

Paula Aamli  
Doctoral Thesis

Working Through Climate Grief:  
A Poetic Inquiry

January 2021



*Fig. 01: Cliff doodle, felt tip image reproduced on canvas, then photographed with feet (2019).*

Submission coversheet- Individual's work



Ashridge Doctorate in Organizational Change 2017/20

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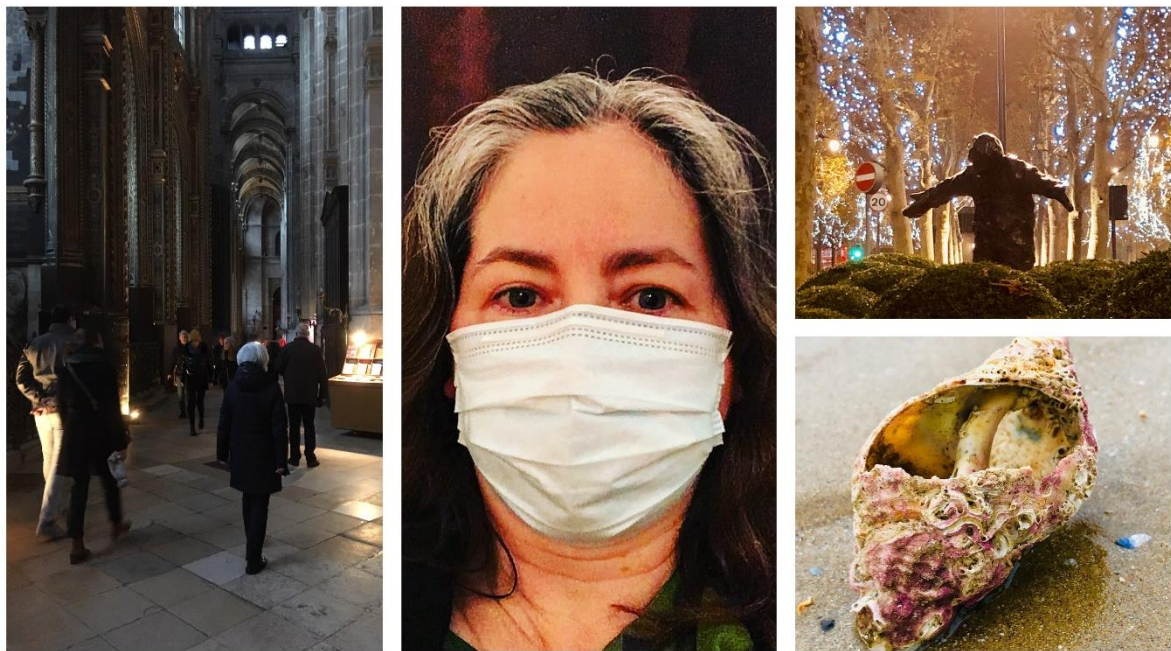
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*Fig. 02: Church, gallery, business district, beach – a photo-collage (2018 – 2020).*

## Acknowledgements

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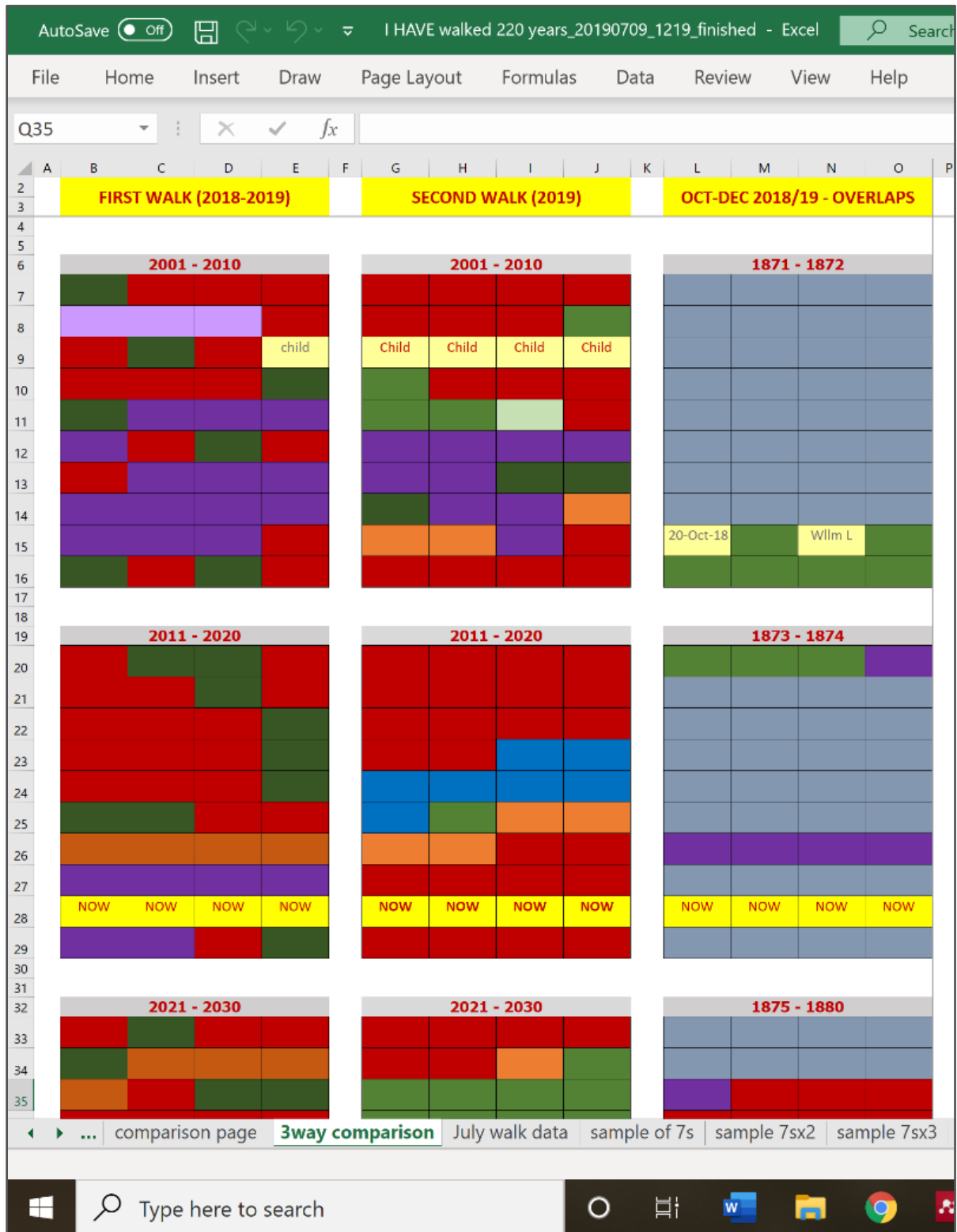


Fig. 03: Excel spreadsheet as artful overview – poetic charting extract (2019).

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Please note:

1. All photographs, collages and poems included here are mine, unless otherwise indicated.
2. Some of my photographs have words in (for example, where a word appears in a collage, or, when I provide a visual extract from my walking log). These images are contextual and any words which may appear in them are not intended to be considered as part of the main text; as such I do not include them in the word count. Where I want to draw attention to specific wording from e.g., my log, I refer to the relevant quotation directly in the text.
3. Photographs /correspondence /artefacts by others are used with permission wherever the author's identity is known to me, and if not known, the source context is given, for clarity.
4. Identities are obscured where requested and to the extent it is meaningful to do so. Any conversations about inquiry are included by permission; any identifiable details about an inquiry interaction have been checked and included by agreement.
5. Identities are not emphasised but are also not obscured where I am making a statement of fact e.g., naming someone in mentioning that we were at school together or where it is not meaningful to 'anonymise' e.g., it would be straightforward to establish the identity of my parents even if not disclosed.
6. Whenever someone preferred not to be identified or asked for my writing to be changed in respect of how I referred to them, I have changed the text or obscured the identity where this is possible, or, if not practical, I have not included that part of the work in this paper.

## Abstract

Modern Western culture is weighed down by systemic injustices and sliding into climate crisis.

I hold a position that one root cause is our disconnectedness, from nature and from each other:

i) that physical environmental damage leading to climate crisis has been much more possible to inflict when humans construct ourselves as disembodied and somehow immune from the harm we are creating; and ii) that the social injustices layered into the foundations and maintained in the institutions of Western capitalism are much more plausibly sustained for as long as the beneficiaries of capitalism construct themselves (/ourselves?) as distanced and somehow different from those who have been taken advantage of, marginalised, excluded.

In response, I seek to inquire into and contribute towards what eco-philosopher Joanna Macy terms “the work that reconnects” (Macy, 2020, n.p.n.), grounding this effort in “present-oriented inquiry” that focuses on the quality of my personal embodied presence. This paper introduces an arts-based method, which I term *poetic charting*, developed around a set of templates that track and support a sustained, ongoing reflexive and poetic practice and through which I hope to map a process of reaching towards reconnection within a wider world.

I locate this work within post-modern and constructionist thinking, in which the “problem” of human subjectivity is reframed as key to effective reflexive inquiry. I advocate for the use of arts-based research as well suited to teasing out personal embodied and intuitive experience and as effective in fostering reflexive inquiry practices. Reflexivity is key, because paying attention to subjectivity and seeking to enter into broader connections is only useful to the extent that we have willingness, capacity and skill to process and adjust in response.



## Introduction: Parameters for the Work and This Paper

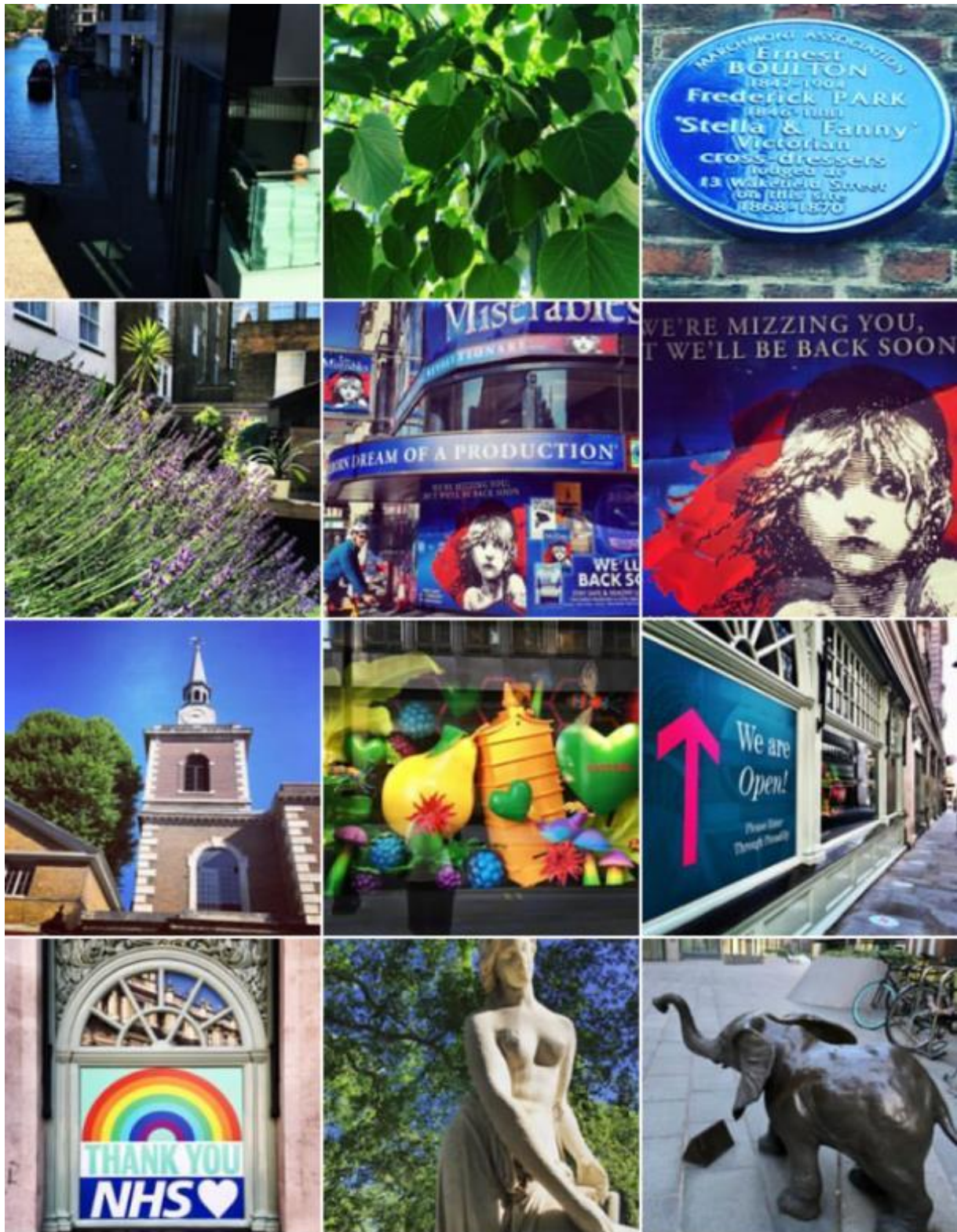


Fig. 04: Instagramming daily walks in “lockdown London” – a photo-collage (May 2020).

*Is everything finally feeling a touch “End Times”-y?*, I ask myself, a middle class white person.

I say this in a jokey way, but I’m asking in all earnestness, inside, and it fuels my research.

How could a planet so abundant, so full of scientific wonders, so extravagantly provided with beautiful sunsets, habitats capable of sustaining life, and multiplicity of *things existing*, have come to be dominated by a species whose representatives seem intent on being awful, not only to all other creatures seeking to co-exist alongside them, but also awful to each other?

Despite well-researched popular books of non-fiction that would reassure us that humanity has never “had it so good” (say, by Steven Pinker, 2018, or by Hans Rosling, 2018), I am not surprised that, faced with fires and droughts and melting icecaps, global pandemics, the rise of far right movements in Western democracies, and many other instances of political, social and economic turmoil, that this is not how many people *seem to feel*.

People? Well, me, anyway. I miss my naively optimistic childhood frame of reference, when I only thought I needed to be sad about losing dodos and dinosaurs and believed that “we are all equal now”, having learnt that sexism and racism were bad, but “progress” had “fixed” them. I now suspect that aspects of life on Earth have been *not ok* for much longer for others, from cultures that have been colonised, for natives of ravaged eco-systems, from species being squeezed towards extinction. Through this inquiry I am learning – from ecologists, from colonised Indigenous people, from BLM activists, from LGBTQ+ campaigners<sup>1</sup> – that to be shocked by evidence of systemic injustice, endemic exploitation (of other humans, other species, the natural world itself) is itself an expression of my own privileged, protected status.

I interrogate my own locatedness, identity, role/s within this nature-culture history-moment, studying how to be a good witness, ally and ancestor. This work is: urgent, essential, entangled.

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<sup>1</sup> BLM = Black Lives Matter; LGBTQ+ = Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer + (other)



## 0.1 My approach to a large-scale crisis and my purpose for this work

Climate crisis; extinction threats; systemic ecological and social injustices... These are huge-scale issues which I cannot and do not pretend to be able to solve – impossible to tackle decisively across an entire individual human lifetime, let alone a single doctoral thesis. Nonetheless, these issues are, I believe, topics that we should be discussing, that we should be (*with some urgency!*) learning how to think and speak about, how to respond to and plan for.

The problems associated with climate breakdown may seem, may *be*, unmanageably massive and existentially terrifying, but they are relevant and rapidly approaching. These issues should be things we are capable of contemplating and discussing; in our homes, our communities, our social and educational institutions, and our political assemblies; and in our commercial organisations, in our places of work; in our organisational change doctorates...

It is as an attempt to bring climate crisis awareness into my everyday discourses that I have chosen to centre the change “problem statement” for this doctorate on climate breakdown.

This is not because I have delusions of “solving” the climate crisis, but because I believe that it is urgent for individuals, organisations and societies on Earth today to learn how to deal with being alive at a time in history when climate breakdown is rapidly emerging, and has not yet been “solved”, and may possibly prove to be unresolvable. I do not believe I will deliver this, either – but I do believe that I can make a clear and positive contribution to our profound “change challenge”. I am a poet, not a scientist, and my contribution lies in scrutinising the minutiae of reactions, moods, emotions, sensations, expressions.

I do this in the belief that poetry can capture and make visible aspects of our emotional and psychological make-up differently from, and in certain respects, better than we can express these things through the supposedly dispassionate tones in which we tend to give voice to those perceptions generated through logical reasoning.

I understand poetry as effective for “holding discourse” with our own lurking sub-conscious, and for offering a gesture of empathy and connection towards others. I believe there are clear applications for poetic modes of expression and connection in the face of the terror, rage, or in my case, primarily denial and then grief, that may manifest in response to an existential threat.

Poetry, at least in the way I use and write poetry within this work, requires and develops the capacity to pay close, keen attention to the phenomenon at hand. What, precisely, does it bring to mind, make me feel? Why is *this* word, or metaphor or sentiment the right one to bring that moment back to life, and not *that* word, or metaphor, or sentiment? Poetry teaches me to notice myself in context of the world around me, and to speak about it in a way that might move an audience; I use the word “speak” deliberately because my experience has been that there is something significant about poems as *performative*, capable of being spoken aloud to others.

I believe that it is through our attentive, repetitive noticing and reflection – as individuals, as collectives (families, colleagues, friendship groups communities) and as social beings located within wider social structures – that we slowly, gently, progressively, equip ourselves to discover that, “What will help is...”

For instance, the threat of climate crisis offers a perverse invitation for those of us who have been educated within a mainstream modern Western worldview, namely, an invitation to pivot from thinking in our culture’s contest metaphors (in which we must “beat” climate change) towards metaphors of participation and emergence (in which we “contribute” and “shift”).

Neither the capacity of poetry to enable us to explore our own inner state nor its capacity to engage an audience will necessarily lead to improved resilience or to (re)connectedness with other humans or with our surrounding ecologies. However, I believe that poetry can help take us closer to all these things – to better understand ourselves, to better empathise with others – if our poetic efforts are applied, consistently and craft-fully, in service of these ends.

The question of “ends”, or *purpose*, is one of the critical questions, arguably in all human activity, but certainly for research that deals with inner psychological states and experiences, where “findings” cannot be precisely replicated and may largely rely on researcher testimony.

(Other critical questions, to which I will return, include how we can claim and test the extent to which such work is *valid*, and whether, or the extent to which, the work is *useful*.)

Aside from the functional aspect of this work, in that I am writing a doctoral thesis, with an intention to attain the associated doctorate, my own deeper overall purpose has two dimensions:

i) *to enlarge my personal psychological capacity*, which in the context of this specific inquiry often manifested as capacity to acknowledge and to work through climate grief (I see this as a repeating spiral of activity and commitments); and ii) *to capture as vividly as possible on the page the “what and how and why” of my method and processes* in the hope and belief that these will prove useful to other inquirers in working with their own concerns and questions.

I have pursued this overall purpose as an action research inquiry, using the activity of walking as the window for peering into my own world, and using artful means, including, but not limited to writing poetry, as the way to interact with my data and to (re)present my findings to others.

## 0.2 Characterising arts-based research and action research

As just described, I position this work – in which I seek to explore my own life experiences, my choices and my commitments given a backdrop of emerging large-scale climate breakdown – as arts-based research framed within action research principles. I write this recognising that, outside the specific networks using these research approaches, the terms are not necessarily well-known while, within these networks, there are difference of view as to their meaning, emphasis, and where to draw boundaries around our communities of practice.

If I had been writing, using the established terms, six or twelve or eighteen years ago, I might have referred to the former, instead, as “art based” or “arts-informed” research, or perhaps to “artful knowing” or even to “a/r/t/ography”, and to the latter as “action inquiry”, or “participatory action research”, or as “cooperative inquiry”, or even as “action science”.

Both terms have, in the past few decades, been through a proliferation of attempts to create appropriate naming conventions, followed by a progressive narrowing to a smaller number of terms in common use within the core networks of research-practitioner-adherents. Notice that I refer here to networks, plural. Not all action researchers use arts-based methods, and not all arts-based researchers would define themselves as action researchers. There are points of commonality, of overlap, and points of tension, or differences in priorities and focus.

At the risk of over-simplifying, I understand action researchers as often located in the borderlands between academic institutions and some external field of practice, which might be, say, consultancy, or business management, or executive coaching or international development. Generally, action researchers have an explicit commitment to trying to intervene within situations and within systems, seeking changes to make lives, not just company results, better. Research problems may often arise from within these fields of practice, but crucially for action researchers, so does the knowledge that can enable a problem to be analysed and resolved.

Consequently, there is a strong democratising tendency – action researchers may also themselves *be* practitioners in those fields, and if not, they seek to partner closely in the process of research with people who are. The aspiration is that research findings are generated *in collaboration with* the groups that feature in the research, not just *about them*.

Arts-based researchers also operate in border territory, but I suspect that often these are internal borders within the sprawl of academia – at the boundary between the library and the laboratory, perhaps, in, say, a mingling together of communications educators with social scientists.

Certainly, arts-based researchers may also be practitioners, in which case, it is likely that they would be, for example, educators, artists, therapists, musicians or actors, as well as researchers. Arts-based researchers draw from artistic /artful disciplines at any stage of research, in order to perceive and process differently, and to connect with research participants /audiences.

In language coined by an action researcher (John Heron, 1992, 1997), they enact a commitment to “extended epistemology”, championing this stance and conviction within academic contexts.

It makes sense that arts-based researchers could also have democratising intent, particularly in relation to seeking to reach audiences for and with their work; they do not necessarily have a social justice agenda, though many do, and would argue that all *should*. However, arguments about quality of artistic output can also tend towards exclusivity and exclusion; if only people who practice art to an expert standard can be arts-based researchers, then most people cannot.

Sandra Faulkner writes that

The poet and the social scientist share a common approach; both ground their work in meticulous observation of the empirical world, have the ability to be self- reflexive about their work and experience, and the capacity to foreground how subjective understanding influences their work (Faulkner, 2019, p. xi.).

This captures one important part of my aspiration for my work – I have aimed to “see myself” present/ing in the world as meticulously as I can, to foster effective habits of reflexivity, to be disciplined and unsentimental in making my subjective presence visible in the work.

But do I have the right to use this, even aspirationally, as my framing? I am, after all, *not* a social scientist; I graduated in the humanities and I work in governance, concerned in my day job with the “functioning” (and dysfunction) of formal structures of oversight and control. And while I write poetry, am I a poet?

I mentally flick through possible criteria, noticing the tension.

I am not (yet?) a published poet<sup>2</sup>, in the sense of “by a traditional, recognised publication” or “paid for published work”. Shocking when I see that I am embedded into assuming that a “mainstream” pay-cheque is a kind of *ultimate validation*. That said, I am “a little bit published”. (Does that make my work “a little bit valid”?) I have featured in other people’s blogs, in the written-by-and-for-members magazine of the British Association of Psychological Type (BAPT), and my poem “A Tree Off-site” was used to open a collection of poems about the workplace, self-published by Jonathan Cook (2019). Opened. The. Collection. (“Look, Mum! I’m first!”). I get a small heart-glow happiness that these Others liked my work enough to want to use it (*but is it only poetry, then, when other people like it?*)

One of the qualities of “doctoral” knowing is a cultivated sensitivity – hard-won, and perhaps needing to be regularly re-cultivated – the being alive to problems and complexities in an action taken (or, not taken), an apparent insight, an un-examined behaviour, emotion, assumption. Seeing the problematic and still acting, reflecting, *trying to see*. Committed to the attempt.

Early on, I thought that visual methods might be a route into and through my inquiry. I read Ellen Dissanayake (2002, 2012, 2017), seeking to understand the significance of “making art” in our evolutionary development, pondering its role in play, in ritual, in community-building. I turned to Suzi Gablik (1994) for a deconstruction of “high art” in formal culture, bounded, hierarchical, *capitalist, patriarchal* – generating “super-normal returns” for the favoured (predominantly male) few, a world away from Dissanayake’s depiction of art as mainly something that we do to establish connection and to build relationship, a process not a “thing”.

---

<sup>2</sup> In January 2021 – I have just had a poem confirmed for inclusion in Issue 26 (March 2021) of *Allegro*, the online poetry magazine for contemporary poetry.... Nearly “published” ...

The inquiry shifted I have retained my interest in “creative expression”, a desire to be part of a response to Gablik’s call for a “re-enchantment” of artful practices, but the focus pivoted, from visual to verbal forms, from mainly creating photos and collage to mainly writing poetry.

I want to briefly acknowledge the inquiry that could have taken off from these beginnings, to recognise the substantial body of scholarship undertaken in fields such as visual ethnography (Susan Pink, 2013) and visual methodologies (Gillian Rose, 2016).

My eventual research has not been centred on these disciplines but owes a considerable debt of influence, the most profound of which has been understanding that “seeing” is far from uncomplicated. This is tough, slippery work which requires commitment to learning to notice how we may be embedded – enmeshed, complicit – within the systems we challenge.

I was a rather dis-embodied child, a “brain in a jar” type (Caitlin Moran, 2011, p.111), full of internal rules about what was and wasn’t safe; uncomfortable around my peers; unimpressed that I was born female; ill-at-ease with my parents’ respective working-class families-of-origin. I was... keen to impress the grown-ups; terrified of being “wrong”; not remotely “at home in nature”. The kind of child who read avidly about climbing trees but never tried to climb one.

Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln characterise our current context as “a historic present that cries out for emancipatory visions”. They call for qualitative researchers to act accordingly, arguing that “the pursuit of social justice within a transformative paradigm challenges prevailing forms of inequality, poverty, human oppression and injustice” (2018, p.1).

I understand this positioning as also making room for work that challenges *ecological* injustice and oppressions that extend beyond humanity to impact the *other-than-human* and *more-than-human* world.

I believe that the work matters, that these commitments and efforts make a useful difference, because I take *sustained self-reflexive inquiry* to be essential (if not, by itself, sufficient) in generating change goals and commitments that offer genuine, and appropriate, transformation.

So, I commit to a sustained practice of self-reflexive inquiry, trying to cultivate Faulkner's "meticulous observation", (2019, p. xi), trying not to gloss over my subjective understanding/s.

### 0.3 Poetic inquiry as a reflexive methodology

The *poetic charting* processes I describe in this paper have been developed to support my engagement in a reflexive research methodology ((Mats) Alvesson & (Kaj) Skoldberg, 2009), where "reflexive" inquiry is "a particular, specified version of reflective research, involving reflection on several levels or directed at several themes" (p.8). The development of a reflexive approach to knowledge generation is important – arguably, essential – but also at times not straight-forward and not convenient. In the words of Deanna Fassett and John Warren,

Reflexivity is the process of exploring how we... create the phenomena we observe, through our assumptions, values, past experiences, language choices and so on... Engaging in reflexivity is like constantly twisting around and around in the mirror, seeking glimpses of the small of your back; you know it's there, it undergirds your action, but it is very difficult to apprehend unless it causes you pain, someone helps you see it, or you're particularly flexible. (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p.50).

Why is reflexivity relevant for an inquiry into climate crisis and into how to support organisations through change? Because the conditions for climate breakdown – and climate action – and the textures and structures of organisational life do not (merely) exist "over there" but involve and implicate me "in here", as an individual, a citizen, as a consumer, and as an employee, a manager, direct report, teammate, and colleague, at work.



It is of course not possible to have a one-person climate crisis. That is not how a planet-wide, systemic, complex, multi-factor phenomenon works –it is, by definition, all-encompassing. However, the daily impacts and effects are often experienced as mundane and routine: Do I carry on buying plastic disposable razors? (No.) Do I still use throwaway tampons? (Also, no.) Do I still fly internationally? (Sometimes, yes – pandemic conditions excepted – but it is no longer taken-for-granted that I will.) Do I still eat meat? (Yes – not as frequently.) And so on.

I have come to understand that it is when I am committedly, authentically self-reflexive that the Carl Rogers axiom, “What is most personal is most general” comes into effect (2004, p.26).

For me, it has been easy to establish a disciplined practice around mundane, repetitive actions – arguably, from multiple exam campaigns to a string of six marathons in my thirties, I have been constantly drawn back to sustained practices where everyday repetitions add up over time. I have also seen the quality of my writing improve over six years during which I have written literally hundreds of thousands of words. It has been *much harder* to step into the honesty, vulnerability, and self-exposure that the “most personal” part of the Rogers quote alludes to.

When Caitlin Moran wrote of her teenaged belief that she was effectively just “a brain in a jar” (Moran, 2011, p.111), this resonated deeply with my own memories of sitting on the floor in my bedroom, “thinking profound thoughts” and shunning exercise, believing that the thoughts, and not the body, was what mattered, what made me valuable, made me human. It has been a slow process to come to know myself also as embodied, located, present within time, and space, a marvellous both/and combination of nature-creature and social-creation.

I am absolutely sure that this (trained/learned) tendency for humans to perceive ourselves as somehow detached from our body-context is not limited to just Caitlin and me, although I have also come to understand this not as the mindset of *any* generalised human but specifically as an echo of the elite white male persona encoded as “the archetypal person” in Western cultures.

The prevalence of this flawed and self-deluding attitude matters, I now believe, because humans can make terrible, destructive decisions about the natural world and tolerate cruel, inequitable outcomes for other humans when we perceive ourselves as somehow not really part of nature and somehow not really connected to or responsible for those *other* people.

In my effort to do reflexive work well, I seek to learn from other researchers and from other artists and artful practitioners of many types. Irrespective of whether the expertise is primarily “researcherly” or mainly “artistic”, I want to know something about how they do what they do, and why they do it, and how their research or representational choices impact their audience.

Happily, there is (now) a wealth of vivid, vulnerable, self-disclosing research writing available to learn from, though acknowledging that not all examples of such writing are equally successful as works of artistic merit *and* as pieces of research, and occasionally, some papers may struggle to be either. Writerly skill may fall short of the ambition for a piece of work or we may lack established criteria by which to judge it, which was initially the case for Ron Pelias’s article, *The Critical Life* (2000; see also Sandra Ragan’s response, same volume).

Non-exhaustive examples of vivid, personally vulnerable, research writings include: Marianne (Tracy) Paget, on dying of cancer, (1993); Sophie Tamas, on surviving domestic violence (2011, 2012, 2013); John Warren, on identity struggles and whiteness (2001); and Laurel Richardson (2019), re-writing her family story afresh in her 80s, based on information that came to light as the deathbed confidence of a sibling.

Turning to the artists, I have variously spent time reading, and seeking to learn from the following poets, among many others: Billy Collins, on his mother (2005); Marie Howe writing to her dead brother (1997); and John Guiney-Yallop, poet and researcher, on poems enlivening his education research (2008).

#### 0.4 Key principles for this work (= principles for not being sure)

This work aspires to contribute to a body of research literature linked to organisational change.

I do this by paying attention to the local reverberations of large-scale changes that are being forced upon the dominant capitalist economies of the “advanced” Western world, and that I understand as also driving strongly negative changes to the global biosphere, generally within ecosystems that take little to no benefit from these dominant Western capitalist economies.

I do this, using my own life as my primary “laboratory” – although clearly not a laboratory as formally defined – and through processes that allow me to “catch” slivers of my everyday data. These slivers I analyse (or, perhaps more precisely, contemplate) and convert (re-present) as small-scale art works, which I then re-experience as audience, and can also share with others.

This is tricky work because climate crisis poses existential-level threats to numerous aspects of life on Earth, and ultimately, of course, to the ongoing prospects for biological life on Earth.

At a less melodramatic level, the work is tricky in ways that all change-oriented work is tricky – because change is experienced as disruptive however much the proposed change/s may be welcomed as improvements, and because humans seem to be psychologically well-adapted to living within a conception about “the way things really are” and poorly-adapted to maintaining an accurate, dispassionate assessment of “how I used to think things really worked [before...]”.

I remember – very vividly – when this last idea came to life for me, which was reading the opening pages of a book called “Being Wrong”, by journalist Kathryn Schulz, (subsequently also condensed for presentation as a TedTalk), when I was in the throes of getting divorced:

There is an experience of *realizing* that we are wrong... In fact, there is a stunning diversity of such experiences... Recognizing our mistakes can be shocking, confusing, funny, embarrassing, traumatic, pleasurable, illuminating, and life-altering...

But there [isn't] any particular feeling associated with simply *being* wrong...

The whole reason it's possible to be wrong is that, while it is happening, you are oblivious to it. So, it does feel like something to be wrong. It feels like being right. This is the problem of error-blindness. Whatever falsehoods each of us currently believes are necessarily invisible to us (Schulz, 2010, p.18).

I appreciate that Schulz herself is not an academic and I accept that her book would not be the appropriate reference citation for information on, say, the science of error blindness. This is essentially the same kind of point Schulz makes herself, in the introduction to her notes section, on p. 345, where she acknowledges the usefulness of Wikipedia as a place to start from in doing research, whilst simultaneously confirming that it never stands as her final, definitive source.

Here, though, I continue to use Schulz as my interest is not just in her proposition but also in the memory of the “lightning bolt” sensation I felt when reading that part of her work, so strong that an imprint remains to this day. Ironically – and in line with the book’s objective – I had a revelation about how I had always tried to keep myself “safe” by “being right”.

In this moment, I saw how impossible it was to be sure on this. After the first shock, this realisation was freeing. I decided to try to embrace working from an assumption that I may be wrong *and not know it*. This decision to operate on an ongoing basis from the possibility that I may always be unwittingly *at least a little bit wrong* has become one of my key principles.

To honour this principle, I aim *wide* in terms of inputs and seek to be *slow* in drawing conclusions. Speaking in terms of the “shape” and “rhythm” of my work – words deliberately chosen for their echoes of embodiment and musicality /performance – I find in the early phase of an initiative (a work project, a research inquiry, moving to a new neighbourhood), it seems as though I’m interested in “everything”. I sample different methods; I read broadly; I take endless photographs but use very few of them; I start collages and abandon them, half-formed.

Then, as the project stabilises, this is where stable structures emerge and I move into slow and steady mode of delivery, a phase in which the scope of my interests narrow, but where I seem to have high stamina to complete a small set of tasks over and over again. Walk 10,000 steps; assign steps into “blocks” representing 2,500 steps walked and give each block a colour; take an attitude of meditation and write a short journal note capturing the essence of the experience; and repeat, and repeat, and repeat. Maybe for five months, maybe six, maybe seven.

Then – pause. Do something else for a bit; write an article for a newsletter; catch up on reading.

Finally, return to the piled-up accumulation of scrappy, apparently inconsequential, daily repetitions and tunnel a way into and through the piles of data, turning what I find into some sort of artful representation. In the early years of inquiry, I often created collage; more recently, the primary mode of expression has been poetry, perhaps with a collage-like arrangement of photographs, offered as an accompanying illustration, aiming to evoke the mood of the piece.

To generalise a little, the cycle of an inquiry often begins with a frenetic flurry of curiosity and the following of intuitions; settles into a steady rhythm of persistent repetitions; falls briefly into silence before an effort commences to spin data scraps into a worthwhile representation; and ends with the extending of an offer, a gesture that says, “See what I have made, what I have seen...” Much of the time, this end is not really an ending, but folds into another cycle.

The cycling into another cycle is to be expected because, returning to the opening principle, the likelihood is that even if I think I see the implications of my data clearly, I am probably *at least a little bit wrong*. This is not at all to say that the effort wasn’t worthwhile. Possibly it wasn’t, but most of the time, the effort to pay sustained attention – sometimes focused, sometimes diffuse – is rewarded with *some kind of insight*, or at least, with an aesthetically interesting artful representation (my art is likely to be in the form of a collage, a photograph, a poem or essay, or collection of writing; others might create music, sculpture, a play, a movie).

### 0.5 Key features in the structure of this paper

So far in this introduction, I have outlined an overall purpose that I aspire to in this work, comprising an *inward-looking element*, to develop artful processes that assist with effective self-reflection, in order to better understand the assumptions coded into my culture, and become empowered to take steps towards the more just alternative society I can imagine; and an *outward-looking element*, to communicate about my work in ways that make it accessible for others asking similar questions and with similar longings for a utopian alternative future.

Additionally, I have located my work as an example of arts-based research – poetic inquiry in particular – and operating within an overall action research framing.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows – chapters one to four explore the premise and rationale for this work; chapters five to eight look at the detail and implications of my process; and chapters nine and ten summarise its impact and contribution, and possible next steps.

**Chapter one** – covers what I believe about how we can come to know, at least, what is relevant in terms of the activities described through the course of this paper and the claims I make about how these contribute to the process of creating actionable knowledge. The ability to make a stable assessment as to the underlying validity of the work is, I believe, largely dependent on being able to clearly understand the basis of these claims to knowledge.

This chapter attempts to be explicit about the quality criteria which I rely on in claiming this work as good action research; the chapters that follow attempt to show how the criteria apply.

**Chapter two** – describes the overarching “change challenge” which has driven my inquiry, setting out the climate crisis with reference to the recent scientific evidence and commenting on the developing (risk management) response in my own sector, financial services.

**Chapter three** – turns to the modes of inquiry I draw on in seeking to process and respond to the threat of climate breakdown outlined in chapter two. I argue that we need to draw on more than just our rational-logical ways of generating knowledge, to address more than the technological aspects of climate change, which I contend is not sufficient (although important) because I understand climate crisis to be a moral problem. I have already said that I am a poet, not a scientist and this work is not rooted in the “hard sciences” but in the personal, messy, subjective psychological territory of human response to crisis, and to change more generally.

**Chapter four** – speaks to my methodological approach and choice of method(s) and (ahem) *walks through* a summary of my process – from stepping into a world of potential data to the data<sup>3</sup> that is captured through *poetic charting*, and the ironies that arise in the interplay of i) embodied action; ii) the verbalising activity of note-writing; iii) the appropriation or re-purposing of software designed to process quantitative information; and iv) the re-presentation of this learning, this *new knowing*, in artful forms (poems and images).

**Chapter five** – looks at my *poetic charting* process in more depth, including providing visuals for the chart templates, and examples of the templates-in-use while **chapter six** covers a few of the key questions that have emerged for me resulting from the process of inquiry.

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Checkland and Sue Holwell (1998) differentiate between *data* and *capta*, using *data* to mean all the possible observable facts whereas *capta* refers to facts that have been plucked from the background by humans, for use within a formal information systems or for informal communications [these are my own summaries of the concepts, not direct quotes]. While I appreciate that the term *capta* usefully calls attention to the constructed nature of those “facts” that have been selected for use by humans, and the way it resists the disappearing of human involvement in the apparently neutral term *data*, I generally choose not to use it in this paper. Firstly, although technical language inevitably creeps in - and I have tried to ensure that where I use precise academic terminology, I also define it – my preference, and my commitment, has been to write as much of the paper as possible in “everyday” language. Secondly, although of course the observations that filter through into my charts and then into my poetry are selections, I value the ability of the term *data* to gesture to the totality of everything that *is*, beyond my conscious selection. In the end, because everything that could be perceived must BE perceived to be included, I take the position that having acknowledged that supposed “neutrality” of data is a fiction, the use of the term is nonetheless a false-but-handly heuristic (i.e., mental shortcut, or rule-of-thumb).

For example, although I had an animal rights “phase” as a child, becoming a Christian as a teenager largely erased that perspective, I would now say, incorrectly. It was a shock to be brought back, through inquiry, to the question of fair treatment for other animals in the assertion by Richard and Val Routley<sup>4</sup> (1979, and as below) that our present peril is rooted in human chauvinism – a view I now share.

If our species does not survive the ecological crisis, it will probably be due to our failure to imagine and work out new ways to live with the earth, to rework ourselves and our high energy, high-consumption, and hyper-instrumental societies adaptively. We struggle to adjust because we are still largely trapped inside the enlightenment tale of progress as human control over a passive and “dead” nature that justifies both colonial conquests and commodity economies (Plumwood, 2007, n.p.n.).

**Chapter seven** – starts the process of reflecting on my learning moments in this inquiry, alone and in a variety of (informal) engagements with others and giving my understanding of *how learning occurred*.

I attempt to make explicit what I have learned in these informal spaces with others and the practical means by which I undertook such co-inquiry. Since I inquire with poetry and images, I will consider performance and the role of audience, including seeking to address those elements of arts-based research theory that help to illuminate possible ways to work collectively with our human experiences as *embodied* beings and which give context to questions of performance /performativity, musicality, and rhythm.

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<sup>4</sup>After the Routleys divorced, they continued, separately, to write about and campaign for the rights of the natural world, and each took a new surname reflecting their environmental commitments, becoming Richard Sylvan and Val Plumwood, respectively.



**Chapter eight** – complements this by looking at two examples of *poetic charting*. The first of these (2018-19) was framed as a “generational time-walk”, thinking about inter-generational responsibility and also about my own relationship with family. The second (in 2020) proved in the end to be mostly about how life experiences and assumptions shifted due to COVID-19.

Finally, in **chapter nine** I consider the claims that can be made for this work, in terms of my own overall purpose and a proposed contribution to wider communities of inquirers, while **chapter ten** gives some closing thoughts about action implications and commitments of my work, given the emerging clarity of the deep injustices that underlie the climate crisis.

### **“Unpacking the artful representations”**

One common element in every chapter, including this one (see 0.6 following), is the inclusion of a short section that provides some commentary on the quotes, poems, and images in that part of the paper. These comments are not exhaustive, that is, they do not say everything I feel I *could* say about each individual piece, what I think the piece means, why it has been included, or why I have selected this combination of pieces to appear together, in that order. This would be, frankly, an impossible task, and I think would offer diminishing returns.

Essentially, these remarks attempt to balance between the more social scientific or action researcherly desire to be explicit and detailed about claims to knowledge, to what is said to be known and the basis for this knowing versus the more artistic or arts-based researcherly impulse to leave room for mystery, for members of an audience to have their own experiences and draw their own conclusions. The latter reticence leaves plenty of space for an empathic, artful encounter, but also risks failing to convince the audience that the author /researcher has clear and definite intent for their work, since this intent is not articulated as such on the [page](#).

Accordingly, in each of these sections, I have picked one or two themes to highlight and have tried to pay attention to varying my focus across the span of the paper so that taken together, these sections form a reasonably comprehensive account of my own relationship to my art, and what role I understand these pieces have played in creating actionable knowledge.

My main intention is to try to show how the art I present in this paper supports my overall purpose and my writing in each section is shaped by reference to the seven questions in 0.6, although in the interests of space, I do not explicitly repeat them each time and instead invite the reader to refer as needed to the list on page 36.

## 0.6 Unpacking the artful representations that open this paper

Elements of my work have been described as “ironic”; I agree and see irony at several levels.

I live and work as part of a society whose technological comforts and accomplishments are unparalleled, but which creates and maintains these modern miracles at the cost of profound damage to the global ecologies on which we depend for life. The same human capacity for complex problem-solving that ushered us into the age of agriculture, into the building of cities, into periods of invention and industry, although not as a neat progression (as Chris Gosden clarifies in his introduction to human prehistory, 2018) – may not save us from suffering irreversible destabilising of the biosphere, from a possible extinction event of our own making.

Furthermore, my mode of inquiry has been embodied, playful, artful, but the presentation of it to the academy takes the traditional form of a series of rational arguments, extended in writing, and defended through a process of debate. The forms are in tension with each other; these are not modes of knowing that integrate readily. The very attempt is ironic – an explicit and precise exposition is necessary and important in one epistemological context and resisted in the other.

Finally, as was remarked, key elements of my process and structure are ironic. I build an artful practice around data held and manipulated in an Excel spreadsheet, a programme more typically associated with the number-crunching, graphs, and charts of a *quantitative* study. My own work is *not* a quantitative study, although within each walking inquiry, I have accumulated a *large quantity of data*. Some of these data are numeric, but even these have not been subject to more a basic statistical analysis, such as in the early part of the inquiry, when I calculated average stride length and how much distance I covered, therefore, on average, per 10,000 step target. (See Appendix One for a selection of graphs created alongside those calculations.)

I found it soothing to keep track of this mundane daily information; it reassured me that I was *doing something* and provided motivation to keep on keeping on when enthusiasm waned.

However, the counting of steps was not, itself, the inquiry and ultimately it did not much matter exactly how far I walked. What mattered was that I persistently paid attention to cultivating a habit of daily walking, and that I used this to anchor an ongoing reflective practice.

From the observations and reflections during and after those walks, I learned about my world.

Initially, I came to know my neighbourhood as a series of quantities – the number of steps to the station, to the office, to the supermarket. Then, I found – the connections and cut-throughs, the posh parts fallen on hard times, the rough bits getting a new lease of life; the places I enjoyed spending time; the places that scared me and that I avoided for who I might encounter. Finally, over months of walking, as these aspects of my locality became sufficiently familiar that they no longer held my attention, my focus turned with increasing regularity towards my inner state – the stresses I carried with me into the walk; the petty tensions playing out at work; the need to broker competing priorities between certain friends or certain family members.

Interwoven with this, I wrote poetry from my journal data; I made collages; I took photographs.

I have included examples of this in the body of this paper, as witness to those activities, and to convey something of the tone and style of my art-experiments as I progressed this inquiry.

Where I have included artful representations, I comment briefly on how these support my overall purpose in and for this work, by reference to at least some of the following questions –

1. When, how and why did I create this piece?
2. What did I learn or what experience does it represent?
3. What qualities are conveyed or attempted or engaged with?
4. Who are the primary imagined – or actual – audiences?
5. How successful is this as a piece of art?
6. How successful is this as a representation of my research?
7. How does this piece support the overall purpose of my work?

To model this approach in respect of my introductory pages, I will now comment here on the range of representations used so far, and on their meaning for me as also an audience member for these pieces but acknowledging my uniquely privileged relationship to them as their creator.

### **Range of representations**

The first 15 pages of this paper contain four images (in my version, they appear in colour), and the introduction closes with a piece of poetry, entitled “You can’t say that”. The title is a pun, pivoting around the various things we should or should not say to each other about our identity or belonging, but also, in the middle of the poem, turning on a Welsh word I literally don’t know how to say – Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> If you would like to try to learn how to say this, there is a handy song on the internet that attempts to teach the pronunciation – see Woods, 1980. I found it useful, though I still get stuck in the middle.

Together, the images offer a reasonable “gallery-in-miniature” covering the range of forms I have explored over the course of this inquiry – there are two photo-collages, one scribbled doodle, and a screenshot showing one of the many Excel-based “chart” visuals I created in service of spending time to analyse and get beneath the surface of my walking journal data. I consider this selection as a very good representation of my research, and I am not discouraged from that view by the awareness that all of them, overtly or more subtly, fail as pieces of art. The doodle is childish, I know (but I also enjoy the energy that I see in the image); Excel is designed to handle management information, not as a graphic design tool; and the tone and/or arrangement of the photographs depend heavily on formatting that was provided (and arguably suggested for me) by the host software.

Personally, I find both photo-collages aesthetically pleasing, if in different tonal registers. The Instagram assemblage in fig. 04 feels a bit “Disney” /primary colours while the images collected in fig. 02 are sombre, and as such, apparently more in keeping with the working through of grief referenced in my title. I would argue that the Instagram piece, which draws on photographs from the height of our first COVID-19 lockdown, is also an authentic representation of a way of working with grief, i.e., by denying it and as displacement activity.

The main form missing from this selection is the physical, paper-based, cut-torn-and-pasted version of collage-making which I used regularly in the early stages of this work; for examples of this type of art-making, see figs. 07, 24, and 57. By contrast, the poem that closes the introduction *is* representative of my earlier work, being free format, where most of the poems written to accompany these cycles of walking inquiry use a formal structure (e.g., pantoum, haiku). In fact, the poem is one of my more recent pieces and has been included for the subject-matter. At one stage, I thought I wanted to explore my Welsh heritage (by locating myself in Wales for my first cycle of inquiry) but in fact, the more closely I looked at what I know of my Welsh roots, the more I understood my sense of “outsider” status.

The most dominant figure on my mother's side, Great Gran Jo, was, by background, not Welsh at all but Irish; and none of my blood relations, male or female, originate from where my mother grew up, in Pembrokeshire. By the time I wrote this poem, I understood that one of the things I indeed cannot say, in that context, is that I am (really) "local".

### **A particular kind of audience (of one)**

With artful work, there seems to be a strange distancing effect, once something is finished; there is a way in which I find myself detached, experiencing the piece at one level as its "audience", even while I retain a specific privilege as its creator (in that I have access to whatever I can still remember of my original inspirations and intentions in creating the piece).

By reference to the cliff doodle, I am a unique audience of one for the image in fig. 01 in that:

i) I can recall the location on the Pembrokeshire Coast I was thinking of when I sketched it (and this may help to explain the affection I feel for the doodle, as overlay how it actually looks with my memory of how the place "really is"); ii) I also remember creating the doodle during a period of reflection following a coaching session with my coach, Clare, where we had explored an imagined version of the cliffside path scene, complete with beautiful view, steep cliffs and a stormy sea surging over sharp rocks below as a way to explore my feelings about changes "on my horizon"; and iii) I happen to know the fate<sup>6</sup> of the large canvas print on which I was standing to take the photograph looking down at my feet (and echoing the sketched-in pink feet in the doodle), which, for me, gives this image a sad, nostalgic undertone. None of this is "coded" into the artwork to be available for others; as the "originator", I must accept that other audiences will bring their own associations and make different connections.

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<sup>6</sup> I forgot to keep track of the canvas through the course of a conflict that played out around the edges of a workshop, and the piece suffered the usual fate of workshop props that are not guarded sufficiently carefully i.e., it was disposed of by the cleaners, when tidying up afterwards. To be fair to the cleaners, this is exactly in line with what they were paid to do. A sad fate... and a waste... but not uncommon.

## 0.7 [Poem] You can't say that<sup>7</sup>

**A** is for “anodyne” –  
Communication that has been  
Scrubbed up,  
Slicked back,  
Buttoned down,

Anxious not to displease,  
Hiding its unremarkable blandness  
Behind mild, inoffensive, slightly old-fashioned language.

**E** is for “English” –  
Not local, not from round here,  
As my Welsh Auntie explained to me  
When we visited Wales for the holidays.

**L** is for “Llanfair... Llanfair...  
Llanfair-something-something-something-something-llantysiliogogoch”  
An otherwise – anodyne – village on the pretty Welsh island of Anglesey  
Blandly unremarkable  
Except for the nineteenth century marketing gimmick  
That gave it the longest place name in an English-speaking country.

And also, for  
The “Landsker Line”  
And “Little England Beyond Wales”.

Although the Line is not a Line  
And Little England Beyond Wales is still Wales  
These explain why my Welsh mother grew up speaking English.

**S** is for “sea” and “shore”  
And “sand” and “stranger”.

**W** is for “water”,  
The “waves” that give the sea its sound  
As it sculpts and re-sculpts the sands of our now-local beach.  
You maybe thought I was going to say “Wales” – didn’t you?

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<sup>7</sup> For links to voice performances of poems featured in this paper, see p.322.





## Chapter One: On Knowing

One of the most common mis-readings of my work and of my research has been to say, "Oh, Abram is suggesting that writing is bad and that the alphabet is the cause of all our problems."

This is a terrible misreading, because I'm a writer and I love the written word... and I'm deeply given to the exquisite power of the written word to open wonders... I'm not at all suggesting that writing is bad, but, rather, that... the alphabet is a very potent form of magic, a very concentrated form of animism.

Abram, D. (Interviewee) & Vaughan-Lee, E. (Host). (2020). The ecology of perception: Interview with David Abram [Audio podcast] Emergence Magazine.

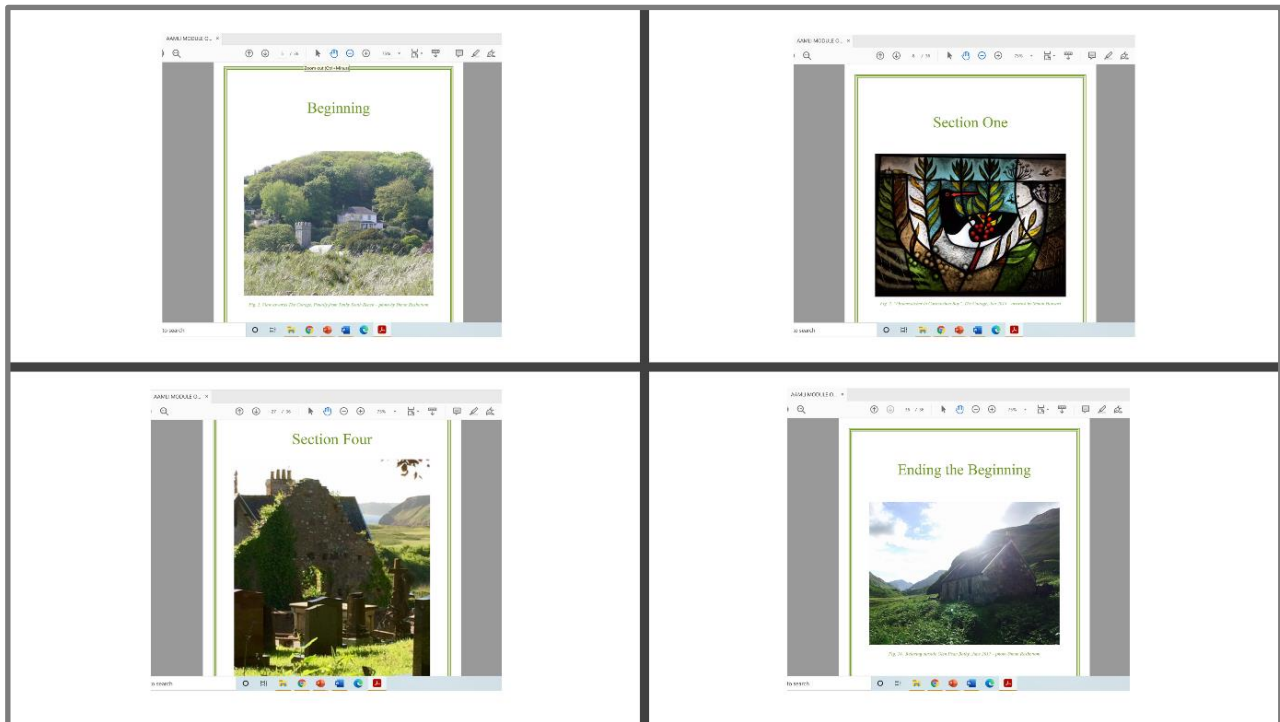


Fig. 05: "Escape to the country" (originals, 2017; arrangement, 2020).

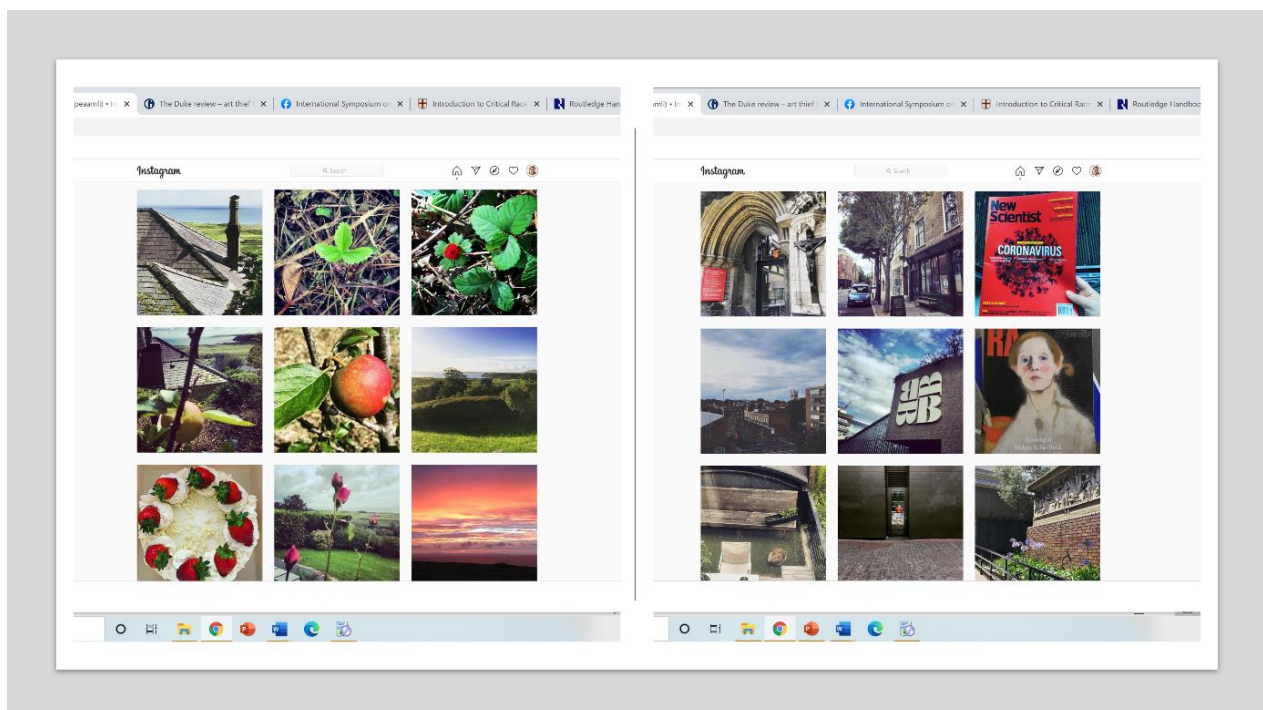


Fig. 06: Instagram as photo-collage – two examples (LHS, Aug 2020; RHS, July 2020).

## 1.0 [Poem] Travel Prep (“In Vino, Veritas”)

My boyfriend IM'd me from the pub just now when I was on my way home on the bus.

The – young, blonde, pretty – female civil engineer working in his team  
is leaving next month to travel round South America.

The men are at drinks after work

trying to decide on a good

leaving present.

He assumed I

would know

what to buy

but I think

he felt that

I was not

in the spirit

when I

suggested

anti-

kidnap

insurance

or a

rape

alarm.

## 1.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter One

### Seeing and showing as well as possible

Figs. 05 and 06 at the start of this chapter are from different points of the arc of this inquiry. The images in fig. 05 are lifted from a paper near the beginning of my inquiry process, while the Instagram photographs shown in fig. 06 were taken this summer during the pause between England's first and second lockdown to control the spread of COVID-19, and uploaded in sets of three, six or even nine images (because that's the length of one line of photographs, at least as displayed on my screen, such that adding just one at a time disrupts the previous layout).

What both sets of images, divided by time, have in common, is what I was trying to do when I was taking, arranging and presenting them – an effort to capture a mood, idea, sensation, to the best of my ability, and resolutely ignoring that I couldn't necessarily say in words what it was.

I can't speak for what happens "on the inside" of anyone else's creative process (*of course!*), so I try to find a sense of what it feels like for me (*and I do this by going still and closing my eyes and then doing something which seems like listening, except with an internal focus, in which I'm listening for a kind of strong pulse of excitement to show me where the energy is*).

The centre of the experience seems to turn around becoming aware of that pulse, an instinct that "there's something going on here", which I suppose is the "inspiration" side of the cycle, and then trying to express that instinct as accurately and as well as possible in artful form, which I suppose to be the "execution" side of making art and where craftsmanship is helpful.

It's quite important – for me at least – to differentiate here between an attempt to express whatever the thing is that is being sensed, observed or felt, as opposed to "explaining" it.

Certainly, it's possible that I might sense something, tune into it to the best of my ability, express it artfully, and immediately understand, as I look at the artful representation (in that moment of transition from my role as its originator to my new role as First Member of the Audience). But having words to wrap around the expression in order to explain it in rational terms is not essential to the artistic endeavour, certainly not immediately, and possibly something about the impulse to create this piece in this particular way will always remain mysterious. In terms of criteria for judging the quality of a piece of art, then, I suggest that the correct standards for judgement here are not about what does the piece "mean" but rather about the *feelings it provokes* – does this piece *feel satisfying* to make or to experience, and does it *feel authentic*? One of the most rewarding aspects of working in this way – intent on the expression, slow to commit on the meaning – is that this keeps open the possibility that there will be plenty of room to interpret differently, with the benefit of further analysis, or additional reading, or having lived a bit longer, inquired a bit more, spoken to more people...

(In principle, this is of course possible, irrespective of how strongly a conclusion or "lesson" was drawn out initially, but I suspect that the "stain" of that earlier attempt at sense-making lingers, "colouring" what can be seen later on – this is why, as researchers, and as action researchers in particular, we are wise to resist the seduction of knowing what our research answers are too early in the process, or heaven forbid, before we have formulated the question!)

In the case of fig. 05, I was clear at the time that I wanted the paper to have visual identity i.e., to be presented on the page, accompanied by these images, in this colour register – at the time, I couldn't say why but in looking again, two years later, it seems immediately evident that I was reacting to climate grief with a desire to find a way to run away from it. Hence, I now suggest, I was hungry to live in the idealised vision of a rural idyll I am trying to convey in this choice of images and in how I have stylised them for representation.

By the time of creating the photographs in fig. 06, I still catch myself in moments of similar longing – I personally find the tone of the images on the left hand side to be similar to that in fig. 05 – but now I am aware that this is escapism, and not my “real life” world, which appears – also, I would argue, in somewhat idealised fashion – in the images on the right hand side.

### **The mystery of a poetic moment**

Simplistically speaking, there are essentially two basic approaches to the writing of poetry contained within this paper.

One approach, by far the best represented, is the deliberate use of poetry in analysis and representation. This is the approach operating when I decide to try to write a sestina, or that I will convert six months of walk-charts into a series of 26 five-stanza pantoums, or that I will do another cycle of walking inquiry but this time, I’ll draw from my notes to write some haiku, to see whether (and, if so, how) this seems to lead to noticeably different outcomes than I get from writing the much longer, more densely-packed lines of the pantoum, at least as I adopted and adapted it. This kind of poetry may end up with something that feels inspired, but the starting point is more functional, in the spirit of, “I wonder what would happen if...?”

The other approach (the first approach, chronologically) is the poetry that comes into being when something about what’s happening suddenly strikes me as poetic in some way and I start what is effectively a process of transcribing from life, to shape a life experience into a poem. The poems at the start of chapter three and eight are examples of this approach; the “poem in a wine glass” in this chapter is another. Presumably it would suit an argument in favour of walking as “significant” as, in itself, a mode of inquiry if these moments *always* happened when out on a walk, but for the wine glass poem, for instance, I was on the bus...

The granular actuality of the poetic experience unfolding resists the simplifying narrative.

## 1.2 On knowing as situated and political

### **A personal shift from “knowledge as scientific /universal” to “knowledge as situated”**

These are the voices in my head:

First, the scientific /humanist worldview I grew up with. According to this worldview, human ingenuity has fixed and will fix (almost) all problems and remains our best hope of facing down problems in the future. This is a paradigm in which enlightenment-style education is the engine-room for progress, in which spirituality is mere superstition and in which emotions are suspect.

A second voice in my head is the project management /governance oversight culture at work. This view blossoms forth from the first, but the emphasis is less on future-facing ingenuity to drive change and “progress” as on measuring and controlling what is happening *now* (and as needed, re-storying and assigning blame for any negative outcomes of decisions from the past).

Both variations are highly preoccupied with numbers in the belief that numbers are “objective” and that the information we have worked out how to measure and to take account of tells us everything important. Both embrace the logic that the best kind of solutions are technological, and that such solutions are also scalable, replicable everywhere, and have consistent effects.

Through the course of this inquiry, however, I have learned to be suspicious of some of these fundamental assumptions, and in particular, to resist the idea that this scientific, generalised view of knowledge is the one that should be applied pre-eminently, to all contexts and issues. (I consider the scientific paradigm as useful for addressing problems in the natural sciences.)

From feminist thinking in particular, I have learned the importance of insisting that all knowledge is situated, and that the standpoint of the knower is significant, because the context we are in changes both our experience of life and our interpretation of its meaning.

Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter explain the nature of the challenge to the Western scientific generalising theory of knowledge, in the introduction to their anthology of feminist philosophy:

Feminist analyses of philosophy have insisted on the significance and particularity of the context of theory. This has led many feminist epistemologists to scepticism about the possibility of a general or universal account of the nature and limits of knowledge, an account that ignores the social context and status of knowers. Is it likely that that epistemological accounts of dominant knowledges, that is, knowledge produced and authorised by people in dominant political, social and economic positions, can apply to subaltern<sup>8</sup> knowledges as well? (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 1).

The feminist stance, that in order to understand a claim to knowledge, we *must* take appropriate notice of the social context and status of the knower/s is what makes a primarily first person research topic viable, where the term “first person” means a project that focuses on a research question by exploring the made-explicit perspective of the researching individual.

First person work makes a bold claim and a humble claim at the same time.

Bold, because this work insists that the lived experience of a situated individual can be a site for the creation of valid knowledge, with relevance that extends beyond the life circumstances of the researcher.

Humble, because this framing refuses the “trust me!” evasiveness of traditional modes of research, where individual interests (biases, inclinations, preferences and possible blind spots) are excised from view and must be guessed at or inferred indirectly from the research findings.

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<sup>8</sup> The term “subaltern” is derived from the work of Antonio Gramsci (see e.g., 2020), where he uses it to refer to groups in society who are treated as being “of inferior rank”, subordinate to the ruling elite.



The fact that I have chosen to inquire through a first person framing makes it even more important that I pay sustained attention to the implications of my own subjectivity. This also includes paying attention to my cultural and educational background (the cultural “voices in my head”) that may create pressure to hide or minimise, dismiss or deny what I could otherwise see and offer from a subjective, enmeshed, embodied perspective.

Taken together, this all means that the usefulness of what I think I know – now – should be viewed not only in terms of the epistemological propositions I advance (i.e., the facts and interpretations I offer as fruits of my doctoral inquiry, that I offer to others as a basis for action).

It would also be wise to take a view on my likely biases from my status and standing in society, my resources, my ambitions, my track record – what, in short, I am likely to be trying to gain.

My work draws on a period of six years of inquiry and my views now differ quite considerably from the worldview and operating logics I held at the outset (I would note, though, that a major reason for embarking upon my graduate studies was the misgivings I had about those logics).

At the start of that period, I didn’t accept that modern humanity was teetering into climate crisis but, writing now, I no longer clearly recall what it felt like to believe that and live accordingly.

It would be easy to deny I had ever thought that way, except that I have a trail of readings and papers that bear witness to where I started and help me to remember that I’ve changed my view.

Even after having accepted climate crisis as a reality, I initially treated the issue, in line with the prevailing mindset of my youth, as a technological problem to be solved by science.

I did not immediately see the linkages between environmental degradation and those power imbalances and multiple social injustices that have shaped how the crisis is unfolding. I learned over time to see this, and now that I interpret in these terms, I struggle to imagine not doing so.

### Steering a course through “knowledge as political”

It is toward the goal of overturning... “perspectival hierarchies” [in which the assumed “universal subject” is in fact an able-bodied, middle-aged, elite white male and in which all other perspectives are subjugated or disallowed as “abnormal”] that some feminist epistemologists have developed what they call *standpoint epistemologies*, which seek to epistemologically valorise some of the most discredited perspectives of knowledge. Sandra Harding [1991, 1993] is one of the best-known proponents of such a view. (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p.5).

*Standpoint epistemologies* go further than a bland observation that – whatever the conventions of epistemological philosophy – actual human experience originates from a local “life context”. The feminist point here is that since our political systems, including systems for the production and dissemination of knowledge, are constructed to favour the elite, then an effective critique of these systems cannot be made from within the elite, no matter how well intentioned. Instead, this approach proposes an inverse of the customary hierarchy of knowers, treating the most marginalised as being best placed to comment on the impacts of privilege and to offer remedies.

It is easy to assume that standpoint feminists are making a “no, listen to ME” argument, but this is not (necessarily) the case, given that many feminist scholars are members of elite groups. Without question, there *is* a version of white, female, middle-class, (middle-aged) interest that effectively wants to be levelled up with white, middle-class, (middle-aged) *men* i.e., to have the right to have the downside of their gendered identity expunged, so that they (we?) can be exactly as privileged and rapacious and negative in their habits of consumption as the stereotype of the elite white male. In 7.3, I consider an example of where I have struggled with such behaviour, and the tendency is called out strongly by Black feminists (as in the Combahee River Collective’s statement (1977), an extract of which is at the start of chapter 10).

Yet many white feminists at least in intention recognise themselves as relatively privileged, and thus as not the key beneficiaries of standpoint epistemological thinking. Mainstream feminism generally also i) recognises gender as one of several dimensions of identity that might attract discrimination; ii) recognises that not all members of any identity group are impacted equally by their status; and iii) recognises that individuals who have more than one such characteristic may well suffer a complex and intensified oppression, an effect now widely named as “intersectionality”, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991).

Cognitive authority is usually associated with a cluster of markings that involve not only gender, but also race, class, sexuality, culture, and age... Gender identity cannot be adequately understood – or even perceived – except as a component of complex interrelationships with other systems of identification and hierarchy... Thus, to refer to a liberatory as “feminist” cannot mean that it is only for or about “women”, but that it is informed by or consistent with feminism. It seeks, in... feminist parlance, to unmake the web of oppressions and remake the web of life (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 3-4).

What this has meant, for me, in inquiry, is that I have tried (not always successfully) see the nuances in my own situated identity as precisely as possible, including noticing and calling attention to moments of shift, or contradiction, and to evidence of layered or complex identity.

As I “walked my family history” in the first version of my *poetic charting* walking inquiry, I learned to notice that, yes, I’m white, and yes, I went to Oxford and work for a bank, but also that I was born into a lower middle class family, the first child of two early career academics, both of whom made the social and cultural transition to London from small provincial towns. I learned to notice then, that my lineage is not “posh” but “provincial”, but also that at the scale of our home islands, we are all, as many generations as I know, Celtic or Anglo-Saxon “locals”.

And yet, concurrent with this, I have also come to appreciate that from a Deep Time perspective, my human ancestry began in Africa, 5-7 million years ago, and that our life origin, shared with all Earth-life, was many millions of years before that, 3.5BYA, in water.

A highly strung child, I had grown up feeling responsible for everything, so I started inquiring with a strong, unexamined presumption that I was on Team Elite Oppression<sup>9</sup>. It is only as I built a deeper analysis of the social world/s I (have) inhabit(ed), that I have developed a more complex picture of contexts in which I indeed seemed to be (aligned with) “the oppressor” and situations where I was rather more outside, marginalised, (aligned towards) “the oppressed”.

### 1.3 Key quality criteria for this localised, particularised work

I turn now to the question of criteria, because knowing also involves knowing how something should be made sense of, how it should be judged, how set in context of other things we may also claim to have knowledge about.

I have used a set of quality criteria to guide my inquiry and to try to help me know when the outputs of the work are good. I have not used the traditional measures of scientific knowledge, established in the West from the Enlightenment onwards – reliability, validity, generalisability – because I am not trying to contribute to the total stock of human scientific knowledge.

Rather, because my inquiry is framed as action research, and because my work also draws on arts-based research – poetic inquiry in particular – I have attempted to work to criteria I believe are appropriate and relevant for judging both good quality action research and good quality art-in-service-of-research (the criteria for good quality art-for-the-sake-of-art are different).

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<sup>9</sup> This move towards nuance included problematising the binary opposition of oppressor /oppressed. It is, of course, not typically as simple as that – although sometimes, in extreme conditions, perhaps it is.

My criteria have been i) the extent to which the work can be linked to a *sustained effort*; ii) the extent to which it *feels truthful*, expressing something authentic; iii) the extent to which an artful expression is *aesthetically appealing*, however judged; and iv) whether the work promotes *social conscience* (or personal self-improvement).

The first two criteria are linked, I think, intuitively so. The more time and attention I pay to something, the more likely that I will understand and be able to capture and convey its essence; also, for me, the other, linked, feature between sustained effort and truthfulness is the increased possibility for *perceiving* [the subject] *at depth*.

The second two criteria are also linked, which may be less intuitive, given the limited value that can be placed on artful activity, certainly within Western hierarchies of thought.

Susan Finley, however, writing on arts-based research strongly asserts that inquiry rooted in artful activity has political effect and can sustain change.

At the heart of arts-based inquiry is a radical, politically grounded statement about social justice and control over the production and dissemination of knowledge...

Emancipation from colonising human research that objectifies its participants (casting them as subjects) is not possible unless research is democratised and brought under the control of people in their daily lives.

One objective the arts-based researcher can serve is to provide tools and opportunity for participants to perform inquiry, reflect on their performances, and preserve, create, and rewrite culture in dynamic, indigenous cultures. (Finley, 2008, p. 72, 73-74).

### **Quality criteria as focusing attention on the processes for “knowing together”**

The question of quality criteria is also useful because it draws attention to what I am coming to understand as fundamental to human knowing, i.e., the degree to which it arises collectively.

Western thinking about epistemology traditionally casts knowledge as something generated by individuals, where knowledge becomes shared through bargaining, negotiation, or competition by individual knowers, but feminist theory reverses the relationship, asserting that meaning is created through community interactions, and acquired by individual knowers subsequently.

As Lynn Hankinson Nelson writes,

Communities are the primary loci – the primary generators, repositories, holders and acquirers of knowledge... My claim is that the knowing we do as individuals is derivative, that your knowing or mine depends on *our* knowing... On the view I am advocating, communities that construct and acquire knowledge are not collections of independently knowing individuals; such communities are epistemologically prior to individuals who know (Nelson, 1993, p.124).

According to this view, traditional criteria are not dominant because many individual knowers independently assert their primacy, but because the establishment as a network does so.

Judging research according to criteria of reliability, validity, and generalisability feels “natural” because these criteria came to prominence through the same set of processes that established the systems and establishments of modern Western education. They are the working vocabulary of the specific community networks that created those systems and, as such, they continue to exert a powerful grip on the mechanisms of assessment and review in education in the West.

This point of view convinces me, and I suspect I would find it unremarkably self-evident, if not for the fact that I have slowly, painfully learned to notice how the Enlightenment scientific orthodoxies are framed, in many of the thought systems of the West, as if they are not points of view at all but as “the correct way in which the world is seen”, their subjectivity excised.

I find this as also having explanatory power for the importance attributed by action research to participation, interaction, exchange and collaborative activity. It’s worth noting that Nelson does not characterise the processes of knowledge formation within epistemic communities as mechanistic; rather, it is that our communities offer an immersive context for our knowing.

Together, by means of implicit and explicit processes, we set the tone, terrain and boundaries around what we consider possible to know, and what “good quality knowing” looks like.

*For arts-based research* (irrespective of whether or not this is arts-based research within an action research frame-of-reference), the dimension of interaction-in-community is particularly significant, since not only the research but also the art has an implicit audience (and these audiences may not be the same group/s though I would expect at least some overlap).

Artful representations seek to express... something. Possibly this something exists only very fleetingly (as in music, dance, the act of performing a poem or a piece of theatre), possibly the something leaves vestiges of a more permanent record (photograph, mural, film, sculpture).

The artful gesture can be witnessed; an artful representation is a “bringing into the light” of the thing the artist is seeking to express, not necessarily in a form that is readily accessible to others.

For research that aims to explore, to analyse, to discover, to come to know, and that uses art in some part of the process, or in many or all parts of it, the artful artefacts created offer a means through which insights can be communicated and tested, as one possible form of validation.

*In action research*, “knowing together” is emphasised, certainly more so than in the traditional academic focus on individual contribution to knowledge.

This shows up in action research design, where the principle, for example, in researching into an organisational or community context, is that every stage of the work is understood as being a collaboration *with* participating representatives of the community or organisation, and not as an experiment performed *on* them. In action research terminology, this is known as “second person” work.<sup>10</sup>

The value on “knowing together” is also reflected in desire for informal interactions, named by Judi Marshall as “first person inquiry in collaborative relationships with others” (Marshall, 2016, p.9), known as “first-person-with-others”, for short. Here the other person or people are not engaged within the formal structures of a piece of research and, ethically, the lines must be drawn to keep the details of any interaction appropriately “off screen” but they offer vital perspective, support, encouragement and, as needed, balancing opinion, or indeed challenge.

My own work has benefitted tremendously from:

i) informal exchange with various peers from my doctoral community, in particular after formal supervision group structures had concluded; ii) from occasional catch-ups with alumni from AMSR; iii) from the input of my somatic coach, Clare; iv) from chats with my god-mother and god-daughters; v) from discussions with work colleagues in the book club and sustainability engagement group; and, vi) perhaps most important of all, from the care, engagement and patience of a particular work friend and informal co-inquirer, with whom I have spoken at depth many times over the past seven years.

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<sup>10</sup> Whereas “third person” work is larger-scale, and could be, for instance, as interactions with a “public” that is not known to the researcher personally, possibly where the feedback discussions are dispersed through a broad audience or set of audiences, rather than looping tightly back round to the researcher.



## 1.4 Quality versus necessity: On structure and anxiety management

Content warning – heights and falling.

I have a fear of heights. No – that’s not it... In the right conditions, I love being up at height, feeling the awe that rises in looking at the sweeping majesty of a wide horizon on a clear day.

I have a fear of edges, edges at height, that is. Fear of exposure to those edges. Fear of falling.

I am clutched by sweaty, cramping paralysis at the thought of the ground vanishing, of the deep *nothing* beyond, filled by nothing except for some inexplicable dreadful mesmerising appeal that draws the fearful towards the void. And then – nothing again except the pounding of blood in ears, breeze buffeting the face. Until contact with the unyielding surface far beneath.

Just thinking about it makes me want to retch. I sit, safe in my office, fighting my gag reflex.

After I passed through transfer (from masters to doctoral level work), I felt this sensation.

It was as though I had been walking a route between mountains, where the valley itself was rising steeply, but without the sense of gaining height, tucked as it was behind close rock walls.

In this moment – passing into the part of the programme where I would set my own research, determine my criteria, design and undertake inquiry, analyse, interpret, propose conclusions – it was as though, without warning, I turned (left, in my inner home movie of the experience) round an outcrop and – suddenly, breath-stealingly un-foreshadowed – I’m high on a cliff path with an entire valley unfurled before me, an indistinct patchwork right to the distant horizon.

The scene is not the same as, but not entirely unlike, the cliff-edge doodle shown in fig. 01.

I freeze, my throat clutches closed. I must walk forward (and I want to) but I can’t. After a few moments – who knows how long – of blind, white panic, the voice of Clare sounds in memory, calmly encouraging me to breathe, a little deeper, to feel my feet in contact with the floor, to feel my knees, hips, lower back, shoulders, chest, jaw, and to allow each of these to relax.

Vision returns. I can imagine taking a wobbly step forward, wondering if my watery, uncertain knees will hold me up; they do. I unfreeze myself and begin to move, starting as I do to reconnect with a chirruping rise of excitement about what I don't yet know, but will encounter.

I am reminded of a much-loved part of a much-loved book from childhood, C.S. Lewis's novel, *The Horse and His Boy*, (1954 /2009) from the *Chronicles of Narnia*, and specifically chapter 11, the unwelcome fellow traveller (p.166 – p. 187). In this part of the story, Shasta, the main character, finds himself walking a dark path through mountains at night, keeping as far as he can from a mountain lion which seems to be stalking him. The next morning Shasta discovers, first, that overnight he has crossed through a mountain pass into a new valley, and second, that the creature he had feared had been walking between him and the cliff edge the whole time.

Sadly, there is no companion lion on my own mountain path, none that I can see, anyway, but I do, now, have a plan, and that plan is to keep moving along the path, keeping a respectful distance from the edge to the best of my ability. Moving unsticks me from my edge-terror and helps me feel that I am moving back towards safety; the calm motion soothes and reassures.

This, in slightly fanciful language (but recalling a clear imagined moment), introduces the functional role played by the various, iterating structures I invented and used to give form to initially formless work. Structure invites process and provides a way to keep track of processes; structure injects a true-and-not-true sense of progress by allowing me to chart my course from beginning, to middle, to end. Structure was important-and-not-important at the same time.

The use of structure and repetition was useful – and arguably, needed – to get me several freeze-points in the work. I don't know if action research requires structure, but *I do*. The structures in my work operate in the spirit of, "I'm not *too* sure how I'm going to find my way to the as-yet-inexpressible insight I am searching towards, so let me try [this], because I can always change it, and oh! It's rather helpful. Great, carry on then, this could be interesting."

I can't say, of course, what impressions the cliff path scenario described above stirs for you, but it certainly conveys a charge of anxiety to me (sparking a surge of anxiety, as I read back). It now strikes me as quite amusing that for most of this inquiry I have been simultaneously quite well aware of discrete moments of high anxiety but oblivious to the overall "narrative arc" of anxiety which the individual moments both contributed to and reflected.

It was only after quite extensive inquiry and reflection that I noticed that the climate crisis "suits me well". Being a high anxiety person without really acknowledging that I am means that for years I have wondered what disasters are lurking around the next corner whilst also telling myself that I'm ridiculous for entertaining that kind of fear. The threat of emerging climate breakdown gives me a real and credible terror to worry about and perversely, this makes me feel somewhat better i.e., because I can repudiate the inner voices accusing me of being anxious for no good reason. Please don't misunderstand me – I'm not *in any sense glad* that we are facing the deep losses of climate crisis, the real possibility of terrible suffering – I am however relieved by the thought that being highly anxious is a sane and justifiable reaction.

I should state that working within a structure doesn't *always* generate material I find relevant and I seem to find this a low-stakes outcome; it doesn't seem hard to abandon and re-set.

I should also say that structures are strategies for anxiety management, and for creating orderly processes that are easy to navigate and work with, but they are not guarantees of outcomes. They are not even a guaranteed coping mechanism or a guaranteed way through to the end of a cycle of inquiry (assuming that cycles of inquiry really do end, and that as inquirers, we know what the end looks like, so that we can tell when we have arrived there and draw to a close).

This matters because the scientific assumptions underlying our dominant mechanisms for elite knowledge generation in the West tend to like formulaic approaches (i.e., tend to welcome strong, clear structures) and do tend to want to convert processes into immutable laws.

I suggest that it's hard to resist the pressure to start to believe – and act – as though there is “one best way” to do *whatever kind of research we happen to be engaged upon* and to want to insist that all others who come after us, for their own safety and the safety of their findings, must follow our processes, approaches, methods and methodologies precisely.

I suggest that it's hard to resist falling into this kind of pattern because (returning to Lynn Hankinson Nelson's analysis, noted above) *the overarching epistemic community to which we belong as researchers “knows” this is how to do research*. Those of us who want to commit to treating knowledge as *genuinely co-created*, must constantly struggle to stop understanding knowledge creation as something reserved for our social, political and intellectual elites – elite groups who then use access to knowledge as grounds for imposing social and political structures on the rest, who don't “know” and therefore need to be led by the groups who do.

Learning from Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux, I need to be suspicious of, and resist, any impulse to turn my guiding, reassuring structures into formulas or laws. I can treat my processes as rules, if I understand that these rules are on constant notice that they might be renegotiated.

Once structures become laws, they cease to be able to support or sustain democratising action.

Committed to the specific, the play of context, and the possibility inherent in what he called the unfinished nature of human beings, Freire *offered no recipes* for those in need of instant theoretical and political fixes. For him, pedagogy was strategic and performative: considered as part of a broader political practice for democratic change, critical pedagogy was never viewed as an a priori discourse to be reasserted or a methodology to be implemented, or for that matter a slavish attachment to knowledge that can only be quantified (Giroux, 2010, p.719, emphasis added).



## Chapter Two: Positioning My Change Motivation/s

Remember me, when I am gone away,  
Gone far away into the silent land.

From the poem "Remember", by Christina Rossetti  
Published (1862) in "Goblin market and other poems".



Fig. 07: First collage, AMSR6 workshop one, Ashridge (Oct 2014).

## 2.0 [Poem] Town and country: A sestina

*[Poetry as summation of a research experience and evocative of identity tensions, Jan 2020.]*

Two days of watching the trees thrash like grass and I rush to town, fleeing the **storm**,  
No longer really sure - do I belong here or there? And where am I the **stranger**?  
In the country, steps unravel as one single thread, a long front-door-to-front-door **walk**,  
The only reason to press on, the chance to be near and gaze towards the wild **water**  
Of the storm-churned sea, whilst the wind makes patterns in the air with the **birds**.  
Today, I sit, squashed, in a procession of traffic, glad to have elbowed into the **bus**.

Cyclists eddy past us unpredictably, as we breathe as one, entangled, on the **bus**.  
The metal frame of the bus cages us, dislocates us from the disruption of the **storm**.  
In the throb and moan of traffic, I no longer hear the raucous shrieks of the **birds**.  
Young people wait in the kerb for an Uber, schooled to take rides from a **stranger**.  
Whilst I, scornful of my brittle-armed umbrella, stand in the rain, indifferent to the **water** -  
But not so scornful as to risk the progressive damping of an hour's **walk**.

Friday, I head slowly home from the suburbs, evading the dark park – a two hours' **walk**.  
I try to learn the rhythms of traffic as I go, cutting across a side road in front of the **bus**.  
I had joked I would not walk home in the rain, but it stayed dry, sparing me the **water**,  
Though kerbs and pavements pooled with puddles from the earlier **storm**.  
A girl descending from a bus, crossed hurriedly, eyeing me as a suspect **stranger**.  
The traffic so dense, I only once caught song fragments to tell me there were **birds**.

Oystercatchers, sanderlings, robins, finches, crows, gulls, terns – local **birds**  
Dart about in bushes, swirl upwards on the wind, hide amongst rocks, as we **walk**.  
Their presence reassures even when the storm-sculpted beach is a **stranger**.  
Once an hour we press into the fig tree's shade, escaping the rattling rush of the **bus**.  
The sky is heavy with dark purple clouds; we walk alone on the beach in the **storm**,  
Unbalanced by the fierce sandy air, deafened by the pounding roar of the **water**.



I'm surprised by the dismay Town People feel, when the grey sky sags with **water**.  
Umbrellas flap and fuss, passing on pavements, like eddying storm-clipped **birds**.  
Bookshops, offices, cafes, taxis, bars – all offer distancing shelter from the **storm**.  
Even chasing the daily ritual of steps, I hesitate and duck the chance to **walk**,  
Greedy tearing through my newly acquired book, as I bump slowly home on the **bus**.  
No-one wants to share a seat with – brash teen, sheltering tramp, crazy-eyed **stranger**.

Even in my long tweed coat, walking through these private roads, I am the **stranger**.  
Sleek passing motors threaten every step to dowse me in muddy, oil-slick **water**.  
I pass small, resentful huddles of Friday evening commuters, tutting their tardy **bus**.  
The broken black mass of an upturned umbrella sprawls in the gutter like a dead **bird**.  
A stranger's face resolves into a colleague's smile, unplanned, halfway through my **walk**.  
I walk on, into the still, cold night – no obvious remnant of the mid-morning **storm**.

Spurning the short-cutting **bus**, I walk the black road past the common, listening for **birds**.  
In town, the threat of drenching rain**water** is enough to turn me aside from my daily **walk**,  
Where on the beach, I am the solitary **stranger** dancing in the wild arms of the **storm**.

## 2.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Two

### **Artful beginnings and anxiety**

This chapter opens with a quote from a poem by Christina Rossetti, which also appears hand-drawn onto a piece of rough collage work from the beginning of this inquiry, in 2014.

I include it partly sentimental reasons, but also as a witness into this paper and to myself that from the start, my wide-lens perspective on climate crisis “out-there” has been entangled with “in-here” fear of facing up to human mortality and to my own, eventual, approaching, death. And even though I realised that big-picture scenario early on in this inquiry, I have been slow to appreciate how much of my small-scale, everyday process is also laden with the need to create regular, achievable routines to manage pervasive, submerged, unrecognised anxiety.

I have been explicit throughout that my basic survival strategy for progressing through the doctoral process has been to commit to taking some sort of tangible action Every Single Day. I mean, that’s not a *bad* strategy – it is “common sense” sensible, just like quitting smoking, taking regular exercise or making sure that monthly income exceeds expenditure (caveat – where this is a reasonable expectation, rather than a trope used to punish the weak and vulnerable in society whilst also excluding them from access to reasonable, secure income).

Nonetheless, it is only recently that I have started, in reflecting, to realise that I needed to create structures of daily activity not because “the work” necessarily inherently needed my attention and action on a daily basis, but because it was soothing, and stabilising *for me* to work like that. Taking a somatic perspective (and with thanks to my somatic coach, Clare), my present working assumption is that in fact, it was my rational /logical “voice-over” brain that didn’t want to acknowledge that I am a high-functioning, high-anxiety individual. (In context of the macho world of financial services, that sounds like an admission of weakness, doesn’t it?)

However, I am guessing that “in my gut” or somewhere in my nervous system, my body already “knew” how I operated and what would suit me – which is how I came to be attracted to creating structures that allowed me to gather high volumes of low-stakes data (this was a way of reassuring myself that it didn’t really matter if nothing important happened once, or twice, or several times a week, because the balance of data could still contain interesting observations).

### **Technical accomplishments**

The accompanying poem, by contrast, is my one and only attempt at writing in the poetic format known as a sestina, essentially as a writing exercise to close out my second round of walking.

A sestina consists of six stanzas with six lines where the final word in each line is repeated in every stanza, but in a different order (this repeating pattern is highlighted in red font in the example poem; there is then a final, 3 line stanza with two of the repeating words in each line.

I was pleased with this poem, which I worked more carefully at crafting than I have tended to do with the weekly pantoums; consequently, thus far, I have been too nervous to try to write another one (“that tricky second sestina...”) – and it was partly to avoid this performance paralysis that I deliberately made writing a weekly pantoum into a bit of a production line.

For the pantoum series, I established a fixed 5 stanza format to use each time (thus reducing one variable, since the source structure can be of varying lengths, providing the plaited repeating form is followed).

I took an explicit stance of not minding too much whether or not the resulting pantoums “worked well” as poetry, providing they worked as authentic representations of the experienced I had had over the course of a week’s walking (i.e., treating them as writing exercises not as attempts at the finished article).

I used the sestina to explore my dawning awareness that although I thought I wanted to prefer the Welsh countryside setting compared to my life in town (easily stereotyped as “stressful” and “disconnected”), actually I didn’t. The effect of walking every day in my local London neighbourhood with an attitude of diffuse curiosity was that I was feeling increasingly settled, and increasingly happy, in town. Not only was this an outcome I had not been looking to find, but as I started to notice this was how I was feeling, I began to be able to admit for the first time how much I had started from a simplistic “town = bad /countryside = good” position.

Turning to the question of the extent to which these pieces are “good art” or “good research”, I am drawn to noticing the contrast in approach between the sestina and the collage. The former is probably the most technically accomplished piece included in this paper and the latter is probably the least accomplished; what I think is important here, though, is that technical accomplishment, while nice to have, is far from being a critical quality criteria.

Social scientist, novelist and editor Patricia Leavy argues that while attention does need to be paid in arts-based research to craft and to respecting standards of execution in each underlying discipline, it is more important to ask, “What is this piece of art good for?” (2020, p.32).

Here, I suggest that the piece of collage was “good for” making it “ok” to create something in a spirit of intuition and taking a playful attitude to the limits that have been imposed (in this case, limits on time and limits on source materials to work from). The most strikingly “artful” item on the collage, though, is not the collage at all, but the line of poetry by Christina Rossetti.

I don’t think it’s irrelevant that the piece returned to me as a memory of a performance, a time when I had spoken the words aloud and experienced their power to evoke and channel emotion.

I don’t yet feel that I have a satisfactory explanation for *why* a poem differs in impact in performance, compared to its effect when encountered on the page; I hold this as a live inquiry.

## 2.2 We are here. And all is not well.

### 2.2.1 Climate crisis as “change challenge”

We are here. And all is not well.

The title of this thesis is, “Working and Living in a Time of Climate Breakdown”.

When I began my studies, in autumn 2014, I thought that I would need to open by carving out space to explain the climate change position, to clarify why this niche topic had gripped me. However, awareness of climate change has been climbing the public agenda throughout this period and is now a main-streamed, headline-generating focus issue in most major economies. This shift can be linked to: i) an increasing availability of detailed scientific analysis which overwhelmingly points to the conclusion that emissions from human industrial activity is destabilising our planet’s climate and poses a risk to all biological life; ii) a spike in extreme weather events that have painted into the public imagination what a destabilised global climate means for everyday life experience (such as, fires in California and Australia; the Arctic tundra melting and temperatures spiking above 20 Degrees Celsius in the Antarctic summer for the first time on record; increasingly violent storms and increasingly frequent and severe flooding); and iii) public mass protest movements such as the non-violent civil disobedience of the School Strikes and by Extinction Rebellion; and the impact of charismatic and compelling figureheads, such as Sir David Attenborough, and Swedish teen activist, Greta Thunberg.

In the next part of this introduction, I will provide a brief selection of recent statements from major publications on the topic of climate crisis. I will not be devoting any time or wordcount to critiquing these sources or to discussing the extent to which their basic claims about climate change are credible, any more than I would devote time to the respective merits of arguments for evolution versus creationism; in mainstream scientific thought, these cases are made.

By contrast, there is ample room for debate about how we can be such tremendously intelligent creatures and yet capable of imperilling the only viable planetary home we have – and I seek to consider and contribute to this. That debate encompasses questions of power, of the distribution of resources; arguably, these are topics that cannot be resolved without considering gender and gender inequalities, or race and inter-racial injustices.

There are also – urgent – questions, if we do not wish simply to drive forward into our own oblivion, about how to respond to climate crisis, how we might seek to change our ways of living and working, now that we know we do so in the shadow of climate change.

### 2.2.2 Climate crisis as “my” change challenge

I am here. And all is not well.

The backdrop and motivating “meta question” for this thesis is the threat of climate breakdown – but this is not a subject I can examine dispassionately, as if it was some scenario taking place in a work of fiction, or on some other planet, viewed, remotely, from a safe telescopic distance.

I can’t do that, any more than I can research human mortality with no psychological ripples – at some level, I cannot be fully distant from whatever my thoughts and feelings might be about my own approaching future death, or the death of others who are dear to me.

For this reason, this is a “post-positivist” thesis. I make no attempt to remain “objective”; my work stands in the tradition of post-modern scholars who reject the idea that objectivity is actually possible and question whether an objective stance is necessarily preferable anyway.

This is first person work, from the perspective of the researcher (me!) as subjective persona.

I am middle-aged. One day I will die and already my soft body is whispering and hinting about corporeal deteriorations; I swing between accepting, denying, resisting and seeking to flee.

I am a Western woman, living in Central London, presently working for a large bank. Dispassionately, the basic set up of my life means that I consume more than my “fair share”, even if I don’t consume “the maximum possible”. How, then, should I live? That said, I am childless, and will probably die of other causes before the worst fears of climate change activists are realised. Should I just brush all this aside as being of no real personal relevance?

These are some pragmatic considerations – and then there is the emotional, psychological, (spiritual?) overlay. I have been progressively coming alive to a sense of everything imperilled and everything already lost, to the great grief of coming to know myself as living as part of the climate breakdown generation. Biological life is teetering, precarious – endangered.

I find this, to put it mildly – upsetting. The signals are that I am far from alone. So, what to do? How should we live? What should our work organisations do? What is the role of the committed individual, the corporate strategy, consumer lobbying, government intervention?

These are questions that I aim to address through the arc of this thesis, but not from some sealed-off commentary box. Rather, this inquiry started with me, and continues to involve me. Before I start recommending change interventions for my financial services employer – or for random strangers on the internet – I wanted to know who *I am*, in context of my personal, embedded, embodied experience, how I am situated within my social and economic context, how I might relate differently to my culture of origin and to the natural world that contains me.

I have explored these questions by means of a first person poetic exploration, adopting a practice of walking daily for slow, sustained periods of time, in the built and semi-built landscapes that constitute my ordinary everyday environment. I have journaled reflectively, using a form of “compressed writing” journaling, and colourful visual charting, that I invented to help me inquire in this way; and I have used poetic inquiry methods to analyse and make sense of my data. This is, in short, an arts-based piece of first person action research.

### 2.2.3 Climate crisis and financial inclusion

We are here, and all is not well.

That, at heart, is the essential start of every “change challenge” and it is profoundly, specifically, the expression of my feeling at finding myself, in mid-life, living into what seems to be the beginning of the end of 10,000 years of relatively stable and benign climate conditions.

This is, also, an Organisational Change thesis; the energy that animates the inquiry throbs and thrums with the drive for fresh insight for effecting change... A seeking “towards”. Central questions could include: What is the “better world” we would like to move towards? What organising principles will get us there? How will change happen? How will change succeed?

I work for a bank, one of the big, multi-jurisdictional ones, and I first became interested in questions of organisational change following the global credit crisis that erupted in 2007/08 and the lingering effects of which are still felt in the world’s capitalist economies 12 years later.

I thought I understood the problem/s, the topics we – humans – needed to address.

I understood that the models defining the parameters of the financial markets were flawed, had gone wrong, meaning that pricing assumptions unravelled, and risk management frameworks and mechanisms blew up or blew away, proving in turn to have been inadequate or illusory.

Furthermore, it seemed to me that the people, institutions, structures, most implicated in the creation and proliferation of these failed models were also, broadly speaking, the people, institutions and structures best placed, because best resourced, to be resilient in the face of the effects of these failures – the loss of liquidity, the collapse of entire marketplaces, and so on.

The rich hunkered down for a few years, before emerging, ready to go bargain-hunting, enlarging their share of economic resources while the less well-off and the more marginalised, not well-resourced to weather the crisis, became *even less* well-off, *even more* marginalised.



This seemed to me to be not just and not justifiable. The change I was driving “towards” at the start of my post-graduate studies was – how to build a stable, functioning global financial economy calibrated towards fair and inclusive returns for all, rather than tuned for returning hot, short-term profits for system insiders and those who already had more than they needed?

I still consider that the unmediated effects of Western-style capitalism tend towards injustice, meaning that capitalist structures require, in my view, a degree of modification and ongoing intervention /regulation in order for the outputs and rewards to be good enough for enough of us to be allowable as the ongoing basis for human civilisation and for the global economy.

However, I now also believe that Western-style capitalism needs to be tempered or, even better, pointed in radically new directions, because it has become clear (again, in my view, *unarguably clear*) that fossil-fuel consumption to power the industrialised economies that have emerged from the capitalist West over the past 200 years have altered the composition of our planetary atmosphere in ways that are destabilising the overall benign climactic conditions in which humanity has spread and flourished over the past 10-12,000 years.

This newer – for me – awareness (which has come into sharp perspective for me only over the past six years or so, the same past six years in which I have been pursuing this study, and which has brought with it horror, terror and a deep, abiding, roiling, ever-present grief) is not actually a change of topic from the subjects of financial inclusion and social justice.

Climate crisis remains linked to financial vulnerability and exclusion, not so much in the immediate effects (weather events are, at first glance, inclusive and indiscriminate) but because responses to climate breakdown, certainly in the short and medium term, depend on access to and control over resources. The poor are at greatest risk from climate crisis because they are at greater risk from most things, having – by definition – little or no buffering resources.

This vulnerability is stark in poor countries and regions but also present, if more subtly, in developed nation contexts. In terms of my original question, how to make modern capitalist structures sufficiently fair for all (if indeed this is possible), I have come to believe that financial vulnerability and climate vulnerability intermesh and must be considered together.

#### 2.2.4 A brief survey of the recent evidence on climate change

I am not a scientist; I have conducted zero experiments personally gathering climate data. Nevertheless, based on what I have heard and read from sources I consider credible – individual scientists, research institutes, inter-governmental panels – who *have* done the experiments, who have gathered, analysed and extrapolated the numbers, my personal ontological stance is unequivocal. I am convinced that climate crisis is real, that it is driven by human action, and that not all humans are uniformly to blame, but rather that this is originally and primarily caused by the dominant structures in my own culture of origin – Western, industrialised, capitalist.

Awareness of climate change has been climbing the public agenda, linked to i) an increasing availability of detailed scientific analysis; ii) public movements of non-violence civil disobedience such as the School Strikes and Extinction Rebellion; and iii) charismatic figureheads, such as Thunberg and Attenborough. A few quotations below, from recent publications by international organisations, give a flavour of present climate concerns.

The 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Special Report on the expected impacts of average global temperatures rising by 1.5 degrees C above pre-industrial levels included the following observations:

B1: Climate models project robust differences in regional climate characteristics between present-day and global warming of 1.5°C and between 1.5°C and 2°C.

These differences include increases in: mean temperature in most land and ocean regions (high confidence), hot extremes in most inhabited regions (high confidence), heavy precipitation in several regions (medium confidence), and the probability of drought and precipitation deficits in some regions (medium confidence).

(IPCC, 2018, p. 9).

B5: Climate-related risks to health, livelihoods, food security, water supply, human security, and economic growth are projected to increase with global warming of 1.5°C and increase further with 2°C. (IPCC, 2018, p. 11).

In a report looking at the effects already being experienced as a result of environmental degradation and climate change, the Living Planet Report 2018 published by the environmental charity WWF and entitled “Aiming Higher” highlighted the losses to planetary biodiversity:

The Living Planet Index... tracks the state of global biodiversity by measuring the population abundance of thousands of vertebrate species around the world. The latest index shows an overall decline of 60% in population sizes between 1970 and 2014...

What is clear is that without a dramatic move beyond ‘business as usual’ the current severe decline of the natural systems that support modern societies will continue. With two key global policy processes underway – the setting of new post-2020 targets for the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Sustainable Development Goals – there is currently a unique window of opportunity to reverse the trend. Lessons can be learned from progress towards addressing other critical global issues, like climate change, and everyone – governments, business, finance, research, civil society and individuals – has a part to play....

We are the first generation that has a clear picture of the value of nature and our impact on it. We may be the last that can take action to reverse this trend.

(WWF & the Zoological Society of London, 2018, pp.7-8).

Finally, it is worth noting that rising global temperatures and degraded environments have implications not “only” for other forms of biological life but also for future humanity.

Climate change risk is a significant threat, possibly the top (long range) threat facing humanity today. The World Economic Forum 2019 “Global Risks Report (14th Edition)” lists extreme weather events, natural disasters and the failure of climate-change mitigation and adaptation as being among the top five global risks in 2019, both by likelihood and by impact. None of the other “Top Five” risks appear in both categories.

The 2019 International Monetary Fund (IMF) “Working Paper on Climate Change Mitigation” warns that:

There is growing agreement between economists and scientists that the tail risks are material, and the risk of catastrophic and irreversible disaster is rising, implying potentially infinite costs of unmitigated climate change, *including, in the extreme, human extinction*; see e.g., Weitzman 2009.

(WP 19/185, 2019, p. 11, emphasis added).

This paper was mentioned by XR spokesperson, Rupert Read, on Question Time, allowing him to refer jokingly to the IMF as “those famous eco-extremists” (Read & Bruce, 2019, October 10, min. 12.33). So, from one perspective the “change challenge” of climate crisis is profoundly existentialist, if taken seriously. It seems to me very plausible that the lingering vestiges of climate denial might be traced to an (unconscious?) flight towards psychological safety.

It may be too emotionally charged, too threatening, to accept that if humans continue to live in carbon-hungry cultures, we will ultimately inflict irreversible damage on the environments we depend on.

More immediately, and more pragmatically, as humanity learns to live in a more unstable planetary climate, more prone to instances of extreme weather events and other (e.g., health) crises, this means organisations coming to terms with higher intensity risk management.

This is true both for parts of the world that we have been more used to thinking of as being at risk from extreme weather events and parts of the world (such as the UK) where the climate has been generally speaking very stable and well suited for human life, in the relatively benign conditions of the Holocene period, that is, the c. 10,000 years since the last Ice Age.

#### 2.2.5 Climate crisis and risk management

For UK banks, for example, climate risk has already been formally commented on by the UK financial services regulators.

A 2019 speech by the then Governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, to the Climate Related Financial Disclosures Summit (text of the speech is available on the Bank of England website) included the statistics that i) in the five years 2014-2019, global carbon emissions have risen by 20% and sea levels by over 3.3mm per year (quoting data from [climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/sea-level/](https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/sea-level/)) and ii) that global temperatures are on course to increase by 3.4°C by 2100 (quoting data from [climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/](https://climateactiontracker.org/global/temperatures/)).

Carney subsequently published a Q&A in the Guardian newspaper (October 2019), in an article which was introduced with the following remarks:

Companies and industries that are not moving towards zero-carbon emissions will be punished by investors and go bankrupt, the Governor of the Bank of England has warned. Mark Carney also told the Guardian it was possible that the global transition needed to tackle the climate crisis could result in an abrupt financial collapse.

He said the longer action to reverse emissions was delayed, the more the risk of collapse would grow. Carney has led efforts to address the dangers global heating poses to the financial sector, from increasing extreme weather disasters to a potential fall in asset values such as fossil fuel company valuations as government regulations bite. The Bank of England has said up to \$20tn (£16tn) of assets could be wiped out if the climate emergency is not addressed effectively. But Carney also said great fortunes could be made by those working to end greenhouse gas emissions with a big potential upside for the UK economy in particular ((Damian) Carrington, 2019b.).

The Prudential Regulation Authority (PRA) has identified two particular direct risks for financial services firms arising from the climate crisis, also one indirect risk.

The indirect risk, primarily relevant for the insurance sector (and first articulated in a 2015 report, “The Impact of Climate Change on the UK Insurance Sector”), is liability risk i.e., where others suffer climate-related losses and seek to recover these.

The two direct risks, identified in linked 2019 publications, “Enhancing Banks and Insurers Approaches to Managing the Financial Risks from Climate Change” (PS/SS), are i) increased physical risk of natural disasters and ii) transition risk associated with the need to shift systems, economies and social structures away from carbon-intensive consumption.

In an indication of the complexity of the climate crisis “change challenge”, these risks tend to pull in different directions.

It may be better to respond as soon as possible to the physical risks (e.g., the increased likelihood that environments will experience flooding, drought, fire, extreme storms, etc.) by, say, changing specifications for buildings, constructing flood defences to mitigate the severity of the impacts when such events occur. On the other hand, the faster businesses try to shift, the more likely they are to see transition risks crystallise.

#### 2.2.6 A role for capitalism?

Adair Turner, the former Chair of the UK Financial Services Authority (until that body was replaced in 2013 by two separate, linked, bodies) published a piece in September 2019 entitled “Capitalism in the Last Chance Saloon” and I quote from it here in some length, because it cogently makes the argument for why our existing capitalist structures should be able to mobilise effectively on climate crisis and warning that critics of capitalism may be running out of patience with the time taken to do so. I also offer brief critique, which I aim to pick up in more detail through the course of the paper. Turner writes that:

Believers in a market economy are dismayed by radical voices arguing that capitalism is incompatible with effective climate action...Against this growing tide of radicalism, companies, business groups, and other establishment institutions urge caution and more measured action. Achieving zero emissions as early as 2030, they argue, would be immensely costly and require changes in living standards which most people will not accept...A more affordable and gradual path of emissions reduction would be better and still prevent catastrophe, and market instruments operating within the capitalist system could be powerful levers of change (Turner, 2019, n.p.n.).

It is also possible, of course, that the “dismay” described here links to the challenge to entrenched power structures and well-embedded modes of assigning economic value.

One of the main reasons the PRA is concerned with transition risk is that there is a very real possibility that the present existing financial markets could experience severe disruption – or even, in extremis, fail altogether – if entire sectors are written down or rendered non-viable because they depend fundamentally on fossil fuels and cannot credibly be shifted to non-carbon-emitting technologies.

In fact, Turner is not naïve about capitalism’s mixed motives. After writing about the pragmatic reasons for choosing a measured transition plan, as opposed to a more drastic one, Turner calls out that over the past 30 years, capitalism has not used its position to mitigate, but to obfuscate:

These counterarguments are robust. The costs of achieving a zero-carbon economy will increase dramatically if we try to get there in ten years, not 30. Most forms of capital equipment naturally need replacement within 30 years, so switching to new technologies over that timeframe would cost relatively little, whereas switching over ten years would require companies to write off large quantities of existing assets.

Technological progress – whether in solar photovoltaic panels, batteries, biofuels, or aircraft design – will make it much cheaper to cut emissions in 15 years than today. And the profit motive is spurring venture capitalists to make huge investments in the new technologies required to deliver a zero-carbon economy.

But it is also true that the capitalist system has failed to respond to the challenge of climate change fast enough; and in some ways, capitalism has impeded effective action... If adequate policies had been adopted 30 years ago, we would be well on the way to achieving a zero-carbon economy at a very low cost. The fact that we did not is, in part, capitalism’s fault (Turner, 2019, n.p.n.).



Nonetheless, Turner continues to back the mechanisms of capitalism as capable of taking humanity effectively through the transition to low-carbon that we must achieve in order to avert the worst impacts of climate change – and he suggests that matters have now reached a point where it is capitalism’s own best interests, or rather in the interests of those who control capitalist structures and who have the power to help or hinder these efforts, to choose to do so:

Once clear prices and regulations are in place, market competition and the profit motive will drive innovation, and economies of scale and learning-curve effects will force down the costs of zero-carbon technologies. And if we do not unleash that power, we will almost certainly fail to contain climate change.

Unless capitalism’s defenders support the immediate establishment of far more ambitious targets and policies to achieve net-zero emissions by mid-century, they should not be surprised if an increasing number of people believe that capitalism is the problem and not part of the solution. They will be right to do so (Turner, 2019, n.p.n.).

Of course, at the moment, it isn’t obvious what the alternative would be.

Jonathan Porritt, writing in, and about, his book “Capitalism as if the World Matters”, rather takes the view that capitalism’s “last chance saloon” (to borrow Adair Turner’s phrase) is equally the last chance for all of us:

“Whether capitalism is really capable of delivering a genuinely sustainable, equitable economy is by no means clear. But it had better be. It is the only game in town and will be for many years to come.” (Porritt, 2007b, n.p.n., see also Porritt 2007a for the broader argument about redeploying capitalism in service of the biosphere, instead of treating the planet as resources to be consumed, degraded and excreted as waste).



## Chapter Three: Modes of Inquiry – Action, Artful, Poetic

What did you do -

Once

You

Knew?

From "Hieroglyphic Stairway", by Drew Dellinger

Published (2011) in "Love letter to the Milky Way".

### 3.0 [Poem] The edge of the world

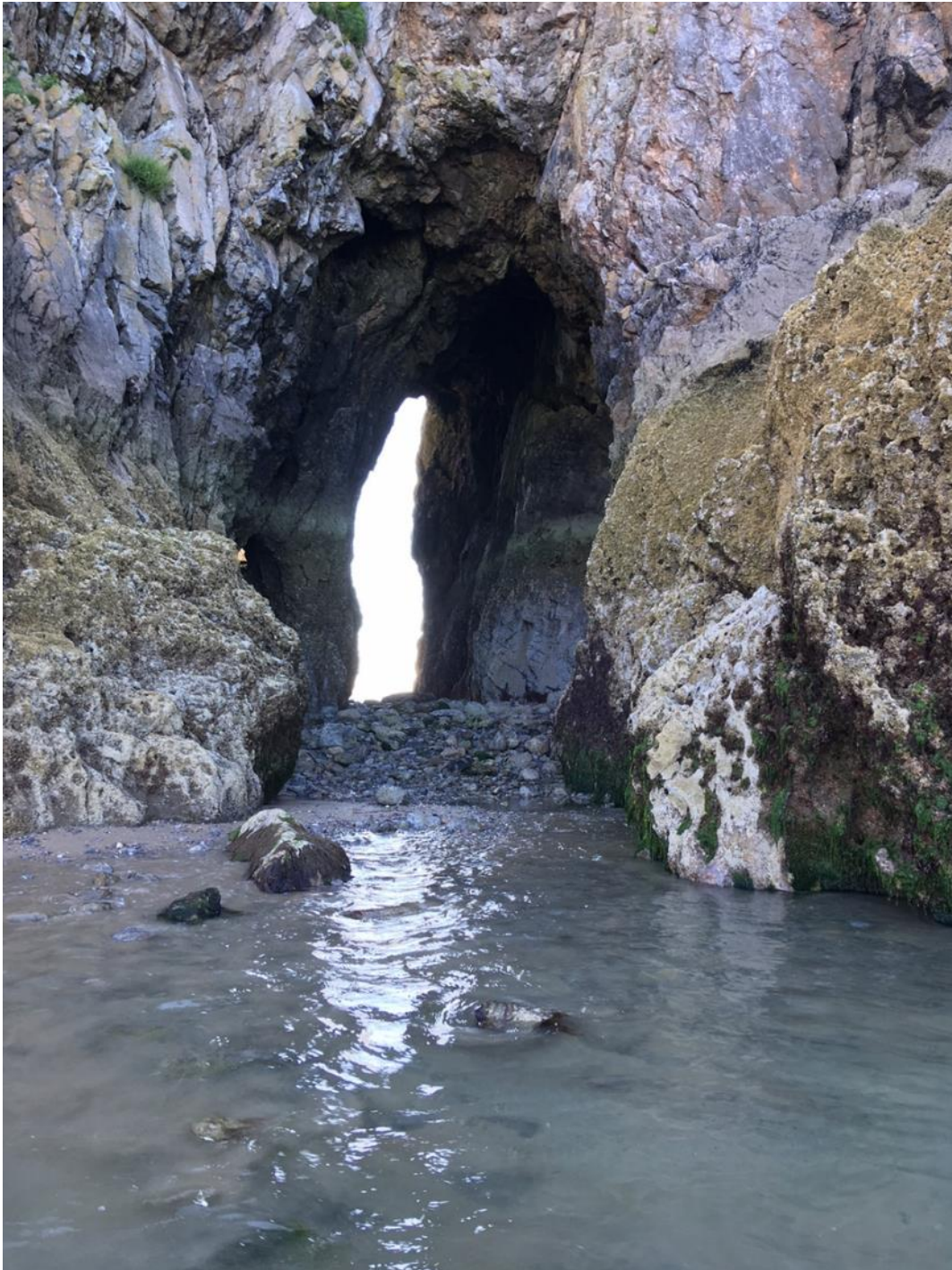
*[A response to Hieroglyphic Stairway, January 2015, Penally, Pembrokeshire.]*

**I went down to the edge of the world to watch the passing of this age.**



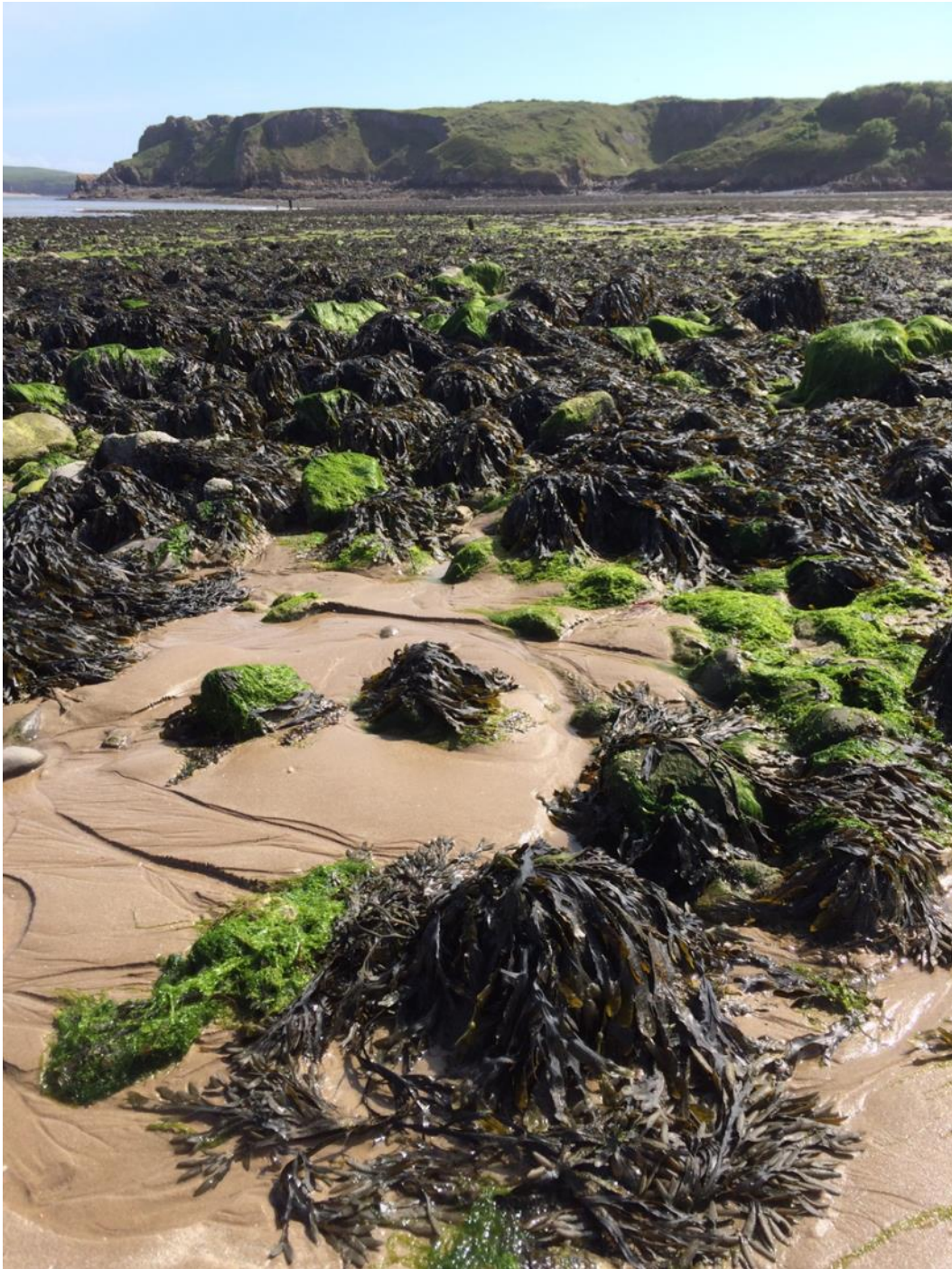
**The sun spills amber liquid on the wet clag underfoot. I feel the hug of the ground; I hear the soothing shrieks of feathered sentinels, overhead.**

I see the end of ages written on the rock teeth that still seek to consume,  
clutching at Caldey in the maw of the sea.



My eye sees a future where the stars burn up and the clouds sigh into nothing  
for there is no more rain and the pale blue atmosphere has boiled into the black.

And in that forward seeing, I see how vast and tiny my now-beach is, wrapped round with waves, and cliffs, and birds, and stones and shells.



It contains the smallest moment –and yet the whole big universe is also here, waiting with me on the beach for night to fall. Waiting together. Witnessing.

*Figs. 08, 09, 10: Beach scenes and coastal scenery, Penally (2015-2016).*

### 3.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Three

#### **Work that reconnects**

I have tended to write about the impulse to structure an inquiry so that it included Wales as if that was driven from desire to explore the Welsh side of my family background. This poem, and the accompanying images, suggest a different (and relevant) “origin story”.

At the time I first entertained the possibility that climate degradation is real, this seemed to shake some “assumed solid” foundations; it was hard to accept that although the sun will shine for so many years it might as well be eternal, biological life could be extinguished, and soon.

Walking on the beach there, I felt held by the paradox that the scenery felt tremendously stable and enduring even though the reality was that everything around me was changing all the time, at different rates (tides... arrangements of stones on the beach... the very shape of the rocks themselves... the erosion of the land between the mainland and Caldey Island...)

When I see these photographs, I am reminded that the ancient landscape of Pembrokeshire was, in its sheer continuing existence, comforting. Although I tend towards calling this a “poetic piece of writing” rather than a poem, what it remains “good for” is catching the disorientation of being caught up in cosmic-level events (I suppose, reflecting how far from my control our global climate truly is) and the deep comfort of feeling myself “companied” by nature.

I also include this not-tremendously-great poem because that poem was a response to Drew Dellinger’s poetic question, “What did you do – once you knew?” and the answer, “I went for a walk on the beach and wrote a poem” is sometimes dismissed as *not a good enough answer*.

The reasons for this have varied but could be mapped somewhere along the continuum from, “The crisis is so serious that we need to focus all our efforts on the serious work of [xxx]...” to “Nice for you that you get to spend time somewhere pretty, but poetry is basically pointless”.

I disagree. The re-embodying work of knowing, corporeally, that we are from-nature provides the essential love and stamina and resilience that gives “staying power” for other actions (which should certainly also happen). I have also become increasingly firm in a view that making art, both as a creative process and as a form of expression, has great value in its own right and does not have to be linked to a particular political, commercial or even social outcome to be justified.

### **Resisting the stereotypes – and/or living them?**

The other piece of art in this chapter comes at the end (see fig. 11). It’s appropriate that this photo-collage depicts layered images, as the making of it was also layered, and for the first time (but certainly not the last), the layers here were electronic as opposed to being made, physically, with paper and cut images and glue (stuck together in the original sense of the name, collage, derived from the French verb “coller”, to stick).

The photograph of the broken whelk shell is the same image in fig. 02 above, except that here, when I took the selfie holding a printed copy of that photograph, the image was flipped (and I’m still surprised how much difference that seems to make, although I do appreciate that the various filter overlays also have an effect). I’m also still really fond of this little electronic experiment (and frankly that was, superficially, the reason for its inclusion).

At the same time, I’m also a little bit mesmerised by the mood it projects, which for me sometimes seems to be playful, sometimes angry (maybe it’s the one bright red block that nudges me in that direction when I feel that way?), and always more than a little bit challenging.

I notice, again, that I’m working quite hard here to project a non-polished, non-slick image.



I present myself, peering from behind the photograph, with a wide-brimmed woven hat<sup>11</sup> pulled down so that my hair is entirely covered (but arched eyebrows remain prominent). The briefly glimpsed clothes are casual, with a few middle-aged neck wrinkles clearly visible on my bare throat; unlike all the photos from my late thirties, my nails are not manicured.

However, the choices to present myself as unpolished are exactly that – choices. In the selfie presented alongside the original version of the whelk shell photograph, in fig. 02, my hair is clearly greying and undyed but I'm standing in front of a painting by Mark Rothko, at an exhibition in London, having walked (on a blustery day, accounting for the faint disorderliness) from my home on the other side of the city centre. Equally, in the collage in fig. 11, I have set up the shot so that it's possible to see a little bit of the painting that hung (in that flat) on the wall above the sofa. Now, clearly, I don't own the Rothko, and the watercolour that we do own wasn't particularly expensive and isn't by anyone especially notable (I just – liked it). Nonetheless, it would be utterly disingenuous to pretend that I don't have the resources to present as a well-to-do city-dweller; closer to the mark to note the mulish set of my chin in this image and conclude that I don't wish to dress up and I don't expect to be made to do so.

I may have started this inquiry a little bit in love with the “escape to the country” trope, I may want to imagine myself as resisting the stereotypes, but frankly to participate in a mid-life protest against the posturing and crowdedness and pace of urban life is (ironically) textbook middle-class behaviour, at least as far as I can tell from a quick glance around my peer group. So, am I acting on my own initiative, or acting out one of the classic threads of to-be-expected-for-my-age-and-stage-and-cultural-niche narratives? I find that the story more interesting as I give in to being, in fact, a (non-polished) city-dweller and shift the focus of my attention towards learning how to belong better here.

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<sup>11</sup> Also, sadly subsequently lost (see footnote 5). RIP, much-loved bobble hat.

## 3.2 The basic premise/s of my inquiry

### 3.2.1 Inquiring within an action research paradigm

Starting from AMSR and continuing into my present doctoral work through ADOC, my research stance is “action research” oriented. I hold the epistemological position that:

i) **actionable insight** – insight that can form the basis for *credible knowing* – arises in our lived, everyday workplaces, in our social settings, in our private lives, as well as in formal, ‘segregated’ places of learning, such as in laboratories and libraries; ii) we can perceive, codify and convey this **contextualised knowing**, through cycles of activity, close observation and careful reflection and that these carefully applied, carefully described processes are viable methods that can differentiate *practical knowing* as something other and more than hunches, impulses or guesswork; and iii) described as vividly and with as much truthfulness as we can muster, the insights generated through these repeated cycles can be valuable to other inquirers, as **experiential wisdom** which can be explored and applied to other contexts and questions.

The term “action research” in fact encompasses a group of somewhat similar philosophies of knowledge generation that developed within an overall proliferation of approaches to research through the course of the twentieth century. For the account of that development, I am indebted to David Coghlan (2011), who also draws on Clem Adelman (1993).

My understanding of action research is also influenced by Hilary Bradbury (2010, 2015a&b); by Peter Reason, writing alone (e.g., 1988, 2006) and with others (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, Reason & (Kate) McArdle, 2004, Reason & (Melanie) Newman, 2013, Reason & (John) Rowan, 1981); by Bill Torbert (see e.g., 2001); and by Gill Coleman (2001, 2011, 2015).

The development of action research disciplines tracks the period in which higher education became more established and much more widely available, which makes intuitive and commercial sense of course and which mirrors a proliferation of approaches to research beyond the natural sciences. I make specific reference to the development of formal higher education because action researchers, broadly speaking, wish to have the knowledge generated through their activities formally recognised as valid, credible research.

At the same time, action research does not sit easily within educational institutions, which may possibly say something about the types of personality who might tend to prefer and be drawn towards an action research framing. Whatever the truth of that, certainly action research innately self-marginalises within the academy by virtue of the significance it gives to knowledge generated *outside* the academy. Following earlier analysis from Robert Rapaport (1970), Coghlan describes the characteristics of action research as being:

that it addresses the twin tasks of bringing about change in organisations and in generating robust, actionable knowledge, in an evolving process that is undertaken in a spirit of collaboration and co-inquiry, whereby research is constructed *with* people, rather than on or for them (Coghlan, 2011, p. 54 – emphasis original).

In terms of origins, Coghlan points for the global North to the pioneering work of organisation theorist Kurt Lewin in the States (pp. 55-57), also associated with the Organisational Development work of the Tavistock group in the UK and the workplace democracy movement in Scandinavia. Lewin's work was notable in being derived from direct experimentation with social or organisational interventions and it is Lewin who established the concept of research progressing through cycles of action inquiry, which Lewin structured and policed inflexibly (and which I take as being his way of demonstrating the “scientific validity” of the method).

In contrast to the spirit of Coghlan's definition, above, Lewin's work was *not* participative – Coghlan suggests (p.57) that this may be because Lewin's early death in 1947 prevented a fuller development of his action research principles. Coghlan acknowledges however:

The consciousness-raising work of [Paolo] Freire and the Marxist-based liberation movements in the southern hemisphere (frequently referred to as emancipatory or participatory action research), feminist approaches to research, the return to epistemological notions of praxis, and the hermeneutic school of philosophy associated with... [Jurgen] Habermas are important strands and expressions of action research that did not grow out of the post-Lewin tradition... (Coghlan 2011, p.56, citing Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

These “bottom-up” movements are entirely congruent with an epistemological philosophy that supports the democratisation of knowing, in other words, that makes room for the possibility of valid knowledge creation taking place away from the acknowledged formal centres. This is a potentially vital aspect of action research when the “change problem” is an embedded, systemic issue such as the present climate crisis, in which the source issues are enmeshed within existing power structures and where it may take the amplification of challenge from the margins of the system before problems – and possible solutions – receive meaningful focus.

### 3.2.2 Incorporating lived experience through an extended epistemology

One aspect of the “democratisation of knowing” is the question of *whose knowing* is allowed to count; this is a question of power and of access, of inclusivity and *fairness*, topics to which I will return. Another aspect, which I explore here, is the question of *what counts as knowing*.

Within academic circles, debates about the nature of knowledge, and the relative importance or usefulness of different types of human knowledge, are a long-standing, established and arguably fundamental element in intellectual discourse.

During my own lifetime, the primacy of logical-analytical scientific reasoning has been routinely problematised, at least within the humanities and social sciences. This is, however, not to say that the apparently arm's length, apparently dispassionate forms of knowledge creation developed in and for study of the natural sciences have lost their place at the top of the knowledge hierarchy in Western thought. Indeed, positivist assumptions and quality criteria pervade many of the present academic management hierarchies and these values are also seen to be thriving in the management systems of our capitalist organisational structures:

We come to know the world holistically in many different ways, but only some of them are recognised as valuable in modernist society. The myth of utility-maximising, rational *Homo economicus* strongly informs wealthy, Western, patriarchal culture. On the surface of things, people tend to get rewards most highly for working in their heads with ideas, concepts, money and numbers... (Seeley & Reason, 2008, p. 27.)

As an alternative, John Heron and Peter Reason (1997) articulated an expanded model for modes of human knowing and how these modes interact with each other, although retaining a presumption that the inter-relations between modes of knowing are hierarchical.

In this framework, one thing leads to another in a particular order, accruing complexity and increasing in value through the stages of ways in which things can come to be known.

Their model, then, traces a progression i) from experiential knowing, or ways of tuning in to catch insight based on what the bodily senses are aware of ii) moving into presentational knowing, which depicts what has been sensed in one or more artful forms that displays and communicates to others iii) then to propositional knowing, which seeks to draw conclusions and is the mode of knowing best understood and most used in Western-style education systems today; and iv) finally into practical knowing, where we enact and use what we know.

Given this model was developed by action researchers, inquiring at the boundaries between organisations and the academy, it is perhaps not surprising the hierarchy progresses on past the “propositional knowing”, the articulation of argument, vis, the dominant mode for knowledge in academia, and instead culminates in “practical knowing”, the valuing of expertise related to and expressed in practice (see also (Chris) Argyris & (Donald) Schön, 1974; Schön, 1982).

Nonetheless, the simple fact of including non- and pre- analytical modes of knowing within a formal theoretical framework was, for the time of writing, a radical act and anticipated the strong turn towards the artful and the performative in early twenty-first century research.

For an [alternative] theoretical framework, we draw specifically on the “extended epistemology” articulated by John Heron (1992,1999). His four interwoven ways of knowing... reach beyond the confines of conventional intellectual positivism to embrace the pre-verbal, manifest and tacit knowing we might associate with artists, crafts people and our own guts and hearts and bodies (Seeley & Reason, 2008, p. 28).

Note that in this citation, where the primary writing voice for the article is said to be that of Chris Seeley, the hierarchical aspect of the framework is de-emphasised, repositioned as an interweaving of different modes of knowing (and which implicitly allows for influence and progression to and fro between them rather than a simple, linear through-stepping).

Seeley was a graphic designer first, before moving into academia, and social action, as an action researcher working and researching international development interventions. In relation to Heron’s extended epistemology, Seeley’s main interest was on developing insight – and practice – in relation to presentational knowing, (also described in Seeley’s work as “artful inquiry”, Seeley, 2006; Seeley & (Ellen) Thornhill, 2014), where Heron’s own thinking was relatively less progressed.

Writing with Peter Reason, Seeley proposed names and descriptions for four action approaches which generate good quality presentational knowing.

These action approaches (Seeley and Reason, 2008, p.32), are listed below, noting that I have substituted my own short summaries in place of the original, longer explanations:

- i) **Sensuous encountering:** [drawing explicitly on all our senses in knowing the world];
- ii) **Suspending:** [taking a beat between experiencing a thing and concluding about it];
- iii) **Bodying-forth:** [expressing our imaginative impulses]; and
- iv) **Being in-formed:** [remaining conscious of and alive to the “experiences, surprises, provocations and evocations of presentational knowing”].

In describing these approaches, Seeley does not prescribe that all must be identifiably present for presentational knowing to “count”, nor does she suggest that the list is exhaustive.

Seeley does, I believe, indicate that for good quality work, a practitioner must be working within these modes, or doing something akin to them. The obvious challenge of this perspective for the academy in that with the possible exception of “bodying forth”, none of these modes are externally verifiable and even “bodying forth” has to be translated for the written discussion (like this one) that is the staple, prescribed communication channel for most academic work.

Seeley’s response is an argument by association – if the outputs of presentational knowing are *of good quality* then it is likely that the practitioner has drawn on them and conversely, claiming to be undertaking artful work in these ways is not sufficient to guarantee the quality of output.

For Seeley, there was another, equally pressing, problem around the evidencing of good quality presentational knowing in (action) research, and that was the relative lack of evidence of any kind of artful practice, whether of high quality or otherwise:

There is a gap between the richness of knowing that action research espouses and how it is commonly practised and presented...

In spite of [Heron's] advocacy [for an "extended epistemology"], for many action researchers, it is still not "normal" to do "arty" things, which can end up in the realm of "alternative" or "other" ways to know, firmly positioned away from everyday practice (Seeley, 2011, p.84).

Chris Seeley died in 2014, after the start of the turn towards the incorporating of artful practices and artful ways of knowing, in North American academia in particular, but before being able to witness the proliferation of work and of publication on "artful" approaches linked to and extending beyond qualitative inquiry which has followed.

Non-exhaustive examples include Tom Barone & Elliot Eisner (2012); Lynn Butler-Kisber (2018); J. Gary Knowles & Ardra Cole (2008); Patricia Leavy (2015, 2018).

I like to imagine that Seeley would have welcomed – and contributed enthusiastically to – the diverse forms of experiment and expression now emerging under the banner of "arts-based research". Admittedly, these examples include work executed at varying levels of technical capability, which I suspect Seeley would have found frustrating.

Nonetheless, surely, overall, she would have been encouraged by the attempts to take seriously work offered in this space for the sake of its contribution to human knowing, as opposed to treating the artful elements in research as "excursions" or "distractions" or as allowed to be present within organisational and/or academic work merely as decoration.



### 3.2.3 Assigning value to artful (“arts-based”) research

The term “arts-based research” was coined in the 1990s by Elliot Eisner from his work at Stanford (Eisner, 1981, 2005, 2008, Barone & Eisner, 2012) though it is only recently that “arts-based research” has started to emerge as the main term to describe the field.

Whilst explaining her choice to shift to using this term in the second edition of her textbook on qualitative inquiry – and therefore away from her earlier choice of the term “arts-informed” inquiry, following Knowles & Cole (2008) – Lynn Butler-Kisber noted that “[Eisner] opened the doors to this kind of research and it has flourished in the last two decades largely through his efforts.” (Butler-Kisber, 2018, p.17). Meanwhile, Susan Finley, who was already writing to the term “arts-based research” in 2008, also acknowledged Eisner’s stance and actions:

Eisner... carefully spelled out the differences between scientific and artistic approaches to qualitative research in educational inquiry (Eisner, 1981).

He encouraged social scientists to accept artistic ways of knowing as complements to science and urged acceptance of narratives in the forms of novels as desirable manuscripts for doctoral dissertations, and he envisaged adaptations of music, dance and poetry as forms of research representation (Finley, 2008, p.73).

Eisner himself saw “the arts” as making a potential four-fold contribution to academic knowledge (2008, p.10-11), in their role as complementing scientific modes of knowledge.

The first contribution identified by Eisner is that the arts can teach us to pay due attention to nuance; the second is that the arts can generate empathy which in turn inspires us into action.

The third potential contribution by the arts is to offer fresh perspective, jolting us out of familiar ways of thinking about a topic or issue; the fourth is to help us to discover our own humanity, which Eisner says is connected to our learning to notice and appreciate the emotions we have experienced through our encounters with artful material.

Finally, Eisner summarises these inter-connected effects in the single idea that “all of the processes that I have described contribute to the enlargement of human understanding” (2008, p.11), as indeed, he understood that the “logical positivism” of the scientific method also did, in the domains where questions raised can best be addressed through the processes of precise and rigorous problem-solving that the scientific method is designed to achieve (2008, p.9).

The challenge to scientific inquirers, per Eisner, is not to fall into the trap of trivialising the questions that can be examined (reducing the problem to make the question “precise enough”) whilst the challenge for artful inquirers is around sustaining sufficient long-term energy and momentum in the face of the resistance Eisner deems likely, since “short-term enthusiasts are hardly going to be able to provide the kind of leadership... [required].” (2008, p.10).

The other issue, which he ends with, leading me to suspect that he considers it the more pressing, potentially the more dangerous to the future of arts-based research, is a version of the same issue that troubled Chris Seeley (and which she addressed in her 2006 dissertation) – *will the quality of the work produced as arts-based research be sufficient to see it through?*

This feels close to home. I realise that questions on what constitutes “good” arts-based research must be addressed as I seek to persuade you of the usefulness and quality of this thesis, which is explicitly positioned as a “poetic” exploration. I am also concerned with questions around what this kind of work is good *for* and what criteria will be useful and appropriate as we seek to make judgements on quality, on individual research efforts and across the field more widely.

### 3.2.4 Uncovering meaning through poetic inquiry

Poetic inquiry is achieving an increasing momentum and recognition as one of the emerging disciplines within arts-based research. According to Sandra Faulkner:

“Poetic inquiry” is the use of poetry crafted from research endeavours, either before project analysis, as a project analysis, and/or poetry that is part of or that constitutes an entire research project. The key feature of poetic inquiry is the use of poetry as/in/for inquiry (Faulkner, 2018a, p.210).

Poetic inquirers have convened seven times (2007-2019) at the International Symposium on Poetic Inquiry (ISPI), leading in turn to the publication, so far, of nine volumes dedicated to exploring poetic inquiry across a range of applications, including: education and the social sciences; as political response and for social justice; and ecology/environment/climate.

Pauline Sameshima, introducing Sameshima, (Alexandra) Fidyk, (Kedrick) James & (Carl) Leggo, 2017, stated that they aimed:

[to draw] attention to the ancient connection between poetry and the natural world..., broadening the ecological scope and impact of poetic inquirers. We sought to attend to poetry as ecological, the *spatiality* and interrelations of all things where “*nothing stands alone*” (Griffin, 1992, p.207) and poetry as imaginal, as a way to bring life, timelessness, and newness to the not-yet seen (2017, p.17, emphasis original).

As I explored “artful inquiry” and “arts-based research”, a poetic approach to the material resonated with me and consequently my primary modes of analysis of my first person work (i.e., work which is framed with explicit reference to the subjective point of view of the researcher-as-subject-of-the-research) draw on poetic inquiry principles.

As I sought to immerse myself in the detail of the data, cultivating a renewed and re-framed familiarity with its context, textures and patterns from the perspective of action-researcher-and-participant, I used a process of poetic writing and “re-shaping” to develop a sense of the overarching themes, the tone and mode, the shape and rhythm of my own experiences as refracted through months of journaling.

### **On the characteristics and possibilities of poetic inquiry**

To draw a quick caricature of the Classical Greek view of poetry, broadly speaking, Aristotle was in favour of acknowledging a place for poetry in formal, credible discourse whilst Plato was against. Let me trip over myself in my hurry to clarify: I don’t offer this as a profound, complete or sufficient analysis, simply as a pencil-sketch starting point, which I include as a nod to the ongoing looming shadow of Greek philosophy in Western intellectual thought.

According to poetic inquirer Alexandra Fidyk (2017), Plato considered poetry to be not philosophical, ethical or pragmatic, which I interpret as being an objection that poetry is not faithful in representing the “real world” and as such, not “real world useful”.

Fidyk, takes a counter position, arguing in favour of poetry’s place in the academy on the basis of its pedagogical effects. In so doing, she presents poetry as capable of conveying relevant, actional insight and able to move its readers into useful intervening actions. She addresses Plato’s long-ago objections to poetry using the same categories of his resistance, writing that:

[Poetry] is *ethical* for the passions and emotions enacted move us to “particip-action” and activism; it is *philosophical* for it lays bare truth and knowledge – personal and collective, contemporary and ancient; and it is *pragmatic* for it offers practical consequences constituted as meaning and value in research, community practice, and episteme (Fidyk, 2017, pp. 32-33, emphasis added).

Where Fidyk, then, argues in favour of poetry by referencing its external pedagogical benefits to move its readers (acknowledging that, as framed, this could be an effect also experienced by the poetic inquirer as simultaneously creator of and audience for a piece of poetic inquiry), Margaret McKeon pinpoints an internalised pedagogical impact, where it is definitely the poet who learns and changes.

McKeon describes her process of poetic inquiry as

... a pedagogy of coming to know myself deeply, so that I can be of better service to my relationships of ideas, places and people.

It is challenging myself to become more than open-minded, to grow into being open in spirit, in emotion, and in bodily presence. *It is mapping my interior landscape as a key to understanding external ones* (McKeon, 2019, p. 62, emphasis added).

This elaboration of the charting of both internal and external worlds is a good match to my own experience through the course of my cycles of walking-and-writing and poetic analysis.

Progressively, through daily walks, I quite literally “got the measure” of my neighbourhoods, measured by my own stride length. 1000 steps from my East London home to the local station, 3000 steps from my flat to the glass turnstiles on the ground floor of our company Head Office, 5000 steps from my front door to my desk at work if I take the slow route through the park.

At the same time, as I walked, I came to know myself in a new way, in the physical and emotional “shape” I hold in the world, as I walk. I walked – to process anxiety. I walked – to enjoy a spring morning. I walked – to avoid having a difficult conversation, or to have one.

And because I chose to walk with a particular question in mind about my family of origin, the question which largely determined how far I walked for both first and second rounds of inquiry, I also came to know myself in a new way in context of my heritage and personal history.

I have pointed to both Fidyk and McKeon as explaining poetic inquiry through a pedagogical framing (whether externally or internally focused). Meanwhile, poetic inquirers Kedrick James and Carl Leggo advocate for poetry from another perspective, on the basis of the power of poetry to convey the writer's experience.

James writes that "what makes poetic inquiry so useful is its capaciousness of expression" (James, 2017, p.23) and Leggo lists out an alphabetical litany of its capacities:

Poetry invites: Activism, awareness, comedy, consonance, contemplation, description, emotion, exposition, fantasy, imagery, imagination, music, narration, orality, performance, philosophy, prophesy, rhetoric, romance, storytelling, tragedy, voice, wisdom and words. Poetry is playful and purposeful. Poetry invents worlds and teaches us how to live in them (Leggo, 2017, p. 28).

According to Monica Prendergast, poetry not only teaches us how to live in the worlds it has invented, but is also useful almost therapeutically, as a mode of processing. Writing about an experience of staging a production of *The Hobbit* in a Canadian prison, as part of a charity theatre/educational project, Prendergast observed that "Writing [auto-ethnographic poetry about the production] allowed me to access my deeper affective responses... It was an experience that feels as much about grief as joy, as well as finding unexpected sources of courage and wisdom in this process." (Prendergast, 2013, p. 314).

It is also Prendergast who points out the experiential similarity between weighing words in the creation of poetry and "sifting data" in the search for research insights:

Sifting through data, whether researcher data from field texts of various kinds or participant data, is the process of intuitively sorting out words, phrases, sentences, and passages that synthesize meaning from the prose...

These siftings [are] metaphorical, narrative and affective... The process is reflexive in that the researcher is interconnected with the researched, that the researcher's own affective response to the process informs it (Prendergast, 2006, p. 370).

This brings me, finally, to Melisa Cahnmann, who points out that, although traditionally considered as quite different activities, what qualitative research and poetic practice have in common that they rely substantially on being able to communicate effectively as written forms. Having listed out a range of technical devices used in poetry and which could have relevance in educational research, Cahnmann wonders “why not” draw on poetry when writing research?

We cannot lose by acquiring techniques employed by arts-based researchers. We must assume an audience for our work, an audience that longs for fresh language to describe the indescribable emotional and intellectual experiences in and beyond classrooms. We may not all write great popular or literary poems, but we can but we can all draw on the craft and practice of poetry to realize its potential, challenging the academic marginality of our work (Cahnmann, 2003, p. 35).

### 3.2.5 Writing as a way of knowing

#### **A role for “experimental writing” in research**

Is it necessary for research to remain in the realm of “non-fiction”, to produce the sought-after “actionable knowledge”? To entertain the idea of poetic inquiry is already to reject this view. Poetry is liminal; it slides between worlds. It makes invention feel real and reality feel invented.

*A poem is a fictional, verbally inventive moral statement* in which it is the author, rather than the printer or word processor, who decides where the lines should end.

Fiction [in this context] ... does not mean... factually false. There are lots of falsehoods which are not fictional and... lots of factually true statements in literary works... Fiction... is *the kind of place in which the moral holds sway over the empirical*. ((Terry) Eagleton, 2007, p.25, 35, emphasis added).

Constructionist thinking indeed treats traditional research as already at least somewhat fictional. Traditional research writing insists on being treated as non-fictional, and yet also seeks to project the impression of being written by an author with no subjective persona – clearly a fictional construct, as this is a thing not possible in actual human lived experience.

Lynne Kisber-Butler summarises the [constructionist/constructivist<sup>12</sup>] position as follows:

Social constructivism is predicated on the idea that lived experience is socially constructed, understood in context, and influenced by the historical and cultural experiences known to individuals... The ontological stance of constructivists, born out of the work of Gregory Bateson, Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, among others, is that reality is socially constructed /created through social practices, interactions and experiences... There is no such thing as a single reality... there are multiple ways of understanding /knowing the world, which are always constituted and contextually dependent (Butler-Kisber, 2018, p. 11, 14).

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<sup>12</sup> I struggled to understand how the terms “constructionism” and “constructivism” are differentiated by academics, until I came across Kenneth Gergen’s explanation (2015) that while the terms can be traced to different origins and treated as having different shades of meaning, in some contexts (e.g., social science writings) they are treated as synonymous. For what it’s worth, Gergen summarises the original shades of difference as follows: *Both challenge the idea that we can know the world for what it is and argue for the centrality of the constructing process in determining what counts as knowledge... [However] where constructivism places the origin of knowledge in the head of the individual, social construction places the origin in social process* (2015, p.30). In my own writing, I have typically struck to the term “constructionist /ism”, gesturing towards the influence of social practices, and my reading of Lynne Kisber-Butler’s text is that this is also her meaning i.e., she is treating the terms as synonyms.



I have mentioned that Eisner argued that novels should be accepted as valid doctoral form and that Cahnmann's position on poetry is that academics would be well advised to study and adopt writerly techniques from literature to enhance the impact of their written research.

Patricia Leavy, a leading "next generation" voice on arts-based research, argues strongly for both narrative research and fiction-based research. She depicts these approaches as providing researchers with certain freedoms of expression not available when working with "real" participants within traditional research constraints. Leavy's claim is that

The rise in narrative inquiry and emergence of fiction-based research are about *making research more truthful, meaningful, useful, accessible and human...*

Given the historic polarisation of fiction and non-fiction, it may seem strange to suggest that *fiction can be more truthful than "facts"*, which may conceal as much as they reveal. The strongest critique of autobiographically driven narrative research and fiction-based research is that it may not be trustworthy or meet the standards of social scientific knowledge – the knowledge is simply "too subjective". This concern is based on positivist and postpositivist criteria for measuring validity and reliability, which are *not appropriate ways of understanding arts-based research* (Leavy, 2015, p.64, emphasis added).

Maybe (probably) my very attempt to follow the distinction, dividing fictional-type writing from non-fictional type writing simply illustrates how schooled I still am by the habit of thought that turns phenomena and experiences into materials that are sorted and treated according to different knowledge categories, in a hierarchy stretching from "very serious and reliable" (thus, scientific and high status) to "very unserious and unreliable" (low status and "artsy").

Sociologist Laurel Richardson was one of the first to attempt to cross the academic divide, confessing to finding traditional social science writing *boring*, in her chapter in Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln's *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2018, p.818) and attempting to counter this with what she initially termed "experimental writing", forms that explicitly sought to compel and to evoke, i.e., drawing on poetry and narrative to "tell" research as if telling a story.

The story of a life is less than the actual life because the story told is selective, partial, contextually constructed and because the life is not yet over.

But the story of a life is also more than the life, the contours and meanings allegorically extending to others, others seeing themselves, knowing themselves through another's life story. (Richardson, 1997, p.6).

### **At the border between "fiction" and "life"**

Laurel Richardson locates her own work as being in the borderlands between social science and literature, with some examples more firmly in one camp or the other, but much of her work seeking to blend between them to produce what she calls "CAP (creative analytical processes) ethnography" (2018, p.821) and what Kenneth and Mary Gergen term "performative social science" (2018, p.54). Both terms nod towards an element of irony in these approaches.

These new "species" of qualitative writing adapt to the kind of political/social world we inhabit – a world of uncertainty... CAP ethnography displays the writing process and the writing product as deeply intertwined... How do the authors position themselves as knowers and tellers? These issues engaged intertwined problems of subjectivity, authority, authorship, reflexivity and process, on the one hand, and of representational form, on the other. (Richardson, 2018, p.821).

One particularly prominent example of the “new species” is autoethnography, described in the opening section of the Handbook of Autoethnography as centring around

[The need] ... to create particular and contingent knowledge and ways of being in the world that honour story, artfulness, emotions, and the body; to treat experience and individuals with responsibility and care; and to compel all who do, see and listen to this work to make room for difference, complexity, and change. (Stacey Holman Jones, Tony Adams, & Carolyn Ellis<sup>13</sup>, 2013, p.25).

I include this positioning detail because, at least among the action researchers I have encountered, there is quite a pull towards and a fascination with autoethnography, albeit while recognising that it is not precisely the work we ourselves are doing. Judi Marshall for instance says that autoethnography “can be seen as a cousin” (2016, p.8) of first person action research:

The commitment to see the political in the personal and to articulate and explore this is especially valuable and links to first person action research... Resonances between autoethnography and living life as inquiry... include embodiment. Autoethnography, however, is less likely to integrate experimental action [which is fundamental for action research] into its approach (Marshall, 2016, p.8)

The handbook helps me to work through the ways in which my own work approaches-but-differs-from the aims of autoethnography, by clarifying these (pp. 22-25) as being to:

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<sup>13</sup> Sociology and communication scholar Carolyn Ellis is a leading proponent of autoethnography and a prolific author of autoethnographic articles (plus a few books), including: 1990, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2004, 2007, 2008, 2013, 2017. I think it is significant that Ellis turned to autoethnography after an early career controversy around breaches of trust in respect of members of a fishing community (1986) who spoke to her as a friend and who were not consulted about their subsequent portrayal in her written research. Ellis subsequently turned her research-lens inwards, towards her own life but/and also towards the lives of her “intimate others”. Ellis’s partner Arthur Bochner is also a scholar of communication and an autoethnographer in his own right (see e.g., 1997, 2001, 2006, 2012, 2018). Other authors writing in this genre include Tessa Muncy, (2010), and Norman Denzin, (e.g., 2006, 2013a&b, 2017, 2018).

1. Critique cultural practice.
2. Contribute to existing research [theory].
3. Deploy vulnerability in the work purposefully [as the teaching “moment”].
4. Seek a response from audiences.

On the first point, the Handbook tells us that

... autoethnographers intentionally *highlight* the relationship of their experiences and stories to culture and cultural practices... If an author writes to tell a story to illustrate a sad, joyful or problematic experience but does not interrogate the nuances of this experience in light of general cultural phenomena and cultural practices, then the author writes autobiographically (Holman Jones, et al, 2013, p. 22-23, emphasis original).

In my own work, yes, I am interested in the implications of the things I encounter, but I flick between a purely personal interest, to interest about how aspects of human culture/s are refracted back to me, to seeking to relate certain things I experience to the encompassing web of life around me, the “more than human world” (Abram, 1997). It seems unarguable to me that we *should* have a moral commitment to end social inequality and the aggregated impact of my reading and my research activity has been an increased clarity on how society should be remade to be *fairer*. I do not, however, have the autoethnographer’s steady gaze on cultural materials, nor do I seek to offer a deeply considered sociological type cultural critique as the main point of my work, though I do write what I see, in a gesture of transparency and concern.

Linked to this, to the second point, I am not *primarily* aiming to add to existing research *theory*. Incidentally, the Handbook doesn’t exactly specify that it means “research theory” but the examples given, in my mind, clearly imply that it is theory they are interested in exploring. There is a strong assumption that autoethnography illuminates some aspect of identity politics relevant to the writer – coming out or living with illness or facing racism /sexism /class bias.

In this work I do claim to make a meaningful contribution, but my main interest is in bringing arts-based action research to life (first for myself, but also, later, as an offer to others) in the practical processes of my method. This draws on sustained repeated daily actions, which are observed, reflected on, and experimented with, and which I track using a series of simple templates that I believe render the gathered materials accessible, visual, and poetic. It is a framework that I term *poetic charting* and its purpose is to act as the container for ongoing cycles of reflexive noticing, learning, re-presenting and coming to know (in order to act)

To the third point, ah yes, vulnerability. Although I have increasingly come to understand the seriousness and importance of power dynamics and the political discourse within cultures (more of that later), I face into these reluctantly, because it becomes impossible to progress whilst ignoring that these dynamics i) exist and ii) dominate any possible outcomes.

Yes, I aim to be autobiographically precise and honest, shading at times into vulnerability, although *I hope* I have successfully avoided the sensationalism that can ring as tone-deaf, or attention-seeking or, at worst, exploitative. I recognise that taste and perceptions of ethical boundaries vary on this. Where self-disclosure is included, I am *intending* to make a gesture of transparency, from an axiological stance that holds that the best service I can do for my reader is to try to show you my biases.

This *should* provide information that can help you to interpret and judge my work. At times, our readerly and writerly perspective might align; at other points, the readerly view might well be better and clearer in making interpretations than I can be about my own work, wedded as I am to my biases, even as I am attempting to expose them.

On the fourth point, yes, I hope for audience response; I hope to spark change motivation in you as well as in myself. I simply think that this motive is not unique to autoethnography.



*Fig. 11: Pic collage series, selfie with shell, shell photo credit Simon Rosbottom (2018).*



## Chapter Four: On Method/ology

I do believe in the transcendental. I believe that poetry and art without a transcendental element doesn't really exist for me.... I know nothing more exciting than writing a poem. And all of that ten years [when I wasn't able to write a poem], I hoped that I would write another poem. And I did try, but they were all fakes.

If you have quite a lot of technique — which now, after 60 years scribbling, I have — it's too easy to produce forgeries. And there are books upon books full of forgeries. I do believe that, if you don't have anything to say, say nothing. And that silence is part of the enterprise, and *silence is sacred too*.

Longley, M. (Interviewee) & Tippett, K. (Host). (2016). The vitality of ordinary things: The On Being podcast [Audio podcast].



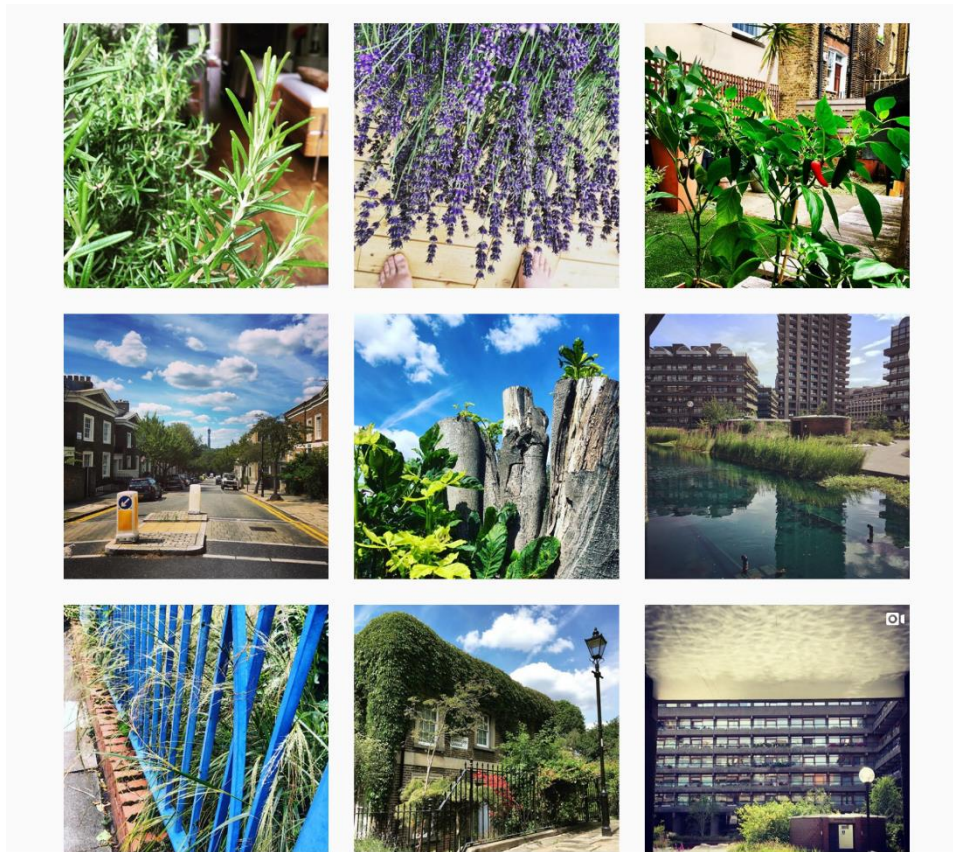


Fig. 12: Extract from the “city as forest” series – Instagram as photo-collage (Summer 2020).

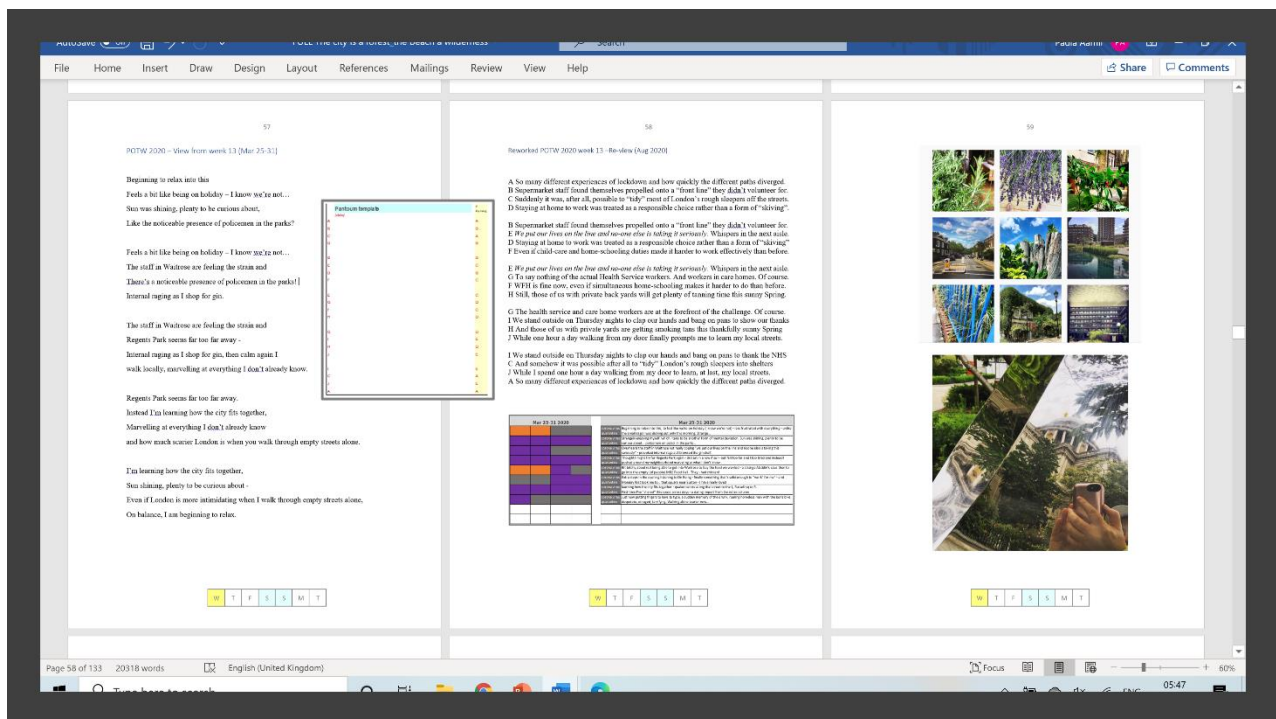


Fig. 13: Visual representation of the poetic charting cycle, from journal to pantoum (2020).

#### 4.0 [Poem] What is Good and Effective Poetry? A (Sort-of) Cento.

A good poem creates a recognisable world.

The self is a jumping-off point for discovery.  
The poem is truer if you're not bound by the truth.

Everything in the poem should belong there.  
A good poem speaks into a poetic tradition,  
Always has a "hinge" – an unexpected twist.

Good poets leave out the anecdotal.  
They know if there is a thread to follow.  
The turn in a poem comes from within the poet.

The poem takes off in a surprising direction,  
Rewards a reader by not wasting your time.  
Good poems are memorable, even years later.

Showing vulnerability is important.  
Say the thing without over-explaining it.  
Paint the moment through detailed observation.

Write only what you are willing to discover,  
Only lines that you could print on a T Shirt.  
Being accessible doesn't mean you're dumb.

Good and effective poetry means:  
Believe you can succeed and work hard.  
Be willing to be good. Whatever that means.

Poets contribute to the wellbeing of society.  
Poets contribute with depth, courage, passion.  
Poets contribute by writing as well as they can.

A poet-researcher writes every day.  
Reads deeply, reads with close attention.  
Imitates good writers. Whatever that means.

Poetry is – as everyday as doing your laundry.  
Poetry is – falling in love walking across a room.  
Poetry is – writing for all the great, dead poets.

A good poet must be willing to be good.  
Have good luck – and the ability to self-edit.

**Remember – poetry is always about death.**

## 4.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Four

### **Art as transcendental, art as functional**

The work I have been doing, and which I seek to describe and present in this paper sits, perhaps awkwardly, perhaps invitingly, somewhere in the middle ground between the functional and the transcendent. Figs. 12 and 13 represent this nicely, in my own eyes, at least.

Largely, I suspect, as a matter of temperament, I start pragmatically, following an impulse that I should “do *something*” and in the hope that once in motion, one thing will lead to another and I will happen – or stumble – across promising material, material that might reveal or lead to something I deem *meaningful*. I walk, to *do something* (and because walking holds the feeling, for me, that it could potentially have meaningful things to reveal).

Sometimes the results were at closer to “functional”; sometimes, I seemed to be *onto something* and the poetry – and/or the photographs – seemed to take on some sort of “transcendent” edge. I’m not necessarily suggesting, by the way, that only the poems with that “something extra” are worth attending to. This is back to Patricia Leavy’s prompt to consider what the art in question is “good for” (2020, p.32). Leavy also acknowledges that all researchers will not assess the answer to that question in the same way, noting that differences in background have an influence on the criteria that tend to be prioritised:

Based on disciplinary perspective, one may value artfulness over usefulness or usefulness over artfulness. Similarly, transparency may be valued more by someone with a scientific or social-scientific background, while some with more formal art training may find transparency counter to the spontaneous and magical elements of art and art making (Leavy, 2020, p.276).

In walking, I pay attention, sometimes focused, sometimes diffuse – my gaze is caught, I take a photo; my mind wanders, I reproduce scraps of what I was thinking about when I get home. As I look at the grid of nine images in fig. 12, selected from photographs taken, on whim, as I walked my daily steps, I am drawn in by the bright blues and greens, the suggestion of plant life bursting out in unexpected place. I no longer have any difficulty in imagining that the modern city is built on land that once sustained wide swathes of woodland. It's tempting to imagine that every time humans leave or make space here, plants return to cover it (but while that might be true of our climate in the recent past, it may no longer be true going forward...)

Later, I sift, looking for what I can best describe as the “pulse of energy” that tells me something worthwhile might be lurking; to assist with the sifting, I construct poems; to create some consistency, I adopt one particular format for a period of time (this choice is not “magical”, but “mundane”, assumed useful on a contingent basis, assumed likely at some stage to be replaced). Fig. 13 brings all the elements together, including a “thumbnail” version of the fig. 12 images. I am particularly pleased that, although as reproduced here, the words are too small to read (or, to read comfortably), it is possible to differentiate the two pantoums according to their layout.

The pantoum on the left spreads over the full page, and most individual lines are quite short. The pantoum on the middle page is arranged to look materially denser; partly this comes down to setting the lines more tightly, but it is also immediately evident from the pattern that the individual lines themselves are longer. I'm not sure that this is inherently significant, but I certainly had a different focus in the first round of writing (in which I focused on evoking as closely as possible the feeling of that week's walking experience/s) than in the second round (where I was taking advantage of writing after some time had passed to take a wider perspective so that these later poems often referenced the larger context of the pandemic or wandered into exploring memories and loose associations, not staying within the sensations of the walk itself).

## **How do we know?**

The (sort-of) cento in the opening section of the chapter is derived from pages 100-129 in Sandra Faulkner's textbook on poetic inquiry (2018), in a part of the book that looks at questions of poetic craft and poetic criteria. In these pages, Faulkner summarises a series of interviews with practising poets where she asks them to describe the qualities they value in poetry and to name some well-known poems they consider as exemplifying these qualities.

I fragmented the interview extracts included by Faulkner and formed these fragments into my own poem; a cento is a collage (or "patchwork garment") of a poem created by sampling from lines of poetry written by other poets; here, my material draws from reported conversations about poetry instead (hence, a sort-of cento, not strictly speaking a cento in the classic sense).

The two-column layout was initially pragmatic – I wanted to have the whole piece on a single page and because the piece is composed of a long series of short lines, this setting suited. Having laid out the page, I then found that I really liked the, "On the one hand /on the other hand" effect and the way the spacing separates individual stanzas into little "idea-lozenges".

I also like the breaking up of the opening and closing stanzas, which was purely to facilitate the single-page format but which, to me, breaks up the pace of the poem a little on the way in and the way out – and adds emphasis to the lone line at the end. This also, as it happens, spins the final thought in the poem off in an entirely different, sombre direction, thereby enabling the piece to meet one of the stated criteria for good poetry, by including a "turn" or "hinge", albeit the poem doesn't "turn" until right at the last possible moment.

Closing the poem with an assertion that the underlying exploration in poetry (regardless of the apparent theme of the poem) is our own mortality fits well with my wider preoccupations and was certainly the reason I retained this particular comment and "saved it" for the end.

## 4.2 Methodological choices

Methodological choices in a research or inquiry context speak to the rationale that underlies the use of a particular approach, procedure or technique (or set of approaches) as the means to investigate whatever is the focus of inquiry.

Methodological choices, in other words, are not innocent or apolitical, any more than is the choice of procedures for buying or selling things in an economy, or the choice of approach in selecting and validating political leaders. In inquiry, methodological choices are boundaried by the preferences of the inquirer, but they are also, perhaps more so, boundaried by what the prevailing research environment permits. This may seem evident, but bears repeating here.

As an inquirer, my own methodological preferences have been materially shaped (delineated) in the first instance by my commitment to working within an overall action research framing.

For me, this includes the urge to do work that in some way engages directly with the complexity and contradictions of my everyday work and life contexts, rather than operating “offline” with simplified models. These models are “not-realities” stripped of key features of everyday life but amenable to being researched, such as in the simplified non-person of *Homo economicus* (the tongue-in-cheek name for the assumed uber-rational profit-maximising individual used in modelling how financial markets are supposed to behave, but who doesn’t in fact exist).

Action research takes seriously the unpredictable, often confused, sometimes contradictory, qualities of work-happening-in-real-work contexts and life-happening-in-real-life-situations, but/and also refuses to accept that these contexts and situations are inevitable or immutable, wanting to know *what* is happening, *why* it happens, and *how* it could happen differently.

Methodologically, action research does this by drawing on techniques and procedures that foster *reflexivity* (a particular kind of pondering driven by commitment to change shaped from a deep understanding of the phenomena that are the subject of the researcher’s reflections).

For me, creating art (poetry, photographs, collage) is an obvious way to enact my commitment to the *extended epistemology* proposed by John Heron and Peter Reason (1997) and action research, as I undertake it, naturally orientates towards forms of artful expression to support reflective activity and to create the container for the alchemical processes of *reflexivity*. (Usually, I simply aim to spend time playing around with making and remaking an artful thing, allowing the actual subject matter to receive the lightest of my diffuse attention, off at the edge of whatever I believe I am focusing my attention on... this often creates room for insights.)

Action research, as I undertake it, is also methodologically *sceptical* – of claims to authority, of assumptions that because things (in a family, at work, in society, in our political institutions) currently operate within a particular set of logics, that this is how they *must* or *should* operate.

Taking a few examples from my own cultural background: Why should childcare be constituted around an assumed norm of nuclear family units, not least because individuals do not seem particularly excited about remaining within the nuclear family they apparently committed to? Why should some forms of work be configured as requiring a salary, but not all forms of work? Why does where you are born dictate nationality and why is this important? Who decides what laws come into being, and the extent of their application, and who decided who the decision-makers should be and what exactly makes one thing legally binding, but not another thing?

This scepticism also extends to the structure of a research project and the role of a researcher. I see little of the structure of a piece of research as innate or inevitable, which in principle implies that decisions about structure, procedures, techniques become instead a matter of choice and negotiation (and therefore influenced by the persona of the researcher). That said, a methodological choice can only be made to the extent the methodology in question can be both imagined and carried through, ideally, not as some one-off gesture which might illuminate briefly, firework-like, before fading into darkness, but as a sustainable ongoing set of practices.

This matters because the preferred, and permitted, ways of doing research – the available methodological choices – are deeply contested in modern Western economies. In our capitalist structures, centres for research legitimise methodologies they prefer not so much by making other approaches illegal, but by de-prioritising them for funding, or by mandating the use of assessment criteria that make more sense, and can more readily be met, for research operating within certain methodological constructs but which are not aligned, or less well aligned, to other methodologies, where it can be harder to demonstrate whether and how they are achieved.

Positivist and post-positivist methodologies, having with different (but compatible) levels of belief that it is possible to have “objective” research undertaken by “disinterested” researchers, tend to generate research that performs better against rigid assessment criteria and checklist performance reviews, as opposed to research outcomes generated through methodologies that operate from a constructionist, post-constructionist, or post-structuralist stance, or similar.

Likewise, quantitative methodologies (I do not take these to be inevitably positivist, though I do see natural alignment with a positivist mindset) would typically play out in these systems rather better than qualitative ones and much better than “experimental” arts-based approaches.

If this seems to paint a picture of action research and arts-based research as not well understood or well sponsored in mainstream locations where knowledge is created and disseminated (schools, universities, business schools, management consultancies, business strategy teams), yes, that is what I am doing. I perceive both communities as methodologically marginalised.

This is not necessarily entirely negative – I think there is a certain kind of energy at the edges, in the excitement of cross-disciplinary conversations, in the sharing of perspectives between individuals with different life-skills, different forms of experience, differing cultural heritage.

But being at the edge of things also creates some vulnerability, and vulnerability can be costly.



Deanna Fassett and John Warren write about the mundane acts of compromise that keep their work as critical communications educators within acceptable boundaries in their institutions, and the lurking concern that each act of compromise undercuts the scholarship they stand for.

Every time I chair a thesis to completion, I must attach a letter justifying the author's use of first-person voice. This, I'm told, is a formality... Revising this memo year after year is having an effect on me, though I can't say yet as to whether that effect is positive or negative, whether my growing frustration is positive or negative... In writing an "exception" for first-person voice – an exception for who the student is in the world, and her or his choice of research methods – I (re)affirm that this is somehow less scholarly than other, perhaps more statistical, work. In my (in)action, I fail to challenge: Why not make the people who mask their choices, who excise every last trace of themselves from their work, account for their decision? (Fassett & Warren, 2007, pp. 43-44).

This personal anecdote of balancing methodological choice against institutional preference portrays different methodologies as being essential in conflict or competition with each other. I think this *is* a common way to experience methodological differences, but does it need to be?

At a practical level, to the extent there are more academics than well-funded jobs, and if funding is channelled to or away from projects based on methodological construct, it doesn't seem that differences could be other than confrontational. However, I suspect that the issue runs deeper.

Advocates of mixed-methods argue for a pragmatic (or perhaps, capricious?) blending together of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, or rather, of elements from each approach. However, to me, it seems that the underlying ontological logics (about how the world "really" works, what is real and what is true) pull in different directions or at best have problem-solving relevance for very different problems – they are conceptually "oil and water" immiscible.

Partly, I take this position by considering my own work in this inquiry. Superficially, my activity appears to be framed as quantitative. I take  $x$  number of steps, understand the average stride-length to understand how much distance is covered, set a target, reach or exceed target on a repeating basis (in this case, daily) and continue for a specified number of observations.

However, a deeper look into my methodology reveals the numbers to be a form of set-dressing. The important thing about the numbers is not what the numbers *are* but what they *do* – they encourage me to maintain a regular habit of walking (a habit in which I then ironically undercut the measurements by refusing to use them to “optimise” my “performance”). My doggedly unhurried walking encourages a meditative disposition; the meditative state allows some observations in, keeps others out, and this is what I aim to capture through *poetic charting*. My method is qualitative and artful and does not use quantitative data in line with quantitative methodological principles – deliberately, because these are not my principles for this inquiry.

Some qualitative researchers argue instead for combining different *qualitative* methodologies, exploring the phenomenon from different perspectives sharing a common paradigm. Norman Denzin is said to call this “triangulation”, per Uwe Flick (2018); Laurel Richardson (writing her part of a shared chapter with Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, 2018) prefers “crystallisation”.

Both metaphors are somewhat useful but not fully persuasive. *Triangulation* is used e.g., in surveying as a way to establish the location of the “point” of a triangle from other known measurements (the length of one side of the triangle plus the size of the two angles at each end). However, the issue with qualitative methods is that they mostly *don't* generate exactly corroborating information; at best they provide complementary insights. Taking the metaphor to its logical conclusion, the observer is going to end up with a lopsided (failed) triangle.

Meanwhile *crystallisation* refers to the process by which a solid compound forms from a solution or gas and the metaphor offers some nice features for method.

Richardson's main point is that crystals hold distinct structures – they are not “blobby” or easy to collapse, although some structures are more stable than others. This is a nice defence against the assumption that qualitative work, because subjective, must be amorphous, indistinct, incapable of holding shape. She also notes that different “perspectives” are a natural feature of the crystalline structure, with its multiple surfaces and its ability to refract light different when viewed from different positions. This suggests how one “thing” can be seen in different ways.

However, at a certain point, the metaphor loses its explanatory power. Crystals are compounds of specific chemicals, so how does that work? All qualitative projects involving *xyz* method will have *abc* structure or outcome? No. The source chemistry implies limitations and a certain repeatability that I don't think describe qualitative work well at all; the image fails.

Metaphorical language aside, there is a simple point in Denzin's work, which does resonate, especially in relation to the many possible techniques and approaches within arts-based work.

This point is that rather than ruling techniques and approaches *out*, we should be looking to welcome multiple approaches to the work *in*. Not all processes are well suited to investigation all questions, but most techniques and methods may well prove useful for certain questions and contexts. Indeed, I consider that quantitative methodologies rightly should continue to hold sway, just not over the soft /human sciences. Possibly, our institutions prefer standardisation, which is easy to recognise, to green light and to assess, but Denzin has a wider vision, and one he argues we should actively push for.

I hope to chart a path of resistance. Because the qualitative research community is not a single entity, guidelines and criteria of quality need to be fitted to specific... genre-driven concerns... I favour flexible guidelines that are not driven by quantitative criteria. I seek a performative model of qualitative inquiry... We need a large tent, a tent large enough to make a home for all of us (Denzin, 2018, p. 840).

### 4.3 On method and the detail of my process/es

#### 4.3.1 Walking as encounter

Walking began as self-improvement effort. Then there was an experience that pointed *beyond*; the same pattern as in 4.1 above, where a functional thing at a point becomes *transcendent*.

During 2017, I gradually manoeuvred myself towards walking 10,000 steps a day, occasionally at first, and then regularly hitting two-three day bursts, then eventually, making the target daily.

I walked until familiarity became habit, obscuring my initial resistance to being told what to do, my lurking sense that in the dialogue about regular daily exercise, my culture seemed to have lost sight of the fact that while the concept might be sound, the actual literal target is a made-up number. Not magic, not more than a lure to get us into the routine of low-level activity.

Then, in December, somehow some plans changed, and I found myself spending several weeks at the Welsh coast. Our house is in a small village, approximately two miles away from the local town, which is most easily reached, on foot, along a long curve of sandy, pebbly shoreline.

Consequently, over a stretch of maybe ten days, without having consciously intended to do so, I walked on the beach, every single day, for between 90 minutes to two hours. And then – something happened. I started to feel as though the natural world around me was teeming with *presence*. The gulls, yes, and the shells, and the grasses and the fish and the crows. These creatures were physically present, playing their usual parts in the coastal eco-system, but I also started to imagine a pulsing, living presence lingering just behind the air and the clouds, just beyond the pale sunshine, the wind, the gusts of rain. It felt as though Nature had presence, as though a veil between worlds had become thin. It felt as though an invisible, living consciousness was gesturing towards me, not quite making contact – as if, should I be able to stand quietly enough, I might catch a voice whispering to me in the salt-tinged air.

I realise this sounds fanciful; it felt fanciful. It felt, in fact, not unlike the tiny glimpse towards Deep Time I had tried to represent in *The Edge of The World* (3.0, above), which was about a walk on that same beach, almost three years earlier. Similar, but more intense and profound. Yet the feeling of *encounter* was also oddly familiar, as though I should have expected it.

During 2015 and 2016, I spent some time studying the work of Adrian Harris on Ecosomatics (Harris, 2008, 2016), which is framed by the philosophical and psychotherapeutic theories of Eugene Gendlin (e.g., 1997) and his own philosophical /spiritual eco-paganism.

Harris centres his work around a phenomenon he calls *thinking with place*, which is a mode of interacting with and learning from a person's immediate external environment by slowing down and opening into a quality of calm, non-directed open attentiveness. His aim is to foster deep *relational* knowing between humans and the natural world from which we have emerged but which, at least in Western cultures, we often seem separated from and oblivious to.

One of Harris's aims was to explore ways to stimulate capacity for a sense of connectedness without having to make some grand gesture, some quest into whatever we take to be a "pristine wilderness environment"<sup>14</sup>, recognising that most people cannot realistically travel into remote wilderness (and leaving aside the extent to which it would even be desirable that they should).

Ecopsychologist Rob Greenway used to guide people on wilderness treks and after years of research concluded that "civilization is only four days deep" (Greenway, 1995) ...

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<sup>14</sup> The Scottish-American writer John Muir wrote passionately about America's astonishing and somewhat endangered "wildernesses" (e.g., 1911 / 2014), sparking the National Parks movement that saved considerable tracts of land from aggressive capitalist exploitation. However, Muir was slow in acknowledging that his beloved "wilderness" had also previously been home to Indigenous peoples who had lived largely non-extractive lives in that landscape but /and had been part of its overall ecology. In the UK context, in somewhat different circumstances, there is deep tension between pro-environmental writers who consider the hill farming in the Lake District National Park as ecological vandalism (George Monbiot, 2014) and those who consider traditional farming as redeemable and as essential to feeding the UK population in environmentally responsible ways (James Rebanks, 2015).

Something profound happens after about 72 hours... Rob found that almost everyone experienced “an increased sense of aliveness” and “feelings of expansion or reconnection”. Rob calls this phenomena “the wilderness effect” and it’s one of the best established theories in ecopsychology. I was hugely excited when I first read about the wilderness effect... [but] my excitement was short-lived [as] the effect Rob had observed happened on extended trips into the American wilderness...

Could it be that something like the wilderness effect [also] happens when we spend... quality time in urban nature? The short answer is yes; ecopsychologists generally agree that simply spending meaningful time communing with nature is beneficial ((Sylvie) Shaw, [2002 and] 2006) and the full-on wilderness effect is a difference of degree rather than a difference in kind ((Adrian)Harris, 2019, n.p.n.).

Harris’s technique (perhaps) resembles mindful and meditative practices, at least to the extent those practices also allow and welcome impressions and impulses received through the body. It is, I believe, similar to what Chris Seeley was trying to describe in the term *sensuous encountering* (e.g., in Seeley & (Peter) Reason, 2008, mentioned in 3.2.1 above), except that I think that Seeley’s sensuous encountering does not necessarily ask for (or desire) stillness in drawing explicitly on all senses to know the world. My own practice (evidently) also did not involve stillness but rather, walking as exercise – however, now in my mid-40s, I walked slowly, conserving energy, wary of provoking aches or strains, a disposition well-suited to the open, curious wondering attitude Harris advocated.

I came back from this period of winter beach walks encouraged that a walking practice could be one good means – though not, as I have said elsewhere, the only means or necessarily the best means in all cases, well as it has worked for me – to foster a process of reconnection with the natural world that I was hoping would be i) possible and ii) a viable alternative to the disconnecting, destructive, consumption-oriented logics of modern Western capitalism.

#### 4.3.2 Ironic analyses and artful re-presentations

From this strange, profound episode, I began to fashion the shape of an inquiry process. I determined that it should be possible to weave walking into a formal process of inquiry, as a method for paying attention in a structured way to the quality of experience and the effect it seemed to be having. Introducing a clear structure was useful pragmatically, to help me keep track, and psychologically, to reassure myself that I was keeping track. In creating a structure, I had a clear goal in mind, but allowed the exact shape to iterate and settle, depending on the parts of my whole experience I was most interested in tracking and on what I thought I would need for analysis (what analysis I thought I would be doing). This re-shaping continues; presently, I am on my third cycle of *poetic charting* journaling and each time, as I change the question I am “walking towards”, I make deliberate, minor, adjustments to the Excel template.

In preparing for that first walking cycle (2018-19) and proving that I had not listened closely enough to Adrian Harris’s observation (that spending meaningful time in any kind of nature is beneficial, that the wilderness effect impact is a difference of degree, not a difference in kind), I first presumed that “being away from everyday life” was a key element.

Even when I re-cut the premise of the inquiry to turn around walking specifically in context of my everyday life, not away from it (because my questions about how to live more sustainably apply to my everyday life most urgently, and because, over time, my inquiry has caused me to suspect the wastefulness and middle-class privilege involved in the “getting away from it all” mode of engaging with nature) – it took me a week or two to take seriously the centrality of the non-airbrushed urban everyday-ness of my East London home. The light green blocks in the middle of the right hand column of fig. 03 signify a walk in countryside; the grey-blue blocks before and after them signify gaps in the record – I was still walking my 10,000 steps but I didn’t “go for a walk” and so I didn’t make a journal record. I was into the third week before I committed to using my daily step data to drive my journaling (and to journal daily).

This was when I started using coloured blocks (such a key part of the Excel-as-art aesthetic!).

It occurred to me that it might be interesting to be able to see, as an informal “heat map” of concentrations and distributions of colour, the places where I actually walked in the ordinary course of life. This was a clear move away from the premise that I would only pay formal attention (by tracking and journaling) to steps that met a pre-judged standard for “going for a walk”, which initially meant, “somewhere pretty, outside everyday routines”.

I also wanted to “keep track” to find ways to “make visible” (as best I could) the detail of my thoughts and feelings for my “future self”. This seemed essential because I expected my own interpretations to continue to shift and as my understanding – of the phenomena, the context, the arguments – have deepened, these new perspectives seem to overwrite and obscure my recollection of how I once perceived things in the past.

This is the reason I have embraced an inquiry methodology that is reflexive, that accommodates cycling back round through materials and memories, in a repeating “re-view” process that helps to uncover how I am changing.

What, then, was the exact process of inquiry? On any given day, during a period of formal journaling, I walked, through a time and a place, and as I walked, the phenomena of life occurred, in me and around me, some of which I noticed, some of which I didn’t notice consciously, much of which I didn’t notice at all.

Later that day, or early the next day, I sat at my desk, with my laptop, internet browser off, and allowed my body to still and settle, taking a “listening” pose; what I was “listening” for was the return of impressions and memories from when I was (recently) walking. As things came to mind, I paid some light attention to them, and if they coalesced, I wrote them down, in fragmentary form, to fit into the 80 pixel by 1,200 pixel space in that part of the Excel template.



I liked writing in fragments; it fitted my awareness that these short recollections were indeed fragmentary, in contrast to the full totality of the original experience of being and of walking. My process was an attempt to use a version of the all-body meditative-style approach described by Adrian Harris, following Eugene Gendlin (who created a six-step method called *focusing*).

To sum up, the bodily or felt sense emerges from the implicit and can be made explicit though symbolization [for example, being translated through the medium of language]. I can best express this using the metaphor of the implicit as a huge ball of string and the felt sense as one strand that we can pick up, perhaps using *focusing*. As I pull on a strand (the felt sense) it slowly unravels (carries forward) the ball of string (the implicit) into my hands (the explicit). This is a radically different conception from that offered by the representationalism of dualistic epistemology. Instead of an internal representation of an external “reality”, we have a process of knowing that is grounded within our embodied experience of a specific situation (Harris, 2008, p.73).

I also liked this process of feeling back into the experience and discovering keepable fragments because it felt like the first part of a creative process, a sifting through towards the parts that seemed to have some intensity, some quality of life and truthfulness about them – the parts, in short, that would be worth retaining in a poem or as inspiration for some other artful expression.

Poetry, then, was an easy next step; I had already done the hard work of pulling my impressions “loose from their original contexts” which Terry Eagleton, the literary theorist, has described as a key characteristic of successful poetry (2007, p. 32). The process of creating poetry offered another opportunity to dwell in my material, looking for truthfulness, authenticity, and interest; it was also a chance to try to create something aesthetically appealing, at minimum, to me. Using poetry suited me, but I think other artful expressions could also be effective (as mentioned, I sometimes shift between artful modes, although I focus on poetry in this work).

Using structure as a frame for the poetry was also an obvious step, given I had chosen to host my journal in an Excel spreadsheet. The software makes it easy to create a template with consistent dimensions and to replicate a template, many times, with a predictable look and feel.

Admittedly, there are some “rules of the road” that must be respected, such as the maximum content a cell can contain without “bursting” the given proportions.

At one level, of course, structure matters. A long poem has space for context, explanations, diversions where a short poem, with no room for any context at all, offers a concentrated “hit” of pure experience, which when successful, is powerful, but inevitably also fleeting, elusive.

At another level, using a structure is merely functional, in reducing the number of different choices that have to be made during the progress of inquiry, which is helpful in freeing up cognitive bandwidth to focus on the content of the phenomenon or experience. In this, I see the use of structure to support a sustained period of inquiry as pragmatic and reassuring,

I need to keep remembering, though, that the structure is there to support, not as an end in itself. When the energy shifts towards taking actions that seem to be about preserving the structure for its own sake, I need to be able to ask whether I am experiencing one of those “mid-way-through” dips in energy or whether I am noticing that the structure has outlived its usefulness.

This is a dilemma for inquirers because the presenting data is similar but in the first of these scenarios, it is probably best to press on while in the second, it is time for a change. And I can change if I need to, because my structure is just a device to help me inquire, so when it begins to be constricting and “in the way”, I can abandon or adjust it.

This is a dilemma – it is also an opportunity. The process of tuning in to subtle shifts is part of (my) sustained inquiry practice and often a point where some fresh insight is about to become accessible for the first time (even if, sometimes, it is the insight that an idea has run its course).



## Chapter Five: The Process/es of *Poetic Charting*

We must learn to cooperate in [the world's] processes, and to yield to its limits.

But even more important, we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it.

We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe.

We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence.

For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.

Wendell Berry (2002) *The art of the commonplace*. Pg. 20, "A native hill" (edited by Norman Wirzba).



5.0 [Poem] What I write about when I write about walking: A pantoum.

*[Poetry as data analysis – a “look back” poem after 2 cycles of walking inquiry / 25 pantoums.]*

- A Another sunrise, another sunset – I am, indeed, most blessed.
- B Often the words speak of weariness, my soft body in mid-life.
- C Walking round the edges of my everyday life – to, from, between.
- D Tourists, the homeless, coots, urban foxes – all have “walk-on” parts.
- B More often than not, I tell of weariness, in this body, in mid-life.
- E Now ambling, now brisk; vacant, focused, anxious and at peace.
- D Tourists, the homeless, coots, urban foxes – all have “walk-on” parts.
- F These recur and recur, while my intimate others stay teasingly off-stage.
- E Now ambling, now brisk; vacant, focused, anxious and at peace.
- G Yellow light, grey skies, buffeting wind, rain. Rain again.
- F These recur and recur, while my intimate others stay teasingly off-stage.
- H Surprised how much I seem to walk for comfort, for recovery.
- G Yellow light, grey skies, buffeting wind, rain. Rain again.
- I Pondering how much (I assume) process makes form, forms experience.
- H Surprised how much I seem to walk for comfort, for recovery.
- J A year of walking and I start to “see” footsteps as squelching coloured blocks.
- I Pondering how strongly it seems that process makes form, forms experience.
- C Walking around the edges of my everyday life – to, from, between.
- J A year of walking and I start to “see” footsteps as squelching coloured blocks.
- A Another sunrise, another sunset. Another sunrise, another sunset.

## 5.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Five

### **Making activity habitual (making habit inhabit the body?)**

Figs. 14-16 and the poem in 5.0 are a very good “moment in time” representation from my first couple of cycles of inquiry, during which I first experimented with using my *poetic charting* process/es to convert walking data (i.e., everything noticed and unnoticed that was going on in and around me as I walked) into “capta”, the term used by Peter Checkland and Sue Holwell, (1998), for the constructed nature of the “facts” and “findings” we convert from *everything there is* into *the subset of things we notice, emphasise or understand ourselves to have perceived*. “Capta” is what gets recorded, and analysed, in my Excel-based charts and journals.

Fig. 14 is a screen-grab, deliberately not presented in a format where the detail can be read, but as you *can* see, the tables have been completed, beginning to end; fig. 16, for comparison, shows a view where a couple of the segments are still blank, a reminder of the repeating nature of the core activities, whereby a picture builds over time, as multiple small accumulations.

Interposed between these, fig. 15 was my first effort at conceptualising my material poetically.

The figure shows the source material which I drew on to make an abstract free-form verse composed of even-shorter fragments distilled from the journal notes – the visual has stood the test of time better than the writing did and in 5.0 I’ve chosen instead a later poem which attempts something similar and succeeds somewhat better. The source material in fig. 15 was a non-random selection (I consciously chose line items where I could see that they held some sort of meaning) but at the same time, I (also deliberately) introduced a few constraints to create a degree of patterning. For example, I divided my table into deciles, then from each decile, I selected three line items as source material for the poetic summary I wanted to compose.

In this case, having taken a sample, once, across the full set of walking journal charts, I was unsure what to do next; I paused my poetry-as-analysis until I came across the idea of using a pantoum structure, applied to smaller cuts from the walk-journals.

Using the pantoums meshed well with the orderly nature of the host Excel spreadsheet. It was also a format that allowed me to repeat and repeat (i.e., mimicking what I was already doing with the underlying walking activity) and refreshed how I engaged with my walk-chart data, by “switching on” a poetic /aesthetic attentiveness for relatively short, intense bursts of writing.

The poem in 5.0, “What I write about...” was the final pantoum from the first sequence. I set out to make it stand, to the best of my ability, as a summary of all the summaries, so essentially, a distillation of what it came to feel like, over the whole arc of activity, to walk, and notice, and write, and reflect, and then reflect again, poetically. My big surprise came when I tried to “lift” the poem “off the page”, in preparing to speak the poem as a performance – initially, I found the poem hard to say and couldn’t find its rhythm, even though it had seemed on the page as though it had one, when I read it through, silently. This was unexpected because I previously considered my poetry “performance friendly”; eventually I realised my earlier poems *began* as spoken pieces (and were written down later).

The breakthrough came when I took the poem outside for a walk, to rehearse – walking has its own certain kind of rhythm, formed by gait and breath and footfall, which meshed with the rhythm of the pantoum. This was a poem written from fragments of a walking journal and, furthermore, was written to express something of the experience of walking daily – surely no surprise if the cadence of the piece echoes the gait and pace and rhythm of a speaking walker!

### **Permeable boundaries and the ethical choice to avoid writing directly**

The structure for any data collection exercise imposes certain boundaries round the activity.



In *poetic charting* I worked within limits I had imposed through the format of the Excel journal, but also limits linked to the distance I planned to record using a formal charting structure, to the decision to use walking as the focus activity, and so on. In this poem, I made a deliberate effort to notice some of the ways these choices played through into the shape of the experience.

This where it dawned on me that the format pulls my attention away from what I once assumed was “what mattered” (thinking back to my early 30s, when I was desperate to get to the office as quickly as possible and to stay there as long as possible). Instead, I have been “walking round the edges... to, from, between”. This is not to say, however, that my walks are sealed off from the stuff of everyday life; if they were, it would indeed be hard to see how the activity could produce source material for poetry or help me build resilience or reflexive capacity.

When I look at fig. 15, I see references to sunny walks along the canal, but I also see notes in there – sometimes sketched so obliquely that no-one else would know how to decode them. To realising that airy promises I’d been given on the way into role were indeed nothing more than air. Elsewhere, to walking in a state of dissociated shock after a sharp and unexpected falling out. I keep the specifics off the page, but the sketches are to remind me that I processed these things as I walked, and I walked as I processed them. I lived them, and they shaped me. I am reminded of Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, on writing as a process of discovery, which, she tells us, she came to know in part through writing down stories of the older generation who had been present in her childhood and who were beginning to become frail and to die.

As for me, I struggle every day not to be unworthy of the older women in my hometown who keep teaching me ethics. It may seem that I am not writing about them in this essay, but I assure you they are speaking to you in every word you read... I trust writing and know that one morning I will awaken and write towards these women in a way I cannot yet imagine (Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, in Richardson & St. Pierre, 2018, p. 832).

## 5.2 Poetry & climate change: Doing the work

### 5.2.1. “Poetry & climate change” as “extreme shorthand”.

I have started using the phrase *poetry and climate change* to summarise the central thread of my inquiry.

*Climate change* is my primary “problem statement” (although I have learned that I cannot consider climate change without also considering the deeply unjust social, political and economic structures that have created and preserved the conditions for climate crisis).

*Poetry* initially interested me as a form that brought me comfort and connection; I like poetry. Then, as I paid attention to what poetry *does*, I discovered certain researchers, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, who use poetry *as an inquiry method*. This encouraged me to incorporate poetry into my own work, learning more through exploring in my own right.

I now understand poetry as well suited to inquiry into the natural world. Poetry facilitates attentiveness to sensuous everyday detail in the external environment, stimulates emotional responses with a certain quality of “rootedness” and has good capacity to allow for representing the ambiguities, contradictions, complexity and layered-ness encountered in nature and in life.

In artful action – and in related art-based research projects – attentiveness to the subjective, committed personal experience is fundamental and so artful inquiry often begins with first person work, which can then be adapted to address communal concerns. Inquiring together is important because it can stimulate an experience of connection that in turn fosters participation.

As the environmentalist, essayist and traditional-methods farmer Wendell Berry tells us, cultivating a participatory mindset matters to the topic of climate breakdown given the extent to which the present climate crisis has been brought about by the single-minded pursuit of what we believed to be good for us regardless of what harms or benefits the wider environment:

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world... Now, perhaps very close to too late, our great error has become clear... We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and to learn what is good for it (Berry & Wirzba, 2002, p. 20).

It is one thing to come to accept that climate breakdown threatens but knowing how to act in response is not straightforward. For one thing, it is not enough to invent clever new technologies since humans will also have to use them, and equitably; for another, the fear (or grief or rage) provoked could seem overwhelming, the scale of the challenge, insurmountable. This crisis requires both the application of our scientific ingenuity *and* that we build our individual and collective psychological, emotional and moral readiness. Whilst not replacing technological innovations or political reform, there is a role for those artful actions that locate and re-connect us, growing our capacity to problem-solve from a more participatory standpoint.

In this section I describe the method I have developed to support my own small scale, first person, artful /poetic exploration of navigating the choices to be made that I have woken up to the understanding that I am living – working, planning, experiencing, aging, relating, exploring, questioning – in an age of rapidly manifesting climate breakdown.

I term my processes *poetic charting* and I share my approach in some detail as a contribution to the academy: by making my method transparent and clear to follow, *poetic charting* becomes available to be adapted for other contexts and inquiries. Although my own inquiry has been primarily first person work, per Judi Marshall (1999, 2016), the same processes can also be used to support group-based inquiry. *Poetic charting* allows for large volumes of data “fragments” to be accumulated over time in a structure that allows for easy tracking /navigation and for flexible re-presentation in charts, diagrams or translated into poetry.

### 5.2.2 “Stepping into” my *poetic charting* process

This small scale, first person, artful/poetic exploration was conceived purely as a walking inquiry, exploring the effects (on myself) of slowing down and spending more time outside.

Initially, I proposed a “grand gestures” style of walk, in which I would hike the new national footpath along the whole coast of Wales (opened in 2012, timed to align with the London Olympics and which, combined with Offa’s Dyke Path, circumnavigates the entire country).

This seemed appealing in part because my mother’s family had settled in Pembrokeshire and we have a family property that overlooks part of the coastal path that is now incorporated into the new national footpath. I could literally walk out of our front door, turn left or right and keep walking until I had circled the country and arrived back at our door from the other direction.

In theory, there was an extra pull or “charge” round this because it happens that my maternal grandfather was a local town planner in Pembrokeshire for 30 years, from the 1940s to the early 1970s; that was the reason the family moved here. A heavy smoker, he died of lung cancer shortly after his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, when I was a baby, and having, not long before his death, received an OBE for his work in setting up the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

However, in the end, this seemed too dislocated from the rhythms of everyday life. I wasn’t sure how I would translate whatever I experienced in a “bubble” of full-time walking back into my workplace, my neighbourhood, the spaces I inhabit and where I am looking for climate-conscious change to be enacted. I chose, instead, to concentrate on daily scraps of time, framed around the relatively common cultural habit of trying to walk “10,000 steps a day”. I imagined that even in the built and semi-built urban environments that constitute my everyday outdoor landscapes, that by paying close attention to the experience of time spent outside, I might reawaken a sense of myself as coming from and belonging within the more-than-human world.

To underpin the inquiry, I drew on a set of simple, accessible activities which, *in the way I practise them*, could be described as “embodied” and /or “artful”. My interest in approaching the inquiry in this way was that I hoped to explore the assertion that “embodied” and “artful” practices pull awareness towards “the present time and place”. The idea is that such approaches offer an enriching awareness of the interactions between a human-being-in-a-body and the encompassing environment and as such would be particularly useful in the attempt to notice, articulate and portray the quality of felt, lived experience through the walking inquiry process.

Below I list five types of activity that played a material role in my inquiry process during what became two initial cycles of inquiry, Oct 2018 to May 2019, and July 2019 to Dec 2019. Following each activity, I briefly describe its key characteristics in context of this inquiry.

1. Walking – *Characterised by the regular, slow placing of foot before foot, more focused on moving my body through space than on seeking to cover ground or reach a destination;*
2. Journal writing – *Shaped initially by the pragmatic wish to maintain even-sized cells in my Excel-sheet walking journal, I used a “compressed writing” style, each journal entry being limited to short and often fragmentary snippets, 25-35 words long;*
3. Poetry – *After I had been walking and journaling for c. four weeks, I found that I moved naturally into writing poetry; as the inquiry progressed, I found that my “compressed journal” snippets themselves became more noticeably, overtly poetic in their aesthetic;*
4. Photography – *Use of photography in this inquiry was an expansion of my existing practice of using my social media presence to house an ongoing informal photo-journal; and*
5. Collage – *Not being formally trained in any of the fine arts, I was astonished to find collage-work to be an intuitively approachable medium for me, well suited to expressing an eclectic and cluttered sensibility and effective for exploring complexity, ambiguity, juxtaposition...*

### 5.2.3 The choice of walking as a primary mode of data generation

I chose to use walking as the primary means of generating data because it provided a simple way to spend time outside, moving relatively slowly through my external environments.

I chose to use walking because it integrates easily into my everyday life with little need for adjustment. I can walk to, or towards work, on a weekday, and for leisure and exercise around my local neighbourhood at the weekend, comparing the qualities of these more-or-less focused, more-or-less purposed journeys.

I chose to use walking because I have walked regularly since childhood and it has a familiarity and an immediacy and an accessibility that is comforting, reassuring, soothing, undemanding.

I chose to use walking because I don't need to concentrate hard to do it, because it is realistic to expect myself to walk regularly and in doing so, to amass a large volume of simple observations in an efficient, low impact manner within the framework of ordinary life.

My rules were:

i) I would walk a pre-set minimum number of steps per day, which in turn meant that all days of the week, in all weathers, whatever else was going on, I was sneaking in a regular minimum amount of walking – and then noting some basic information and journaling about my experience of the walk on that particular day. I chose 10,000 steps /day since that is an already established, familiar target in my cultural context (and needed little explanation therefore). Other could choose to set the daily target higher or lower – as long as there's some consistency.

ii) My steps and distance calculations would be taken roughly – I would not try to be precise. However, I *would* use the same approach and measuring device throughout the walking cycle so that any distortion or mismeasurement was consistent through the course of inquiry. To this end, I measured steps using a walking app on my iPhone rather than, say, on a wrist device.

iii) I didn't have to walk the target in one go and generally found that I generated better quality observations when I walked more frequently and over shorter distances, which honestly, I think partly reflected that over the shorter distances, I wasn't as tired. That said, I also found that I needed to be walking for long enough to "notice" I was walking. The compromise was aiming for a couple of "chunks" of walking each day. Roughly speaking I tended to try to walk at least 2,500 steps as a single session, two-three times a day and, linked to this, I also chose to classify walks by type and then record the "walk-type" by rounding roughly to the nearest 2,500 steps.

The categories for the types of walking were a mixture of terrain descriptions and descriptions of the purpose of the walk, mostly because the vast majority of my walking was in very similar urban environments, so I needed another classification in order to differentiate.

For simplicity, although I recorded actual steps walked each day, in the coded section of my journal, I rounded down to the nearest 2,500 steps – this felt it compensated, to an extent, for the "nothingy" steps e.g., between desk and printer that got recorded unconsciously, unintentionally, if I happened to be carrying my device with me at the time.

In seeking to journal about my experiences, I adopted a short-form journal template, which became integral, thus I have come to understand the activity as a "walking-and-logging- and-compressed-writing" inquiry, which together I have termed *poetic charting*.

One of the most significant features of my journal notes was they were deliberately fragmentary in nature, which quickly led to the fragments taking on an abstract and ultimately a poetic-type quality, led by the compressed format. The Excel template I designed as my walking log had limited space for writing which meant that I learned to translate a day's walking experience into a short summary (25-35 words). Thus, the happenstance of the shape and size of the field in the template drove an entire creative exploration, initially, by accident.

The “rules” for the writing were i) I would about each day’s walk on the same day, or occasionally, on the morning of the day after walking and before walking again; ii) the writing should not attempt to be a “complete” account but should convey something vivid or attention-grabbing and “felt true”; and iii) people I know would only appear identifiably in the journal entry (beyond noting the mere fact of their presence when we walked together) where they were aware of the walking inquiry and explicitly agreed to be included – during these walks, only my partner fully met the criteria for representation and even he appears infrequently.

#### 5.2.4 Incorporating poetic analysis

In generating data, then, I drew on a range of creative modes of expression, including writing some poetry which directly formed part of the source data, and writing fragmentary journal entries, in a “compressed writing” format, which became increasingly poetic over the months of walking, as I paid more attention to the impact of the poetic across the arc of my inquiry.

When it came to the analysis of my data, other artful modes fell away, and poetic inquiry has become the primary mode for seeking to identify actionable insights from the source material. Writing in 1997, Corinne Glesne gave credit to Laurel Richardson for inspiring her to explore integrating “experimental writing” within her research methodology; following Richardson, Glesne called her experiment with poetic analysis “poetic transcription” and explained:

In my experimental writing, I join others who through a variety of forms... are *blurring accepted boundaries* between art and science, exploring the shapes of inter-subjectivity, and examining issues of power and authority, including that of researcher/author (Glesne, 1997, pp. 203-204, emphasis added).

Although “poetic transcription” is not the main term that has been adopted for research-incorporating-poetry, I appreciate Glesne’s description for her work because it locates it as connected to and extending traditional social science interview methods (e.g., transcription).



Glesne builds on identifiable social science methodology and then at a certain point in her analysis, she makes a “poetic turn”. Effectively, she did not *set out* to make a turn towards the poetic, but the poetic was “at hand” through work she was doing in other parts of her life and part way through working with Dona Juana’s interview material, she saw the opportunity.

For 14 years, I had been working for a master’s, a doctorate, and then tenure. Other needs, long ignored or put on hold, suddenly had an opening and clamoured for attention... By the following year when I did the interviews with Dona Juana, I had taken several poetry-writing workshops and classes... Although I did not plan to experiment with poetic transcription when I interviewed Dona Juana, upon receiving the transcripts, I could not ignore the opportunity. *I was so immersed in poetry at the time that the poetic impulse took over* (Glesne, 1997, p.205, emphasis added).

#### 5.2.5 Playing with poetic structure/s

During a few wintery weeks, tucked away in the warm kitchen of my cold Pembrokeshire house in the dark quiet of winter, I fermented 12 months of journal fragments (two rounds of walking 2018-2019) into data extracts of between 13-23 rows in length. These extracts became source text for a series of 26 “found poems” structured as free verse pantoums. I wanted to fashion walk-data into poetry as a form of immersion into the minutiae of the data; I wanted to use a formal structure, essentially as a writing exercise, part of the commitment to developing my poetic craft; and one extra benefit of a templated structure is that it can be maintained in Excel.

I was introduced to the pantoum in Faulkner (2019), as “a Malay poetic form that *capitalises on repetition* through the use of quatrains... it is a slow form because a reader takes four steps forward and two steps back.” (2019, p.75, emphasis added.) The original “pantun” (Katherine Sim, 1987) was a short, recited rhyming form, often with a love theme. The “borrowed” Western form (Ron Padgett, 1987, p.133) can be of varying lengths, and often does not rhyme.

Where rhyme is used, this follows an ABAB rhyming pattern; however, none of my own pantoums rhyme. The distinctive feature of the pantoum is that the second and fourth line of each quatrain repeat as the first and third line of the following stanza: in the final stanza, the so-far unrepeated lines from the very first stanza reappear. In the original format, the repetition was supposed to be exact, with differing shades of meaning arising from the shift in context and possibly by exploiting multiple meanings of the same word. In modern pantoums, it is reasonably common to play with changing some of the words when a repeated line recurs.

I created a 5-stanza version, 20 lines in total, which therefore meant using 10 original lines and 10 repetitions or echoes. I treated the walking journals more-or-less as found material, as if written by someone else, but being conscious that I *am* the original author of the text I allowed myself some discretion to adjust the found text, though I maintained the rule that the text had to appear in the original chronological order, when looking only at the 10 “first appearances”. By contrast, I had no consistent rule for which lines had to be dropped or retained, bearing in mind that all the source data contained more rows than I needed to create 10 lines.

After completing my “found poem” series, I wrote an original piece, separate from but infused by that earlier writing and reflecting on five themes I saw as recurring across my walk-data. These were: i) the natural world or weather; ii) my own physical or mental health; iii) my life, work life or relationships; iv) encounters with “other others” (human and non-human); and v) observations on process.

This found poem, respectively titled as “What I write about when I write about walking” or simply labelled as “Walk review”, appears at the start of this section and, in template format, in the images provided below. The title echoes Haruki Murakami on his running practice (Murakami, 2009), which in turn, he modelled, with permission, on the title of a collection of short stories by Raymond Carver (Carver, 2009).

### 5.2.6 Offering a method for poetic inquiry for others

*Papers arranged on the floor, framing a conversation. A group in dialogue about our (human) place in Nature. My photos printed and spread in spiral patterns around us as we speak. Harvested from my iPhone to accompany today's session. Two years' worth of inquiry, July 2017 – July 2019. Chosen to evoke the tone and feeling of the seven-month walking-and-compressed-writing inquiry that is my topic today.*

I have told and shown how my initial project was framed as individual, first person, activity.

Over the course of this activity, I have worked with what is at heart a simple set of templates and processes that can be set up around a practice of daily activity as a way to record snatches of data, repeatedly, over a specified period of time, and which can then form the basis for reflection and re-presentation artistically, working alone or in facilitated workshop groups.

I have named my process *poetic charting* and the basic elements consist of: i) an outline for a walking inquiry journal; ii) an overview diagram which provides a visual summary of terrain walked in / walk type; and iii) periodic extracts, which are sliced segment by segment into a visual and written element, thus for each data period containing the walk “type” colours (using a personal, consistent scheme) and the associated compressed writing. These extracts can also be lined up against one another and this was my original motivation in creating them i.e. I wanted to have an accessible means for comparing my journal notes from any one point in each walking inquiry, across both cycles of inquiry forming my reference data.

The templates and my “rules of engagement” can now be available for others who might want to walk reflectively or turn an activity journal into poetry as poetic analysis. In each inquiry cycle, I iterated a couple of additional templates; the initial set-up involved effort, trawling back through existing data to populate them, but once established, each template proved easy to complete and maintain as part of the daily pattern of reflecting and writing.

I explained the addition of a five-stanza pantoum and created an overview structure for a set of pantoums linked to a specific walking inquiry. The pantoum template was invaluable when I was first learning the twisting pattern of repetitions and also provides a stable, accessible format for maintaining a copy of the finished pantoum against the source data (see e.g., fig. 49).

In this work, the flexibility of Excel for holding non-numeric data has been a real joy – I’ve hardly used the programme’s number crunching capabilities, but I have really appreciated its ability to hold large amounts of data accessibly, to make this data searchable, and present tables and charts in a visually consistent, pleasing (to me) format. Through this work, I discovered that Excel is also wonderful as a vehicle for creating templates and then deploying these, time and again, for different cycles of inquiry, for the same questions repeated over different periods of time, and so on. Occasionally, I even use it for deriving some sort of numeric information from my data, for example, how long is my average stride length, or how much variation was there in the distance I covered for a particular number of days, over the whole cycle, or part of it or conversely how many days did it take to walk a certain distance?

#### 5.2.7 Workshopping the work

To create a workshop from these materials, I have used a simple structure that opens with a presentation of my own experiences, before inviting participants to write a couple of pieces of compressed writing and then share from these pieces, where people are happy to do so, either simply by reading them to each other or by using them as the basis to create poems together.

To support the group activity, participants could be asked to bring source journals with them or, equally, the workshop could involve generating some example material. One option, which I used on several times is to lead participants through a form of guided reflection where I invite members of the group to imagine being outside in nature, perhaps on a walk.

This of course means working with a much thinner slice of data, and with writing not directly generated from actual daily life, but with the advantage that participants can be guided (safely) through a first experience of how to create “compressed writing” journal fragments.

For me, the activity has been walking but my instinct is that the method would work for other forms of action reflection (running, knitting, meditation?) The method should be capable of supporting any regular practice that is contemplative and reconnecting though I do think moving the body helps. Does it work to simply meditate (no movement, no interaction in an actual outdoors environment) and then record your thoughts? Effectively that would mean only working with the compressed writing side of the inquiry loop – there might well be value in framing an inquiry in this way, but I can only say that this is not an approach I have tested.

For poetry workshops specifically, I’ve imagined a way of writing pantoums that draws on the “exquisite corpse” game i.e., where each person writes a portion of the poem and then passes it to someone else who completes the next part. In a five-stanza pantoum, there are 10 unique lines, creating 20 lines in total and it would suit “playing” in groups of say four or five people.

Each person would write the full first stanza (either through an assisted writing exercise or by drawing on pre-written material) and once written, would transpose the two repeating lines into the correct part of the second stanza. Fold the page so only the partially completed second stanza is on view and pass this to the next person in the circle to complete and pass on in turn.

After the initial effort, each person only has to contribute two new lines, copying these – or adapting them – as the recurring lines for the next stanza. For the final stanza, the poem is unfolded and the two lines from the first stanza that have not yet been used are inserted. Voila.

### 5.3 Poetic charting: Templates and visuals

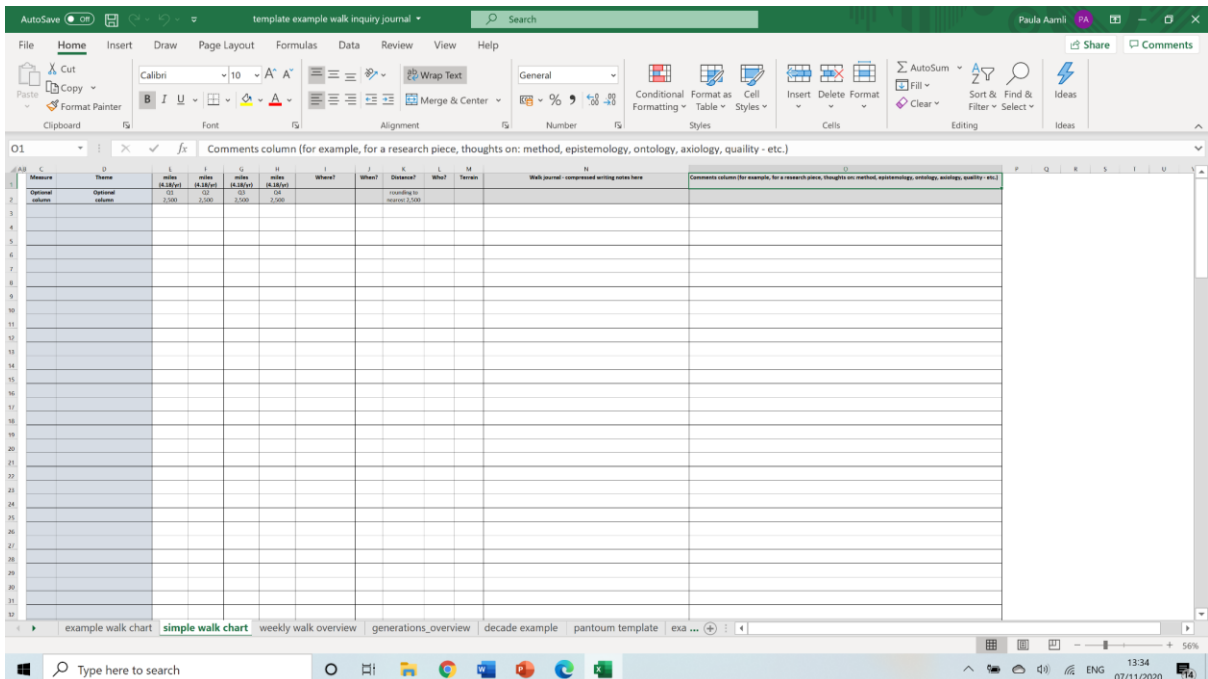


Fig. 17: Template for a walking inquiry using a “compressed writing style” journal (2018).

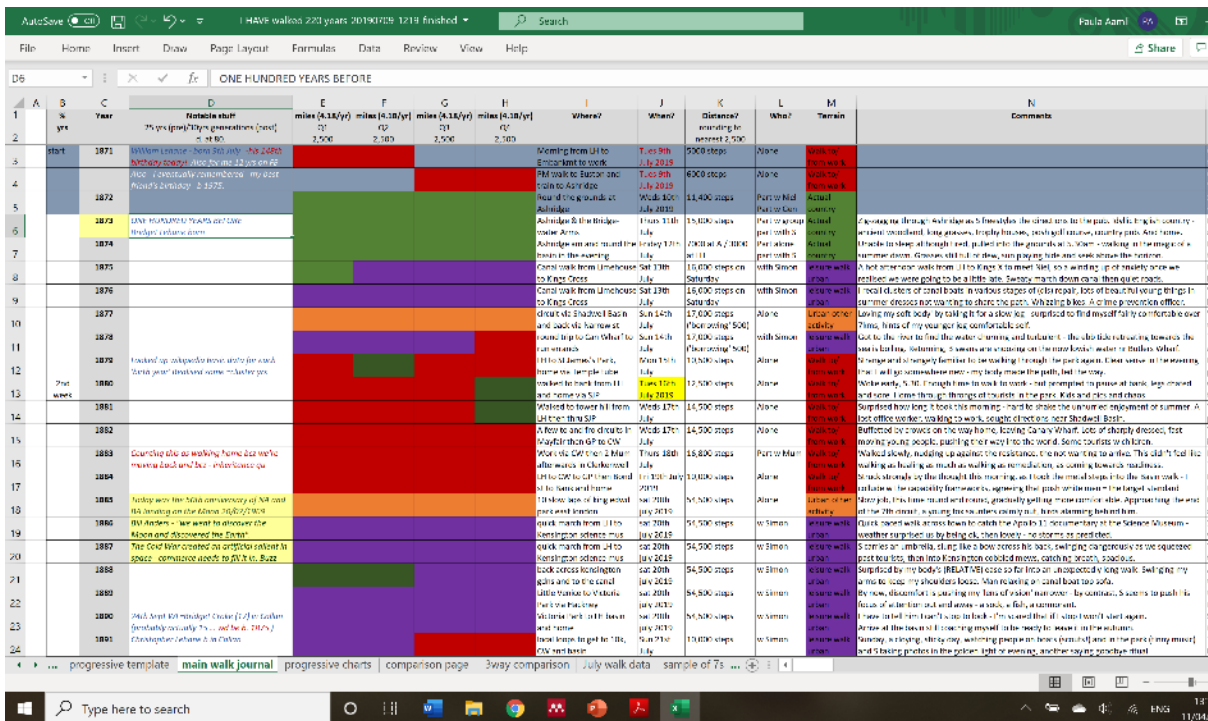


Fig. 18: Example walking inquiry with “compressed” journal entries, inquiry #2 (2019).



Fig. 19: Example completed walk overview (Oct 2018 – May 2019).





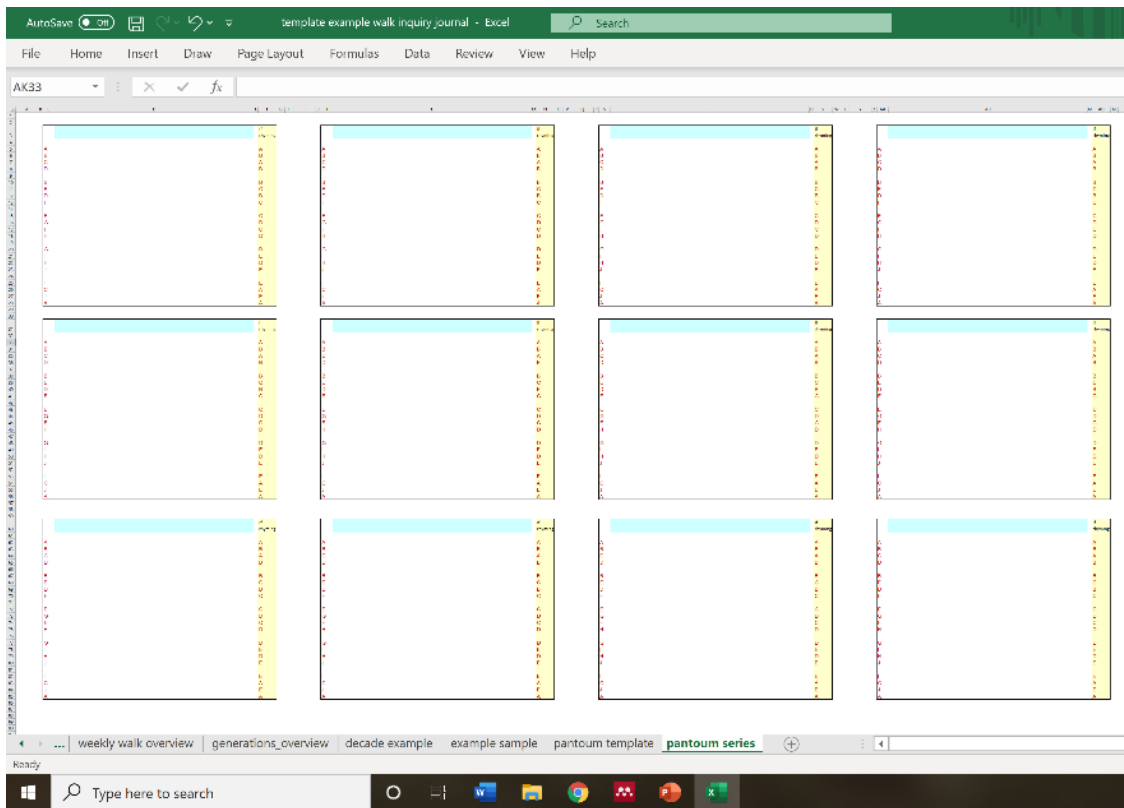


Fig. 21: Template for a 5-stanza pantoum series, overview page (2019).

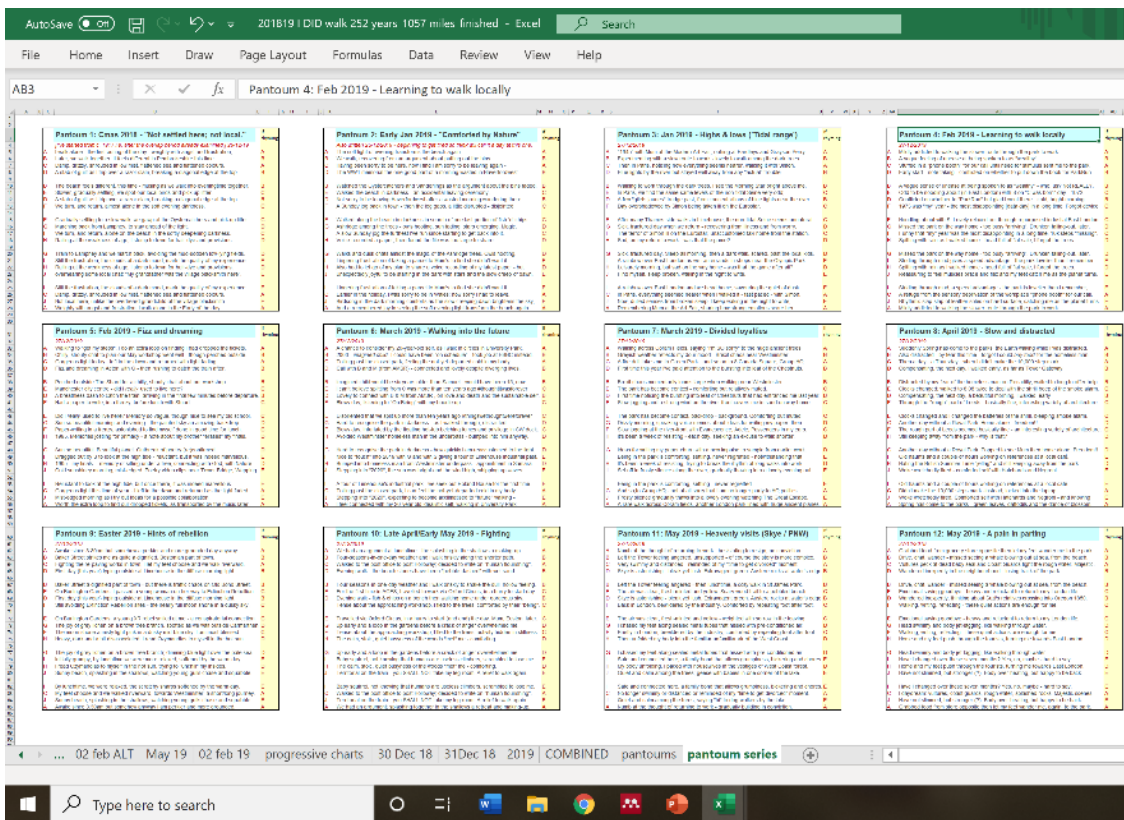


Fig. 22: Example pantoum series, overview, walking inquiry #1 (Oct 2018 – May 2019).

<i>Repetition</i>	<b>SUMMARY PANTOUM – WALK REVIEW</b>	<i>If rhyming</i>
	<i>29/12/2019</i>	
<i>A</i>	Another sunrise, another sunset. I am indeed most blessed.	<i>A</i>
<i>B</i>	Often the words speak of weariness – my soft body in mid-life.	<i>B</i>
<i>C</i>	Walking round the edges of my everyday life – to, from, between.	<i>A</i>
<i>D</i>	Tourists, the homeless, coots, urban foxes – all have “walk-on” parts.	<i>B</i>
<i>B</i>	More often than not, I tell of weariness, in this soft body, in mid-life.	<i>B</i>
<i>E</i>	Now ambling, now brisk; vacant, focused, anxious and at peace.	<i>C</i>
<i>D</i>	Tourists, the homeless, coots, urban foxes – all have “walk-on” parts.	<i>B</i>
<i>F</i>	These recur and recur, while my intimate others stay teasingly off-stage.	<i>C</i>
<i>E</i>	Now ambling, now brisk; vacant, focused, anxious and at peace.	<i>C</i>
<i>G</i>	Yellow light, grey skies, buffeting wind, rain. Rain again.	<i>D</i>
<i>F</i>	These recur and recur, while my intimate others stay teasingly off-stage.	<i>C</i>
<i>H</i>	Surprised how much I seem to walk for comfort, for recovery.	<i>D</i>
<i>G</i>	Yellow light, grey skies, buffeting wind, rain. Rain again.	<i>D</i>
<i>I</i>	Pondering how much (I assume) process makes form, forms experience.	<i>E</i>
<i>H</i>	Surprised how much I seem to walk for comfort, for recovery.	<i>D</i>
<i>J</i>	A year of walking and I start to “see” footsteps as squelching coloured blocks.	<i>E</i>
<i>I</i>	Pondering how strongly it seems that process makes form, forms experience.	<i>E</i>
<i>C</i>	Walking around the edges of my everyday life – to, from, between.	<i>A</i>
<i>J</i>	A year of walking and I start to “see” footsteps as squelching coloured blocks.	<i>E</i>
<i>A</i>	Another sunrise, another sunset. Another sunrise, another sunset.	<i>A</i>

<b>Colour coding in the table above is as follows:</b>		
Topic 1	Nature/ the “natural world”.	Green
Topic 2	My own body / health / mood.	Peach
Topic 3	My own life and work life and close relationships (“intimate others”).	Grey
Topic 4	“Other others” – human and non-human.	Blue
Topic 5	Reflecting on the process and method of poetic inquiry.	Yellow

Fig. 23: Example pantoum with structure and inter-woven themes highlighted (2020).

## 5.4 A basis for evaluating artful research (and this work)

### 5.4.1 What are the qualities of “good work” in poetic inquiry in particular?

If researchers are going to use poetry of all types in their work, we need a critical discussion about how we understand poetry, the process of using poetry as research, and how it informs our work and scholarly endeavours.

[Also] researchers interested in poetry must be aware of poetic traditions and techniques and study the craft as they study research writing (Faulkner, 2019, p. xii).

Faulkner’s text offers a set of characteristics of *good poetic inquiry* – that the work should derive from “meticulous observation” of the world as it actually appears to be (albeit the extent to which this is signalled explicitly in the finished piece will vary); that it should benefit from skilful self-reflection on the part of the writer; and that the writer’s subjective individual perspective should be presented, in some way. one related to the attempt to produce “research” and the other to the attempt to write “poetry”.

Pointing out that these qualities are present in (good) mainstream social science research, Faulkner indicates by association that poetic inquiry can be deemed suitable for research whilst the final point in the extract seeks to remind aspiring poetic inquirers that in addition to developing the skills required to undertake good quality research, they should also educate themselves on how to create good-enough poetry, that not everything that flows from the pen automatically meets the standards and structures of the poetic tradition.

I do not consider it inevitable that poetic inquiry *must* either be good research but bad poetry or vice versa but equally these are different kinds of writing and it is naïve, as Faulkner argues, to think that we have to *learn* to research well but will write great poetry *instinctively*.

The requirements of good research and the requirements of good poetry need to be learned and practised and the tension between them managed *for good poetic inquiry*.

To this extent I now have more sympathy with the position that researchers who wish to use poetry in their research must study poetry alongside the study of research methods.

Certainly I have more time for this view than so when I first encountered, via Carl Leggo (2008), Jane Piirto's 2002 article, tellingly sub-titled, "Writing inferior poems as qualitative research" and which in turn inspired a short poem by me, which I'm fairly confident wouldn't meet Piirto's benchmarks, entitled, "Jane Piirto is severe" (2018a – if you follow the link in the references section, you will find your way to my rather arch voice recording of this piece).

I'm still rather triggered by Piirto's suggestion that only accredited published poets can *really* be allowed to write poetry. Entirely coincidentally, no doubt, this is a criterion that Piirto herself meets and (not linked to my frustration of course) – I don't.

Not that I would suggest that it's a bad idea *per se* to want to push for quality in all aspects of our work as researchers, including in our creative work. However, to me, one of the fundamental appeals of using creative and artful forms to explore what we (can) know *is their potential for accessibility and for broad appeal*.

It strikes me as profoundly at odds with the democratising project (of action research, at least) in relation to human knowing, to swap one kind of gatekeeper (say, the exam board or the editors of academic journals) with another.

I think it comes down to the skill of the poet-researcher to find appropriate balance in their work, resisting the tendency to spin towards one or the other.

If the work is too *research-y* (too meticulous, too concerned with the flagging and foregrounding of the researcher's subjective presence), it could make for very dull poetry.

Equally, the writer may be significantly more skilled at writing research than at writing poetry and so it may be that the poem is not dull, simply, that it's a *bad poem*, technically speaking (and there's the distinct possibility that the academic gatekeepers may also not feel as confident in challenging the quality of the poem as they are in challenging the accompanying research). At the same time (a submerged point in the opening quote, but I think the implication is there) – a poem could be technically competent without containing anything substantive from a research perspective, or indeed, without, in certain conditions, *being considered a poem*.

I came across this idea first in an interview between the Irish poet Michael Longley and Krista Tippett, for her podcast series, *On Being* (2016). At one point, Longley mentions that he went for 10 years without writing a poem and then wrote three over the course of a day (see Transcript, 2016 para 65, 71, 85).

From the context it was clear that Longley didn't mean that he had forgotten the "rules" for writing poetry but that he didn't have anything meaningful to say in poetic form – until, eventually, suddenly, he found that he did. I was really taken by this idea that a piece of writing could have the correct *form* to be identified as a poem – even, that it could meet the kind of formal poetic criteria that modern freeform poetry generally eschews – and yet not, at heart, qualify as a poem in the eyes of the writer.

I found myself wondering whether *an audience*, presented with something shaped like a sonnet or a haiku, would be capable of suspecting that the piece in question wasn't *authentically poetry*. I suspect that we couldn't. Maybe at best we would just find ourselves saying that the poem in question *did nothing for us* – which might equally be true of a masterpiece that we aren't ready (or willing) to "hear"?

#### 5.4.2 How does “good” poetry “work” more generally?

If we assume that a writer of Poetic Inquiry has a baseline technical competence (in respect of both dimensions, the writing of research and the writing of poetry) and has successfully attended to the detail of their topic, and reflected skilfully upon it, and expressed their own subjective position relative to their material – what could we expect to experience, as audience of that “good quality” poetic inquiry work?

In her handbook on poetic inquiry as method, Faulkner references Jay Parini’s book, *Why Poetry Matters* (2008), for example on p. 15 where she quotes Parini on poetry as being a kind of language that lends immediacy to our described experiences, meaning that poems take on independent existence beyond the life of the poet (2008, p. 25).

Literary theorist Terry Eagleton, in *How to Read a Poem* (2007), describes a similar phenomenon, saying that poems have the ability to “[come] loose from their original contexts [which] is to say that ambiguity is somehow built into them.” (p. 32).

Parini also writes that

Poetry matters because it *serves up the substance of our lives*, and becomes more than a mere articulation of experience, although that articulation alone is part of its usefulness. Mainly it allows us to *see ourselves freshly and keenly*.

It makes the invisible world visible. It transforms our politics by enhancing our ability to make comparisons and draw distinctions. It reanimates nature for us, connecting spirit and matter. It *draws us more deeply* into conversation with the traditions that we feed off, modify and extend (Parini, 2008, p.181, emphasis added).

By reference to the emphasised phrases above, Parini suggests that (good) poetry draws us in and allows us to see ourselves, illuminating aspects of what it is to be alive.

Good poetry is said to have an experiential quality, a capacity to stretch through the constraining form of two dimensions words on the page to convey a shared feeling.

Faulkner describes this, in turn, as the linking together of the particular and the universal:

Q: What does it mean to use poetry in research?

A: Poetry in research is a way to tap into universality and radical subjectivity; the poet uses personal experience and research to create something from the particular, which becomes universal when the audience relates to, embodies and/or experiences the work as if it were their own (Faulkner, 2018, p.210).

When I consider my own favourite poems and the qualities they have, I find that *one critical aspect* relates to the substance (what the poems contain and convey) but – equally fundamental to the experience of the poetry – *there is another critical aspect* which relates to the form (how the poems are structured and constructed, how they speak about their topic or theme).

Thinking about my favourite poems (by “professional” poets), I would say that these:

- Make a lived moment real – and, sometimes, make a real moment bearable; and
- Contain clever, competent and creative use of language
- Are evocative of a moment
- Have something to say which is worth saying (not necessarily on a solemn topic)
- Pay attention to appropriate words and shape and rhythm.





## Chapter Six: Questions I Needed to Ask Myself

When I was a child,

I learnt to count to five:

one, two, three, four, five.

But these days, I've been counting lives, so I count:

one life

one life

one life

one life

one life

because each time

is the first time

that that life

has been taken.

From "The Pedagogy of Conflict" by Pádraig Ó Tuama  
Published (2013) in "Sorry for your Troubles".



Fig. 24: "Making a home in the Anthropocene" (Sept 2017).

6.0 [Poem] The “bothness”: From notes on a talk by Bill McKibben.

*[Poetry as literature review – “found” poem extracted from lecture notes made on my iPhone.]*

Apathy cuts both ways.

As much carbon as the whole of history!

Be less of an individual –

Beyond small gestures –

By building movements.

Chained self to the petrol pump;

Completely unhinged.

Everything the scientists told us would happen -

Hard work now.

How tame can we keep this?

How to multiply?

I’m proud -

It’s always about money and power.

Mustn't be allowed to be an excuse.

Non-violent social movements;

Not possible to turn back.

One planet at a time.

Paid respects.

Societies that are unequal are bad –

Something very undignified about leaving it to 13-year-olds –

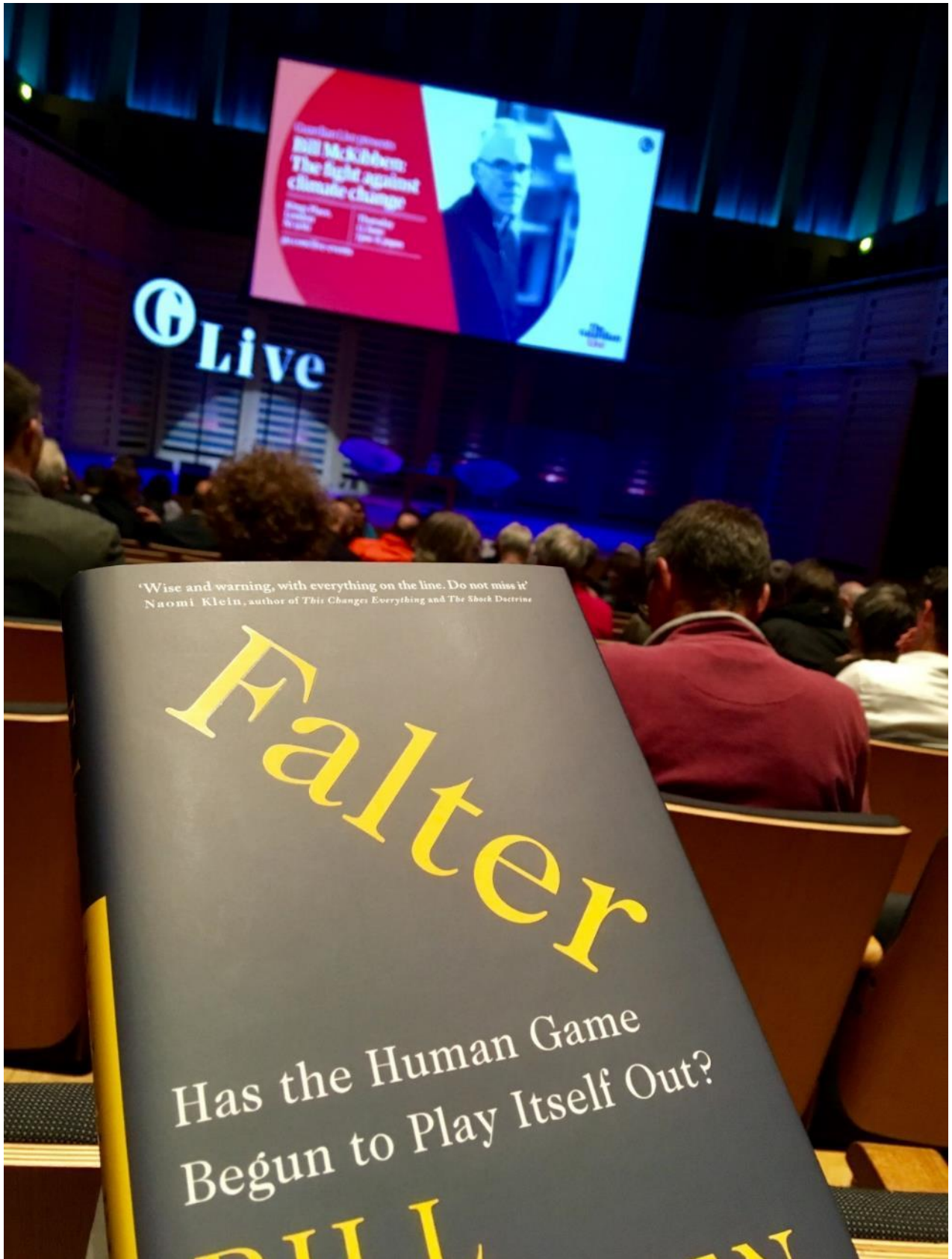
Struggle of the many and small.

The last climate moment?

We get up every day and do the same thing;

What a waste of time.

What will help is...



*Fig. 25: Waiting for the talk to start, Guardian Live, London (June 2019).*

## 6.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Six

### **Abstracting and juxtapositions - understanding differently**

There are a range of types of artful “assemblage” presented through the course of this chapter. Taken together, they are an odd collection, fitting with each other somewhat uneasily, although this seems “about right” for a chapter on uncomfortable questions and challenging realities (exemplified in the poem by Padraig O’Tuama, reflecting on the impact of civil war in Ireland).

Fig. 24 is one of the original, old-style paper-and paste-collages that I have been through a couple of phases of making, generally in the early days of setting off into a new inquiry. Looking back from the final stages of one of those inquiries, I feel nostalgic for the energy released with this kind of making project (and realise that I hope I’m due another cycle shortly).

There’s a carefree freedom to the spirit of discovery that in my experience can generate this kind of work – a willingness to step past what I’m familiar with, what I know would work, and a sense that the stakes are low, that it really doesn’t matter if the attempt is “not successful”.

Fig. 25, and the accompanying alphabetised-but-abstract piece of poetry, are examples of scraps of art that emerge from an everyday moment (attending a book tour speaker event, back in the days when these still took place in person); fig. 26 is the same kind of photo, except that I am on my own in a hotel bar, killing time before a work event. These scraps are not “art” in a formal sense, other than that something about them, in the moment (poem) or afterwards (photo) carried for me some sort of feeling of artfulness, or transcendence.

Fig. 27 is a different kind of thing altogether. For a start it actually does feature elite art, in the form of a close-up shot of part of one of the bronze statues on display in the Canary Wharf financial district – and that art is unironically the centrepiece of the photograph.

I still use (and enjoy using!) a small element of juxtaposition, in that I have kept in shot a glimpse of a car driving past in the background, near a tree decorated with white winter lights.

These pieces offer a collision of themes, and they are also at the tension-point between my appreciation of a good bit of organising structure – where the logic of the underlying aesthetic is that “order is beautiful” – and my appreciation for the “maximalist” jumble of content that real life offers up, where the aesthetic seems anchored in the idea, “possibility is energising”. In this mode, I enjoy the multiple, and disorderly, details in a crowd waiting for a talk to start; or the way that the meanings of things seem to change, and new meanings become visible when items that don’t naturally go together bump up against each other in a collage or abstract poem.

### **Social dimensions, gender dimensions**

Another way of seeing this collection is as a set of social statements, not necessarily conscious. I was momentarily floored when I realised that my “making a home” slogan in fig. 24 could be read as “home-making”. Having looked again at the collage, perhaps I can comfort myself that this would be taken as ironic, not aspirational, given the presence of Frida Kahlo in the top right hand corner, the semi-obscured female models on motorbikes in the bottom left, and some sparkly earrings which are apparently “in jail” higher up on the left hand side.

I suppose in the same way, I am not necessarily sure what other signals are coded in or are not immediately evident in the images but can be extrapolated, given knowledge of their context. Inevitably, attending a talk at the Guardian (fig. 25) locates me in the middle class liberal left (although by this point in the paper, that can come as a surprise to no-one). To what extent is this identity undercut if fig. 27 locates me in London’s new financial district – am I pulled “up” towards the elite or “right”, towards the capitalists? What if fig. 26 reveals that I also frequent conference bars in the Midlands – does the modest regional context “send me lower” – or are we not really playing social Snakes and Ladders in this way in the UK [any more]?

In a sense, social aspects and gender aspects come together in the photograph of “Flo’s hand”, in fig. 27. Taking this picture was one of those luminous moments in artful making, when it suddenly becomes clear, just before something happens, *that something significant is present*. It’s a moment of transformation that seems to arrive almost without any warning, shifting some aspect of the work in a new direction, or introducing a fresh dimension to whatever is unfolding.

When I took this photo, we lived locally to Canary Wharf and I often walked in this direction for my daily step count. I would say this bronze statue (one of several on display in the district) was roughly 1500 steps from my front door and over the course of a number of walks, I had become a little bit fascinated with it. I started diverting the loop of the walk so that I approached Flo from all directions over time. The thing that was rather strange was that the more attention I paid to the statue, the more strongly I felt a quasi-sense of its living presence. This was disconcerting because it was not unlike the process I had been through a few years earlier, when I started to notice the living plants in parks and in amongst the human-made urban street furniture. *Except of course that plants are in fact alive and it is therefore not unreasonable to feel drawn to them as beings*. Statues are not alive, in my perception, and I struggled to understand what I was experiencing.

I concluded that I must be reacting to a growing idea about the feeling that the sculptor had imbued into the statue (or perhaps, had felt about the model that I imagined as his inspiration). Eventually, one day – photograph day – I had that moment of transcendent discovery. I had been chasing hard after the idea that psychological solutions to human degradation of our environment depended on tuning back into an understanding that humans ourselves are also *nature creatures* i.e., we have emerged from nature. Flo’s hand showed me something I had been ignoring or side-lining to that point – that we are also *cultural creatures*, i.e., we are shaped by the cultures we emerge from, and this dimension is also critical and must be explored, made room for, taken into account.



## 6.2 The role of human flourishing: And – who gets to decide?

### 6.2.1 Action research and “human flourishing”

I came to Hult Ashridge Executive Education specifically to inquire within the family of research practices termed action research (discovering “artful” inquiry subsequently, as I progressed along). In describing my *poetic charting* method that has framed my first person activity, I have tried to signal clearly the reliance on modes of research that have a clear lineage back to archetypal action research practices. Thus, I draw attention to cycles of activity interspersed with reflection, then more activity – for me, this involved walking, writing and engaging artfully, e.g., in the making of photographs, collages and poetry.

As indicated, action research is a family of inter-related practices, rather than a tightly boundaried methodology. According to Reason & Bradbury, joint editors of the first and second Handbooks of Action Research, action research encompasses various strands within what they term an overall “*orientation to inquiry*”:

Action research is a family of practices of living inquiry that aims, in a great variety of ways, to link ideas and practices ***in the service of human flourishing***.

It is not so much a *methodology* as an *orientation to inquiry* that seeks to create ***participative communities of inquiry*** in which ***qualities of engagement, curiosity and question-posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues***.

Action research tends to challenge established modes both of academic research and among social change and development practitioners, not least because it is a *practice of participation*. (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p.1 – italics original, bold emphasis my own.)

The above quote opens the 2008 second edition of the SAGE Handbook of Action Research which, along with the third edition that followed, remains a key guide for me to the family of action research practises and a foundational resource for my work.

The contrast is to paradigms built around “subjects” being “examined” (academia) or “fixed” (consultancy) by “experts” (academics/consultants). In Reason & Bradbury’s framing of it, action research is said not to start from a desire of changing “others” *out there*, though it may eventually have that result but rather to start from a motivation to achieve change *with others*.

The Reason & Bradbury quote is a good starting point for considering some key features of (my) version of action research, though is not (and I think does not pretend to be) a comprehensive statement of all forms of action research practised internationally.

The better I understand the principles of action research, the more it strikes me that attempting to provide a ‘comprehensive summary’ runs counter to them.

At least as I experienced and practiced it, action research pursues ‘truthfulness’ rather than ‘the truth’ and looks to gather insight from many perspectives, which need not necessarily align fully, or even at all well, with each other.

As the Reason & Bradbury quote indicates, action research is something of an umbrella term, applied to a group of “similar enough” research principles, approaches and objectives, arising from more than one originating source and having in common a desire to make available on broad democratic principles a robust and reliable set of approaches to learning, and to the identification and dissemination of knowledge.

Looking back to the Reason & Bradbury piece to pick out a few major themes, I would like to draw our attention, in fact, to three ideas nestling in that short first paragraph.

The first, I have already indicated. Reason & Bradbury tell us that action research is *not just one thing* but rather is a (wide) range of activities with some common features. I think it's telling, and not at all coincidental, that they use the term "family", by the way. Admittedly, "family" is a word that scientists sometimes use when they simply mean "a group of things that are somehow connected" – there isn't necessarily any intended overlay to suggest emotional closeness or connectivity. Except, here I think it probably does carry that nuance, deliberately.

In this context I see "family" as a word that has congruence for one deep and essential feature of action research, namely, its emotionally committed nature – its acceptance of and desire to explore and find ways to incorporate the subjective presence of the researcher in the research. The associations of the word "family" have reinforcing relevance for action research, as a "mechanistic" metaphor (action research as a "well-oiled machine" for example) would not.

Secondly, action research is said to be a "living inquiry" and later, as involving "participative communities of inquiry". These inquiries involve both "ideas and practice". So, this is research that bursts out of the library and laboratory to bring ideas which may have been incubated in those (safe, contained, segregated) research spaces into *practice*. Not only that, but this interaction is not said to be directional (i.e., flowing only *from* the realm of ideas to *form/inform* the world of everyday practice). There is room for the links to work in both directions, *for practice to inform ideas*. If we accept the characterisation of traditional mainstream academic institutions as descended from and beneficiaries of social structures in which knowledge power is accumulated behind walls, in (originally literally) "cloistered" spaces, and controlled by the few whose academic rank allows them access to these privileged places, then there is no very good reason for such institutions to be in favour of research that escapes out into the world, where it perhaps cannot be reliably controlled or contained. (This is the theme of the introductory section of Schön's book, *The Reflective Practitioner*, 1982.)

I would mention in passing that the use of the word “living” to describe inquiry performs the same kind of function as the use of the word “family”, priming us to be aware that action research holds an active engagement between what could be described as the “out there”/ “objective” activity of *researching* and the “in here”/ “subjective” perspective of the researcher. I would also draw attention again to the second phrase which I have emphasised in the above quote (using bold underlined style) and which I have already quoted in this section, namely that action research is linked to “participative communities”.

I think it will be clear from my description of my overall solitary first person walking and from my self-introduction in the overview above, that engagement in community doesn’t necessarily come naturally, but is what could be described as a “learning edge” for me.

I consider that the inbuilt movement between distanced (“out there”) and involved (“from within” / “in here”) perspectives is a key aspect in explaining why action researchers tend to push the boundaries of what can be considered as knowledge. A classic action research text, in this context, is the 1997 article by Heron & Reason that describes an extended epistemology of experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical ways of knowing.

Finally, at the end of the first sentence, Reason & Bradbury identify the purpose for action research as being “in the service of human flourishing”.

Initially, I read this as uncomplicatedly aspirational and it closely aligns *with our household values when I was growing up*. Who wouldn’t support people “flourishing”?) but, more recently, questions emerged, and I think they *matter* for this work. Who gets to decide how “flourishing” is judged, for instance; how do we know when we have reached “optimal flourishing” as opposed to “getting by”? Are we only “flourishing” when *everybody* “flourishes”? If not everyone can flourish, who gets to decide who doesn’t? Can we kill the rest of the biosphere in attempting to flourish? Should flourishing be “human”?

### 6.2.2 Pro-human bias and the threat to our biosphere

It is clear to me from Reason & Bradbury's positioning of action research that in context the phrase was intended as an inclusive term – their “working definition” (p.4) describes action research as “concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes” and they later expand on this, saying (also on p.4):

A wider purpose of action research is to contribute through this practical knowledge to the increased well-being – economic, political, psychological, spiritual – of human persons and communities, and to a more equitable and sustainable relationship with the wider ecology of the planet of which we are an intrinsic part.

Possibly the mention on “human” is intended to emphasise “*all humans*” (to steal a catchphrase, “*for the many, not for the few*”) or possibly, the focus is on what *we as a species* are responsible for /able to focus on – certainly there is a genuine dilemma around how to integrate ecological rights into human political structures given that ecologies cannot (directly) represent themselves within those systems (Eckersley, 1992, 1995, 2004).

Nonetheless from a “whole biosphere” point of view, to draw the boundaries of our focus around *human* flourishing remains (accidentally?) exclusionary of “not humans”, albeit it took me several years of iteratively inquiring-acting-reflecting to come to see it as such.

Arguably, this reinforces the argument in favour of structured cycles of reflective learning; the process of peering beneath the surface and adjusting one's position accordingly is the basic founding principle of reflection-centred learning in a nutshell.

Blaine Fowers, for instance, makes this point in relation to the value-set he sees as (silently) underlying much of mainstream academic psychology:

Rather than continuing to tacitly promote a culturally guided perspective on the human good, I believe that our discipline and our society would be better served by acknowledging that every human endeavour inescapably involves commitments to some set of goods and goals, including science.

Such a course would make it possible to reveal, discuss, and critique the hidden commitments to particular goods in our discipline. Moreover, we can begin to explicitly explore the systematic frameworks that are available for understanding human goods (Fowers 2012, p. 11).

We do not immediately see how our starting assumptions may be shaped to invite a particular logic, or line of interpretation, that perhaps (unduly) benefits some whilst (unfairly) disadvantaging others; rather we need to learn to perceive our assumptions through reflective questioning, in order to uphold or adapt them. I've been so needled by wanting to "peer beneath the surface" of this idea that action research serves "human flourishing", that I ended up using it as the organising framework for a series of mini essays in which I explored the implications of various pieces of literature for the concept of human flourishing (and vice versa).

Eventually, in the course of this writing series, I discovered that "human flourishing" was not a phrase coined by Reason and/or Bradbury (e.g., somehow *particularly within the purview of action researchers*) but can be traced back through into the ancient philosophical traditions – in the West, to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (2004).

In retrospect, I'm surprised that I'm surprised to find that happiness was an important line of inquiry for formal philosophy and I wonder whether the implied claim being made for action research is that it is perhaps *not a renegade family of practices undertaken largely outside or on the fringes of the Academy* but should be considered as standing in a heritage of study handed down from the Greeks, from Aristotle.

It is hard to think of a more mainstream pedigree within Western traditions of education and this is not unproblematic, given the male-privileging, reason-preferencing, dualistic, “disembodied” values encoded into Greek philosophy. The Greek word for “flourishing”, apparently, is Eudaimonia which I’m told has also sometimes been translated as “happiness” and which was referenced by the so-called Founding Fathers in their manifesto for a new kind of society, written during their colonisation of the North American Continent.

In other words, in claiming a common objective (human happiness /flourishing), action research pedigree also by implication potentially shares some intellectual kinship with the “pursuit of happiness” mentioned in the American Declaration of Independence.

This is also potentially problematic, looking again at Wendell Berry’s critique of (his own) anthropocentric North American culture of origin, which he describes as “stifling” creation (i.e., Nature), saying that humans must instead “learn to cooperate in [the world’s] processes, and to yield to its limits” (Berry & Wirzba, 2002, p.20). I’m not surprised to find a pro-human speciesist bias identified as present and part of the challenge (I find this to be culturally very deep-seated); I have become convinced that humans must un-learn our (m)anthropocentricity in order to make the shift to living in a sufficiently sustainable way.

### 6.2.3 Environmental degradation as a problem of “power politics”

We also need to reconsider our power structures and our priorities. Ecofeminism argues for example that exploitation of nature must be understood as effectively the same kind of problem as gender inequalities.

Writing in 1980, Carolyn Merchant made the connection in her book, *The Death of Nature*:

In investigating the roots of our current environmental dilemma and its connections to science, technology, and the economy, we must re-examine the formation of a worldview and a science that, by reconceptualising reality as a machine rather than a living organism, sanctioned the domination of both nature and women (p. xxi).

For other ecofeminists (Mary Mellor, 1997, 2009, 2010, 2017; Freya Mathews, 2017), the issues comprise gender bias and inequality but can also be seen playing out in exploitations linked to race, class, etc. This point of view strikes me, intuitively, as more plausible.

Once we identify that it is the outworking of a particular power imbalance dynamic that means our dominant global economies have institutionalised systems of control and exploitation that *systemically* disadvantage women and allow the destruction of natural habitats, then it is obvious to me that we have a pragmatic and moral obligation to take a good look at where else the power imbalance is wrecking injustice and devastation.

It seems evident to me that it is more likely than not that if we look, we will see the same mechanisms of exploitation at work across the spectrum of social injustices – in class dynamics, within racism, in the loaded pay-offs for those identifying as LGBTQ+ for example, and in treatment of the non-able-bodied.

I realise that epistemologically speaking, what I am about to say has tricky implications, but perhaps this is one of those situations where, if I can't see a dynamic at play, *maybe that's because, for whatever reason, I can't see it?*

As a non-scientist, my “go to” science broadcasters are Brian Cox (e.g., on the Wonder of the Universe series, see Cox & (Andrew) Cohen, 2010, 2011, 2014) and Jim Al-Khalili (e.g., on The Life Scientific, see (Anna) Buckley & Al-Khalili, 2011).



These commentators, and others, tell me that a maths equation applies equally everywhere in the observable universe, and that if an experiment demonstrates “xyz” anywhere, it will demonstrate the same everywhere.

These are the rules of the “natural sciences” and the reason that criteria concerning the *reliability, validity* and *generalisability* have long been the established measures of evaluation in the academy. In the positivist tradition with which these structures were established, it was assumed that all human knowing could be judged in the same way, by the same standards.

I have already argued that human knowing in the social sciences and in artful research need different standards of judgement and I believe the question of power dynamics is a good illustration. I may not be able to see what could and should be seen because of my standpoint, the perspective from which I interpret my own life, my social context and these experiments.

*It took me a long time for me to accept what I now see as essential, that environmentalism and social justice, the latter across multiple possible dimensions, must be addressed together – that I must accept and act on the understanding that the climate crisis is a moral issue.*

### 6.3 Holding ourselves to account for climate change



Fig. 26: Handbook, with reflections, shoes and booze (Nov 2019).

*A hotel lobby bar, killing time before a work conference.*

*I have been reading the Routledge Handbook on the train – the kind of experience where it feels as though words and phrases are jumping like fireworks ignited from the page.*

*THIS! And this! This! I have cantered through the first couple of chapters.*

*My pencil-notes in the margins are bursting with exclamation marks and with the word YES in capital letters, underlined. Pausing as I settle into this new location, my eye catches the metallic curve of the table leg, the thick lines of the roof structure reflected on the glass table, apparently pointing towards the book. I lean, rocking to and fro, until the shot contains the RED carpet and the green tips of my shoes.*

**Gender, environment, arty photo #AGoodRepresentation.** (Book – MacGregor, 2017).

### 6.3.1 What will help is...?

The poem at the start of this section emerged from the fragments of my notes on a talk given by Bill McKibben, London, June 2019. I took the notes on my iPhone.

Typical lack of advanced preparation and preference for travelling light meant that I didn't have a notebook with me, and I was a little nervous about running out of battery on my phone, probably because I hadn't finished my walking-inquiry 10,000 steps for the day.

I was self-conscious, too, about the blue-light distraction of the phone screen, conspicuous in the dimmed auditorium, and the kind of thing I know I would be tutting about, passive-aggressively, if someone else was doing that.

But so much of what Bill McKibben had to say spoke directly to the inquiry journey of the past six years of so! I was torn... The result was a set of notes that was already quite a long way down the road towards being condensed, intensified fragments.

I didn't need to do much paring away to get to the base material for the poem. Could be just me but feels like these fragments still tell a strong story and the poem sprang to life when I decided to play with presenting the poem fragments in alphabetical order.

At the event, the comment "What will help" was followed by further remarks on what McKibben described as two great inventions of the twentieth century, one technological and the other social /political – the solar panel and movements of non-violent democratic protest (further described in 2019a, p. 193 and in 2019b, n.p.n.).

These are both good answers, though whether they would be suitable as solutions is rather context dependent. I find myself preferring the non-committal tailing off at the end of the piece, which seems to me to invite the audience to supply their own answer whilst also hinting at the multiple uncertainties that lie ahead.

### 6.3.2 Whose accountability is it, anyway?

This is a thesis about tracing my own personal, individual engagement with climate topics, looking at my inner readiness to deal with “crisis mode”, charting my shifting sense of my own relationship with the natural world, finding myself progressively more aware of my identity as being “of, from and connected to” Nature.

(The “crisis readiness” aspect of trying to live in active choicefulness in light of the emerging climate breakdown has been incidentally useful, as it turns out, as the world slides into pandemic lockdown in the Spring of 2020, at the time of writing. Soberingly, the “real time, real life” sense of living in crisis has also revealed to me something of the multiple levels at which stress can hide away. I can seem to be vastly calm and resourced, right up until I pop in to check on mum’s flat and set off the burglar alarm even though I’d been *concentrating on not doing so*, because the code I’d carefully rehearsed using was... for somewhere different.)

It makes sense, then, to expect that I would approach questions relating to climate change with an “individual level” perspective – and I absolutely do, with the caveat that I’ve never been *fabulous* at “giving things up” and that you wouldn’t have to dig through my shopping receipts for very long to find evidence of purchasing choices that would green-condemn me.

“What should I do more of? What should I give up? Can I still fly? Is not having children a good enough carbon “save” to justify eating out three times a week? Is it ok that I maintain a car, providing it’s a Hybrid? Did you know that bamboo toothbrushes are a “thing”?”

But the climate crisis isn’t really “on us” as individuals, in the sense that we as individuals are responding to a million consumption choices put in front of us, but we “the general public” are not responsible for the industrial innovations that brought us into carbon-overload, nor the industry standards that allow systemic environmental impacts to be perpetuated, nor the markets conventions that makes carbon-intensive products profitable and well-funded.

Governments, legislators, regulators, heads of industry, financial institutions – these are the places where large-scale change will begin, changes that are significant and substantial enough that they could fundamentally shift the basis of the global economy. This could happen, if the people who are in government, who are making laws and regulations, who are running companies and providing companies with funding are motivated to push change through. Without these changes, individual level initiatives are effectively meaningless – useful only in the sense that taking *some sort of action* might make individual citizens feel better in ourselves.

This leads to the logic of calling – for action, for mass protest movements, for marches and letters to MPs, for making a nuisance of ourselves to disrupt the ordinary course of big business.

And yet – do we understand the ethics of making this the standard expectation?

In another field, but demonstrating an important principle of care, Carl Leggo, who was a key champion of poetic inquiry, wrote an early, experimental journal article, listing out a whole series of questions (no answers) that he felt he needed to have asked himself, authentically, before encouraging his students into the contested space of poetic arts-based research (1991). Emilia Nielsen is an academic living with chronic illness and writing poetically about her experiences (for example, 2016). Her work challenges the “able-ism” that she considers to be the norm, not just in “mainstream society” but even – and especially – among activists.

Do the ends (an intervention that might “save the planet”, or rather, preserve the biosphere) justify the means? I don’t think so, not as a blanket approach. Not if we burn through people’s lives and resources and relationships in service of a cause that will manifest over a timeframe of three to four generations. The calculation is out of kilter. Bill McKibben writes that, “Resistance is a subject I take up with some reluctance, because I know a little bit about its costs... The price of... mobilisation has been enormous” (2019, p. 191). I think we must leave space for people to work out for themselves the level of engagement they are “up for”.

## 6.4 Making room for human wisdom as well as human knowing

### 6.4.1 “Human wisdom” for a new era of climate breakdown

Questions like, “How should I live?” and, “How should we organise ourselves?” and, “What could we do – and what *should I do* – to make a difference?” are, of course, ethical questions, though it has taken me several years to recognise them, formally, as such.

My “change motivation” began when I discovered that I was living at the beginning of a (proposed) new geological age on Earth, the Anthropocene, the first geological age in history defined by the activities of a single Earth-dwelling species – human beings.

Human beings are approximately 150-200 years into the development of industrialised, technologically sophisticated civilisations, driven by the Global North and characterised by a relentless push for the commoditisation and consumption of the world’s resources.

Unfortunately, we are learning that this way of life, embedded in our “developed” economies and assumed to be the aspirational benchmark for the “developing” economies in the Global South, has resulted in systemic levels of environmental degradation, so that we now risk – and may already have tipped over into – irreversible climate breakdown.

Humans have never before lived in an age where the daily accepted lifestyles of a dominant minority have affected not only the fortunes of other humans, or other species local to where they are living, but the entire planetary eco-system, our actual biosphere.

We have new questions – but in seeking to answer these questions, we potentially have access to the accumulation of human insight, principally over the c. 5000 years of our written history.

In my view, we need fresh wisdom, or rather, to learn to apply age-old wisdom principles to a new and planetary scale problem, one to which my own (Western, industrialised, capitalist) culture of origin has contributed extensively and for which Western-style capitalist corporations and pro-capitalist political and environmental structures bear prime responsibility. Our margins for error have grown thin.

As we dance closer to extinction, much depends on the wise handling of the resources available to us, including our inner resources of insight, ability to organise, ability to plan and ability to execute our plans in the outer world around us.

6.4.2 “Human wisdom” as a quality accumulated the course of a single lifetime  
Leadership development practitioner Francis Briers argues that there is a critical difference between “wisdom” and “knowledge” in that, according to this view, whilst knowledge can be transmitted remotely and accumulated collectively, wisdom must be grown individually, personally, experientially. Briers writes that,

[Knowledge is quantifiable, which is to say that] knowledge can be clearly recorded and tested for. We are overflowing with sources of knowledge from the billions of books in existence to academic papers, to the internet. We have lots of knowledge very clearly recorded, and for many people, easily accessed. what we do in schools (and by schools, I mean academic environments in general).

Conversely, wisdom is unquantifiable; it can't be recorded, and it can't be tested for... I think there's a reason that the core messages [of the great works on wisdom] have stayed the same over the centuries: they are not about recording wisdom; they are maps to guide us towards cultivating our own wisdom.

If you are recording knowledge then as the data changes, the record must change, but if you are trying to provide a map or set of sign-posts for someone to have their own experience of one of life's essential guiding principles then that is not going to change generation to generation.

I would argue... these things have a timelessness about them, but more concretely, if knowledge can be passed from one generation to the next then one generation starts from the point the last one ended and progress is therefore linear; if wisdom must be based on your personal lived experience then while one generation can be guided by their elders, they can only ever progress for the length of a human life...

With knowledge you just have to have access to the information, you don't even have to have access to the person who made the discoveries – it's relatively easy to pass on. [But while] you can be mentored in developing your own wisdom, but it can't be directly handed down...

Typically, it works like this: You offer [someone]... your hard-earned wisdom), they ignore it... and if you and they are lucky then a few years later they offer you the same piece of advice you gave them, in their own words, as if you had never spoken. People, to a significant degree, have to make their own mistakes – and that's one of the ways we gain wisdom (Briers, 2014, n.p.n.).





*Fig 27: Flo's hand – detail from a Henry Moore statue, Canary Wharf (2018).*



## Chapter Seven: On Learning

You drift off thinking that no moment passes without a critical eye. No moment escapes...

You speak from your white, middle class, male body. You speak from the academy, perpetuating its logic, its standards, perpetuating the system. You speak from your vested interests. You speak out of belief.

Having tracked your day, you examine what you have done. You sense you have a better feel for what is at stake in the ongoing critical process.

You say to yourself: It isn't about demonstrating critical faculties, showing critical superiority, or even striving to become better; it is about how people feel living under its power (p.228).

Pelias, R. (2000). The critical life. *Communication Education*, 49, 220-228.

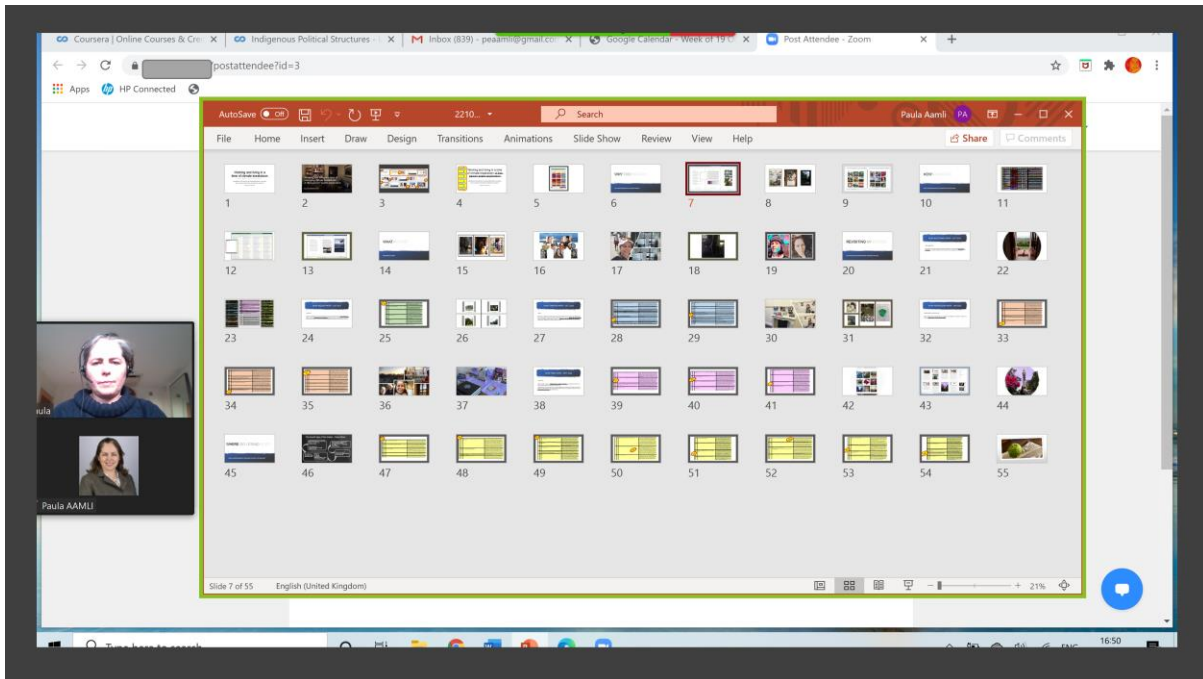


Fig. 28: Revisiting views and influences through this inquiry, self as “audience” (2020).

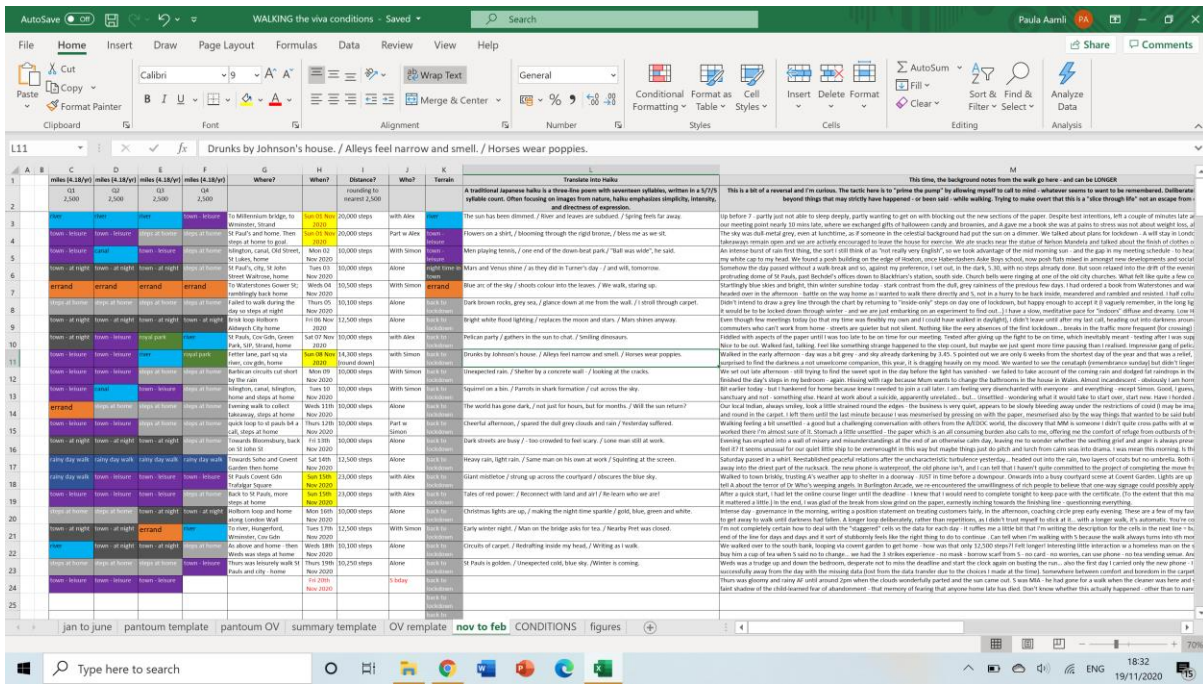


Fig. 29: Setting out for a fresh cycle of walking and noticing – this time, with haiku (2020).

## 7.0 [Poem] The Pace of Trees

*[Written after my first month of formal walking inquiry, November 2018, having changed the course of my commute to approach my place of work from the south, through St James's Park.]*

As walking with Diane since she grew old  
Disrupts my pace –  
Her slow, short, dragging steps; her hand, thin, cold,  
By my firm hand encased –

Measuring my stride to hers: even so,  
Walking this trail  
Of ancient trees, my racing heartbeat slows.  
Another pace prevails.

A metronome of sap-life rules the park.  
A man near death  
Tells how his hand pressed gentle to the bark  
Feels thrumming underneath

Whilst heedless round him, joggers pant and push  
Or work the abs  
Thrusting tired legs aloft, then on they rush  
Past tourists, cyclists, cabs.

They find no benefit to make them stay  
Among the trees  
The dying man and I are in their way –  
That rhythmic footfall... flees.

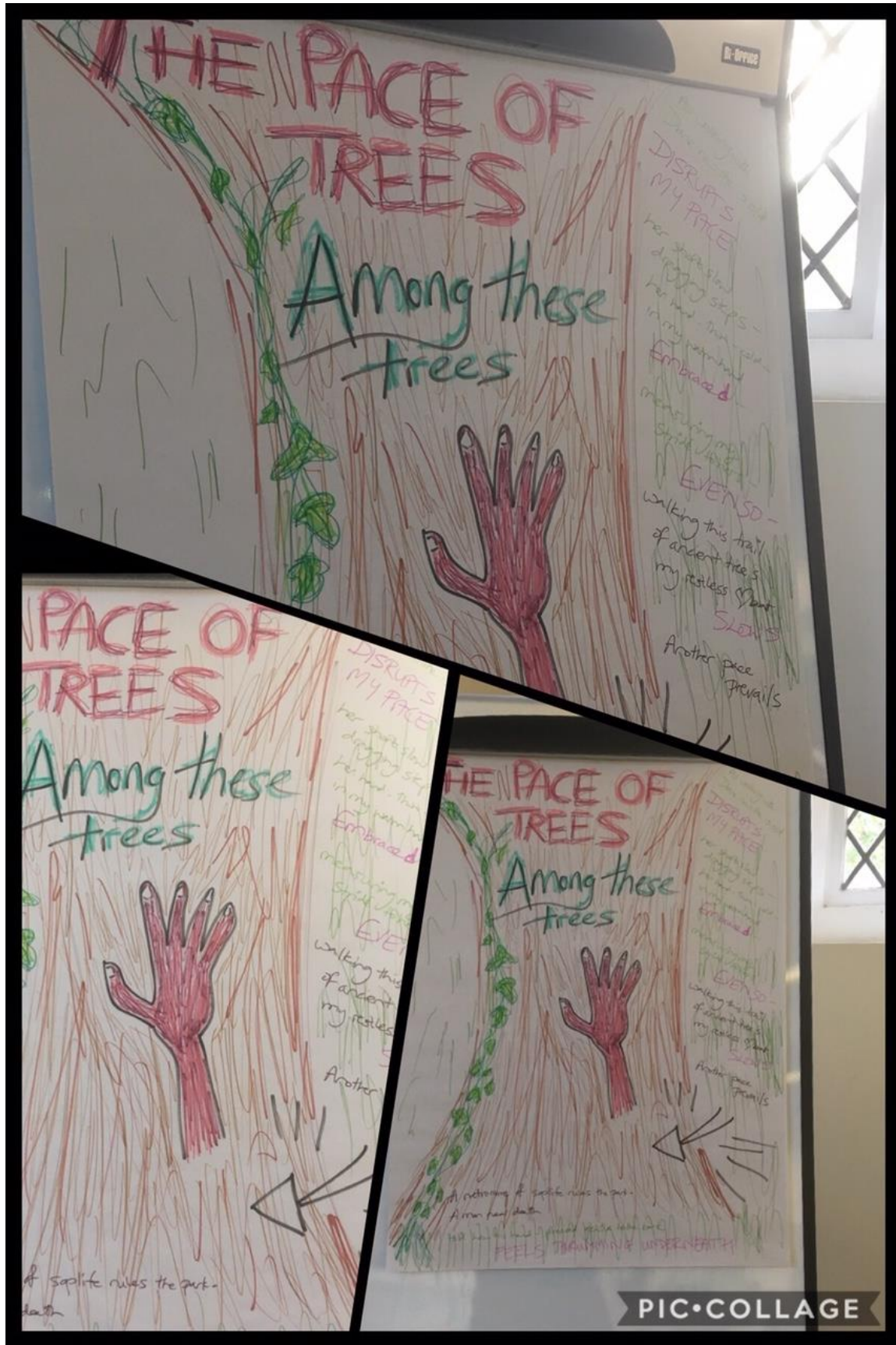


Fig. 30: Tree, ivy, hand, poem – marker pen doodle on flipchart paper, Ashridge (Oct 2019).

## 7.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Seven

### **On forms, structures and choices – and the ways in which choices have power**

At the time of writing, I am just heading into walking and taking notes for a third iteration of my *poetic charting* process. (Fig. 29 shows my recent entries; see fig. 17 for the original table.)

As before, the walking is a means of getting “under” the chatter of the “conscious voice-over” part of my mind, a way of settling into a different way of being inside my body. I move, mildly distracted, paying mostly diffuse, occasionally sharp, attention. As before, I am comforted by access to a clear structure (now familiar), with its predictable, repeating demands for content. As before, I fiddle at the edges of the process, tweaking and adjusting so that the familiar also feels somewhat fresh, new, different. This time, I have changed the colour coding to add some extra options relevant to daily walks in “Lockdown London”, remembering how “same /same” the charts quickly became in March and April when the only colours in regular use were the colours noting that I: ran an errand /walked for exercise /made up missing step count at home.

As before, I have a new question. In the first block of charting, two rounds, I was wondering about my place in the (climate breakdown imperilled) world, about my responsibilities for generations still to come, and how to understand my role and story in relation to the same number of generations looking backwards along my family line. The second iteration quickly shifted to become centred around questions of the progress of the 2020 pandemic and what the crisis was revealing about “normal life” and “normal expectations” about our shared futures. This third return to *poetic charting* asks questions about the process itself. What is important so that this works effectively for reflexive inquiry? What is incidental? Again, the questions are there to point my attention in a particular direction. I do not always hold them explicitly in mind (even if that were possible); they “soak into the background”, colouring everything.

I return to the question of what is recorded, and how. The original charts drove me towards writing fragmentary journal notes so that I could keep the lines concise and even (following an initially submerged aesthetic logic that sees order as beautiful). During my analysis, I added a comments column (on the right in fig. 17) to record trains of thought that needed more space.

I wonder whether the decision to adopt the pantoum as my baseline poetic representation was also about thoughts “spilling over” beyond the initial constraints? The pantoum gave me ten discrete lines, each repeated twice, with the option to add further detail into the repeating line, and the lines I wrote were often longer than might be typical for the form. Basically, I wrote to the very edge of the space available in the template, constraining myself once again, in service of keeping an orderliness to the visual presentation, which personally, I find deeply pleasing.

This time, I am experimenting with haiku – I was asked whether the process would still work if a different (and much shorter!) poetic form was used, and what the impact would be, if so.

Since I understand the process to be constructed of a number of elements that function as “one valid possibility among many”, my answer to the first question is, “Yes, because the underlying purpose is to support a sustained period of attentive reflection; providing the inquirer continues to pay good attention and commit to reflexivity, the *poetic charting* process will work.”

Since I haven’t worked with haiku as part of the process previously, my answer on impact is, “I don’t know, but I would be very interested in finding out”.

Thus far, several weeks into the inquiry, I suspect haiku will be *very* effective for evoking the quality of the reflective activity “as if in the present moment”. I am also realising however, that it will be difficult – impossible? – to use this extremely distilled format to make the wider connections that a pantoum allows, and indeed, through the device of the same lines reappearing in new conjunctions, tends to encourage.



**“Remember – poetry is always about death”**

In the autumn of 2018, I travelled to Oxford for a fundraising event at the Sheldonian Theatre. The event was raising funds to decorate a ward in a palliative care unit with images and text from an illustrated poetry collection, by writer and academic, Robert Macfarlane, and author and illustrator, Jackie Morris (*The Lost Words*, 2017). The rationale was that access to nature, and creative expressions about nature, offer profound comfort to the ward’s dying patients.

One of the speakers was a man with terminal cancer who spoke of his heightened awareness that the natural world buzzes and “thrums” with the quiet urgency of living things going about the business of being alive. This became central to the poem, *The Pace of Trees* (7.0), and is the image I picked out in a workshop doodle featuring this poem, a year or so later (fig. 30 – also influenced by the photograph of the old tree covered in ivy, at the start of the Appendices).

My attention was caught because the man’s testimony of moving into becoming more aware of the quiet ongoing pulsing presence of living things around us had resonance with my own, less urgent and heightened, sense of having been in a slow process of turning back into nature.

I was also fascinated by the role of choice in this noticing – or indeed, in the failing to notice.

I was dimly aware of my own past attitude, when I saw the natural world as “scenery”, as if left over from a shop window display or a theatre production; as I walked to work, I could see other people also outside and apparently paying little attention to the other living things sharing the space (or, alternatively, treating them as photo-opportunities-for-humans).

There are several layers of awareness of death in this poem – the central witness statement by the dying man; the discomfort of seeing friends and family aging; the unspoken but always-on-my-mind concern about whether the beat of life in nature is as unquenchable as it appears.

The Pace of Trees was a deliberate, and untypical, attempt to write using structured rhymes and some iambic pentameter (in the rhythm and length of the first and third lines of each verse).

The shorter second and fourth lines are *not* traditional – it would be more typical to use the same number of syllables throughout or to alternate line lengths. Personally, I’m happy with the effect of the unexpectedly short second line; it reads to me like a stumble in the text, which is exactly appropriate for the overall topic and the theme of the opening verse in particular.

## 7.2 How am I seeing this now? And now? And now?

Through the process of inquiring, I have “banked” various kinds of knowledge. With poetry, for instance, I now know that there are formal structures such as “pantoums” and “sestinas” and techniques such as breaking source material to create “found poems” or injecting tension between form and content in a poem by running a sentence into the next line (“enjambment”).

Is that knowledge useful to me? Probably. Is that knowledge significant to my overall purpose? Perhaps, but possibly not. Has the increased technical fluency made me a better poet? Maybe.

To Michael Longley’s point, talking with Krista Tippett for *On Being* (2016) and quoted at the start of chapter four, technique alone may result in what he calls “forgeries” – things that obey the technical rules of poetry but have no life pulsing through them, no deeper authenticity.

Living poetry has the same relationship to technical skill, it seems to me. as learning moments that cause internal change do to a student’s ability to reproduce accurate information for an assignment. Technical skill opens possibilities, and so does acquiring factual knowledge, but they are not, in themselves, the empathetic, artful poem or the inner moment of insight. Attempting to keep track of what I believe I know, that has changed and continues to change me, is to strain continually for a glimpse of a view that is itself in constant motion.

I returned to graduate studies fuelled by moral outrage from the fall-out of the 2008 credit crisis and yet managed not to realise that I was inquiring into moral issues of systemic social injustice. In the early stages of inquiry, I actively rejected and resisted the positioning of action research as committed to achieving social change (per Peter Reason & Hilary Bradbury, 2008) or constructivist qualitative research as in pursuit of a utopian vision for a reconstructed social world (per Norman Denzin & Yvonna Lincoln, 2018).

Understanding myself in (social, historical, personal, spiritual) context has been an aspiration throughout and yet (somehow) I resisted, for a surprising number of years, acknowledging myself as a female-gendered persona – physical body, socialised presence and all. I would now say that I avoided acknowledging my own gendered identity to slide away from confronting the way female contributions are rendered invisible, as in the “disappearing acts” described in the work of Joyce Fletcher (1998, 2001), or just not counted, per Marilyn Waring (1989, 1999).

I have been drawn to ask questions about crises that are happening “out there”, largely oblivious to the inner turmoil that has shaped me (the kind of somatic influences explored for example in the work of Clare Myatt, 2015, 2019) and which I am able to notice and admit primarily as the survival strategies on which I have depended start to loosen their grip. I have already pointed to the ways that I find structure to be soothing, in that structure transforms amorphous daily phenomena into units of experience that can be accounted for, kept track of, measured.

These structures can convey illusions – that I understand my world, that I am making “progress”, that I am exerting some degree of control. This is useful to me, until it isn’t, and the falling out of usefulness might be linked to sliding into crisis, or might be linked, say, to an increased capacity to cope with amorphous, unstructured *everything* without the “forgery” of structure to wrap around me, conveying a sense of safety which may be both true and not-true.

I'm not sure why I suddenly come to discover a fresh insight or perspective, or how to perceive the boundaries of its usefulness (i.e., what parts of this new insight will become embedded, what parts will be re-learned in a different shape, or the relationship between the parts that last, and the parts that don't, and what could, from other perspectives, be judged as "true").

Making definitive statements about what I have learned and when and how and what I now therefore "know" seemed to me to be similar to saying that I "know" the pattern cast on the floor of a clearing by sun shining through trees. Yes, I may be able to describe the physics of how rays of light travel from the sun, hitting a light receptive cell at the back of my eye, stimulating a nervous response translated within the electricity of the brain to form an image. I may know the geographical or climatic conditions that explains why in *abc* place, the shadows I see are cast by *x* tree species, not *y* tree species. However, the pattern I say I know changes moment by moment, week by week, year by year. In one respect, I understand, well enough, what is happening; nonetheless I "know" fleetingly. Arguably the pattern I glimpse at any single moment is largely irrelevant, but it is not entirely irrelevant because the shape cannot exist other than as an aggregation of these fleeting, in-themselves-unimportant moments.

What I can speak to is the processes, methods, techniques and approaches I use in engaging with the attempt to learn something; and I can help my future self by being as clear as possible, at each stage, about what I think I know. The doctoral process helps, in that it is punctuated with regular check-points. In reflecting on this inquiry, I revisited these milestone papers, collecting snippets of what I said my work was about and pondering the shifts in emphasis.

In my acceptance paper, written October 2016, I said that I wanted to:

Pay attention to and seek to deepen my skill and confidence in working with **expanded ways of knowing** ... (In context, my main form of artful practice was collage and not yet poetry.)

In my inquiry paper, written July 2017, I said that:

I hope and intend that my proposed programme of doctoral study will make a **useful contribution** to efforts to achieve **institutional and social change** specifically aimed at enabling both me and wider communities of interest to live more respectfully and gently within the environment that sustains us.

In my transfer paper, written September 2018, I asked:

What does a “good life” look like, given my growing certainty that the social tropes offered in my culture about what’s important and what success looks like are driving **systemic over-consumption** from top to bottom across society as well as a **chronically unfair distribution of resources** and opportunities, skewed to the vastly rich few at the top?

In my progression paper, written December 2019, I (finally!) started from the premise that:

Whilst climate change may originate as a scientific, technological, and economic problem, the emerging **climate crisis is at heart a moral problem.**

In a sense, this has been the great shock, looking back over six years of inquiry (first in AMSR and now at doctoral level), that it took five of those years before I explicitly wrote about climate crisis as first and foremost a moral issue, rather than just (“just”!) a question of technologies.

Following on from that late-appearing but essential position, my claim here and now is that:

Modern Western culture is **weighed down by systemic injustices** and sliding into climate crisis... *(and potentially taking all biological life along with us).*

I hold a position that one root cause is our disconnectedness, from nature and from each other. In response, I seek to inquire into and contribute towards what eco-philosopher Joanna Macy terms **“the work that reconnects”** (Macy, 2020, n.p.n.).

Linking this to the work of Val Plumwood, in which she seeks to resist human chauvinism and to imagine and advocate for a shift into a new tenor of relationship with the natural world:

The real threat is not so much global warming itself, which there might still be a chance to head off, as our own inability to see past the post-enlightenment energy, control and consumption extravaganza we so naively identify with the good, civilised life to a sustainable form of human culture.

The time of *Homo reflectus*, the self-critical and self-revising one, has surely come. *Homo faber*, the thoughtless tinkerer, is clearly not going to make it. We will go onwards in a different mode of humanity, or not at all (Plumwood, 2007, n.p.n.).

### 7.3 On learning informally with others

In this work, I have used myself as the main test-bed for my inquiry. It may be that I have taken this approach driven by immense, submerged ego<sup>15</sup> but my conscious, self-declared rationale is about access, in that I can take many more observations over a longer period from my own life than I would feel comfortable asking for (or be likely to be allowed to take) from others.

My basic stance, linking to one of my quality criteria-in-use, namely that good action research displays a quality of *sustained effort*) is that I believe that given enough time and repetitions, the conscious projected façade drops away and I start to get access to a less-filtered, or perhaps, differently-filtered, life narrative. Arguably I might put forth biased interpretations of any findings that let myself off the hook, or, assuming I'm brave enough, I can poke around in all the corners, having given myself full informed, ethical consent.

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<sup>15</sup> Who can judge themselves accurately in this regard? It must, to an extent, be a factor.

My learning with others, then, comes not directly from the central process of inquiry but informally, in working through the implications of the inquiry with colleagues; as I swap stories with other developing action researchers, honing our craft by comparing our experiences of it; and in modelling snippets of my process for interested others.

The purpose of this type of informal exchange is not directly “proof of concept” for the specific steps or formats used in my *poetic charting* process. For this, I look (internally) to the quality of my own learning narrative and (externally) to the content, quality and effect of my artful representations created through *poetic charting*. Audience also plays a key role here (see 7.4).

Rather, in seeking connection with others, I am checking for confirmations of or challenges to the basic premises around which my inquiry is founded, such as the premise that reflexive work is transformational, or the premise that engaging in creative activities is an effective means for fostering good quality reflexivity. Or I test my big picture conclusions, such as, that one of the deep problems for humans raised in the mechanistic capitalist cultures prevalent in the West, is our disconnectedness from nature, and that this disconnectedness is driving industrial scale self-harm, harm of planet, harm of biosphere, and harm inflicted on less powerful humans.

Occasionally, in exploring whether and how reflexive work transforms, I have had opportunity to take people through some approximation of the walking – journaling – creating poetry cycle, partly to test my own ability to explain what it is that I do, partly to check for signs that the mechanisms are familiar, or that they make sense, or that they seem to have generative impact.

Figs. 20, 31, and 33 represent three such opportunities – fig. 20 is a presentation given to my doctoral peers during a participant-led workshop; fig.31 shows me leading discussion with an informally convened group of AMSR alumni, during a break in a woodland walk at a reunion; and fig. 33 includes some nature collage postcards which I made and then used to facilitate a reflective session for my Godmother’s church community.

In two cases, it was possible to go for a walk as a group and then reconvene later for some reflective writing and poetry (fig. 20 shows the latter of these two sessions; fig. 31, the former). With the church community group, time was limited and the members in general quite elderly, so instead, we asked people to bring images or artefacts from a place they loved in nature.

With all the groups, we used these inputs (the walk or the artefacts) as our source, broadly standing in place of my own habit of walking 10,000 steps, although in my case, this activity happened over and over again, whereas in the mini demonstrations, there was just one instance. We settled, “listening” for impressions that seemed to want to surface, then wrote a few short fragments to represent these, approximating to the journal fragments in my Excel charts.

Afterwards, (only) those who wished to read their fragments out loud did so, and as a group we discussed and fed back on the activity. In this approach, I was very influenced by, and following, Adrian Harris’s adaptation of Eugene Gendlin’s *focusing* method, and in particular the aim to come to a sense of “shift” and resolution (a feeling of having fresh insight):

*Focusing* begins when we sense our bodily response to something, which can be our felt sense of an interview question or a fieldwork situation. We then seek a symbol for that response – what [Eugene] Gendlin [in his overall *focusing* method] calls a handle (Gendlin, 1997) – and sense whether that symbolization fits our felt sense.

If it does, we can spend time exploring the symbol... [until we sense] the release we experience when we find just the right word or phrase to express an understanding that had been implicit. If we come to a similar sense of completion in *focusing*, we experience a bodily “felt shift”, a physical affirmation that we have brought some significant knowledge from the implicit into conscious awareness. A “felt shift” describes just what we mean by an “Aha! moment” that is accompanied by a release of bodily tension. (Harris, 2008, p. 83).



Fig. 32 represents a different dimension of informal learning – discussing implications and conclusions with a friend who is also a work colleague. The image is a photo-collage where the right hand side features a series of screen grabs from our zoom conversation, and the left hand side shows the picture we were looking at and discussing on screen (see also fig. 27).

That conversation wasn't recorded – it is one of many we have had over the past six years, as this friend is one of my closest confidants at work and we have co-inquired together frequently.

My recollection is that we started from talking about how the sculpture had impacted me and moved into conversation about conserving a sense of engagement and authentic connection in our respective teams at work. We talked about gestures of loyalty and commitment by a mutual acquaintance in the choices she made in phasing her exit to minimise disruption to others; we talked about my friend's recollection of my earlier iciness in certain situations, speculating together that this was how I had been accustomed to coping with unacknowledged anxiety, and my friend made kind comments about how my capacity to process anxiety appears to have improved as I have worked through climate crisis grief and terror through this inquiry.

### **Walking like a white man**

A completely different form of “informal learning with others” – but still of relevance here – has been what I have learned about interacting with others over the course of *walking informally through spaces shared with others*.

Negotiating space is a key feature of most urban walking, of course – that was one thing that was eerie about London Lockdown 1.0, 2020, that I could walk for exercise on Oxford Street, usually unpleasantly crowded and To Be Avoided, and find myself disconcertingly alone.

In the early phase of my walking inquiries, I lived in Limehouse, in East London, and often walked along the extensive canal networks there, on narrow tow paths, navigating my way past narrow boat mooring pegs, families with dogs or toddlers and the occasional territorial swan, whilst keeping an ear out so as to avoid the metallic whirring peril posed by passing cyclists.

In mid-2018, my office location moved from the Canary Wharf financial district to Mayfair. Pavements in central London were less orderly and seemed dirtier and filled with a greater diversity of pedestrians than the relatively focused, fast-moving, grey-suited, able-bodied office worker population I was used to encountering on my route past Canary Wharf's towers.

Navigating efficiently<sup>16</sup> through crowds had been an informal hobby of mine, in my early 30s, during a period of my life when I was regularly in training to run marathons, and I started paying attention once again, as I walked my commute in central London, now in my mid-40s.

I became interested in how space in the informal territory of the pavement is held, claimed, disputed, conceded and taken – usually wordlessly and perhaps not always consciously.

I read thought pieces (by white women) where they described gendered aspects to walking down a street, specifically the stereotypical but also, often, typical white male presumption of having perpetual right of way – e.g., Monica Hesse's article for the Washington Post (2019).

Subsequently, I read thought pieces (by Black women) where they described the politics of pavements as *intersectional*, involving both gender *and* race dimensions – see e.g., Haja Marie Kanu (2019), writing for gal-dem (an online and print publication committed to sharing perspectives from women and non-binary people of colour).

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<sup>16</sup> I note in passing that these are not innocent terms, and that I am aware they come loaded with assumptions – what does “efficiency” mean, exactly, in this context? Does it mean, “Finding the most equitable possible use of the space so that every group trying to use the pavement has their needs taken into account and has the best possible experience of being able to move in and through the space”? Not a spoiler, I think, to confirm that this is *not* what efficiency meant to me, in context, at that time.

On a couple of occasions, the question of “pavement behaviour” became a topic in coaching sessions with Clare. We considered, and played out, how it was to imagine walking in a calm, grounded state; how that state contrasted with what happened in actual daily encounters; and what “good” and “bad” use of space might look like, in body posture, in pace, in eye contact, in competing against or mingling with the walking rhythms and walk patterns of others.

I “walked these possibilities” up and down the coaching space. I noticed examples of when I was strident in holding my line, examples of when I was happy to concede, and the relatively rare examples of when someone took space from me that I hadn’t been intending to offer.

Suddenly (or eventually, but the kind of eventually where an insight has been gathering force slowly, somewhere behind the curtain of consciousness and one day, moves into view in front of the curtain and becomes *obvious*, impossible not to be known) these different circles and cycles of walking, and noticing, and reading, and exploring-in-safety combined together.

I saw with absolute clarity that my work in projecting presence on the public street had been an exercise in walking as far as possible like a certain kind of white man – the elite white male who feels entitled to dominate any available space and no longer holds to the old-fashioned polite etiquette that a person, sorry, a man, in that position should take care of the weak, needy, vulnerable, and female, around him. It was a lightning bolt moment that told me my own pavement etiquette had to change – from thinking about space through the lens of my own use and need of it towards looking out for opportunities to concede or share space.

In that moment, I also saw that the way I walk along a pavement isn’t just about walking down pavements; it’s about how I occupy space at the office, in the bonus pool, at a party. This was my single clearest glimpse into why Black women express frustration or rage at white cis-gender female behaviour; why we are too often not good allies to other humans who may have a harder fight than we do for access to resources.

## 7.4 On the role of audience, performativity, embodiment and musicality

### **The role of audience – being moved**

I don't often cry.

One monumental burst travelling to see my grandmother for the last time – the grandmother who helped to raise me, and whose life I “walked through” in this inquiry, and at whose funeral I read Christina Rossetti's Remember (1862). Many tearful moments thinking of Mandy Thatcher, AMSR alumna, whose cancer story closed on 01 February 2020.

I don't often cry – at life.

But I cry frequently as audience to – film, tv, theatre, music, poetry.

I am moved, sometimes without warning but for reasons that are evident, as at the mention of the toddler-sized coffin at the end of Seamus Heaney's Mid-term Break (1998), sometimes in a way that I cannot easily articulate, at the sheer relief at the sense of being *comprehended*.

Most recently, the Keep Going Song, by Thebengsons, 2020, had this rain-in-sunshine effect (it is a kind, full-souled presentation by two hippies singing blessings as the pandemic rages).

The ability of artful material to not just *inform us about* a subject but to cause us in some way *to live an experience* is not incidental or peripheral to how art functions to enrich our research.

Patricia Leavy opens her book on arts-based research practice by talking about her daughter's response to being taken to a concert, a synecdochal symbol for *what the arts can do*:

She stood on her chair and instinctively flung her arms up and started screaming with everyone else... She was part of something. It was visceral, embodied, and powerful...

The arts can uniquely educate, inspire, illuminate, resist, heal, and persuade...

The arts can connect us with those who are similar and dissimilar, open up new ways of seeing and experiencing, and illuminate that which otherwise remains in darkness (Leavy, 2020, p. viii-ix)

### **The role of audience – moving (towards) others**

Patricia Leavy characterises herself as desiring to connect to “similar and dissimilar” others. Examples include women struggling with body image issues or gender roles in relationships but who are not trained to decode or communicate in academic language i.e., women who Leavy would see as likely to benefit from her social science research, if she could get it to them in a form they would read (her strategy for achieving this has been to write “chick-lit” novels<sup>17</sup>).

This group (young women with self-esteem issues) are a “non-standard” audience for social science research and also a rather specific niche audience in their own right. This illustrates Tom Barone’s point that there is no such thing as a single “non-academic audience” and that all researchers must have a sense of the specificity of their relevance, and appeal, to succeed:

Ultimately all arts-informed researchers, like other artists and writers, must understand that the scope of their audience will always be finite... [nevertheless] my hope is that all arts-based social researchers will continue to experiment with various ways to move their work into the public domain, generating trenchant questions about prevailing societal conditions that might otherwise remained largely unasked outside the walls of the academy (Barone, 2008, p. 490-491)

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<sup>17</sup> I was nervous that Patricia Leavy might not take kindly to having her work described in this way (given that it’s a dismissive-slash-derogatory term for female-centred writing), but it turns out that she wrote a positive article on “chick-lit” for the Huffington Post (2014) and seems to be on a mission to claim the genre as potentially empowering for women.

Notice the “both/and” nature of Barone’s argument here – there is no easy, homogenous mass audience for (any) arts-based research material, *and* successful engagement with any (relevant) audience group will be worthwhile if this allows social science insights to pass into that group’s conversation, creating the possibility that the insights become known-in-context and reshaped.

Notice that I have shifted the emphasis toward an action research ideal i.e., from seeing the role of the audience as “passive recipients of knowledge from the academy” (a variation on the traditional model of knowledge as created and controlled by expert elites) to audience as “active participants, alongside the researcher/s, in the deepening and localising of insights”.

The audience can potentially be *very* small and yet worth engaging. Susan Finley has worked on various projects to support young homeless people and travellers in accessing education.

Given the shifting and fragmentary nature of their living arrangements, engagement with travellers generally unfolded in bursts, with frequent gaps in interactions, or loss of contact.

One project used email to create a group that functioned as both creators and audience for work; there were just five main participants, plus Susan Finley herself, positioned as a co-inquirer. Finley’s aim was to use poetry as consciousness-raising activity, to build skills and confidence:

My purpose was to shape a virtual community in which there were positive life experiences for each of the individual female travellers who chose to work with me...

We were to engage in a mode of “street education” in which we were each, simultaneously, teachers and students... My pedagogical purpose was to create a network of female travellers and use it *to encourage a women-centred literacy project in which poetry and other writings were shared among participants.*

I saw possibilities in this dialogue for me to encourage reading, writing, and computer use, and I imagined opportunities to promote the leadership skills of these young women that I understood to be potential leaders among street youths.

My pedagogy emerged from my conviction that these curious and intelligent girl-women could contribute to making real change in the power structures of street youths, inspiring cultural change that put women on equal footing with male street youths, thus elevating the status of women (Finley, 2010, p.61, emphasis added).

I found two features of the write-up instructive.

Firstly, although all five participants reported moving off the streets into some form of sheltered housing, this is not claimed as showing the intervention succeeded. Finley comments that she did not explicitly aim to persuade the young women to leave the streets (implied is: but rather to be more empowered, safer and better able to protect themselves from harm, in any context). It would be nice to think the writing helped, but the connection is unproven, though possible.

Secondly, there *is* a definite, tangible impact – on Susan Finley herself. In the “coda” to the article, Finley notes that the experience of exchanging poetry with these young women inspired the establishment of a programme (“At Home At School”) hosted through her own institution.

### **Arts-based research theory – embodiment and musicality**

In these attempts, to convey research in artful expressions available to the audience for that art, to find connection points that might make research-informed art accessible to such audiences, arts-based research theory is useful (to me) on two points in particular.

Importantly, the theory does not exclude but actively *includes* all art forms as potentially useful in furthering research – from the most concrete to the most ephemeral. This matters because to the extent art is ephemeral (music, dance, spoken poetry, theatre-pieces-in-performance), it is removed, in form at least, from the academic norms used to “catch” and “convey” knowledge.

[I say this but am immediately drawn to wondering whether this is *fundamentally* different from pre-modern scientific efforts to imagine how planetary bodies move in space, what atoms are, the composition of electricity or black holes, or from modern scientists wrestling with “invisible” topics, such as the non-universal nature of time (Carlo Rovelli, 2019).]

Partly, I believe, the rationale for these inclusions is that this is a more *truthful* and *authentic* reflection (to echo one of my earlier-stated quality criteria) of the range and complexity of human consciousness than excluding them would be.

We move, we experience moments of intangible empathy hanging in the air, human-to-human, human-to-non-human, our speech and movement have rhythms, and these play an irreplaceable part in our being, engaging, knowing.

It does bring obvious challenges around representation within the constraints of a thesis, such as how (whether) to introduce non-propositional material into the “argue and defend” format of the dissertation.

Gaylene Perry wrestles with this in her account of being required to provide an “exegesis” of her novel submitted for her fine arts dissertation (1998), provoked by the codified implication that the art can’t stand without an accompanying propositional analysis.

Shaun McNiff is an academic specialising in the use of arts in healing; his academic work treats seriously knowledge gained through artful and therapeutic interactions. He writes that:



The dream is a way of knowing and the same could be said about the process of describing it to another person, enacting it, dialoguing with dream figures, and so forth. We can continue to know it even better through painting, poetry, vocal improvisation, and various other expressive modalities, each offering their own unique interpretation and understanding of the experience.

This is an example of art-based knowing and inquiry, and *to the extent that I engage the dream methodically and document the results, I am researching the experience.* (McNiff, 2008, p.37, emphasis added).

This dilemma around modes of expression and how best to incorporate is also relevant here, with this document structured so that each chapter opens with a short artful interlude consisting of i) an idea/quote; ii) an image; and iii) a poem. This was my attempt to acknowledge the forms that have held my inquiry, and to create mood, or atmosphere, going into each section. I subsequently added commentary that “unpacks” what I believe the art is “about”, which is offered as a bridge between the artful and analytical elements of my work.

### **Arts-based research theory – wisdom from the “other side”**

Arts-based research theory also insists that our knowing is enriched through fresh perspectives gained as we translate well-established insights from one discipline into new contexts.

Where mainstream propositional writing focuses and relies on sequences of two-dimensional symbols (written text) to carry meaning, arts-based work from the worlds of music, dance and theatre reveals that the “putting forth” of an artful thing can also be critical to sense-making.

Susan Finley identifies performance of art as being the means by which insight begins to be transposed into action for a fairer world, clarifying issues and strengthening resolve:

*Performativity* is the quality criterion I emphasise... to achieve... inquiry that is activist, engages in critical reflection, resists neoconservatism in preference of social justice, and purposefully facilitates imaginative thinking about multiple, new, and diverse ways of understanding and living in the world (Susan Finley, 2008, p.80).

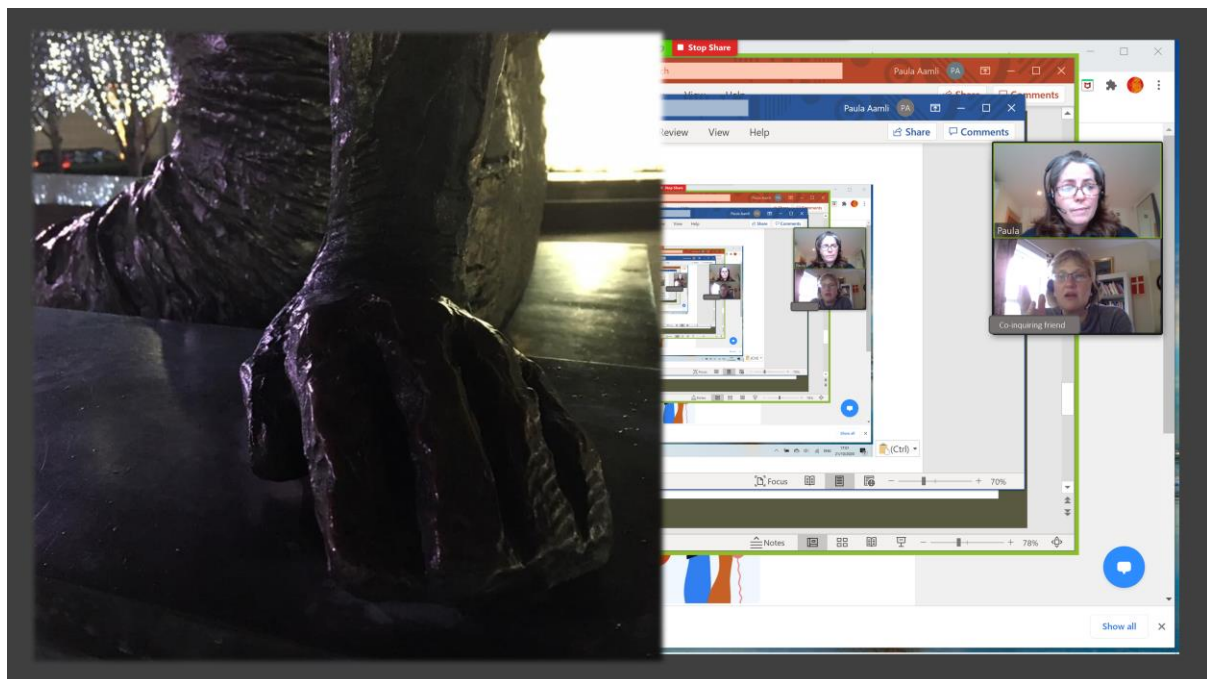
Access to fresh insight is a fundamental benefit of working across disciplinary borders – however, it is still *work*. Liora Bresler started in academia as a musicologist before moving to work on an education research project with Elliot Eisner, in which she drew on her knowledge of music to make sense of classroom observations, which were unfamiliar to her (2008, p.226).

Bresler developed a framework for using dimensions of music (form, rhythm, melody, texture) to illuminate aspects of lived experience in terms and from the perspective of these elements, but she cautions researchers aspiring to use artforms (such as music) to inform their work that, “although musical experiences create these sensitivities [oral, kinaesthetic, cognitive], it takes an active transfer to apply them to social science research” (Bresler, 2008, p.227).

This is a useful reminder that the guiding assumptions within a specific artful form are to an extent unique to that form, and must be learned, practiced, internalised, hence the insistence on *sustained effort* and continuing to pay attention to *aesthetic impact*, both of which are quality criteria I have emphasised as applicable and important for evaluating this work.



*Fig. 31: A pause during a walk in the woods to discuss our responses to climate crisis (2019).*



*Fig. 32: Discussing the “encounter with the hand of Flo” moment with a friend (2020).*



## Chapter Eight: *Poetic Charting My Own Her/Story*

I want them to water-ski  
across the surface of a poem  
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do  
is tie the poem to a chair with rope -  
and torture a confession out of it.

From "Introduction to Poetry" by Billy Collins  
Published (1996) in *The Apple That Astonished Paris*.



*Fig. 33: Collage-gift from a friend, protest T-shirt, tailored gloves and art works (Feb 2020).*

## 8.0 [Poem] Shadows on the landscape

*[Written after a visit to my father, in Macclesfield, Cheshire, Jan 2015.]*

Midmorning and the watery winter sun

Dancing beguilingly on the kitchen taps as the rhythms of a lazy breakfast

Faded –

Sang into the gathering silence

The next verse of the song of the morning,

Calling us to the hills.

A chaos of organisation later and we are stuffed into the car,

Stumbling past Saturday traffic that snaked and stuttered through stony streets until –

Escape!

Boot-encased and festooned with scarves,

We tap a slow beat upwards to the shoulder of the rise.

The shadows climb with us.

They, like we, summit slowly,

Slipping unevenly up jagged steps and

Tipping from traitorous turf canyons

Fringing lakes of mud that lurk to engulf the unwary.

At first

It is the ghosts of our former selves

Cursing and puffing amongst us,

A chorus of ‘Do you remember?’

Dipping between the sacred and mundane.

Twenty years since, or thirty. What was her name again? So young. Tragic.

And the time we sat... here!

No, this bench,

Round the corner.

My, it was cold.

Funny sight,

Huddled in against the evening,

Hunched and chattering,

Howling at the harvest moon.

Rising higher,

Our feet push further into the past.

Quarry scars rake the hillside

That rings with imagined chisel blows,

The grind of engines, screaming drills.

Bones from ancient waters –

Composted and crushed to rock

Then gouged and cracked and crumbled,

‘Seventy percent of our bustling town’ lined with their stony remains.

Now our chat wanders loose

Beyond the edges of the county

To tall tales of dinosaur bones

So scaled that eight men together could hardly hold them.

Then tracing the violent caress of vanished ice rivers

We wind back into the valley,

Passing crouched farms

With their whispered tales

Of uncounted years

Spent fighting the wind.



Approaching the car,  
Our ghost companions  
Shake and fade,  
Floating away.

We pass the threshold of the lane,  
Stretching stiffness out of back and neck –

Claxoning for attention  
In the shelter of the parking bay

That called unnoticed  
On the heath amidst the tales.

## 8.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Eight

### **What does it mean to see? And what is meaningful to look at?**

What does it mean, not just to look but to *see*? Recently I came across a social constructionist joke emphasising the role of what we already believe in what we think we are seeing in a reversal of the traditional common sense maxim (i.e., that we can believe something if we see it “with our own eyes”). Rather, as the constructionist tells it, “I didn’t see it, till I believed it!”

The awareness of a strong internal drive in humans to make sense of the world around us by reference to the narratives and logics that we already consider credible has been an important factor in several of the design choices I have made for this work, some of which are reflected in the artworks included in this chapter.

The capacity for self-deception leads me to the logic of wanting to look not once, but over and over again; this is a key reason for using *sustained, ongoing effort* as one of my foundational quality criteria when considering research findings (my own and those of other researchers).

The slipperiness of interpretation also helps to explain why I draw on a number of forms of creative expression, attempting to meet another of my foundational quality criteria, that the work should convey a sense of truthfulness /verisimilitude, that it should “ring true” as an authentic expression of what is seen – and what meaning is taken – at the moment of creation. This is because the artful forms I use leave traces behind (I appreciate not all art-forms do).

The effort, then, becomes to convey as fulsomely and as accurate as possible what seems to be important in the thing I have experienced or am witnessing, and to do this over and over again. This builds a body of work that can be accessed by an audience, who form their own view about what is shown, and the extent to which a representation is truthful or meaningful.

Figs. 43 – 49 stand as examples here. They are extracted from a much larger series of images from when UK went into lockdown in March 2020 to try to contain the spread of COVID-19 (available on Instagram @peaamli). Previously crowded pavements were suddenly empty (fig. 43), public amenities placed out-of-bounds (fig. 44), and various creatures that typically venture outside under cover of darkness became bolder about sharing human spaces in daylight (fig. 45). I didn't see my place of work for a month, and then only from the outside (fig. 46), the conventions for using public transport changed, more than once, so that we had to re-learn where to board and when to pay (fig. 47). Tributes to the NHS sprang up all over the place (fig. 48) and restrictions on leaving the house meant that sometimes, I found myself walking to 10,000 steps in my bedroom (fig. 49).

Now, I can imagine objections to the inclusion even of a small selection of such images as part of a doctoral submission and suggest that these objections could be boiled down to i) are these photographs of my daily life important (enough) to merit such serious academic attention? And ii) are these images good (enough) to take up other people's time considering them?

I'm going to take these in turn, and am calling on a social scientist poetic researcher, Sandra Faulkner, for help addressing the first objection, and poet Billy Collins for help with the second. Faulkner vigorously argues that working with highly personal subjects can be an effective means of progressing from person-level insights towards external political and social goals:

The use of personal poetry engages the political power of poetry to present embodied, nuanced, and myriad scenes of marginalized and stigmatized identities. Poetry taps into the universal through radical subjectivity. The poet's use of personal experience creates something larger from the particular; the concrete specifics become universal when the audience relates to, embodies, and/or experiences the work as if it were their own words (Faulkner, 2017, p. 89).

Translating this into action research tropes, I read Faulkner as saying that it is not (or is not necessarily) solipsistic or irrelevant to the “real work” to look closely at the minutiae of an individual life, but that this internally focused first person work can be where meaningful discoveries occur. These discoveries then in turn can shape our work in second person contexts (e.g., shared learning and change objectives at the level of small-scale networks of e.g., colleagues, friends, neighbours) and third person contexts (e.g., shared learning and change objectives relevant to a wider system, society, set of institutions, etc.)

Meanwhile, Billy Collins, across the breadth of his work, argues for the value of a light touch. Having been reminded by recent headlines of the brutal reality of repression still widely in evidence today, I wavered about whether to include the Collins quote that opens this chapter.

There is of course a danger that the poem is read as denying or making light of torture – which, to be absolutely clear, is abhorrent and not remotely a laughing matter. However, there *is* a serious, and I believe, valid point, in what Collins is saying in his poem and in what I am trying to get at by including it. Collins is, I believe, saying that a lightness of touch may, in some circumstances, serve better as a source of insight into the essence of the phenomenon at hand.

I am suspicious of, or at best, a little down-hearted by, the kind of activism that responds to the many grievous struggles and injustices that exist by insisting that everything we do must always be fully imbued by our grief and anger. To the extent that we are unable to acknowledge these evils whilst also continuing to access the joy, beauty, fun, thankfulness and so on that still, at the same time, also characterises human existence, to that extent, we are, I believe, denied the sources of relief and restoration that can keep us resilient, can spare us from burnout.

Are my photographs from lockdown “good enough” to merit “serious” consideration? Probably not – I’m not best placed to comment because it happens that I’m really fond of them. Are they capable of conveying the things that gave comfort and hope during that time? I hope so.

## **Walking with my family**

Speaking of burdensome subjects – in a post-Larkin world, families of origin can often be assumed to be problematic, as famously expressed in Philip Larkin’s poem, *This Be the Verse*, “They f--- you up, your mum and dad. / They may not mean to, but they do.” (Larkin, 1971).

I grew up with so much suppressed anxiety, I suppose I assumed that it must have an evident, obvious cause and this made me reluctant to go looking, nervous of the answers I might find.

But what if anxiety, however pervasive, has no straight-forward rational explanation, if the secrets shied away from by previous generations turn out to be small sorrows, not particularly melodramatic, nothing to be ashamed of from today’s perspective? A heart-to-heart on a walk in the Cheshire hills (described in 8.0) reveals no horrors, just some chirpy trivia and the sad news of the daughter of friends, lost to cancer as a young woman, some years previously.

The big revelations are – small revelations. People in the family story squabble with their siblings, fall in love, have children divorce, change jobs, move to a new country. They “make something of themselves” – or they don’t. They terrify their parents by driving around on a motorbike, even though both parents know of relatives who died young in bike accidents...

They go to university – or they don’t. They buy a big grand house in an expensive part of town, or they build their own house, with a large play area in the garden with a trampoline and what looks like a kiddie assault course, robust enough to withstand the attention of a tribe of cousins. Or they live in a flat that belongs to a parent. They pattern themselves after their parents, or pattern themselves as a protest, resisting the things their parents seemed to care for.

Maybe in middle age, their politics drift to the left and they find themselves going on a Walk for Wildlife with one of their parents (fig. 33) and wondering how it took so long to realise that the things they were told as a child would have been worth paying closer attention to.

## 8.2 Walking and *poetic charting*

### 8.2.1 Looking back to my childhood

Most of my adult life, I have acted as though I came from “nowhere in particular” and that (almost) all the important relationships in my life began after I went to Oxford for University.

Going to Oxford changed my life. Quite apart from anything else, the degree I earned there made me eligible to convert onto a graduate training programme with a global bank at the age of 29, after I walked away from the not-for-profit sector.

(The factors that led me to walk away, are, as they say, another story, but it was my third significant “loss-of-faith” moment, the others being my progressive disenchantment with what I now see as narrow, exclusionary, patriarchy-sustaining evangelical Christianity, and my related, slowly-strengthening resolve to leave a marriage that wasn’t abusive but wasn’t – ever, really – what I wanted.)

I went to Oxford because going there felt as though it was within my grasp, which is not how it felt to my parents – my mum turned down an offer to take her doctorate at Somerville because she couldn’t see herself at Oxbridge. Oxford felt possible because going to a fee-paying secondary school changed my life, and, probably not incidentally, my accent, and gave me the focus and support and self-belief to apply there and to take up a place there.

I went to a fee-paying private school because I was bright enough to pass the entrance exam with no coaching and because my parents could afford to pay to send me there, once they had got past their left-wing reluctance to do so. We lived in Cheshire because my parents worked in the pharmaceutical industry – I realise that I’ve never asked whether they had any left-wing reluctance about that. We lived in Cheshire, but we weren’t *from* Cheshire.

As far as I could tell, we were from “nowhere in particular”.

Both my parents left home at 18, from Pembrokeshire (mum) and Nottinghamshire (dad). They went away to University and never went back, other than for occasional awkward, stilted visits to siblings who had stayed at home.

We lived in white middle-class suburbia and we spent time with other families from white working-class backgrounds who had also earned university degrees and landed professional sector jobs and were making themselves middle-class. My parents were like them except that after graduating, my parents had lived for a few years in South America and then in France.

I thought this was by some stretch the coolest thing about my parents. They drank *filter coffee*, not the instant powder that my grandmother insisted tasted better. They spoke foreign languages and had friends from Abroad. I wanted to live in Abroad, too; it sounded so adventurous. I promised myself that I would leave Cheshire at 18 and never go back.

Looking back, I have... questions. And I now see so many things that I didn't, then, question. For example, why don't I remember any posh people? Cheshire is supposedly full of them. Clearly none of them were friendly with my parents, which makes perfect sense to me now.

Why did I feel so out-of-place? Was it *really* just a class thing? Maybe. That explains the feeling alienated from my cousins on both sides, none of whom took kindly to the “Home Counties with A Touch of Lancashire” accent I had adopted.

It may explain the not-getting-on with the sun-kissed-looking kids at school but doesn't explain why I also felt out-of-step with the other kids I grew up with, the children of people who *were* friends with my parents.

And, if equality and social change were so important, why did we spend our childhood at piano lessons and cricket matches rather than learning to be good little activists?

I do remember my mum standing in the supermarket fruit aisle making sure she didn't buy anything from Still-Subject-To-Apartheid South Africa. And I remember her making me go door-to-door in the neighbourhood, delivering and collecting the charity envelopes she had volunteered to distribute – until I was bitten by a neighbourhood dog and then that stopped.

Thinking about my life as it appears now, the things I think I stand for, the trade-offs I make, the compromises I rationalise, I wonder, “What shadows these choices will cast for my future reflexive self?” I wonder what shadows they cast to others, glancing at my life, or peering at it now, looking at me working in a bank, making ad hoc charitable donations and avoiding protest marches and demonstrations even when we're *not* in the middle of a global pandemic.

I went to Oxford, to start my “from nowhere in particular” life but I suppose I am not surprised that, acknowledged or not, my past remained with me - in my values, experiences, priorities, friendships. Also, in the swirling patterns of my specific DNA, my position in the chain of generations that have been before me, my place in the web of life that knits together the global biosphere. After all, the reality is that I do *not* come “from nowhere”.

When I started paying attention to climate crisis, I realised that the “disembeddedness” I had wanted and welcomed is almost certainly part of the problem.

If I am “from nowhere in particular” then can I go *anywhere* and treat it as mine, acting from a sort of perpetual mindset of re-colonisation? What obligations do I have to take care of where I am now or where I go?

I wanted to walk, as part of the construction of this inquiry, because I wanted an excuse to get out of our human-made structures, away the mesmerising allure of my laptop screen and dependence on our Wi-Fi connection, patchy as often is, now that we are back in Clerkenwell.



I wanted to walk outside (even though most days stepping “outside” takes me into a city-scape not into countryside and certainly not into “wilderness”) because my starting assumption was that separation from a sense of ourselves as “from the natural world”, as part of Nature, was one pre-condition (*the main one?*) for structural choices that degrade our natural environments.

I learned to suspect that the pre-eminence given to productivity and profit-maximisation in Western cultures was another vital part of the picture; this troubled me at first, because seeing myself as “productive” was fundamental to my sense of myself as a “flourishing” human.

Latterly, I am also learning to be more troubled by the assumption that productive humans must be flourishing, and that flourishing humans must be “productive”.

One fundamental lesson of the 2008 credit crisis was that *terrible* employment practices (and terrible social consequences) can become tolerated and normalised from a basic logic that hitting targets is always good.

Walking became a covert rebellion, in placing value on *travelling more slowly than necessary*.

And walking *also* became an opportunity spend some of that “slowed-down” time reflecting on where I come from – as an evolved nature-being and also as a child of a particular family in a specific cultural context, or set of contexts, during a certain period in their respective histories.

### 8.2.2 Looking back further



*Fig. 34: Three generations on the doorstep, and a fourth behind the camera (1974).*

The idea of including my family story as part of my initial cycle/s of inquiry sidled up on me.

I wasn't aware of having burning questions about my family background, which I tended to see as "remote" from my life and work and studies in London, the everyday things I was absorbed by or cared about. By contrast, I did have pressing questions about Wales. I felt a subtle shift when we travelled from the city, five hours west by rail or road, to Pembrokeshire, almost all the way to the end of the land, almost as far as the cliffs facing towards Ireland.

The coast cast a subtle spell – the astonishing palette of greys and greens and turquoise that saturated the entire shore-scape, the sense of being in the presence of ancient land (the oldest rocks in Pembrokeshire date back 650 million years, projecting back into the deep past). I felt a consolation in the unhurried rise and fall of the tides, the erratic shifts in the tilt and curve of the beach, the predictable movements of the gulls, sanderlings, oystercatchers; I loved our house, with its extravagant, endlessly soothing view over Carmarthen Bay.

I had questions, like, "Could I find a way to belong here?" and I think I accepted that answering that question would probably involve thinking about my family history and how and where I fitted into it. My grandparents settled in Tenby but were not *from* Tenby. My grandfather, John Price, received an OBE, in the final year of his life, for his planning work on the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park but I haven't found any mention of him in the local histories of the Park. Mum travelled back to Pembrokeshire from her home in France specifically so that I would be born in the county she grew up in, but at that time we were only there briefly, as visitors.

So, I was going to walk in Wales, to inquire about nature, and about my relationship with Wales. I was going to take a block of time out from work and walk the length of the Wales Coast Path and Offa's Dyke Path, together a distance of 1,057 miles. (*Eerie to think that since I was planning to walk Spring 2020, I would have been disrupted by the present pandemic.*)

When I shifted to what I eventually ended up doing, i.e., a sustained period of short local walks, I looked for some continuity, and decided that I would walk, cumulatively, the same distance and that I would think about the Welsh side of my family while I did so. It was immediately, instinctively clear to me that my primary focus would be on drawing the line back through Nanna Aileen, my maternal grandmother. She was my chief babysitter and primary caregiver after my mum went back to work, my great source of stability and love as a child. This meant, however, “leaving” Wales almost immediately, because her mother, Great Gran Jo, was Irish. I don’t remember my Great Gran Jo. She died when I was one and as far as I’m aware, other than for fig. 34, the only other picture we are both in (sort of) was a photograph of my mum, Nanna Aileen and Jo standing together in a garden, my mum heavily pregnant with me.

My mum remembers Jo with fondness – and with fear. Apparently, she was mercurial, laughing and playful one moment, shouting and lashing out the next; apparently, she mellowed with age. Jo was born in Kilkenny, Ireland, a place that we had never visited, even though Jo had returned to Kilkenny for the birth of her first child, my grandmother. Other than giving birth, who knows what else happened but presumably, something... bad. Jo never went back again, even for her parents’ funerals and the Irish family was never mentioned when my mum was growing up.

Mum and I travelled to Kilkenny in 2017 to look for papers on the family history. The records in Kilkenny were good. we quickly mapped the main family relationships for Jo, born Anne (she took “Angelica Josephine” as her name at confirmation), and for her father, William, and for his father, David.

Inevitably, it was easier to trace the men than the women. We found that they were stonecutters and that this was certainly what took them to Kilkenny. By the 1911 census, the Lehanes are listed as living in a “third class cottage” in Kilkenny; Anne/Jo Lehane was 16 and probably a year or so away from moving away, ultimately forever.



*Fig. 35. Hotel view and the nearby site of the Lehanes' cottage – photo collage (2017).*

Oxford changed my life, but so too did Great Gran Jo's decision to leave Kilkenny. And so did Nanna Aileen's decision to marry a middle-class man and move to Tenby. And so, also, did my mum's decision to go to university, then into business, then into running a business.

I am grateful for their choices, giving me this family story of progress and progressive enrichment, generation by generation. At the same time, given what we now know about the emerging climate crisis, the story of "progress" is a story I am trying to complicate, problematise and ultimately "unlearn" as not the most useful story, given the limits on Earth's resources. Further, given what I now understand about systemic injustice, I also question the implied moral, that our fate is (mainly) determined by our individual choices.

Per Kate Raworth (2017), I want to know what I think it will take to lift people out of poverty without overshooting the limits of our planet's capacity to absorb our activity.

### 8.3 Example one: *Poetic charting* an imagined 250 years with my family

#### 8.3.1 Two main influences for a "time-walk"

To the best of my knowledge, this specific structure – walking generationally in this way through the timeline of my own family, from the past into the future – is unique, though it combined two particular influences, first encountered in AMSR.

The first influence was directly poetic, namely the 2011 poem, Hieroglyphic Stairway, by Drew Dellinger, in which he imagines a conversation with his great great grandchildren:

It's 3:23 in the morning  
and I am awake  
because my great great grandchildren  
won't let me sleep.

My great great grandchildren  
ask me in dreams –  
What did you do while the planet was plundered?

When I encountered Dellinger's poem, I couldn't read it without crying.

I was raw with horror and grief from the realisation that the environmental damage I had been peripherally aware of was not merely rude, obnoxious behaviour by a few "gammony" capitalists but was inflicting probably permanent, probably irreparable changes. Wildlife was dying, habitats being destroyed. The crisis was calling into question the long-range viability of all biological life on the planet.

Previously, I hadn't paid much attention to the prospects for future generations, being choicefully, contentedly childless. But I can *imagine* future generations – most of my friends have children; my brother does. Dellinger prompted me to consider what *I* would want to be able to say to these imagined people with their notional (hoped for) future lives. My way into the topic of intergenerational justice was via Dellinger, who I understand as influenced by the teachings of Indigenous elders, in addition to having been mentored by the great Catholic environmentalist, Thomas Berry (1990, 1999, and see also Zegneg, 2013).

The second influence is science-based but strongly imaginal, the work of Stefan Harding (e.g., *Animate Earth*, 2009) where he reframes humanity's relationship with the planet in relational terms, following his mentor James Lovelock. Harding suggests a series of activities to help his audience to explore this perspective, intellectually and affectively, including an imaginal "timewalk" through the full 13.9-billion-year history of the universe in highly summarised form, say equating one metre walked to one million years ((Peter) Oswald & Harding, 2018).

### 8.3.2 The mechanics of walking and charting

I decided that 10,000 steps "stood for" one year on the timeline.

I worked out that the target 1,057 miles could be equated to a generation-boundaried timespan starting in 1871 with the birth of my Irish great grandfather, William Lehane, and ending in "2123" to when an imagined great great grandchild would be expecting (his) first child.

Essentially, my "walk through time" was imaginal, although anchored by a scattering of facts where known – names, birth dates, marriage dates, death dates. For all "future" births and deaths, I "smoothed" and "depersonalised" by imagining that everyone who appears in the timeline has a child at the age of 30 and dies at the age of 80.

I looked back into the past along a chain of mother /daughter relationships, but when I “looked forward”, to reflect that I have nephews, not nieces, I imagined a chain of fathers and sons.

Year	Notable stuff also incl who: Born Married Split up Died	miles (4.18/yr)	miles (4.18/yr)	miles (4.18/yr)	miles (4.18/yr)	Where?
1871 4.1825	William Lehane - born 9th July (My mum, gt gd-d is 8th July)					Coniston - Tarn How to Three Shires Inn
1872 8.37						Coniston - Tarn How to Three Shires Inn
1873 12.5m	ONE HUNDRED YEARS BEFORE					Coniston - Tarn How to Three Shires Inn
1874 16.73m						Limehouse Basin to Queen Eliz Park
1875 20.91m						From Cork Street, Mayfair to Limehouse
1876						From Cork Street, Mayfair to Limehouse
1877						Limehouse to RA and back again
1878						Limehouse to RA and back again
1879						Limehouse Basin to Queen Eliz Park
1880	Walked my first decade -William Lehane was 9(ish) on 9/7/1880					Limehouse Basin to Queen Eliz Park
1881	Natural History Museum PG Wodehouse born					From Cork Street, Mayfair to Limehouse
1882	Iambic pentameter emerges in the notes for the first time...					Thames to Tower Bridge and back
1883						Remembrance walk Olympic park/Tower
1884	Greenwich set as the meridian for universal time Oct 13th 1884				Mddx Library	Remembrance walk Olympic park/Tower
1885	Death of Victor Hugo aged 83; Huckleberry Finn is published	Mddx Library	Macclesfield 14/11	Macclesfield 14/11		Hendon Central to Mddx then home
1886						Cork Street St John St Bank /DLR/ home
1887	Wrote first walking poem -William Lehane was 16(ish)					8CK to Tower DLR - feet hurt! - home
1888						A round and round in Hyde Park mostly
1889						Thames to Tower Bridge and back
1890	24th Sept WL=Bridget Croke (17) in Callan (probably actually 15)		Late + rain + bus =FAIL	Late + rain + bus =FAIL		Misc various - to St Pauls and SJ Park
1891	Christopher Lehane b in Callan					Green Park- Pimlico_ W'minster
1892		OXFORD	OXFORD	OXFORD	OXFORD	Ashmolean, SJC, St Aldates, Drayton
1893		OXFORD	OXFORD	OXFORD	OXFORD	Christchurch meadow and univerty park
1894 100m	Just over 100 qualifying miles walked so far :- ) 9.5% //POEM	OXFORD	OXFORD	St James's Park 26/11	St James's Park 26/11	Christchurch meadow and univerty park
1895	Anne Lehane ("Gt Gran Jo") b to WL & Bridget nee Croke // 12th April					Work-bank-Amwel St - bank - 10DH

Fig. 36. Walk journal with extrinsic historical data circled in red (Oct 2018).



Initially, I thought I would “bring the past to life” with snippets of actual historical events that occurred in the years I was “walking through”, maybe reading about them as I went but it quickly became apparent that this idea was peripheral to my question, not really adding anything to the thread of inquiry I was following. Anyway, roughly half of the walk was through an imagined future timeline, to the birth of a notional future great-great grandchild; there *could be no* “historical data” for that part of the activity... It was *just* about imagining.

Clearly, on a small scale, there was a “real” sense in which I was walking through time, through seven months for the initial walking inquiry, and through five months for the second.

So, there’s a “real” practice at the heart of my inquiry and lots of data, nicely filed away in Excel format, that can be cut and re-cut, and it all feels satisfyingly “sciency” and analytical, even if the basic data unit (my average stride length) is only a rough-and-ready measure, and the measurements proved to be not more important than the notes or the coloured-in blocks.

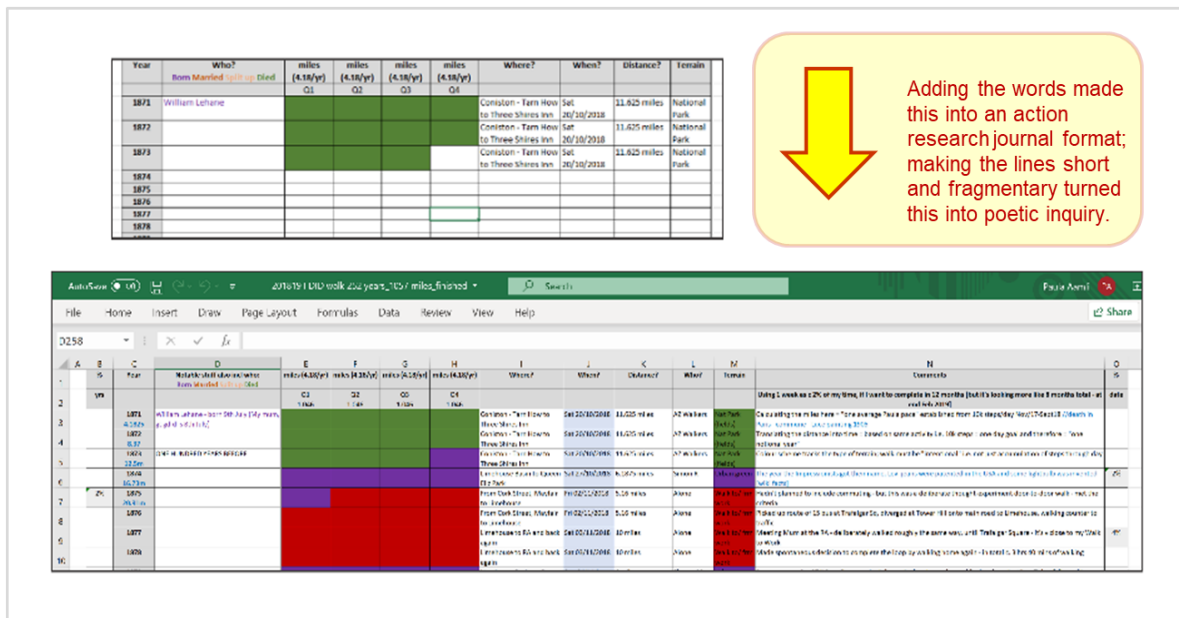


Fig. 37: Setting out – original and enhanced versions of my journal template (Oct 2018).

### 8.3.3 “1871 to 1894”

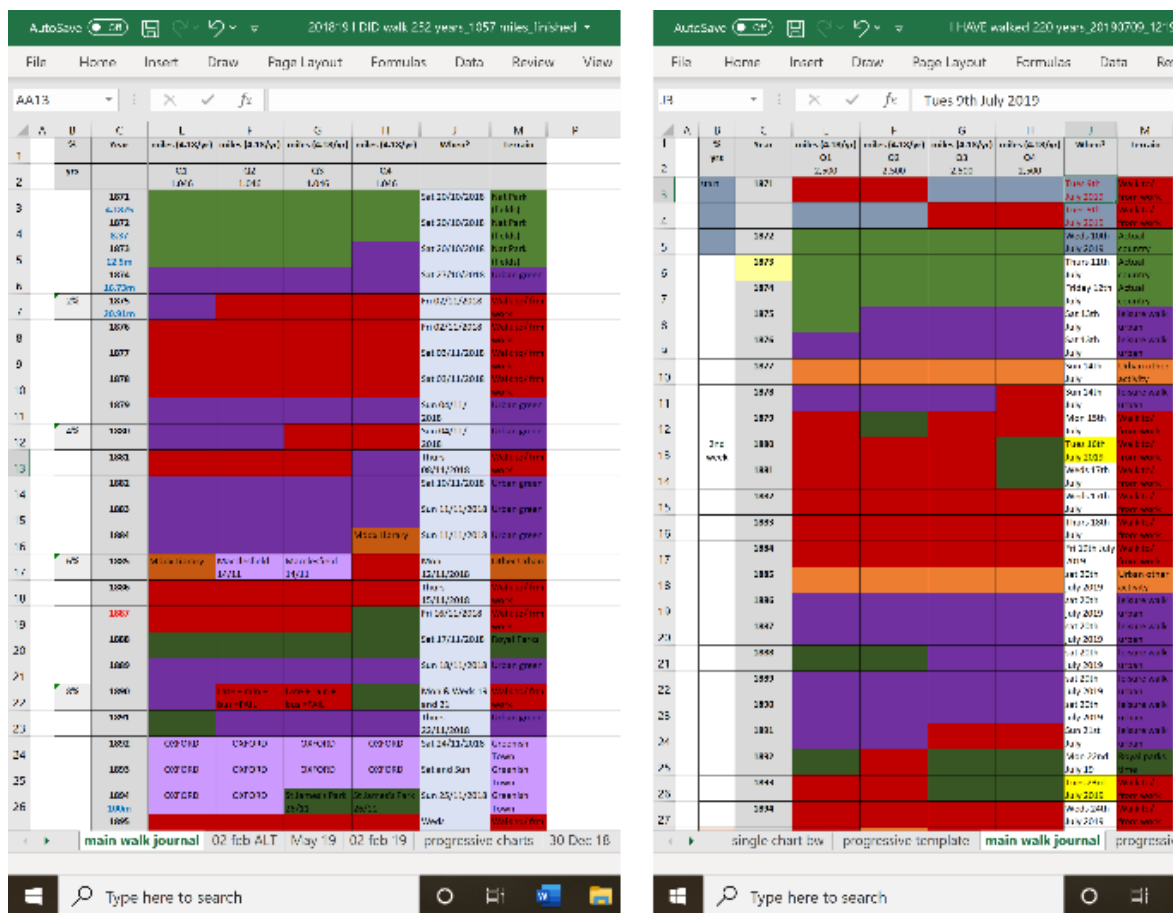


Fig. 38: Walking with the Lehanes (Oct 2018 / July 2019).

These four sections are included to reassure you (or, more likely, to reassure *me*) that back in 2018/19 I really did all that walking, looking for insight, and that I diligently wrote notes and coloured in blocks on the charts to record the “terrain” I was walking in. Each block represents 2,500 steps and took 15-30 minutes to walk depending on whether I was pushing or dawdling. Tiny slices of time. Wondering, wondering, about generational responsibility, about *my* role and responsibilities. Tying to re-imagine myself connected to nature, but also within a family. First time through, I started at “William Lehane’s birth-year”, 1871. The second time, I started *poetic charting* on his birthday, 9<sup>th</sup> July, but “unofficially” (that’s what the grey-blue blocks denote). I started the formal record two days later, counting from 1873 when my great-great-grandmother, Bridget Croke, was born, because I also wanted to acknowledge *her* life.

### 8.3.4 “1959 to 1982”

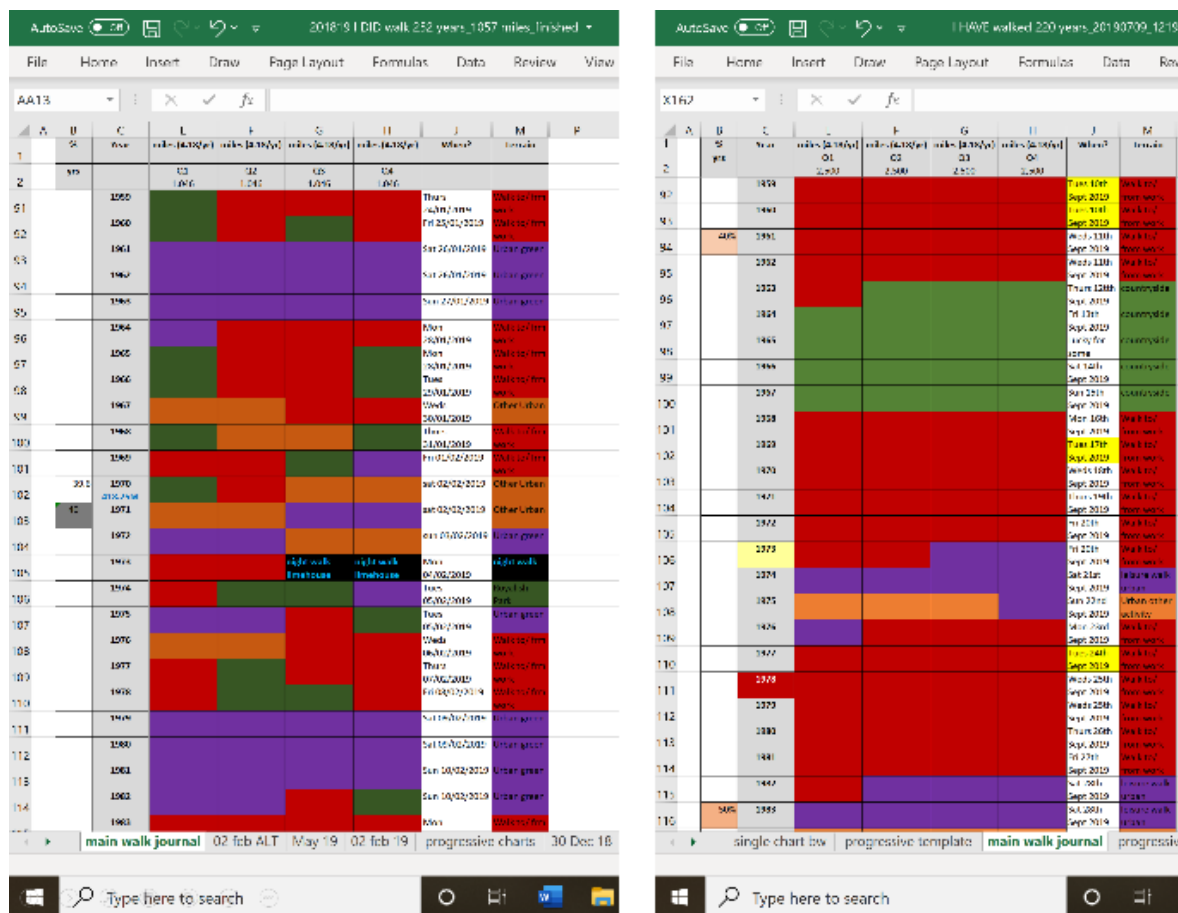


Fig. 39: Walking through my “birth year” (Jan 2019 /Sept 2019).

The screenshots cover the start and end of the walks, the section that walked “into my life” and the section that stepped from the then-present-day “into the future”. Red blocks, the most common colour through these walking cycles, show when I was walking-to-commute.

No individual data point really “matters” – these are slices of my mundane, small-scale everyday life – and even the cumulative picture is somewhat interesting, *somewhat not* and conversely, in a way, each moment of REALLY paying close attention mattered tremendously in teaching me to address the question, “Who am I now? What about now? And – now?”

It was disconcerting to imagine walking through my parents’ lives towards my own, imagining them as young, as having many choices, imagining my birth as one of their unfolding choices.

### 8.3.5 “2018 to 2041”

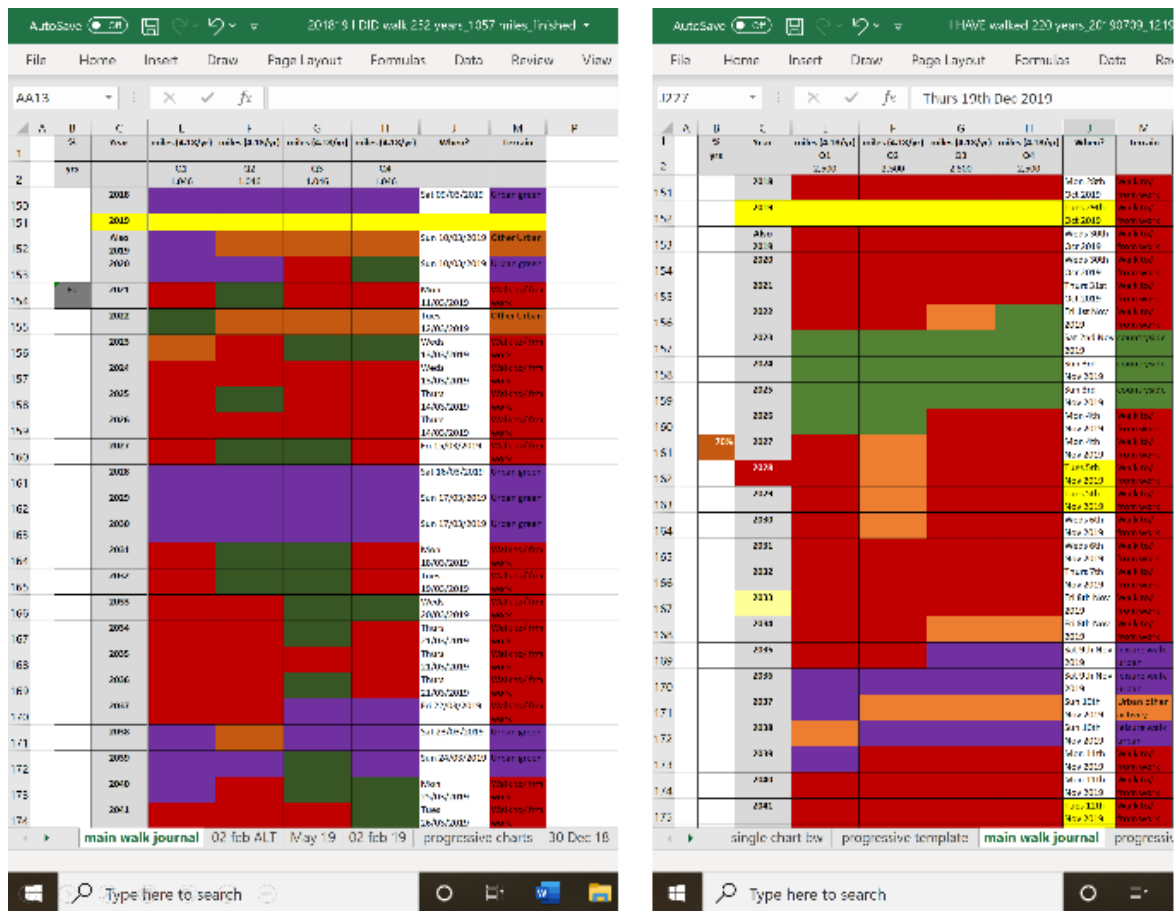


Fig. 40: Tipping into “the future” (March 2019 /Oct 2019).

Another disorientation – stepping from a loose framework of facts anchoring the walk into an entirely imaginal exercise. (At the time of walking, 2020 was in the future... I had no idea...)

My isolated book-worm childhood had shown me that I felt closer to the protagonists of the books I read than to most of the people I spent time with “in the real world”. Now, through writing exercises and reading the experiences of other writers and researchers I had slowly built my confidence that it was possible to use fictional writing to explore *real* issues. Now, walking, I imagined the process of aging towards the end of life, wondering about what would matter to me then, wondering what kind of world my imagined great-nephews would live to see.

### 8.3.6 “2100 to 2123” / “2085” to “2093”

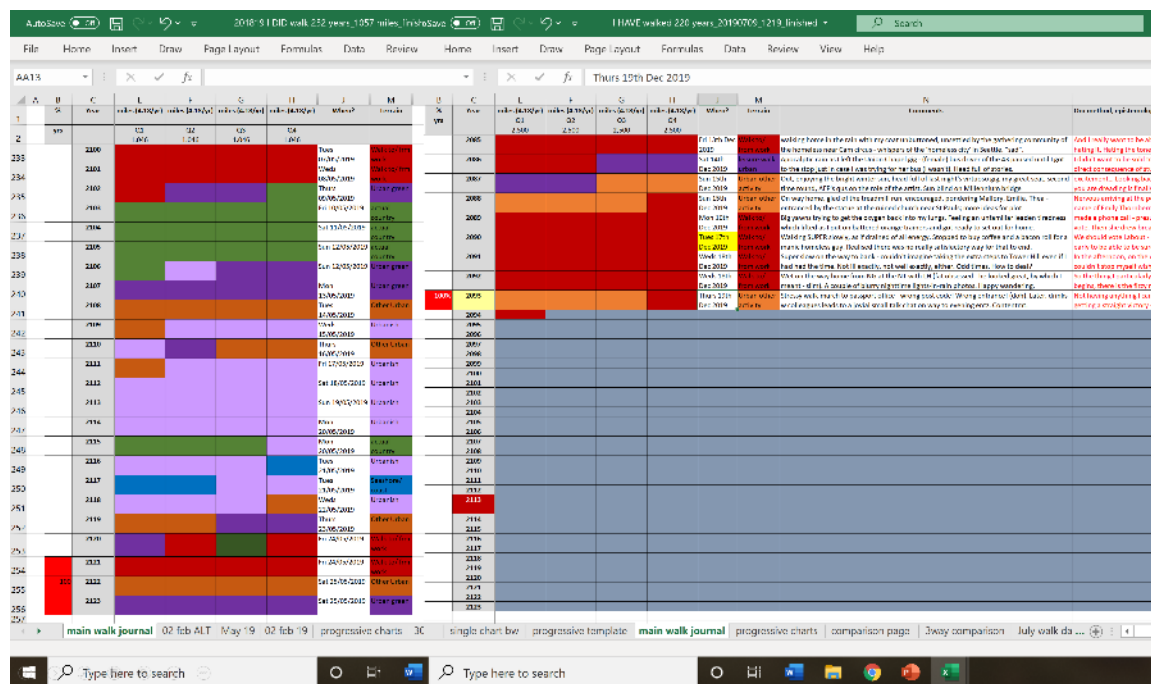


Fig. 41: Completing the walk/s (May 2019 /Dec 2019).

The final screenshot in the series shows that I didn’t walk as far the second time round (that’s the significance of the recurring grey-blue blocks on the bottom part of the right-hand graphic). I didn’t feel “done” with following the generational links – and I *did* want to keep walking, because walking was a consolation and because the small dependable repeating activity of the journal kept me calm – but I didn’t see the need to walk the entire “notional” Coast Path again. Speaking of coast, the mid-blue coloured blocks in the left-hand graphic represent seashore; these three are the only blue blocks in the selection, though not in the entire dataset. Coast walking generally meant being in Pembrokeshire and the chunks of time we spent there – Easter, May Bank Holiday – seemed not to coincide with the datapoints I chose to include. Still, I am struck by the absence of coast in an inquiry originally proposed as a Coast Path walk. I conclude that Wales is not as important to me as I had expected (an inkling further confirmed by noticing that I wanted to stay in London and not in Wales during the 2020 pandemic).

#### 8.4 Example two: *Poetic charting* the first COVID-19 London lockdown

My original walking cycles, linked to an imagined “time-walk” through generations of my Irish/Welsh family line, dated to Oct 2018 – May 2019 and July – Dec 2019. Then, when starting to write up, in H1 2020, I decided to undertake a cycle of *poetic charting* as I did so, re-cutting the chart template to remove the “time-walk”. My intention was to maintain the simple daily reflexive activity as a routine, seeking to keep my experience fresh and current, since I knew the original walk-cycles would feel increasingly remote as time ticked past.

I didn’t anticipate walking into and through UK lockdown in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but that’s exactly what happened, and it meant that fortuitously. I found that I had accumulated data both before the crisis hit locally, and during the peak.

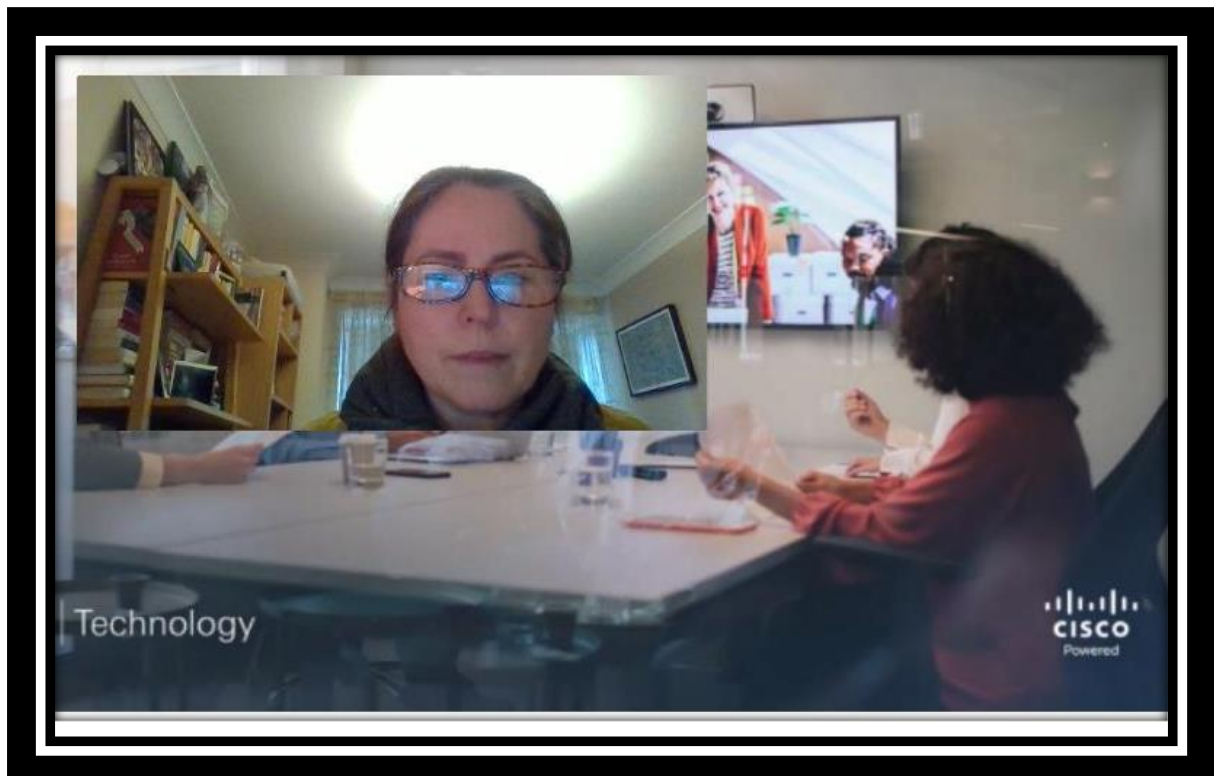


Fig. 42: COVID-19 remote-working selfie (Mar 2020).

There had been a secondary motive, too, for continuing to generate *poetic charting* data and a linked series of pantoums. At the time, I was signed up to contribute a workshop called “Pantoums of protest” for a conference stream with the aim to “inspire... protest with poetry (poetics) and to create more and deeper reflections upon the interplay between poetry, poetics and protest”. As preparation for that workshop (subsequently postponed into 2021), I wanted to test my ideas, generated in the first round of writing, against a fresh set of source material.

For 26 weeks, I walked and journaled daily, grouping my data into “charts” week by week, starting a new chart every Wednesday (since 01 January happened to be mid-week). In the day or so after each chart was completed, I used the material to create a pantoum, following the same structure (5 verses of 4 lines) established during the 2019 walk-cycles.

After 26 weeks, once I had charted my way to the end of June, I deliberately broke the series; the discipline of deciding when to stop generating fresh data is part of the process, I believe. A month later, and following discussions with my research community, I revisited the poems.

The intention is to work from the same material as before, re-cover (and ‘recover’) the same period of time, the same source data, the same source journal fragments, and with the benefit of having peered into the first poetic attempt at representation, which was synchronous with that material, where now I am writing some months later, and the other side of lockdown.

Patricia Leavy says that “arts-based practices have developed to service all phases of the research endeavour: data generation, analysis, interpretation and (re)presentation” (Leavy, 2015, p.20) and as mentioned, Sandra Faulkner makes a similar claim for the use of poetry “in, as and for” research (Faulkner, 2019, p. xi).

I took this second repetition as an opportunity to deepen my experience with using poetry-as-analysis and poetry-for-interpretation, not just as a data source or as a presentational form.

This time my focus was less about poetry as “evocative description” and more on trying to make sense of the data – and the data-presented-as-poetry – that now existed. Here, my focus was on allowing free-association and poetic ambiguity to reveal my data in a fresh light.

To help me do this, I set some rules for the new round of inquiry (as guides to “push against”):

1. Re-read the original poem; note reactions; make notes (optional).
2. Re-read the journal fragments; make notes (optional).
3. Highlight the phrases that still “seem alive” in the original poem – or journal notes.
4. Write a fresh pantoum, from this material and with the benefit of this reflective process.

As usual, the unwritten “rule” was that I could break the rules, provided only I paid attention and recorded myself doing so. I believe that I best serve my research community by closely describing my process, and the ways I transgress against it. This is a pedagogical stance, influenced by my experience of reading Glesne (1997) and being comforted and encouraged by her careful inclusion of granular details of how she did her poetic work. These details gave me a clear “picture” of what she did, which in turn made it possible for me to mimic what she was doing or improvise from her starting point. I consider Glesne’s willingness to describe her process a generous act, supportive of building a wider epistemic community.

In the first cycles of creating pantoums, the work was very quick, because the activity was quite “closed in” and narrow. My job was to go back through my journal fragments, written as part of my *poetic charting* method, and pick from the fragments any pieces which still had some sense of “living charge”. These fragments I slightly buffed into poetic form and in semi-abstract arrangements, like little stained glass windows that were not quite “about” anything in particular, or which had been made from the scattered shards of earlier windows, hints of the original decoration sometimes preserved in new settings. Second time round, I instead took several different sources, including the poems made in the previous round.



This second immersion felt more fulfilling than the initial writing process, largely because it has yielded several creative “surprises”. I am learning to respect the waywardness of poems, that the best poems wander (or “turn”) wherever they wish to go, and the wise poet simply follows as scribe. I realise that the impression that this is what happens a “fiction”; I know that I am the writer and that the poem, a piece of writing, my creation, does not have actual independent will or life. But in the experience of writing, *the impression of being “borne along”* by something else, to a destination that I, the writer, did not anticipate – is compelling.

In the following pages, I have included a series of images, figs. 41-52, to illustrate the stages of the process. Figs 41-47 are photographs from a selection of daily walks during “first lockdown”. I intend these to evoke the sometimes-beauty, sometimes-oddness of that period. Figs. 48-50 are extracts intended to illustrate the basic *poetic charting* method – being close to the method, the “creepiest” part for me is the way certain colours disappear from the chart, because I am no longer commuting to work, for example, and others start to dominate.

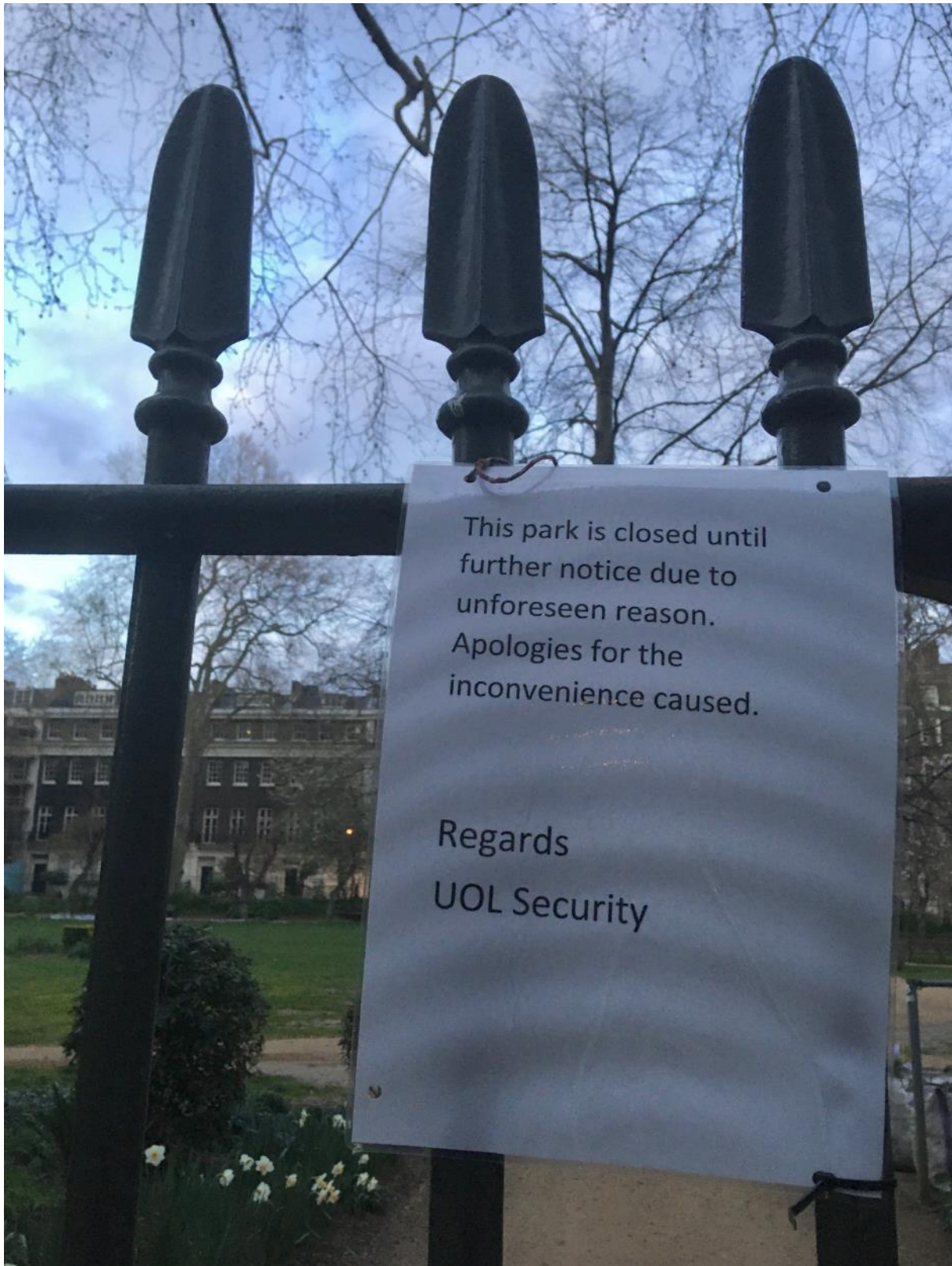
Finally, figs. 51-52 show part of the process of what I am calling poetic “re-view”, which includes pulling, for now both rounds of poetry, together into a collection tentatively entitled “This city is a forest”. As I have walked, I have slowly tuned into how much of my city is filled with green, a tiny visceral glimpse of the vast woodland that once covered this island.

To be clear, these photographs *are part of* a poetic process of noticing, locating, analysing. Several images contain words, but rather than focusing on the text I ask you to consider these images as artful “artefacts”. That is, I invite you to notice the forms, the interplay of colours and journal texts, etc. Often, the words are (deliberately) too small or too blurry to be legible.

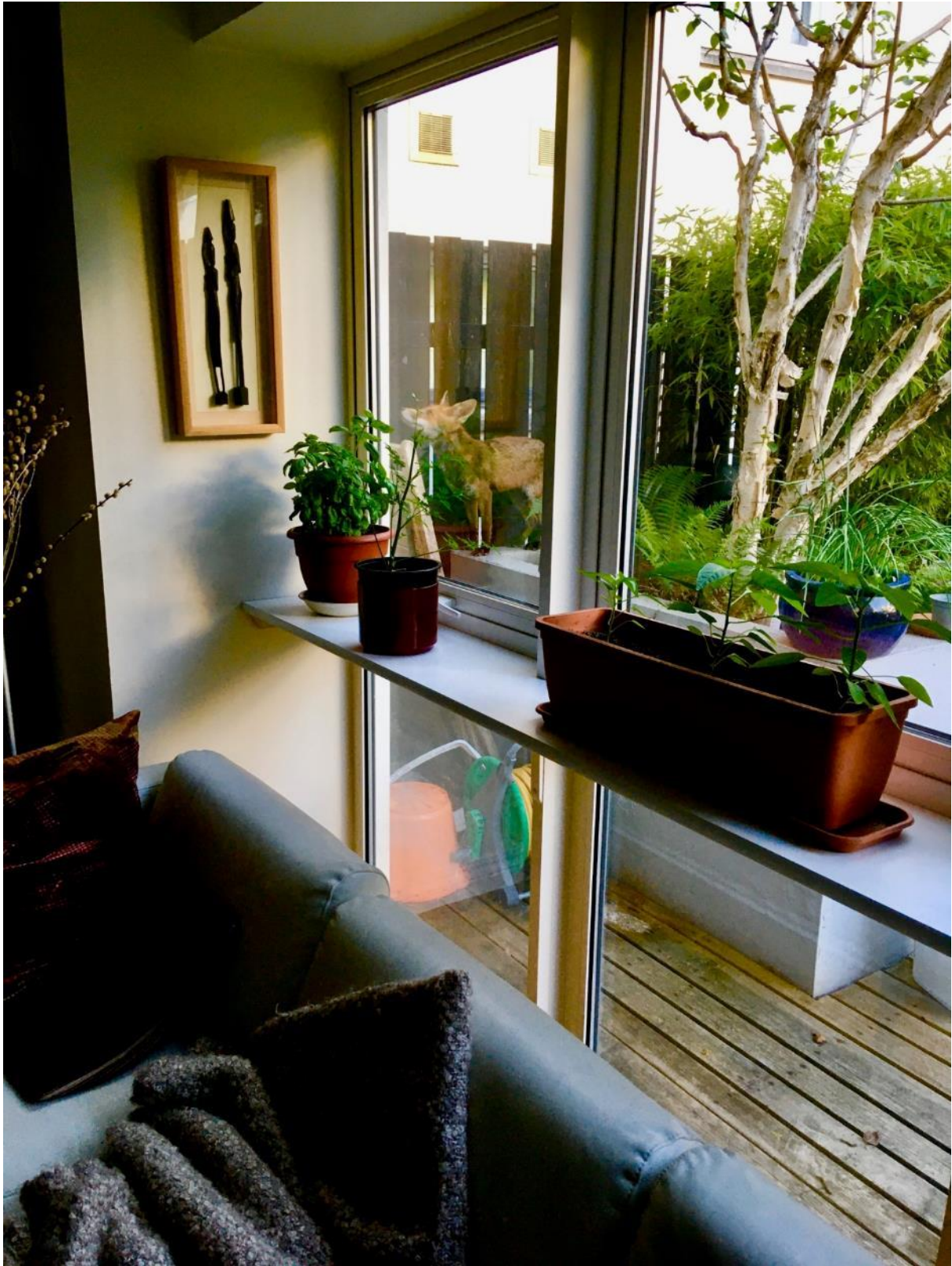
In fig. 51, the “first round” poems and “second round” poems can be distinguished by layout. The original pantoums are double-spaced while the “revisited” poems are denser, with single line spacing (so, one original poem and two revised poems appear in this shot).



*Fig. 43: Unable to resist the lure of the Thames-side walkway in morning sun (April 2020).*



*Fig. 44: One of a proliferation of notices closing or altering access to amenities (April 2020).*



*Fig. 45: Urban visitor (April 2020).*



*Fig. 46: Deserted Mayfair – reflection selfie outside our closed offices (April 2020).*



*Fig. 47: London buses seeking to adapt (April 2020).*



*Fig. 48: The Shard lit up in NHS blue (April 2020).*



*Fig. 49: Night light and “seascape” whilst finishing my steps-target indoors (April 2020).*



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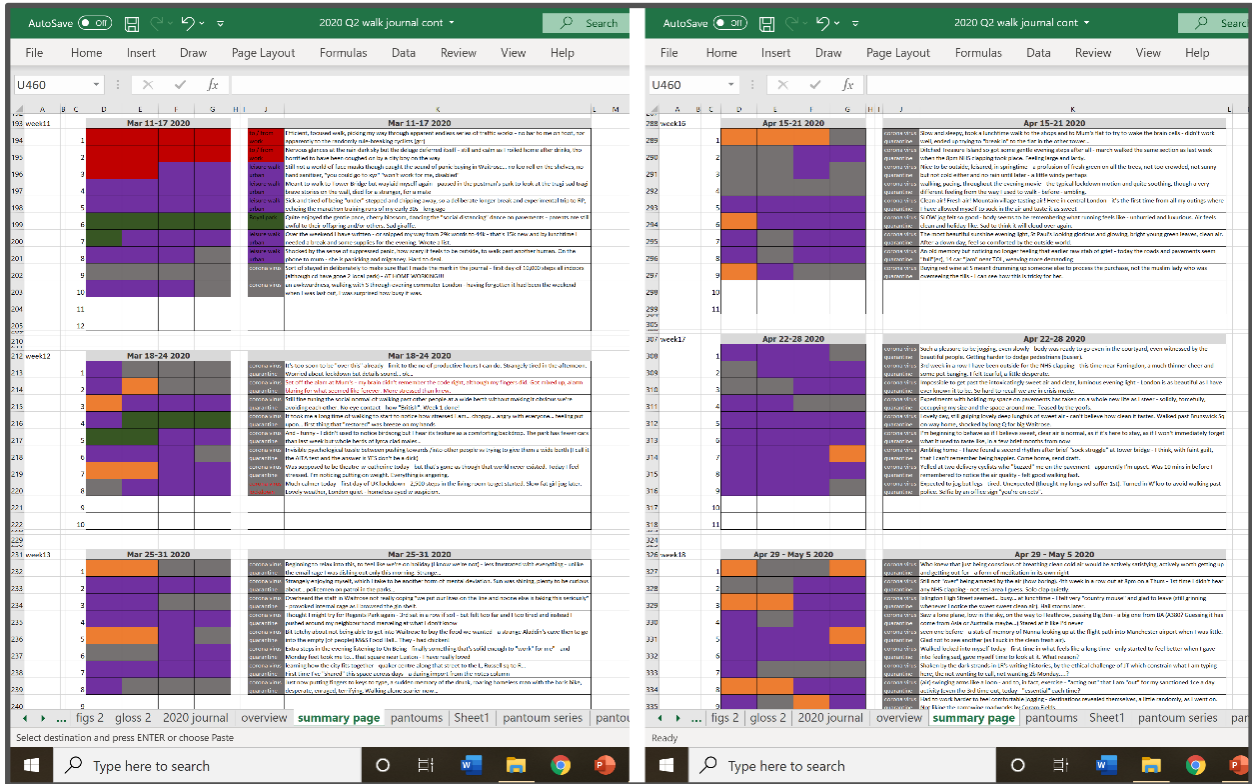


Fig. 50: Weekly charts (April 2020).

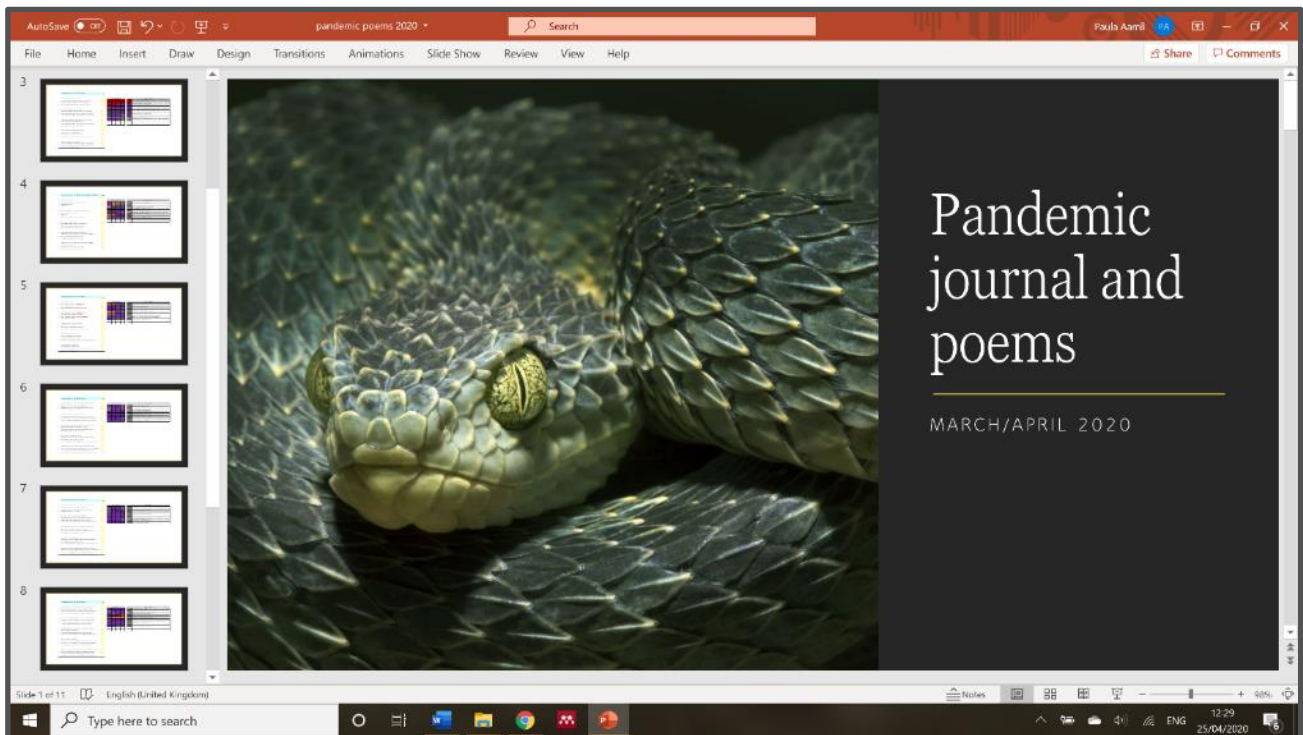


Fig. 51: Pandemic pantoum collection (March/April 2020).






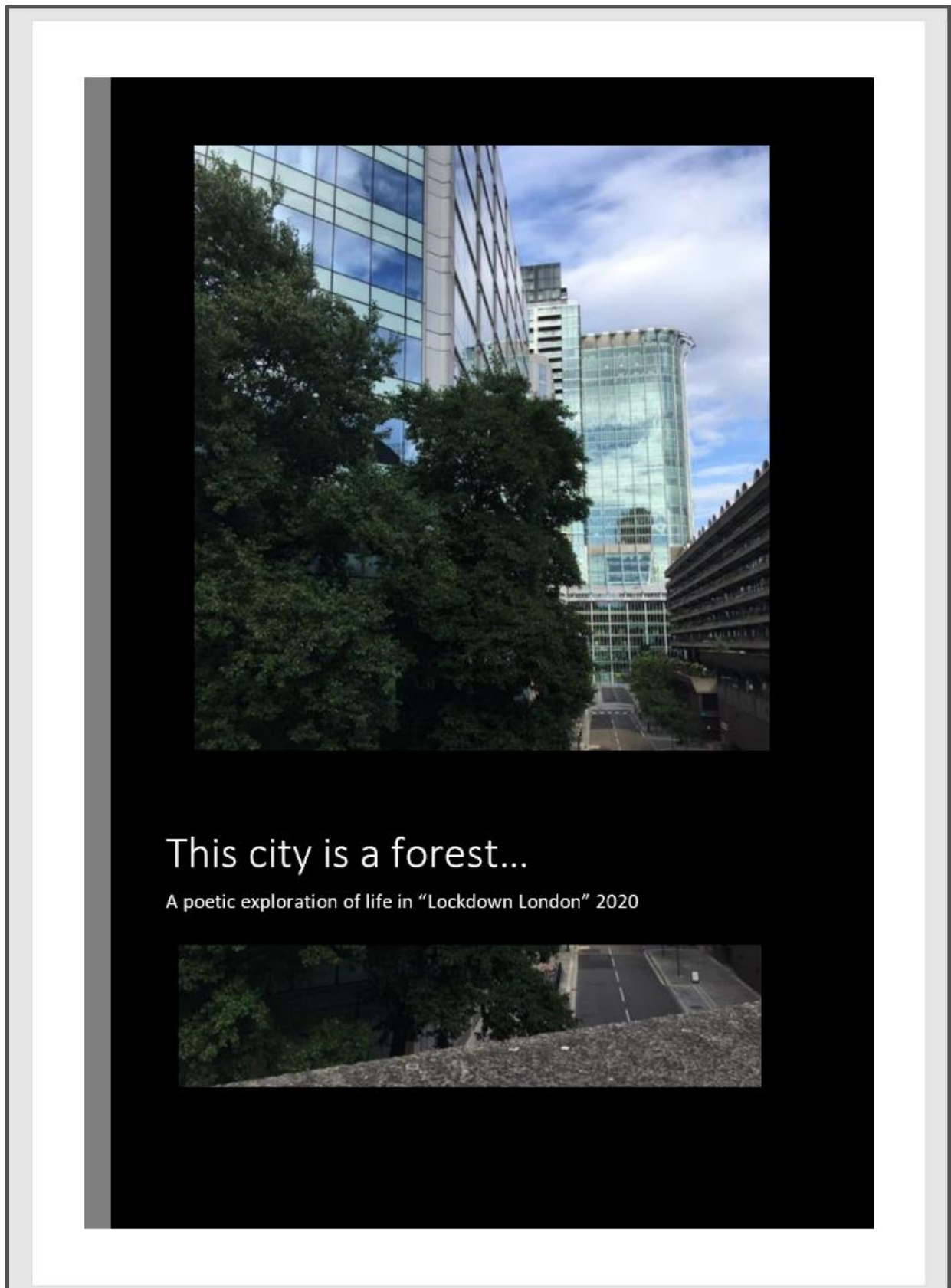
<p>POTW 2020 – View from week 7 (Feb 12-18)</p> <p>My boyfriend's friend told me to "make friends with the ice", Years ago when I was stiff and young and terrified of falling - Before I knew the welcome calm unravelling of walking loops in the park, Before I'd heard words like "intersectionality" or knew discrimination to be real.</p> <p>Years ago, walking on snow, I was stiff and young and terrified of falling; Now I have a wide rolling sea gait to go with my broad hips and twinging knee And have encountered intersectionality and know discrimination to be real. Am I still of any value, middle-aged and childless and female, plainly dressed?</p> <p>I am comfortable in my well-practised sea gait, other than for my twinging knee - More comfortable than flitting wraithlike between the check-in queues in Oslo. A paradox of self confidence in a fading middle aged plainly dressed female body, I accompany a white-haired parent, not a tribe of cherry cheeked cherubs.</p> <p>Trying to wrangle a parent's bag, I flit anxiously between check-in queues in Oslo, wishing I was back in the simple rectangle of my local east-end tree-lined park I travel with my white-haired parent, not a tribe of cherry cheeked cherubs; My Saturday park <u>cicclings</u> had been to please myself, not calm a toddler.</p> <p>Anxious, I long for the calm of my simple east-end park, lined with London planes. I have slowly learned welcome calm unravelling of walking loops in the park And my Saturday park <u>cicclings</u> are just to please myself, not calm a toddler, And it's been many years since I last <u>worried</u> about "making friends with the ice".</p> <p>W T F S S M T</p>	<p>Reworked POTW 2020 week 7 –Re-view (Aug 2020)</p> <p>A In mid-February, Heathrow said that the "elephant in the airport" was climate change B But I think maybe by then it was already the silently spreading novel coronavirus. C We paused overnight in Oslo – I checked my bag through, and mum kept hers, D Which led to a spike of anxiety, flitting between check-in lines the following day.</p> <p>B Somehow, we got through the journey north without encountering the novel coronavirus. E The ship had hand sanitisers installed on every deck with attendants installed next to them. D This led to some anxious flitting between queues as part of the ritual of sitting for dinner. F Lucky really that the requirement to perform 2 metre distancing was not then a "thing".</p> <p>E The ship had hand sanitisers installed on every deck with attendants installed next to them. G I rolled around the outside decks in pursuit of 10,000 steps a day, re-acquiring my sea legs. F Lucky really that the requirement to perform 2 metre distancing was not then a "thing". H I silently thanked the long-ago memory of Tor telling me to "make friends with the ice".</p> <p>G I rolled around the outside decks in pursuit of 10,000 steps a day, re-acquiring my sea legs, I Watching as thin, low ribbons of rocky islands floated past under a snow-grey sky. H I silently thanked the long-ago memory of Tor telling me to "make friends with the ice". J A couple of times we saw sea-eagles and at night the northern lights danced dimly around us.</p> <p>I Where possible, we hid from open water behind thin low ribbons of rock, under a grey sky. C We paused overnight in Oslo on the way out and in Bergen on the way back home again. J The northern lights danced dimly above us, shimmering all the way down to the horizon. A We wiped our hands multiple times daily, dodging the coronavirus, ignoring climate change.</p>  <p>W T F S S M T</p>
<p>32</p> <p>Reworked POTW 2020 week 8 – Grief is good.</p> <p>A So many layers of grief in this poem – B Sadness at remembered fragments of a failed marriage... C Wet cheeks from rain and tears on hearing of Mandy's cancer death... D Climate grief... Species death grief... and the wrecking ball of Coronavirus still to come.</p> <p>B Norwegian shopping mall provoked me to sadness, remembering a failed marriage - E And a sad smile, too, for our childish gravity, how seriously we took those shopping trips. D The grief of divorce was years away. And climate grief, And damage caused by COVID-19. F Even your grandmother was still alive, in those days. And my grandmother. And Mandy.</p> <p>E Our earnestness provokes a sad smile – we took our "grown up" errands so seriously then. G Our early 20s and we thought we were building our "forever" lives, in our "forever" homes. E Your grandmother was still alive, in those days. And my grandmother. And Mandy. H We laughed as we skidded in the wet snow; the wet snow and laughing still endures, at least.</p> <p>G In our early 20s and we thought the lives that we were building then would last forever. I Death still seemed optional and our climate-killing consumption didn't seem to hurt anyone. H We laughed as we skidded in the wet snow; the wet snow and laughing still endures, at least. J Now I know that cold rain stinging into my eyes is a blessing – reminds me I'm alive.</p> <p>I In my 20s, my own death still seemed optional, climate crisis seemed improbable, and remote. C In my 40s, I have cried in the rain, scared of climate breakdown, mourning my dead friend. J Now I know that cold rain stinging into my eyes is a blessing – reminds me I'm alive. A So many layers of grief in this poem.</p> 	<p>33</p> 

Fig. 53: WIP extract from review /re-view of my H1 2020 poems (Aug 2020).



*Fig. 54: This city is a forest – emerging theme for re-viewed H1 2020 poems (Aug 2020).*



## Chapter Nine: Reflections on a Changed Life

Tell me, what else should I have done?

Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?

Tell me, what is it you plan to do -

With your one wild and precious life?

From "The Summer Day", by Mary Oliver, 1990 -

Reproduced (2012) in *House of Light*.



*Fig. 55: Walking amongst the ancient stones: Visit to medieval church, Paris (Dec 2018).*

9.0 [Poem] The progress of a walking inquiry 2017-2020

*[Poetry as data analysis – initial summary poem, free-form, after 1<sup>st</sup> cycle of walking inquiry.]*

**Absent**

Sometimes

The walking bores me.

Step after step after step after step.

Mind untethers, wandering

Away from my feet until

Arriving

They return to each other.

On these days I struggle to remember

The shape of the park in darkness

The route taken

The weather.

The days blur together.



## **Disassociated**

Sometimes

It feels as though

Walking is the only thing that

Keeps me

Alive.

Step after step after step after step.

Mind unfreezes, returning.

Blind

To my context

I am alert

Only to the edges of my skin.

On these days, I am obsessed by the

Pattern of my footsteps.

Rhythmic. Repetitive.

Comforting. Soothing.

The undemanding slow unfolding

Into who cares what route? –

The movement is what matters.

**Present**

Sometimes

I am alert,

Curious,

Expansive.

Step – pause – step – pause – step – pause – step.

Learning my way as

My footfall

pushes towards

somewhere

new.

Street debris appears to me like

Life collage.

The happenstance of dark leaves against

The light dawn sky.

Graffiti

Juxtaposed against

Dog walkers in the local park,

Gleaming towers of the financial district

Jutting abruptly, sharp and thrusting, in the distance.



Fig. 56, 57: Limehouse park scene with Canary Wharf towers – photo and collage (2018).

## 9.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Nine

### **Found art / made art / well-made art**

Figs. 56 and 57 are the visual (photographic and collage) equivalents of the two approaches to poetry described above in 1.1. Fig. 56 captures a “transcendent moment”, a beat in the middle of everyday living (or, more precisely, in yet another moment spent walking in the local park, chasing steps) that suddenly pulls the attention by resolving briefly into an artistic composition. Fig. 57 is the deliberate process of taking a photograph, breaking into fragments and looking to see how and whether I see things differently when I remake the fragments into a collage.

The word sorrow – printed in clean, clear purple graffiti onto a pillar, above a twisting rope motif signifying “Ropemakers’ field” – compelled me. An old-fashioned word, not really the sort of thing I would expect from the local teenagers. Gone a few days later, painted over.

Sorrow is the word to match my mood, as I walk, trying to process the helplessness and grief and terror I feel at the concept that our stable environment is splintering apart around us.

It’s a calm Spring day. In the park in the foreground, the trees are in fresh green leaf and the only drama, such as it is, comes from the young woman stooping to re-attach her puppy’s lead. The world seems serene; if I didn’t know about climate breakdown, *I would not infer its existence from what I am seeing here*. But I believe the scientists – disaster is lurking,

Death makes yet another appearance, this time in a schoolgirl memory of studying William Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1597 /2015). Juliet, reluctant to say goodbye to Romeo at the start of their short romance says, “Parting is such sweet sorrow” (Act 2, Scene 2, line 189) and the play strikes an appropriately melancholy chord for me, with its themes of love and loss and the punishing collateral cost of the feud between the two powerful central families.

The view across to the towers of the Canary Wharf financial district (where I still worked, at the time this photograph was taken) rounds off the image. Even without a climate overlay, the contrast between the shininess of those towers and the beaten look of the various council estates which are the park's more immediate neighbours, though out of shot, would be discomfoting.

Given what I know about climate change, with its links to industrial capitalism, to the sectors financed by banks like the one I work for, it is hard not to see the distant towers as menacing, a symbol of immediate economic disparities, but also symbolic of a possible threat on the horizon for humanity. A threat – or the engine-room of technological green finance solutions... To the extent I still think green finance solutions will save us.

On that, now that “the City” has woken up to the need for effective climate change risk management, and to the possibility of making money from the transition to a low carbon economy, I think it is extremely likely that this pivot towards green finance will happen and will probably happen surprisingly quickly. However, capitalism fundamentally works to the benefit of people who are already powerful and well-funded. Unless there is active intervention to ensure every segment of society receives climate crisis protection and an apportionment of any benefits, the impact of such transition is likely to exaggerate yet further the gap between rich and poor. The poor will suffer first and worst and are much more likely to be “left behind”.

**(What) is this piece good (for)?**

The poem in 9.0 is not a particularly good piece of poetry, artistically or technically speaking, but it *is* a good (in the sense of “faithful”) representation of the embodied experience of using walking as a mode of inquiry. I notice that the title of the piece gives the dates of inquiry as 2017 – 2020 and that feels right, in relation to the writing. Although I didn't start *poetic charting* until October 2018, I walked regularly in 2017 and adopted the 10,000 steps target in late November. (At time of writing, I am two weeks short of three years walking to this target).

The poem describes three different “embodied conditions” experienced whilst walking, which I term as *absent*, *disassociated*, and *present*. It’s probably fair to say that these are broad descriptive categories and could be broken down further, to get closer to granular distinctions, but I also insist i) that these are identifiably distinct embodied states; and ii) that all my “significant” walking inquiry experiences could be tagged into one or other of these categories, i.e., meaning that while very broad, they are also acceptably “complete”.

*Absence* (mainly in the sense of “absent-mindedness”) is the original, and most prevalent, of these states, certainly initially. It describes the kind of experience where the body moves through space on a kind of “automatic pilot”, so that the walker arrives at the destination safely but not having paid attention to anything that happened on the way. Possibly the walker’s mind had been preoccupied with vivid problem-solving in some other part of life or possibly the walker had been thinking of anything, everything and nothing in particular.

This blankness is not (directly) useful for inquiry, other than possibly, say, as a finding that I was finding it hard to pay attention, and the knowledge that I would habitually be trying to write up a brief note later was helpful in drawing me back to consciousness of the activity.

Nonetheless, this was not wasted effort – the body was still moving through space, still learning the rhythms of movement, and the relative distances to my familiar destinations, and so on.

*Disassociation* was also not a “target embodied state” for the purpose of inquiry, but it was a wonderful discovery to realise that this is what my body does when some upset penetrates past my carefully controlled perimeter defences and pushes me towards emotional overwhelm.

Truly, this was valuable new information (or, more accurately, important familiar knowledge that at some level felt shaming, such that I had been in the habit of pretending it didn’t happen.

*Presence* is, naturally enough, the target embodied state for a reflexive inquiry, but unsurprisingly a hard state to maintain for any length of time. This was especially true in the early days of forming the habits of paying diffuse – and precise – attention. Gradually, I noticed how to notice what to notice, whether the weather, or the nature creatures, or the plant life, or the traffic – or indeed, whether some inner state was pulling the arc of my attention inwards.

Oddly, once I was better at paying attention, I was more relaxed about allowing my mind periods of absence, and sometimes I actively encouraged this – for example, carrying with me onto a walk some aspect of a paper I was trying to write but was sticky to put onto paper, or where the threads of the argument kept getting tangled, or I had lost sight of the overall purpose.

My current “best summary” of the experience of learning to walk while paying attention to the condition, impulses and requirements of my body is that my “embodied” self – that is, the version that accepts myself as a conscious presence conjured by the firing of nerve endings and influenced by the shape, form, disposition and health of my flesh – has knowledge about what I want and need and what matters to me that is non-verbal and pre-verbal.

To the extent I trust my intuition and act towards it with curiosity and attention, to that extent, a process takes place by which information makes its way through the body into consciousness. What starts out as *sensed but not verbalised* gradually finds its place, and accordingly its expression, in the conscious mind. I gradually become able to say what I “unsayably” knew.

With walking – I came to a view that arriving at work feeling calm and purposeful was more important than arriving there as quickly as possible. From the perspective of my conscious mind, this was a conclusion I drew about the benefit of taking roughly 30 minutes longer on my daily commute *after* I had committed to this as a practice. But how did I know to make the commitment in the first place? I strongly suspect that my body “knew” that it wanted to be less stressed some time before my mind consciously came to know it.

## 9.2 If nothing we do matters, then all that matters is what we do

In AMSR, I quoted a Nietzsche-inspired speech from an episode of the TV series, *Angel*:

If there's no great glorious end to all this, if nothing we do matters then all that matters is what we do. Cause that's all there is. What we do. Now. Today. I fought for so long for redemption, for a reward, finally, just to beat the other guy. But I never got it. . . All I want to do is help. I want to help because I don't think people should suffer as they do, because if there's no bigger meaning, then the smallest act of kindness is the greatest thing in the world (Tim Minear & Thomas Wright, 2001).

I think – I hope – it's clear from the focus of this paper that I consider my unique contribution to be in relation to personal, individual-level, subjective work. I offer a method which combines walking regularly with journaling in a compressed, fragmentary style well suited, in my experience, to supporting poetic and artful expression and analysis.

Notwithstanding this, I am however still very much, absolutely interested in external, “real world” impacts and motivated to explore further the connections between this largely internally-focused practice of reflective reconnection and how I – and we – behave at work, in our communities, in relation to our political structures, in our families, and so on.

Speaking frankly, I find that this exploration quickly becomes a little disturbing. Take, for example, the vision of “Enlightenment Human” offered by Steven Pinker in the introduction to his upbeat book, *Enlightenment Now*, which argues (drawing on a wide range of data across numerous spheres) that life for humans is better than it has ever been:

As a sentient being, you have the potential to *flourish*... As the heir to billions of years of life perpetuating itself, you can perpetuate life in turn. You have been endowed with a sense of *sympathy* – the ability to like, love, respect, help, and show kindness – and you can enjoy the gift of mutual benevolence with friends, families and colleagues.



And because reason tells you that none of this is particular to *you*, you have the responsibility to provide to others what you expect for yourself. You can foster the welfare of other sentient beings by enhancing life, health, knowledge, freedom, abundance, safety, beauty, and peace. (Pinker, 2018, p.3-4).

This is an appealing vision, but I don't recognise it as the embedded norm in society today.

In a similar way, it's lovely that I have some ideas about how we could encourage personal resilience in the face of stressful workplace or family situations and improve our psychological preparedness for dealing with ecological crisis. But – doesn't that also play into an agenda where it suits those who benefit most from the present norms to persuade all of us that the best option available is to continue to endure, and not to seek change?

I think it does – or it can – which suggests to me that my ideas need to be considered and crafted paying attention to existing political, economic, cultural and legal frameworks and with thoughtful consideration of how I would like to try to influence these to change.

Kate Abbott, writing for the Guardian, covered Sir David Attenborough's speech at the launch of his latest Nature documentary, urging the young generation to live as they wish, but to avoid wasting resources (2019) – this is an "individual level" perspective on how to create change (in this case, how to turn future generations aside from degrading our environment).

One of the top comments, curated by the Guardian moderators, challenged this message. "Too late for that," they said, "We need urgent structural change, now." I agree, *and (yet)* individual motivation to push for change also matters. Keeping hope alive in our children matters. Finding small actions that can nurture a sense of caring for the planet, in my view, matters. I find the message worthwhile, even if, alone, it is insufficient.

I am becoming sure that change (in human society) results from ongoing, complex and unpredictable interactions between individuals and large human structures. There is an important interplay between individual intrinsic motivation (“expensive”, emotionally and psychologically but capable of tremendous impact, not necessarily for the greater good) and the agreed-upon larger social, political and legal structures that contain us in our normal, everyday transactions. These structures save us from having to work out our moral principles from scratch for every interaction; they protect us from much of the impact we might otherwise suffer from others acting outside these norms, to our detriment. However, if the structures themselves are no longer fully fit for purpose – and I would argue that the climate crisis demonstrates that our current dominant human arrangements are not – then we enter a difficult space of renegotiation. And it’s not obvious to me who will get to be at the table.

At this point in my six-year inquiry process, I’m as optimistic as I’ve ever been that humanity will find ways to shift our future path away from the worst predictions of climate doomsayers.

I think I have good reason to be hopeful.

Mass civil disobedience has been identified by Bill McKibben as one of the great innovations of the twentieth century and one of humanity’s best hopes for the future (2019a, 2019b).

COVID-19 permitting, we have seen an astonishing recent flowering of large-scale non-violent civil disobedience movements calling for climate action, principally, of course, Greta Thunberg’s School Strikes and Extinction Rebellion campaigns (Thunberg, 2019a, 2019b; Carrington, 2019a; This is not a drill, 2019; Read, 2018a, 2018b; Read & Bruce, 2019).

Meanwhile, the mainstream is also starting to respond. In my day job, as part of a small leadership team in a large global bank, I have seen the focus and tone shifting as our UK regulators set out clear expectations on commitment to transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

I am seeing an up-scaling of activity on both “sides” of the balance sheet. On the business side, there is a proliferation of green finance initiatives seeking to grow the “green” marketplace and our share of it; on the risk side, we are crunching numbers, establishing Risk Registers, benchmarking our exposures, giving thought to adjusting Risk Appetite Statements, etc.

As soon as limiting carbon emissions becomes profitable – or failing to do so, too costly – change will follow. Human ingenuity can I think be relied upon, human kindness, less so?

Left to its own devices, Western capitalism will deliver protecting the richest best for longest. We are already well set to achieve this; if this is an outcome that we are ok with, no need for substantial interventions. Of course, not even the richest will be able to escape *absolute wholesale systemic collapse* – but we are, *probably*, a few generations away from that.

Given the logics of a form of capitalism designed around “maximising of utility” with no checks and balances to ensure that the “happiness” produced is shared sufficiently widely across broader society, we arrive at this outcome yet allowing the winners to feel broadly ok about it. The poor will suffer first and worst, the rich and powerful, less and later. I’m not ok with this vision of the future (it’s effectively a vision of the present, if I’m honest...)

I’m not ok with it, even though my family-of-origin is (now) reasonably affluent. I’m not ok with it even though we have been beneficiaries of a so-called period of meritocracy, moving from firmly working class to firmly middle class in 3-4 generations, grateful as I now am for everything my parents, grandparents, great grandparents did to convert their opportunities.

The more time I spend learning to re-see myself as emerged from and “of” nature, the nature that is paying the price for all this capitalist abundance for the few, the less ok I progressively become with the unjust patterns of gouging and consumption and hoarding for the privileged.

I recognise that I say this from the relative security of sitting atop a small pile of hoarded assets of my own. Am I willing to learn to re-tune my life to keep lightening my impact on the biosphere? Absolutely, yes, I am. Am I willing to have less, to share more? Yes.

Am I willing to give up my little pile of tokens so that the established white male elites can go on living their best lives, ripping through natural habitats, destroying the planet's ecologies, living directly and indirectly on the outputs of modern slavery and the suffering of the poor? That's a hard no from me on that one – but it's also what I'm agreeing to go on tolerating if my inquiry stays restricted to personal walks in the park only; if it doesn't spill over into tactical and strategic changes at work, into my voting patterns, into advocating for social change.

I am becoming convinced that humanity needs to re-set our moral frameworks and commit to seeking human wisdom “reimagined” for the challenges of climate breakdown. So, I'm arguing for a moral framework that shifts mainstream modern structures back towards a deep sense of collective responsibility, one that values social justice for all humans and ecological justice for the biosphere but does not apply these principles as a dictatorship.

I do worry about whether there's a danger that we might drift into a form of “it's for their own good” thinking that allows entrenched power structures to persist, garlanded with green-washed slogans, enacting a kind of eco-fascism, in which collective choice is restricted on the basis that humans cannot be trusted to act for the benefit of the wider biosphere.

There is little in mainstream Western politics or in Developed World capitalism to make me think that our existing capitalist structures would “govern wisely” for the broader biotic community<sup>18</sup> that can't vote or shop or otherwise buy the market's attention.

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<sup>18</sup> A now somewhat old-fashioned term which was brought into popular use by Aldo Leopold in his influential collection of environmental essays, *A Sand County Almanac*, 1970.

Robyn Eckersley traced and rejected this argument in the early environmental movement:

Reacting to the “limits-to-growth” literature of the early 1970s, [the] “doomsday” ecopolitical theorists warned that we faced a choice between “Leviathan or Oblivion” [Ophuls, 1973], that the urgency of the ecological crisis demanded tight, centralised government environmental regulation, energy and resource rationing, population control and a suspension of normal channels of political participation.

(Eckersley, 1995, p. 171).

Yet, nevertheless, the ideas of deep ecology and of eco-feminism give me some energy around the possibilities. I don’t have any idea how to incorporate the rights of non-human members of the biotic community *expressed in their own terms* but do think that if humans can develop sensitivity to deep ecology perspectives and ideals, we can begin to incorporate these into our stories, to internalise them, to find ways to imagine living them.

Per Freya Mathews:

To overcome mind /matter dualism... it was necessary to propose an alternative principle of individuation, one that defined entities in terms of their inter-relations with other entities. An ecological perspective provided a ready-made template...

From the viewpoint of ecology – or to be precise, ecology under a philosophical interpretation – entities are defined in terms of their various constitutive relations with other elements of an ecosystem (Mathews, 2017, p.60).

This doesn’t sound very easy; to those of us brought up in the dominant capitalist culture of the West, it doesn’t immediately come naturally.

However, I have over the course of the past five years noticed a shift within my own values and psyche towards ecological connectedness; I have seen how slow, persistent nurturing creates the possibility for people who are not in agreement with each other to remain in dialogue and in relationship.

I now believe this kind of change is possible, slow, hard (impossible?) to control – and essential if we are to realise Wendell Berry’s vision of living as though what is good for the world is good for us (Berry & Wirzba, 2002, p.20).

If nothing we do matters, then all that matters is what we do.

*I know this feeling*

*Not strange at all*

*Amen*

### 9.3 Sense-making as this inquiry draws to a close



*Fig. 58: Selfie, borrowed hat, Kilkenny – this may be the most “me” I feel? (July 2017).*

### 9.3.1 Revisiting my purpose and aspiration for this work

This paper is ending, and this inquiry is ending, or pausing. Acknowledging this, I seek in the next few pages to i) revisit the work I have been exploring, as positioned for this audience; ii) offer some thoughts on its contribution/s; and iii) peer towards challenges which may lie ahead.

In this paper I have stated that the threat of climate crisis is my overriding motive for the work, and that I am seeking to form strategies for working and living in ecologically respectful and (ideally) restorative ways despite being enmeshed in a society that depends heavily on industrialised, carbon-consuming, capitalist (Western) economic structures.

Immediately this poses dilemmas for an academic project...For a start, my research cannot be dispassionate, even if I wanted it to be, and believed that possible, because I live on the planet which risks being engulfed and I am personally threatened, directly or indirectly; and because, as part of the winning, economically exploitative “1%”, I am part of the problem.

I accept, then, that I am implicated but reject the suggestion that my subjective entanglement is de facto invalidating. I believe that *all* research is ultimately “a view from somewhere” notwithstanding the Cartesian aspiration towards “a view from nowhere” objectivity.

Further, to the extent our academic inquiry does not actively address our embodied, located subjectivities, I believe we will miss key aspects of what can be known.

If we do not acknowledge our own ever-present subjectivity, I wonder about the extent to which we can identify or correct for ways in which what we think we know is shaped and altered by our perhaps overt, perhaps hidden, subjective viewpoint. I also lose the potential to draw on (and refine) what I “lurkingly” know – intuitively, sub-consciously, contextually.



My research, then, takes a social constructivist position, “predicated on the idea that lived experience is socially constructed, understood in context, and influenced by the historical and cultural experiences known to individuals” (Butler-Kisber, 2018, p.11).

At the same time, a global-scale, multi-system environmental crisis is clearly too large, in itself, to be a viable subject so how to show the parameters of the “project”? Climate breakdown is not a problem *any* single individual will solve, although I concede that there are many scientists who will contribute far more, certainly in terms of technology solutions, than I could hope to with my Seemed-Attractive-At-The-Time degree in Modern History.

That said, my reflections have led me to characterise the climate crisis as primarily social and political rather than “merely” technological. The Industrial Revolution vastly accelerated the rate at which humans can release atmosphere-heating “greenhouse” gases but arguably our dominant human cultures have been consuming and degrading the environment since we began transitioning to live in agricultural communities c. 10,000 years ago. Predictably, negative climate consequences are suffered disproportionately by poorer groups while the material benefits of exploitation are disproportionately hoarded by the already-wealthier.

This is why I now believe that any effective long-term response to the challenge of climate change *must* address questions of social justice and *must* seek to enact fairer structures, for all. Framed in this way, I argue that there is a clear role, after all, for a Humanities graduate, with experience in HR, Learning & Development and organisational change. The inquiry presented here is “action research” oriented, meaning that I seek to generate credible knowledge at the margins of academia and explicitly hoping to generate actionable insights that can make a difference in “real world” individual, social and organisational contexts.

A final dilemma is that in 2020 we do not lack “causes”. There are many injustices that rightly call for our rage and our grief, our sincere commitment to change and to act. Why climate?

This is a question I have only just started asking; this I understand as in keeping with the most basic action/reflection mechanisms that sit, in some shape or form, at the heart of an action research philosophy. We circle the “terrain” pursuing different insights, applying them back to the original, or an amended, question; over time, we view the same subject from multiple perspectives.

Largely thanks to the pandemic, I have recently had fresh insight into how anxiety manifests in my daily experiences, and how it lingeringly affects me. My present best guess into my own motivations is that climate crisis “appeals” because it is congruent with the submerged, inchoate concern I apparently carry around with me, a sense that *something isn't quite right*.

Recognising that I am disposed towards catastrophising, by the way, has no bearing whatever on whether the crisis in question is “real” i.e. (sadly) this doesn't mean I'm imagining it. However, it does, I believe, help to explain why I have been drawn, above all, to the emotional and psychological impacts of living with climate crisis anxiety; this perspective helps me understand why I readily orientate towards the existential threat, the fear of dying.

This also, I think, explains why I am drawn to inquire artfully and above all poetically and in first person mode. I agree with Patricia Leavy on the power of poetry in research, that:

Poems use words, rhythm, and space to create sensory scenes where meaning emerges from the careful construction of both language and silences. In this way, a poem can be understood as evoking a snippet of human experience that is artistically expressed in a heightened state (Leavy, 2015, p.78).

### 9.3.2 On types of contribution

I now turn to the question of contribution/s, conscious that this topic is a gate-keeper; that to pass by, I must credibly defend the claim that my contribution to the academy is meaningful.

I proceed – cautiously. I start with the less-familiar and not-quite-answering-the-question part of the topic, by considering what I believe the work has contributed to me.

On p.222, I mentioned a 3-fold loss of faith, in the “malestream” church, in my marriage, and in the still-problematically-White-Saviour-esque charity sector, where I worked after leaving university. I embarked on this inquiry not too long afterwards, when I was still, effectively, at the bottom of the vale.

I arrived already frustrated with the short-termism in my sector and with the way this seemed to lead to the wrong behaviours and outcomes being preferenced and rewarded. At the time, I was mostly exercised about how annoying this was to work within and had not tuned into the external implications (damage to the environment for example had largely passed me by).

During AMSR, I was confronted by and accepted the evidence of climate damage, first as a technological challenge and then, later, as a philosophical, social and political one. AMSR also helped me to confront my fear of death and by the time AMSR was ending, I was starting to tune into Thomas Berry’s “communion of subjects” (2006, p.149), starting to respond to Joanna Macy’s call into the “work that reconnects” (e.g., 2020, n.p.n.).

To this, ADOC has added the dawning awareness that climate damage has not in fact been caused by “all humans” or by “a generic human” but principally by the capitalist West, a realisation which then led to the (in retrospect, very evident) realisation that both climate dangers and capitalist benefits are unevenly distributed. The climate crisis is political, therefore, and the solutions *must* include serious efforts to address systemic social injustices.

Latterly, and rather more surprisingly (at least, surprising to me), my ADOC process has prompted me to pay attention to my personal anxieties and need for safety.

I believe this has become accessible as I inquired artfully and poetically, methods which provided mechanisms for exploring my subconscious terrains – the resisted, the ambiguous and conflicted topics. Even working artfully, it has been a slow process for me to engage and only in recent work have my “intimate others” started appearing directly in my poetry. (To maintain an ethical boundary, I have not selected these poems for this paper.)

Next, I consider what I have contributed towards organisational change in my place of work. My “Head of...” role is an advisory one – I do not directly run any part of the banking business, but I support and seek to guide people who do so. In this, my aim is to be not so much “eminence grise” as “eminence green”, advocating for environmental sustainability.

Presently, I act from the assumption that wherever I choose to work or live, I am in the system.

I stay, and I seek to have a positive influence. Even though quite possibly none of our employing organisations is in a position to “solve” climate change, without question, our organisations, and the individuals within those organisations can contribute to mitigating environmental harms and perhaps to the development of better ways of being and working.

I hold a view that influencing climate action (indeed, any kind of change) at work requires a series of commitments, including to : i) *translations*, the careful use of skilled, thoughtful modes of communication to bring concepts into “play” in language that the organisation understands; to ii) (self) *disclosures*, which, at heart, expresses the commitment to speaking up; and to iii) *boundary crossings*, the willingness to focusing time and energy both within and away from the main channels of power, irrespective of the likely pay-back (or lack thereof).

In terms of my own “*translation*” efforts, I am open at work about my belief in the importance and usefulness of arts-based methods, but if I want to convey some sense of *why*, I tend not to mention creativity directly but to talk instead about strategies “for supporting personal resilience and re-imagining organisational change processes connected to climate crisis”.

In terms of *making disclosure/s* about what matters to me, I am “out at work” as a climate crisis believer, to the extent that when I say things like, “I think we should consider the sustainability impacts” in my local leadership team, the typical response is, “*Well of course you do*”, which is sometimes followed by talking about the impacts and sometimes not.

In terms of *boundary crossings*, a certain amount of luck and opportunism may be needed. Important messages may find their way into organisational conversations in unthreatening small-scale interactions apparently far from the centres of mainstream activity.

What I am contributing, to my epistemic community, on, I hope, an ongoing basis is my engagement and, as far as I can manage it, my attitude of open curiosity to the possibility of new knowledge emerging from the interaction of our subjective viewpoints.

The feminist philosopher Elizabeth Potter has argued that in fact unacknowledged subjectivity infuses all knowledge production, including in “traditional science”, referencing Mary Hesse:

Hesse reminds us that physical situations have indefinitely many aspects and at any given time we notice only some of these; it follows that every time we notice things in the world or observe things, we drop out information that could be taken up at other times or by other people (Potter, 1993, p.166, citing Hesse, 1974, p.52).

To me, Potter's critical insight is that individual bias is not countered simply through membership of a single community, since in this process of filtering and selecting information, what we believe we know is generated within and by reference to our "epistemic communities".

Consequently, she says, we also need to hold a respectful scepticism towards what we think we know collectively, and seek open, curious dialogue between communities so that our biases can be revealed and engaged, allowing what we collectively believe to shift and be re-shaped. Of course, paying attention in this way is only useful to the extent we have willingness, capacity and skill to process and adjust in light of the data we uncover. This explains the importance of developing habits not just of reflection (characterised as passive observation) but of reflexivity.

As Fassett & Warren state,

Reflexivity is the process of exploring how we, as teachers and researchers, create the phenomena we observe, through our assumptions, values, past experiences, language choices, and so on...Both "reflexivity" and "praxis" connote process – an important reminder – and neither is a destination or end result... Freire's definition of praxis... calls for teachers (teacher-students) and student (student-teachers) to reflect and act together, collaboratively, in order to transform the world" (Fassett & Warren, 2007, p.50-51, citing Freire, 1970/2003, p.44.)

When it comes to contribution to wider debate, I am hesitant to try to claim "unique" status for any of my work in a field which is rapidly extending and maturing, but I do suggest that my work contributes to the testing and validation of emerging "arts-based research" theory. In particular, my work insists that artful inquiry is not "merely" illustrative or decorative but should be taken seriously as mode (or rather, modes) of engagement through which the research community can come to know, and in which we can find agency.

In fact, I am somewhat at a loss, a little affronted, at the implication that attention need not be paid to the aesthetics in presenting “real” academic work, with the result that this work is often at best indifferently presented, aesthetically speaking. (Because design is unimportant?)

Where I believe I am doing some of my most interesting work is in exploring the potential of poetry for knowledge generation, and as a means to evoke, to draw attention, to process, and to create possibilities for change. I draw on Faulkner & Cloud on poetic activism, that:

...poetic inquiry can be an active response to social issues, a political commentary, and a call to action... [and] a way to reflection on power inequities, to make their personal experience part of the critique, and to realise the potential power in poetry as political discourse (Faulkner & Cloud, 2019, p. xi & p. xiii).

Nevertheless, I also see value in my visual art (work) and do not wish to allow it to be disappeared entirely, even though it is not the *main* theme in a thesis positioned as “poetic”.

My photographs and collages are amateur and make opportunistic use of social media tools; I use them as a complement to my journals, as I continue to try to re-apprentice myself to seeing the non-human and more-than-human elements of the world around me (what David Abrams termed “the ecology of perception”, in an Emergence Magazine podcast, 2020).

As a case in point, the selfie in fig. 65, was created using a Facebook filter (but not posted). In the caption, I wonder whether it is “the most me”, mainly referring to the choice of styling reflected (patterned hat, a glimpse of informal summer dress, no make-up, no jewellery).

To me these signify a “homespun”, “craftsy” aesthetic which I enjoy wearing and which I embrace deliberately (defiantly) in counterpoint to my mum’s dark 1980s power suits, from when she was an executive, and in opposition to the manicured designer-wear that is the mainstream corporate uniform at work. I enjoy the garish filter for similar reasons.

I also appreciate the deadpan gaze-to-camera, which seems to offer a challenge, perhaps to the imagined male gaze (a phrase coined by Laura Mulvey, 1975); to me, looking now, there is an ambiguity which could resolve into laughter or into an angry retort. I believe I was trying to get used to looking at myself as a middle-aged woman (albeit mediated by my smartphone). I believe I was mulishly refusing the invitation repeated tongue-in-check by Cordelia Fine, to “leave the men to pursue status while the women devote themselves to the important business of staying young” (Fine, 2017, p. 20, quoting (John) Dupré, 1993, p.292).

I propose that my specific, unique contribution to the academy, to the larger project of generating good quality insight, is in my process and method, rather than in any specific theoretical position or insight, important as these have been personally, in helping me to clarify my own position and “action logic” (David Rooke & Bill Torbert, 2005). As described, I use an Excel-based journaling technique, *poetic charting*, that supports sustained self-reflexive inquiry in a flexible, accessible – and poetic – way and I believe this can be readily adapted for other work and contexts. I believe that this matters, makes a useful difference, because I take *sustained self-reflexive inquiry* to be essential (if not, by itself, sufficient) in generating change goals and commitments that offer genuine, and appropriate, transformation.

Denzin and Lincoln characterise our current context as “a historic present that cries out for emancipatory visions” and they call for qualitative researchers to respond accordingly, arguing that “the pursuit of social justice within a transformative paradigm challenges prevailing forms of inequality, poverty, human oppression and injustice” (2018, p.1), which I understand as comprising work that challenges *ecological* injustice and oppressions that extend beyond humanity to impact the *other-than-human* and *more-than-human* world.



### 9.3.3 On the challenge ahead

We are still here – for now, even as the rest of the biotic community thins and vanishes around us (WWF, 2018; Kolbert, 2014). We are still here, with ever-increasing indicators of emerging climate crisis (IPCC, 2018; IMF, 2019; This is not a drill, 2019; Thunberg, 2019a, 2019b), and learning what it is to live with increasingly frequent shocks as ecological vulnerability manifests in “real life”, “real world” impacts to our human and planetary systems.

For instance, see Andrew Revkin’s discussion with Herman Daly and Kate Raworth on the broader economic and ecological implications of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19, Revkin, 2020; and for the origin of those ideas, see Daly, 1997 and Raworth, 2017.

The growing global instabilities across multiple dimensions, for now, have attracted wide media coverage, although this is certainly no guarantee of cohesion around a shared response and it is far from clear whether future forms of human organisation will see us move towards utopian visions of fairer, gentler ways to live, with each other, within the overall multiplicity of life on Earth. Certainly, the fifth – and at the time of writing, latest – edition of the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018) reflects grave concern by the editors about what they term the rise of “neoliberalism” in the early decades of this century.

The contributed chapters which follow contain multiple discussions of the threats to inclusion, social justice, freedom of thought and expression in Western universities and other public domains and institutions. So, the future is contested and potentially bleak.

Yet my experience, both at work and at home has been that as our precarious condition has become more evident, there has been an opening up of conversations about our global future, in spaces where (unless I just wasn’t paying attention, which is certainly possible) these conversations were not previously welcomed.



## Chapter Ten: [And Finally] - On Purpose

The fact that racial politics and indeed racism are pervasive factors in our lives did not allow us, and still does not allow most Black women, to look more deeply into our own experiences and, from that sharing and growing consciousness, to build a politics that will change our lives and inevitably end our oppression...

This focusing upon our own oppression is embodied in the concept of identity politics. We believe that the most profound and potentially most radical politics come directly out of our own identity... **Eliminating racism in the white women's movement is by definition work for white women to do**, but we will continue to speak to and demand accountability on this issue.

Excerpted from: A Black Feminist Statement - The Combahee River Collective. (1977).



*Fig. 59: Crescent Moon and Venus, Clerkenwell evening (Feb 2020).*

## 10.0 [Poem] Pantoum No 9 - Remembering

*[Written during the summer break between pandemic lockdowns in London, 2020.]*

When still a child and, understanding for the first time the terror of approaching death,  
My desperate solution was to be remembered. Consequently, I burned to write and be known.  
It didn't occur to me that I could be memorialised on the long wall of a city cemetery  
Or stuck as a plaque on a bench, fading gradually to nothing at the edge of a once-loved spot.

In childhood, I (briefly) burned to be remembered as a famous writer, beating off death.  
In youth, I longed instead to be a martyr missionary, to fall from time into the arms of God.  
I scorned the idea of being planted in some local family, remembered as a plaque on a bench,  
But now, with age, and coming to a fresh love of place and space, I want this most-and-only.

In youth, I longed to dodge death in Christian service, falling from time into the arms of God.  
Those fires have dimmed but seeing silver stars on a clear night still calls me to worship.  
In aging, I have come to a fresh love of place and space. My hands and heart lift in gratitude  
That a galaxy-sized vast array of probabilities collided together to give me consciousness.

The sight of silver stars scattered in clusters across a clear night still calls me to worship.  
It makes me glad that long-ago people imagined the stars into pictures and gave them names.  
A galaxy-sized array of probabilities collided together to give them consciousness, and me.  
Mostly, I don't know who they were, but I know that they – and I – have lived.

It makes me glad that long-ago people imagined the stars as pictures and gave them names –  
A better way to remember than pinning a sad scroll of war dead on the wall of a city cemetery.  
Mostly, we don't know who those people were, but we know that they – and we – have lived.  
Perhaps a deeper love of living – now – is what saves from terror at the approach of death.

## 10.1 Unpacking the artful representations in Chapter Ten

### **I didn't see it until I believed it!**

At times during the writing of this inquiry, I have pondered how my own history of shifting beliefs has shaped the work –

- i) initially taught, and resistant to, a strongly materialist view of the world, in which life ignited billions of years ago with no external /divine intervention, in which consciousness was a coincidence, in which moral codes emerged haphazardly from within societies and where humans should treat each other well, because that is how we ourselves would like to be treated;
- ii) as a teenager, becoming an unironic Biblical literalist, having lacked access to the information that there are *many* shades of emphasis across the various Christian traditions, including combinations that simultaneously allow expression of a belief in God whilst also holding that the Earth is old, that women are not inferior to men, that it is not “sinful” to have a sexual orientation other than cis-gendered heterosexuality, that...; and
- iii) discovering, and embracing, these alternative interpretations, as I drifted leftwards into a liberal Christianity, then out through the doors of the church and into a wide world beyond, filled with many shades of meaning.

My working assumption is that my own rather fractured history of beliefs has made it easier to learn to say that the social reality inhabited by humans is socially constructed, and at the same time, has not made it easier *at all* to live consistently from the radical logics of that paradigm.

What I believe shapes what I see, even knowing that there are many other possible ways to belief and construe things; and what I see seems compellingly real as I experience seeing it.

The poem in 10.0 addresses my shifting life-logics, by reference (of course?) to death. Death is a familiar theme throughout this work, overt expressions of spirituality rather less so (even where problematised and held out not as answer but as a form of ongoing questioning, as here).

On the other hand, spiritual references appear in several of my images (e.g., fig. 02, and by association, figs. 55 and, arguably, fig. 60, bearing in mind fig. 02 also includes the other two).

These “transcendent moments” are threaded into many parts of the work, as I hope is evident.

Seeing stars in a clear night sky still prompts an up-swelling elation and wonder that does feel a lot like what I once unquestioningly termed “worship”; I am also amazed, although really should not be, when I encounter evidence that past humans also saw these phenomena and were moved by them. Most recently, I felt this when looking at a depiction of the Moon and Venus shining over the Thames painted by Turner two hundred years ago (image in Appendix Three).

I am deeply grateful for the presence and power of these moments, in a life where my narrative about my own spiritual beliefs has become less certain, less dogmatic, less desperate to try silencing or extinguishing other views.

However, this *should not* be interpreted as a position that “all moral stances are the essentially equivalent” or that “anything goes”. Rather, I understand my sense of spiritual presence as one expression of what Joanna Macy termed “the work that reconnects”<sup>19</sup>. It is a source for the personal resilience in the face of deep grief and tumultuous political challenges, an answer to the first part of my overall purpose in engaging in this work, which I described in the Introduction as being *to enlarge my personal psychological capacity* (here, in order to “cope well with the deep changes required during the painful conditions of climate crisis”).

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<sup>19</sup> Macy has championed this approach over a long career in many writings and summarised it again in an article for *Emergence Magazine*, 2020.

The second part of my overall purpose was to communicate as vividly as possible so that others might form a clear understanding of *how* I have gone about the process of my poetic inquiry (here I assume that the first part of my purpose does the work of explaining *why* I am doing it).

My hope is that some of these others will feel motivated to adapt these processes to support with inquires of their own, and those who do can move forward with their version of this activity with reasonable assurance that it is capable of producing good quality outcomes – judged from within both *arts-based* and *action research* assumptions of what is of value.

## 10.2 Action implications of linking the climate crisis to social justice

I have been explicit that through the course of inquiry, I progressively came to see climate breakdown as a moral problem at least as much as a technological one (progressive, therefore, in both senses i.e., meaning that I came to this position in several stages, and that the position I now hold is considered “socially progressive”, invested in seeing social structures change).

The progressive stance implies action commitments because social justice, as envisioned, does not yet exist and, requiring the dismantling of entrenched interests, will not “just happen”.

As I think – hope – I have also made clear, I did not start my inquiry around how I should cope and what I should do in response to climate crisis in the belief that this was also an inquiry into the existence and perpetuation of social injustices.

Shame on me for what I now consider a wilful blindness, a refusal to connect the dots in case the picture thereby revealed was inconvenient, or would cast me in a poor light (as an affluent city dweller, an Oxford graduate, an employee in the financial services sector, as a scaredy-cat non-activist, and so on...)



Shame on me, but at the same time, I also have compassion for my former, scared, self, coded as I was through education and the norms in my place/s of work to identify with and think like a proxy “elite white Western male” (by the way, I mean this in reference to my time in the charity sector as much as to my present employment in banking). I was reluctant to open my eyes to the *preventability* of many of the wrongs suffered by the weak, poor and vulnerable because I assumed, by proxy, that I was responsible for perpetuating (and, to an extent, I am).

Simultaneously, I was reluctant to look closely at the implications of my own background and identity – in which I am “establishment-problematic” by dint of being female, “nouveau intellectual”, the first in my family at Oxford, rather working class, and Irish by heritage. Here, the fear was that I would find myself excluded from privileges I was also afraid to find I had been exercising at the expense of others. Layers and layers of avoidance and fear.

Such habits, in my case, of avoidance, run deep and are hard – *hard!* – to break (which in itself seems to me a perfectly adequate explanation of why action researchers describe their work as *cycles*, often repeating many times, with slight variations – if these habits were easy to resist or remake, then action research would be linear: issue / investigation / solution / move on).

In trying to move forward, I often seek guidance and inspirations from other artists – because my commitment is to exploring action research problems through arts-based methods, these artists also stand for me as valid, relevant and informative role models for elements of the work.

The (ground-breaking, feminist, pro-inclusion) science fiction writer Ursula Le Guin is one such source of inspiration – and information. Aged 81 in 2010, Le Guin started blogging, and a collection of her posts was published in 2017, shortly before her death in January 2018. Among other things, Le Guin wrote about the energising rage which was a feature of her years of involvement in the US feminist movement, and the tension between finding anger freeing or finding it corrosive, in the latter case, often when linked to, and concealing, other emotions.

Fear, in a person of my temperament, is endemic and inevitable, and I can't do much about it except recognize it for what it is and try not to let it rule me entirely...

My fears come down to fear of not being safe (as if anyone is ever safe) and of not being in control (as if I ever was in control). Does the fear of being unsafe and not in control express itself as anger, or... use anger as a kind of denial of the fear? (Le Guin, 2017, p. 145)

I am grateful to Le Guin and other writers for representing themselves on the page, whether in their fiction, or “direct to camera” in essays and blogs – because their attempt to sift through their experience adds to my own understanding, perhaps by describing something I recognise in myself, perhaps by offering a comparison, perhaps in the challenge of encountering something *unfamiliar*.

Ursula Le Guin followed the thread of her anger and found that it led her to an underlying root of fear; in me, fear is easy to observe and it is my anger that is hiding.

This is significant to the question of my action commitments, because the more feminist literature I have read, the more critical race theory I am exposed to, the angrier I am becoming.

For example, I was enraged to return to the work of Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully (1993, 1995) – where they introduce the concept of “tempered radicals”, as being individuals situated in mainstream corporate (or academic) life who also carry another set of commitments that are at some level in conflict with their corporate selves – to discover that the conflicts being described are not (as I had previously assumed) ideological as much as they were questions of identity. The rage, I should clarify, was not directed at the authors, but at what they described.

They saw something that still rings true to me 25 years later, *but really should not be tolerated*.

Here is an extract from the summary of the 1995 argument, by editor Peter Frost, commending the article to his readers:

Tempered radicals, Meyerson and Scully argue, are individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations and **also to a cause, community or ideology** that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with, the dominant culture of their organization. Their radicalism stimulates them to challenge the status quo. Their temperedness reflects the way they have been toughened by challenges, angered by what they see as injustices or ineffectiveness, and inclined to seek moderation in their interactions with members closer to the centre of organizational values and orientations (Frost, in the introduction to Meyerson & Scully, 1995, p. 585, emphasis added).

As framed, this does sound as though the piece focuses on questions of ideology. This is how I first understood it because it was also how I understood myself i.e., working for a financial services organisation, embedded within a highly industrialised, capitalist society, and holding spiritual and environmental views with behaviour logics, pay-offs and rewards that I see as not naturally aligning to those of my employer or not being held widely in my culture of origin.

However, when Meyerson and Scully set the scene, these are their chosen examples: A woman executive... a (male) business school professor of working class origin... a (female) African American architect... These are not ideologies, they are *identities* – by gender, class, race.

These individuals do not easily fit within the dominant cultures of their organisations or professions... [They] must struggle continuously to handle the tension between personal and professional identities at odds with one another... Women and members of minorities have become disheartened by feelings of fraudulence and loss as they try to fit into the dominant culture. (Meyerson & Scully, p. 586).

The dominant culture here is “mainstream corporate life”; the struggle referenced is the right to have a professional job /career, and also to be female, or originally poor, or Black. This is shocking and wrong and *still too familiar* (in terms of career rather than job, perhaps). It enrages me to read about it – so much so that I just wanted to reject Meyerson and Scully’s whole argument as mis-directed and mis-guided. I *wanted* them to argue about the tensions of being left-leaning in management consultancy, or a closet graffiti artist working for the police, etc.

How can we live in a culture where it is still considered almost unheard of to be from an ethnic minority and also a practising barrister? Why should that person lose their roots to do a job?

As Ursula Le Guin explored, although anger can feel deliciously liberating, and is an excellent accelerator for protest, I am concerned on practical grounds (that anger may hinder attempts to solve problems through constructive collaboration) and on psychological grounds (that I may lack the skill to handle my anger safely and appropriately). That said, one of the implications of moving to the position where I now see climate crisis as an expression and consequence of social injustice/s, is that I need to learn how to feel angry and to act, and to act appropriately.

### 10.3 Lessons from Freire and Sprague

The main thing I want to say here is that as I come to the end of this process of inquiry I now – and rather belatedly – **understand action research as a struggle to reshape how we understand the world**, to free ourselves in relation to dominant ways of thinking and to do for the sake of something beyond ourselves. What I believe I am struggling towards is to learn how to be a good citizen of our planet and a responsible member of the biotic community (as Aldo Leopold, 1970, would term it) – and in this, I am learning to appreciate the deep debt, as a developing action researcher, I owe to the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire.

For Freire, literacy was... a preparation for a self-managed life, [fulfilling] three goals of education: i) Self-reflection, ... which is an understanding of the world in which [we] live...ii) [becoming] aware of the forces that have hitherto ruled [our] lives; and... iii) [finally, setting] the conditions for producing a new life (Aronowitz, 2009, p. ix.).

In 3.2.1 above, I cited David Coghlan's summary of the origins of action research, as proceeding from the work of Kurt Lewin in the United States, and from, among others, Paolo Freire, in the global south. I have been aware of this action research lineage throughout my time as a developing action researcher, but only recently have I appreciated the importance, and the profound difficulty, of what Paolo Freire's critical pedagogy is attempting to do.

The formula sounds familiar, with slightly different nuance and emphasis, as a type of change theory orthodoxy – to achieve change, it is necessary to understand past conditions, analyse the range of possible interventions, and based on that process of reflection, commit to action. The radicalism becomes clear when we add the overlay of an ambition to challenge entrenched political interests, and to do so in a way which does not simply swap one system of top-down hierarchical control for another labelled with a different name but using the same mechanisms.

In Freire's framing, emancipatory knowledge cannot be downloaded from teacher to student in a checklist or formula, or through learning by rote (i.e., the "banking" of knowledge that already exists), even where the information is useful or would be relevant. Emancipatory knowledge is derived by collaborating together as co-participants to find solutions to in-context problems, problems which have also been identified by group insiders, rather than by any external agent/s.

That in itself is hard to do from within systems constructed around and intended to perpetuate certain kinds of control hierarchy – our Western systems of education, of management, of commercial and political organisation being classic examples of this type of structure.

I have come to understand this as charged and elusive not just due to these external conditions, however, but because our inner conditioning (speaking, at least, in respect of people socialised in the dominant cultures in the West) shapes us towards being authoritarian, not participatory, and certainty-seeking, rather than welcoming uncertainty and unanswered questions. I have come to believe that these as *the forces that have hitherto ruled our lives*.

The nature of the challenge for educators was summed up by Jo Sprague for her own field of Communications Education (while this work is neither education or communications, formally speaking, both disciplines are key in change management and her remarks were a provocation).

Sprague identified, first, the difference between the superficial achievement of persuading people to adopt a particular vocabulary and the harder, deeper achievement of creating internal understanding of what the terms mean. This is probably a universal challenge in any discipline that relies on specialist technical language (which, I guess, is most of them).

In communications education, the concept is that human realities are shaped by our common cultural agreements about what things mean, that is, are socially constructed. The language is relatively straight-forward to adopt; the implications are both profound and elusive.

Other challenges follow on from this – if our words create worlds, will the people who understand this and have developed skills around communication be prepared to commit themselves to creating and sustaining the social conditions that free and empower others, or will they use their education, as Western culture encourages, as a private tool, or in service?

Recognizing that communication is always politically laden, we know that it defines the power arrangements of society, both preserving privilege and setting boundaries. And so, we know that we cannot teach about it as an innocent tool of individual empowerment, equally accessible to all... (Sprague, 1994, n.p.n.).

#### 10.4 And finally...

This is tough, slippery work which requires commitment to learning to notice how we may be connected and embedded – enmeshed and complicit – within the systems we challenge.

Through this process of inquiry, nonetheless, I have found active, actionable hope. I now believe that through attentive noticing and reflection, we equip ourselves as individuals, as communities, and as social beings located within wider social structures, to be succeed in identifying (and committing to?) the insight/s that in our context “What will help is...”

Personally, poetic inquiry has helped me, including helping me find the connectedness, confidence and equilibrium to want to commit my energy and my resources in service of nudging my society towards being more ecological sustainable and more socially just. Therefore, I return again to the poem in 10.0, one of pantoums from the second phase of rewriting (writing poems as “re-views” of the data I gathered during the Spring lockdown).

I called this piece “Remembering”, to reflect the way that the content of the poem twists and loops into memories of my earlier self and also to echo the title of the Christina Rossetti poem (1862) quoted at the start of Chapter two, that framed the very early stages of this inquiry.

The work captures how my ontological position has softened in terms of my early religious commitment which I now think was an impulse to flee towards safety, as James Baldwin said of his own teenaged conversion experience (1962, 1990), although for different reasons.

At some level, I was surprised by what the poem that emerged; I consider that sense of surprise in poetry to be generally a good thing, a sign that the sub-conscious is activated, involved. I didn’t expect to write about my childhood fear of dying, which wasn’t directly in the source material, though the cemetery walls and memorial plaques on benches were.

(I now wonder how I could have expected to avoid thoughts of death, when walking in context of a lockdown imposed in response to a global pandemic and seeking to prevent the spread of a new disease that was infecting and killing people in ways that, as yet we barely understood.)

I myself was moved by the poem, and comforted by it, which I also consider a good thing – hopefully an indication that the piece might have captured something that would also be moving for a wider audience, though of course, not for everyone in that audience.

I read the poem on a couple of occasions to several of my much-valued informal co-inquirers; their response, again, not definitive, suggested they also found the piece moving. I am thankful for the patient presence of several such friends in the background development of this work, for their feedback and for the generosity of their frequent encouragements. This is work that benefits deeply from interaction with others who are also trying to see, and *behave*, differently.

High level, my action commitments are to continue to self-reflect, as precisely and truthfully as I can; to continue to explore the forces that have hitherto shaped me and perhaps ruled me, and to exchange perspectives with others, to test and refine what we think we understand; and to continue to imagine a kinder, fairer world, and look for opportunities to move towards it.

This last commitment includes participating in democratic processes at national and local level, using my voice – formally and informally – at work, looking for opportunities to be inclusive, including when this means modelling openness to seeing the many ways in which I am vested in systems and structures that perhaps limit me and certainly work to the exclusion of others.



It makes me glad that long-ago people imagined the stars into pictures and gave them names.

In youth, I longed to dodge death in Christian service, falling from time into the arms of God.

Those fires have dimmed but seeing silver stars on a clear night still calls me to worship.



*Fig. 60: Canary Wharf statue by night – photo credit Simon Rosbottom (2018).*



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<b>Poem title</b>	<b>Link to Soundcloud voice recording</b>
Fear and walking	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/fear-and-walking">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/fear-and-walking</a>
Forgetfulness	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/forgetfulness-a-pantoum">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/forgetfulness-a-pantoum</a>
I know this feeling	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/i-know-this-feeling-a-found-poem">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/i-know-this-feeling-a-found-poem</a>
June walk	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/june-walk">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/june-walk</a>
Remembering	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/remembering">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/remembering</a>
Shadows on the landscape	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/shadows-on-the-landscape">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/shadows-on-the-landscape</a>
The "bothness"	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/the-bothness-a-found-poem">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/the-bothness-a-found-poem</a>
The edge of the world	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/the-edge-of-the-world">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/the-edge-of-the-world</a>
The progress of a walking inquiry	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/the-progression-of-a-walking-inquiry-2017-2020">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/the-progression-of-a-walking-inquiry-2017-2020</a>
The ZIP moment	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/the-zip-moment-a-found-poem">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/the-zip-moment-a-found-poem</a>
Threshold	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/threshold-with-background-street-noise">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/threshold-with-background-street-noise</a>
Town and country	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/town-and-country-recorded-outside">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/town-and-country-recorded-outside</a>
Travel prep	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/travel-prep">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/travel-prep</a>
What I write about when I write about walking	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/what-i-write-about-when-i-write-about-walking">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/what-i-write-about-when-i-write-about-walking</a>
You can't say that	<a href="https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/you-cant-say-that">https://soundcloud.com/paula-aamli/you-cant-say-that</a>

## Appendices



*Appx Fig 01: Tree with cut ivy and fresh growth, spire in background, Ashridge (2019).*

Appendix One: “Steps” data Nov 2017- Sept 2018

Day no	steps/ week	kms/week	average/ day	average km	average pace
295	100309	72.6	14330	10.37	72
288	88503	57.7	12643	8.24	65
281	103836	66.9	14834	9.56	64
274	94624	65.9	13518	9.41	70
267	78863	52.1	11266	7.44	66
260	94904	59.9	13558	8.56	63
253	91534	65.1	13076	9.30	71
246	87974	62.4	12568	8.91	71
239	77367	51.3	11052	7.33	66
232	85174	56.6	12168	8.09	66
225	107366	67.2	15338	9.60	63
218	99248	65.8	14178	9.40	66
211	98863	67.8	14123	9.69	69
204	97321	69.1	13903	9.87	71
197	101554	67.1	14508	9.59	66
190	103632	75	14805	10.71	72
183	154990	111.1	22141	15.87	72
176	123170	81.3	17596	11.61	66
169	114331	72.6	16333	10.37	63
162	93849	65.3	13407	9.33	70
155	88046	57.9	12578	8.27	66
148	84109	51.5	12016	7.36	61
141	96383	65.6	13769	9.37	68
134	107365	68.3	15338	9.76	64
127	103816	67.1	14831	9.59	65
120	100833	68	14405	9.71	67
113	72816	50.4	10402	7.20	69
106	77596	52	11085	7.43	67
99	81173	56	11596	8.00	69
92	91240	57.9	13034	8.27	63
85	111568	66.1	15938	9.44	59
78	89686	55	12812	7.86	61
71	90981	61.2	12997	8.74	67
64	94638	62.1	13520	8.87	66
57	108725	75.4	15532	10.77	69
50	91364	56.7	13052	8.10	62
43	95485	61.9	13641	8.84	65
36	83883	52.7	11983	7.53	63
29	101567	70.5	14510	10.07	69
22	115630	77.9	16519	11.13	67
15	82132	54.9	11733	7.84	67
8	87920	61.1	12560	8.73	69
1	93829	62.9	13404	8.99	67

*Table I: Daily walking data (steps/stride) grouped by week, 25/11/2017 to 21/09/2018 – this data was the basis for my decision to use 67cm as my “typical” average stride length.*

date	steps	kms	steps range	no	average steps	av kms
27-May	41231	31	no at or > 40k	1	41231	31
01-Apr	30280	17.5	range 30-39.9	4	33533	23
07-Apr	25158	13.6	range 25-29.9	3	25503	14.4
27-Jan	22118	15.2	range 22-24.9	10	23207	16
04-Aug	21007	16.2	range 21-21.9	8	21334	14.2
04-Feb	20316	13.3	range 20-20.9	7	20540	13.1
12-Aug	19332	10.9	range 19-19.9	8	19586	13.15
18-Feb	18029	10.6	range 18-18.9	7	18500	12.1
03-May	17253	11.4	range 17-17.9	10	17498	11.82
30-Mar	16586	12.4	range 16.5-16.9	6	16808	11.42
25-Aug	16063	11.9	range 16-16.49	7	16308	10.99
28-Jul	15516	10.1	range 15.5-15.9	6	15704	9.78
19-Feb	15012	9.7	range 15-15.49	10	15173	9.56
04-Jan	14502	8.5	range 14.5-14.9	11	14737	9.33
01-Jan	14005	8.2	range 14-14.49	10	14291	9.31
27-Aug	13523	9.2	range 13.5-13.9	8	13673	9.44
19-May	13038	8.5	range 13-13.49	12	13270	9.25
28-Jan	12813	7.7	range 12.8-12.99	7	12872	8.37
20-Apr	12624	8.2	range 12.6-12.79	9	12735	8.41
15-Dec	12417	8.1	range 12.4-12.59	10	12492	8.44
30-Jan	12261	8.8	range 12.2-12.39	3	12307	8.07
19-Jul	12068	8.4	range 12-12.19	8	12094	7.80
20-Jun	11814	8.3	range 11.8-11.99	5	11877	8.18
23-Dec	11637	8.5	range 11.6-11.79	5	11678	8.52
18-Jul	11409	6.2	range 11.4-11.59	10	11491	7.32
01-Feb	11247	7.3	range 11.2-11.39	6	11308	7.70
31-Aug	11021	7	range 11- 11.19	5	11076	7.30
08-Jan	10828	6.8	range 10.8-10.99	11	10902	7.41
23-Jul	10620	7.1	range 10.6-10.79	4	10679	7.38
06-Aug	10410	7.2	range 10.4-10.59	10	10499	6.89
30-Dec	10201	6.4	range 10.2-10.39	17	10277	7.11
02-Mar	10158	6.7	range 10.15-10.19	10	10175	6.8
18-Mar	10102	7.3	range 10.1-10.149	9	10118	6.9
28-Aug	10052	7.2	range 10.05-10.09	19	10071	6.7
11-Dec	10011	7	range 10-10.049	22	10024	6.9
21-Sep	9089	5.5	between 7/8	3	9209	5.9
13-Mar	8543	5.8	between 8/9	1	8543	5.8
04-May	7663	5.4	between 7/8	3	7728	5.1
25-Apr	5401	3.5	between 5/6	2	5517	3.6

Table II: No of steps/day over 307 days, 25/11/2017 to 27/09/2018 (grouped into ranges, lowest at the bottom, date shown is the day when I took the fewest steps in the given range).

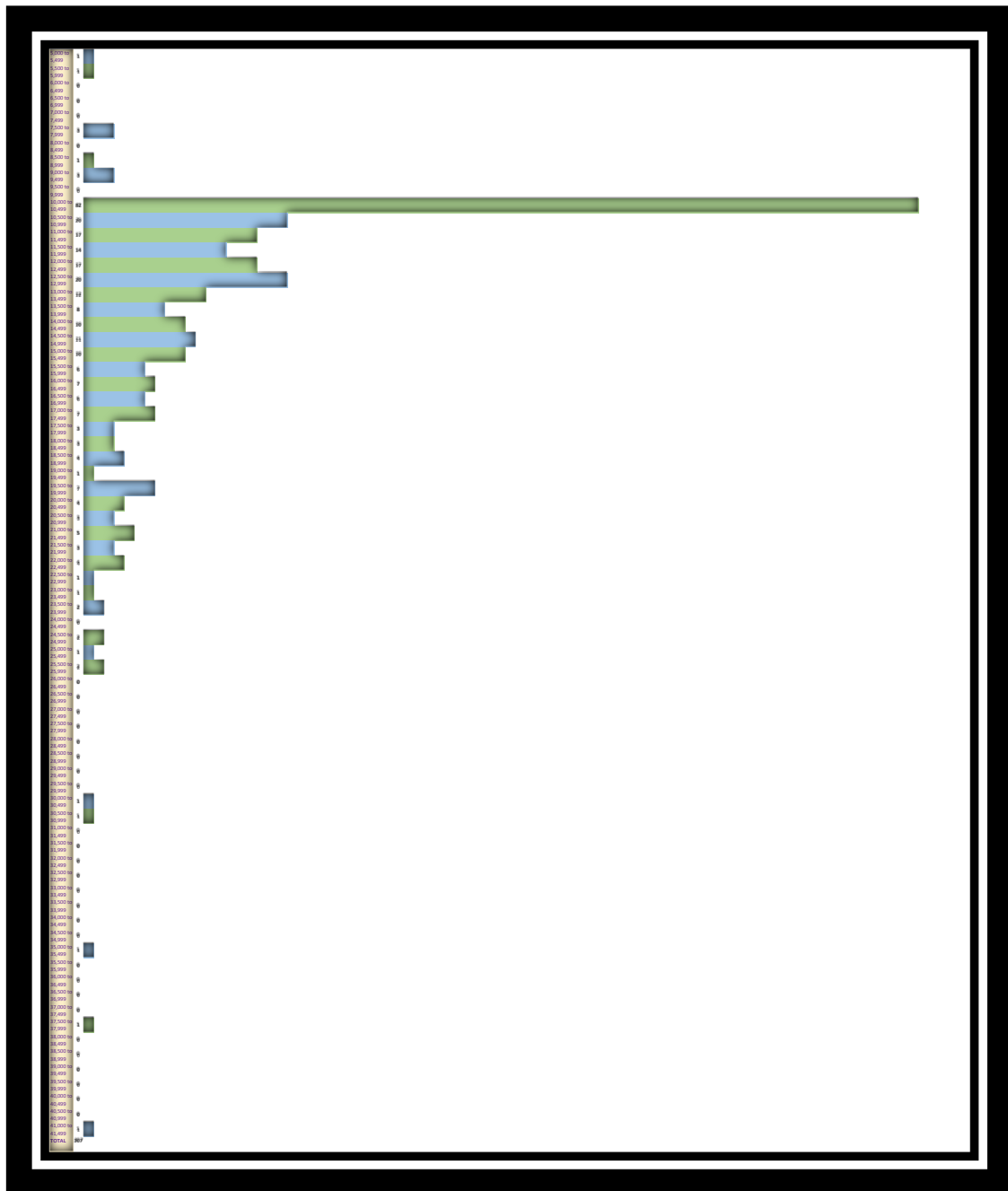
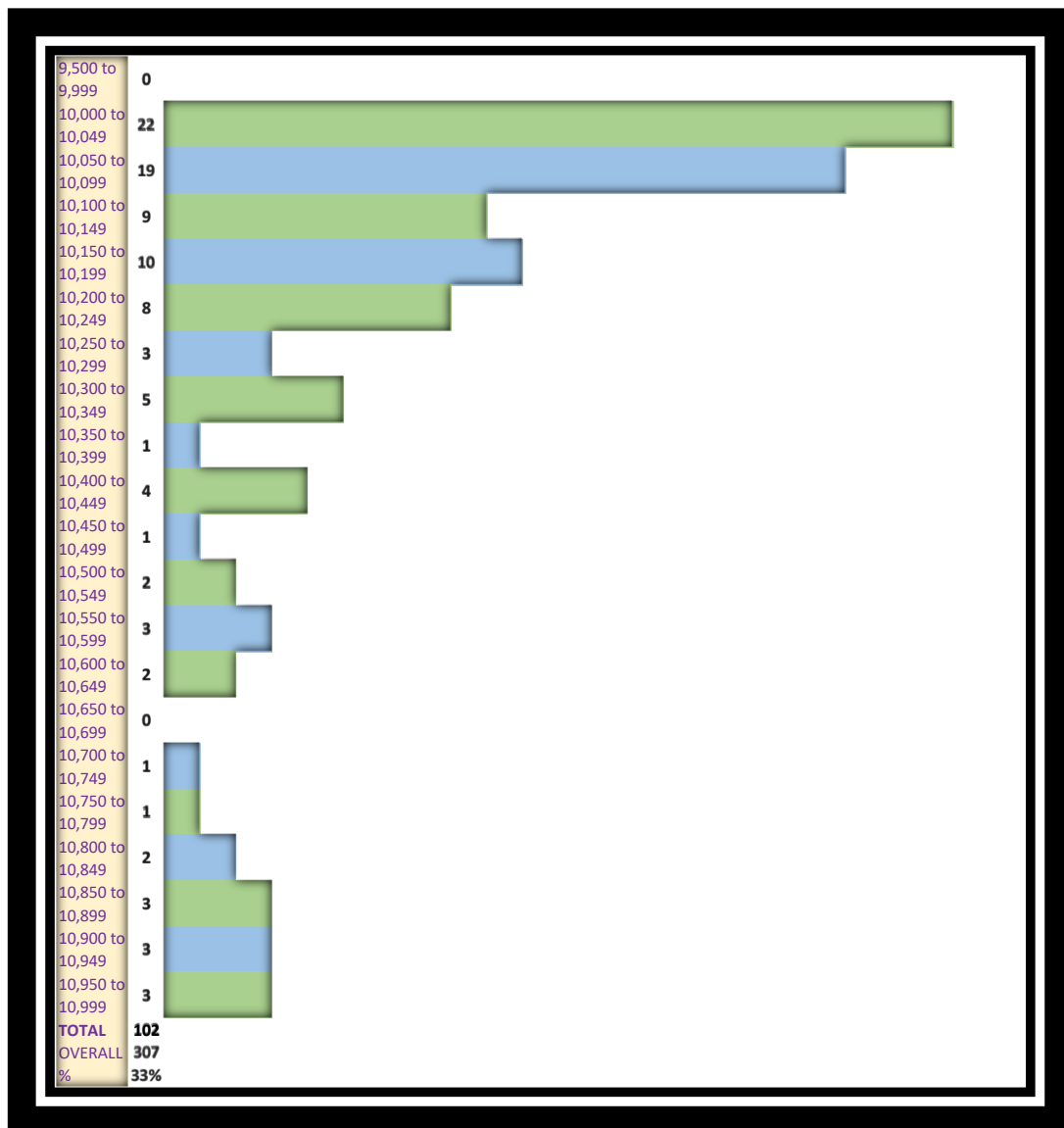


Table III: Same data series, with occurrences grouped into ranges to the nearest 500 steps, where the days with fewest steps are at the top of the page. Data incidences are clustered in the ranges immediately above the minimum “qualifying” target of 10,000 steps (as expected) = 82 days of 307 days at 10,000-10,499 steps (27%) and a further 20 days at 10,500-10,999 steps (6.5%). Unlike previous table, ranges with 0 incidences also appear.



*Table IV: Extract from previous data series, showing the 102 days where I walked between 10,000-10,999 steps, this time with the ranges sub-divided into increments of 50 steps.*





Appendix Two: The “pre-story”



*Appx Fig. 02: Selfie, with tree, Ashridge (July 2019).*

**Scene: Northern France. I am four.**

We have been living in France since I was born (although I was born in my mother's home county of Pembrokeshire, Wales). We travel between France and the UK by car, stopping in various towns along the way. We visit war graves... restaurants... vineyards... cathedrals...

My parents are academics – scientists, atheists. I'm not sure what the vast cool stone building is for. Mum tries to explain that people who thought there was a God built places where they could come to try to meet God. We walk across the threshold into the immense dark space within, glowing faintly with flickering yellow candlelight. Mum believes the dark space is empty of divine presence, but I find it full and immense and awe-inspiring.

I start to learn, for the first time, that I experience the world as having a quality of *Presence* – as “full” of the spiritual. Over time, I come to know that reflecting on the existence of life, on my experience of *being alive*, provokes me to respond with gratitude, with a kind of worship.

**Scene: UK, near Manchester. I am six, seven, eight, nine...**

These are the years when I perfect the practice of living inside my own head. Whenever I am left to my own devices, I can be found, sealed in my bedroom, with the bedroom door firmly closed. I sit on the floor for hours at a time, reading, my back against the radiator, wedged in between the wardrobe and the desk. For some reason it never occurs to me to sit *at the desk* to read – instinctively, I feel more comfortable (safer?) tucked out of eyeshot of the door, while my mind wanders. I don't hear my family if they call for me. My body is in residence, but my mind has roamed far away, adventuring in various fantasy worlds.

I learn that books are doorways to enchanted places; that words and stories can be powerful medicine. I spend as much time as I can exploring these imaginal spaces, dreaming.

**Scene: Northern France. I am 10.**

I have been staying in Rheims, with the Delvare family, friends of my parents from when we lived there previously. My parents wanted me to have an exchange so that I could learn another language and the Delvares arrange that I can attend the local school with their daughter, Anne. It is a music school; I am not musical. I have not done a particularly good job of making friends with the French school children and this does not particularly concern me.

One day, sitting in the back of Mme Delvare's mushroom coloured Deux Chevaux, staring through the curved triangle of the back-seat window, I realise that I am thinking in French.

I learn that it is possible to use words to slide into other worlds when I am here, not just when I have escaped into fiction. I become interested in exploring the "worlds" inhabited by other cultures. I dream about travelling *in real life*.

I decide that when I grow up, I will live overseas. I decide that I will travel *far away*. I start to dream about marrying someone from another land, about making a life – elsewhere.

**Scene: UK, the Lake District, Friday 16<sup>th</sup> October 1987. I just turned 14.**

For years, once or twice a year, we have been coming on family holidays to the Lake District – my parents, with me and my younger brother, and two or three other couples, two of which don't have children. I am comfortable with this; I know how to make conversation with these adults, who are all working class by origin, highly educated, now working in the professions or in white collar office jobs or in academia. I like the attention.

They talk about history and feminism and the Labour party and boycotting South African fruit and CND (and, when it's just the men, about football scores and about the cricket). They do not go to church or play golf. They have not joined the Rotary Club or the Women's Institute.

We rent self-catering accommodation and play board games and eat cake bought from a local farmhouse shop and in the evenings the adults take it in turns to cook and they all drink wine and tell stories. Most days we hike locally. Often it rains.

This year, for the first time, my parents for some reason are not able to stay for the whole week – they have to go south for some sort of work thing (both of them work for Astra Zeneca, my father as a research chemist and my mother in the medical information team).

The other adults agree to look after us for the couple of nights my parents have to be away. As it turns out, this is the week of the Bad Storm, which hit overnight, the 15<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> October 1987.

In the morning after the main storm has passed, it is clear that we can't go hiking on the fells, so we set out to visit a local mini steam railway instead. We park the car and walk the several hundred metres along a tarmacked road to reach the visitor's centre. The group is spread out, walking in 2s and 3s. I am on my own, somewhere in the middle.

Suddenly, some instinct, I suppose, kicks in. As if involuntarily, I break into a run, to close the distance to the adults ahead. The next moment, a large tree branch crashes into the road where I would otherwise have been. The adults talk of nothing else for the rest of the day.

Replaying the incident now, I imagine it must be that I heard the sound of the great bough giving way even if I didn't understand, consciously, what I was hearing. Whatever the explanation, I learn that I am grateful to be still alive, still functioning, uninjured.

**Scene: UK, Trowbridge, near Bath. I am 15.**

It is a year later. Maybe, after my brush with death in the Lake District, I had become more focused on trying to understand the “meaning of life”, maybe it was an “age thing” but in the intervening year, I have become a member of the school Christian Union. I was not, perhaps, the most obvious person to join the Christian Union – and it is, of course, a development my atheist mother does not approve of.

When I first arrived at “Big School”, by deliberate design on the part of my parents I didn’t know the Lord’s Prayer – I learned it from the mumblings of my classmates, as we sat, heads bowed, staring at our knees, fidgeting. Initially, my attendance is entirely pragmatic, the result of a bargain with Fiona, one of my few friends at school. Fiona had agreed to come with me to Mah-jong Club every week, providing I would go with her to Christian Union.

Eventually there is a Christian Union weekend away. We travel south by minibus, which is a source of some excitement and later inspires a couple of us to write a long piece of somewhat laboured doggerel. That weekend, I become a Christian.

**Scene: UK, Oxford. I am 18.**

School had suited me well and I was looking forward to more of the same at University.

My parents had crossed tentatively into the middle class based on their access to a high quality education and almost the only red line in our family was the expectation that my brother and I would study hard and stay in education until we had a good degree from a good University. (Lurking behind that was an assumption that this was the best way to secure a well-paid job, but this was not discussed directly and was not the part of the message I tuned into.)

At some point, I decided I wanted to go to Oxford – this made everybody nervous, in case I couldn't do it. That year my school got c.10 pupils into Oxbridge; I was one of them. In those days, you took an exam in the first term of Upper Sixth and then had an interview, and if you passed both stages, you were offered a guaranteed place.

When I arrive for the interview, the weather is dank and dark and white fog coats the yellow stonework of the college buildings. I feel as though I have stepped into a Victorian novella; I am enchanted. I wander past the Lamb and Flag, mesmerised by the ancient tree that bends across the alleyway at the college end of the passageway. Knowing almost nothing about Oxford customs, I accidentally interview in a version of the University exam uniform (black trousers, white shirt, floppy black hat). Some of the current students look askance at me but the tutors apparently understand that this is ignorance and not a send up. I get in.

My Oxford years are full of depth and curiosity and joy and wonder. I go there to study – and I do, tuning out the politicking and the socialising and planning of future careers in the City that is going on around me. Having a career doesn't, at this stage, interest me; the relentless self-promotion intimidates me; I feel uncomfortable. I prefer my own company, hidden quietly in a cool spot in a library, surrounded by the smell of gently mouldering books.

*Be sure to say hello to your brother for me.*

A parting line, muffled, on the other side of the door.

*A melodious, gurgling giggle in response.*

Maybe,

I imagine,

a tipped-back head,

White of the neck momentarily exposed,

Tossing of artfully tangled long blonde hair.

Was that the game?

I have paused, frozen here  
For the past – several – minutes,  
Engulfed in my black suit and white shirt,  
Drowned by my black hat, embarrassed by  
The oversized curve of its brim,  
That had so delighted me  
In Manchester  
On Saturday

When I insisted  
That, yes, that one was the one,  
That was what I wanted to wear for this,  
This all-important life-direction-changing interview.

Was that the game?

In that moment,  
I knew myself to be –  
Outsider.

One who does not have a brother  
Already known to  
Oxford professors

Waiting on the other side  
Of that closed wooden door  
To judge me.

I have been standing, frozen, on the threshold  
For a long time, waiting  
For permission to enter.



That day,  
I walked through the white wooden door –  
The unexpectedly double doorway,  
The second door,  
Into a caricature of an Oxbridge Don's office,

Large and light,  
Two full-length windows  
Giving wisteria-edged glimpses  
Back down towards the honey-yellow stone

And cobbles and close-clipped keep-off-the-grass lawn of the courtyard.

Shelves  
And shelves  
And shelves and tables  
And window ledges and chairs  
Cascading books and papers and more books.

Persian carpets, perhaps.  
*I don't really remember.*

Dark velvet curtains, a little fusty.  
*I don't really remember.*

Two men sealed into chairs  
In the open part of what I now see  
Is a suite of rooms,

Two further doorways  
Beckoning beyond them.

As far as I know  
These rooms might even  
Extend  
Forever.

The men are white, elderly, affable,  
Festooned in dark gowns,  
A little fusty.

They welcome me in.  
I sit down.

They ask me questions.  
I answer as best I can.

*I don't really remember.*

I do remember that I mention Polish history at one point –  
The younger of the two men brightens  
And I rush to evade,  
*We haven't really  
started yet,*  
I say

And the danger  
Of his keen attention passes.

Five weeks later, a letter  
An offer

All my life since then –

Yes, and

Before,

Also

It seems that

I have been standing, frozen, on the threshold

For a long time, waiting

For permission to enter,

For a letter

An offer.

**Scene: Southern China, Yunnan University. I am 24.**

Eighteen months after sitting my Oxford finals exams, I am back in a classroom, on the other side of the world, this time as a language student.

I am learning Chinese, living in the foreign students' block at Yunnan University, Kunming, a city tucked away below Tibet, above Thailand and Myanmar, in South West China. I am sharing an apartment with a young blonde American woman whose hair marks her out, beacon-like, in the city crowds – this is in a time when it is still relatively unusual to see Western faces, at least in this part of China.

There are very few privately owned cars, and almost no Western brands. We live in a newly constructed apartment block, all bright pink tiles and multi-coloured crazy paving, a look seemingly styled on the Gingerbread House in Hans Christian Anderson's gothic tale, Hansel and Gretel. I'm not certain whether the intention is to make the Western students feel special or to keep us confined – quite possibly, both.

Very little of what is taken by the locals to be “obvious” makes immediate “intuitive” sense to me. Instead, I must *learn to hear* the building blocks of the language as words, not as sounds; I must *learn* that the sense of what is rude and what is polite differs in some significant ways from my culture of origin. I learn that I am foreign and that my way of seeing the world is not the only possible way the world can be. Now, I cringe that I did not already know this – but I *did not*, in a meaningful internalised way, *already know this*.

This experiential discovery of difference is more useful than anything I learned at Oxford.

**Scene: USA, Colorado. I am 25.**

It is a year or so since I left China. I am working for an American Christian University. My new boss suggests I attend their annual conference. I go, but I'm not sure that my mind is on the conference lectures.

I had put on quite a bit of weight in China, using lardy Western food as a "comfort connection" with home. Back in the UK, where my money doesn't go so far, and where my classroom is at the top of four flights of stairs, I have lost it all again – initially by accident and then with a bit of mulish determination, so that in this moment, I'm slimmer than I've ever been. I have splashed out on a Converse-style blue canvas skirt which I think is tremendously cool and have gold and auburn highlights striped into my hair. I wear cheap, pretty jewellery. I am smitten by my own eccentric stylishness. I am ready to make a mark – and I do.

At the first meeting for our particular programme, I sit next to a charming Norwegian with an earnest manner that doesn't quite mask the mischievousness in his eyes.

Actually, it would be more accurate to say that the young Norwegian takes the opportunity of a change of venue to come to sit next to me. He is the Director of the equivalent department to mine, in Norway. Later I find out that he has already decided he wants to marry me.

Before the end of the year, he asks me to do so and I say yes. But our haste does us no favours; we flounder and drown in our differences. The marriage lasts 8 years.

**Scene: UK, London, Canary Wharf. I am 29.**

I have been married 3 years and we are already struggling. London overwhelms my Norwegian husband and the cost of living here overwhelms me.

For the first time in my life, I pay attention to finding a job that will pay well (feeling retrospective regret for my blasé refusal to engage with the employment “milk round” when I was still at Oxford).

At a graduate assessment centre for a global bank, my interviewer takes a call in French from his daughter in the middle of our conversation. At the time, it does not occur to me to be outraged about this – I think maybe it was a relief to have a few moments away from the spotlight intensity of the interview questions, to find my footing and to relax.

When the interviewer finishes, I speak to him in French without thinking. This goes down well. They offer me the job. I take it.

The interviewer runs a division of our bank based in Geneva and I am posted there for my first graduate role. I become friends with the COO, a woman only a little older than me, who started with the bank straight from University and has made rapid career progress during that 10-year head start. After a few months, she eventually tells me that the person our boss *thought* he had agreed to take was black.

**Scene: Brazil, Sao Paulo, September 2007. I am nearly 34.**

A couple of months after I have been invited to apply to work for the Group Chairman and after I get to the final two in the interview process and lose out to someone else who speaks better Chinese than I do (and is more effectively self-promoting), I receive an invitation to join a junior talent development programme.

The programme opens in Brazil, where teams of junior bankers are partnered with local non-profit organisations for a week. My team flies to Vale Dorado, the golden valley, somewhere in Brazil’s savannah heartlands.

We are there to research ideas for increasing local eco-tourism (with the benefit of hindsight, I'm not sure that my team had much idea about putting the "eco" into tourism and I can't help hoping that the proposals we added to the business plan didn't translate into action).

We hang out, unhurriedly, whilst our programme facilitators try to coach us to "sense into the system" and tell us about something called Theory U. We don't get it, but we love the place and the people, and we bond with each other. We drink caipirinhas. We float down the local river on tire tubes.

Back in Sao Paolo, at our closing conference, I find myself glancing round the auditorium, astonished by the level of energy and animation. A yearning for change floats between us.

I have the sense that I am looking at an entire group of ordinarily hardened businessmen and businesswomen whose lives have, however briefly, been touched profoundly.

I am very slightly concerned that each one of us is planning to fly home to resign and commit ourselves to creating a different kind of "value" from the "shareholder returns" that dominate the normal business goal setting cycles. While it might be an excellent outcome "in the real world", I am not sure this that would look good in a programme evaluation.

Of course, this doesn't happen.

There is no mass exodus from the bank. We return home and it seems, perhaps, that the spell has been broken (but twelve years later and many of my most meaningful workplace connections were still made on that programme).

My own life does change. I finally find enough conviction to leave my struggling marriage. It takes three tense, terse years to unpick the legal entanglement of this shared life, but we part, in the end, amicably.

Then, while the divorce lawyers exchange volleys of paperwork in Europe, I apply for the International Managers (“IM”) Programme and they make me an offer.

The programme takes me to Hong Kong and then, a little counter-intuitively, back to London. I work as an IM for 7 years.

**Scene: UK, London, near Islington, 15<sup>th</sup> January 2012. I am 38.**

It is a Sunday afternoon. I arrive at a modern-looking coffee shop on Exmouth Market, ten minutes late for my appointment with the man waiting for me there. It has been a busy day.

I am wearing an outfit picked out for me by my friend Amber (from the team who travelled to Vale Dorado) and donned, without argument, because I was already late and in a hurry.

Tight dark blue jeans. Spectacular three-inch snakeskin heels. My flimsy sequined top with its plunging neckline is hidden beneath a black sheepskin coat. I would not look out of place at a trendy night club; for the coffee shop, though, even a posh one like this, it is *de trop*. I am thrilled and mortified by how I look, in more-or-less equal measure.

It is my first date with S. He is dressed efficiently in good quality clothes with a touch of old-fashioned smartness. He has nothing of my ex-husband’s earnest diffidence; this man is self-possessed and confident. He is also bright (thank goodness) with the ever-appealing lurking edge of mischief. We get on.

Eight years later we are, so far, still together.



**Scene: UK, London, Canary Wharf. I am nearly 41.**

It is a weekday morning. I am pacing up and down in a meeting room I haven't booked, keeping an eye on the door while I talk animatedly to one of the tutors from Ashridge. We are discussing the Ashridge Masters in Sustainability and Responsibility (AMSR).

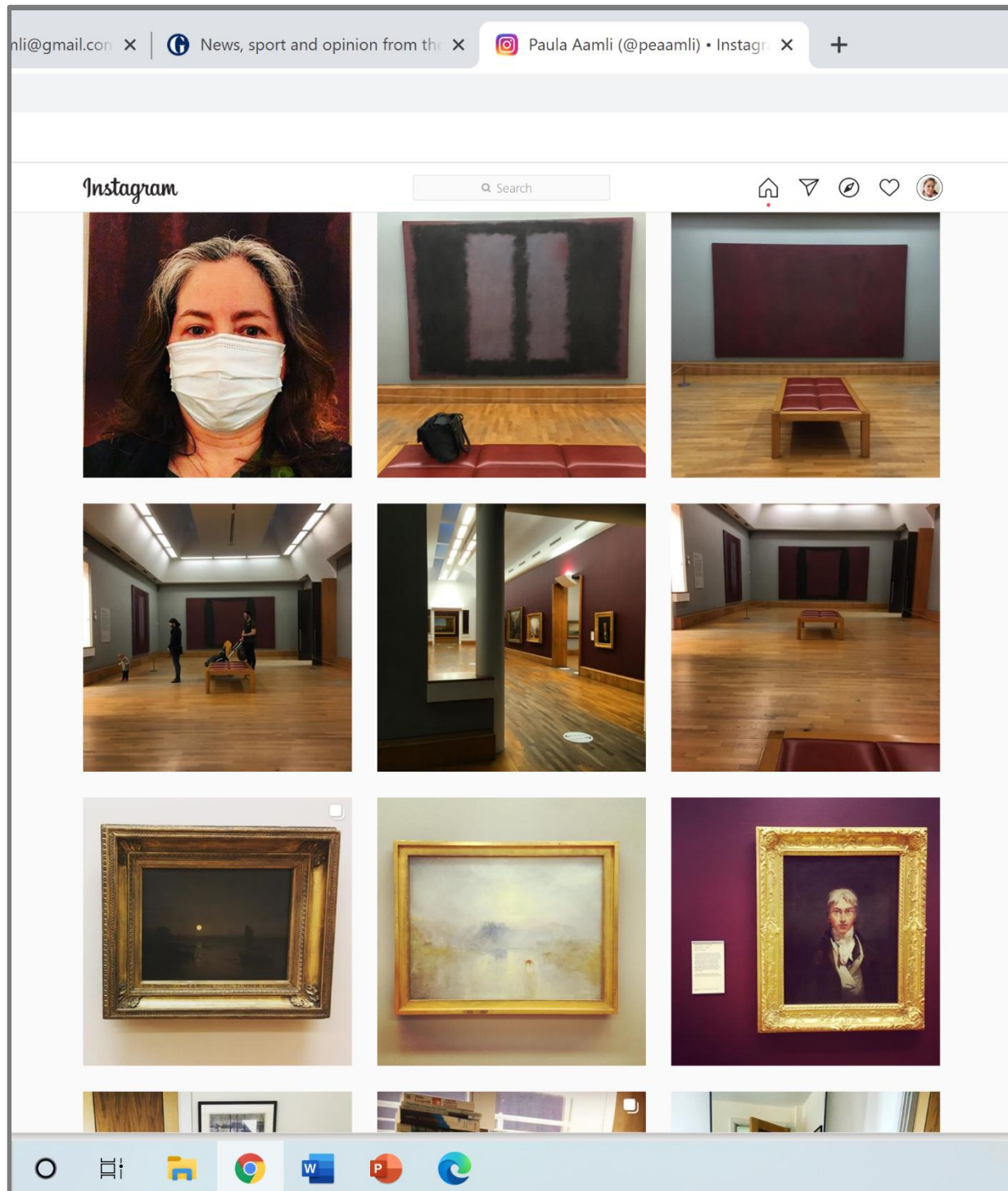
For some years I have been looking for some sort of further study that can help me make sense of my rising concern and frustration with what I now feel to be tightly-wound, self-referencing, short-term performance measures that dictate our business decisions and which don't leave room for measured longer-term planning, for taking care of community impacts, for ensuring our ongoing sustainability.

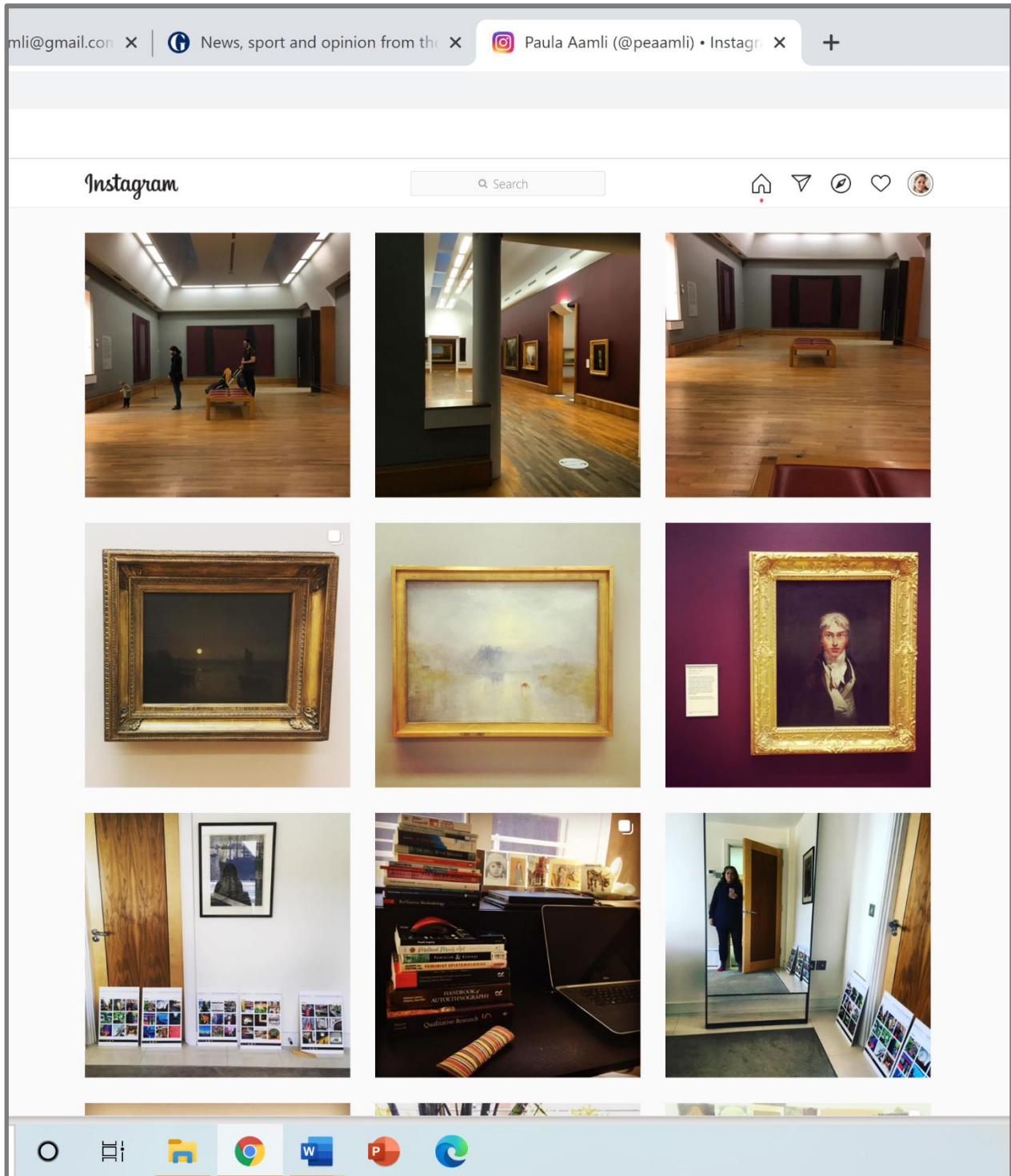
Speaking to Chris, I have the sense that I have found what I was looking for, although I'm not (knowingly) familiar with "action research". Later, I discover that the person who designed the development programme I went on in Brazil is a graduate of an earlier iteration of AMSR and had based our programme design on similar principles. This accounted for the sense of familiarity – and, retrospectively, shows me how deeply that 2007 programme had influenced my organisational values and beliefs.

Chris offers me a place on AMSR6. I accept it.



### Appendix Three: Catching myself looking (Instagram as collage)





*Appx Fig. 03, 04: Gallery and viva prep in a time of COVID – Instagram photo-collage (2020).*



## Appendix Four: Action experiments and interventions

2018 [Reflecting on nature with a church community group]

At the end of 2017, I shared some of my doctoral work with my Godmother and received an invitation to visit her church community group in the following Spring, 2018, to lead a mini-workshop /meeting on the theme of “reconnecting with Nature as a spiritual practice”.

27/12/2017

P: Something or nothing, but I attach for you what I've been working on at the moment - the main item is, self-evidently, my latest piece of "school work" but I've tried to write it in quite an approachable way so I'm hoping that you wouldn't find it too much of a desert trek if you decide to read it ;) The second piece, the "song", is a stem not a finished poem which feels like it could potentially become part of a much longer piece, but this is as much as I've got - for now.

30/12/2017

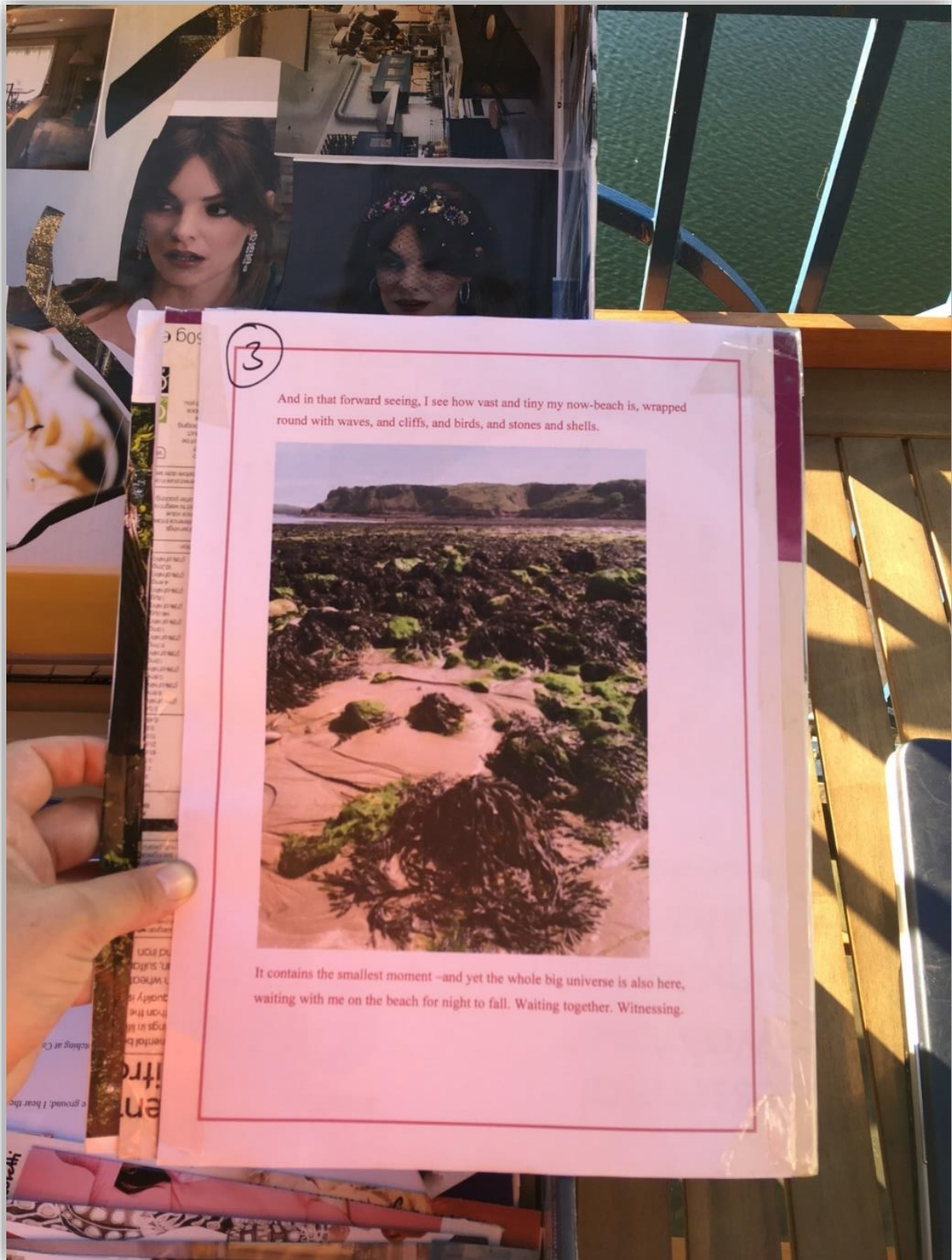
C: N and I are enjoying a quiet day, and I have had time to read your two pieces. I found them both interesting and moving – in particular I respond to your emerging poetic voice, and the sense that the work you are currently engaged in is feeding your soul in a particular way.

As I read your piece an idea began to germinate for a [Community] meeting where we explored some issues around creation and sustainability in a creative way, using some of your reflections as our starting off point. So as you continue your studies, might you like to reflect in parallel on whether you could see yourself facilitating a session for the Community along these lines?

30/12/2017

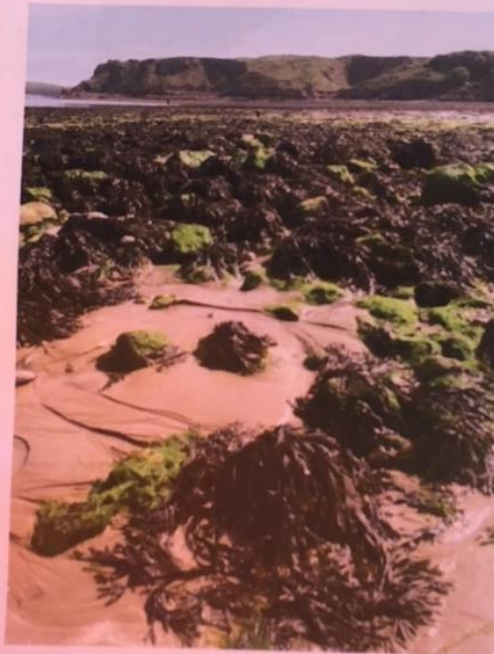
P: Just about to get off a train so will save a detailed response for later.

Wow - in brief - YES I would \*love\* to facilitate such a session!!



3

And in that forward seeing, I see how vast and tiny my now-beach is, wrapped round with waves, and cliffs, and birds, and stones and shells.



It contains the smallest moment –and yet the whole big universe is also here, waiting with me on the beach for night to fall. Waiting together. Witnessing.



*Appx Fig. 05, 06: Collage creations for the community group workshop (May 2018).*



2019 [Workplace translations, disclosures, and boundary-crossings]

*I have teams of scientists  
feeding me data daily  
and pleading I immediately  
turn [them] into poetry.*

*Drew Dellinger, Hieroglyphic Stairway, 2011.*

“Artfulness” and “playfulness” do not dominate within the classic Western capitalist workplace. Although arts-based research has flourished in the early decades of the new century, the primacy of logical-analytical type reasoning, still enshrined at the top of the knowledge hierarchy in Western thought, continues to overshadow other ways of knowing.

It remains largely the case that “we come to know the world holistically in many different ways, but only some of them are recognised as valuable in modernist society” (Chris Seeley & Peter Reason, 2008, p.27). Although various voices now suggest, with Dellinger (2011), that scientists and poets offer complementary, not competing or contradictory, expertise, it is far from the engrained norm for our organisations to behave as though they do or to seek the benefit of both forms of insight.

### **Reflections from a workplace co-inquiry: Overview**

This research inquiry has been grounded in a sustained “first person” exploration, in which:

- i) I first learned to observe myself paying attention to the natural world (“Nature”? “Gaia?”),
- ii) then established a habit of walking regularly to the culturally familiar daily 10,000 step target, generally trying to take those steps outside but acknowledging that sometimes it’s 10pm and I’m walking in little loops up and down my living room,

iii) then began two rounds of *poetic charting*, as I formalised my inquiry around two cycles of “walking generationally”, where 10,000 steps notionally represent “a year” of walking notionally “through time”, from the birth of my Irish great-great grandfather (1871) or great-great grandmother (1873) “forwards through time”, through my own lifetime and into an imaginary /imagined future.

Ethically, I was careful to focus my attention, within my notetaking, and writing, around my own “first person” experience so that other people, from my work life or friendship groups, appear only fleetingly or by consent, or otherwise are anonymised, or not included in the work.

This stance, successfully executed for most relationships and interactions, has been harder with my own family-of-origin, who can be identified easily and whose stories inevitably appear from time to time because they form part of *my story*. Here, I would simply note that the perspective I write from is *my perception* and “other perspectives are also available.”

However, my motivation and purpose in walking, and in the *poetic charting* of my walks, has been to create a routine, undemanding space in which to explore some tough questions of my time, and pre-eminently to tackle issues related to climate crisis. It’s not possible to have a fully “first person” climate crisis; it is, inherently, a planet-scale systemic breakdown.

Epistemologically, in terms of my experience of coming to know, I have found the inquiry path leading inwards and outwards, an experience described by Judi Marshall as “weaving between inner and outer arcs of attention” (2016, p. xviii); if that sounds *too neat*, yes, it probably is. Marshall also says (2016, p. 11-12) that, “there are no *clear boundaries* between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’; for example, a person is not a separated entity, but connected through cycles of exchange to the world around them” (emphasis added).

On the inwards “arc”, my inquiry has encountered questions of my own individual psyche, history, preferences, fears, dreads, hopes and joys, that has been taking me gently, insistently, towards a new clarity about who I believe myself to be, the developmental factors that have shaped me, and the moral positions I now hold. On the outwards “arc”, I grapple with social inequalities, as my walking – and my day job – has caused me to range between Mayfair billionaires versus the London homeless, into questions of power and class structures.

I didn’t necessarily need John Rawls’ conception of “justice as fairness” to have a sense of the systemic injustices of payoff built into later Western-style capitalism (at least, I hope that we’re coming into the latter stages of capitalism in this form).

It helps, however, to have a stable way to think imaginatively about what we might do instead – it is morally unacceptable to say, “This *is*, and therefore this is how things must be”, even though I have also come to resist the guilt-trip logic of, “This *is*, and I must therefore risk everything to confront it.”

Maybe I do – there are, surely, contexts in which we will decide that something merits the risk of catastrophic personal loss, or where circumstances leave us with nowhere else to go. However, I’m not sure that the logic of martyrdom applies as often as we are tempted to believe? Incidentally, I was interested to notice that Rawls (1999) conceives the “natural self-interest” of his imagined negotiators as an expression of appropriate self-esteem; I buy that.

Pedagogically, my own experience has been that the action research “prescription” of looping between doing and reflecting, in structured cycles of curious inquiry is effective in taking the inquirer along a learning pathway.

It is through sustained habits of reflexive inquiry, I believe, that I have come to be exploring questions of systemic social justice and taking a discomfoting look at my own privileged life; it is through cycles of reflection that I have come to realise that commitments by the mainstream have to involve giving up some of our “super-advantages” in order to mitigate climate damage and open the door for fairer outcomes *for all*.

### **Reflections from a workplace co-inquiry: Translations**

November 2018

*All - I'm writing in follow up to the Wellbeing presentation at the recent Town Hall meeting, which mentioned an intention to launch a Business Book Club. V and I have put up our hands for the Book Club and we're looking for others who would be interested in joining us...*

*When and where? We aim to have one “set up” conversation plus one actual Book Club discussion between now and the end of the year – probably scheduled towards the end of the day for say an hour-ish.*

“Arty things” don’t necessarily fit easily into the forms, structures, dialogues or rituals of the “organisational playground” but that certainly doesn’t mean there is no room for artful interventions in our workplaces.

Turning artful insights into action within Western workplaces, typically requires i) translating flexibly from one format to another; ii) carefully managed disclosures; and iii) the occupying of organisational marginal /edge space, from which locations, willing inquirers can navigate the boundaries between traditional forms of knowledge and critical arts-based insight.

There's also a question, for me, about what "arty things" *look like*, when they occur, not as a leisure activity, not as the output of "professional artists", not in "the academy", but rather in an "everyday" organisational context – and here I am following the logic that action research constantly seeks to be useful, relevant and transformative in "real world" environments.

What does "doing arty things" look like in practice, in "real-world" organisational practice/s? With the exception of the charts, graphs and dashboards beloved of our financial analysts and our executive management teams, and the branding tools policed by our communications and marketing departments, "arty things" (including the reading and/or writing of poetry) do not have well-established roles in (my) financial services workplace.

Here I have described my doctoral inquiry method as *poetic charting* and as a form of *poetic inquiry*, but these are not terms that I can easily use in describing my research preoccupations to work colleagues. The only time I describe my doctoral work in those terms in my everyday workplace is when I want to stop people asking questions about it.

Chris Seeley was a bold and persistent advocate for taking "arty things" into workplaces and doing so directly, on the terms that make sense within artful inquiry but are not commonly used as frames of reference in mainstream Western professional workplace contexts.

An alternative strategy is to try to "translate" so that things we come to know "artfully" are "re-imagined" as more familiar workplace processes and artefacts.

This has been my own preferred "way in" for using artful insights in the still-positivist, still-dominated-by-logical-analytical-modes-of-thinking (at least in our overt, written-down, "deliberately evidenced" governance architectures and control frameworks).

Thus, *poetic charting* has informed the structure I used for a governance committee handover and the practice of paying curious, non-directed attention during my daily walking has influenced the discussion format I have adopted in running our local workplace book club.

As a means of recording and working with the walk-data, one pleasant surprise has been the flexibility of Excel – I’ve hardly used the programme’s number crunching capabilities, but I have really appreciated its ability to hold large amounts of data accessibly, to make this data searchable, and present tables and charts in a visually consistent, pleasing (to me) format.

<b>FOR COMMENT ITEM 1</b>	<b>Item</b>	XXX		
	<b>Ref.</b>	Last discussed at ARC XX/XX/19 See p.X of XX for action reference.	<b>Shared item with parent entity?</b>	Y/N - comment
	<b>Description</b>	XXX		
	<b>Date raised</b>	Discussed at ARC XX/XX/2019 See minutes p. X (item XXX)	<b>Scale of impact, if known:</b>	USD XXX
	<b>Quantitative breach</b>	Y/N - comment	<b>Path to Green?</b>	XXX
	<b>Commentary</b>	XXX		
	<b>Mitigation / Resolution</b>	XXX		

Appx Fig. 07: Using a template for “compressed writing” notes in a handover document.

Through this work, I’ve realised that Excel is also wonderful as a vehicle for creating templates and then deploying these, time and again, for different cycles of inquiry, for the same questions repeated over different periods of time, and so on.

Occasionally, I even use it for deriving some sort of numeric information from my data, for example, how long is my average stride length, or how much variation was there in the distance I covered for a particular number of days, over the whole cycle, or part of it or conversely how many days did it take to walk a certain distance?

In working with excel-based templates for the purpose of *poetic charting*, I came to appreciate for the first time how much of the “mental load” in a process of analysis can be shifted away from the researcher and held instead by the impassive, unemotional, steadfastly consistent structure of a good template.

In truth, I am faintly suspicious that *all other researchers have secretly always known this and have chosen not to mention it to me* but I also suspect that this is what “coming to know” is like, the luminous quality when something starts to make sense on its own terms, transitioning from “knowing *about* a thing” to “knowing *that* a thing...” This insight about the “steadfast usefulness” of templates, that they free the attention to allow for creative interactions with the data they support, can easily be “translated” back into an excel-literate financial services workplace – smuggled in as if “not really artful” at all, but artfully used in intent and application, not relegated purely for number crunching exercises.

This is a small example of how coming to know (differently) in my action research studies is creating possibilities for behaving artfully, playfully, with my everyday tasks at work, without necessarily directly signalling the “artful” source of the knowledge I am applying.

In terms of translation, I am open about my belief in the importance and usefulness of “arty things” but if I want to convey some sense of *why*, I tend not to mention creativity directly but to talk instead about strategies “for supporting personal resilience and re-imagining organisational change processes connected to climate crisis”.

**Reflections from a workplace co-inquiry: Disclosures**

September 2019

All - When the Book Club agreed that we would read this small collection of speeches by Greta Thunberg (2019b), I don't think we had predicted how topical she would be (commentators have noted that if the estimated 4 million people did indeed participate in the global "climate strikes" on 20<sup>th</sup> September, that's effectively approximate to 1 in every 2000 humans worldwide). Honestly, our rationale was pretty... mundane and practical. Firstly, our previous book had looked at all kinds of emerging world trends but was silent on the environment, so we wanted a book to balance off against that. And it was small. Very small.



Appx Fig. 08: The first book review of the new series features Greta Thunberg (Sept 2019).



“Translation” is a useful strategy for generic transfer of skills, insights, capabilities – but it is entirely inadequate and unsuited for situations where the “actor” (artful inquirer, researcher, employee, human being) wishes to enact specific, focused change, where the *content* of the original insight matters, not just the process or methodology.

At some point, around mid-way through my AMSR studies, one of my tutors, turning to me during supervision, told me, “I can never remember what you do for a living – and then I realised that you *never ever mention your work* in your writing.” This was an entirely deliberate choice on my part, although I’m guessing that it was a pretty unusual stance in a programme that most came to in their “vocational” capacity, to one degree or another.

Later, I got similar feedback from my examiner, tucked into the freeform commentary that accompanied the Distinction, a mark I found slightly mortifying (but fair). “Not sure how you are applying any of this in your everyday work context”.

At the time, I would point to the bank’s confidentiality standards, its protectiveness about letting *any* internal information spill into the public domain. To give a sense of the culture, this was a period when the bank’s official communications policy still mandated “zero postings” by employees on social media channels that in any way mentioned work.

But there was something else as well, which the repeated rounds of slow walking seem to have helped me with – noticing that I’m not claiming to have *definitively evidenced* a “cause /effect” relationship, nor do I claim that “nature walking has healed me”, nor do I even go as far as to prescribe the same “fix” for anyone else (notwithstanding a strong suspicion that, adapted to suit temperament and circumstances, *it probably would be a helpful practice.*).

I think back to the child-version of myself, frozen on the way to the bathroom, not wanting to be caught accidentally eavesdropping on my parents; to the teenaged-version of myself, frozen, having arrived too early, at the threshold of the Oxford entrance interview that would open the doors to my teenaged academic dream, or close, cutting me off at the threshold.

The memories – still accessible, though no longer feeling entirely familiar – illustrate how my psyche had shaped itself around a powerful *not wanting to be seen*. I was *desperate* not to be judged or punished or shamed or made fun of – an odd mix of bold and safety-seeking. This is a powerful psychological shaping towards i) keeping my most precious commitments a little bit separate, a little bit hidden from view and ii) keeping work life at arm's length.

Research by Megan Reitz & John Higgins (2017a, 2017b, 2019) has chronicled the complexities and dangers of “speaking up” in corporate culture, both from the perspective of bosses, who may not see all the factors that make them in fact *much harder to speak up to*, than they perhaps think they are, and from the perspective of employees, who might be weighing up those factors and trying to decide whether, all things considered, they are prepared to speak.

The work is interesting, insightful, somewhat provocative but I didn't personally need even well-designed qualitative research to persuade me that being seen could be dangerous – fatal? I was a world-class hider...

And since I have an ontological perspective that our human “shape” and preferences, developed through the accumulation of our life's experiences, once formed, tend to linger I probably still am, whether I see or don't see the implications of my behaviours. Our adult dispositions, I believe, are hard (not impossible) to shift away from, being shaped in response to influences that we probably never absolutely manage to leave behind.

So, it's not entirely inconsequential that I have moved to experiment with breaking cover now. My search for understanding of and a moral stance on the climate crisis has brought me a new intellectual and moral clarity on the issues, while all the walking and gazing at rubbish-choked canals and park trees, cloud-obscured horizons and the scintillation of stars has helped me to feel more comfortable in who I am and how I fit, less scared of drawing attention.

Because these are topics where I'm convinced that it matters whether we choose to act or not to act and that it also matters *when* we act, where I believe corporates have a responsibility to take action, and, acting on a theory of change that *small gestures are worth attempting*, I have been experimenting with being the (inconvenient, politely grating?) voice in the room.

I wasn't on the streets with Extinction Rebellion (This is not a drill, 2019) – don't tell me, after all these words and all these pages, that you would be surprised to hear I was too self-conscious, too *daunted* to go? The Extinction Rebellion call to action hit me hard – I felt a shaken blend of pressing urgency to be there and a panicky sociophobe desperation not to be.

One morning, in the early part of the Extinction Rebellion Easter 2019 campaign of non-violent occupation of key sites across central London, a campaign that concluded with the UK government voting to recognise that we are facing climate emergency, the then global head of our business line held an in-person Town Hall, to which I and other local leaders, were invited. It happens that twice previously I had worked in teams reporting to this executive; he knew my face and a little about my history.

In my self-appointed role as (Goody Two-Shoes) “good corporate citizen”, I also had a track record of leading with an articulate and relatively user-friendly question for the speaker, generally asked early, in the “break the ice” stage of Q&A.

At someone else's insistence, I was sitting with her, squirmingly close to the front of the venue. I knew that I would put up my hand to ask a question, and he would recognise me, and feel that I was a friendly face, and I would get to ask... about what?

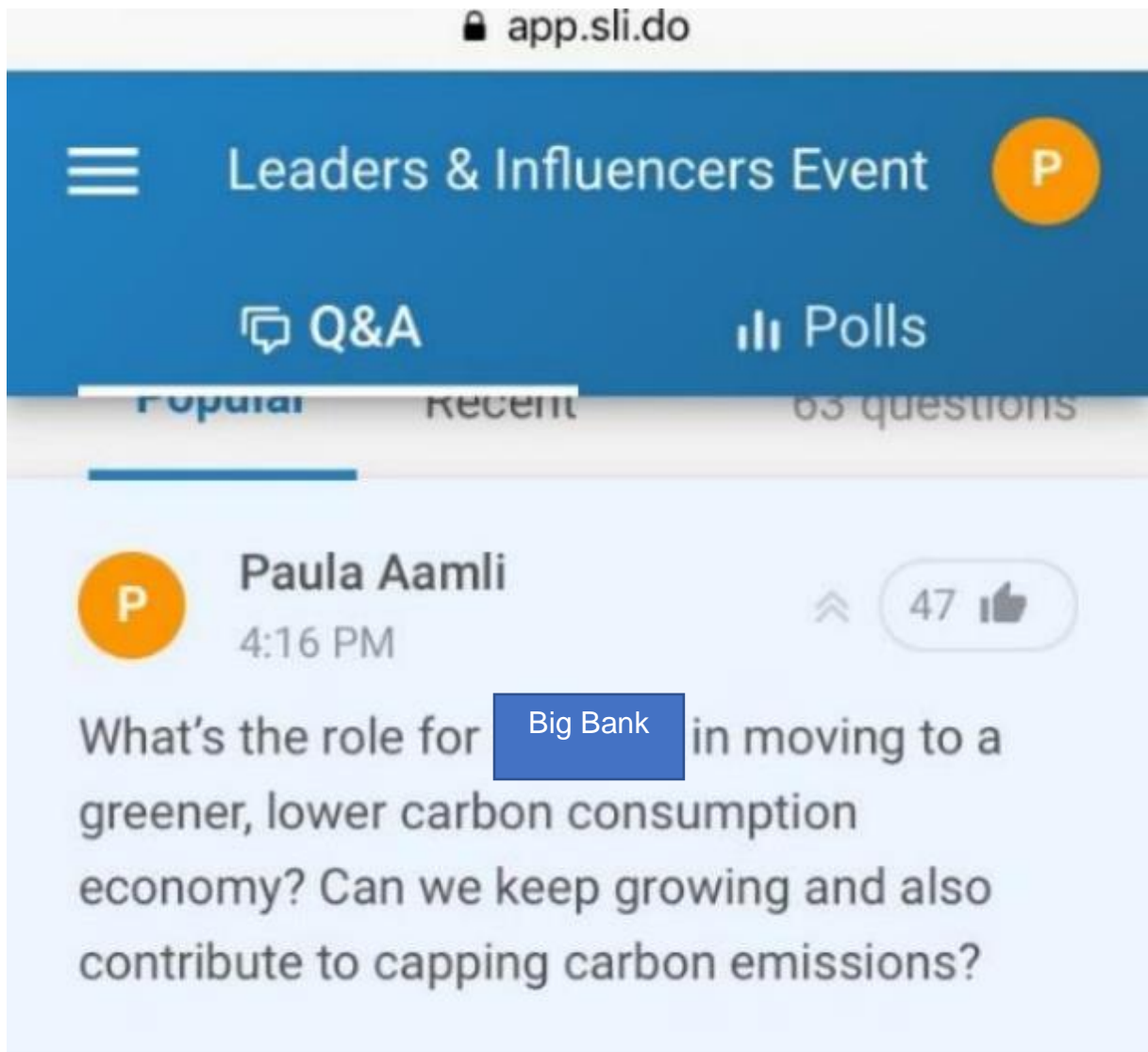
Through the talk, I could feel prickles of energy building up, stomach churning and then falling away – stage fright. I felt a – shadowy – memory of my younger-self sense of purpose. *I was not out on the street, but I was here in the room* and could use my presence for attention raising.

The moment came and went – I put my hand up, maypole high and straight, caught the eye, captured the second question in the room (behind the banker *who always asked the first one*).

I was at pains to sound earnest but not too emotional; to my horror, I felt the sting of tears as I spoke (obliquely, not referring to the movement by name) of the protests; he spoke warmly in reply, said something appropriate – I'm not sure what; also succeeded in not saying the words "Extinction Rebellion" on a recorded webcast.

And so there it was – it mattered, or it didn't; I'm not sure that it made the lightest bit of immediate, practical difference. But there we were, in a global business line mainstream strategy presentation, edging into discussing climate crisis.

I also think that this is where Seeley's "arty things" may be helpful, this time explicitly *because* they sit outside the (often tightly policed) core activities and channels of communication and management oversight within an organisation – noting that in this paper, I am *not* considering the ways in which mainstream business activities in themselves may be explicitly, implicitly or even inadvertently "artful", although these are also potentially fruitful lines of inquiry.



*Appx Fig. 09: “Using my voice” at the UK Conference, (October 2019).*

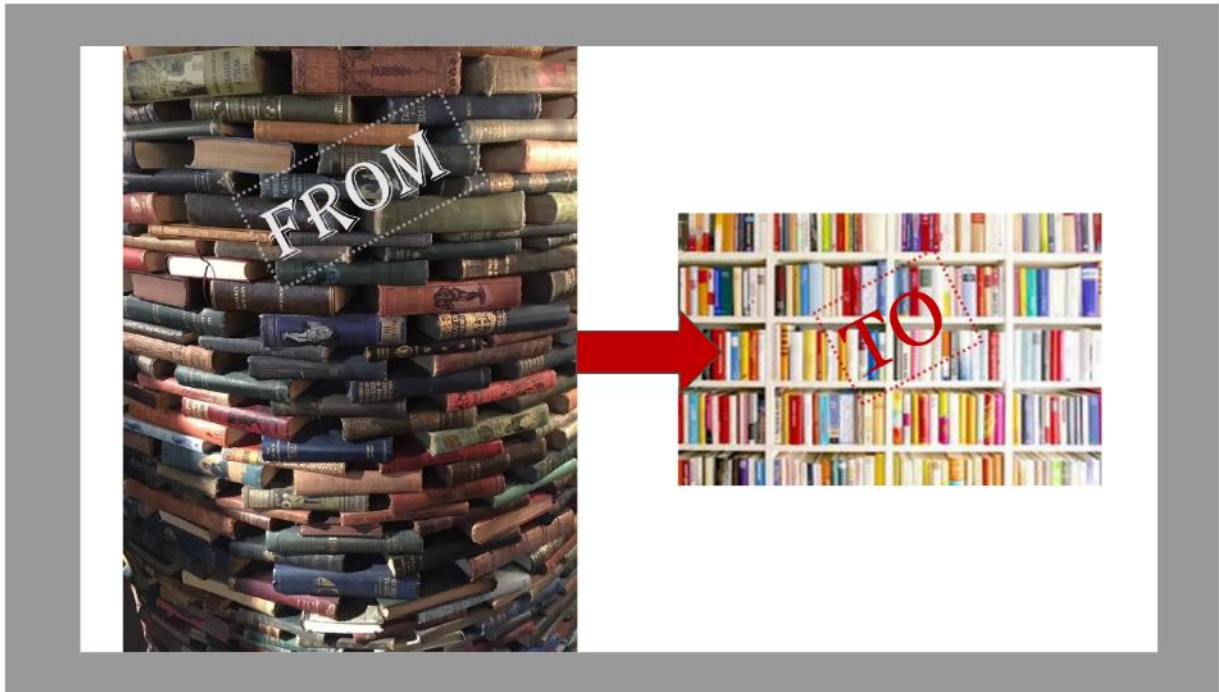
In my own (financial services) workplace, with the exception of the charts, graphs and dashboards beloved of our financial analysts and our executive management teams, and the branding tools policed by our communications and marketing departments, “arty things” (including the reading and/or writing of poetry) do not have well-established roles – but there is a growing encouragement for staff to participate actively in cultural or artful activities under the banner of “engagement”, “diversity in the workplace” and “mental well-being”.

The existence of these spaces, and their active sponsorship by management, is a statement about certain organisational values – what the organisation *is*, or *wishes to be*, or *wishes to be perceived as being*.

Nonetheless once they exist, places where “arty things” can happen have the potential to become sites of “action learning”, places of connection, curiosity, exploration. Over the past 18 months, I have convened and acted as the main facilitator for a workplace book club – a meeting place that has been described as one of its small number of attendees as a “soft disruptor” and which I argue is an “artless /artful” intervention into our work culture. I suggest that the book club is “artless” in the sense of being a “naïve” or guileless intervention, too small scale and overtly “non-ambitious” to be considered credibly politically threatening and also in the sense of not using specific “artistic” materials.

I claim that the activity is nonetheless “artful” in the participatory style of engagement, in the inclusion of “alternative” voices and perspectives, and in the “performances” that have emerged. The club could also be said to be “artful” in that it does have an “artful” and “designed” presence in the periodic book reviews sent out as newsletters to the wider business. At the same time, it is important that we resist a reductionist reasoning that treats “hard-nosed business activities” against “soft and fluffy artiness” as a binary opposition, irrespective of which side is deemed the “positive” orientation and which the “negative”.

There are numerous debates underway, rightly problematising aspects of “doing art” or “using art” in service of a particular agenda, and consciously or unconsciously reflecting or pushing up against established power structures, including, of course, emotionally charged allegations of cultural appropriations, which I would suggest are often well-founded.



*Appx Fig. 10: Negotiating the “look” of the Book Club newsletter header with the comms team.*

A good example of a small-scale artful experiment is given in *Chicks with Sticks* (Brigitte Biehl & Noelia-Sarah Reynolds, 2018). The experiment involved “guerrilla knitting” whereby small scraps of brightly knitted material were tied or wrapped onto objects in the public spaces of an English Business School. The analysis is particularly interesting in the various discomforts it unearths. Where hygiene concerns, even in the pre-COIV-19 landscape, are a potentially “legitimate”, rationalised challenge, other objections equated the yarn markers to plague warnings on doorways in medieval England, to bullying, and to mafia-style threats.

Meanwhile the researchers themselves report heightened emotion when knitted artefacts are taken down. A more sinister, or troubling, idea is that the kind of corporate sponsorship and support described above could be taken as examples of the “false generosity” critiqued by the Brazilian educator and philosopher Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970/2000) as strategies employed by “the oppressor” (those in power, those in control of the resources) to keep “the oppressed” quiescent in their own oppression.

To say that I find this to be a discomfoting interpretation of capitalist philanthropic interventions is putting it mildly, as someone committed to seeking positive change on humanity's treatment of the environment, and also someone with more than 15 years' service in a global bank. In terms of making disclosure/s, I am "out at work" as a climate crisis believer, to the extent that when I say things like, "I think we should consider the sustainability impacts" in my local leadership team, the typical response is, "*Well of course you do*", which is then sometimes followed by talking about the impacts and sometimes by changing the topic.

### **Reflections from a workplace co-inquiry: Boundary crossings**

March 2020

*All – I am conscious that we are in very unusual times, with lots of changes to our usual business arrangements, intense market activity, and quite a bit of uncertainty.*

*I'm conscious too that most of us are busy and pre-occupied with making these new arrangements work, at work and for our home lives. On that, I wanted to mention that in the coming weeks, the Book Club will be offering a couple of reading ideas, hoping that these will be useful for when (if?) you do encounter some "down time" ...*

Writing in the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (Norman Denzin & Yvonna Lincoln, 2018), Susan Finley asserts that "Critical arts-based research practices, perhaps unlike some other approaches to arts-based research, positively embrace the responsibility of the researcher to overtly engage in political activism and even to use their arts and research to inspire activism among their audiences" (Finley, 2018, p. 566) and she insists on the importance of adhering without apology to critical arts-based inquiry as value-committed, message-laden work.



Finley attempts to retrieve the term “propaganda” as something that can be positive, in the sense of using politically committed art to seek to effect positive social change (p.567).

She strongly rebuts an analysis by Tom Barone and Elliot Eisner (2012, p.128) in which they suggested, I think approvingly, that her own research into youth homelessness was “politically ambiguous”. Susan Finley asserts instead that “(Susan) Finley and (Macklin) Finley’s street research project (re-presented in (Johnny) Saldana et al., 2005, and analysed by Barone & Eisner, 2012) did not intend political ambiguity” (p.570). At the same time, I believe Finley identifies a crucial dynamic underlying the debate. After all, research that is committed to effecting positive social change must be challenging *something*. Finley writes that, “For researchers to concede that the doing of critical arts-based research is closely aligned with creating propaganda *sets researchers on edge, aware that they stand outside the safety of accepted methodological practices.*” (2018, p.569, emphasis added.)

These are evocative phrases – “[setting] researchers on edge” ... “outside the safety” – which reference both the psychological and physical insecurity that can attach to operating in the margins, far from the closely controlled, but /and well-patrolled and well-protected centre.

Arts-based researchers point to the multi-disciplinary nature of their activities as a strength – but it is also the case that navigating the “border terrain” between disciplines, or priorities, or sets of assumptions about what matters most, is often not straight-forward and involves risk. I don’t think there are simple answers – in our globalised, inter-connected economies, there aren’t really many viable options for disconnecting, as the currently-still-current global COVID-19 pandemic has sharply reminded those of us living through it.

This crisis has pushed many organisations into transgressing previously established boundaries, as whole sectors cease operations, as other industries move their entire workforce into “working from home”.

People who do step away successfully probably have access to an inequitable level of resources enabling them to do so – in the present conditions of lockdown, resource has been loosely symbolised by the range of self-isolation locations available, whether that’s access to a second home, a detached house with a large garden, or a billionaire-style private Caribbean island. In more “business-as-usual” conditions, even for people with illustrious careers, “leaving the organisational playground” probably means a loss of influence, possibly a loss of influence that wasn’t fully appreciated for what it was. Artful inquiry, I believe, encourages us to keep exploring, carry on making the gestures that open up questions, create new conversations, stimulate our imaginations to begin to envision different futures.

Arts-based researchers are committed to developing skilfulness in the navigating of the borderlands, the successful negotiation of these “boundary crossings”.

In terms of boundary crossings, I hold the Business Book Club intentionally as a location for “soft disruption” – a meeting place where we can talk about building effective habits to support our individual productivity *and* we can also “edge into” conversations that encourage attendees to begin considering ways in which our well-resourced, well-networked lives might reflect systemic imbalances rather than arising purely as a result of hard work, talent, application, inspiration... the set of personal characteristics we are culturally more likely to reference. Insights generated through artful inquiry may “slip into new costumes” to take their place on the corporate stage; important messages may find their way into organisational conversations in unthreatening small-scale artful explorations far from the centres of mainstream activity, even when the dialogues hosted there are intentionally framed around commitments to positive social change that contain inherent discomforts and tensions.

Skill, support and a certain amount of luck may be needed to negotiate these “border lands”.

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2020 [Informal “mindful moments” and attempting to intervene formally]

**Attempting to achieve influence through informal channels**

In May 2020, my workplace ran its annual “well-being” campaign as a month of online events and downloadable content (an arrangement that reflected the enforced remote working conditions linked to efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK).



*Appx Fig. 11: Pinecones and branches, Seattle (2019).*

For my own local business line, this included a series of eight “mindful moments” published twice weekly and consisting of a short voice recording 2-4 mins long, with a positioning written text and one or two images.

This was a series that I compiled (and recorded) and somewhat unconsciously it transformed into an exercise in collecting and sharing ideas that have emerged as meaningful for me in guiding my own “utopian vision” of an alternate way for humans to live on Earth.

I write about it here from two perspectives. One is that I hold a question about the “alchemical” creative outcome of a particular interaction (conversations with the employee volunteers looking for appropriate content for a specific type of engagement activity with colleagues) in a particular context (my workplace). I didn’t set out with a set of readings, in search of a communication channel for sharing them, but from a blank piece of paper and an invitation (framed as partway between an *opportunity* and a *favour*) to “make something uplifting”.

I note the context of a (slightly desperately voiced) invitation, pondering that this is the second year in a row that I have provided content, so there’s a backdrop of some trust and track record, and recalling that last year’s material was pretty “mainstream” – five short book reviews, written by three members of the book club and mostly on “business friendly” themes. I am also drawn to notice the difference in the quality of my own engagement. In contrast to the start of my studies, I was really willing to share, deeply, from my personal convictions.

I talked to the organiser on a Friday afternoon, still under conditions of lockdown; as we spoke, I ran my eyes over the bookshelves in my study, where my “special” collection of ADOC-y books is kept. At one point I found myself telling L, not really having meant to do so, that my books were more precious to me than diamonds – bearing in mind that she works with High Net Worth clients this is probably *not* something she hears very often and we both chuckled at my flustered reaction as I realised what I had just said.

The other perspective is my interest in the content itself, in the “what emerged” – eight readings that progressively unfold an important narrative thread through my ontology of nature.

**Reading one – Nature is entrancing.**

Cheryl Strayed processes grief on a wilderness hike.

*The text provided for work opened with the following positioning statement:*

Today’s “mindful moment” is from “Wild”, by Cheryl Strayed – an extract in which Strayed writes about the impact of seeing Crater Lake for the first time, towards the end of her long hike along the Pacific Crest Trail. (Strayed, 2013, pp. 262, 271-272.)

*The accompanying recording was 3 mins 30 secs long.*

**Reading two – Nature’s systems are complex.**

Aldo Leopold considers the connectedness of systems in nature.

*The text provided for work opened with the following positioning statement:*

Today’s “mindful moment” is from “A Sand Country Almanac”, by Aldo Leopold, one of America’s early leaders of the ecology movement. In this extract Leopold narrates an experience he had as a young Wilderness Ranger which shaped his understanding of how all things are inter-connected and inter-dependent within natural systems.  
(Leopold, 1970, pp.138-140.)

*The accompanying recording was 2 mins 46 secs long.*

**Reading three – Humans have to (and can) re-learn an orientation towards nature.**

Rebecca Solnit points out that hiking for pleasure is a constructed “thing”.

*The text provided for work opened with the following positioning statement:*

Today’s “mindful moment” is from “Wanderlust”, by Rebecca Solnit, featuring an extract in which Solnit reflects on a “founding” of walking in nature as leisure activity.

(Solnit, 2001, pp. 81-82).

*The accompanying recording was 3 mins 50 secs long.*



*Appx Fig. 12: New training shoes for the “great outdoors” (2020).*



**Reading four – Nature repays close attention with wonder...**

David Abram adds “paying close attention” to “spending time in nature”.

*The text provided for work opened with the following positioning statement:*

Today’s “mindful moment” is from the beginning of “The Spell of the Sensuous” by David Abram. Abram is an influential recent figure in the environmental movement and speaks for the more “spiritual” end of sustainability activism, a perspective also known as “Deep” ecology. Abram’s philosophy is to pay very close attention to the everyday phenomena in nature, including nature creatures we may not immediately warm to!

(Abram, 1997, pp. 17-19.)

*The accompanying recording was 2 mins 40 secs long.*



*Appx Fig. 13: Spider webs and morning dew, Penally (2018).*

**Reading Five - ... And with joy.**

Nan Shepherd finds the joy that comes from close attentiveness.

*The text provided for work opened with the following positioning statement:*

Today's "mindful moment" is from the beginning of "The Living Mountain" by Nan Shepherd. In this extract, Nan Shepherd reflects on the joys hidden in a particular quality of stillness that occasionally descends on the high plateau of the mountain landscape.

(Shepherd, 2011, pp. 96 – 97.)

*The accompanying recording was 3 mins 30 secs long.*



*Appx Fig. 14: Discarded feather, Ashridge gardens (2019).*

**Reading six – Our planet’s history is a Deep Time story.**

Robert Macfarlane has a Deep Time encounter at some personal cost.

*The text provided for work opened with the following positioning statement:*

Today’s “mindful moment” is from Robert Macfarlane’s most recent book, *Underland*, which is a bit of an instant classic in “environmental” writing and certainly written on an epic scale. At the start of this extract, Macfarlane has just undertaken a hazardous and possibly ill-advised trip through some remote mountains in winter in search of a cave where local archaeologists have discovered some ancient cave paintings.

(Macfarlane, 2019, pp. 277-279.)

*The accompanying recording was 3 mins 30 secs long.*



*Appx Fig. 15: Pembrokeshire coastline (2018).*

**Reading/s seven – Connection with nature is tremendously comforting, as we struggle with life’s trials and life’s approaching end.**

Two poets faced with life’s trials find comfort in nature.

*The text provided for work opened with the following positioning statement:*

Today’s “mindful moment” is actually two moments - two pieces of poetry from female authors who died in the last couple of years, one English and one American.

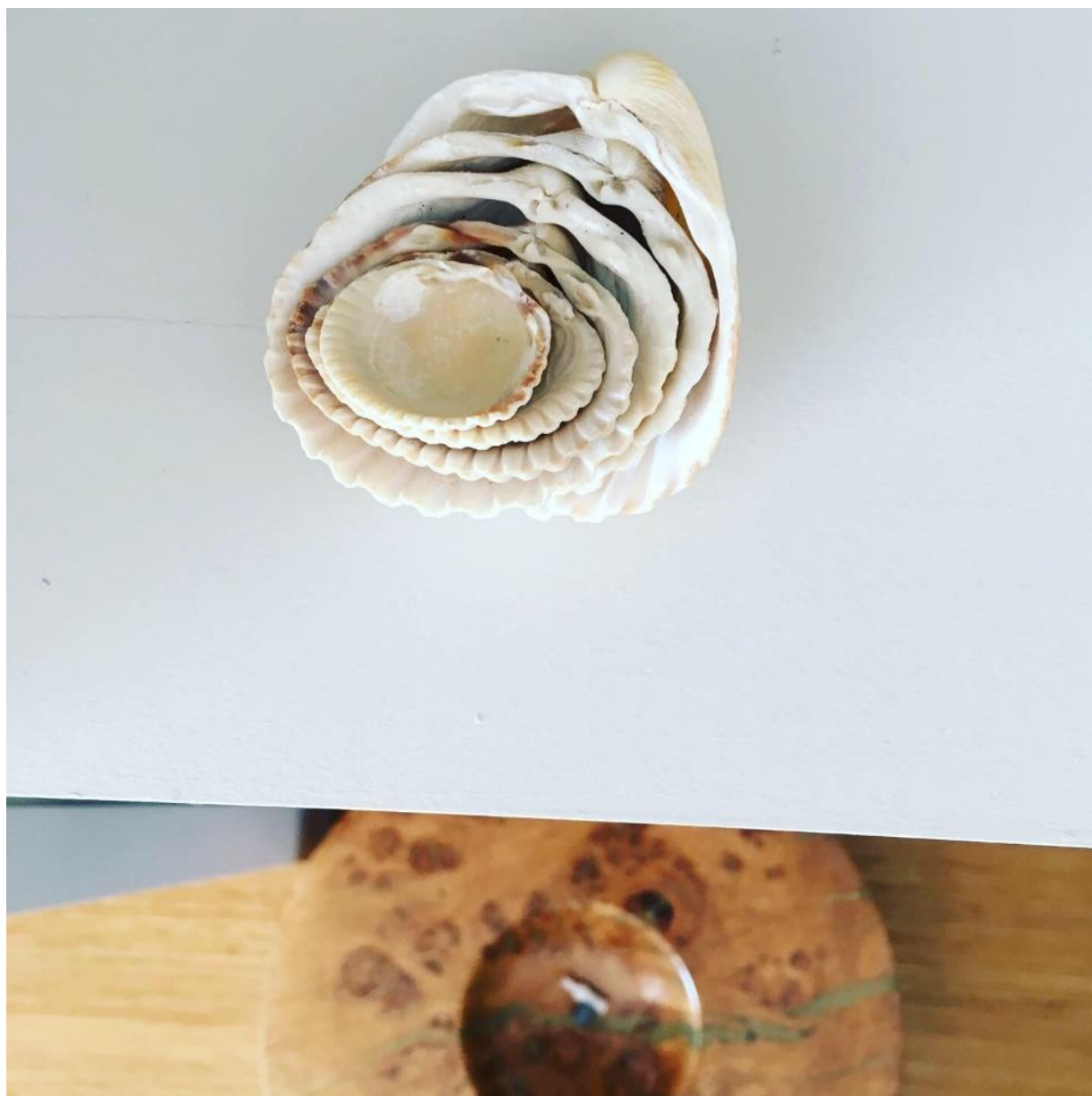
Both poems take a nature encounter as the key moment, one a “cultivated” moment, linking to picking flowers in a garden, and the other very much “out in nature”, watching wild geese flying overhead.

Both make the connection between the natural phenomena that surround us and the meaning we make in our lives, as we live, and as we age.

MARY OLIVER – WILD GEESE (first published 1986)

HELEN DUNMORE – MY LIFE’S STEM WAS CUT (published 2017)

*The accompanying recordings were 1 min 35 secs and 1 min 07 secs respectively.*



*Appx Fig. 16: Shells and dish (2018).*



*Appx Fig. 17: Dried flower arrangement (2018).*



**Reading eight – The consciousness of being alive on this rich and complex planet is a gift.**

Oliver Sacks is grateful for a long life with many rich experiences.

*The text provided for work opened with the following positioning statement:*

Today's "mindful moment" – the final one of the series – was written by doctor and author Oliver Sacks near the end of a long life and reflects things he is grateful for. (Sacks, 2015, pp. 18, 20).

*The accompanying recording was 2 mins 20 secs long.*

*Reflection on the meaning of this piece, to me, in context of this doctoral inquiry:*

With its focus on a human responding to approaching death, this text returns me to where I began, setting out on AMSR6, nearly six years ago, remembering lines from a poem by Christina Rossetti... recalling for the first time in twenty years how I had spoken them at the funeral of my beloved maternal grandmother, the grandmother whose family story I have explored in more detail in my ADOC Timewalk.

But what a difference. I went to AMSR terrified of the idea that I – personally, specifically – might (WILL!) die, unable to cope with the idea that human activity could be killing the planet, or rather, destroying the biosphere that sustains biological life.

Through the course of inquiry, I have learned, in a new, visceral way that I am *animal*, emerged from nature, that it is natural – in my nature – that my life leads to my death.

The thought of the damage we are wreaking on our planet, *our home*, continues to appal me but it has become a familiar horror, not acceptable but not so unbearable as to be impossible to contemplate. And I have come to appreciate deeply the consciousness of our existence, of the beauty that surrounds us as well as the terrible things that also do.



*Appx Fig. 18: Candle, burning – photographer unknown.*

### **Attempting to wield influence through formal channels**

At the end of 2019, I formally-informally added the role of Sustainability Lead to my “official” Head of Governance day job and wrote my first sustainability paper for our local leadership, briefing them on the bank’s ambition to articulate our commitments on the Road to Net Zero Carbon Emissions. The concept of discussing climate mitigation efforts as an attempt to shift global emission of CO<sub>2</sub> to “net zero” conveys a sense of the challenge of the climate emergency in relatively business-friendly terms and is a concept championed by Myles Allen, as part of his work for the IPCC (per his Life Scientific episode, Allen & (Jim) Al-Khalili, 2020).

In January 2020, I was asked to be our local business representative on the larger UK entity’s Climate Risk Forum and wrote and defended a formal update into our own local Emerging Risks Forum. This report drew on publications by the Prudential Regulation Authority (2015, 2019a, 2019b) on the risks associated with climate change for the sector.

In February 2020, I acted as the business Sustainability Lead in contributing to a piece of – so far theoretical – strategy work, starting to consider the obligations and requirements of the UK’s Net Zero Carbon Emissions commitments (linked to the climate emergency declaration mentioned above). All big UK banks will *have to* play a role if the UK is to meet these targets.

Until the disruptions of the 2020 global pandemic, these conversations were now happening *everywhere* in the financial services sector and although the pace has slowed as focus turned to immediate contingencies, the UK’s financial services regulators have been clear that their overall focus on climate risk will not be changing.

I guess relevant questions would be: Are these discussions sincere? How seriously are players in the sector taking the issues? How much of their balance sheet would they be willing to commit? Is this a “real conversation” or only lip service driven by regulatory expectations?

And do the banks actually understand the exam question? Do we know our present baseline?

Do we know what will help?

(I am reminded of the last line of my repurposed-from-Bill-McKibben found poem, “*What will help is...*”, the “down” beat of that line tailing into silence.)

### **The road towards Net Zero Carbon 2020 - 2030**

The approach shaping our commitments:

Achieving net zero carbon emission requires that we commit to a plan that combines carbon reduction plus carbon removal. Carbon reduction strategies are actions we take to shrink the amount of Greenhouse Gases emitted in the first place while carbon removal strategies are actions that we take to pull Greenhouse Gases back out of the atmosphere post emission.

Carbon reduction strategies are preferable where possible, but carbon removal is better than not acting at all and may be essential to meet emissions commitments whilst also meaning that society can continue burning carbon in processes where fossil fuels cannot yet be credibly replaced, such as in the production of concrete and most plastics.

#### SETTING OUT OUR GOAL

We will structure our strategy into five sections with each section broken down into i) a 2030 target (which at the time of writing consists of a piece of text commentary plus a placeholder space for a numerical target which will need to be iterated as the detail is firmed up ii) a 2020 objective i.e., something that we can “start now” and iii) key “levers” to focus on for impact.

Proposed principles:

1. We will commit publicly to a clear target that is measured in scientifically credible terms e.g., including all greenhouse gases in the calculations and taking into consideration all relevant sources of emissions, so including emissions linked to suppliers and customers, as well as the bank's own direct carbon footprint.
2. We will "take the mental load" off our people to the extent possible by embedding our sustainability commitments within our BAU system and processes. In other words, we will work through embedding sustainability commitments within our mainstream processes rather than working to hit BAU targets on the one hand and struggling to meet carbon emissions targets through supplementary activities layered over and above the day job (which has the potential to be both exhausting and also constrained in possible impact.

Practically speaking, this means working to reassess and re-engineer our credit risk assessment and pricing models, our investment profiles and allocation models, our "cost to serve" analysis, and so on.

3. We will embed recognition for right behaviours and "above and beyond" commitments, ensuring that our reward structures are calibrated to acknowledge actions that deliver "climate progress" and effective "climate risk mitigation" within the overall balance of valued outcomes and behaviours.
4. We will ensure that in each business year our people can clearly see, understand and be able to speak about our key commitments to mitigating potential climate breakdown in relation to i) our customers ii) our suppliers iii) our own internal activities and iv) our workplace culture, practices and offering.



*Appx Fig. 19: Thumbnail print-out of a proposal for supporting Net Zero targets (Jan 2020).*

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## Appendix Five: Love and loss

### Remembering and grateful for Mandy Thatcher (1970-2020)



*Appx Fig. 20: Mandy Thatcher, Spanish Point, photo credit Brendan Conway (2016).*

13/06/2020

*Yesterday, I cried, again, talking about you. I shouldn't have been surprised, really, but I still feel a little guilty. Do I have the "right" to be incapacitated by tears when I try to talk about who you... were... what you meant to me? We were friends, co-inquirers, lovers-of-the-Earth. Not family, not "significant others". Not even in each other's lives particularly often – I saw you, in those last years, maybe a couple of times a year. I'm not trying to co-opt your early death into being somehow about me. And yet, the tears come. I loved you – I... love you.*

*I'm looking, now, at that photo of you at the start of my paper (fig. 01), placed under the open-bracket-birth-year-death-year-close-bracket title, and my throat is tight, eyes welling. I am so glad to have a copy of this happy photo of a time we were together, still a "Learning Group". Taken by Brendan, a little over four years ago, when four of our six-strong Learning Group were on a recce to the hotel at Spanish Point that was selected, after some focused advocacy by Brendan and Ralph, as the location for the final AMSR6 workshop, later in 2016.*

*The three Learning Group women are in the original photograph, but I've chopped me and Gen out of the frame, more or less, so that the shot centres on you, with the sea and the sunset sky behind you. There are several photos from that trip, from that evening, I could have chosen. You and Gen building a small cairn from the stones on the beach, showing it off, arms flung wide, laughing at the earnestness and silliness of the gesture, joyful in our combined company. But I wanted this one – looking straight at the camera, a beautiful, kind smile lighting you up, hand reaching up to touch Gen's wrist, gently acknowledging her arm around your shoulder.*

*This is what I said about you to your best friend, for the celebration of your life, scheduled for mid-March 2020, which was cancelled, or maybe better to say, postponed, when it became clear that the UK was teetering towards locking down, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic:*

*Mandy was bright and kind and droll and unpretentious and unflinching. She had the most beautiful precise clear writing voice. She wrestled with the suppression and erasure of women's voices and experiences before I'd even started noticing that that was a "thing" ... (personal communication to VSS, March 2020).*

*And you turned up, several times – when it mattered – during ADOC. We sat and practised for my Transfer Viva, at Searcys, in St Pancras, and you sat with me when I was recovering from my One Big Argument during supervision and helped me figure out moving back from Limehouse to Clerkenwell. The day I lost the canvas with the "looking out to sea" doodle on it (fig. 02); the doodle that stood for artful knowing experiments, and for family connections with the coast path, and for coaching conversations with Clare, and confronting my fear of heights.*

*There has been so much fear lurking in this inquiry. Fear of secrets in my family's past that turned out not to be awful after all, at least, not to me. Fear of not being safe. Fear of intimacy, of needing anything from anyone, of loving. Fear of losing the planet we live on, or rather, the biosphere we depend on for life. Fear of dying. And yet... My AMSR inquiry began with memories of a poem spoken at the funeral of my beloved Welsh grandmother (fig. 04), gradually expanding to consider the possible loss of all life. And my ADOC inquiry is winding down in a global pandemic, BLM demonstrations, and the death of a dear friend. Your death*



Johnny, the kitchen sink has been clogged for days,  
some utensil probably fell down there...

For weeks now, driving, or dropping a bag of groceries  
in the street, the bag breaking, I've been thinking:

**This is what the living do...**

We want the spring to come and winter to pass. We  
want whoever to call or not call —we want more and  
more and then more of it...

But there are moments, walking, when I catch a  
glimpse of myself in the window glass, say, the  
window of the corner video store, and I'm gripped by a  
cherishing so deep for my own blowing hair, chapped  
face, and unbuttoned coat that I'm speechless:

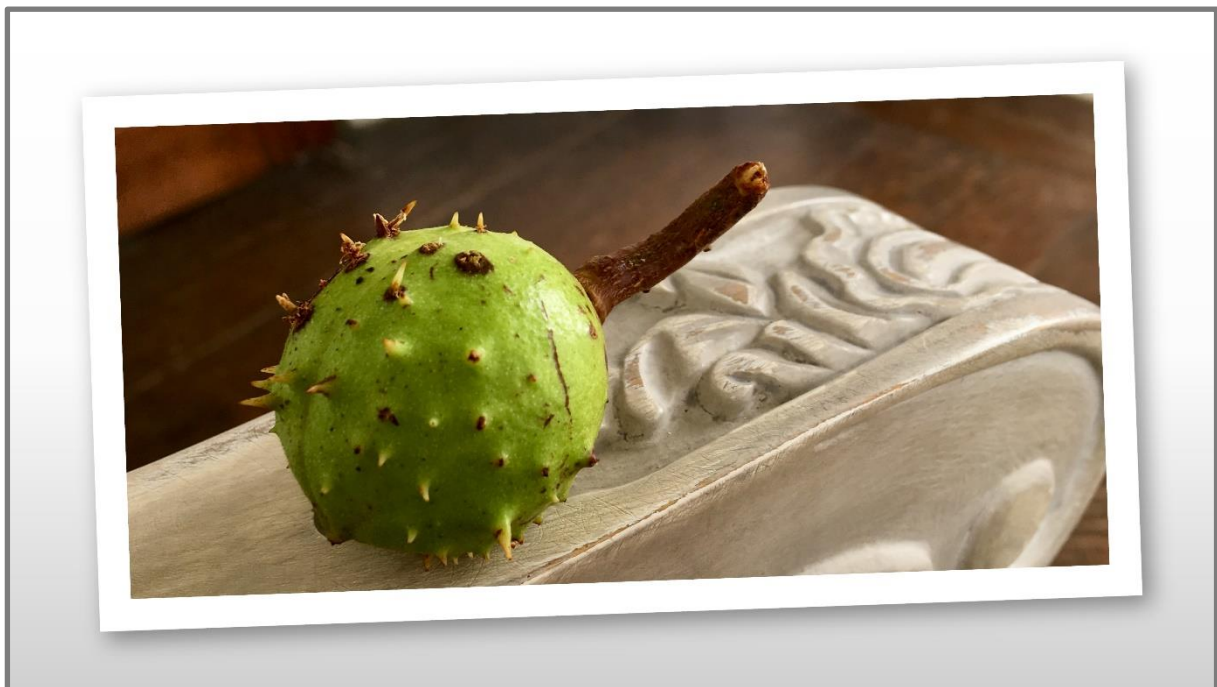
**I am living. I remember you.**

From: Howe, M. (1998). What the living do [Poem].





*Appx Fig.21: Viva day – photo collage art boards, reflection and wooden door (2020).*



*Appx Fig.22: Fallen conker shell rests on the carved, painted arm of a wooden chair (2018).*