

‘Longing for an Inarticulable Place’: Reflections on the *Hielan’ Ways Symposium*

‘The Hielan’ Ways region rests between the heartlands of Aberdeenshire and Moray to the north, and the Cairngorm mountains and Ladder Hills to the south [...] it contains areas of hidden beauty and stark wilderness, which are traversed by a web of ancient footpaths and tracks.’¹

On 14 and 15 November 2014 the *Hielan’ Ways Symposium* was held in the Grampian village of Tomintoul. The event spanned two days, the first dedicated to walking, the second to talking. The symposium marked something of a culmination to *Hielan’ Ways*, a two-year long project curated by Deveron Arts, in which a disparate selection of artists were invited to respond to an ancient but underappreciated network of drove roads in the northeast of Scotland. But the symposium also opened the project to fresh speculation with its subtitle: *Perceptions of Exploration*. Introducing the afternoon session on day two, anthropologist Professor Tim Ingold meditated on the productive tension produced by those words: ‘perception’ and ‘exploration’. He posed two observations that offer a useful starting point for thinking about this event. Firstly, he suggested, we can think of perception precisely *as* exploration, perception being what it is that we as humans do in the world. Perception thus considered is not a question of representing the world, but of finding a way *into it*. Secondly, Ingold urged, we might consider the different ways of thinking about exploration. These include discovery, a mode of exploration driven by the desire to find out, sending us in search of unknown places and unknown things. But exploration also happens in imagining, in remembering. For Ingold, such exploration can be characterised by ‘*a longing for an inarticulable place*’. The whole *Hielan’ Ways* project seems to speak directly to this idea. In each of the artists’ work we find an attempt to engage with this place, the always provisionally defined geography of the Hielan’ Ways. Whether this engagement takes the form of walking practice as is the case with Ron Brander, Gill Russell and Simone Kenyon; through traditional music in the case of Paul Anderson; The Rhynie Woman’s making of food and drinks from locally foraged produce; or by interrogating and reinterpreting the toponymy and cartography of the place as we find in the work of Alec Finlay, and again Gill Russell, each of the artists approaches the space of the Hielan’ Ways through the imagination. Their art always, in some respect, depends on the work of imagination. As such, we might say that there is a longing which underpins this project; a longing for a place – the Hielan’ Ways – that nonetheless always remains just beyond reach, never fully representable, always in excess of articulation. This is

¹ Gill Russell, *long-coise: footprint* (Huntly: Deveron Arts, 2014), p. 4. The term ‘Hielan’ Ways’ was coined by Deveron Arts to identify collectively this network of paths and tracks.

evident in Alec Finlay's observation that the project was not about renewing the drove roads but about renewing a practice of walking. Not about rewriting what has already been written – the lines, tracks and paths written by foot on the land – but about a less tangible process of movement and of (bodily) perception. There is, in this, a sense of creating a space of free play and negotiation, an opening of dialogue; a space of communication if not communion with the landscape.

Words and phrases like 'communication', 'dialogue', and 'space of free play', bring us towards the loosely demarcated contemporary art practice described variously as dialogic, relational, socially engaged or, in Claire Bishop's terms, participatory art. Deveron Arts sits comfortably within this zone of practice; it is foundational to their approach and is exemplified in their slogan, 'the town is the venue'. It's within this field that I think we can productively position the *Hielan' Ways Symposium* as a mesh of participatory and dialogic practices curated by Deveron Arts and their Walking Institute. In 'Relational Aesthetics' Nicholas Bourriaud provides a particularly useful observation for thinking about the art event when he suggests that '[art] is a site that produces a specific sociability', an interstice, or 'space in social relations which [...] suggests possibilities for exchanges other than those that prevail within the system'.² If one of the central motifs of such a field is the use of art to produce or reproduce relationships between people as participants in practice, action, or event situations, then this is also foundational to the *Hielan' Ways Symposium*. Added to this, however, Deveron Arts here exhibit a desire to use art to produce relations not only between people but between people and the land.

Talking

The 'Talking Symposium' of day two produced a unique sociability which sought to reflect on and in turn reconsider the various art practices that shaped the *Hielan' Ways* project within a wider conception of exploration. The day was split into a series of artists' reflections on *Hielan' Ways* in the morning and a more expansive reflection on 'perceptions of exploration' in the afternoon. The session post-lunch included talks from Richard Long, the world renowned walking artist and pioneer of landscape art; Gavin Pretor-Pinney, the founder of the Cloud Appreciation Society; Vanessa Collingridge, broadcaster and researcher into early modern cartography; Karen Darke Paralympian cyclist and adventurer; and Doug Scott CBE, one of the

² Nicholas Bourriaud, 'Relational Aesthetics' in, Claire Bishop ed., *Participation* (London & Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 160-71, p. 161.

finest mountaineers of the twentieth century with numerous first ascents in the Himalayas. The contextualization that such an array of speakers produces destabilizes our received notions of exploration and casts the *Hielan' Ways* project in a new light.

If, as Ingold suggested, perception can be considered the means by which we find our way into the world, it comes as no surprise that movement, or mobility, was a central feature of each of the talks. For forester Steve Brown, who has worked in the Grampian region for more than twenty years, it was the movement of flora and fauna across the landscape and the shifting tendencies of land use in the Hielan' Ways area that were brought to the surface. For Vanessa Collingridge, it was the mobile nature of cartographic representation, particularly in relation to the mythical Great Southern Continent that fascinated the oceanic explorers of early modernity. Gavin Pretor-Pinney, on the other hand, was fascinated – and fascinating – on cloud physics, ending his talk with an account of his experience of the 'morning glory' phenomenon, a particularly rare wave-like cloud formation which he witnessed in central Australia, and which offers an ephemeral playground for 'surfing' glider pilots. Despite the diversity of their subjects, these presentations shared a common thread in their scientific engagements with the world around them – whether ecologically, cartographically, or nephologically informed. While Brown, Collingridge and Pretor-Pinney all *experience* their subjects in an embodied way, walking through forest, poring over ancient maps, or gazing upwards at the sky (not to mention the embodied experience of precipitation), in this case they brought a more distanced or less immersed perspective to the symposium which was elsewhere dominated by experiential reflection; by the varied experiences of embodied encounter with, and movement through, the land.

The *Hielan' Ways* was about reinventing a practice of walking. It is through walking that *Hielan' Ways'* artists Gill Russell, Ron Brander, Simone Kenyon, and Finlay – by proxy – remake this place. It was Brander's own interest in walking the old drove roads of the Hielan' Ways that provided the initial impetus for the project. That, and his noticing of that term – unabridged: the 'Highlandman's Road' – on a two-hundred year old map of Huntly, marking a 'road' that exists in the town now as a track between two housing estates, but which, then, offered a main route out to the hill country that sits at Huntly's edge. It is the passage through time, experienced both through research and the movement of one's body through the landscape that defines Brander's contribution to *Hielan' Ways*, in his rigorous history, *Ower the Hills tae Huntly*. '[Most] of all', he writes, 'it is people and their actions, over time, who create a sense of place. [...] Roots in the past are branches in the future'.³ Closing his talk at the symposium, Brander offered an image: he

³ Ron Brander, *Ower the Hills tae Huntly* (Huntly: Deveron Arts, 2014), p. 19.

is standing, arms outstretched, in his right hand an ancient flint tool found on the Cabrach moor, in his left, a teaspoon, also found on the moor. This image, Brander reflected, demonstrates a continuity of use and practice that is central to our conception of the Hielan' Ways, a continuity of embodied presence in the landscape. This is something that underpins Simone Kenyon's work, too. Her engagement with the landscape emerges out of her reading of Nan Shepherd's meditation on the Cairngorms, *The Living Mountain*. Her project, *In the Footsteps of Nan Shepherd*, is informed by performance, dance and walking and is realised not in the interpretation of embodied practice, but in the practice itself. I'll return to Kenyon's work below.

It is, however, Finlay's work which *reinvents* the practice of walking most profoundly, undertaking his own explorations of the Hielan' Ways landscape through the eyes and limbs of others. His collection, *Some Colour Trends*, to which, again, I'll return, interprets the names of places and features found on the map of the Hielan' Ways area. The outcome is a plethora of visual and textual modifications and representations – poems, aphorisms, colour wheels and playfully designed walking routes across the landscape, linking, for example, 'Garnet Rock to Blue Cairn', or 'Well of the Reddish Backhill to White Well'. No longer able to go for long walks in the hills, the features which piqued Finlay's interest had to be investigated by proxy explorers, most frequently Gill Russell, who, alone and in collaboration with Finlay, produced *lorg-coise: footprint*, a series of fourteen thematic maps crossing the area. Here we find the routes traced by the aforementioned walks, alongside others linking water features – 'a route of springs' and 'a walk between two burns' – or, in another example, a walk linking 'sheilings and shooting butts' (Russell, pp. 22-3; 30-1). The maps are the result of a sustained walking engagement with the Hielan' Ways country, and in turn they operate in such a way as to expand the notion of 'ways' altogether. Taking neither the traditionally walked paths that feature on the surface of the terrain, nor the summits that typically determine hillwalking routes, but instead adopting notional themes or following enticing topographical features, Russell's maps playfully renegotiate the terms of hillwalking in this area. Pictorially they depart from traditional cartography. Some of the maps include place and/or feature names, others reproduce the contour lines of the Ordnance Survey, but all are radically simplified. Some of the maps have only two lines, one – white – tracing the path of a watercourse, for example, and the other – red – marking the route walked along and across it.

Paul Anderson's *Hielan' Ways Symphony*, of all the artist contributions to *Hielan' Ways*, is the one least reliant on a practice of walking. Speaking at the symposium Anderson reflected on the fact that he lived on the edge of the Hielan' Ways geography and could look out to it through

his window, composing the movements of the symphony in proximity to, if not immersion within, the landscape. His interpretation, through traditional Scottish music, is, however, firmly rooted in the walking traditions of cattle droving. The symphony was premiered on the Friday night at the symposium in the Richmond Hall, Anderson playing with a five-piece string section in lieu of a complete orchestra. I couldn't help but envy Anderson's playing as a means to communicate the imagined experience of following ancient tracks. During his symposium presentation on day two, when he took-up the fiddle to express a mood or feeling that inspired his composition, he inadvertently straddled that line between articulation and non-articulation, employing music to negotiate the gaps in language.

Karen Darke's talk preceded the two keynote presentations from Richard Long and Doug Scott. Following a rock climbing accident which left her paralysed from the waist down, Darke has gone on to explore numerous continents, hand-peddalling her way across the Himalayas and the arctic circle. Hers is a unique experience of embodied engagement with the landscape and one that seemingly defies adversity to explore and expand the notion of physical limits. In this, she shares a common interest with Doug Scott. Scott's presentation was remarkable. He described what it's like to sit-out a long siege attempt to establish a first ascent in the world's highest mountains; he recalled anecdotally watching his climbing partner Dougal Haston making the final moves in the ascent towards the summit of Everest, and then the hallucinatory ordeal of bivouacking in the 'death zone' on their subsequent descent. But while Scott's achievements were extraordinary, and the audience was transfixed by his account, the pioneering spirit and sense of conquest that invariably accompanies feats of mountaineering attracted a degree of scepticism from Ingold. Can we not see in this approach to the landscape something of the same urge that marks much of the history of exploration with the dark and fatal taint of imperialism? In part, Ingold was also responding to a claim Scott made regarding cavers being the only explorers left. He countered this claim by suggesting that every toddler, every child, is exploring as they learn to navigate their way in the world. It was a notion that provided an unexpected point of contact with Richard Long's keynote address. Long's talk was disarming – shy and faltering – but nonetheless engaging for that. He led us more or less chronologically through the highlights of his career as a pioneering artist of landscape and walking. Undoubtedly, Long was one of the star attractions for a symposium which put walking and art at its core. One of the installations he described, however, was particularly pertinent to Ingold's observation. In 1977 Long undertook a walk in Macgillicuddy's Reeks, a mountain range in south-west Ireland, in which he made his way on a circumnavigation of the range by throwing a rock that he had picked up at the side of the path, following it, picking it up and

throwing it again, following it, picking it up, throwing it...on and on until he made it back to the point from which he started. Like all Long's work, the signature thematics of self, body and landscape were the guiding factors: the project was undertaken in solitude, the rock was selected to fit Long's hand and thrown the distance his arm was able, the steps taken were measured by his bodily stride. With what seems like an arbitrary concept – that of following a rock thrown – Long's work enacts a mode of exploration that is underpinned by a strictly embodied perception. It is through his body's measure and capability that he finds his way into the landscape. It was only when I returned home from the symposium and watched my then not-quite-one-year-old daughter emulating Long's technique to navigate her way around the sitting room – with a plastic toy in place of a rock, with a stumbling crawl rather than a purposeful stride – that I recognised in Long's work the ludic quality of perception and exploration that Ingold was gesturing towards. And is it not reasonable to suggest that there is such a playful element in all of the work that came under discussion in Tomintoul? At least in the sense of a discovery of the world through movement, through our bodily movements, our tactility with the places around us, and in our efforts to expand and destabilise the structures and edges that define them.

Such was the strength of the Talking Symposium. By juxtaposing the *Hielan Ways* artists' talks with those of the invited speakers, the diverse ways of conceiving exploration all reflected back on the *Hielan' Ways* project. The subtitle to the event 'Perceptions of Exploration' was an appropriate modifier, inducing us to view the artists' work on *Hielan' Ways* as a range of modes of embodied perception brought to bear on a shared sense of exploration; exploration of the landscape in its history, terrain and toponymy, but also exploration of relations, collaboration and the possibilities of artistic endeavour. In this sense the Talking Symposium produced a space, or interstice, in social relations by opening the potential for a discursive arena around the concepts of exploration, perception, and art. However, while this worked on an intellectual level, the somewhat anachronistic lecture-hall format represented a stark departure from the spatio-social potentialities inherent in the structure of the first day. The programme was oversubscribed, meaning that there was little time for sustained discussion involving the audience, or even between the speakers, to develop in any productive direction. There were, of course, other openings for dialogic relations throughout the weekend. The ceilidh on Friday night was one, bringing old hands and the uninitiated together in music and dance, at times sedate and mannerly, frenzied at others. Hospitality, similarly, produces space for new relations to form; in queues, waiting for coffee or edging along the buffet trays, or sitting down together to eat. The food was organised by The Rhynie Woman, an artist collective from the village of Rhynie on the eastern edge of the Hielan' Ways region, who make art of exquisite locally foraged

food and sociability. And into the night on Friday, if you happened to step into the bar of the Richmond Arms Hotel in the centre of Tomintoul, you would have found Paul Anderson, his wife Shona Donaldson, Steve Brown and Jake Williams playing an impromptu session with fiddles, pipes and a homemade electric guitar. Such seemingly minor elements of the event were invaluable to the dynamism and originality of the programme. However, I want to argue that it was the Walking Symposium of day one which embraced the idea of using art to interrupt social relations most profoundly, to produce new relations between people and between people and the land through embodied practice.

Walking

This was a move to take the symposium participants – at least those who signed up for both days of the event – into the geography of the Hielan’ Ways, on walks ‘with’ the project artists and invited speakers. The participants could, in this way, experience the place of the Hielan’ Ways directly. I want to suggest, here, that the idea of ‘art as interstice’ is somehow imbricated with Ingold’s concept of the ‘inarticulable place’. The very idea of an inarticulable place, after all, implies an existence outside of readily definable or speakable boundaries. It implies an interstitial place; a place *in-between*, of fluidity, or perhaps place *as* fluidity. In *For Space* Doreen Massey argues for a dissolution of the traditional philosophical distinction between space and place. She defines space in terms of interconnectedness, plurality, and as a ‘network of stories-so-far’ produced by the various human and non-human actors who inhabit or constitute space *as* space; place *as* place.⁴ Walking together (and apart – in groups), as we did on November 14 2014, a certain sociability was formed through which we, as participants, came into contact with the human and non-human actors whose stories *write* this space-time landscape: the incessant rain; wind; geology; grasses; heathers; peat; trees; clouds; bird and beast; tea and cake; rivers; buildings; histories; each other. And in doing so, the experience of landscape and dialogue was recalibrated or re-socialized.



November 14 2014:

⁴ Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 6-9.

Black Route A, the 'Smuggler's Route', exists already as a dotted line on the O.S. map. It starts at the Well of the Lecht around NJ235153 and travels north then northwest before turning at ninety degrees in a north-easterly direction to pick up the Crombie Water and follow this to the College of Scalán at NJ246195.

We have been counted on the bus, and having got off the bus we are counted again. We walk the half-mile or so along the Conglass Water to the disused Lecht Mine. Nick May, a geologist, had been going to talk to us at this point about the mine's history, but someone wanted to go back and Nick offered to drive them. In his place Claudia Zeiske, organiser of this event, and Nick's wife, tells us that it had been a magnesium mine and between the group which is made up mainly of artists, but with an engineer, an ex-potter, a mountaineer, and others thrown in, we manage to discuss the various uses of magnesium.

Eventually someone notices the interpretation board installed on the inner wall of the building. Apparently it was manganese, not magnesium, that had been mined here.

We are counted again. And again. When we're satisfied that everyone is present we set off to walk back along Conglass Water and pick up the path heading north up the hill. It is 10:30am.

I walk in a line following Richard Long who follows Claudia up the hill of Carn Dulack. The river follows its winding course below us on the right. The hills mark the horizon in a brown lumpen sweep. It is raining hard. Like everyone else I pull my hood down tight and the combination of hooded and batted heads and a narrow path means this section of the walk is experienced in a sort of communal solitude.

We cross a line of grouse 'butts' and I notice one blue shotgun cartridge on the ground beside butt number three.

□



Near the top of Carn Dulack on November 14 2014 the wind picked up to gale-force. I, and those on 'Black Route A' with me, had to lean into the wind to stop from being blown off our feet. Someone walking towards the back of the line suggested linking arms in an effort to keep from being dragged off-course. I took a few short videos with my phone to try and record the force of the wind. In one of them, a woman in a yellow waterproof jacket – I'm not sure of her name – has let go of the muscular tension that is required to withstand the wind and stay on the path. The picture judders

and the soundtrack crackles and breaks with frequent momentary lapses into silence, but we can tell that she has abandoned the path, letting the wind take her. With her arms held out like a child she interrupts the preformed route, breaking into short frenzied runs. A space of free-play opens on the hillside.

Passing over the shoulder of Carn Dulack we stepped out of the wind. It was at this point that someone in the group noticed a mountain hare – not quite completely white – running through the heather. In the distance we could now see Scalan, the terminus of Black Route A and the meeting place where we would eat lunch and gather with the other group, before reforming for the afternoon walk. These factors combined to produce a relaxed conviviality. The group spread out, no longer required to walk in single file, and conversations were started up. Writing on walking as an ethnographic practice, Ingold and Jo Lee suggest that ‘[to] participate is not to walk *into* but to walk *with* – where “with” implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing the same vistas, and perhaps retreating from the same threats behind’.⁵ Citing this quotation in a recent article in *C Magazine*, Simon Pope asserts in turn that ‘[w]alking alongside becomes a means to negotiate a flow – of conversation, of movement. Moreover, it becomes symbolic of an ideal type of relation, where moving together, shoulder-to-shoulder, conveys the potential for *mutuality, parity or equality*’.⁶ This is how these group walks were positioned: a walk ‘with’ Richard Long; a walk over Tom Trumper ‘with’ Doug Scott. This approach to the walk suggests a resistance to the received structure of leader and led that Ingold, Lee, and Pope argue against and, in this way, Long’s participation with and alongside the rest of the group provides an example of the reorganisation of the social identified by Bourriaud.

However, the group *was* led. Zeiske, as both a qualified Walking Leader and curator of the event, had a certain responsibility in this regard; a certain curatorial care. But if this is to undo the parity suggested by ‘with’, it simultaneously presented another free space in which to experience the landscape. Although we were not walking in particularly challenging or threatening terrain, we were on the edge of a largely unpopulated area in extreme weather. Had I been walking alone or for the first time in the area, as was the case for most of us, it would have been important to remain attentive to navigation so as not to get lost. But in these circumstances I found myself able to relinquish this personal responsibility. I walked the ensuing distance engaged in conversations, blindly abandoning myself to the navigation of others to the point that

⁵ Jo Lee and Tim Ingold, ‘Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing’ in, Simon Michael Coleman and Peter Collins eds., *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), pp. 67-85, p. 67.

⁶ Simon Pope, ‘Walking Transformed: The Dialogics of Art and Walking’ in, *C Magazine* 121 (Spring 2014), pp. 14-19 [Online Access 18 January 2015] <http://cmagazine.com/2014_121_pope.htm>

I would be unable, standing outside Scalán Seminary a short while later, to point with any certainty at the hill I had walked off. We can thus identify a tension at work here. Unfettered by navigational responsibility, the landscape became a site of interactivity and dialogue. There was, at least in my own case, a departure from any romantic engagement with the landscape – with the shared vistas – in the sense of sublime rapture. Neither was I, for this section of the day, even particularly aware of my immediate surroundings, other than as background or by way of footfall. Instead, the hill-scape was reconfigured as social space, the landscape experienced in a mode of distraction; in and through conversation. While there was an undeniable closeness or immersion *within* the landscape taking place as a result of the bodily experience of weather and terrain, there was, simultaneously, a somewhat paradoxical distance from the land produced, in terms of attentive engagement with and study of its intricacies and nuance. The afternoon walk with Steve Brown, Gavin Pretor-Pinney, and Simone Kenyon, on the contrary, had a more meandering approach and a greater attention precisely to the intricacies of land- and skyscape.

□

Scalán Seminary consists of a little cluster of buildings bordered on all sides by flowing water: Caochan Dubh, Slochd Burn, Crombie Water, Allt Deònaid. The main building, which dates from 1767, is a two storey whitewashed house with a bright blue door. When we arrive this door is open and inside kettles are boiling on gas stoves (there is no electricity) alongside stacks of teacups. There are cakes too, generously made this morning by John and Sylvia Toovey, the caretakers of Scalán. The hospitality and the roof are deeply welcome. In a smaller building off to one side there's even a fire going where we wait for the next group to arrive.

Doug Scott arrives to lead another group on 'Black Route B' back to Tomintoul over 'Tom Trumper', a small hill immediately west of Scalán. It turns out that Doug – veteran of over forty Himalayan trips entailing first ascents of Everest South West Face, 'The Ogre', the North Ridge of Katchenjunga and the North side of Nuptse – has neglected to pack waterproofs and has had to borrow a pair of leggings from Joss, Deveron Arts' current Shadow Curator (although he did take a harness and rock-climbing shoes out of his rucksack before pulling on the borrowed trousers and joining the rest of the group). He is also hampered by a not-fully-healed broken ankle which recalls, ironically, his infamous descent of 'The Ogre' thirty-six years ago, crawling for six days from an altitude of 7,285m with both legs broken at the ankle. Tom Trumper is, by contrast, just 582m above sea level.

I watch them leave.

It is still raining heavily when we leave Scalán for the afternoon walk, a more 'micro' and meandering exploration of the landscape.

With forester Steve Brown and the ‘cloud guy’ Gavin Pretor-Pinney, we are directed to look down, and up, to take notice of the land we’re traversing, and the skies that roll continually overhead.

Steve’s expertise in forestry extends to rural land use, agriculture and soils. Pausing on the track a short way from Scalan he tells us about the differing soil conditions, the presence of peat, of grasses or heathers, the improvement or not of land, and the suitability for tree species.

A short way up the track we meet the group who’ve been walking on the ‘Ruins and Romans Route’ with Gill and Ron. They’ve been stravaigin’ around the ruins and have just left a bothy where Jake Williams was waiting for them – at Gill’s request – with music and whisky. They don’t seem so bothered by the continuous rain.

As we wander up the glen Steve points out a weasel trap, one of many placed by gamekeepers on logs crossing the estate waterways to trap and kill grouse predators. He tells us about the practice of heather burning – also used to keep predator numbers down in the management of grouse moors – and reveals for us the patterns of juniper growth on the hillside.

The sky is filled with dense, unbroken rainclouds – but Gavin remains upbeat, stopping at various points to fill our heads with cloud names and properties. Cumulo Nimbus. That’s what we experience as a dull but highly mobile blanket overhead. Turning your attention to something, dwelling on the sight or feel of a thing, renews its fascination. We have all been walking under the clouds for hours and though, perhaps on any other day in the hills, when the rain had been pouring down on you relentlessly, you would by this point find yourself downcast, trudging for home, we are instead a group of fully grown adults, wet through, gazing at the reinvigorated sky.

I am walking with Gavin about half a mile from the end of the route. The bus is waiting on the other side of a spruce plantation that we are making our way round. Now, for the first time today, the clouds part, letting a little of the late afternoon sun illuminate their edges with an ethereal orangey-pink radiance. Gavin is beside himself, and it would take a cold-hearted ‘blue-sky thinker’ not to be swept along with him.⁷

□

It is, however, one thing to have the landscape shown to you and another to feel it for yourself. It was around NJ242189, near Wester Scalan, when I fell into step with Simone Kenyon. Of all the artists, her’s had been the longest involvement in Deveron Arts’ *Hielan’ Ways*

⁷ I’m borrowing this play on ‘blue-sky thinking’ from Gavin, whose Cloud Appreciation Society Manifesto pledges ‘to fight “blue-sky thinking” wherever we find it’. See: <http://cloudappreciationsociety.org/manifesto/> [Accessed 9 December 2014].

project. She had started *In the Footsteps of Nan Shepherd* in the autumn of 2013, so had by this time been walking the Hielan' Ways for over a year, leading walks, mapping routes, meeting people along the way, always trying to establish or articulate what her project was actually about, yet always resisting the need to represent or translate her *experience* of the Hielan' Ways. Thus, in speaking to Kenyon one of the central issues underpinning this type of art project came to the surface: the tension between the experience and its representation. Nan Shepherd is useful here. She writes, towards the end of *The Living Mountain* – a meditation on her relationship to the Cairngorm mountains – that 'no metaphor [...] is adequate'.⁸ For Shepherd, the sense of being that a long time spent walking in the mountains produces – the condition, that is, of walking 'the flesh transparent' – is beyond articulation (Shepherd, p. 106). Her own efforts to elucidate this condition, in *The Living Mountain*, probably come as close as anyone could to expressing it in language. But it is an inarticulable condition. Shepherd thus embodies the phenomenological position iterated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the first page of *The Phenomenology of Perception*, the desire to 're-achieve a direct and primitive contact with the world', and for which the body, as the primary site of perception and experience, is central.⁹ 'One is not bodiless, but essential body', writes Shepherd (Shepherd, p. 106). Likewise, the bodily experience of walking is, for Kenyon, the true object of her practice. It is a practice conceived in terms of performance and dance. Movement, she claims, is central; the movement of the body in the landscape. And it seemed to me that it was in moving through the landscape, walking steeply uphill through wet heather, and talking about this way of conceiving art practice, that the social interaction *with* rather than *within* the landscape was felt most strongly. It was here that the inarticulable place of the Hielan' Ways seemed to make its voice heard, or rather felt. It was here, in other words, that the space between the representation and the experience of this place was outlined most acutely.

Perhaps Alec Finlay articulates the inarticulability of place with the greatest economy. The final fragment of 'On Pair-Names (After Peter Drummond)' appears like this:

place
 & the space
 between them
*name*¹⁰

⁸ Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011), p. 106.

⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London & New York: Routledge, 1996), vii.

¹⁰ Alec Finlay, 'On Pair-Names (After Peter Drummond)' in, *Some Colour Trends* (Huntly: Deveron Arts, 2014) p. 17, ll. 8-11.

I admire Finlay's typographical gesture, the indentation of lines 9 and 10 of his poem. By offsetting these lines from the italicised '*place name*', positioning them not only 'between' but to one side, this compound noun is broken apart, its integrity questioned. It confounds reading. How can we articulate these lines in order that they make sense without bridging that all-important gap between *place* and *name*? And what of Finlay's play on that problematic distinction between place and space? Here, as with Massey, the two are imbricated; that which is marked as 'place' by name *is space* – 'the space between'. Of course, Finlay's 'space' refers not only to the topographical space out in the world that any given place name denotes, but the blank white space between these two words on the page. And not only these, but the semantic 'spaces' – those complex histories and interpretations – that lurk behind place names. Most usefully, however, what Finlay's fragment invites is recognition of the difficulty, or impossibility, not of naming, but of *saying* a place.

What we are left with is that space between. And it is here that we walked on 14 November. There we all were, moving on the mountain. Each exploring their own experience of weather, of wetness, of land rising and falling, of talk back and forth, of introspection, muscle-ache, footsoreness and exhilaration; each experience, in itself beyond representation, somehow contributing to that sense of place in time. I would have liked to have seen it all from above; our movements around this place, for there were several groups of us, with Richard Long; Doug Scott; Simone, Steve and Gavin; Gill and Ron, walking, pausing, sometimes meeting, sometimes drawing lines with greater strength of trajectory, at others meandering around, doubling back, spreading out, getting lost (almost), setting out, returning. What would we make if not a dance? A text? A writing, inscribing ourselves on the surface of the land? Could it be that in such a text we might approach, if only as imagined memory trace, a way of articulating this place? Or is that simply longing?

Works Cited

- Bourriaud, Nicholas, 'Relational Aesthetics' in, Claire Bishop ed., *Participation* (London & Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. 160-71
- Brander, Ron, *Over the Hills tae Huntly* (Huntly: Deveron Arts, 2014)
- Finlay, Alec, *Some Colour Trends* (Huntly: Deveron Arts, 2014)

- Ingold, Tim, and Lee, Jo, 'Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing' in, Simon Michael Coleman and Peter Collins eds., *Locating the Field: Space, Place and Context in Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2006), pp. 67-85
- Massey, Doreen, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005)
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London & New York: Routledge, 1996)
- Pope, Simon, 'Walking Transformed: The Dialogics of Art and Walking' in, *C Magazine* 121 (Spring 2014), pp. 14-19, Online: <http://cmagazine.com/2014_121_pope.htm> [Accessed 18 January 2015]
- Pretor-Pinney, Gavin, *The Manifesto of the Cloud Appreciation Society*, Online: <<http://cloudappreciationsociety.org/manifesto>> [Accessed 9 December 2014]
- Shepherd, Nan, *The Living Mountain* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2011)