voice as an arbiter of form and presence. I also wanted to allow a freer form of reading where the reader had permission to move through the text of the poem in other ways. I began to experiment with the materiality of the printed text itself, to see whether other, possibly suppressed, meanings might be made possible by physically interrupting the narrative voice.

On the one hand, my fascination with archive documents is with the text as object, with the clear material evidence of its having been handled and worked. Close physical examination of the original manuscripts reveals something of the original speaker's actual presence: as well as variations in handwriting, crossings out or other marks, the object itself might be well-thumbed, torn or stained. The whaling journals I have worked with are hand-written in shop-bought ledgers and exercise books. It is also interesting to speculate how the shape and size of their pages might have encouraged the writer to condense or elaborate their thoughts. Often in the text it is possible to detect the syllabic rhythms of the individual speaker's own voice he<sup>5</sup> lapses into dialect or reaches for other ways of describing. All these reveal the private 'thinking through' that produced the document as a relic of this initial act of witnessing. It is this immediacy of contact with the speaker himself which inspired my experiments with erasure.

My erasure poems began with a growing awareness of the phenomenological impact of language in an otherwise unworded space - of encountering language-as-matter. The source text for 'Old Whaling Days (II)' is a page from the memoirs of a Hull

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<sup>5</sup> It is appropriate here to use the gender-specific 'he' as, of course, the crew of whaling ships were all men.

captain in which he describes the process of navigation through shifting ice. The poem was created by removing everything except the narrator's own references to the floe edge or points of land. The result is a graphic and verbal enactment of their start-stop movement; its visual structure becomes a form of topographic map, the marks of the text signaling definite points in an otherwise blank white space. 'The Arctic Pilot' was created by the erasure of almost all of a dense page of text of navigational direction. What is left is the bodily process of articulating this previously unworded space. 'The North Ron Light' imagines the inner monologue of this Orkney lighthouse as day gradually becomes night and it begins to articulate its presence. The erased page is from the book I had with me on a trip to Orkney, and records a phenomenology of place in which, in switching between reading and looking, the Orkney landscape becomes infused in, or viewed through, through this text, which is just visible as a palimpsest. My aim was to record my encounter with this text as it was framed by, and infused with, these new surroundings. I used a different erasure practice to create 'Old Whaling Days (I)', in which in which a whaler describes the hunting of the whale using the language of courtship. By lifting these extracts out of the source text, I could expose the narrator's self-concept of mastery and ownership, of both the animal and of the arctic landscape in which these rituals of this courtship are acted out.

Erasure as a form also presents another model of the poem as map: we are literally plotting new meaning onto/into an older textual landscape. Travis Macdonald sets the poetic technique of erasure firmly in a postmodern context, as an experiment in violating the presumed singleness and coherence of both authorial inspiration and the text as object (2009). In finding entirely new poems in older texts, we acknowledge our shared heritage of making language, along with the dense layering of language and text which poets stir up and add to. The erasure poem physically locates the poet in the textuality of poetry, in the bodily task of writing. The white spaces around words and marks, while also sculptural, contribute to the visual and aural rhythm of the text as a whole. They are imposed and radical silences, says Macdonald - an impossibility of language. These silences in turn throw the text, when it occurs, into relief: our encounter with the printed word is all the more intense. For Macdonald, the rendering strange of language, by reminding us of its essential materiality, is the main concern of erasure poetics.

My fascination with archive documents also lies in how their shared cultural world - the social imaginary - is preserved and gradually revealed. To read these documents is to become immersed in the language as shaped by the narrator's own accent and rhythms of speech; the text is imbued with these oral and aural qualities.



Figure 8. Mural on Hessle Road, Hull. Image © Chris Pepper, 2017.

For example, in my poem 'Herring' I have lifted whole phrases in an effort to capture and make distinct the first speaker's own voicing of this place, to try to make him present as the originator of the poem-world, rather than myself as poet.

The sequence 'Hessle Road' grew out of a set of oral histories recorded as research into the aftermath of the collapse of Hull's deepwater fishing industry<sup>6</sup>. From the mid 19<sup>th</sup> to the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, the distant-water fishery, claimed locally to be the largest in Europe, developed as a distinctively place-centred activity (Byrne, 2015:235). In these recorded accounts there is an understanding of Hessle Road as existing in the liminal zone between the sea and safe, inhabited land (Byrne, 2015:9). Jeremy Tunstall describes the qualities of life at sea that seeped into life ashore: for example, the fixity of rituals and roles over generations so that these had an 'absolute and unchanging quality'; the distinct working slang; the sense of isolation and self-

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<sup>6</sup> Byrne, J. (2015) *After the trawl: memory and afterlife in the wake of Hull's distant-water trawl fishery from 1976*. PhD thesis. The University of Hull.

containment; and the sheer physical and emotional intensity of working at sea (1962:133-134). The habitual movement between land and sea and these fixed roles and patterns of social contact created the fishing district as a deeply rooted network of meaningful lived spaces (Byrne, 2015:13). This was the land edge of a sea world.

Its decline in the 1970s, attributed both to overfishing and to unfavourable agreements over fishing zones, had a devastating impact on the Hessle Road community and a major impact on the city generally. From the outset I was very aware that these sources had an additional and ongoing social and emotional significance which, I felt, complicated my engagement with them. The interviews reveal how emotive these issues were, and still are; the interviewees describe their deep and ongoing sense of loss, both personal and shared. One of the stated aims of Byrne's project was to explore with members of the community how the industry should be remembered and represented for visitors 'as the former fishing communities seek the "right place" for a trawling past in a future city' (Byrne, 2015:iii).

This is the concern of several community groups, including the Terrace Enders maritime art project (Figures 8 and 9) which was funded by Hull 2017's Creative Communities Programme<sup>7</sup>. As with my representations of the Orkney island of Eday, I was concerned that my use of these recordings might be understood as an aestheticisation and commodification of these stories, further undermining the community's understanding of, and ownership of, its own history. John Wrighton describes one of the definitive aspects of 'poethical practice' as being 'fundamentally preoccupied with an emancipatory social activism: a welcoming of the other by way of a participatory and non-totalising poethics' (Wrighton, 2010:2). In the construction of our identity within the relations that language signifies, said Wrighton, we participate in relationships of exchange and power, and thereby, in this participation, are implicated ethically. I was highly conscious of my presence and intervention in these narratives, and my accountability to the speakers themselves as the community continued to come to terms with its experience. My desire was that, in manipulating and re-presenting these stories, my intervention did not become an act of appropriation, either of meaning or of voice. Before I began, therefore, I discussed with Dr Byrne whether my creative re-presentation of these dialogues might be

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.visithull.org/discover/article/terrace-enders-murals-take-shape-hull/>

considered inappropriate by her interviewees. We agreed that presenting these historical sources in a different way might generate fresh engagement, allowing a wider audience within Hull to begin to understand how the trawling community's experience continues to bear on the 'social imaginary'.



Figure 9. Terrace Enders mural, Hessle Road, Hull. Image © Simon Fitch, 2017 Hull.

In working with archival accounts, 'more than evidence of what is past', says Marika Cifor, 'there is always story, imagination and future to consider' (2016:13). Affect theory, and particularly how it is brought to bear on the handling of archive material, has been very useful to me in clarifying my concerns about an appropriate artistic response:

In what ways, and to what extent, do records, and the holdings of our archives capture or contain emotions and other forms of affect that were experienced by the creators or others engaged or present in the making of the records? How should the archivist represent such affect



to potential users, and how should the archivist anticipate and respond to affective responses and reactions on the part of those users? What kinds of affect are experienced by the archivist? What ethical imperatives and dilemmas does a consideration of affect present for practicing archivists? (Cifor and Gilliland, 2016:1)

The study of archives and archival practice have traditionally been concerned with material records - 'the actual and the tangible' (Cifor and Gilliland, 2016:2) - and continues to be shaped by 'the still prevalent modernist construction of the study and practice of archiving as a "science"' (Cifor, 2016:10). This has led to particular forms of knowledge being foregrounded and other forms neglected due to the absence of substantive material evidence. As a result, within archival theory and practice there remains 'an unreflexive preoccupation with the actual, the instantiated' (Gilliland and Caswell, 2016:55). However, as the assumed neutrality of the scientific model has come under scrutiny in postmodern thinking, so has the idea of neutrality in the process of creating the archive as well as in its interpretation.

As a consequence, the application of affect theory in the field of archive studies has often been linked to a revision and redress of power. Archivists are witnesses, says Cifor, and so unavoidably act within a framework of relationships. Witnessing is 'both a mutually constitutive and a performative act' (2016:18). With this role comes responsibility towards individuals and communities, both to acknowledge the archivist's own concerns about restorative justice and to acknowledge how the subjectivity of the witness shapes production and documentation of the primary source material. The responsibility I felt towards both the interviewees and the recordings as artefacts was to do with ownership. While acknowledging my own (inevitable) presence as poet, I wanted the poems to feel as if they belonged within the interviewees' own world, and for the speakers to recognise their own speaking voices as the authority which generates the poem.

The sequence 'Hessle Road' demonstrates the extent to which I was unable to remove myself from the form or field of the poem. There is a tension between myself as poet and the speaking voice of the interviewee. In these broad arrangements of text and space, I bring together words, phrases and sentences which, as I listened,

stood out as revealing distinctive patterns of speech or trains of thought, as in one speaker's melodic use of the refrain 'Well he said'. The marks on the page demarcate a territory and a textuality created and occupied by the voice. The double meaning of the word 'mark' as a buoy in a fishing ground and a mark on the page reminded me also of Tranströmer's flag-lines across the Baltic ocean which mark out this notional space, and W. S. Graham's dramatic description of the gannet 'fishmarks' in 'The Nightfishing' as 'signs falling / Through their appearance' (168-169).

In 'we went to the North Sea and places like that', the list form of the poem records the speaker's own stop-start delivery. In other poems the form is the result of my erasure of parts of a printed transcript, as in one woman's description of her instinctive knowledge of the course of her father's ship. The appearance of the text on the blank page almost enacts her moment of realisation; here, this memory-invested place becomes real as it is worded. In all of these poems, the appearance of text in white space is also intended to reproduce the invested presence of the speaker in the tension between speech and silence in their own reliving and retelling their story. The emergence of these words in this white space also points to how the meaning and significance of these events is still unfolding. As an archive, this is unfinished record.

The place that is created in these poems is a product of my (contemporary, creative) engagement with these retellings. In her thesis, Byrne discusses the historical accuracy that these accounts might have, and the reasons why accounts will alter over time (2015:33). Interviewees might omit details through a conscious or unwitting attempt to sustain their own self-concept as part of this absent, now semi-mythic world; or through honing the story over time for an audience (including themselves); or through simply forgetting. The story changes with the telling: the performative retelling of these experiences (to listeners, to the interviewer, to themselves) is an essentially dialectical exchange. This is a generative interrelationship of past and present framings. In the Hessle Road stories, the 'truth' is renewed each time it is spoken.

I draw here on Johannes Fabian's examination of the assumption of an antithetical opposition between 'objectivity' and 'subjectivity', and his idea of the essential subjectivity of that which we hold to be objectively true. The empirical model

of observation and testing is falsely applied in the fields of social and ethnographic research, he argues. Here, the generation of knowledge is an intersubjective process:

Presence *is*, because before there is representation there must be presence; and in the end the question of ethnographic objectivity still comes down to the question of what makes it possible to have access to another culture. (Fabian, 2001:23)

His argument posits an epistemological rather than a (lesser) psychological basis for our knowledge of the other. The knowledge that arises in the intersubjective space comes from a dialectical process 'apart from and beyond psychological attitudes, historical circumstances, ideological leanings, and power relations' (2001:25). What we hold to be objective truth is initiated and negotiated by productive confrontation that takes place in dialogue.

Applying Fabian's theory, the place described in the recordings is a co-construction of the interviewer Dr Byrne and individual being interviewed, created in the generative confrontation between these subjects and bearing traces of its own cultural and historical moment. The place that the poem sequence 'Hessle Road' depicts is, in turn, a result of my equally contextualised confrontation with the interviews as text. Fabian's idea of the essential intersubjective nature of objectivity allows memory, hindsight and emotional weight to play a part in the truth-making process, rather weakening its (empirical) accuracy. In the social imaginary, Hessle Road is constantly being renewed. Fabian's theory allows us to talk about the impact of archive voices not simply in terms of legacy, but also in our contemporary engagement with them and their capacity to co-author new meanings and to renew the narrative of the wider community in which they are historically and culturally embedded.

The poem 'Hull' - the final poem of the collection *Summer Ferry* - presents multiple speaking voices. The sources from which these fragments were taken include the whole range of texts that constitute the source material for this thesis - written and oral, archive and contemporary, graphic and worded - including my own notes and poems. These are presented as a collage, set out graphically in a grid that is intended

to suggest a fishing net. The reader can read in any direction and start at any point. There is no narrative arc, and my only intervention in their otherwise random arrangement was to ensure that fragments from the same source text did not appear next to each other. My interest in collage as a poetic form grew from the possibilities it seemed to offer, especially regarding archive texts, for making present the source text and through this something of the voice and place of the source speaker. Each fragment is a voice. Each can be understood as a gesture towards the environment in which it was made. My intention in presenting these extracts alongside each other was to expose the relativity of each statement as a gesture to 'fix' its surroundings.

Theoretically, the net can be extended in any direction, and incorporate an infinite number of 'voices'. In this poem, these multiple constructed worlds exist simultaneously. The net plots them spatially on the page and holds them alongside each other, exposing their incompatibilities. Each element has a double function. Each refers to the moment in which it was written, in all the circumstances of its making - historical, biographical, artistic - even the fragment's meaning is revised by this new context. As an artistic form, collage is intended to force the reader to infer meaning using their own hierarchies of ordering and symbolic interpretation to find their own way through this new text. 'Collage, or assemblage, effects a displacement from artistic object to reader [...] In this way, the opposition writer/reader is deconstructed' (Barbeito, 2000:31).

In collage as a form, David Antin perceives the possibility of 'a subtle sense of the observer', 'the sense of an implicit narrative without a story' (Antin et al., 2004:102). In interpreting collage, he says, the reader engages in a creative process of self-location. In its absence of structuring narrative, collage as a form provokes this reflexive association, this creative self-positioning in front of the text. There is a sense, therefore, in which the poet of the collage poem can transfer the process of meaning-making, or generating the structure of the poem-field, to the reader. Yet even while the poet hides behind the screen of fragments from the prior text, the poet is implicated as its originating agency, as the creative presence which has set out the form and parameters of the collage work. The sense of the creator's own absence that the collage form generates grows out of the strangeness of the reader's encounter with these decontextualised fragments, and from the self-conscious process of

meaning-making that the fragmented text forces. In its 'provocational strategy', says Antin, it reveals the poet's overarching presence.

The sequence 'Hessle Road' is a collage in that the poems are deliberately not numbered: the reader can read them in any order, so that the poetic space becomes variously populated with these different, concurrent voices. There is a slight sense in which the 'Hessle Road' poems do perhaps retain something of the empirical process of documenting: the extracted phrases are in the order in which they occur in the interview, as a deliberate reference to the event of their being spoken. However, though the process of publishing in printed form requires the poems to be laid out as a sequence, elsewhere the poems have been ordered differently or sit side by side<sup>8</sup>. The poet and reader are mobile among these voices.

M. NourbeSe Philip's collection *Zong!* (2011) is a supreme example of a poet using collage, randomisation and erasure as strategies to release suppressed meaning and to (re)populate the poem-field with multiple concurrent voices. The source text is an insurance litigation document from a case in which the owners of a slave ship sought damages for the value of one hundred and fifty slaves who were thrown overboard in the mid Atlantic in an effort to conserve stocks of drinking water. Philip's original plan was to tell this story as a novel; however she turned to poetry for the multiplicities of meaning and suggestion that could be created through its disruptions of grammar and syntax, and for the creative possibilities of its non-linear, non-narrative open forms: '[t]he not-telling of this particular story is in the fragmentation and mutilation of the text' (Philip, 2011:198)

This is a restorative project. In *Zong!* Philip's explicit primary intention is to bear witness to the event itself (2011:203). Philip is challenging the historiography of the production of this document in which the voices at the centre of the story are (literally, forcibly) missing. She wishes to restore the 'cacophony of voices - wails, cries, moans, and shouts' that had been 'banned from the text' (2011:203). The source text - the claim for compensation for lost cargo - both acknowledges and denies the existence of these people and, by its own existence, continues to reinforce the cultural and political structures which led to their deaths. She compares language as a system

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<sup>88</sup> Versions of this poem are due to appear in Harrison, L. (2020) *Disappearances*. Bristol: Shearsman, and Smith, J. (ed) (2019) *Hull, city of poets*. Hull: The History Troupe.

of control to a body of law: both are self-authenticating mechanisms which have a potent ability to decree what *is* or *is not* (2011:196). For Philip, the story the historical text tells is locked within and denied by the text itself (2011:199). In *Zong!* she wants to push against the boundaries of language, to move beyond its closed system of representation and self-reproduction. In depicting this historical event as deeply dehumanising and therefore almost unwordable, the physical rupture and disintegration of the legal text, as a symbol of the cultural edifice which produced it, is key. Quoting another of her poems, she says:

At times it feels as if I am getting my revenge on ‘this / fuck-mother motherfuckin language’ of the colonizer - the way the text forces you - me - to read differently, bringing chaos into the language or, perhaps more accurately, revealing the chaos that is already there. (2011:205)

Her poems, she says, ‘are about language at its most fundamental’ (2011:195).

Philip’s poetic method enacts the absurdity of the existence of people who did not legally exist - ‘a form of affective self-possession’ (Dowling, 2011:43). Her strategy is to fracture and recombine the written text’s peculiar discursive landscape, producing words and sounds from the languages that would have been heard and spoken when the event took place - demotic English, Portugese, Latin, Yoruba. To read the poems is to perform these voices as the people in the story moan, stutter, shout or interject:

drowned the law

their thirst &

the evidence

obliged the frenzy

in themselves

in the sea

ground the justify

in the necessity of

when

who &

which

from *Zong! #19* (2011:33, 1-11)

In this way she (re)creates lyric voices, each of which implies and restores a speaking subject.

The white space in these poems is absolutely crucial to Philip's meaning. It is the blank ontological space of the ocean into which these people vanished. At one level it dramatises the blunt absence of the body, and the rupture of speaking voice and speaking self. The white space also allows us to move through and round these voices, imagining them as one or several persons, all unfixed.

At times Philip intersperses these text fragments with her own voice:

there is

creed there is

fate there is

oh

oh oracle

there are

oh oh

ashes

over

*ifá*

*ifá*

*ifá i*

*fá*

fa

fa

fall

ing over

from *Sal* (2011:60, 1-15)

This is a deliberate self-presencing in which she acknowledges, as a native English speaker and as a poet who works primarily in English, her own implicated position in the historical/cultural system which normalised the event and produced the historical record. This system, with its implicit power relationships is reinforced and renewed in the ongoing use of its medium, the English language (2011:198). As a language user, says Philip, ‘in this post post-modern world’, the individual becomes ‘multiple and ‘many-voiced’’ (2011:205). Her own identity is a linguistic and textual construct, continuous with the textuality of the historical legal document. ‘Language is contaminated’, she says, ‘possibly irrevocably’ (2011:199).

This thesis is an examination of the role of language, and in particular poetic language, in representing and constructing place. I understand this is a form of cartographic practice in which the selectivity and subjectivity of the originating authority, or ‘voice’, can never be entirely eradicated to create a direct, non-inflected poetry of place. In this chapter I have discussed my own and other experiments with collage and erasure and physical disruption of the text as strategies by which the presence of the poet might be suppressed in favour of other, prior voices which themselves perform the construction of place. This enquiry began with a desire, when



creating poems from archive documents, to recognise and reinstate the original narrator as an originating authority in the making of the poem. To clarify my thinking I referred to Fabian's idea of knowledge arising in the intersubjective space. This allowed me to understand my creative reconfiguring of these texts not as an appropriation or colonisation, but as a generative encounter which renewed their cultural significance. Affect theory in archival practice also made me appreciate the essential subjectivity of act of witnessing, and that therefore the autobiographical self is implicated in this engagement, particularly when it is framed as a restorative project.

I have discussed how, by disrupting narrative pathways, there is a sense in which the poet can transfer the process of place-making, of conceptually framing the poem-field, to the reader. Yet even while the poet hides behind the screen of these fragments, the poet is still implicated in its 'provocational strategy' (Antin) as the creative presence which has set out the parameters and form of this work. My own collage poems 'Hull' and 'Hessle Road' can be reordered and expanded; yet the overarching idea which originated and continues to shape and define these poems through these transformations persists, and makes me present as their originating authority. Similarly, in my erasure poems, while the source text is clearly named and still (almost) visibly present, the resonance of the retained fragments is a product of my own subjective encounter with the text as text. The authorship of erasure texts and other forms of collage is frequently questioned, says Cole Swensen, and yet these processes are 'a condensed version of what all poets do - consider the field of language and make careful choices' (2006).

## CHAPTER 6. *Summer Ferry: a critical exegesis*

This project grew out of my desire as a poet to develop a non-autobiographical, outward-looking poetry of the Angus landscape - a long-term goal. My interest in this issue is both philosophical and technical: this thesis is a close examination of the



Figure 10. The village of Auchmithie, Angus. Image © L Harrison.

process of self-presencing and self-erasure in the making of the poem, a question I have explored by engagement with relevant critical theory and by close reading of poets in whose work I see this question as key. I have explored language as a form of cartographic gesture analogous to the construction of place through language, an action which comes to the fore in the concise and condensed process of making poetry. An examination of how the self is implicated in language and in the poetic framing of place, begs the question of whether it is logically possible to use language in a non-inflected, non-autobiographical way. I have discussed the creation and location of the speaking self in my own and other poets' work, beginning with the deliberate self-presencing of Lorine Niedecker and the progression of her Objectivist poetics, and concluding with the creation/restoration of voices, and therefore of historical presence, performed by the poetry of M. NourbeSe Philip. In their poetries of place, from sites around the northern coastline to more distant and imagined locations and times, each of the poets has addressed the status and role of the lyric 'I' and the role

of the speaking voice in creating and sustaining place. Their work has provided models for me in my own experiments with the 'I' as textual construct.

The collection *Summer Ferry* grew out of my engagement with issues to do with the use of language as these arose in the contextualised process of writing. The poems reveal my relationship with the 'social imaginary' that is centred on the village where I live, and my ongoing excavation of and negotiation with its interweaving threads - dialect and speech rhythms, place-names, stories, archive documents, and a material intimacy with the landscape itself. The site of the village of Auchmithie has been occupied for at least 3,000 years, and I am very aware of the living aftermath of these layers of dwelling, and how it continues to be acted on and affected by my own presence and by our wider cultural, geographical and political environment. This echoes the layers of language and meaning from which we synthesise and revise our idea of place, and from which I, as a poet, draw. The poems record my own mapping out of, and self-triangulation within, these multiply-occupied layers.

In my poetry, the northern coastline represents this perpetually unstable psychic space in which the process of constant self-location takes place. The shoreline is a liminal space, and therefore essentially beyond the reach of the cartographic coloniser; categories are jumbled by the sudden, disruptive action of storms and big tides which strew the shoreline with detritus from other locations and other times. The poems, in their various symbolic and formal re-framings, are paratactic attempts to stabilise and define this unstable space. The experiments with language and form in *Summer Ferry* draw attention to the coming-into-being of place through language and to the action of language on my own construction of place. As an enquiry it is open-ended: the poems enact a rhetorical play of ideas, moving back and forth between the different strands of this enquiry and matching them against each other. The cross-disciplinary interests of this thesis and the poems themselves are rooted in practical, immersive research; in testing out ideas and words by putting myself *here*.

To further understand this process I have drawn from contemporary semiotic theory and its examination of the generative, intersubjective process of meaning-making through which the relevance and referential function of our body of language is confirmed and renovated. This renovation takes place in our play with grammatic

conventions, and in our articulatory emphasis, our bodily performance. Language bridges the gap between private and public space; its renovation reveals our rethinking and revising of the social imaginary and of our own location within it. In poetic language, 'the most concentrated form of verbal expression' (Pound), this process is most visible. In experimentation with form and language, this process can also be tested.

Poetically, this thesis is an open-ended enquiry. The very loose arc of the collection enacts the ongoing interplay of ideas in a poetic project that itself is necessarily 'continuously unfinished' (Watts). The subject matter of these chapters advances simultaneously, just as these themes interweave in the poems.

The collection *Summer Ferry* began as a response to the Objectivist experiment, and in particular to Lorine Niedecker's sense of intimacy with and identity with her own home territory, not as a closed space but in how it mediates the wider world. In her letters to Louis Zukofsky she frequently refers to what she is reading and how it has imbued her thoughts. In '10 Poems', the flood-world of Niedecker's Southern Wisconsin merges with the woods behind my village. In this 'loquacious interior', our voices are merged. These woods are also the setting for a poem-map which explores Setha Low's definition of embodied space as 'the location where human experience and consciousness takes on a material and spatial form'. In 'Ethie Woods', the woods become the cancer ward of our local hospital. In this process of place-making, I am simultaneously witness, participant and protagonist. I experience the woods as a series of personal spaces like the hospital's sub-wards and bays, in which the phenomenology of sun, rain, insects, tree sounds and signs of decay are continuous with and inseparable from the life of the ward.

'10 Poems' also explores her and Zukofsky's interest in the sufficiency of the single word and of 'the clarity of image and word-tone' (Zukofsky, 1931b:272); where 'each word is in itself an arrangement' (Zukofsky, 1931b:274). Niedecker looked to exploit the resonances of small, everyday words. The last poem of this sequence - 'Words - / a tiny art.' - was created from two extracts from a longer dialogue with Zukofsky on this theme.

The idea of the sufficiency of a single word is tested throughout this collection. In 'Skagaströnd', for example, the word 'monday' heads the second poem, acting as a dull, 'mundane' weight. In the tenth poem the first line is a single word: 'lull.' Its structural and therefore temporal separation sets this word out from the rest of the poem; its soft consonants allow the word to be prolonged as the poem is read aloud, and its sound is echoed and its dull presence re-emphasised in the half-rhymes of 'crumpled', 'trough', 'allows' and 'turbulence'. The short stanza forms of this poem, and the metering of white space which forces the eye and the voice to linger on these words, allows them their full sonic and evocative weight.

Attention to the individual word inspired my creation of the form of the rune poem, which is a variation of an Icelandic mediaeval form in which three definitions are offered for each rune. The isolation of single words to permit excavation of their meaning is used in several poems in the collection, and is pushed to its extreme, perhaps, in the last poem in the sequence 'Close's Fishermen's Map of the North Sea'. Here, with all other words removed, only the gesture of 'attention to' remains.

In Chapter 1 I began to explore how the unity and coherence of the poetic voice transfers coherence to the poet's environment. This transfer is imagined in 'Close's Fishermen's Map of the North Sea', a poem-map which reimagines the context in which these fishing grounds were named. Little is known about the cartographer, Alfred Close, other than that he set himself the task of making and updating these charts which were used and revised until they were superseded by modern navigation technology. Until then, fishermen sent Close data concerning soundings and stock locations, along with warnings and advisory notes which were reproduced around the map's isobathic lines. In its construction, the map is thus a discursive object. The sequence of fishing grounds at the top of each page is both my implied narrative ordering and the course a fishing boat might take. The opening italicised poem is extracted from the general disclaimer on the map. The description of the tidal current which 'partakes the form of the land', and the names themselves, echo my idea of the North Sea as a hybrid and negotiated space, continually partially overwritten with fragmented individual and collective acts of narrative self-location.

In my discussion of the semantic theory and poetic practice of Julia Kristeva, Edwin Morgan and others, I have shown how I locate poetic language within the ordinary processes of communication and generation of meaning. These ordinary processes include the performative import of words and phrases, and the persistent feeling that dialect and local names somehow anchor us to/in place. Dialect is a very rich seam for my own writing, especially for its alliterative and performative character and the material and historical bonds it creates. In 'Bird Song' I describe how these forms of language intermingle in my own speech. As with Jen Hadfield's 'died', in 'Summer Ferry' the articulation of these Orcadian weather words seems to import meaning beyond the simple announcement of a kind of rain.

The presence and role of prior voices and prior texts in my own place-making is dramatised in the poem 'Caa'in', in which the various versions in these archive documents of the word for the mass cull of pilot whales reappear in acrostic poems which list local sites of cullings and beachings. This was once a common practice around the northern archipelagos, as is reflected in some place-names; though deeply distasteful by contemporary standards, 'caa'in' was a necessary source of winter fuel oil for a frequently impoverished population. In its treatment of this archive material, the poem therefore also points to the historicity of meaning, to the discrepancy between (contemporary) language and the (now lost) circumstances of its making.

'Rock Pool' was written as I began to explore the blunt process of autobiographical self-projection, by which our surroundings are made meaningful only in relation to ourselves. This theme reappears in the poems 'Seahouses' and 'Gull Poem'. In 'Seahouses', this place is being overwritten by its re-presentation in graphic form, by the action of making lines on the water as the boat is rowed across the harbour, and by the walker whose sense of self-realisation grows as he marks his own footfall on the ground. This process of self-projection is most explicit in 'Topophilia', in which Cuthbert's retreat to this purer, ontologically prior space is the emotional and narrative culmination of the trajectory of his life. These coastal locations are 'places of longing' in that they offer a blank space onto which the narrator of each poem projects autobiographical meaning. These poems stand in contrast to the other poems of *Summer Ferry* in which this process of projection is questioned and tested.

John Wrighton describes the essential problem of poethical practice as language's action of phenomenological self-prioritisation. By reconfiguring and reflexively examining the 'I' as it is constructed in the imagery and language of the poem, I acknowledge this self-prioritisation, which in its reconfiguration in each poem, is revealed as a provisional rather than final self-location. The writing of poetry, with its necessary self-location in the texture and textuality of the poet's and audience's cultural and linguistic heritage, thus has an inherently reflexive stance. David Farrier sets the issue of appropriate poethical practice in the context of Anthropocenic thinking, and the increasingly urgent need to challenge the ontological status of 'the problematically monolithic "we"' - the individual, completed self at the centre, the figure in the landscape which gives it scale and meaning. In *Summer Ferry*, there is no final identity of the lyric 'I'. The speaking voice is variously located in the composite, continuous textual flow of voices, and in the seamless phenomenology of embodied space.

The unity and coherence of the poetic voice is both undermined and confirmed by the last poem 'Hull', a net of overlapping concurrent voices. The sources from which these fragments were taken include the whole range of texts - written and oral, archive and contemporary, graphic and worded - that constitute the source material for this thesis, including my own notes and poems. Its open-ended form means that it can be infinitely extended and the fragments re-ordered. In this way the poem demonstrates the actual, ongoing process of mapping as a simultaneously cartographic and reflexive response. Its form also emphasises the ongoing nature of this project.

My approach and retreat from the imposition of final meaning is also an ethical position. My initial desire to create a non-inflected poetry of place now seems misplaced, once 'place' is understood as essentially mobile, as a physical and conceptual extension of the self and therefore as a contracting and expanding world which is being constantly reconfigured. My *at homeness* in this place now depends on the constant revision of this part-private, part-shared world which language strives to frame and plot. That there is no definitive framing or voice in this collection of poems reflects the continuously unfinished reflexive process of reframing and relocation, and my continual retreat from mapping final meaning onto the coastal landscape.





# Summer Ferry



poems

Lesley Harrison  
December 2018

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## ROCK POOL

*Nucella lapillus* - dog whelk

midday.

our room, curtained red and green  
grows dense and more private

as daylight presses down.  
protruding one long eye  
I insert my

foot into a hole, and glut  
in root and slime  
in teeth and froth

as you fur, yielding, belly out  
your mucal pit, your lip  
your rind dissolving.

*Aphrodita aculeata* - sea mouse

soiled in the spume,  
this damp pudendum

its annelid rings  
its fleshy protrusions

shrinking, oiling  
like butter in my hand

Its iridescent mat still  
flickering gold, gold, red.

shame.

see how it buries its head.

*Olindias phosphorica medusa* - cigar jellyfish

how it flirts in and out  
of corridors  
and libraries of weed

a glass bulb a weight of water

pure animal,  
astonished at itself

like a word in an empty room  
blooming wall to wall  
trailing penumbra,

hermetic complete.

*Axinella siddimilis* - staghorn sponge

caught in a flummery  
of pinks and underthings,  
gloved like a clown

a hand  
bloated, girlish,  
crooking a finger

all tenderness and need,  
sweating slightly

*Pagurus bernhardus* - hermit crab

the joy of hotel living :

the comfort of a temporary skin

magnolia, tidy, claustrophobic,

its subtleties of soft, hidden lighting

its ballroom surfaces, its slim columella;

and pinned to the wall

in tiny, tiny annelid writing

instructions for escape.

## LITTORAL          rune poems

'The text commonly called the Icelandic rune-poem is only a poem by courtesy'.  
*R.I. Page, Viking Society for Northern Research, 1999.*

nacreus	the <i>dura mater</i> , shiny, opalescent like the inside of a shell
coriolis	a deflection a drift to the east a north sea sun chill
littoral	talus – a debris the friction of the shore a memory, a dull prehension
amphidrome	a null point an upwelling, a stealth approaching from all directions
crail	its sea dip its reds and underwater greens its blinking windows
macula	larval, eel-like a form beneath the surface a pitting between cells

## VOTIVE SHIPS

i. *16<sup>th</sup> century graffiti, Bassingham*

a thin ship  
gradual, becoming  
the form and texture of prayer

sailing  
in stone coloured twilight  
the inner world and the outer deep.

ii. *St Monans Kirk, Fife*

or this morning at the shoreline  
a new front, dim and uncertain

draining all colour from the air  
until the horizon had vanished

our small boats suspended  
between earth and sky - vaporous, almost air

neither steersman nor tiller -  
in sea gleam, in still bright water.

iii. *Oude Kerk, Amsterdam*

stirring  
between pole and tropic

these dark boats  
that glide in thought, mid ocean

like birds - their swiftness of intellect  
their clean sharp flight

through steep walls  
and odd parts of sunlight.

iv. the *Chloe* GY11, Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre

the tide rolls in  
slithering off pilings

dragging back and under;  
the sudden sump of pavements

our sea streets  
flowing inland, on half bright hills

where you and I  
are held to the world.



v. *Århus Cathedral, Denmark*

a shallow bowl,  
its threads lengthened for attention

self contained, its slope and weight  
displacing the world around it.

how near we are to the world;  
the heft of these sudden towns

their traffic and footfall,  
their tall wood houses that creak

as the turf beneath them dries, subsiding.  
its underside shimmers like a leaf.

## HERRING

from *The Harvest of the Sea* by James Glass Bertram. London: John Murray, 1873.

The larvae are filaments of glass,  
the otolith visible behind the large blue eye.

At birth they die or thrive

in the great ocean workhouse  
floating like threads; the lump of their heart below  
a silver sac of air.

At night they wind together, poppling as they rise  
dispersing at the surface, sinking at dawn  
on gravels and anticlines

a dark idea following the current  
- blue in gold, slate grey in purple -  
off Foula, wavering in long, thin lines

hauled up in drifts, kissing the surface  
the light of their colour fading long before  
the boat can reach the harbour.

## ETHIE WOODS

*'tree-in-bud': a linear branching pattern of the spread of tumours into other areas*

\*

the trees are light:  
a physical disturbance  
a whirling of mirrors

here in the now  
and everything is motion -  
sycamore, alder

crowding together  
in flickering leaflights  
in ferocious whispering.

\*

beech and oak, standing  
like hymns in the forest,  
single cells drinking in the sun

slow transfusion  
in the upper layers.  
a radiance. light into matter.

\*

Spring:  
like the greening of a lung,  
cloaked in its own

bright fur  
of wet, lucent spore,  
beady, microscopic -

its metabolic  
spread in all directions.

\*

a tree grows out of itself:

lung, sap, root  
the white embryo  
muscled, curling under

leathering,  
the nub of its joints  
bulging like iron

the whole blind process  
unfinished, beginning  
again and again.

\*

suddenly, the wind floods in –  
a headlong rush  
of branches, like children

playing hide and seek  
finding holes and tunnels,  
burying insects.

\*

sun.  
an all over warmth  
opens the petals of her body

her sessile leaves  
growing bright and pale,  
slanting outward

the dried buds  
the dark callus tissue  
yellowing in sun spots

the seeds of her eyes  
deeply enclosed.

\*

the oncology of tree bark :  
old burrs buckled on its hide

its dry skin  
mottling like lichen.

\*

the blackbird:

its sideways glance,

its upwards listening.

\*

as if this was a room in a house

the furniture all gone, the ceiling lifted at last

the light falling in

herself dead centre

ushering in guests, who whisper in monotone

*cirrus cirrus cirrus*

\*

a hurricane, trapped:

whitish, like thunder

spilling and slamming

in disbelief, routed

clashing the pines

their roots ballooning ;

credulous holdfasts,

hurling and hurling

in colossal abandon.

\*

all afternoon  
in small, even rain  
the birch, eavesdropping.

\*

burl, ovule, node, carpel  
milksap, heartwood  
xylem, phloem, air.

\*

the half life of insects:  
  
charged particles,  
spinning in small collisions  
as they fizz and hum, unwinding  
  
each brief iota  
tingled, nasal and keening.  
their thin harmonics.

## BIRDS OF THE NORTH SEA

An invocation, using birds' names as they alter during passage or along migration routes between Orkney, Shetland, the Faroe Islands, Iceland and Svalbard. To be read aloud.

<i>arctic skua</i>	tyvjo – aulin – kjove – kjói - tyvjo
<i>arctic tern</i>	ritto – tirrick – kría - kyst
<i>black guillemot</i>	teistie – tystie – tjest – peiste - teist
<i>curlew</i>	whaup – whaap – wulp
<i>golden plover</i>	weeo – hjejle – ló – heilo
<i>great northern diver</i>	emmer – immer gös – imbre – lómr – islom
<i>gull</i>	meeuw – maa – måge – máfur - måke
<i>lapwing</i>	kievit – teeick – whippo – vibe
<i>long tailed duck</i>	ijseend - calloo – havelle – hávella
<i>oystercatcher</i>	skeldro – shalder – tjaldr – chaldro
<i>razorbill</i>	alk – wylkie – álka – alle - apparluk
<i>ringed plover</i>	sanloo – sinlick – sandiloo – sandlo



## TOPOPHILIA

*Saint Cuthbert spent his last years in seclusion in a cell on the Northumbrian island of Inner Farne.*

i.

morning.

a cloud lifts, the island resolving

in a turn of ocean

the sparkling clink of waves on sand

sound, a living matter

sound illumined

a wave swallowing a rock pool,

the gulls, their sharp words

repeated and repeated

the god of my childhood

in the grey white sea noise

in the screech of sea birds.

ii.

Spring tide.

I walk into the sea's cold bloom,

its heft, its anonymity.

I trace my entire belief

in the viscera of salt and wind,

the natural fall of cloud.

here is only everything :

the secular ocean,

the crush and crush of new waves;

its motion brings peace,  
the beach, its privacy and darkness  
a relief from psalmody.

iii.

a round hull  
knocking into hollows

the eider,  
their broody pots of down

this bright space,  
its salutary emptiness.

iv.

a stone cell  
hunkered on a rock.  
quiet vacancy.

in these walls  
words fall  
with the weight of leaves

and on  
the bare earth  
slowly uncolour.

v.

gathering

in the green light of dawn

elder croon in the

hollows between waves

their white defined by

the darkness of the water

conscious points

in this inexhaustible space.

vi.

to dwell outside myself,

to live in the lived world

among snails and grasses

in ordinary daylight

growing old, neither man nor woman

fasting in silence.

vii.

the dune slacks. beds of neat helleborine

watercress and elder.

the milk vetch, tight lipped.

viii.

otters pry in bedrock  
puddling the sand, then vanishing completely  
in the heavy green.

I love the disappearance –  
the free power of waves,  
the world that ends at the surface

the presences of stars in daylight.  
the thin white moon.  
the gannets, their slow ovation.

## 10 poems

from *Niedecker and the Correspondence with Zukofsky 1931–1970*, edited by Jenny Penberthy.  
Cambridge University Press, 1993.

#1

April :

a cold clear morning  
in the north woods

deep in the

green

loquacious interior

a library of bird songs

at ordinary speed.

#23

walking,

eyes to the ground

equisteum, algae

fine-haired weeds and mediaeval ferns

old tapestries of

dried moss

and creeping fleur de lys,

fungal, illumined.

#24

Sunday.

the blackbird

sits on its eggs

in rich church silence.

#41

the house by the road

dissolves into heat

and dry canes.

the flood has subsided.

now birds and animals come close,

rabbit and rail snouting

ropes of parched matter,

starlings whistling

through the open door,

the river winding by with an

almost friendly feeling

#43

a poem -

its clean calf smell,

its brown eyes.

#43

*For best work, you ought to put forth some effort  
to stand in north woods among birch.*

I took a book down from the bookshelf  
and a cold wind blew through the gap.

#88

listening to Strauss, in darkness ;

an alpine mountain meadow

its colours

chiming against the sky

the clean set of the whole,

the mountain air

its music box simplicity.

#112

felling a tree : one foot on one branch

the other on an other branch

now I hail the sun and the moon -

the sun at noon, making a point

the moon and its flying horse

#135

our words are cormorants  
on an inland river

as thousands of geese, flying over  
make a  
wilderness in your ear

as the sound you hear inside a shell  
is the rhyming  
of your own blood

each plant and animal  
source and symbol.

# 175

words -  
a tiny art.



## BIRD SONG

and if a blink of summer sun  
and if a cott of wood and wing  
and if a middle afternoon  
and if a sudden beat of air

or haud my eye inside my coat  
or hide my colour in a tree  
or jookin under leaf and leaf  
or cleckin in a bowl of turf

nor cheetle on a sunny wa  
nor airy chirrup in a lum  
nor pleepin in a hollow wood  
nor climbin up inside a cloud

a hiddle in a pot of mud  
a feather belly full of rain  
a bluey nap of skin and down  
a water eye, a strip of seed

yaaaaaach,

yaaach

orrrrlo? orrrlo?

pleep

tick tick

tickticktcktcktktktktk

pleep

## CAA'IN

CAA'IN WHALES, *the mode adopted for driving a shoal of these animals into shallow water to capture them.*

Thomas Edmonston, *An Etymological glossary of the Shetland and Orkney dialect.* 1866.

*A Fortnight ago I & some of my people drove 23 whales onshore on this Island, & about 30 more have been got in the Bay of Firth.*

John Balfour, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1820. *Balfour's Scrap and Trenabie Papers, Orkney Archives.*

upper scapa  
burr a y  
c l i ffdale  
st o l a  
bay of holland  
sout h ron  
m u ddisquoy  
sc a pa  
mil l bay  
kerston  
scapa  
inganess  
hui p  
sc a pa  
st o l a  
ed a y  
sm i ddybanks  
bri g o waithe  
copinsay  
knockall  
scapa  
hoswi c k  
sc a pa bay  
strons a y  
f i rth  
sa n day  
sca p a  
l a mb head  
link l et bay  
strons a y  
s c apa  
backas k aill  
neebi s ter  
scapa bay  
shapinsay  
scapa

## SUMMER FERRY

### Orkney Ferries

16:00 Kirkwall to Eday 17:15 (1h 15 min)

i.

an undertow  
of soft green summer light

of oilskins blooming,  
of prams and damp windows  
and streets of kitchen houses

a bow wave thick as tar,  
the outer edges of the town  
veering off

in diesel thud, in velvet dusk  
in clear cool lines of water.

ii.

an orange island  
slips into the sea.

a numberless sunset  
of unknown birds

lifting, perturbed  
shifting in layers

a hologram  
swirling and combining

habit into form  
one form to another

almost resolving;  
a thinking in clouds.

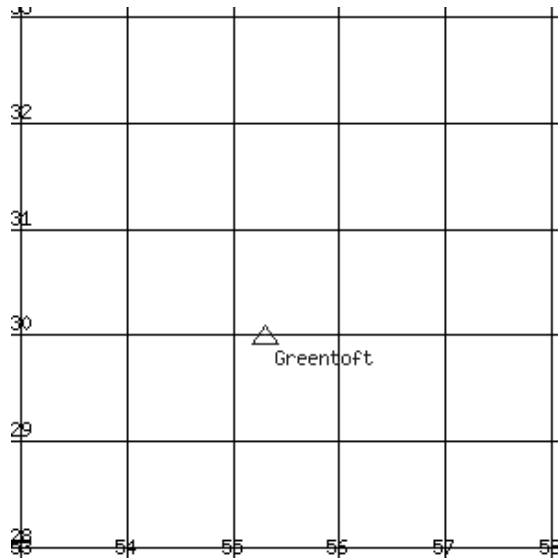
iii.  
the ferry rounds,  
and now the island appears  
hills rising out of hills

as the pier becomes,  
approaching in minutes  
on long seaweed ledges

on thundering water,  
names thrown out like ropes.

iv.

Trig Name	Original Name	New Name	EASTING	NORTHING	HEIGHT	ORDER	TYPE OF MARK
Greentoft	HY52/11	HY52S011	355293.25	1030004.72	101.803	2	PILLAR



v.

the new wind turbine :  
its pulsed hush and hush

a soft, phonic substance  
washing over us.

vi.

A map is open on the table. The hills have vanished,  
valley bottoms risen into plateaus. The coast flares out  
in perpetual low tide. The island is fixed in its summer  
colours - blue, green, brown. The island, mute and  
present. We are god-like, everywhere at once.

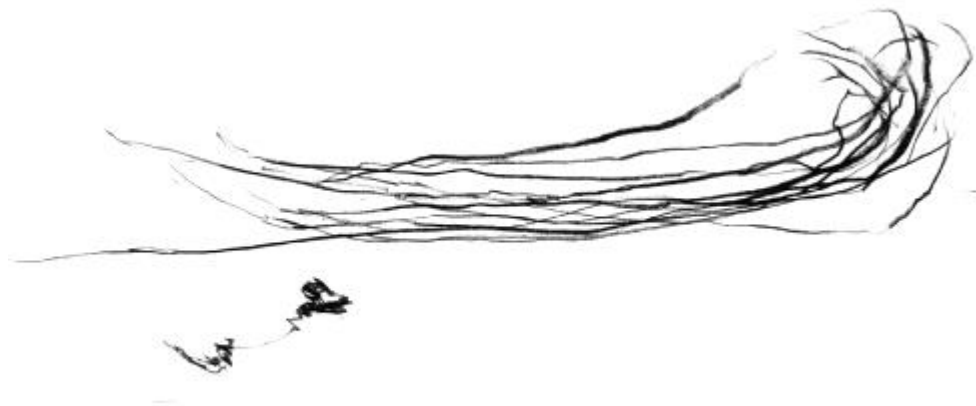
Outside, the ground pales and dries. A crow is inside  
the sun, its shadow curving over and over, its  
tongueless skraik a hyphen on the page.

vii.

all afternoon,  
lying, face down  
among sky coloured hills

- Mid Tooin, Keelylang -  
small things in the grass.

viii.



ix.

**'The Circular Walk'**

the sheep fank,  
clotty turds  
mill loch,  
stirring with high cloud:  
a hole filled with sky.

the sheep fank,  
clotty turds  
yellowing the turf

Road End.  
the arbitrary logic of  
tarmac.  
my feet stick like magnets.

West Side:

the roadside cairns,  
a yett for butter.

away over  
at the westray pier.  
cars turn  
their windows catching sunlight

the turbine.  
turn your back to the mast:  
and suddenly the ground flows away

*plink plink.*  
goldcrests in the gorse.

four o'clock.  
suddenly, the sky grows dark.  
the dog bursts rabbits from the ditches.

a curlew in a blue vein.  
a dead cow sinking in the turf.



x.

rugg, murr, hagger, rav      *light drizzle. almost subconscious. a blanket*

eesk, neist, fiss      *persisting, articulate. tensed.*

dister, skub      *suddenly unlatched. stone cold, hurrying off*

luffer, glet      *conscious, drying. a bright patch. an afterwards.*

xi.

the sky is warmth, a ringing from within.

the sky is a song, a horse, a tree.

the sky is retreating into its centre.

the sky is earthy, earthly - a violin in middle notes.

the sky is sharp, like steel cooled in water.

the sky is a drum.

the sky is mechanical, menacing. the sky is a curtain.

the sky is spreading red, towards and around, like an oil.

the sky is an old grey, primitive and cold.

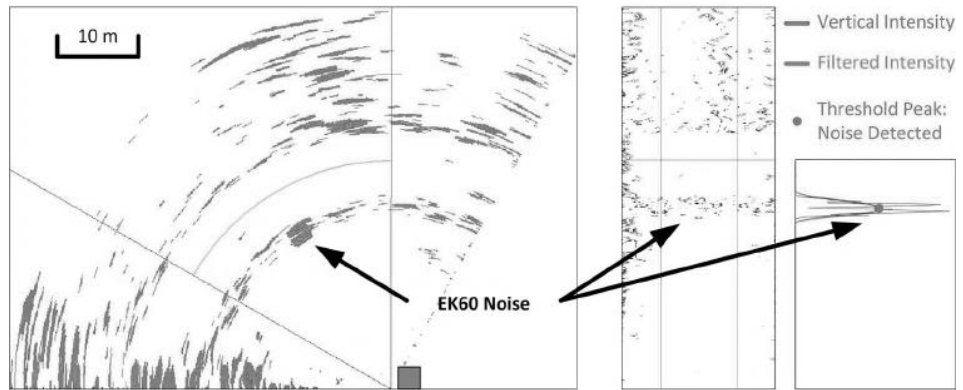
the sky is a lit match. the sky is a line.

the sky is a great silence.

the sky is a glove.

xii.

- telemetry** : the transmission of measurements and other data from remote or inaccessible points.
- commutation** : a process whereby multiple data streams are combined into a single frame.
- asynchronous** : not continuously synchronised by a common clock.



xiii.

at Newbigging,  
locating redwings

in ambient subsound :  
the thrum of the turbine

whipping and whipping  
its subtle white turbulence.

the thrush, countersinging  
in the scrub.

xiv.

CHAPEL HILL

a lunar still

a cleft

a red willow.

COTT

a road end

a bay exposed to the moon

a sun cool to touch.

NONEYHA

a sea blue evening,

all swallows and silver blink,

windows tilted to the sun.

xv.

night fall.

walking up the spine

in growing dark, through peat hags

and scraps of blue-black ocean,

the outer islands rising

one by one

in flat constellations,

the whole north

spread around my feet.

xvi.

*Dennis Hd*

L<sup>t</sup> Gp Fl ev 10 sec vis 14 m  
S going stream begins 6 hrs  
before

*Start Point*

L<sup>t</sup> Gp Fl (2) ev 30 sec vis 14 m

*Noup Hd*

L<sup>t</sup> Gp Fl (5) ev min vis 22m  
Storm sig

*Sanday Sound*

L<sup>t</sup> Gp Fl (2) ev 10 sec vis 10 m

*Auskerry*

L<sup>t</sup> F vis 16m

or there, North Ron  
its tempo slowed down  
to two or three beats per minute.

xvii.

*Glasgow – Reykjavik*

a hundred tiny people  
vapour-thin, staring

a cosmology of islands,  
the solid silence  
of the blue between.

xviii.

<b>Bay of London</b>	<i>Bay of London</i>	<i>Hugh Marwick, Calfsound. Robert Sinclair, Sandhill. Robert August, New London.</i>	086 12	<i>This name applies to a good size bay with a large, sandy beach, situated upon the east coast of Eday &amp; about 3 miles from Calf Sound.</i>
--------------------------	--------------------------	---	-----------	--

‘These smacks were heavy-hulled with a draught of two fathoms. They were buoyant fore and aft, with the well contained amidships. Augur holes were drilled in the sides of the hull so that water could flow freely for re-oxygenation. Fish placed in the well could then be carried upriver to market (from 1750 especially Billingsgate, London; from 1900 the Faroes) in fresh condition. The swim bladders of the fish had to be pierced to prevent them from floating. Turbot and other flatfish were suspended on thin rope to prevent them from clogging the augur holes.’

xix.

In a rush of words, the radio comes on  
its odd singsong voices and

gusting sentences, its whines and ticks  
its tides of hissing static

riffling the shore birds, their flat pink notes  
rising to the surface.

xxi.

*‘a spell of rain’*

purple – raw – silver

viridian – charcoal

green - gold - ultramarine

*‘a slight sea’*

pearl grey,

furring at the edges.

*‘an unstable front’*

a door slams mid afternoon.

a car starts. stops.

starts, then slowly disappears.

xxii.

the field is

a White Sea island

silently adrift

in milk fog

- dream substance -

a dull albedo

miracles of objects

appearing

in dark or yellow patches

the horses

still as statues

xxiii.

For what truly connects data is not clouds, but transductions. Transductions transform energy - and thus information - from one form into another. Noise or heat, for example, or even ocean waves can be transduced into electricity, which can be transduced again into a display, a number, or a beam of light. Your ears and eyes are transducers: as are your hands, turning these pages.

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xxiv.

stone sparrows  
clicking and whirring,  
a bright telemetry

- piped morse,  
switchings of  
wire and scrub

and small thermal inclines,  
their song degrading  
in wide open space.

a snowy owl :  
isolate, mooting  
its own baltic language.

xxv.

In an afternoon of listless grass,  
suddenly the world is moved,  
the ferry bearing round like a compass

tilting, all bells and telegraph  
summoning the cars of the island  
its muscle engines pounding green water

as it seesaws on its keel  
tugging at the pier, until it fits in  
neat as a duck.

The ferry sounds its horn in the present tense.  
Clock hands are turning.

xxvi.

the pier, 3am :

the turbine chirring and chirring

in new dark, in neon gleam.

#### SOURCES

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## The North Ron Light, Orkney

59° 23.359'N 002° 22.890'W

Ruins true refuge long last towards which so many false time out of mind. All sides endlessness earth sky as one no sound no stir. Grey face two pale blue little body heart beating **only upright**. Blacked out fallen open four walls over backwards true refuge issueless.

Scattered ruins same grey as the sand **ash grey** true refuge. Four square all light sheer white blank planes all gone from mind. Never was but grey air timeless no sound figment the pass-

ing light. No sound no stir ash grey **sky mirrored earth mirrored sky**. Never but this changelessness dream **the passing hour**.

He will curse God again as in the blessed days face to the open sky the **passing deluge**. Little body grey face features crack and little holes two pale blue. Blank planes sheer white eye calm long last all gone from mind.

Figment light never was but grey air timeless **no sound**. Blank planes touch close sheer white all gone from mind. Little body ash grey locked rigid heart beating face to endlessness. On him will rain again as in the blessed days of blue the **passing cloud**. Four square true refuge long last four walls over backwards no sound.

Grey sky no cloud no sound no **stir** earth ash grey sand. Little body same grey as the earth sky ruins only upright. Ash grey all sides earth sky as one all sides endlessness.

He **will** stir in the sand there will be stir in the sky the air the sand. Never but in **dream** the happy dream only **one** time to serve. Little body little block heart beating ash grey only upright. Earth sky as one all sides endlessness little body only upright. In the sand no hold **one** step more in the endlessness he will make it. No sound not a breath same grey all sides earth sky body ruins.

Slow black with ruin true refuge four walls over backwards no sound. Legs a single block arms fast to sides little body face to

Source text: *Lessness*, by Samuel Beckett. In *Texts for nothing and Other Shorter Prose, 1950-1976*. Faber & Faber, 2010.

## FRISLANDA

At first, a trail in dark or yellow patches  
streaking the current, the water strangely green  
a silver line on the horizon -

an untethered land, wild from seclusion  
where all we wished for we could see,  
such was our need for enchantment;

then arriving, found it an empty windswept place  
inconvenient, open to the weather  
without sun, stars or moon; but a peculiar light of thought :

its contours obscured, its mountains rising to vanish  
the whole mass clouded in an aura  
of fuddled sunlight, all shadow erased.

Our ship butted forward, through milk fog  
and penetrable furrows of rock and reef,  
soft ice hissing round the prow;

our map-makers fumbled with their inks, mis-sizing,  
our world drawn in,  
each buttress vaulting into air, each gulley descending to nothing

the air growing dry and dull,  
a whiteness that gathered but did not fall ;  
and an odd feeling of forlornness

came over us, our ship now weightless and emptied  
the crew ancient, half-eroded,  
only traces pencilled in.

Then the sun slipped through a hole,  
the monstrous hills receding upward suddenly,  
small waves glittering and dancing,  
the island now luminous in absence on a vast, blue sea.

Now, in the cloud light of age,  
in pale, ordinary rooms  
like an arctic afternoon, neither freshening nor dulling

old men about to tell the tale  
will stumble into silence as, one by one, words fail  
the truth no longer marvellous,

our island only existing as parts of other places  
like young ice forming on the current  
hissing and curling, growing strange as it fragments

as little by little, nothing comes to mind  
or perhaps nothing happened.

*In 1558, to illustrate an account of voyages made by earlier generations of his family, Nicolo Zeno of Venice published a map of the North Atlantic. It included the islands of Eslanda, Engroneland, Estotiland, Icaria and Frislanda (62°28'33.93N 7°39'35.04'W). These islands continued to appear on naval charts long after they were proved not to exist.*

## THE ARCTIC PILOT

**General information.** - The coast line is wholly in Russian territory, belonging to Russian Lapland, Russia proper, and western and eastern Siberia. To the westward are the Barents Sea and the White Sea ; eastward of Novaya Zemlya, the Kara Sea, and Arctic Ocean ; the shores of these seas are tolerably well known as far as a point some distance beyond the Yenisei River ; but beyond this point the constant ice in the Arctic Ocean renders navigation so difficult, and the sterility of the neighbouring shores makes exploration so impracticable, that even the contour of the land as shown on maps or charts can be considered as only approximately correct.

In the western and frequented parts of this territory, long stretches of coast line frequently bear local names besides the territorial designations already given ; thus, the coast of Lapland, westward of Kola Inlet, is named the Motovski Coast ; from Kola to Svyatoi Nos, the Murmanski Coast ; and southward of Svyatoi Nos to Kandalaksha, the Terski Coast.

**The White Sea** includes the space occupied by tidal waters southward of a line from Svyatoi Nos to Cape Kanin, the southernmost part being Nimenskaya Bay in the Gulf of Onega, and the westernmost part the head of the Gulf of Kandalakski, in lat. 67° 7'N., long. 32° E. It naturally forms northern and southern divisions ; from the northern part, the Gulf of Mezen extends southeastward, and the Gorlo (or throat) southwestward, the latter leading into the southern division, the open part of which is called the Basin. The Gulf of Arkhangel is southeastward of a line from the Zimniya Hills to Zhizhginsk Island ; the Gulf of Onega, partly occupied by islands, is southeastward of a line from Zhizhginsk Island to Kem, and the Gulf of Kandalakski extends northwestward from the Basin.

The southeastern side of the Gorlo, from the entrance to the Gulf of Mezen to the northeastern side of the Gulf of Arkhangel, is known

Source text: *The Arctic Pilot. Volume 1. The Coast of Russia ...*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917.

## SKAGASTRÖND

*the rain falls  
that had not been falling  
and it is the same world*

George Oppen, *On Being Numerous*

.

midwinter :

when sunrise and sunset are the same

one hour then another

in minutely changing detail -

orange orange, red

each note growing longer,

holding its tone

the hills behind gleaming

the sea a wordless green

.

monday.

swimming through daylight

holding the moon in my head

I stretch my arms to show

how wide, how thin

these elongated mountains

the road splaying out at the sea,

the sea's pitted surface.

.  
how the wind  
in a bowl of hills

can shimmer and stall :  
a tumult, held under pressure

tremorous sub aural  
felt in the room of the skull

- vague dread of  
some kind of other

.  
morning.  
daylight is a whitewash  
of seaweed under cars

land voices on the pier,  
huddled boats, each in  
its own black halo.

the tide is viscous, like tar.

low cloud.  
a flat acoustic ceiling :  
the crane and winch, hammering  
the edges of the sea to the beach.

the shop's electric door  
bleats across the car park.

.

the library :

a window open to the sea

a dark field of water

a perfect ratio of sea and sky.

the balcony's green railings.

now, a white bird.

.

aurora :

a hail of charged particles streams

from the pole

an ice blue sail,

riffling in draughts

mineral amorphous

receding upwards

in a fine gauze screen.

the heat of the television -

its tropical colours

lapping at the ceiling.

.  
rain falls,  
a light / dense pattern  
a soft pandemonium

a conscious  
fingertip beating  
slowly going out of phase

as the cloud blows over.  
air over grass,  
wind over water.

.  
Sunday - low tide.  
gulls pick relics from the beach,  
tinkering with molluscs

pattering triangles  
into black thick mud.

a tiny agnostic piece of ice  
floats out / in  
warped, like concrete.



.  
then suddenly the ocean sinks  
where she rolls up against  
the surface

breaching, in daylight  
with outbreaths of the real

cold sea  
folding in, closing over.  
(silence)

.  
lull.

how the wind crumples  
between houses, a momentary trough  
that allows quiet in.

slight turbulence,  
like walking through a mirror.

.

Saturday.

hitching at the roadside

the steady hiss of rain

the mountain eroding, molecule by molecule.

.

a warm day, midwinter.

memorous insects

are humming and swaying

tightened into knots

in pockets of low damp

heat, and wan sunlight.

slight ecstasies of moths.

.

sunset.

how the sun burns everything yellow :

the sea now a hole in the ground

the house now only its roof

a slow sublimation, minute by minute

until only colour remains.

# SEAHOUSES

a triptych

i.

how he strives to capture the shoreline :  
the wooden boats, the stippled houses  
the gulls, the dried starfish

concrete and local,  
the household beach below,  
the pier, damp at its ankles.

the sea stopped out -  
a creased white space.  
the sea, its lifting falling mood.

ii.

rowing –  
a calm circular motion

inducing sadness, and inward thinking  
that flows into dreams

old forms stirred to the surface,  
uncoiling, dripping

necklaces of sea glass and silver  
discarded, over and over.

iii.

I walk to remove myself :

a natural erosion, a gradual wearing down

through fluctuating tidewrack

and rot, the drain's beery water

and long low cloud, and stubbled empty rises

cancelling myself in rhythm

a thinking in movement, a nodding to the ground

growing lighter to exhaustion, I almost vanishing

my hovering footfall

pitting the surface like rain on paper :

here.            here. here.            here.

## Close's Fishermen's Chart. Section 2. The North Sea.

London: Edward Stanford, 1905. Price 10/-

*Coming from the westward  
a ship enters the true stream*

*the true stream will always carry a vessel  
towards the North Foreland  
, and from it when it is falling*

*except near the Coasts, where  
it partakes the form of the land*

### THE SEA BED

When taking soundings, it must be borne in mind, that the sea bed like the land, consists of hills, valleys, plains of sand or mud; of rugged cliffs, sometimes with abrupt faces, at others with jagged sloping sides, or strewn with boulders, etc., etc. A single cast of lead might mislead a mariner, as it might happen to drop on a spot either much more shoal, or much deeper than the average soundings in the neighbourhood. This explains why fishermen find many soundings not shown on any chart.

Fishermen sound every yard of the sea under 200 fathoms in depth, and find nearly every shoal, reef, or deep hole in the sea. A Government surveying ship out at sea, only sounds a spot here and there, as a rule many miles apart. The distances can easily be ascertained by following the line of soundage and measuring the distance between each.

Note carefully the distance between the soundings on the chart you are using, and then plot your soundings accordingly on the chart. Experience has demonstrated that as a rule a series of soundings plotted on a chart at the same distance, agree within a fathom or two with those shown on a chart, even in deep water. In the case of a very foul bottom, the difference in the soundings may be even greater. But a navigator in such cases will of course use his common sense.

*[mud, dark, sand, shells, rock, hole, course, stones]*

- ABERDEEN BANK - Buchan Deep - WITCH GROUND - SWATCHWAY -  
THE GAT - LONG FORTIES *Fine Sand* -

### WITCH HOLE

they leaned towards Denmark  
divining the grey ship,  
eyes hair streaming

moaning like gulls,  
boiling cloud out of  
a blue ordinary morning,

waves fizzing  
round the keel,  
the new queen buckled, puking

in the squall,  
the white bloom of water that  
the ship fell through.

### UNST

this island  
where grass grows like hair.

on days like this  
you breathe through your skin.

### THE GAT

gåos - tirkick - mallimak - svartbakk  
*Those lost at sea come back as birds.*

- St MAGNUS GROUND - TURBOT BANK *Rough* - OTTER BANK SPRING & SUMMER  
HALIBUT.COD.LING. WHEN CLEAR OF DOGFISH -

### **ST MAGNUS GROUND**

snow falls

on the dark moor

the old ship groaning

like a tree.

### **NUN'S ROCK**

kneeling to bedrock -

entranced

almost overshadowed in

the sudden sea hole

biblically black,

her blunt head - her cowl - her silence

### **OUTER BAILEY**

a dozen petrels

low to the water

almost landing pattering the

constant downslide,

### **THE MINCHES**

and afterwards,

the sky

blue as a boat.

- SANDHAILE FLATS - WELL HOLE - OUTER WELL BANK - OUTER SILVER PIT -  
DOGGER BANK SW PATCH {*Breaks in strong gales*

### **SILVER PITS**

fog : blind ahead.

large areas of silence

the sea eroded

a loose fluorescence,

neither hot nor cold

like a room in an empty house

with trees somewhere outside

in the garden,

the blinds drawn down.

### **FARN DEEPS**

the moon, occluded.

a single bulb

hung in the belly of the kirk

### **DOGGER BANK**

*sīc (Old English)*

*slakki (Old Norse)*

*sík (Old Norse)*

*slack (Yorkshire)*

*sig (Danish)*

*slug (Angus)*

*sike (Yorkshire)*

*sluch (Shetland, North East)*

*syke (Berwick)*

*sloc (Gaelic)*



- TAIL END DOGGER BANK - NORTH EAST PIT - SYLT GROUND - HELIGOLAND  
DEEPS - BORKUM FLAT - OYSTER BEDS -

## **WADDEN SEA**

strange dreamland,

this subtidal region :

sea to bay

bay to lake

lake to swamp

swamp to weak meadow

the old seabed

brought up to the air

the wind blowing carefully all day,

the ground so dry

that walking is easy.

## **HELIGOLAND**

September.

a sharp cold stream

a pink line of current

the wind from the moon

kindling the sky

green then coral red.

two or three stars

glow low down

like aeroplanes, landing.

## THE SEA BED

When taking soundings, it must be borne in mind, that **the** sea bed, like **the** land, consists of hills, valleys, plains of sand or mud ; of rugged cliffs, sometimes with abrupt faces, at others with jagged sloping sides, or strewn with boulders, etc., etc. A single cast of lead might mislead a mariner, as it might happen to drop on a spot either much more shoal, or much deeper than **the** average soundings in **the** neighbourhood. This explains why fishermen find many soundings not shown on any chart.

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# Old Whaling Days

from the Personal Narrative of William Barron, Captain. Hull, 1895.

(I)

1.

about 3 in the afternoon we got fast to a large fish.  
after a flourish  
she succumbed to us.

2.

the sea began to increase, with showers of snow  
as she was hastening towards the  
outside of the fiord,

it was with difficulty  
they could lash the fins together  
and tow her to a place of shelter.

3.

the whale became furious  
rolling over and over near us  
when she struck the boat,

leaving some of her skin on the sheets.  
the harpooner fired a bomb lance  
which explored in a vital part

4.

I saw her under water  
she was beautifully distinct, and in slow motion  
she lightly touched the vessel.  
the concussion made her tremble

5.

one was struck  
she led us a nice dance  
then went into the pack.

and during the whole time was  
perfectly calm, the water smooth

6.

she came to the surface  
and two more boats got fast,  
leaving three to lance.

and in a few minutes  
the sea, the boats and  
the men were crimsoned

7.

to shew her rapidity, she immediately  
rushed under the floe, down to the bottom

and was hauled up, having  
broken her neck,  
embedding in the dark blue mud.

8.

she was swimming on her side,  
evidently watching our movements.  
(but at too great a depth)

(II).

we sailed to the eastward,  
the middle ice

it was snowing, and freezing keen  
holes of water,  
closed or opened out.

ice here formed into a pack.

Sound ice.

a ship along the land floe

Something like smoke was rising from

the broken masses a light  
air or wind

we began to  
tow in company gradually  
threaded our way northward, among loose  
streams

succeeded in reaching  
the west water, ran

the dreaded white breakers on the heavy ice  
the outer edge, or crust  
, clear of the swell

the moon was at its full, moving  
A heavy sea was running, and thick  
snow falling.

We parted with the

other ships  
along the land until it became dark, then set  
for home.

## GULL POEM

Like the day I went almost blind from staring at the ocean; or  
the day I found the gull, buoyant for hours

as the tide pulled out beneath it - trussed, unblinking  
as I dragged the barb back through its mouthparts, then

unpurled the mile of orange twine around its neck and ankle, the lath  
of its heel exposed, the wing's dry apparatus,

the ruff of swollen meat near its eye  
which beheld me calmly, all puzzlement long past

as I waded in and placed it back on the clear  
calm surface, where it bobbed about like plastic, then drifted out to sea.

## HESSLE ROAD

~

so I went fishing out of Spain

round the south end of England

the Irish coast

hake, whiting

then the Falklands, fishing for squid

you had to pick the horn out

we were flown home with the ship

I came home            went casualling on the fish dock.

It's the sea life more than anything

I've done nothing else but the sea

~

well he said you can tie a cod line can't you

well he said you've been doin as third hand

so we let go and sailed

~

we went to the North Sea and places like that

we went to Ireland and Ullapool, transferring

we went to Wales and left the ship

we went to Wales and took the bus home



~

mackerel is just a thing

you come across a **mark**

you tow across the **mark**

that hole

you tow across it, and the boat would be full

~

he tried hard to come home.

when they turned the ship round to come back

we knew before most people

if the tides were right, we went to meet him

the ship coming in at the dock.

but at the back of that,

there was that worry, like when another ship went down

and you'd be anxious until they came.      there was

always his suit in the wardrobe

always his shirts pressed

~

or tugs and supply boats -  
like driving a taxi,  
always on standby

or tied up in Peterhead :  
*handle an anchor, move a rig,*  
*back in*

~

2 am : the bobbers  
walking to work in their clogs  
iron shod, like horses

or a barra lad, a hundred kit in yer barra :  
run there  
run back  
run there  
run back

~

water - fish slab - floating ice - the bobbers landing kits -  
board scrubbers - the cod liver oil, pumping out - I've no  
sort of clear cut - shore riggers splicing wires - the  
Marconi man - coal wagons, clankerin an clankerin,  
bunkerin the ships up - miles and miles of coal -

~

or the women  
at tide time, blowing kisses

or the women at night  
mending nets out back

~

pulling and riving  
using the wind,  
the fish put away in minutes

a second honeymoon -  
two or three days  
a day for each week

it was part of our play -  
*ships alongside,*  
*meet your daddy*

a village :  
four thousand fishermen at sea.  
I was there before I was born

~

at sixty two, I did a trip pleasuring  
fresh fishing - the norwegian coast -  
thirteen days twelve hours, dock to dock  
the grounds that I used to  
I've never felt so well

~

the last haul, going home :

the watch stopped

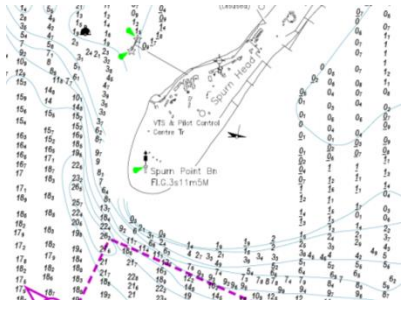
all hands for six

to get the back broken of the work

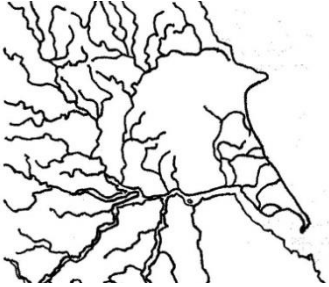
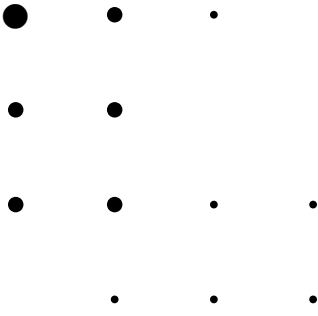
twenty men on deck

everything else is forgotten

# HULL

<p><i>Swing the lamp :</i></p> <p>four loud voices</p> <p>like a layer of oil on the table.</p>	<p><i>the bulla (n):</i></p> <p>i. a mollusc with thin, fragile shells</p> <p>ii. of whales, the middle ear</p>	<p>evening air :</p> <p>the offshore breeze</p> <p>spilling over the horizon.</p>
<p><i>Balaena mysticetus</i></p> <p>the whale,</p> <p>its human gasps</p>	<p>- Sunk Sands - North Channel -</p> <p>- Hawke Road - Sunk Spit - Foul Holme -</p> <p>- Paull Sands - Paull End</p>	<p>a breach -</p> <p>the buss, a wet lobe</p> <p>plosive, exhaling</p>
<p>at the horizon</p> <p>a ship, inverted</p> <p>sailing on its masts</p>		<p><i>lux, candela :</i></p> <p>a visible light, near green</p> <p>pure spermacetti</p>
<p>a cloud bank,</p> <p>the sea ice-green</p> <p>glittering like the ice cap</p>		<p>the Gulf Stream -</p> <p>a blue streak, entirely transparent.</p> <p>a sleeve of glass.</p>
<p>hoisted</p> <p>foetal, collapsing</p> <p>in its own sudden weight</p>	<p>[Blacktoft Jetty]</p> <p><i>light, occulting</i></p> <p>a conscious, constant /</p>	<p><i>duntie – æður – eidereend</i></p> <p><i>mallimak – maali – qaqulluk</i></p> <p><i>redshank – stelkur – tureluur</i></p>

<p>- Symmetry - Thomas - Thornton - Trafalgar - Truelove - Valentine - - Venerable - Zephyr -</p>	<p><i>old Truelove, staunch and true. Peace to her ashes.</i></p>	<p>- Keddington - - Langled - Rough - -Dan - Tyra - Roar - Valhall -</p>
	<p>ENGLAND - RIVER HUMBER  King George Dock Entrance, E.      53° 44.4' N0° 16.4' W <b>Oc.Bu.</b></p>	<p><i>old Harmony, rounded in chains.</i></p>
<p><b>Whitby to The Wash</b>  <b>Wind F3 SE becoming SSE</b>  <b>Max. Gust 17kn becoming 15kn</b>  <b>Sea State Smooth becoming Slight</b>  <b>Visibility Good</b></p>	<p>the White Sea.</p>	
<p><i>well, the town couldn't hold me a two day tycoon with a girl on each arm</i></p>	<p>Fresh way. - Increased speed  through the water.</p>	<p>[Spurn Point]  sunset.  whole cities slide by  weightless, inverted</p>
<p>fog -  a peculiar blackness  a mid-morning silence.</p>		<p><i>or the women at tide time, blowing kisses  or the women at night mending nets out back</i></p>

<p><i>Flurry.</i> - A convulsive movement of a dying whale.</p>	<p>- St MAGNUS GROUND - TURBOT BANK <i>Rough</i> - OTTER BANK SPRING &amp; SUMMER HALIBUT.COD.LING. WHEN CLEAR OF DOGFISH -</p>	<p>When we come home, we begin to vanish.</p>
<p>[twilight] the pilot boat hurries out - a turbulence of small lights a wash of surface noise</p>	<p><i>December</i> - <i>Breiðafjörður, Faxaflói</i> <i>sucking your fingers to your elbow</i></p>	<p>the watch : 18 hours on 6 below</p>
<p>Those lost at sea come back as birds.</p>	<p>Fisc flodu ahoft this-fish the-tide raised (i.e. stranded)</p>	<p><b>OUTER BAILEY</b> a dozen petrels low to the water</p>
		<p>on ferenberig onto mountain-mound (i.e. ashore);</p>
<p>land light : its hoodwink eye unblinking</p>		<p><i>sīc</i> (Old English) <i>sík</i> (Old Norse) <i>sig</i> (Danish) <i>sike</i> (Yorkshire) <i>syke</i> (Berwick)</p>

EXTRACTS from APB Humber Estuary Services *Current Humber Charts*; JNCC *Directory Of The North Sea Coastal Margin*, distribution of white-beaked dolphin; Close's *Fishermen's Chart of the North Sea*; OED; BBC Shipping Forecast; Franks Casket rune translated by Bill Griffiths; *Men of the Sea*, J. Connelly & B. Meek.

**Ethie Woods** was published in *The Tree Line*, ed. Michael McKimm (Worple Press/Woodland Trust); **Birds of the North Sea**, **Caa'in** and **Summer Ferry** in *Landscapes: the Journal of the International Centre for Landscape and Language*; **Bird Song** in *The Antigonish Review*; **The North Ron Light** and **The Arctic Pilot** in *Alligatorzine*; **Frislanda** in *The Island Review*; **Skagaströnd** in *Causeway/Cabhsair*; **Close's Fishermen's Map** in *English*; **Old Whaling Days (I)** in *PN Review*; and **Hessle Road** in *Hull, City of Poets*, ed. Jules Smith (The History Troupe Press). **Rock Pool** won the 2016 Wild Atlantic Words competition, judged by Bernard O'Donoghue.

Most of the poems in *Summer Ferry* will be included in the collection *Disappearance*, due to be published by Shearsman in January 2020.



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