

*Drawing on Nature:*  
*the Legacy of Ruskin's Moral Cosmos*

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This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of PhD in Fine Art at Lancaster University. The complementary component of the submission is presented in the form of visual documentation of drawings through photos contained in Appendices 1–3.

## **Declaration**

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Doris Rohr

October 2016

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In collaboration with Eilis Murphy (2016) for Rohr (2015–16) '*Jetsam*', design of protective case (not reproduced) and artisan book binding. Further information: *Folded Leaf*, <http://foldedleaf.ie/collection/artists-book/>. © Book binding and protective box cover design copyright Eilis Murphy.

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## **Abstract**

### *Drawing on nature – the legacy of Ruskin’s moral cosmos*

This interdisciplinary project investigates drawing as a form of looking, and the possibility of transcending looking, into perception. Words and photos constitute a text that weaves together distinctive strands; those of drawing, those of writing in italics (subjective, personal reflections: the journal) and those of academic writing with reference to scientists, artists and philosophers of relevance. The format is deliberately interdisciplinary, defying traditional academic conventions and proposing creative and hybrid interrelations of the visual with the verbal. The purpose of the text is to re-establish drawing as a means of perceiving and understanding, to gain insight. John Ruskin advocated drawing as a means of looking and self-education, encouraging all to learn to draw in order to love nature.

In the text submitted here, the visual and the verbal are interpreting each other. The drawings form a visual journal alongside the written journal, exploring continuous narrative on paper and in notebooks. Research methods included walking, observing and collecting. The drawings aim to reveal a spiritual dimension of nature through descriptions of journeys and encounters, actual and imagined, with inanimate and animate beings, thereby visually presenting a stream of consciousness.

Ruskin’s spiritual and moral view of art and nature provides much contemporary relevance in an age where the shortcomings of the ideologies associated with modernism have become recognised and critiqued. Philosophical and ecological considerations for the wellbeing of the life-world, the cosmos, have created a basis for a reappraisal of Ruskin’s legacy. Drawing and writing become tools to see the world and to build responsible relations with it. In order to be a good artist, a good drawer or writer, art needs to strive for moral integrity.

# Introduction

## *Project proposal, aims and methods*

The project arose from a desire to evaluate the legacy of nineteenth-century art critic, theoretician and artist John Ruskin. It aims to elucidate and produce evidence of Ruskin's continued relevance to contemporary ecological and philosophical understanding of nature through text and image. Ruskin provides an inclusive model of how drawing can act as a foundational method, establishing it alongside and of equal importance to verbal discourse. This is of relevance to visual practice-based research, as it differs from the traditional doctoral research in the humanities in that it allows visual, multi-sensory, time-based and spatial practices to inform the investigation into written sources, archive material and other primary material.<sup>1</sup>

Hence, the prime purpose of this project is to test Ruskin's *method of perceptive looking* through my own practice of drawing, scrutinised further through philosophical and critical enquiry.

Ruskin implies that drawing aids looking, and that looking is always more than observing accurately and truthfully, as it is about deepening the dialogue with the cosmos, with nature, a term as contestable and complex then as it is now. This 'nature' is an integral part of human existence. In order to scrutinise Ruskin's concept of nature further, selected writings on nature by contemporary French philosophers Michel Serres and Bruno Latour were consulted and evaluated alongside and in distinction to twentieth-century philosopher Martin Heidegger's thoughts on nature

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<sup>1</sup> Rust, Chris et al (2007) *Review of Practice-led Research in Art, Design & Architecture*, AHRC, reports back on changes in methodology since the introduction of practice-led PhDs. A different take on this is by Elkins (2008).

and art.<sup>2</sup> Such philosophical underpinnings form the bedrock of less analytical and more lateral creative investigations here, but they do not constitute the core of the research. Philosophy is a resort taken to offer another perspective to connect diverse writers and artists, ranging from twentieth-century travel writing and nineteenth-century novels and short stories to science writing and journalism. These writers and artists share a desire to reintegrate nature into a larger belief system – demonstrating a metaphorical approach to ecology. Terms like ‘nature’ and ‘ecology’ are large, contested and impossible to confine. At times, the term cosmos has been used to denote a holistic understanding of a world of interrelationships of animate and inanimate; at other times, nature has been put in inverted commas to denote that it is a construct rather than reality, then it is capitalised to refer to it as an awesome deity of sorts with reference to Ruskin, then it resurfaces as nature *other* than us. Simon Schama reintroduced the word landscape in *Landscape and Memory* (1996). Likewise here, arising from the futility of finding a better word, *nature* as a term has become reinstated; blemished and corrupted as it may be, it is good enough, as it is hard to find a better word. This examination of a basis for definitions is necessary, because the investigation of Ruskin’s legacy through drawing is about nature. But not only is there a need to define the possibilities of the term nature in philosophical, spiritual and aesthetic ways, and with it the chosen methods of critical enquiry, but also the term drawing requires further reflection. What type of drawing is appropriate to investigate Ruskin’s legacy?

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<sup>2</sup> Heidegger is contested for historical and ideological reasons, in particular due to being considered complicit in German National Socialism during the period of its rise and establishment in the 1930s. Although Heidegger distanced himself from such ideological compliance, an essentialised view of poetic sublimation of the experience of nature contains aspects that make me uncomfortable, evoking the aspects of soil and folk ideology Nazism was so fond of propagating. More in Chapter 7.



Ruskin's drawing appears to be primarily about observation, as he encourages us to look closely and to observe as accurately as possible. For examples of architecture, art and painting in particular, Ruskin considers additional visual methods, including the reproduction, the interpretive diagram or schema and photography (the daguerrotype), permissible to educate the reader. Diagrams and schema are interpretive methods of analysis of nature's laws (waves, clouds, plant diagrams demonstrating laws of organisation, of growth, of movement), attempting to prove a point that all nature had underlying divine origin, was organised even if it superficially did not seem so. But this never substitutes Ruskin's plea to go and see for oneself. Nature, Ruskin knew, was on the doorstep, for those who had eyes to see. One only needed to lower one's eyes humbly to discover benign wild order in the mosses and patches of wildflowers, and needed only to look skywards, heavenwards, to observe the clouds, messengers of the divine principle.

This lyrical empiricism, a practice of looking to deduct subsequently underlying organisational laws, is a 'romantic science'<sup>3</sup>, one might say. As scientific textbooks would encourage the learner of botany, of marine biology, or of geology or climate to go and study established laws through field testing, so Ruskin advocates field testing of a different type. When evaluating his findings, Ruskin holistically combines empiricism with mythology and subjective appreciation.

Ruskin's method of looking, drawing – drawing as 'closer looking' – helps us to understand and appreciate nature. Ruskin's interdisciplinarity implies that knowledge systems range across sciences and humanities, with important ecological and moral implications. Ruskin created a moral aesthetic, but disliking the reductive aspect of

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<sup>3</sup> The term is credited to Russian psychologist A.R. Luria. See Gnyp (2010) in interview with artist Eoin McHugh discussing 'failed' science in relation to McHugh's own visual project.

aesthetics (if read as sense experience), he rejected the terminology and coined his own (*theoria*). This science–art–philosophy nexus is as topical now as then.<sup>4</sup> Themes of wildlife, nature, conservation abound in current media and television channel coverage, and their popularity is also attested to by wildlife charities’ large followings. Many contemporary arts practices engage with themes examining nature, frequently with an environmental or ecological emphasis.<sup>5</sup> Ecological and aesthetic concerns (eco-aesthetic) have invited a renewed interest in Ruskin’s writing and proposals for visual practice. Ruskin’s proto-ecological concerns (*Storm-Cloud*, 1884) are well documented by Birch (1981), Brimblecombe (2012), Fuller (1988), Spuybroek (2011) and Wheeler (1996).

But to return to the key method of this research project – drawing as a form of penetrative looking, providing insight, needs further foregrounding: Ruskin’s extensive written and visual work promoted a special kind of looking, to enable self-awareness and to become more discerning in appreciating the arts and culture. Learning to look, and through that to develop an understanding of one’s environment (natural and cultural), encompassed a prophetic understanding of nature as ecological system exposing human nature and morality by integrating spiritual with scientific values. Ruskin promoted drawing as a method and agency, a tool that could sharpen penetrative examination of the environment and pay homage to the beauty of creation, a creation perceived as under threat from metaphorical and actual forms of pollution. Ruskin’s teaching of drawing establishes intellectual insight and acts as practical research method. This makes his work immensely relevant for our own times.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, a recent discussion by Chris Packham, Jeremy Deller and George Monbiot (2015) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b05yt1c4>

<sup>5</sup> Rashed Araeen, Mark Dion, Jeremy Deller, Hesse-Honegger, Eoin McHugh and Birgit Knoechl are some I have looked at in the more peripheral context of this project.

Considering that Ruskin's output in writing was prolific, whereas his drawing practice often seemed confined to spare-time activity or illustrative purposes for his publications, this seems a tall claim. But Ruskin's passion for combining the work of the eye with that of the hand is the subject of many of his writings and projects. Ruskin's commitment towards drawing education was overwhelming, attested by the publication of *The Elements of Drawing* (first published 1857), the personal teaching of labourers during night school, and by the project of establishing an alternative education system through the Guild of St George (Atwood, 2008). Drawing was instrumental in the plan for social reform in accordance with spiritual ideals about appreciating the natural world and searching out its originary order.

Social reform, educational reform, environmental awareness, caretaking of resources, working and creating with integrity, honesty and humility – these ideals remain of great relevance for our times. But the question arises: in how far can looking back to a traditional – one might say conservative – way of examining and translating the world, using the hand and not (or rarely) the machine, be of use for a contemporary set of problems foregrounded and lamented by Ruskin: the vacuum left by spiritual uncertainty and ambiguity, a crisis of defining morality, a lack of solidarity, co-operation and sympathy of humanity towards its own kind, and a wasteful and irresponsible attitude towards the world's natural resources and the wider life-world. So in some ways this project is a proposal, to see what might be the value of drawing with the eye and the hand, without machines, or at least minimising the role of the machine, to slow down the process of perception. But, as this research project also acknowledges, the possibility of digital and intelligent use of machinery may not be in contra-distinction to Ruskin's overriding concerns with re-establishing the dignity of labour. At this point of introduction, one cannot present foregone conclusions but

needs to lay out the field of enquiry, to examine the tensions arising from lifting a method from a previous century to insert into a contemporary framework, and to present the possibility of such a grafting exercise to establish new discourses, insights and values.

The overall structure of this submission is organised in chapters beginning with a personal introduction to Ruskin in relation to my own research interests. Chapters are interspersed with alternative systems of annotations: the italic script provides access to the raw data of processing sense impressions, mood and reflections *in situ* as a primary verbal activity. Notebook drawings provide insight into such emplaced direct primary observation and reflection as visual annotation. The academic writing (standard non-italicised script) follows accepted formats of presenting research and contexts in search of logically coherence. Images intersect the body of typed formatted words. Most of my own drawings are taken from visual narration in the format of scroll drawings, several metre-long rolls of inexpensive lining paper chosen for its easy corruptibility (low-grade conservation paper) and low material value, to further accentuate the way time enacts, superimposes upon and alters meaning, and to prevent a possible co-option of the outcomes into marketable objects. If this study is about conservative values, it is also about its other: deterioration and deconstruction. All conservation is an attempt to slow down – but never reverse – the transformation of matter. Most of my narrative drawings on Western paper (lining paper, interleaving papers) and Eastern paper (Chinese mass-produced paper) have already discoloured and changed from their more pristine beginnings. When inserted into the text, the images perform an illustrative function, but then the written word is meant to accompany the drawings (for example, in the public exhibition of the drawings, text has taken such a supporting role); the hierarchy of word over image is reversed. The

relationship of the visual to the verbal depends on its context of publication: the text is an installation of words with images in the thesis, and images become installed as drawings in the exhibition and artist's book, where the verbal aspect of theoretical subtexts becomes subordinate to the visual thought and expression. To make the mutual role of text to image, or visual to verbal, more explicit through the documentation of the research, this submission contains images as illustrations inserted into the text, further image reproduction of visual work in Appendix 1 and 2, and a third appendix containing images of public exhibitions.

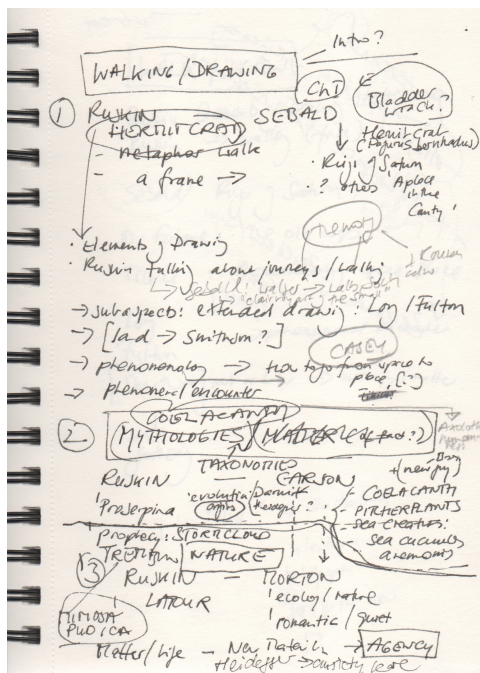


Figure 1 Doris Rohr (2015) Notes on structuring themes and associations, fountain pen on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.

Ruskin's literary legacy was enormous; a huge output in writing, as evident in the published outcome *The Library Edition of The Works of John Ruskin* (edited by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 1903–12). These 39 volumes are not the whole, as additional correspondence has since been made available, and other writings remain

archive material.<sup>6</sup> Ruskin lectured widely, in a period when film or video recordings were not available. Ruskin's drawings complement his extensive writings; for me, the drawings remain the least diluted aspect of Ruskin's thoughts. Not that visual language is free of ideological content, but a drawing can change its mind less than a text going through numerous editions and republications. Of course, a drawing can be overdrawn and edited, but this appears not to be the case with Ruskin's drawings. Ruskin's numerous re-drawings of Turner's work (for illustration purposes) and his own diagrams form a separate category. The relationship between text and image therefore forms an important aspect, as it is key to my process of research.

Ruskin introduced *Modern Painters V* with the ambitious, somewhat messianic plea to influence the "movements of the world [...] by botanical law" (*Modern Painters V*, in *Works VI*, p. 19). Looking back over the journey of relating my own practice as drawer and writer to that of Ruskin, the importance of 'botanical law' is not to be underestimated. What botanical implied then, and what it may present now, is one of the subjects to be examined further on along the journey of this project (Chapters 4 and 6).

### ***What is moral drawing?***

Drawer, artist and teacher Maryclare Foá endorses the moral quality implicit in drawing, providing contemporary validity to the project of tracing and interpreting the relevance of Ruskin's method of drawing as a tool for understanding and appreciating environment:

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<sup>6</sup> In the bibliography of his book *John Ruskin* (2015), Andrew Ballantyne lists additional publications of correspondence (pp. 241–2). Ballantyne's introduction (pp. 7–10) summarises Ruskin's enduring appeal.

The more I look, draw, write, perceive, the more I am aware that all action has consequences, as have non-actions. [...] I propose that to miss the significance of connectivity in any form of creative practice is to blindly stumble through life precisely without due care and attention (2012, p. 72).

Key here is the word connectivity, and that all actions have consequence. Foá is indebted to French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's philosophical investigations into perception.<sup>7</sup> She concludes:

If it is the case that all things are interconnected, then an action (in this case a drawing) affects consequences, and we are responsible for the effects of our actions. (2012, p. 74)

Penetrating how all things connect can lead to paralysis. Pain, helplessness.

Recognising clouds, or water, as beautiful structures, patterns, beings, and also

understanding that this is nature's drawing (one is reminded here of early

photographers talking about the negative as nature's or sun's pencil).<sup>8</sup> Nature speaks.<sup>9</sup>

The acidity of the water, the level of water, its mutability, what it contains. The shape of clouds, the direction of the wind, the air pressure. How wind, water and weather affect climate. Flooding and draining, desert and deforestation. Melting ice caps.

Rising sea levels. Loss of species and diversity. Clouds as messengers. This is what Ruskin has taught us to see.

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<sup>7</sup> Maryclare Foá refers specifically to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind" in *The Primacy of Perception*. I am grateful for the reminder of the importance of Merleau-Ponty in the shaping of my thoughts on perception.

<sup>8</sup> Introductory remarks of William Henry Fox Talbot in *The Pencil of Nature* (1969).

<sup>9</sup> French philosopher Bruno Latour questions the privileged position of humans in parliamentary and democratic systems of representation. Non-humans and humans interact, bear relation to each other and non-humans also speak or murmur or utter, and have impact. Participation by non-humans is an act of *translation*, a kind of *ventriloquism*: "thanks to which things become in the laboratory, by means of instruments, relevant to what we say about them" (2004, p. 67). Latour challenges democracy to address and represent all creation when asking: "How can we go about getting those on whose name we speak to speak for themselves?" (ibid, p. 70).<sup>10</sup> As James Elkins (2008) suggests in his critical writing, the relationship between writing and images is complex, and not one of clear subordination of one to the other. Elkins establishes a category of *writing with images* where one complements the other, and is non-substitutional. This he demonstrates in a number of essays concerning texts with photos (amongst them W. G. Sebald's writings).

I began to recognise his method of looking or perceiving (through drawing, through writing) when I subsequently read others *in sympathy with nature*. Ecologist and scientist Rachel Carson describes the birds falling from the sky and fish drifting belly up on acidified lakes, a testimonial to the impact of pollution. W. G. Sebald, in *The Rings of Saturn* (2002), laments the fate of depleted shoals of herrings and presents this as preamble to human genocide. Ruskin regards industrial pollution in tandem with spiritual pollution to be the cause of storms. Typhoons sympathetically raging about innocent death: biblical wrath. God's disappointment as exhalation, outrage. Drawing, like writing, like any action or inaction, has moral consequence. Drawing in itself can be moral or immoral.

Ruskin's method draws attention to visible and invisible aspects of organisation of nature. He connects this concept of making visible with observational and analytical drawing skills, schooling perception as vision. This has repercussions for British artist Michael Landy's approach to drawing, for example the drawing of weeds (Mabey, 2011) as contemporary conceptual arts practice. Likewise close observation of natural form is evident in *Watery Ecstatic* by Ellen Gallagher (Adewunmi, 2013; Kay, 2007), informed by the artist's desire to penetrate myth through a visual deconstruction of racial identity.

Michael Landy talks about observational drawing as a 'one to one' experience (in Farthing, Chorpening and Wiggins, 2012, p. 52). "The reason that I like drawing is because I like being by myself basically and I like being quiet" (ibid, p. 53). And further he adds: "So most things start with drawing, which is a meditative process for me and then it also allows me time to think through the idea as well as I go along" (ibid, p. 57).



Both Landy and Gallagher demonstrate moral drawing in the contemporary. With Landy, the concept of weeds depicted in old-masterly detail questions social and biological hierarchies. With Gallagher, deep sea creatures, real and fantastic, biological, scientific, products of myth and cultural history, interpenetrate to deliver a contemporary post-colonial interpretation of nature. Moral drawing of nature, I propose here, is observational drawing with a twist: the underpinning of vision, the use of fictive or mythical subtexts, and the use of imagination all furnish a richer, more profound, critical interpretation of the world and its established hierarchies and systems.

In *Proserpina: Studies of Wayside Flowers* (1882) Ruskin attempts a holistic system of classification connecting science (empirical observation) with a taxonomy drawing on mythology and folklore. This is of direct relevance to Gallagher's work. But beyond the world of art, *Proserpina* is hybrid anthropology and science: ethnobotany. Ethnobotany is defined as a study of links and relationships between people, cultures and plants (Woodworth, 2013). Ruskin attributes mythological meaning and moral responsibility to observed phenomena which he records through drawing: the belief that nature is all-encompassing, human and non-human, is of also of relevance to Latour's *Politics of Nature* (2004).

Moral drawing then becomes a value judgment of what amounts to a good drawing, where the emphasis is on 'good' as ethical, rather than stylistically or technically 'good'. Some of Ruskin's diagrams and illustrations contain reproductions of images by artists to explain his theories about what makes good art. Many of these diagrams concern images of flowers, trees, branches, leaves, and the arrangement of parts to each other; there are also a large number of images concerning 'inanimate' matter of waves, rock formations, clouds, often based on Ruskin's own drawings on site.

Typically, Ruskin's own drawings make specific visual points about underlying rules, systems of orders and analogies of systems. Figure 2, *Debris Curvature*, is a perfect example of the dual objectives of many of Ruskin's diagrams, at once observing natural phenomena and offering an interpretive, if poetic, analysis of function within a larger system of laws. Debris mutates into something beautiful, winged, airborne. This is paralleled by a kind of metaphorical negative space, or its other – the descending path of rubble collapsing at a foothill, anticipating a spiral of entropy. Both balance each other beautifully and complement a larger perfectly integrative law. Debris is redolent of ground becoming shapeless matter as destiny; it is drawn in parallel to the swallow's wing which never touches the ground. These antimonies of sorts are Ruskin's contribution to philosophy in my view: through drawing analogies between two opposed forces in nature a new meaning emerges. Although I suspect Ruskin would not approve of this term, for me this demonstrates dialectical visual thinking.

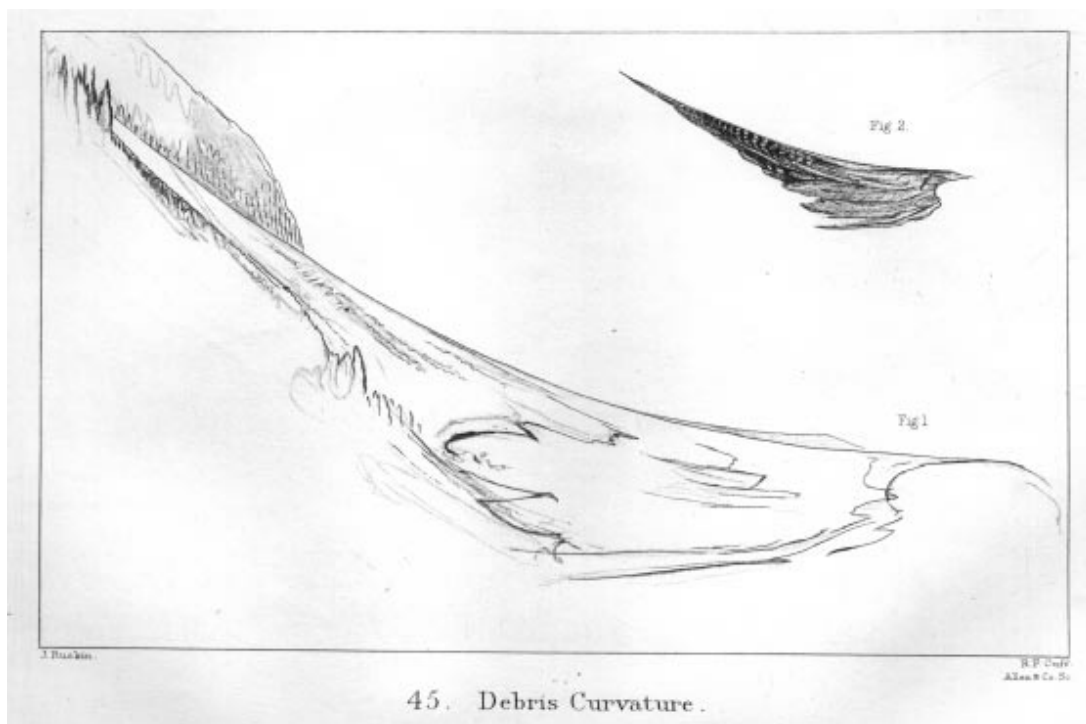


Figure 2 John Ruskin (1904) *Debris Curvature*, in *Works VI*, Fig 45, p. 345/6 © Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University).

### *Structure of thesis*

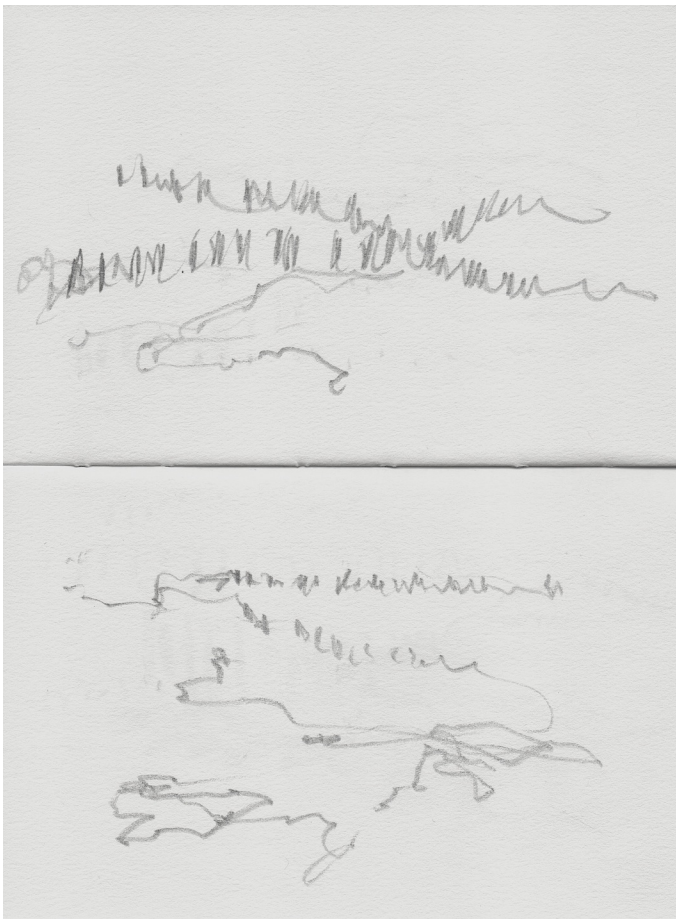
The *Preamble* acts as a meditation on how the visual and verbal, image and text, form an ever-increasing interpenetative network linking various methods of my research, writing *in situ*, reflective writing, academic writing and research, drawing *in situ*, drawing in studio, drawing for exhibition and as spatial installation.

Chapter 1 “Noli me tangere” sketches out preliminary observations on Ruskin’s relevance to contemporary art and ecological vision, and comments on biographical aspects of Ruskin’s personality, in particular his acute sensitivity providing a fundamental aspect to his approach and understanding of art and nature. *Italic notes* from my personal journal allow insight into stream of consciousness and the processing of direct, primary experience. Images illustrate and provide an alternative annotation system of narration.

In Chapter 2 “Passage”, methods for presenting drawing through text as trace and journey are developed. This chapter begins to make lateral connections between conventional or traditional ideas of drawing *en plein air* and extended definitions of drawing, including the *passage* as term denoting both text and journey. My journeys made me collect objects from the sea shore, which I elevate to still life objects. These are drawn in the quiet of the studio. *Marine Scrolls 1 and 2* reference found objects (Appendix 1).

Chapter 3 “Border Crossings” explores further the connections between walking and drawing, and extended notions of drawing and mark-making are discussed with reference to contemporary travel writer Robert Macfarlane. The *travelogue* becomes established as a genre that connects Ruskin, via Macfarlane, to W. G. Sebald. It is a format, a literary genre, and therefore implies methods of relevance to my own

practices of drawing and writing, as it legitimises the personal italicised observations as an alternative annotation system. I have deliberately refrained from photographic documentation of my own working practices and processes, not with the intention to exclude expanded or performative notions of drawing (which are legitimate and inferred), but wishing to keep my own documentation firmly confined to writing and drawing.



*Figure 3 a & b Doris Rohr (2014) Notebook: drawing while walking the coast, pencil on paper, 10 x 15 cm each.  
© Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.*

The search for meaning arises when one takes stock of material collected, amassed and archived. Selectivity and systematic collation of sources form part of an editing process. Ruskin was a discerning observer of natural phenomena (like weather conditions, rocks, hills and mountains) and a critical investigator of culture

(architecture, painting, townscapes, vernacular relationships between land and people). Drawing presented to him a means to make a record of what was fast disappearing (*The Stones of Venice*). Then again, drawing was also a way of establishing relationships in art and in nature (Ruskin distinguished benign nature from corrupted nature in his moral conception of wilderness).

In Chapter 4 “Taxonomy” the legacy of Ruskin’s taxonomy is presented as a plausible system to accommodate anthropological frameworks. Ruskin increasingly evokes mythology in his later writings, and this also begins to infuse my own visual narration techniques in the images I develop in *Marine Scroll III: Sinken* (Appendix 1). For example, world events captured through photojournalism evoke the ancient myth of Icarus in contemporary guise.

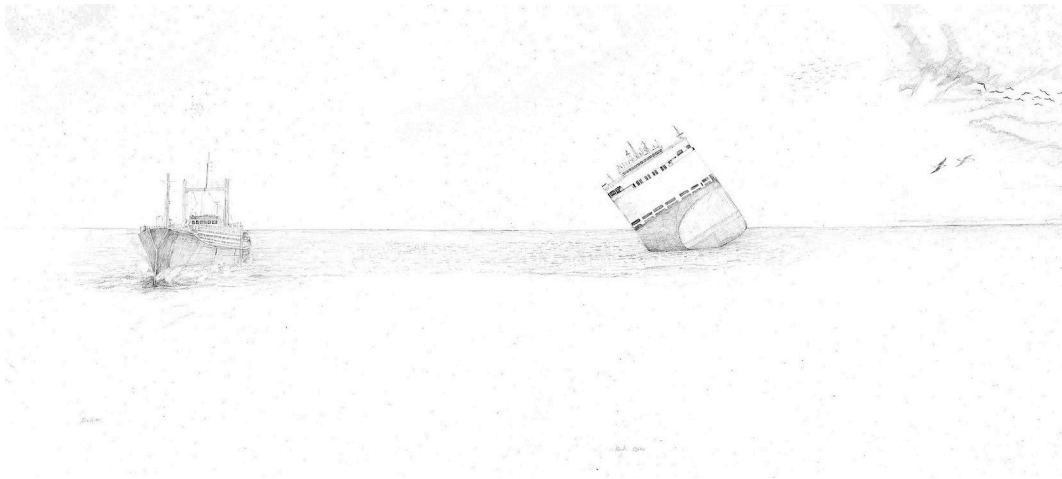


Figure 4 Doris Rohr (2015) Detail from *Marine Scroll III: Sinken*, pencil on paper, overall dimensions 56 x 1000 cm, detail 56 x 120 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge

Chapter 5 “Contrails” pays attention to the use of phenomenological description, which forms part of the travelogues of Ruskin and Sebald. Both writers share ecological moral concerns and dystopian fears. Ruskin’s 1884 lecture *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century* provides material for comparison with weather descriptions in Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn* (2002). Both authors connect weather

observations with themes of catastrophe (storms, war, genocide), human history with moral failure. This method of creative association enables me to link drawing with writing and fiction with fact. Beyond describing nature through observation, interpretive and imaginative functions of drawing and writing infuse the gestation process of subsequent narrative drawings. Melancholia provides a subtext for Ruskin and Sebald in relation to my own practice of writing and drawing. Mood infuses literary and visual exploration. The impossibility of neutrality when talking, writing or drawing about and with nature. Weather observations are noted through real-time drawings and writings *in situ*.

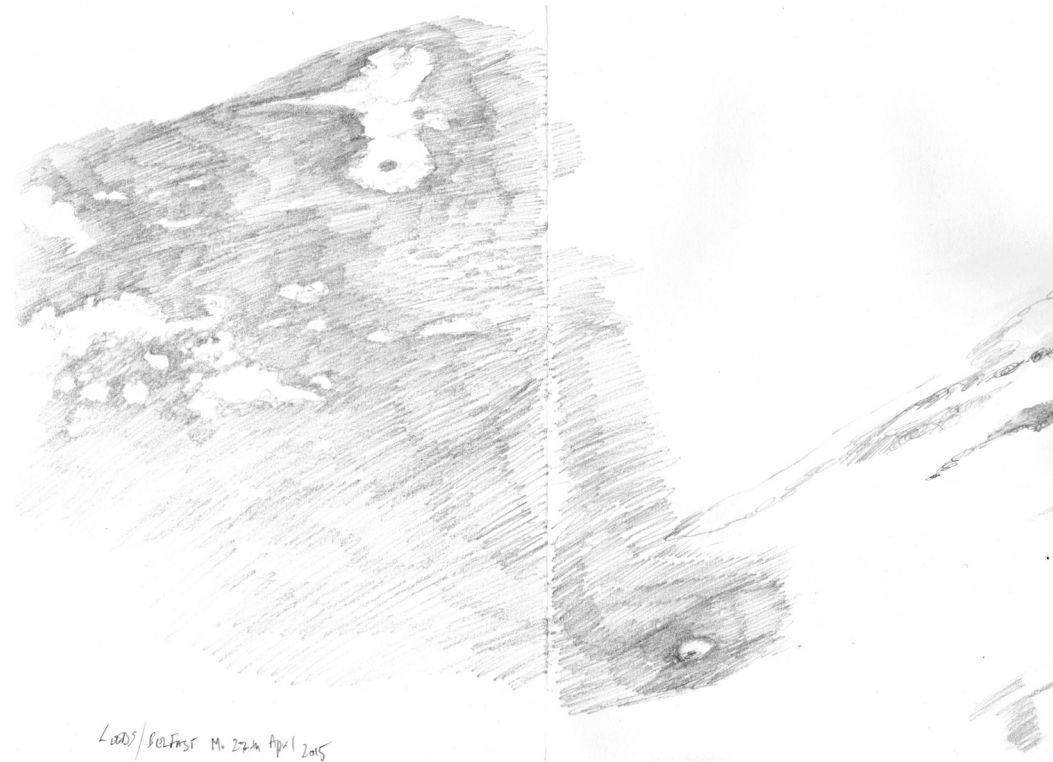


Figure 5 Doris Rohr (2015) *Concertina Sketchbook*: Cloud drawings from aeroplane journeys, graphite on cartridge paper, *Concertina* overall dimensions: 14.5 x 500 cm, detail: 14.5 x 18.5 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.

Chapter 6 “Chaos and Order” then considers decay, decomposition, formlessness as ultimate dystopia. The theme of entropy emerges; Ruskin’s belief that rocks, wildness, plants and architecture form part of a wider system becomes relevant to contexts of

philosophical and scientific thought concerning chaos and order. Entropy need not imply nihilism. Inevitably, eschatology infers its *other* – the search for origin. My own writing and drawing attempts to make sense of this; it fails in searching for a solution. Failure emerges as possibility for other visual possibilities yet to be found.

In *Marine Scroll IV* (Appendix 1) some of Ruskin's exercises given in *The Elements of Drawing* permitted a search for a different visual structure. Ruskin's exercises for the depiction of stones inform the initial subject matter of the scroll, with its overall theme of stones and rocks. Prior Ruskin's lecture of *Storm-Cloud* had initiated a series of weather drawings which also found their way into *Marine Scroll IV*. Furthermore, world events, catastrophes, and found media images supplement observational studies and drawing exercises.

In Chapter 7 "Disclosure" the theme of origins of nature and the horizon of nature, chaos and order, continues to inform the enquiry, here via Heidegger in relation to Ruskin, Serres and Latour. Both origin and future (horizon) become the subject of philosophical speculation. Philosophy's verbal bias empties out the visual space. The lack of visual narration in Chapter 7 betrays this. At this point the making of images do not run in tandem with the academic text. This becomes a review point in hindsight with reference towards visual thought and process. At this stage I had to let go of observational drawing (temporarily so in the long term).

We can only interpret history through our capacity of memory. All memory is selective. Drawing and writing traces what has been, and the future is a collaged fiction – it points towards alternative visionary readings of presence. As the value of myth and prophecy is to connect the incomprehensible, this offers further possibilities to investigate the intrinsic value of drawing as creative thought process. It is unlikely that this research process can be conclusive. The concluding remarks and images

therefore form a temporary stage in assessing what drawing and writing may contribute to caring for nature. Drawing and writing witness the tracing of managing loss, our own personal losses, and those of a wider collective entity of living and non-living beings, of habitats and species both human and non-human. Final reflections are therefore in the shape of journal entries alongside drawings composed from imagination and the collaging of found images (photos from journals, newspapers). This departure from observation of natural phenomena was not premeditated; it was partially the result of a period of ill-health and temporary disability preventing me from taking walks and collecting natural specimens. The period of illness and process of recovery added its own dimension to the research practice.

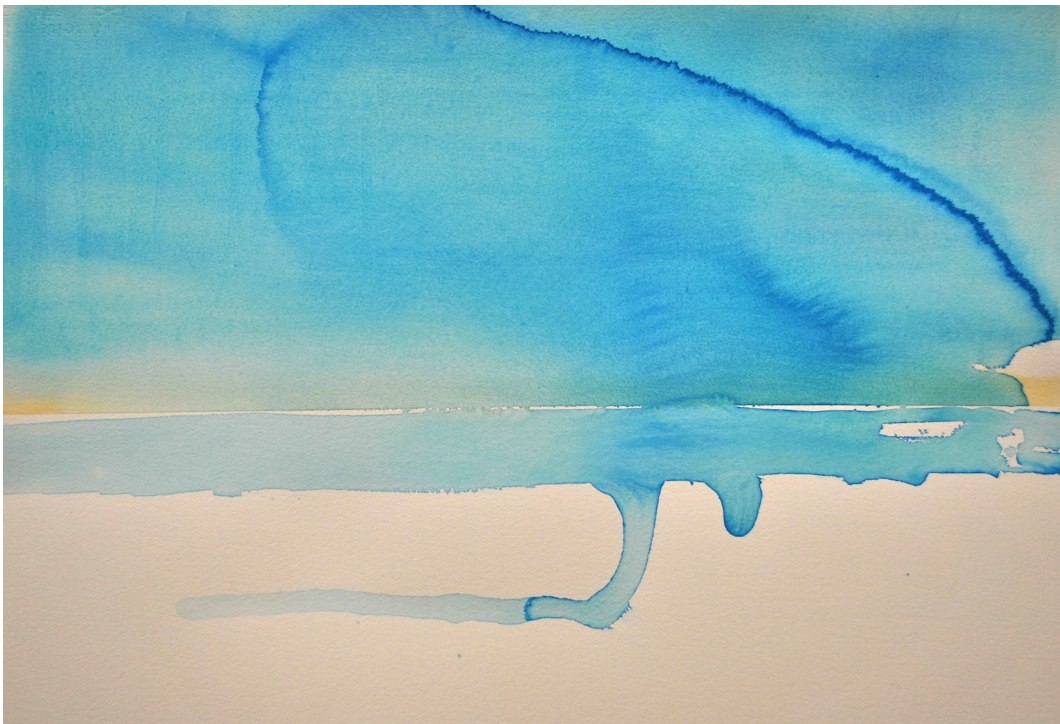
Selected images and drawing approaches from *Marine Scrolls IV* have led to hybrid formats of processing visual information. The series of clouds on layered Chinese paper (Appendix 1) fuse natural with man-made formations of clouds. These drawings merge graphically with writing, as the drawn marks begin to resemble the lines of my handwriting (Figure 8 a & b). Similarly, the technical properties of watercolour as a medium help to distance a desire for easy legibility, or overly literal representation of nature coded as signs for tree, stone, bird or cloud. Watered-down pigments flow into each other, revealing half by chance formation and pattern, allowing my finger to create temporary divisions of dry to moist. A sequence of watercolours (Figures 6 and 7) was prompted by a newspaper image of a Russian jet, shot down by Turkish military on the 24th November 2015. I find myself compulsively drawn to such images of aftermath: the image of smoke resembling a cloud released by the exploding jet, its remains already below the surface of the water. Here painting becomes mediated through drawing: the fine line drawn between pools of water, the



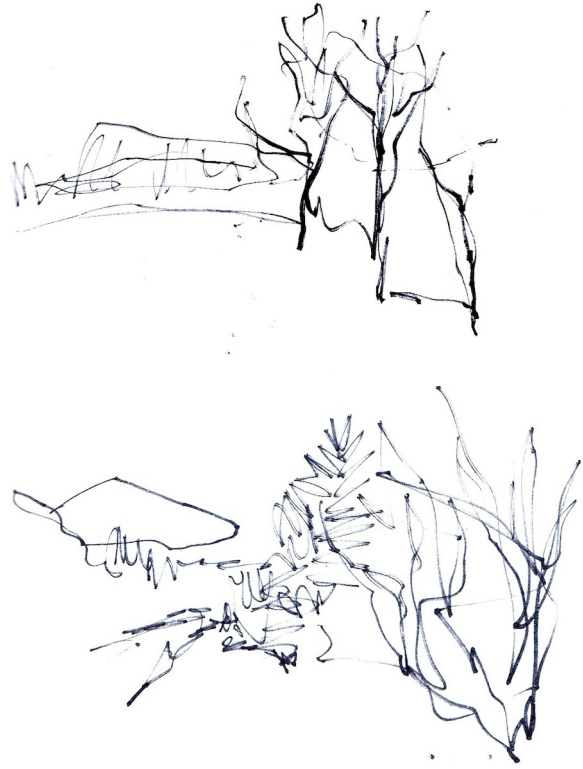
exposed whiteness of the paper becomes its negative space, becomes the drawing. The seam of pigment separating man-made cloud from firmament – another.



*Figure 6* Doris Rohr (2016) *Before*, watercolour on handmade Indian paper, 57 x 77cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.



*Figure 7* Doris Rohr (2016) *After*, watercolour on machine-made French paper (Arches), 57 x 77 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.



*Figure 8 a & b Doris Rohr (2015) Notebook annotations walking drawing consecutive pages, fountain pen on paper, 7.5 x 10.5 cm each. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.*

## Preamble

### *Woven text – the process of writing through images*<sup>10</sup>

[A]nd I was afraid my soul would be blinded if I looked at things with my eyes and tried to grasp them with any of my senses. So I thought I must have recourse to *logoi* [...] and examine in them the truth of the things that are. (Plato, *Phaedo* 99d–e)<sup>11</sup>

This text presents images, through two registers of drawing, alongside two registers of words. The registers are broadly defined along the lines of primary observation and annotation (the raw) and synthesised, critically reflected and composed (edited image or text). The overall synthesis is intended to be read as a text that weaves together distinctive strands: those of field drawing; those of studio and exhibition/installed drawing; those of writing in italics (subjective, personal reflections: the journal); and those of academic writing with reference to scientists, artists and philosophers of relevance to the discussion.

Drawing and writing share many aspects as they use an adopted invented vocabulary of signs as referents for a large complex of interrelations and possible meanings.

Drawing shares with the handwritten script a mediation between body and mind in a given time and place. Both systems of annotation operate in-between gesture and symbol, reflect on sense experience through a system of annotations, and mediate self with environment. Although sense experience, in particular observation, contributes to the thinking and translation processes at stake here, the drawings presented are not attempting to deceive (*trompe l'oeil*). The types of drawing presented are a translation

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<sup>11</sup> In Derrida (1993, p. 15).

of experience, emotion, sense awareness, and a form of reasoning, interpretation and analysis, thereby sharing many characteristics with writing.<sup>12</sup>

The postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and principles are what the work of art itself is looking for.<sup>13</sup>

We talk about withdrawing, drawing in, drawing conclusions. We don't talk about writing the same way. We don't *withwrite*, for example. Perhaps this is why drawing is persistently referred to as liminal, without clear boundaries, slippery, multi-disciplinary, elemental, primary and primitive.<sup>14</sup> Yet I propose here that drawing has the capability to critique the self-confidence and supremacy associated with the verbal, and thereby – apt for a visually practice-based research project – the status of drawing becomes emancipated in questioning the written text. This deconstruction process has been promoted by Jacques Derrida, who foregrounds a critique of text

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<sup>12</sup> Farthing and McKenzie (2014) in *The Drawn Word*. McKenzie (pp. 8–10) alludes to the complexity of relationships of word to image in Eastern art, in particular Chinese writing and drawing as pictographic language that transcends boundaries, with special reference to the work of contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing. McKenzie quotes French post-structuralist philosopher Jean-François Lyotard, who states in *The Postmodern Condition: a Report on Knowledge* (1979), that the postmodern text escapes the tight 'familiar' rules of establishment. Further examples investigated in the publication substantially support creativity in informal text–image relationships enjoyed outside publishing conventions, like Joseph Beuys' blackboard diagrams (Zumtick in Farthing and McKenzie, 2014, pp. 21–25). Harris (2015, p. 38) refers to runes as the earliest writing systems in Anglo-Saxon culture, the rune alphabet – “a system of hieroglyphs”. Weather, wind and clouds find ways into visual symbols and turn into writing.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, cited by McKenzie (2014, p. 10).

<sup>14</sup> For example, Irene Barberis (in Farthing, Chorpening, Wiggins (eds.) 2012, p. 78): “...the word drawing has such expansive meaning.” And further (p. 79): “My theory is that a good drawing, in whatever manifestation, moves us neurologically and kinetically into a space that I term the ‘liminal edge’, a boundary between logic and the unknown or intuitive, permitting the viewer to potentially access both the traditional and intuitive experience of the artist’s perceptions at the point of making.” Deanna Petherbridge, cited in Garner (2008, p. 27): “[A] major reason for its irresolute state is the problematic issue of defining what *is* drawing [...] Drawing, however, seldom attracts consensus views. Instead it invites frustration or obsession in attempting to clarify something which is slippery and irresolute in its fluid status as performative act *and* idea; as sign, and symbol *and* signifier; as conceptual diagram as well as medium *and* process *and* technique.”

through visual methods, as outlined in *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993) and *The Truth in Painting* (1987).

### ***Manifestation***

Drawing connects touch with sight. A finger scores a line into a soft ground, sand perhaps, and makes a trace. Or follows the misted window pane leaving a trail of temporary clarity on the otherwise opaque glass. A finger touches the outline or surfaces of another thing or being. Explores the texture of a stone, a shell, a sponge, a piece of velvet, skin or fur. Touch is intimately connected with the hand, and hand intimately with drawing (with tool or without). Drawing manifests: it makes itself visible (*manus* – hand – gesture – touch).

#### manifest (adj.)

late 14c., "clearly revealed", from Old French manifest "evident, palpable" (12c.), or directly from Latin manifestus "plainly apprehensible, clear, apparent, evident"; of offenses, "proved by direct evidence"; of offenders, "caught in the act", probably from manus "hand" (see manual) + -festus "struck" (compare second element of infest). (Douglas Harper, 2015)

Drawing connects with its intermediary, the support, the ground. It shares this with writing but is of a different order of presentation. What connects my writing with my drawing is the relay of experience through touch: a mediating tool, instrument or body part offers articulation, refinement, concentration. At times I draw directly with my body, my fingers touching a surface, a texture, experiencing sensations of pleasure, surprise, expectation. These gestures and investigations of space and form convince oneself of existing. They are a type of temporary drawing. What concerns me in those moments, what I perceive as seemingly outside of my body, as being external to myself. My environment other than me. That outsideness has become internalised, injected, digested and filtered. A transubstantiation of sorts. My body in interaction

with my brain, connecting emotions, muscle action, intentions, intuitions and instincts, desires (even) produces something else, an amalgamation. Drawing as text becomes the residue of this process. Words as text may be another outcome of this translation process. When I draw or write *in situ*, the two processes are intimately connected with each other, and are equally spontaneous. The writing *in situ* is unmediated, *en plein air*, an outpouring. This is a different type of writing from the carefully reflected and edited type of writing used for academic discourse.

Static experience is almost impossible – the smallest movements and the way my body is held in balance in space imply endless motion and time passing. Static looking through the drawing process invites slowing down, concentration, elimination of superfluous sense data. Moving is of a different category; the whole body ‘looks’, perceives and acts in response to the environment, changing with each step. Surfaces change, the feet interact with ground always changing. Skin experiences moisture, heat, wind. Ears filter sounds and noises. Peripheral unfocused vision complements the other senses.<sup>15</sup> Translating such a variable, dynamic experience is difficult to reduce into an accepted convention of sign systems. It invites departure, experiment and delayed recognition.

The hand – it gestures. When writing, the hand acts as medium, translating symbols formed in the brain. Memory and sense experience conflate into an agreed consensual system of signs – language. Text can take different formats, may be undecipherable, or be only known to the author.

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<sup>15</sup> With reference to Paterson (2007) in regard to multi-sensory appreciation of experience and application to design, technology and the arts.

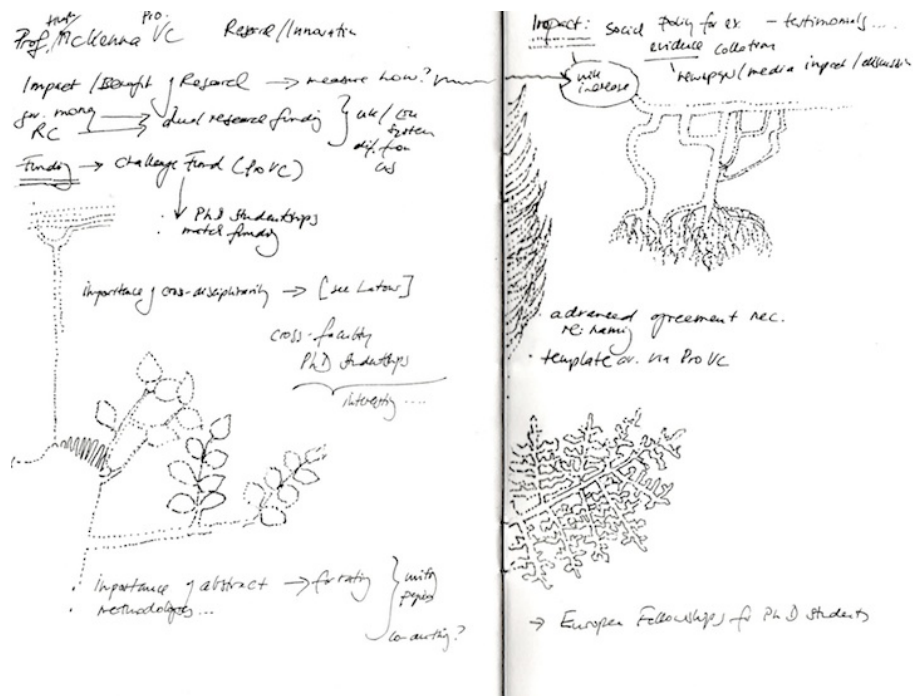


Figure 9 Doris Rohr (2014), Notes made during a meeting with algae drawings from memory, Fountain pen on paper; 20.5 x 28 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.

### The visual embodying knowledge

In academic writing one must adhere to a relatively rigid set of conventions qualify, to be acceptable. “Creative” writing implies that we can fictionalise, need not prove, or provide evidence. Fiction and poetry aim for a different use of language, concerned with revealing another layer of knowledge through association.

Translations into shape, colour, form, texture – drawing, painting and the spaces in between – all this is also governed by agreed systems. Depending on its contexts – cultural, historical – drawing can be a rigidly objective format (Tufte, 1997) and can be as precise if not more precise than verbal language, or at its other extreme it can be fanciful, subjective, inventive, undecipherable, ambiguous.

Examining the practice of drawing as a subject of academic scrutiny in relation to relevant theory suggests that a flexible, elastic approach to research may lead to new

insights through discovery, but nevertheless this relation is governed by the academic conventions of logical argument, grammar, syntax, systems of referencing, word count, and the setting of clear parameters of organisation. Within that, there is room to wriggle. This is important, as it helps to connect my writing with my drawing. My drawing wriggles with perception, imagination, with being not too literal, not too descriptive. The thesis investigating the theory underpinning the practice of drawing is a framework: 50,000 words or thereabouts, left-aligned, typeface 12 Roman, italics reserved for titles and emphasis, quotation marks for sources, footnotes for references and for extraneous thoughts. Lateral digressions. Footnotes. Marginalia. Such are an invitation to perforate the dry clarity of logic with the moist<sup>16</sup> creativity of lateral thought.

Reading John Ruskin's complete set of *Modern Painters* has made me aware that the balance between the page's 'main' text and 'foot' note can be reversed. Ruskin likes his digressions – a double-page spread entirely filled by a footnote, the page's main text reduced to one line. In such, Ruskin's writing precludes Derrida's.<sup>17</sup> Ruskin's use of drawing, at times entirely conventional (the reference to another artist's work as illustration of an argument), also goes beyond this purpose, and drawing becomes reinvented as alternative system of thought: the diagram, frequently derived from scientific contexts of botany, natural history and geology, nevertheless infused with imagination, poetry congealed with science. Ruskin's obsessive fascination with clouds is indicative: natural phenomena double as messengers, personified demons and divine drawings.

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<sup>16</sup> Alexandra Harris (2015, p. 109) speaks about rain and storms acting as initial creative force ("primal mess") – a fertilising moistness.

<sup>17</sup> Charlie Gere has repeatedly drawn my attention to Derrida in relation to Ruskin. See "Ruskin's Haunted Nature" (in Mays, Sas and Matheson, 2013).



### ***Editorial processes: selection, elimination***

There is always selection – in any drawing and any writing process. Elimination, editing back, paring down. When being taught how to draw (the Western conventions), there is a pedagogic pattern to follow: from line to tone into illusionism (the still life as object to exercise the eye), the wider territories of town or landscape governed by laws of perspective (interior or exterior spaces and buildings, topography, single- and multi-point perspectives), foreshortening and proportions (the body, anatomy, buildings, ornaments), negative space, balance, composition. All these laws are ordering systems; they ask me to subordinate sense data into an accepted system of representation. Not adhering to this at all would make my art outsider art – incomprehensible, fascinating perhaps, but without socially shareable meaning.

Writing has a special capacity to bear witness to the flux of time. The reflexive process of remembering, of narration allows for the transience of time. Letters, dated, are documents of a particular point in time. Journals address the day (*jour*), hour, the calendar. The very act of writing, as in drawing, is time passing *tangibly*. The notebook: both journal and diary, sketchbook and story. Conventionally, notebooks start on the first page on the left and describe space and time consecutively. One can of course dispense with such conventionally prescribed linearity. Chinese script comes to mind – a language based on images. Chinese drawing and calligraphy is often presented in vertical (top to bottom) orientation, Japanese manga allegedly reads from right to left. So did some Western medieval manuscripts (Harris, 2015, p. 61). A section of a painting, drawing or calligraphy presented on a scroll will only be revealed one section at a time, so that the viewer has to physically move the drawing (or painting) on, or alternatively, the narrator animates the time frame and dictates the pace of motion.

Static narrative formats like concertina sketchbooks allow for physical exploration of sequence. Writing mixes fluidly with drawing in my own notebooks. The notebook is for the raw annotation; the direct translation of experience into thought, pattern, mark. The studio (withdrawing room) enables distillation into other formats. The writing parlour (a moveable space, my bed, the computer, the living room sofa, a seat on a train) likewise enables such a distillation process into reflective, edited prose. *Writing with images* is the option the book or scroll invites – the portable intimacy of a book engaging the imagined reader's/viewer's touch, the turning of pages. A bound hard cover book, another room to withdraw into, public and private at the same time.

Adopting rolls of lining paper as large sketchbooks or notebooks is a consequence of the above thought process. Working from left to right remains a Western outlook I cannot let go of, especially as I am right-handed. The scrolls I have produced (*Marine Scrolls 1–4*) are in landscape format and require reading from left to right. I acknowledge my indebtedness and admiration to non-Western cultures, in particular Zen drawings, which I admired from an early age onwards. To the same degree I remain fascinated by medieval manuscripts, which so effortlessly combine image with text, demonstrating the visual literacy of artists and artisans providing legible visual text for the illiterate in their stonework, altar pieces, stained-glass windows, tapestries and frescos.

### ***Subjectivity of the artist researcher***

Writing and drawing do similar things for me: they fuse and articulate the constant humming, the white noise of experience, the multiple existences we lead – virtual and real. They form part of a meditative process in which I can explore and privilege certain sense impressions over others. I consciously select what I draw or write about. I don't draw myself, for example, at least not in a recognisable or conventional way.

Rarely do I draw other people. I draw *nature* as other – or that is how it started. Tree, bird, stone, feather, fish, plant; vegetable and animal; inanimate. But then I *do* draw myself – my feelings, senses, projections. I draw with and for others in imaginary dialogue. I listen to the internalised voices of others when drawing, my own ancestry, familiar voices. I reach out to connect with the plethora of other things and non-things: matter, particles, atoms. These connect with me, inform me, make me – I am not a separate substance from my environment. My life would not be possible without that outside that I need to constantly internalise and breathe in and breathe out, as life is breath. The outside sends signals, it is *noticed*. Drawing is about noting – notations. So this journey is about learning to understand how drawing and writing intertwine when annotating *nature* as a term considered under reconstruction.

Do I translate words into pictures? I no longer translate German phrases into English when writing or speaking in English. Yet my language is structured by foreignness and cannot help bear witness to non-native syntax. These aspects of cultural identity also find their way into visual thinking. Early formative experiences in childhood set preferences of structuring thought in representation and articulation. When I draw sense experience, this is an immediate transformation into mark and image. When I *select* my subject matter, a kind of internal command takes place – a process of directing intentions.

Why write about drawing if it is liminal? There are many types of drawing and each type has its own baggage and historical and cultural conventions. Creativity thrives when let off the leash, so this offers an opportunity. This unleashable quality about drawing is a distinctive advantage for saying something so far untold, yet it is a disadvantage when it comes to managing a remit. It is almost as if I need to start off with a proposition, which then through application becomes transformed and changed

into another proposition. One such proposition here is the necessity of observation as preliminary requirement for drawing. Studying Ruskin has been instructive, particularly his methods of how to draw and see in *The Elements of Drawing*. But Ruskin also advocates drawing as an educational process (*Modern Painters III*, in *Works V*, pp. 376–8). It is an education of the soul. I noticed this about the experience of drawing: if I connect with what I draw and fully devote my attention to this, it is *good*. The process is good – it is a meditation, a prayer, fully concentrated mind. The result is good, as the trace of this act of connecting is in sympathy<sup>18</sup> with what I have paid attention to. No drawing has validity unless it can be drawn with sympathy, to paraphrase Ruskin. So the proposition has shifted and narrowed the definition of drawing I am interested in, as drawing is about educating oneself and about my relationship to other beings; drawing has a moral component that surpasses observation.

One aspect that provides a base note to this project is that of cultural belonging and the complexity of such in a life led through two different languages and sets of memories and histories: my childhood in Germany and my adult life in Britain, in England and in Northern Ireland. Self-chosen exile is a response to a crisis of identity and an inability to connect, to belong. This also articulates a strength, furnishing resistance to the seductive rhetoric of national identity. As a result, a confused, dislocated sense of self takes refuge in a wider framework of connective identities that tie together languages, histories and cultures in their complexity and contradictions. This is what it means to be European for me. At a time when nationalistic thought is once more undermining the idea of a peaceful union of culturally and geographically

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<sup>18</sup> Ruskin: *Modern Painters IV* (1856), in *Works VI* (1904, p. 19), with reference to Lars Spuybroek (2011). Further discussion in Chapter 1.

connected countries, this is an important realisation and position to voice. As a European I can believe in the distinct cultural differences and languages, yet I do not have to believe in supremacy. I am allowed to stumble across several cultures and histories and weave my own voice into the mix, taken from all. This hybrid way of processing is reflected in the peculiar direction of my research, combining German literature with Ruskin. It is the result of my self-chosen position that I found self-exiled German writer W. G. Sebald and Austrian nineteenth-century novelist Adalbert Stifter (a master in describing the tragic quality of misrecognition of otherness) appropriate to help me to reflect on Ruskin. Despite all cultural differences, there is much that connects across time and history. So a subtext of this project is also to demystify the sense of separateness of cultures and histories in Europe at a time when nationalism was on the rise (the nineteenth century). Ruskin, I project, may understand where I am coming from, when lamenting the Franco-Prussian War in *Stormcloud* (Wheeler 1995, p. 100). So as a preposition, it is already apparent that this research project, even in its fictional moment, will not have a happy ending.

Throughout the research period I have often been overcome with great sadness. Whether the toxic qualities of plastics suffocating marine life, or the inability of humankind to accept difference, and the reluctance to learn from collective and personal mistakes; all contribute to a sense of paralysis and subsequently lead to a depressed position. When drawing the sea, the waves, the living and inanimate within the sea and at its shore, sadness has often overcome me. So much waste, death and destruction. The black bile of melancholia, the artist's 'privilege' since the Renaissance, I was able to recognise in the writing and drawing of the artists, poets and scientists I consulted over the journey of this submission. Drawing as a process also provided solace, acting like medicine, a drug. It doesn't cure the ills of the world,

but it soothes. The German word for solace is *Trost*. The process of drying wet blinking eyes.

*[T]he thought of drawing, a certain pensive pose, a memory of the trait that speculates, as in a dream about its own possibility. Its potency always develops on the brink of blindness. [...] Blindness pierces through right at that point and thereby gains in potential, in potency: the angle of sight is threatened or promised, lost or restored, given. There is in this gift a sort of re-drawing, a with-drawing, or retreat [re-trait], at once the interposition of a mirror, an impossible re-appropriation or mourning, the intervention of a paradoxical Narcissus, sometimes lost en abyme, in short, a specular folding or falling back [repli] – and a supplementary trait. It is best to use the Italian name for the hypothesis of this withdrawal [retrait] in memory of itself as far as the eye can see: the autoritratto of drawing. (Derrida, 1993, p. 3)*

## Chapter 1 *Noli me tangere*

### (Gospel of John 20, Verse 17)

#### *Beginnings*

My first encounter with Ruskin happened more than thirty years ago in Venice when visiting an exhibition of his collection of daguerreotypes. The exhibition poster depicted a Venetian gothic palazzo, conjuring in my mind associations of visionary fantasy (a mirage perhaps like the gothic dome in Caspar David Friedrich's *Winter Landscape*), and that of the ancient doomed island *Atlantis*.<sup>18</sup> The blemished metallic surface of the photographic plate, reminiscent of a Claude glass, the daguerreotype's shadow of reflection, seemed a poetic prophecy, an embodiment of all things' impermanence. The opalescent surface contributing to a sense of submersion as if an object of excavation, an antique Roman glass.<sup>19</sup> This daguerreotype embodied the sea as metaphor for deep-seated knowledge, containing mythical origins, the history of all things past, present and future.

The exhibition poster accompanied me to my first academic teaching post at Norwich School of Art, where it adorned the office space. Its enigmatic attraction started me on the way of my investigations here, nearly thirty years later, on John Ruskin and how his thoughts might connect to my own practices of drawing and writing.

During a visit to Brantwood, Ruskin's home at Lake Coniston (where on a sunny day it feels like being in Northern Italy), I encountered a minute domed glasshouse – a bell

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<sup>18</sup> 'Ruined Eden': Hunt (1982, p. 155) quotes Ruskin from one of his letters to his parents saying "Another ruined Eden – 'in the fall/ Of Venice think of thine.'"

<sup>19</sup> Hunt (ibid, p. 156) indicates that Ruskin was delighted about the heliograph ("sun's drawing") recording so accurately and precisely all the detail of Venice's vanishing architecture.

jar – in one of the living rooms.<sup>20</sup> This small Wardian<sup>21</sup> case held the idea of mountain, a rock with growing moss, cultivated wildness. This microcosm, a closed system and ecological microstructure, was nature itself, and also its opposite, the artificial vision or dream of nature perfect, a cultural object. Ruskin’s understanding of wildness has its origin here in the moss on rock.



Figure 10 John Ruskin (c. February 1871) *Study of a Piece of Brick, to show Cleavage in Burnt Clay*, watercolour and bodycolour over graphite on wove paper, sheet 21.9 x 15.4 cm (WA.RS.ED.281) ©Ashmolean Museum University of Oxford.

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<sup>20</sup> See also the theme of the “Glassturz” W. G. Sebald explores in *The Rings of Saturn* (2002) when walking the Suffolk landscape (German edition: 2001, p. 77).

<sup>21</sup> Wardian cases were initially conceived to facilitate transport of exotic species from plant-hunting excursions on demand for botanical gardens and private patrons. The Wardian case was the invention of amateur naturalist GP Dr Nathaniel Bagshaw Ward (1791–1868) (Musgrave, 2002). They soon became domestic objects, and beautifully crafted glass cases adorned the studies of wealthier households, allowing “the household the habits and growths of various species often collected in the wild” (Logan 2003, p. 150).



Although it is not certain that the bell jar contained moss in Ruskin's own time, or whether this had been an interpretive curatorial device, the above *Study of a Piece of Brick* illustrates that Ruskin foreshadows an aesthetic of entropy (in the context of land artists Robert Smithson and Richard Serra and painter Per Kirkeby [Smith, 2012]).

### ***Wildness: Ruskin's nature***

In his book *The Sympathy of Things* (2011) the design theoretician Lars Spuybroek proposes that wildness is decoration. "The first thing we should acknowledge is that there is nothing natural about the wild – in fact, the wild is *the home of decoration*" (p. 231). Spuybroek redefines Ruskin's *nature* as a mode for twenty-first century decoration, a redesignated role for ornament after the fall of modernism, because ornament is humane. Ideal wildness as exemplified by moss on rock offered Ruskin the promise to ask questions of aesthetic, moral and social importance. Wildness has become a refuge, an ideal fantasy, as our connection with nature as a place to fear or to be in awe of has become obsolete. This idea of wildness offers an idealised and mythical space untainted by consumption. For Ruskin, wildness was a beginning and an end, a prophetic hope linked with mystical divine presence (see Chapter 5); for us, wildness is an endangered and threatened place we want to love but cannot make sufficient sacrifice for. So we consume it as a TV fantasy, or visit theme-parked nature reserves that package or enclose nature in a commercialised bell jar equivalent (experience as consumption, for example the Eden Project).<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Tim Smit's Eden Project in Cornwall. See <https://www.edenproject.com/eden-story/about-us/sir-tim-smit-kbe> (accessed 21st January 2016).

### *Nature as goodness*

What we hold on to, and this connects us with Ruskin, is the belief that nature contains the possibility for good living – in particular goodness defined as prosperity and wealth (cornucopia).<sup>23</sup> This stands in stark contrast to unethical exploitation of natural resources, a tension Ruskin recognised, ultimately leading to loss and certain death. Such conclusions have become further corroborated by twentieth-century ecologist Rachel Carson, and subsequently evolved into the dystopian ecological nightmare of the twenty-first century. The hope enshrined in a self-sustaining system, the moss a metaphor for benign wildness, continues to be with us as a projection or desire, a fantasy of breaking the entropic spiral of irreversible destruction of the cosmos.

Whether Ruskin cared for the originary and evolutionary pioneer function of mosses is less clear. He alludes to the humility of lichen and mosses in *Modern Painters IV*:

Meek creatures! The first mercy of the earth, veiling with hushed softness its dintless rocks; creatures full of pity, covering with strange and tender honour the scarred disgrace of ruin, – laying quiet finger on the trembling stones, to teach them rest.<sup>19</sup>

Nowadays green algae are regarded one of the earliest multi-cellular life forms on earth, and mosses as their terrestrial cousins following a few million years later, by evolutionary standards not such a long time. Although Ruskin undoubtedly was caught up in the conflicted accounts of evolutionary earth science of his time (Fuller, 1988; Hunt, 1982), this mattered less than Nature's capacity to teach by perfect example. Sensuality is bracketed – like the moss behind glass, within reach yet not

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<sup>23</sup> The idea of nature as cornucopia forms the pretext to John Ruskin's moral fairytale *The King of the Golden River* (1841) in *Works I* (1903, pp. 305–349).

<sup>19</sup> *Works VII*, in Fitch (1982, p. 339).

possible to touch. Not appropriate to be touched. Lars Spuybroek refers to this relationship as one of sympathy with things, being relational, symbiotic:

Ruskin's sympathy is an ethereal, indeed *asensual*, aesthetics that offers no pleasure whatsoever in sharing appearance or tastes but only in sharing each other's life and actions. (2011, p. 228)

The miniature capsule is utopia in reverse: *Garden of Eden*, a world before the Fall, a manifestation of a desire to prevent the Fall (if that were possible). So one enters mythological time, where the relationship between the inevitable (fate) and human moral conduct is set into its archaic frame.

Ruskin's sensitivity – his cautious yet sympathetic touch, his reluctance to consume, becomes a moral choice shared with nineteenth-century Austrian novelist Adalbert Stifter. In the view of the literary critic and writer W. G. Sebald,<sup>24</sup> Stifter's fiction embodies the necessity of abstention, of non-consumed relationships as a condition for happiness in parenthesis. Ruskin's bachelor lifestyle becomes thereby a premise for ethical living. Ruskin's personality appears to be an embodiment of the fictional characters in Stifter's educational novel *Der Nachsommer* [1857]<sup>25</sup>, sharing with the adolescent hero Heinrich an interest in natural history (amongst those an interest in minerals, geology, and in drawing and mapping mountains) and with the novel's mentor figure Freiherr von Risach the capacity of combining aesthetic sensibility with wisdom gained through painful life experience. Like Ruskin, Stifter wanted to teach

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<sup>24</sup> W. G. Sebald (2012), *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks*: "Bis an den Rand der Natur, Versuch über Stifter" (pp. 15–37), and "Helle Bilder und Dunkle – Zur Dialektik der Eschatologie bei Stifter und Handke" (pp. 165–186).

<sup>25</sup> Adalbert Stifter (1970 [1857]). *Der Nachsommer* – which translates awkwardly to "Indian Summer"; perhaps "Late Summer" would be more appropriate – is a novel I was introduced to by my mother. Re-reading this novel, I find the parallels between Heinrich and Ruskin uncanny. For details on Ruskin's childhood upbringing, see *The Wider Sea* (Hunt, 1982).

humanity in harmony with nature, and show a way of learning about the natural world that embraced morally valid human relationships.<sup>26</sup>

Fictional and non-fictional characters share this *sympathy* with their environment as a premise. Not touching, or touching indirectly, with utmost care, leaving nature *unconsumed*, as far as possible, this amounts to an alternative system that in contemporary terms may be referred to as ecology of cosmic interrelations.

Ruskin promotes a view in which touch is purified, and where possible relegated to the surrogate activities of writing and drawing. Sublimated experiences of nature become an alternative to enjoyment, heightening an experience and deepening it. Not-touching and quasi-(surrogate) touching is instrumentally fulfilled through the haptic capacity of drawing. Drawing is more than substitution, however, as it offers a translation of experience, a mediated relationship between human subject and the environment.<sup>27</sup>

### ***Reluctant consumption – drawing as sublimated touch***

Drawing as sublimated touching, Ruskin's method of drawing as a loving and understanding form of looking, becomes the starting point for my enquiry into Ruskin's legacy and relevance for twenty-first century visual engagement, theory and practice. It is my project to demonstrate that Ruskin's method of looking transcends observation. But close observation is a necessary requirement, a foundational and

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<sup>26</sup> Stifter's *Bildungsroman* (educational novel) is clearly relatable to Ruskin's pedagogical ambitions. Stifter's novel describes how the protagonist, adolescent Heinrich, acquires a holistic aesthetic and moral understanding of the world untrammelled by materialistic desires. Heinrich's father is a business entrepreneur, who had loftier ideals in mind as legacy than that of commerce: Sheehan writes "Heinrich's *Bildung* is a gradual, indirect process; he does not learn by confronting crises or dramatic events [...] In art and in life, one must seek to avoid the dislocations that can be caused by unbridled passions and excessive spontaneity" (1989, p. 830).

<sup>27</sup> Akin to Descartes's view of sensory capacity of eyes, looking becomes the capacity of the eye's ray touching the world (Ingold, 2000).

preliminary step to attain a comprehensive understanding of nature, as accuracy of observing relationships and organisation of parts in nature lead to a deeper perception of organising principles (the ideal). Already in *Modern Painters I* Ruskin explains that technical knowledge of painting alone, although “invaluable as the vehicle of thought”, was insufficient for the painter (“in itself nothing”). Ruskin expands:

He who has learned what is commonly considered the whole art of painting, that is, the art of representing any natural object faithfully, has as yet only learned the language by which his thoughts are to be expressed. He has done just as much towards being that which we ought to respect as a great painter, as a man who has learnt how to express himself grammatically and melodiously has towards being a great poet. (*Works III*, p. 87).

Ruskin insists on the consideration of subject matter as the truly distinguishing factor separating craft from art. The subject’s worthiness is based on the nobility of the idea that informs it; competent technical knowledge and ability of imitation are subordinated and may mislead into a kind of materialism distasteful to Ruskin. This approach brings to mind study methods for classical music (for example, finger exercises for the pianist through the practice of études, preludes and fugues advancing technical understanding in relation to musical theory through performative learning; or the disciplined rigorous physical training programmes of classical dance to facilitate the greater of artistic expression). Subsequently Ruskin refers to the quality of *expression* (ibid, p. 90) as the prime characteristic setting apart the mere draughtsperson from the true artist. Ruskin’s emphasis on the importance of *content* (or the subject matter – in contemporary terms, the concept) is greatly relevant for the context of the visual arts in the contemporary academic environment. However, the emphasis on learning the ‘trade’ is considered of lesser importance, partially informed by a consensus that there is no one single ‘true method’ of learning art. Yet this aspect of highly concentrated ‘looking’ through drawing as a prerequisite to understanding

phenomenal and material appearances and experiences requires greater rehabilitation into art education and professional practice.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Transgressing materialist definitions of art – the ideal in nature***

In *Modern Painters II (Works IV, 1903)* Ruskin extends his definition of what makes good art through an extensive discussion of the faculty of *imagination* in relation to the material and the ideal. This division Ruskin considered “unfortunate” as it made the viewer consider the ideal in opposition to the real, and therefore wrongly assume the ideal as *false* (ibid, p. 165). Ruskin’s conception of a valuable content in a painting or drawing, his definition of *good* art, requires an idealism which illumines from beyond the desire to represent the subject true to its nature.

Any work of art which represents, not a material object, but the mental conception of a material object, is, in the primary sense of the word, ideal. That is to say, it represents an idea and not a thing. Any work of art which represents or realizes a material object is, in the primary sense of the term, unideal. Ideal works of art, therefore, in the first sense, represent the result of an act of imagination, and are good or bad in proportion to the healthy condition and general power of the imagination whose acts they represent. (ibid, pp. 164–5)

As Ruskin’s understanding of the ideal is intimately linked with his understanding of ‘Nature’, an important aspect of the subsequent discussion in the text is concerned with disentangling what this ‘Nature’ meant to Ruskin, and how this becomes reflected in my own contextualisation of the term ‘nature’ in view of contemporary readings of the term.

Ruskin’s childhood love for geology left its mark and laid a foundation for a seamless understanding of how nature and science inform the visual arts and culture. Ruskin’s

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<sup>28</sup> The idea that contemporary conceptually minded artists are uninterested in drawing as a skill and analytical method has been refuted by the Chapman brothers, Michael Landy and Tracy Emin, for example.

desire for order and organisation lead to an intricate, idiosyncratic taxonomy of minerals, plants, birds, landscapes and objects of art and architecture. By mainstream contemporary scientific standards, this classification method is discredited, considered not sufficiently purified.<sup>29</sup> Ruskin frequently pays detailed attention to parts of nature standing in metonymically for the larger system, for example the drawing of a feather, or a stone – that these objects then emblematically stand in for flight,<sup>30</sup> mountains, the environment, and beyond is indicative of his faith in a cosmos. From a contemporary perspective this enmeshing of factual with the imagined is more poetry, more fiction than science – a belief rather than certainty.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The modernist obsession with purification is a concept that Latour deconstructs, thereby indirectly providing an argument for Ruskin's 'impure' or laterally connected way of thought (Latour, 1993 and 2004). Mabey's critique of Ruskin's 'flawed' taxonomy is more surprising (2010, p. 165): "No one today would pay much attention to this perverse strain in Ruskin's thinking." (Let's see...) In *Turned Out Nice Again* (2013), Mabey shows considerably more sympathy to Ruskin's interest in climate and weather – as psychopathological state of mind (a fellow sufferer of melancholia about the state of the world).

<sup>30</sup> See Ruskin's diagram entitled "Debris Curvature": Figure 1.

<sup>31</sup> In Foucault's terms, Ruskin's syntax is more utopia than heterotopia, as Ruskin searches for congruency and resorts to myth to allow for connection or relations. Yet Ruskin's taxonomy is also verging on the incomprehensible, at times so idiosyncratic that it becomes reminiscent of secret languages used by children (babble) and those deemed outside social norms. In *The Order of Things* (1994 [1966]) Foucault refers to Borges:

That passage from Borges kept me laughing a long time, though not without a certain uneasiness that I found hard to shake off. Perhaps because there arose in its wake the suspicion that there is a worse kind of disorder than that of the *incongruous*, the linking together of things that are inappropriate, I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of the *heteroclite*, and that word should be taken in its most literal, etymological sense: in such a state, things are "laid", "placed", "arranged" in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a common locus beneath them all. *Utopias* afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold, they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. *Heterotopias* are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this *and* that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy "syntax" in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to "hold together". This is why utopias permit fables and discourse: they run with the very grain of language and are part of the fundamental dimension of the *fabula*, heterotopias (such as those to be found so often in Borges) desiccate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of grammar at its source, they dissolve our myths and sterilize the lyricism of our sentences" (p. xix).

### *Expanded notions of drawing as text, touch, trace, movement*

Recognising affinities across contemporaries (such as Stifter), tracing connections with subsequent writers, thinkers, scientists and philosophers, leaving a trail projecting into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries... A connective trait is the method in which nature is contemplated and hence better understood. This paying respect (awe) and profession of love for nature is a conditional requirement that unites quite disparate positions in perspective and time across the sciences and the arts. What we value we do not wish to harm. Meditating on the nature of perceptive looking then leads to further reflection on how to try to maintain an ethical position when consuming nature.

Consumption has a negatively loaded image. It conjures the idea of waste, thoughtlessness and greed; gluttony. In the twentieth century we spoke of consumer society meaning a waste society, with critical positions like that of Vance Packard's *The Waste Makers* (1960) correlating immoral standards, waste and consumption. If consumption is ethically corrupt, but survival is only possible through consumption, than *reticent* consumption is perhaps the next best possibility to non-consumption, and withdrawal amounts to an aesthetic, ascetic and spiritual choice of life (Morton 2009, p. 110).

W. G. Sebald's dark reflective descriptions of landscapes, seashore and weather in *The Rings of Saturn* have provided me with an oblique contemporary perspective, as Sebald also makes withdrawal, silence and minimised consumption an ethical choice;<sup>32</sup> melancholia<sup>33</sup> becomes a form of aesthetic resistance as it slows down

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<sup>32</sup> The character of Major Le Strange in *The Rings of Saturn*, and his way of coping with the aftermath of witnessing the liberation of Bergen-Belsen through silent withdrawal, is somehow linked with



consumption. This slowing down is an important element to consider as part of the methods pursued when digesting (consuming) the ocular and kinaesthetic feast of sense impressions the natural world presents. Slowing down is enacted through deliberate exploration of physical space and time, the process of walking.

Walks in the most basic understanding of the word inform and form the research process of making sense of Ruskin's *theoria*. A broader understanding of walking as a form of tracing – since walking always requires physical body contact with the environment that is negotiated<sup>34</sup> – leads into an expanded understanding of drawing through the process of reading, enacting, performing and tracing. Strategies for drawing include touch and movement in space, drawing with pigments and water on surfaces in the wider public environment and in the private space of the studio.

The ambivalence of writing as *trait* and drawing as *trait* (Derrida 1993, p. 2)<sup>35</sup> allows me to consider my handwriting (the notes and annotations in my sketchbook and my journal that in equal measure contain graphic representation in symbols of representation and letters) as part of the larger drawing process. One of the roles such drawing performs is to digest, to transform my understanding of text distributed by others into a language of my own, my own babble that needs sufficient translation to become partly accessible to the viewer/reader.

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Ruskin's touching nature by not directly touching, the indirect qualities of explaining the possibility of touch through non-intervention.

<sup>33</sup> Dürer's engraving "Melencolia I" (1514) has become an allegorical figure for the weight of history and guilt, for unsurmountable complexities and a *condition of social malaise* to many artists. Günter Grass's method of drawing (2007) is both indebted to Ruskin and Bosch, as knowingly sexually explicit. It depicts the consumed and corrupted, but then inevitably so; post-war German art, literature and thought cannot sustain a faith in innocence.

<sup>34</sup> Gerry Davies alerted me to the relevance here of *Walk On – From Richard Long to Janet Cardiff – 40 Years of Art Walking* touring exhibition (2014–5) curated by Cynthia Morrison-Bell and Alistair Robinson.

<sup>35</sup> Derrida presents the "memory of the trait" as *origin* of drawing in his introductory paragraphs in *Memoirs of the Blind* (1993, pp. 2–3). More later.

## **Summer 2013      *Notes from the journal***

*Exercising my fingers I walk them across the page, marking the paper on my journey.*

*Walking my eyes across the maze of black symbols on a white page, letters become images in my head, and I envisage buildings, arches, mountains, moss, rocks, ridges, refuges, weeds, debris, litter, waste, islands, arms and angels. A passage.*

*As part of my method for this undertaking, a philosophical and practical investigation of drawing nature, walks are integral to my methods of research. Mostly local walks in County Down, at times extended further afield to passages across the Irish Sea to Scotland, and alongside the inland shore of Lough Strangford (a sea lough), became the gathering ground, material and imagined. Frequently the excursions would lead to epiphanic moments or encounters with nature: a rock pool with teeming life on a microscopic scale, the mathematically ordered beauty of a shell, a large piece of kelp torn from its anchorage by a violent storm; all such encounters become recorded in notebooks as graphic translations on paper.*

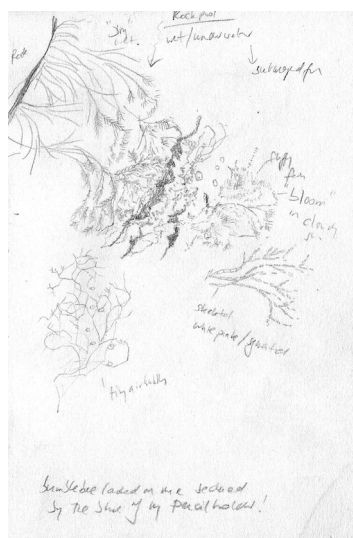


Figure 11 Doris Rohr (2013) *Marine Notebook 1: Observational drawings of rock pool in situ*, graphite on bound cartridge paper, 15 x 10.5 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.

*The field journal was supplemented by the gathering of objects to be taken home and drawn on larger scale. Fragments of nature are drawn with great care, transposed onto delicate supports like fragile Asian papers and interleaving papers used in bookbinding.*



*Figure 12 Doris Rohr (2013) Marine Notebook 1: Observational drawings of algae, graphite on bound cartridge paper, double page dimension 15 x 21 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.*

*Walks along the shore initiated questions about the rhythmic aspect of inter-tidal existence and led to visits to the Marine Laboratory in Portaferry, where I was given a short-term residency, and to Exploris Aquarium, featuring the unique eco-culture of Strangford Lough marine life. There I drew from tanks with sea anemones, small crabs, sea slugs and seaweeds, some of those propagated for scientific research into the potential economic benefits of algae cultures. Fish native to this area found their translations in a 15-metre drawing on lining paper exploring all these encounters, collected objects and notebook studies in a somewhat sequential order of a narration – a visual journal. I had read Rachel Carson’s *The Sea Around Us*, and her exploration of *The Edge of the Sea*, amazed that a scientist was capable of such poetic yet factual writing. It closed the gap between fictional and factitious writings,*

*inserting the category of mythological as one that can find truths both in fact and imagination. This tension between fact and fiction, truth or imagination, this polarity, informs this research on an intellectual level; it has become a subtext, a problem, and a stumbling stone. As it lies at the heart of Ruskin's writings, it confirmed my interest in his views on art, nature and society.*

*Experiential excursions to the shore became my method of investigation; walking, drawing and reflections resultant from reading and questioning the concepts of nature. The more Ruskin I read, the more relevant he became to my own way of working, of drawing, of looking, and of relating this literature and theories about 'Nature', even though the term seems contested, 'under erasure', and loaded with negative charge.<sup>36</sup> Inevitably, having spent many years reading Freud, I couldn't help but develop a psychoanalytically tainted view of Ruskin. Contemporary perspectives throw open a critique, an evaluation of what can be meaningful in Ruskin's work, and offer lasting or new possibilities of interaction with the environment, the social and natural world in which I live. Increasingly Ruskin emerged as ultra-contemporary, questioning the artifice of a gap between art and science and polarities informed by a falsely imposed ideology of modernity. The polarity and reduction of complex moral, aesthetic, libidinal relationships as expressed in classic Freudian psychoanalytic theory in turn became critiqued when reading Ruskin, his texts and his images offering complexities I did not want to reduce to a particular methodology, neither psychoanalytic, nor (post-)structuralist. Ruskin offers a holistic taxonomy, a world order, where all is connected, inorganic and organic, man-made and natural, human and beast, wild and cultivated. I noted my shared passion for the myopic gaze in*

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<sup>36</sup> Morton, 2009; Latour, 1993 and 2004.

*Ruskin and in Carson. An intuitive rather than fully rationalised understanding of Ruskin provided a larger system in which the small is incorporated.*

*This made me consider investigating French philosopher Bruno Latour and his critique of science and politics in relation to democracy. There is nothing myopic about Latour. He thinks in large interconnected abstract systems, stating that the social and the environment are interconnected, that human and non-human interact and are enmeshed. So Latour may well become the litmus test, the possibility of proving that Ruskin has contemporary relevance and can stand the test of time, that his legacy is of importance to contemporary culture, politics, the social and natural world. In Ruskin's own idiosyncratic way, this enmeshing takes particular aesthetic forms. Lars Spuybroek rather amusingly said that for Ruskin all things are plants, and so the taxonomy proposed in Proserpina is a botanic universe:*

To John Ruskin all things are plants, be they houses, women, carpets, city halls, church spires, paintings, countries or anything else – everything is immobile and flourishing at once. [...Such] is what we could perhaps call the wet, vegetal sublime, as an alternative to the dry, mineral one we have been acquainted with for the last two hundred years. (2011, p. 232)

## Chapter 2 Passage

*Ex passage (n.)* early 13c., "a road, passage"; late 13c., "action of passing", from Old French passage "mountain pass, passage" (11c.), from passer "to go by" (see *pass* (v.)). Meaning "corridor in a building" first recorded 1610s. Meaning "a portion of writing" is from 1610s, of music, from 1670s. [<http://www.etymonline.com>]

Walking is relational: my body connects with path, grass, sand. The world passes me at my own pace, is animated, flowing through me, below and above me, projecting infinite possibilities of three-dimensional orientation. Walking is a form of drawing with the body in space: performative drawing. This encounter with infinite spaces around me becomes more than perception, it transforms into *lived experience*.<sup>37</sup>

Distinctive moments, places and encounters connect with sensory perception.

Retrospectively, moments become remembered and anchored in a particular place, or a fragment standing in for place. Such anchor points then provide the departure point for translation and transformation: that of aesthetic processing. Drawing, writing, taking photographs – different ways of documenting moment and place – usually enshrine a subjective position, an emotional relation to this process. These days, taking a photo, sending this via a mobile apparatus to a friend, or sending a short text message often substitutes the methods used for recording in the past: the sketchbook, the camera and its predecessor the Claude glass, the journal and the notebook.

Collating such moments and places through subjective registration (making marks, writing, drawing, painting, scratching) goes hand in hand with gathering relics; a shell, a stone, a flower to press, a specimen marks the beginnings of a collection of material objects standing in for larger events and experiences. The pleasurable walk in

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<sup>37</sup> A point Edward S. Casey develops with reference to the German terms *Erlebnis* (living experience) versus *Erfahrung* (the 'already-elapsed experience' memorised) (in Feld/Basso 1997, p. 18). Casey contrasts phenomenological experience (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty) with Kant; however, Walter Benjamin also discusses the above terms, but privileges *Erfahrung* (Osborne and Charles, 2013).

the fields or woods, often accompanied by some playful gathering of pebbles, fruit or flowers, is located in the ancient gatherer mentality, when roaming through the woods and fields necessitated foraging.

***Walking to gain insight; walking as aesthetic method***

The collection of natural objects, inanimate, dead or alive, has become the occupation of the naturalist, the fieldwork of botanist, geologist, marine biologist, and the like.

Walking can be classified – ambling, strolling, marching, mountaineering, working in the field; all are permutations of the body being in direct relationship to the surrounding spaces, of being self-motored.

Contemporary travel writer Robert Macfarlane explores such different types of walking in *The Old Ways* in relation to the Arabic term *sarha* (2013, p. 212). It originates from nomadic animal husbandry, when *sarha* was the term for letting the herd roam freely. With changes in lifestyle, *sarha* became indicative of leisure, of letting the feet loose, “without constraint or fixed plan”. Walking as aesthetic mode is a by-product of such leisure. However, *sarha* is connected with the sacred and the pilgrimage. When looking for an equivalent term in English, Macfarlane offers “saunter” derived from *à la sainte terre*. The search for spiritual enlightenment becomes the aim of apparently non-directed nomadic wandering.

For Ruskin, walking was a necessary habit *and* luxury (due to his relatively privileged background, it certainly did not form part of a daily routine of manual labour). Other forms of mechanical transport were limited and would never fully replace the necessity of pedestrian exploration. During the nineteenth century, many areas of the world remained uncharted or incompletely mapped. Such mapping of the remote alpine mountains is the occupation of Heinrich, the hero of the aforementioned novel

*Der Nachsommer* (Stifter, 1857). The idealistic character of Heinrich bears uncanny parallels to Ruskin.<sup>38</sup> Fictional Heinrich – like the real Ruskin, the son of a merchant – occupies himself with geological interests as a way of finding a purpose to his quasi-gentlemanly upbringing. The excursions into the Alps and the act of mapping (drawing and diagrams for Ruskin) remain for Heinrich a backdrop to the more important pursuit of learning to understand nature. The meaning of nature extends into the social, moral and aesthetic and slowly grows to envelope vernacular customs and buildings, architecture, decoration, the beauty of artefacts and historical remains of historic substance, in particular those of medieval churches. Historicism feeds into the aesthetic re-evaluation of the arts in an age where industrialisation and the rise of the merchant class rapidly changed the social landscape of Austria and the Habsburg Empire, as it had already done in England with the Industrial Revolution. Heinrich organises expeditions into the mountains, so he can collect, chart and classify his findings and systemise the topographical knowledge into maps. Knowledge had to be gained through physical exertion, and then subjected to become part of a higher system – the taxonomy of nature. As no taxonomy is free from ideological subtext, moral values are inserted throughout the novel's progression.

The walking excursion provided the framework for Victorian plant hunters well into Edwardian times (George Forrest and Frank Kingdon-Ward, for example), and it continues to be an important scientific method in the form of fieldwork nowadays. But Ruskin was neither plant hunter nor mapmaker. The purpose of Ruskin's *fieldwork*

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<sup>38</sup> Hunt (1986) creates a more class-conscious picture of Ruskin's childhood than Stifter fictionally provides for Heinrich. However, in real life Stifter was always struggling financially. The enlightened status of poet-educator remained an unfulfilled fantasy in his own life due to lack of status or sufficiently remunerated patronage (Sebald, 2009). Ruskin was sent to Oxford to fulfil a typical middle-class aspiration: that a good education would pave the way for an increase in social status. Ruskin's father wanted him to be a poet, his mother a cleric – in some ways Ruskin (dis)satisfied both by becoming a preacher on art, nature and social conditions.



was not defined through a single-minded or discipline-bound pursuit. Ruskin indulged in walking as a means of gathering knowledge for comprehensive ideas. The type of walking he engages with comes much closer to the Arabic term *sarha* Macfarlane speaks of above. This way of gathering knowledge is not achieved through focused direction but by allowing peripheral lateral distraction, a process enabling creativity.

In his biography of Ruskin's life, John Dixon Hunt describes how the customary family walk affirmed "Ruskin's lifelong ability to profit by what lies to hand" (1982, p. 34). During a family outing the intention of a healthy quick stroll is thwarted when the whole family is increasingly absorbed by encounters with "objects such as the white major convolvulus in the hedges [...] the sparkling rivulets and winding rivers all combined their forces to make them walk slowly," just as Ruskin observed (ibid, p. 34). This preference for the absorption of detail led to a lifelong preoccupation with the partial and fragmentary, with the aesthetic mode of the picturesque (ibid, p. 34; Spuybroek 2011, p. 207).

The picturesque is the art of things that are under way, that is, on the way in or on the way out being either assembled or disassembled. It is the art of the object being overwhelmed by time, and it is this vulnerability, this fragility, that so immediately gains our sympathy (Spuybroek 2011, p. 208).

This attraction to the fragmentary suited the mind of a person who "was liable also to neglect whole or finished work in preference for intensely registered fragments" (Hunt 1982, p. 41). Not telling the whole story, but leaving enough room for the imagination to fill in the lacking contexts – thereby operating on a poetic level of metonymy<sup>39</sup> – is a method Ruskin advocates for the student in drawing, as the law of mystery: "the law, namely, that nothing is ever seen perfectly, but only by fragments, and under

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<sup>39</sup> Keith Hanley in Wheeler (1995, pp. 10–37) refers to Ruskin's habitual use of metonymy when reading climate and weather conditions – this is of relevance again in Chapter 5.

various conditions of obscurity” (Letter II “Sketching from Nature”, *Works XV*, p.120).

It might be considered the privilege of poetry and art to represent experience of nature through metonymy, but philosopher of science Alfred North Whitehead assures us that it is *also* a scientific mode. In “The Origins of Modern Science” (Whitehead 1925), the way of making experience present through the partial is considered a scientific method. Believing in an underlying order of things where the fragment finds its proper place amounts to a faith in ordered nature, and establishing the probability of such order is the origin of scientific quest:

This faith cannot be justified by any inductive generalisation. It springs from direct inspection of the nature of things as disclosed in our own immediate experience. [...] To experience this faith is to know that in being ourselves we are more than ourselves: to know that our experience, dim and fragmentary as it is, yet sounds the utmost depths of reality: to know that detached details merely to be themselves demand that they should find themselves in a *system of things*: to know that this system includes the harmony of logical rationality, and the harmony of aesthetic achievement: to know that, while the harmony of logic lies upon the universe as an iron necessity, the *aesthetic harmony* stands before it as a living ideal moulding the general flux in its broken progress towards finer, subtler issues. (Whitehead 1925, p. 18, my emphasis)

Walking as aesthetic search, as spiritual or scientific quest for knowledge, walking of that digressive type, as was Ruskin’s privilege,<sup>40</sup> continues to be a chosen modus operandi for artists, writers, thinkers, saints or whatever these day’s prophets may be. Perhaps the word *outsider* captures most of these, but leaves the question of what and who is on the *inside*. Macfarlane attests to this, as his *raison d’être* appears to be

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<sup>40</sup> Hunt (1986, p. 130) quotes from a letter written by Ruskin in 1844. Here Ruskin evidently is distracted by the beauty of the light and so goes for a walk rather than finishes ‘his pamphlet’ (presumably *Modern Painters I* as first draft): “On Monday we went to Chamonix and on Tuesday I got up at four in the morning, expecting to have finished my pamphlet by eight, I set to work, but the red light came on the Dome du Gouté – I could not sit it – and went out for a walk. Wednesday the same thing happened, and I put off my pamphlet till I should get a wet day.”

walking his self out into the unpopulated worlds of landscape to reflect back the sublimation of the experience to his passive readers. Walking as a method of gaining aesthetic insight requires a concoction of real and imagined audiences or spectators, internalisation of outside as introspection. Inside and outside as categories become increasingly less helpful as the membrane is perforated and malleable. This enmeshing or intertextual weaving of active/passive, in- and outside, internalisation and publication is intrinsic to the creative process.

W. G. Sebald also explores walking as aesthetic meditation in *The Rings of Saturn*. Here and in his collection of critical literary essays in *A Place in a Country* (2014) walking is the thread motif in an otherwise eclectic mixture of musings on writers exiled or self-exiled, locked in their mental prisons. A walk along the Norfolk and Suffolk coast becomes the means for Sebald to explore memory, history and ecology. In *A Place in the Country* Sebald compares and contrasts exiled French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's walks at his temporary refuge Île Saint-Pierre in Switzerland<sup>41</sup> with the walks of Austrian novelist Robert Walser, another solitary walker, the "clairvoyant of the small", whose refuge – writing – became submerged in a tidal rise of madness. Walking and writing are interlocked refuges, mental spaces; the performed physicality of the walk part-releases the mind. There is obvious affinity between Sebald's own journey on foot and those of the writers he portrays in *Logis*. The long line of loners and solitary walkers – Jean-Jacques Rousseau, W. G. Sebald, Robert Macfarlane, John Ruskin – is joined by biologist Rachel Carson and land artists Richard Long and Hamish Fulton; all these disparate characters are connected

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<sup>41</sup> Ruskin refers to this island as "Rousseau's island" in *Works III* (1903, p. 504). [Diary entry Geneva, 21st April morning]: "The sunlight falls from the cypresses of Rousseau's island straight towards the bridge..." Ruskin uses an excerpt from his diary to illustrate how local colour of water is dependent on the reflected shadows of surrounding objects, often at considerable distance.

with the mode of walking as aesthetic experience,<sup>42</sup> as a form of practice liberating space in the head, as means for creative inspiration, a form of perpetuating and making tolerable self-exile in all its melancholic lonely format.

Walking as a form of drawing has turned into a conceptual art practice – a performance – from the early 1960s onwards. The likes of Richard Long, Hamish Fulton and to some extent also the US American land artist Robert Smithson would have taken recourse to walking, exploring the large canvas of the environment. Presumably less ‘culturally confined’, to paraphrase Robert Smithson’s infamous 1972 rant against the ‘warden-curators’ in charge of cultural institutions (“Cultural Confinement” in Flam, 1996), the outdoors (temporarily) liberated the artist from a problematic relationship with institutional settings for the arts. Smithson took recourse to flying over the landscape, adopting a panoptical gaze in preference to the terrestrial perspectives of Long and Fulton.

### *Metaphorical walks on paper, in space, in the mind*

What happens if we go walking on paper, in the mind, scratching our mental and physical journeys into material substance? Richard Long would have tried to close this gap between physical motion, performance and making a mark on a ground.<sup>43</sup> Macfarlane (2013) talks about the crofter who through daily gestures marks the stony landscape. A path. A way so subtly moulded from its own ground that it is barely recognisable to the uninitiated eye. This Macfarlane compares to Richard Long’s acts of walking, a ritualistic performance: a marked and drawn space. A drawing in the

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<sup>42</sup> Casey and Davies (2014) explore this affinity and interrelationship between walking and drawing in relationship to Ruskin. I am indebted to the material presented in the “Walking the Line” symposium I was invited to attend as a research student on 2nd July 2013 at The Peter Scott Gallery, Lancaster. Further details can be found at <http://drawing-walkingtheline.blogspot.co.uk/>

<sup>43</sup> A Line Made by Walking (Long, 1967).

expanded field. Embodied. When walking becomes drawing a zone has been entered that is neither/nor. Such transitory zones are attractive. So walk skips into mark, fugitiveness and impermanence, ephemerality the only lasting characteristic.

Drawing is a form of moving on the comparatively less expansive location of paper (or other) as an exploration of physical touch, frequently mediated through an inscribing instrument. This holds also for writing, putting symbols (alphabetic scripts, non-alphabetic scripts) onto paper or other inscribable surfaces.

In my own native language, German, the term drawing translates as ‘zeichnen’ and thereby invites the analogy to *Zeichen* (a sign). All these become etymologically related: *Zeichnen* (to draw), *ziehen* (to drag), *Zug* (train, draught), *Rückzug*: withdrawal, retreat (literally meaning to draw back) – and what else is drawing but going back over what has already been perceived?<sup>44</sup> Many of the aspects mentioned above, the walk as means of processing aesthetically, and such translation mechanisms as a drawing, are intimately connected linguistically. The eremitic withdrawal into the creative space becomes a retreat, a monastic shell, an island, Diogenes’s barrel.<sup>45</sup> Not that all drawing, nor all creative processes require such solitude. It would be digressive to expand into theories of creativity here, but this self-isolatory form of practice underpins my own way of working; if situated in the classroom, the student of drawing has to mentally shut off from social interaction in order to fully concentrate on perception and translation of the objects of study. This relates to the initial proposition that drawing acts as ‘deeper looking’, as a research method indebted to Ruskin, who encourages the serious learner in *The Elements of*

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<sup>44</sup> Compare with Derrida (1993, p. 3), cited at the end of the introduction.

<sup>45</sup> “For Diogenes of Sinope, self-sufficiency was of utmost importance and went hand in hand with his notion of a rational being in reason that is symbiotic with nature. The civilized world is a constructed apparatus that is artificial—getting back to nature, being guided by nature qua reason, is the way through life.” <http://www.egs.edu/library/diogenes-of-sinope/biography/>

*Drawing* to practise in order to understand nature better,<sup>46</sup> to gain insight into the arts, but cautions against the inflated idea that this will make the student of drawing an *artist*.

The detailed drawings and engravings of the German Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer explore drawing as form of illustration, as a means of designing and exploring ideas, as a belief system hovering between faith in underlying divine order, and an emergent empiricism. Drawing then performed both roles, that of science and that of envisioning the divine through finding universal harmonious laws. In Dürer's time the worlds of art and science began to follow different trajectories, but were still intimately linked; in Ruskin's time the rift, the gap or *Riß* threatened to become unbridgeable. J. Hillis Miller (1992) points out the connection between drawing and the German word *reißen*, as drawing in Dürer's time was called. This would have been carried out with an inscribing tool (engraving of wood and metal, or silverpoint, alongside other drawing media). But *Riß* also means tear, and so acts as a metaphorical concept of division, of a no-longer-possible unity of belief and knowledge, the questioning of a unifying concept of truth. Drawing through inscribing and delineating, and as a method of translating sensory manifestations of the natural world, becomes a tool to address underlying philosophical concerns about fragmented and torn-apart ideas about nature. Ruskin is marking the residue of his walks as passages, as a transaction of signs, as a graphic script – a journey on paper:

Ruskin makes the distinction [of word and image] problematic by relating both words and pictures to the primordial material act of scratching a surface to make it a sign. That

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<sup>46</sup> “For I am nearly convinced that, when once we see keenly enough, there is very little difficulty in drawing what we see; but even supposing that this difficulty be still great, I believe that the sight is a more important thing than the drawing; and I would rather teach drawing that my pupils learn to love Nature, than teach the looking at Nature that they may learn to draw” (Preface to *The Elements of Drawing* [1857], in *Works* XV, p. 13).

sign, Ruskin suggests, is always a miniature maze and is always connected to its context by labyrinthine lines of filiation. [...] For Ruskin, not only are signs always both verbal and pictorial, but also any configuration of signs has a temporal and narrative dimension. To trace out a sign is to tell a story. (Miller 1992, p. 75)<sup>47</sup>

Walking as a reprieve from whatever burdens the mind and existence, a temporary release from melancholia, from being chased by real or imagined demons. Macfarlane introduces Palestinian inhabitant Raja, whom he met when walking in Palestine (2013).<sup>48</sup> Sebald muses about the unbearable weight of history and human cruelty in its broken relationship to nature. Ruskin searches for beauty and moral integrity in the face of industrial whole-sale exploitation of nature and humanity, and – perhaps I project – the ability to forget the self for a short while. Walking can become “an explicitly political act and walking [...] a means of resistance” and at the same time “the means for inner voyages, and the passage through landscape” (Macfarlane 2013, p. 212), as each journey becomes intimately linked with special remembered moments, “a way to join events up into stories” (ibid, p. 221).

### ***Fractious passages***

All passages are transitive. They connect time and place with memory, connect action with environment, land, water, or in between; they can be on paper, on foot, in the mind; they may be experienced, invented, erased or half-remembered, leaving a residue in the subconscious. The fragments are noted in the journal, akin to a book of hours. A passage in time and space across the page becomes transformed into graphic

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<sup>47</sup> Hunt’s view on this is that Ruskin’s complex text/image relationship was the result of “the dilemmas of his own constantly developing theories and the various purposes for which he drew. Sketches were memoranda to be used – for engraving or verbal translation – in projected work, but they were also produced by one who still had ambitions as an artist, though gradually dissatisfied with routine picturesque manoeuvres” (1986, p. 154).

<sup>48</sup> Compare here also Colm Toibin’s illustrated essay *Walking the Border* between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland during the 1980s, when the border was armed and policed. Walking will always be a political matter as it is about ownership and access to land.

marks. The status of ambivalence (neither water, nor land, or both, at times) becomes the leitmotif: constant reorganisation and permutation. The rhythm of water eddies, of wave patterns, of low and high, spring and neap tides leaving a temporary imprint.

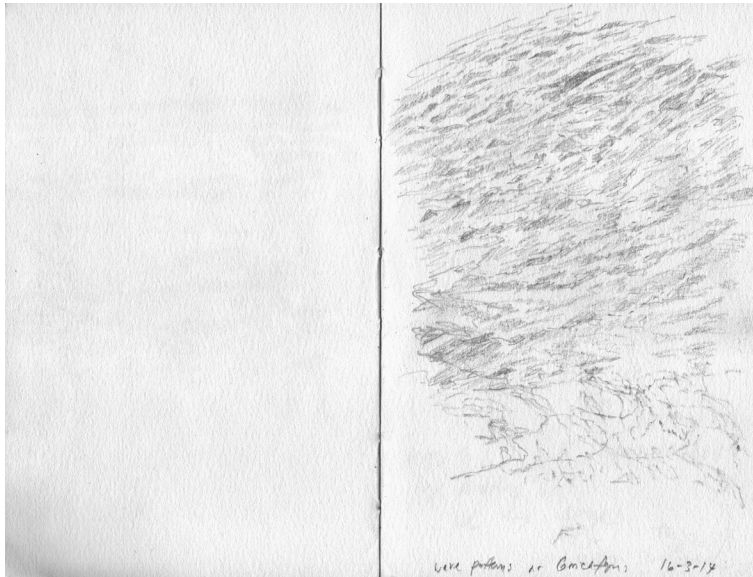


Figure 13 Doris Rohr (2014) Detail from *Marine Scroll I: 'Fundsachen'*, wave patterns observed from passage Belfast to Cairnryan, graphite on lining paper, overall dimensions of *Marine Scroll I* 56 x 1500 cm, detail a c. 40 x 45 cm. © Doris Rohr. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge

“[...] or the precision and grace of the sea wave, so exquisitely modelled, though so mockingly transient – so mountainous in its form, yet so cloudlike in its motion...”  
(Ruskin, *Works III*, p. 495)

What is the ‘edge of the sea’ but a fictive concept? As the sea has no hard edge, she is transformative, constantly changing, rhythmic yet unpredictable. Even the surface patterns of waves are constantly varied, and do not repeat. I noted this when drawing the surface of the Irish Sea during a ferry crossing from Belfast to Cairnryan in Scotland. Reading Ruskin’s comprehensive notes on the *Truth of Water* in *Modern Painters I (Section V)*,<sup>49</sup> I felt a sense of *déjà vu*. *Of Truth of Water* describes in Ruskinian breadth the various formations of water; still, moving, breaking, refracting.

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<sup>49</sup> § 16 “Necessity of watchfulness, as well as of science” (*Works III* 1903, p. 508).



He insists that there can be no shortcuts, no trickery to resort to for an artist looking for truth, who must observe and fail rather than resort to formula. *Of Truth of Water* emphasises the importance of observation as vision, rather than optical knowledge.

### ***Fractious form***

Ruskin animates water, giving it a mythological presence, even personal qualities, describing its characteristics in terms of “weight and wildness”: “this hopeless abandonment of its ponderous power to the air” in regard to wild water, a stream, a river running nearly out of control. Ruskin describes water as “the most beautiful series of inorganic forms which nature can possibly produce [...] every motion of the torrent is united, and all its curves are modifications of beautiful line” (*Works III* 1903, p. 556).<sup>50</sup> Quotations such as this also draw attention to an implicit desire for perfect social organisation early on in Ruskin’s writing. Ruskin refers to the “crystalline”<sup>51</sup> quality of pattern in sea waves and that of the “mountain torrent” (*ibid.*, pp. 556–7, incl. fn). Spuybroek explores further. “I think pattern is not an index of order but the expression of transfiguration. *It is all in the passage*. Pattern is something that *occurs*, not something that is” (2011, p. 100, my emphasis). Spuybroek explains here that pattern in nature never copies itself, that there is endless variation, and he links this with his reading of Ruskin: as pattern has to arise from natural texture, in turn texture has to arise out of the structure of being, of life forms, or organisms, or matter which is in flux.<sup>52</sup> Waves share this characteristic with mountains

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<sup>50</sup> Further references to wildness of sea waves breaking in *Works III* 1903, p. 559 ff (§29).

<sup>51</sup> See also: “like the hollows of mighty waves of some crystalline sea” (*Works III* 1903, p. 279).

<sup>52</sup> “Ruskin shows time after time in *Modern Painters* that only gradations and variations exist, that is, gradations not only of hue and brightness but of dimensions themselves. Texture occurs – I will continue to describe it as an event – when enough lines combine to produce a surface, as when fibres nest and entangle, or when surfaces start to produce lines, such as ripples on water or cracks in drying mud. It seems that only the in-between of line and surface truly exist – all that is not Euclidean – and the infinite dimensions are just illusory stations in active zones of transition” (Spuybroek 2011, p. 83).

and clouds. Mountains as bare as the Alpine peaks with their exposed rock and glaciers are structurally similar to the intertidal desert, as both evoke a primeval state of elementary creation, seemingly barren of vegetation and habitation. For Ruskin mountains are no inanimate matter; the irregularly surfaced Matterhorn has arisen out of its own geological formation, and such variation within repetition, or uniformity with differentials, has to inform our thinking of surface as integral to structure. The Matterhorn has become the frozen surface of the sea, a dramatic wave crystallised into sculpture.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Spuybroek raises the idea that structure for Ruskin has become inverted, pushed inside-out, and is transforming – reconcilable with contemporary fractals (2011, pp. 81–83).

## *10th May 2014 Notes from the journal*

### *Groomsport*

*Tern Island, no more than a bare rise of sea floor, is fully occupied. Constant zirring and harping. The sound of gulls interleaving. Much débâcle. This is an important breeding ground for terns, so one is told by way of notice board. While walking the path to Ballyholme, these thoughts: In rainy weather the seam between horizon and sea, between sky and land, or heaven and earth temporarily vanishes. Tides remove pathways and their demarcation – man-made, beast-made, shaped by wind, rain and waves, irrespective of their authorship. The sea, this great expanse of water, makes oblivious. The mystic writing pad<sup>54</sup> of nature becomes replenished, ready to newly reveal the traces of a retiring tide. This liminality becomes an overriding motif. ‘Things’ permute, shift shape, and what once had an appearance is now utterly transformed, disguised, or becomes another. This shift of meanings of possible interpretations holds reciprocity and rhythmical repetition, but also irreversible change. It has something to do with the impossibility of repeating time or pattern.*

*In the marginal flotsam and jetsam,<sup>55</sup> to find both the immaterial and substantial, real and imagined. The walk becomes a search, at times a deliberate form of looking for*

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<sup>54</sup> The mystic writing pad is a tablet for making drawings or notes on, which then can be erased when mechanically wiped with a slider. Sigmund Freud (1925) used this instrument as an example, as it provides an analogy to the process of remembering and forgetting, and repression into the unconscious. Traces of the writing remain in the fabric of the pad. I am drawing the analogy to the sea as an enormous wiping tool through the tidal sliding of the water, where marks left during low tide become erased. This, as a poetic reference to superhuman time and processes of ‘remembering’ and ‘forgetting’ intrinsic to the sea as a metaphor for the cosmic unconscious, or meta-memory. This is also connected to the idea that genetic traces become ‘remembered’ in species through DNA. The sea as origin and source for life is a theme Rachel Carson explores in *The Sea Around Us* (1953).

<sup>55</sup> Flotsam is debris unintentionally or accidentally lost; jetsam is waste deliberately thrown overboard or discarded, washed up by the sea. <http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/flotsam-jetsam.html> (Accessed 9th June 2014).

*objects to collect, and with the collection comes the recollection, a remembrance of things past (see Proust, see Benjamin). This act of collecting, both physical and metaphysical, leads to taxonomy. The collection of moments becomes inscribed. Arrested. Invested. A retold tale, a chronology, a narrative. Each journey leaves a trace, to become washed away by the next tide. Memory and forgetting, absence and presence, land and water, and the transience between such: an interdependent rhythm of necessary co-existence for survival. A search for balance.*

### Chapter 3 Border Crossings

Now the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, with a divine wind seeping over the waters (Genesis 1, Verse 2).

It had been wild weather when I left Rome, and all across the Campagna the clouds were sweeping in sulphurous blue, with a clap of thunder or two, and breaking gleams of sun along the Claudian aqueduct, lighting up the infinity of its arches like the bridge of chaos [...] and over all, the multitudinous bars of amber and rose, the sacred clouds that have no darkness, and only exist to illumine, were seen in fathomless intervals between the solemn and orbed repose of the stone pines, passing to lose themselves in the last, white, blinding lustre of the measureless line where the Campagna melted in the blaze of the sea. (Ruskin, *Works III*, pp. 278–280)

*Sometimes sea, sometimes land*; such is the description of the Broomway by contemporary travel writer Robert Macfarlane. The Broomway is an intertidal passage from the east coast of England to the island of Foulness. The walk leads to the unknown and unfamiliar; a primeval space, barely undifferentiated, as sea becomes land, and water becomes sky. “We lack,” Macfarlane expands, “– we need – a term for those places where one experiences a ‘transition’ from a known landscape [...] [to] somewhere we feel and think significantly differently. I have for some time been imagining such transitions as ‘border crossings’” (2013, p. 78). Not confined to extraordinary settings, this can be found “even in familiar landscapes” (ibid). Such places, thus made unfamiliar, jolt us from complacency. Macfarlane calls this desire for out-of-placeness a ‘xenotopia’ (ibid).

When I looked back, the coastline was all but imperceptible, and it was apparent that our footprints had been erased behind us, and so we splashed tracelessly on out to the tidal limit. It felt at that moment unarguable that a horizon line might exert as potent a pull upon the mind as a mountain’s summit. (ibid, p. 80)

Macfarlane (ibid, pp. 261–286) is describing a transcendental experience, typified in the archetypal holy landscapes of desert and of mountain and exemplified by the

Tibetan holy mountain, Minya Konka. “We want the pure and holy hills, treated as a link between heaven and earth,” says Ruskin in *Modern Painters I* when sermonising about the *Truth of Earth* (*Works III*, pp. 425–493). Ruskin’s holy mountain, the Matterhorn, fulfils in MacFarlane’s view “a Platonic vision of a mountain, a dream of what one should resemble”. This he likens to “stepping into a fable or an epic poem”. Macfarlane proceeds to quote Ruskin: “The effect of this strange Matterhorn upon the imagination is indeed so great, that even the gravest philosophers cannot resist it” (Ruskin cited in Macfarlane 2013, p. 273). Lars Spuybroek (2011, p. 79) interprets Ruskin’s fascination with the Matterhorn differently: as a concern with infinite fracture and variation, a theme to return to later in relation to entropy. Both interpretations are conceivable, since for Ruskin mountains provided both “gloom” and “glory”, form and fracture, reflecting to no small degree the subjective state of mind he projected onto the landscape and its inhabitants (*Works* 1904, Chapters XIX and XX).

### ***Formlessness and infinity***

Earlier in *Modern Painters IV*, Ruskin re-traces his steps and adds that before exploring further the topic of mountains, one needs to think about pre-creation in its state of formlessness. In Chapter VI “The Firmament”, in the description of the second day of creation in Genesis, Ruskin argues that the reader must not be content to let mystery be, as it requires further analysis (*Works VI*, p. 106). Here the first mention of ‘Heaven’ is noted as significant. Ruskin then conveys that in English there is no strong sense of identity associated with the biblical term ‘firmament’, with the result that it has become obscure and conflated with the idea of Heaven. Ruskin employs characteristic attention to detail when exercising linguistic analysis of biblical verse:

God said, Let there be an expansion in the midst of the waters, and God called the expansion Heaven. [...] We have next to ask what expansion there is, between two waters, describable by the term Heaven? (ibid, p. 107).

Throughout the following paragraph Ruskin concludes that this expanse can only mean the formation of cloud, as cloud is a gathering of water in different physical form to that of the ocean below; he differentiates “water in its collective and tangible state from water in its divided and aerial state; or the waters which *fall* and *flow*, from those which *rise* and *float*” (ibid, p. 108; Ruskin’s emphasis). Because it is apparent that Ruskin the drawer and observer was as fascinated with infinite matter, with patterns prescribing form but evading consistency, as was Ruskin the writer and sermoniser. Hence so much time is spent describing the sheer impossibility of rendering truthful water, waves, clouds, and fractious mineral or mountain in drawing and painting. But truth must be desired when producing the visual imperfections to best attempt. A theological examination of God (not) revealing himself in the shape (or rather non-shape) of clouds follows; this provides cross-references to various books of the Old Testament, with two further New Testament references: one the revelation of Jesus on Mount Sinai (Matthew 24, Verse 30), the other from Revelation (Chapter 1, Verse 7).<sup>56</sup> One needs to keep in mind this subject of formlessness as preconditional to creation, when considering the ideas of ideal form, beauty, fragmentation,<sup>57</sup> destruction, and chaos in their apparently opposing orientations, a *chiaroscuro* of dark and light Ruskin continued to struggle with.

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<sup>56</sup> Fitch (1982, pp. 151, 263, 306–7), for example, referring to Ruskin’s association of “darkness” with Revelation. Cosgrove (in Wheeler, 1995) refers to the angels in Revelation blowing trumpets from the four corners of the world, holding back the winds (“the breath of the world”) to ensure that “the saved will be marked before the opening of the Seventh Seal” (ibid, p. 84, with reference to Revelation 7:1).

<sup>57</sup> So for example, later in Chapter XIV Ruskin proceeds to bestow divine organisation of form to the apparently senseless destruction of mountain rock: “She [Nature] is here driven to make fractured the law of being [...] She is bound to produce a form, admirable to human beings, by continual breaking

## *Origins*

A mythological reading of nature also underpins the writing of scientist Rachel Carson: government-employed biologist, self-elected writer on nature, and patron saint of ecology. In Carson's popular writing her vocabulary is poetic, making frequent recourse to mythology, evoking concepts of 'beyond human' time, of creation, awe, wonder and miraculous encounters, traditionally relegated to the realm of the 'soft knowledge' of artists, poets or composers. Carson's poetic phrases instil aesthetic considerations into natural history. Her considerable talent for couching dry, scientific subject matter into accessible and beautifully written prose has been eclipsed by her reputation as proto-ecologist successfully effecting political change. In *Silent Spring* (first published 1962), she laid bare the deathly effect of organochlorine insecticides and pesticides on biodiversity, providing an incisive critique of intensive farming techniques' domination of US farming. *Silent Spring* is widely accepted to have caused a U-turn by the United States government, leading to the ban on the use of DDT as an agricultural pesticide in the US (Zichella 2012). Carson's lesser-known book *The Edge of the Sea* (1955) reveals a sense of childlike wonder about the microcosmic world of the rock pool. This resonates with Ruskin's eye for detail, who in turn has educated my own way of looking, translated into drawings of small marine organisms and their environments from the north Down shores. Ruskin's moss on rock had found a marine equivalent in the rock pool. Another world in miniature.

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away of substance." (*Works VI*, p. 240), cp. also Ch XVIII § 26 on mountain decay providing a wider range of meaning (*Works*, pp. 382–384).





Figure 14 Doris Rohr (2013) *Marine Notebook 2: Beadlet anemone (Actinia equina)*, watercolour over graphite on cartridge paper, page size 29 x 41 cm. © Doris Rohr. Private Collection.

When drawing these marine organisms, Ruskin's search for origins of creation in the microcosm of rock on moss manifested itself in another setting, that of the rock pool. In their ambiguity of form, of states – of withdrawn existence during low tide and floral exuberance when submerged, alternating periods of protracted reclusiveness with searching for nourishment, confusing in their taxonomy, classed as marine beast – the sea anemones revealed the wonder of creation perfectly. Observing and drawing their movements and forms connected Ruskin's awe for creation with Carson's.



Figure 15: Doris Rohr (2013) *Marine Notebook 2*: Various sea anemone species and limpet, graphite and watercolour on cartridge paper, 29 x 41 cm. Collection of the artist.

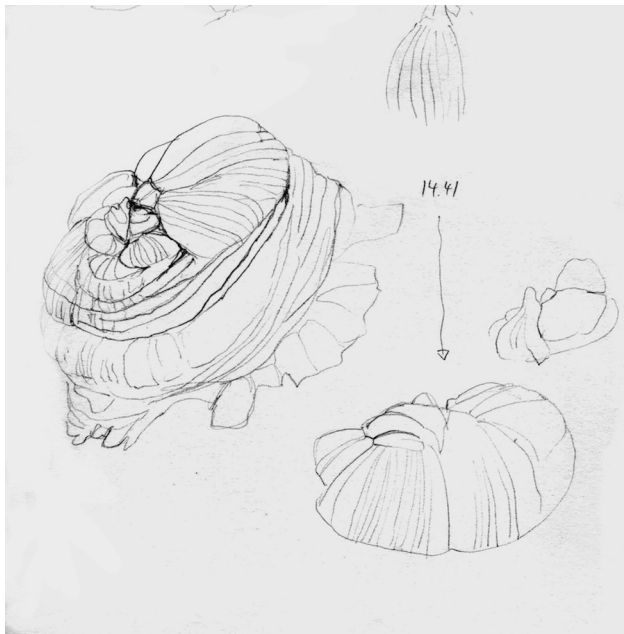


Figure 16 Doris Rohr (2013) *Marine Notebook 2*: Plume anemone in various resting states over the period of several hours (*Mitridia senile*), graphite on cartridge paper, detail c. 20 x 20 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.

### *Mythologies of origins*

In *The Sea Around Us* (1951), Carson considers how formlessness turns into matter, combined with a mythical account of creation: reading each day of creation as a unit of unquantifiable time-lapse, divine creation in Genesis begins with formlessness. Then light separates from its *other*, darkness. Water as the shape of formlessness – *the deep* is a term Carson frequently resorts to. Such quasi-mythical explanations of creation are normally divorced from factual accounts in other scientific literature, but not with Carson.

The division of science from religion, morals and aesthetics was the result of the age of individualism, according to philosopher of science Alfred North Whitehead. Epitomised by Descartes’s dualism of mind and body, this becomes the point of departure from the medieval system of thought (Whitehead 1925, pp. 195–196).<sup>58</sup> The gap widens in successive centuries and becomes an unbridgeable rift in the nineteenth century. By then, “when the urbanisation of the western world was entering upon its state of rapid development” (ibid, p. 196), aesthetics had become devalued. We continue to suffer from the divorce of aesthetics from morality and society (ibid, p. 185).

Ruskin had felt this rift acutely, and it continues to resurface in contemporary philosophical literature. Integrating science with morality and social values is at the

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<sup>58</sup> “What he [Descartes] did, was first to concentrate upon his own conscious experiences, as being facts within the independent world of his own mentality. He was led to speculate in this way by the current emphasis upon the individual value of his total self. He implicitly transformed this emergent individual value, inherent in the very fact of his own reality, into a private world of passions, or modes, of independent substance” (Whitehead 1925, p. 195).

core of Bruno Latour's *Politics of Nature* (2004), which has its foundation in his critique of modernity, which has divided the cosmos into a hierarchical relationship of humans to the non-human world.<sup>59</sup> Latour uses the myth of Plato's cave as a starting point for a radical critique of how science has been split from society and democracy – modernity has privileged scientists as the 'chosen' few to gather knowledge of reality, to report back to the slaves in the cave: the people. The 'chosen ones' interpret reality in their role of fact-givers, as scientists. As a result mankind has become separated from nature, the reality outside the cave. *The Fall from Paradise* is related to Plato's cave. Overcoming doctrines of original sin, Ruskin unravels *The Fall* as the event where man became separated from knowledge, falling out of sympathy with nature.

Ruskin was brought up to enter the clerical profession, or such was his mother's wish. Grounded in the doctrines of biblical creation from early childhood, he nevertheless became interested in the natural sciences.<sup>60</sup> Geology promoted his interest in scientific excursions into the mountains, leaving the lasting legacy of a fascination with inert matter that he weaves into his later writings on moral aesthetics (*Theoria*), as evident in *Modern Painters IV*. The nineteenth century's tensions between geological finds, in particular fossil finds, and religious doctrine have been well documented (Fuller 1988,<sup>61</sup> Hewison 1976, Fowles 1969, Hunt 1982). The resultant arguments about

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<sup>59</sup> The role of aesthetics and art is, however, marginal and subsidiary in Latour's parliament of nature, which means to bring into dialogue science, politics, economics, philosophy and democracy. Like law, the arts are "less implicated, so to speak, in the question of nature than science, politics, or morality." This "in spite of its [art's] importance in the formation of the tasks of the collective..." (Latour 2004, p. 273); a contestable point.

<sup>60</sup> Cosgrove and Thornes reiterate that Ruskin's mother's evangelical influence (if not indoctrination) left a deep imprint on his reading of landscape as moral – "a form of biblical exegesis, learned from his mother" (1981, p. 24).

<sup>61</sup> "At first", when Ruskin was a child, so Fuller explains, he "believed that God's revelation of himself in the scriptures, science as a means of studying nature, and art as a product of the human imagination, were relatively separate activities" (Fuller 1988, p. 33). "I never thought of nature as God's work, but as

religious truth versus scientific truth became a major preoccupation, especially when fossil finds challenged accepted biblical accounts. Findings of extinct generations of previous life forms were considered a blasphemy, presenting a universe seemingly abandoned by God.<sup>62</sup> Art critic Peter Fuller points out the closeness of Ruskin's views to those of geologist Adam Sedgwick, who regarded geology as natural religion, where scientific accounts of nature served as a manifestation of divine providence. Sedgwick maintained that the "external world proved the existence of God in two ways": "by addressing the imagination, and by informing reason" (Sedgwick in Fuller 1988, p. 43).<sup>63</sup> "Sedgwick's view was that this *imaginative* response to nature led to awareness of God, just as much as a rational or scientific response" (ibid).

### ***Re-integrating science with art***

When Whitehead published a series of lectures during the first quarter of the twentieth century, he scrutinised further the relationship between imagination, faith and science. Whitehead argues that instead of perpetuating the incompatibility of art and science, a holistic mutual engagement with both is a necessary requirement to be able to influence "the future course of history" (Whitehead 1925, p. 181). As incompatibilities have existed since time's beginnings, Whitehead maintains, instead of overly dwelling upon which has the greater truths to reveal, such "clashes" should be used as an intellectual opportunity to find "wider truths and finer perspectives

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a separate fact or existence" (Ruskin, *Works* V, quoted in Fuller 1988, p. 33). However, with adulthood Ruskin's position changed, and nature became "God's second book, a locus of divine revelation" (ibid). Fuller considers this consistent with prevalent ideas of natural theology in Britain at the time.

<sup>62</sup> Presumably Ruskin's mother's reaction to the discovery of fossils of extinct species was not untypical. Hunt describes her recounting Buckland's theories in a worried letter to her husband, "that animals had died before the fall of man" (1986, p. 86), evidently concerned about the potentially disastrous effect of such thoughts on their son John. John James Ruskin displays a more relaxed paternal attitude: "I don't think those monsters that John has crawling on a sheet of paper look like accountable Beings." (Hunt quotes from correspondence as edited by Van Akin Burd (1973) *The Ruskin Family Letters* Cornell University Press.)

<sup>63</sup> Fuller's reference is: Sedgwick, Adam (1969 [1833]) *A Discourse on the Studies of the University*, Leicester: Victorian Library (p. 17).

within which a reconciliation of a deeper religion and a more subtle science will be found” (ibid, p. 185). The divorce of science from religion had the result that observation and understanding of the mechanics of nature became unaccountable to morality. But as these are complementary, they need to be regarded in a much more integrative way. Whitehead presents an apparent clash of truths and values as an *opportunity*: “In formal logic, a contradiction is a signal of a defeat: but in the evolution of real knowledge it marks the first step in progress towards a victory” (ibid, p. 187).<sup>64</sup>

Ruskin was on the frontline of such seismic tensions and regarded it his vocation to create a holistic moral-scientific-aesthetic theory. His interpretation of *Paradise Lost* is a theme weaving in and out of his writings and drawings. It informs Ruskin’s reading of landscape as mythical.<sup>65</sup> Hunt argues persuasively that Ruskin’s search for *Paradise Lost* informed his preoccupation with the picturesque from his early student years onwards: the fragmentary ‘ruin’, left over from *The Fall*, is a significant component of his aesthetic model (Hunt 1986, p. 52, 91, 197).

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<sup>64</sup> This has ramifications in the value attributed to imagination by mathematician Alessio Corti in Gemma Anderson’s project of morphology (“Cornwall Morphology and Drawing Centre” in Ionascu/Rohr (2015)).

<sup>65</sup> It also is a key to Ruskin’s understanding of nature – an inclusive system in which living organic and inorganic matter co-exist in some form of balanced interaction. (Cp. Whitehead 1925, pp. 111–112 and p. 205 on symbiotic relationships and organisms, and Spuybroek (2011) on cooperation and sympathy in biology).

**13th/14th September 2014**      **Notes from the journal**

*I am gazing upon the surface of the sea and marvel at the complexity of that outer skin of the sea, that membrane-like oily shiny reflective, incessantly wriggling surface of the sea. All I want is to go below the surface and become part of it, immersed, to be on eye level with the cormorants, to negotiate rocks, algae and jellyfish in this liquid substance which suspends my gravity.*

*In Helen's Bay the cormorants spread their wings on the shore islands next to the disused boathouse of an adjacent manor house. The sand here consists of roughly ground shells, and within the broken fragments I can find exquisite small shells, some with serrated lips, some tubular and snail-like, each composed with Fibonacci's mathematical precision. I pocket the miniscule examples for home, so that they can find their way into a drawing. I long to swim, and resolve to return on Sunday.*

*Sunday noon the beach is busy for a cloudy day, and I dislike intensely the exhibitionist aspect of swimming in an area where most people exercise their dogs, walk their children in prams, and where joggers and cyclists come to work out. I never see anyone swim here, yet allegedly Helen's Bay's pure water quality is classed as excellent, and swimming is cited as a leisure activity in the literature available on the Internet. I had consulted the tidal timetable, as the incoming tide is the safest time to swim and also the warmest, exposed sand storing the heat of the sun. When I reach the rocky outcrops of the smaller, less popular beach, the sky is opaque and overcast, the sand is cool, but the water feels warmer than the air. The water is shallow all over the beach, and even when I swim out further ahead towards the cormorant's island, I never lose touch with occasional outcrops and seaweed. Reversing a section of a*

*swim's length tells me the strength of the current. Wave motion is gentle and there is little disturbance. I glide on my back and watch a gull swooping in circles, enacting some form of assessment process of me: a strange object in the sea. I enjoy the changed vantage point – instead of my looking at a gull, it is looking at me, down on me, topographically (bringing to mind Lacan's sardine can).<sup>66</sup> The cormorants are in the line of my vision, at the same level, if not slightly elevated. The water is cloudy, so opening my eyes under water does not reveal anything. After ten minutes or so I return to the shore, change into dry clothes and with shivering, blood-drained hands holding a thermos mug with tea, I continue to take in the scene. A dog approaches me with the nose and I return the greeting with a friendly caress of the area above the nose, the spot many animals like best to be touched. Sebald caressed the pig just there in The Rings of Saturn, making it sigh from unfamiliar pleasure. I once caressed a cockatoo in that same place above the beak. In Exploris, Portaferry's marine aquarium, the tame rays in the teaching pools are used to educate children to gently touch the rays below their eyes, provided this is done in direction of the skin's fibres, not against, when they are razor sharp. I sense that fish are underestimated for their emotional capacities. If one could include all into sympathy... where would that lead?*

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<sup>66</sup> Lacan uses the sardine can as an example to illustrate the complexities of looking and being looked at. It is a fisherman's story. Resembling in style the narration techniques of parables in the four synoptic Gospels, Lacan (1978) narrates an event where a fisherman (Petit-Jean) points out a floating sardine can in the sea, with the comment that it didn't look back at him. Lacan disagrees. Josefina Ayerza succinctly sums up the 'politic' of the gaze in her web article: (<http://www.lacan.com/lacinkIX0.htm>) "The subject that is an object, that is the gaze, is outside: you are looked at, you are the picture. Lacan's sardine-tin story throws light on the issue of the 'all-seen' subject, now splitting in search of itself, now diving, now reduced to zero."



## Chapter 4 Taxonomy

### *Mythos, Chronos*

Myth structures formlessness. Myths of origin, like that of *Genesis*, impose order through time. The possibility of time is invented and becomes imbued with origin (*Chronos*). Myths intuit laws of causation. Time, according to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, is a necessary consequence to a temporary difference in energy. While in the First Law of Thermodynamics energy remains constant or “symmetric under all transformations”, in the Second Law “whenever energy distribution is out of equilibrium” energy seeks to dissipate and return to equilibrium. The Second Law introduces a space-time dynamic to the state of being (Archives of Science, 2001).<sup>67</sup>

A creative force subdivides the unnameable and unformed<sup>68</sup> into structures, organisms, layers of being. In *Genesis* this happens through constant differentiation processes. Land and sea, heaven and earth, flying and swimming creatures, plants and animals, all such emerge as large categories. *Being* (here defined as presentness, as actuality) becomes divided, sub-divided, classified: there has to be an order. Tiered layers impose a hierarchy in which the human being is customarily situated at the top, whereas the base is a multiplicity of potentialities in their undifferentiated form.

Cellular systems organise themselves (or who or what does otherwise?), endowed with some irreducible calculus, a perpetual interest in evolving (vitalism, perhaps?).<sup>69</sup>

This ‘driving force’ points towards the necessity of mystery: not to be able to explain

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<sup>67</sup> “So whereas the first law expresses that which remains the same, or is time-symmetric, in all real-world processes the second law expresses that which changes and motivates the change, the fundamental time-asymmetry, in all real-world process”(Swenson in *Archives of Science*, 2001).

<sup>68</sup> Why *matter* might be a word better avoided: Matt Strassler (2012).

<sup>69</sup> Spuybroek (2011, p. 14, pp. 68–69) positions God as beginning or end point; further on he suggests that vitalism has replaced a transcendent God (ibid, pp. 269–282).

everything, which leaves room for imagination, is considered the prerogative of fiction and artistry. Evolutionary accounts of the development of life forms, the kingdoms of plants and animals (and less easily categorisable with in-between forms like fungi, lichen and mosses), inform the *Chronos* of taxonomy: evolutionary chronology.<sup>70</sup> Scientific taxonomies tend to turn into systems reflecting social organisation – social organisation cannot be fully divided from scientific models of organisations of life, as culture, politics and society reflect and inflect onto scientific thought and models. Separating these artificially is subscribing to another myth (Latour, 2004).

Ruskin's taxonomy of plants (*Proserpina*) is influenced by Linnaeus, yet proposes a wider network of correlations. Beyond observable traits of appearance, involving analysis of form as structure through drawing and writing, Ruskin exposes other qualities connected with (non-chronological) mythical space.<sup>71</sup> Other qualities involve anthropomorphic readings on moral grounds and spiritual readings on theological grounds – a search for origin and return of life. Ruskin is unable to agree with emerging theories of evolutionary and genetic plant science, as these ideas of natural

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<sup>70</sup> “[T]he myth of Chronos is called a *phēmē* (“oracle”, “tradition”, “rumour”) in Plato’s *Laws* (713c2)” Partenie, Catalin (2014). *The Historical Dictionary of Ancient Greek Philosophy* defines the “age of Kronos” as “an age of innocence. Where people are directly supervised by God”, whereas “we are in the age of Zeus, where human beings supervise other human beings” (Sharbrough, 2015). David Auerbach (2013) proposes that Kronus and Chronus have become commonly (con)fused: “It is easy to confuse the Greek god of time, Chronos (Χρόνος), with Zeus’ Titan father, Kronos (Κρόνος). So easy, in fact, that the conflation has been made for over two thousand years. The Greeks conflated them regularly, at least according to Plutarch. The Romans then coopted Kronos into the form of Saturn, who later became known as Father Time and the god of time. To make things even more confusing, sometime in the late Roman Empire, Saturn was then conflated with the Greek concept of *kairos*, which designates a pregnant or opportune “special” time. *Kairos* is somewhat opposed to *chronos*, which signifies day-to-day time in general. Chronos is the quotidian, the recurrent, the passing of the years, while *kairos* is the moment, the event, the suspension of the normal. But both were piled onto Saturn over the centuries”.

<sup>71</sup> This brings to mind medieval techniques of representing a sequence of events in a composite and circular fashion (continuous narrative, an event), distinct from sequential narration techniques (plot, development, a beginning and an end).

procreation and development are too purposeful, because such readings impoverish nature.<sup>72</sup>

David Carroll regards Ruskin as “one of the great Victorian systematisers in an age of comprehensive, at times eccentric, system-making”:

His distinctiveness is that he combined the system-making and the scepticism in a more volatile mixture than the others<sup>73</sup> so that much of the fascination of his writing comes from the way in which he repeatedly puts at risk his own dogmatic categorising. (Carroll in Wheeler 1995, p. 58)

Certainly Ruskin’s taxonomy of ‘Nature’ is not reducible to plants: *Proserpina* is a fragment of a much larger system. Ruskin’s taxonomy includes natural and man-made ornament, painting, the arts and architecture (emblematic of social structure).

Architectural order becomes subjugated to a value system, for example the arch and its subdivisions into Lombard, Italian, Roman, Byzantine, Gothic, Arabic and Moorish in *The Stones of Venice* (*Works IX*, p. 159 ff). Plants, animals, and their depiction as ornament (*Works IX*, pp. 265–6) are subjected to a holistic taxonomy in which Ruskin offers the reader a means of assessing goodness, what is of good quality and beautiful. Morally good *and* beautiful because unpretentious and honest, fulfilling its function but offering more than that (as an emphasis on function alone would be a heartless universe to Ruskin), demonstrating, by necessity *imperfectly*, a higher order. One is not entitled to judge the force behind it, the unexplainable or divine, but Ruskin encourages us to assess the human creative mind in relation to it. Architecture becomes a testing ground to assess virtue. In good architecture we assess the quality

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<sup>72</sup> Ruskin rejected Darwinist theory on the grounds of it being utilitarian and materialist, both incompatible with Ruskin’s morals (Cosgrove and Thornes 1981, p. 41).

<sup>73</sup> The others, according to Carroll (1995, p. 58) range from Comte’s positivism to Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*.

of mind of the architect, and so, congruently, the use of natural form demonstrates creativity, but we do not assess the aesthetic merit of 'Nature' per se.

*Chronos* (deified time) determines the flow of time from the general (undivided, essential) abstract or formless, to the formation of order (pattern / structures / crystallisation). Ruskin's *taxonomy of ornament* (*Works IX*, pp. 265–6) develops in the following order: 'abstract lines' are followed by forms of earth (crystals) and of water (waves), fire (flames and sun rays) and air (clouds). Having thus covered the four elements, Ruskin proceeds to organic form: shells, fish, reptiles, insects, and here unorthodoxly (more so by biblical, less so by evolutionary standards) he inserts 'vegetation', divided into 'stems and trunks' and 'foliage' to be followed by birds, and finally 'mammalian animals and man'. The marine precedes terrestrial life, and thereby Ruskin nods (an unwitting) approval to evolutionary theory. In evolution, the life forms of the sea appear first, and then life forms amphibian or hybrid, when liminal intertidal vegetation made possible further stages of terrestrial development (complex plant forms, mono- and dicotyledons, multi-cell organisms with digestive systems: animals, in short, including birds and mammals).

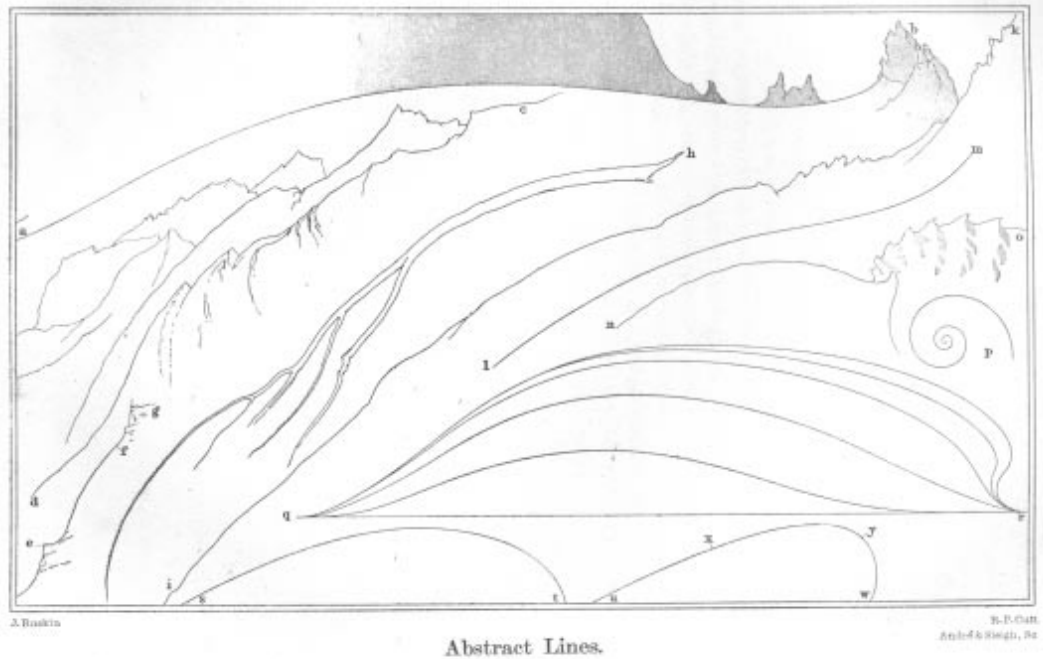


Figure 17 Ruskin, John (1903) *Abstract Lines (Stones of Venice Vol 1)* in *Works IX 1903*, fig. VII. © Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University).

Vitalism separates the animate from the inanimate (‘matter’), and thereby allows for creative force, for an unnameable quality to be in charge of life, but it also creates a dichotomy of non-living matter versus matter imbued with (divine) spirit.<sup>74</sup> Ruskin demonstrates lines of force in a diagram of a leaf in *The Stones of Venice* (Figure 17 line q-r) shows half of *Alisma plantago* on its side, in alignment with the contours of mountain ranges, other leaves and branches; for *Alisma*, see Figure 18 below). But he adds a point so far omitted: “that almost all those lines [as shown in the diagram] are expressive of action or *force* of some kind” (*Works* 1903 IX, p. 268). The leaf of a

<sup>74</sup> “Typically, vitalists reacted to perceived inadequacies of mechanistic explanations, in many cases they rightly recognized that the forms of mechanism, materialism or reductionism advocated by their contemporaries were undercut on empirical grounds” (Bechtel and Richardson, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> Fuller develops Ruskin’s obscure theological argument further. In *Proserpina*, Ruskin differentiates between *Apolline* and *Arethusan* leaf forms. The *Alisma* plant and leaf is unbranched in the organisation of the veins, whereas the elm leaf is branched. The *Alisma* leaf is *Arethusan*, the elm leaf is *Apolline*; the former is fed by dew as the leaf structure holds water more effectively, whereas the latter is fed by rain. This then links with *Deuteronomy*: “My doctrine shall drop as the rain; my speech shall distil as the dew: as the small rain upon the tender herb and as the showers upon the grass” (1988, p. 163).

plant becomes analysed and deconstructed. The underlying structure – parallel veins – gives rise to the association of river systems or irrigation originating in mythical Paradise or New Jerusalem. This signifies more than a one-dimensional account of function, the structure bears witness to and points towards a metaphorical origin: the Garden of Eden. Peter Fuller in *Theoria* (1988) offers comprehensive explanations of the connection of science and myth in Ruskin’s thinking system. Rivers, flowing water, and the organisation of monocotyledons (Ruskin’s *Alisma* plant in the diagram below clearly is one such, as all its veins are *unbranched*) are linked with the Bible (Jerusalem/Paradise) and with Greek mythology (Demeter/Proserpina) (Fuller 1988, p. 164).<sup>75</sup>

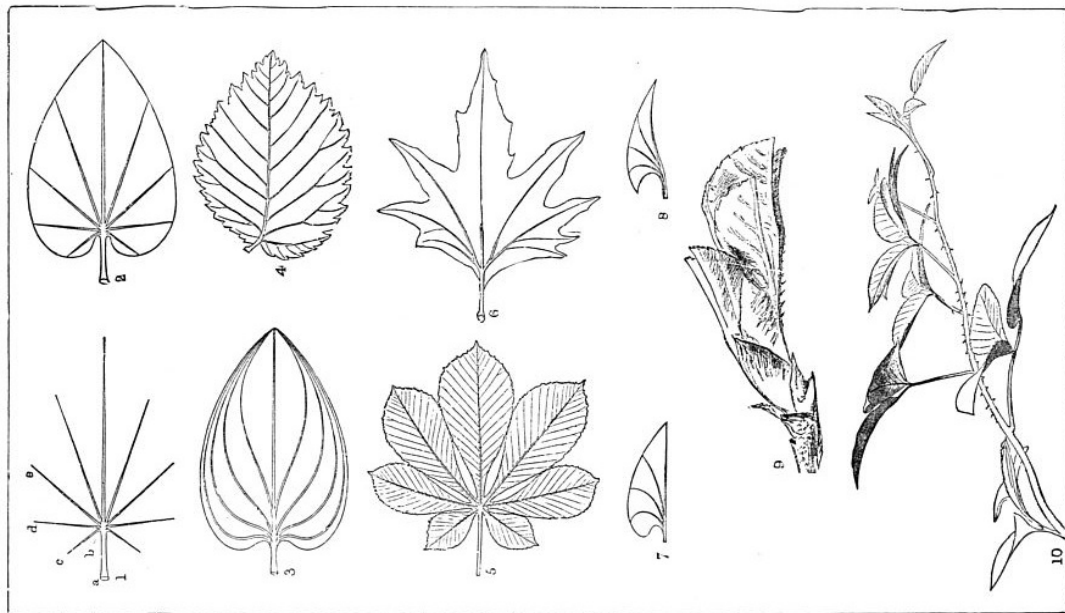


Figure 18 John Ruskin (1904) *The Growth Of Leaves in Modern Painters III Works V, Plate VIII*. © Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University).

Figure 18 (above) shows this type of unbranched leaf shape in numbers 1–3, 7, 8.

Other leaf types are referred to for comparison of force lines. Beyond appearance and

surface (the plant's aesthetic qualities),<sup>76</sup> Ruskin searches out the plant's habit, its character and characteristics, and associations with non-tangible moral qualities. This proves more valuable and more important than a system based on sexual affinities or preferences. Moreover, the linking of plant with myth, the animated quality of geology (the rock face) and of architectural drawings depicting ornamental mythical beasts give a sense that for Ruskin all was interconnected and alive,<sup>77</sup> part of a large breathing whole, some in states of dormancy perhaps, or hibernation, but waiting to be raised to life by the discerning observer of truth in nature – nature being *all* here: stone, animal, plant, capital, the writhing surface of the sea, the fractious skin of the mountain all concealing and revealing a sense of being. Such searches for wider truths, themes of life, death, social order, fate and humanity are frequently inserted in Ruskin's analysis of artefacts.<sup>78</sup> In a sense 'Nature's objects' are also pictures in an imaginary museum for Ruskin, or to reverse this argument on Spuybroek's lines: all artefacts are plants of sorts, as all things are plants for Ruskin.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Not so incongruous if one considers that Darwin acknowledged preferential selection of partners based on beauty rather than fitness for purpose, an argument Rothenberg (2011) presents with respect to Darwin.

<sup>77</sup> But does this make Ruskin a vitalist? Tentatively I would disagree, because I believe he does not separate the animate from the inanimate to the degree vitalism requires as a condition. For example moss and stone, the vitality of geology in relation to entropy, the animated quality of sculpture in *The Gryphon bearing the north Shaft of the west Entrance of the Duomo, Verona*, Ashmolean <http://ruskin.ashmolean.org/object/WA.RS.ED.082>. [accessed via <http://ruskin.ashmolean.org/collection/8979/object/13932>].

<sup>78</sup> For example, in *Modern Painters 1* Ruskin praises Turner's *Slave Ship* as the highest category of truth.

<sup>79</sup> Spuybroek (2011, p. 232).

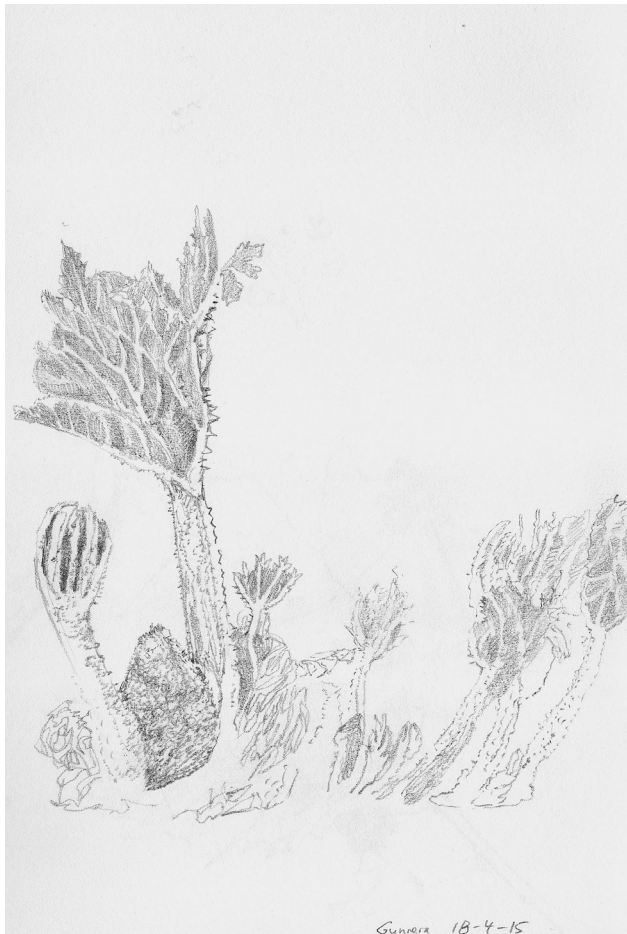


Figure 19: Doris Rohr (2015) Botanical notebook: *Gunnera* leaves emerging in spring in Bangor Walled Garden, pencil on paper, 22 x 15.5 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of artist.

*Emerging shoots of this Victorian introduction to stately gardens, with knobbly prickly stems, full of spring vitality and somewhat sexual connotations Ruskin might disapprove of. No mention of *Gunnera* in *Proserpina*, but cacti didn't do too well. One just imagines this is a plant Ruskin would not like to give prime place in his moral universe. Despite all my love for Ruskin, I tend to like the plants he dislikes most.*

### ***Sublimations: Eros, Thanatos***

Whereas Darwin subordinates beauty to sexual selection, for Ruskin the idea of sexuality is repressed. Sexual relationships remain non-consummated, so biographers maintain, in Ruskin's own personal life.<sup>80</sup> This is not untypical in the nineteenth

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<sup>80</sup> Andrew Ballantyne, as one of the most recent biographers of Ruskin's life, offers a sympathetic reading of Ruskin's personal life (2015). To present celibacy as a lifestyle 'choice' is viewing the matter from a contemporary angle, different to Victorian morals, but also set apart from the association of celibacy with priesthood. John Dixon Hunt (1982) goes into greater detail on Ruskin's non-consummated marriage. Raymond Fitch (1982) reads Ruskin's life and work partially through Jungian



century, it is also demonstrated in the highly organised kingdom of noble relationships in Adalbert Stifter's imagined world of the *Nachsommer* (1857). Both Stifter and Ruskin celebrate the Gothic style, and advocate the 'honesty' of the best examples. More so, a latently simmering critique of materialism acts as a backdrop to the proposed moral system of a universal taxonomy, 'natural' and social. The pursuit of holistic education (in avoidance of selfish gain) of a *studium generale* becomes a moral obligation (not subscribing to an education devoted to specialist knowledge of the sciences *or* the arts *or* the humanities).<sup>81</sup> Far from splitting nature from culture, Stifter and Ruskin are both adamant that the 'social-natural' can be given favourable conditions to exist in equilibrium, productive of the best (in the moral sense) of culture.<sup>82</sup> (Ruskin is more radical, however, in the way he points towards 'Nature's' ability to self-govern in the example of benign wildness).

For Ruskin, architecture is society's exoskeleton, a manifestation of human creativity:

For we have a worthier way of looking at human than at divine architecture; much of the value both of construction and decoration, in the edifices of men, depends upon our being led by the thing produced or adorned, to some contemplation of the powers of mind concerned in its creation or adornment. We are not so led by divine work, but are content to rest in the contemplation of the thing created. I wish the reader to note this especially; we take pleasure, or *should* take pleasure, in architectural construction

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psychoanalytic concepts, thereby essentialising and simultaneously generalising specific aspects of sexual repression.

<sup>81</sup> Stifter's protagonist Heinrich evades materialistic contamination through re-education by the arts and sciences studied and experienced in tandem with each other. Stifter's critique of materialism is immanent in the choices offered to the novel's hero being located in the pastoral, presented as Arcadia. Stifter advocates a moral choice of refusal of business, commerce, even of worldly success. He privileges the rural estate, managed with enlightened principles, the potential place for good governance, where the arts, agriculture as 'eco-system', estate management and social relationships are perfectly harmonious and therefore flourish. Sebald's fascination with remnant feudal estates in *The Rings of Saturn* might be indebted to this to some extent – after all, Sebald wrote a number of essays on Stifter (2012).

<sup>82</sup> Ruskin gives social conditions increasing consideration; initially indirectly voiced, when referencing benign systems of governance in relation to high-quality architecture (*The Stones of Venice*), this becomes explicit in his social writings (*Unto this Last*, 1860/2, *Fors Clavigera*, 1871–1884). Education is a 'remedy' both Stifter and Ruskin develop as a potential cure for the ills of the world. For Ruskin, the outlet becomes lecturing and the Guild of St George.

altogether as the manifestation of an admirable human intelligence; it is not the strength, not the size, not the finish of the work which we are to venerate: rocks are always stronger, mountains always larger, all natural objects more finished; but it is the intelligence and resolution of man in overcoming physical difficulty which are to be the source of our pleasure and subject of our praise. And again, in decoration or beauty, it is less the actual loveliness of the thing produced than the choice and invention concerned in the production, which are to delight us; the love and the thought of the workman more than his work; his work must always be imperfect, but his thoughts and affections may be true and deep. (Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*, in *Works IX* p. 64).

We must not judge a thing or a person by their works, but by their thoughts and degree of concentration and spiritual commitment. If work is analogous to fruit (fruits of labour), than the value of the work must not be reduced by judging the outcome over the architect's intentions. The virtues of architecture are two-fold: there is strength (good construction), which reflects on the capability of the builder, and there is beauty, good ornament and decoration, which also reflects on the builder, his mind and capability to love and express in ornament what he admires. As the taxonomy is one of nobility, of immortality, it is dependent on the degree of 'sanctification' (*Works IX* pp. 64–68). Ruskin does not regard the intelligence of nature as being subservient to man – on the contrary; in nature there is immanent intelligent design and feeling, whereas man's work can only be noble if it truthfully and honestly appreciates divine superiority.

And the right thing to be liked is God's work, which He made for our delight and contentment in this world. And all noble ornamentation is the expression of man's delight in God's work. So, then, these are the two virtues of building: first, the signs of man's own good work; secondly, the expression of man's delight in better work than his own. (*Works IX* p. 70)

Nature is a perfect system and the most intelligent design, woven through with passion and love. Hence man's design has to show "delight in better work than his own" and this bears an imprint in the architect's "own good work". Human work

needs to be sanctified to overcome baseness and brutality; ornament *becomes* nature-divine.<sup>83</sup> Ruskin's taxonomy encompasses structures, natural and man-made, as hybrid creations. Ruskin's 'Nature' is not distinctive from human action, nature is what is intelligently and lovingly designed.

Ruskin frequently acknowledges a divine mind or force in his writings,<sup>84</sup> but his belief system is one of adapting to a range of personal and environmental conditions influencing his theological/mythical orientation. And such change and shifts: fusing classical Greek myth with Christian, absorbing – at times contesting – newer developments in geology and biology, attempting to reconcile these with his own personal experiences in life.<sup>85</sup> Ruskin draws attention to the necessity to connect and emulate systems of natural order that are better, morally and structurally, than what imperfect man can achieve separated from 'Nature'. Further, natural order demands to remain sanctified, pure, unpolluted. David Carroll draws attention to the pathological fear of disorder through pollution as an act of unravelling that appears to contain an entropic dimension of relevance:

Ruskin was hypersensitive to the manner in which order and system is created out of disorder and heterogeneity; each act of ordering implies vividly for him both the chaos before creation and the cosmos called into being by the imagination brooding, like the Holy Spirit, over the waters on the first day of creation. As a result the moment in which forms becomes formlessness, or vice versa, is charged with great intensity (...) a characteristic motif in his writing [...] occurs when a scene of great natural beauty is found to be polluted by modern civilisation. These are moments when the divinely

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<sup>83</sup> Spuybroek (2011) makes a passionate plea on behalf of the humanising quality of ornament. He regards the censorship of beauty (ornament) in modernity a brutalising factor in the development of art and architecture. Spuybroek's critique of modernity bears witness to Ruskin's ongoing legacy.

<sup>84</sup> Ballantyne makes the point that Ruskin's devout Christian thoughts have frequently been ignored in the reappraisal of his work during the later part of the twentieth century. "When Ruskin's ideas are being rescued for modern students, this prayerful aspect of them tends to be sidelined, but it is at their core" (2015, p. 88).

<sup>85</sup> See Fitch (1982), Cosgrove (1981) and Ballantyne (2015).

created cosmos he has celebrated is threatened by the chaos he has always feared.  
(Carroll in Wheeler 1995, p. 60).

Ruskin demonstrates how life, nature and creation become associated with pollution, destruction and death. Freud and Ruskin are unlikely to share much commonality; nevertheless, they shared a love for classical mythology and the human knowledge and wisdom contained in the great poetic writings of Dante and Shakespeare. For neither does the separation of fact and fiction make sense. Freud's legacy to our time is that dreams, imaginations, fantasies, myths are as real – as truthful for their revelatory qualities about human desire – as an understanding of human nature as controlled and rational; Freud thereby provided insight into the motivations of an individual. Ruskin's intentions and directions differ completely, as he proposes a social-natural cosmos, inseparable from the necessity to scrutinise moral responsibility. Freud 'invents' subconscious drives; Ruskin is tortured by his 'superego' (unable to name it as such). Freud's understanding of 'Nature' is inseparable from human nature – in fact, environment has become subsumed into human nature; *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) leads into the abyss of the human psyche. For Ruskin, human nature is subsumed by the vast system of 'Nature', hence natural detail has to represent in part a larger ideal system; yet the abyss looms darkly due to human shortcoming ('fallen nature').

*The Fall* is invoked directly and indirectly, a legacy of Ruskin's upbringing, notions of original sin lurk in the background. Hence the privileging of flower over seed (*Proserpina*) as the flower symbolises innocence, non-corruption, not for purpose but for itself: "Remember that the most beautiful things in the world are the most useless; peacocks and lilies for instance..." writes Ruskin (*Works IX*, p. 72). This quality of beauty without purpose is exemplified by the lilies of the field, which become harbingers of humility rediscovered in the alpine meadows of wild grasses and

flowers. This is reminiscent of the moral quality of humble grass Ruskin refers to in “Of Medieval Landscape – First the Fields” in *Modern Painters III (Works V*, pp. 287–9).

Reading Ruskin through Freud, one might conclude that the trauma of sexual relationships becomes evident in the dislike of compromised (corrupted) natural form. This corruption is by association: what (subconsciously) reminds Ruskin of dysfunctional sexual, personal or social relationships becomes a blind spot, flawed nature or a flawed reading of nature.<sup>86</sup> Ruskin speaks:

[...] of the kind of degradation which takes place in the forms of flowers under more or less malefic influence, causing distortion and disguise of their floral structure. Thus it is not the normal character of a flower petal to have a cluster of bristles growing out of the middle of it, nor to be jagged at the edge into the likeness of a fanged fish’s jaw, nor to be swollen or pouted into the likeness of a diseased gland in an animal’s throat. A really uncorrupted flower suggests none but delightful images, and *is like nothing but itself*. (*Works XV*, p. 470; emphasis mine).

Death forms part of a larger cycle: as insomnia, as hibernation, as a winter’s rest, a seasonal decline. The monstrosity of forms evolved for survival purposes – the seedpod, the cavernous forms of digestive bladder and gut like plant adaption (the pitcher plant) – such designs of ‘survival’ become equally declared morally flawed. Ruskin firmly rebuts the scientific tendency to relate form to function, “the subject of the relation of colour in flowers, to insects – selective development...” (*Works XV* p. 263).

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<sup>86</sup> Compare here with Ballantyne’s interpretation of Ruskin’s marriage fiasco (2015, pp. 99–117). His reading avoids all sensationalism. Instead he unearths a range of complex factors which may well have undermined the relationship of Ruskin with Effie from the wedding day, not least due to Ruskin’s realisation that Effie’s affection had been ‘bought’. Noteworthy is Ballantyne’s translation of Ruskin’s term ‘sympathy’ with the psychoanalytic term ‘projection’ in this context (ibid, p. 108).

Freud's understanding of the psychosomatic evidently informs contemporary readings of Ruskin's drawings, but Freud's privileged reading of love as *eros* infers a subjugation of beauty to desire, sexual drive or *libido* that cannot be reconciled with Ruskin's ideal(ised) understanding of love (divine *agape*), repressed as it may be (one could also argue that Freud repressed *agape*).<sup>87</sup> Christopher Newall asks in the exhibition catalogue to *Ruskin: Artist and Observer* (2014):

Is it absurd to suggest that Ruskin, who had no experience of shared physical love, found himself subliminally attracted to the forms of rocks and ravines, which may have been in some way suggestive to him? Was his instinct to look deeply into and explore and have knowledge of these cavities a reflex led by anxieties and desires connected with his unconsummated marriage? (2014, p. 233).



Figure 20 John Ruskin (1849?) *Ravine at Maglans*, graphite, brown ink and ink wash heightened with bodycolour on white paper, 28 x 21.2 cm; © Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University).

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<sup>87</sup> Fitch exposes a wider proto-psychoanalytic dimension in Ruskin's thought in *The Poison Sky* (1982). To summarise: the dualism of *eros*/*thanatos* finds repercussions in conflicting motivations in Ruskin's work – oscillating between fear of destruction (chaos/fall/moral corruption) and faith in divine order (beauty/moral integrity/'Nature').



Figure 21 John Ruskin (prob. June 1873) *Moss and Wild Strawberry*, graphite and traces of bodycolour on grey-blue paper, mount 54.1 x 37.6 cm original, (WA.RS. REF.090) ©Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.

Again in Newall (2014), Ruskin's drawing of *Moss and Wild Strawberry* is annotated:

A drawing that once again seems extraordinarily suggestive of the contours and concealed part of a woman's body, and one in which the very scent of nature may be savoured, can surely be read as a sublimation of sexual feeling. (p. 256)

One can easily read *eros* into the drawing of *Moss and Wild Strawberry*, relate it to Courbet's *Origin of the World*, but how offensive such explicitness would be to Ruskin, and how problematic by contemporary standards (thanks to gender studies) would be such essentialising of female (or any) sexuality as 'Nature'. Refraining from doing so might as well be taken in Ruskin's favour; it certainly appears wise in hindsight.

Sexual repression or sublimation can take an entirely different meaning – that of immaculate conception – when considering that the strawberry leaf is the symbol of the Holy Trinity in medieval paintings, positioned as natural carpet to the feet of the Virgin Mary, the fruit of the berry signifying Mary’s mystical union with the Holy Spirit.<sup>88</sup> Ruskin’s delicate drawing of the wild moss with strawberry leaves therefore offers multiple readings. His subconscious motivations are a desire for a personal utopia, subsumed in a social one.<sup>89</sup>

*Moss and Wild Strawberry* might well be all of the following: sexual, descriptive, utopian, retrospective, inspective, medieval. Name it what you like, this is part of the astonishing appeal of Ruskin’s drawings, that they are both conservative and radical – both Albrecht Dürer and Michael Landy. Is this a marriage between sacred and profane, of entropy as Gaia? The above drawings, and the earlier reproduced *Study of a Piece of Brick, to Show Cleavage in Burnt Clay* (c. 1871), speak about a radical vision of governance, of complementary sense awareness, of a vision of a liberated paradise without original sin – as desired ideal. Because wildness is a social system for Ruskin, exemplified by the ‘parable’ of happy and distressed wildness.

This becomes clearer when comparing the *Piece of Brick* with *View of a Cliff-side with Buildings* (1861–3). It depicts an alpine cottage garden half torn away by a landslide, exposing the grotesque slide of the earth turning *The Good Garden* into undifferentiated brown slime, leaving as remnant the ruin of an apple orchard, a paradise torn into halves of destruction and cultivation. In Ruskin’s drawings, as much

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<sup>88</sup> For example, Oberrheinischer Meister, *Madonna in den Erdbeeren*, (c. 1425), Kunstmuseum Solothurn, <http://www.kunstmuseum-so.ch/sammlung/altmeistersammlung>

<sup>89</sup> Unconsummated eros in Ruskin’s work bears witness to his own complex relationship to female children – and to Effie, of course. Sebald offers a compassionate reading of celibacy in *Die Beschreibung des Unglücks* (2012). Fitch relates Freud and Jung to Ruskin in his introduction to *The Poison Sky* (1982). *Eros* may here also be regarded in a Platonic sense (Helm, 2013).



as in his writings, one can see preoccupations with his deeper fears, desires and unsolved issues and questions about the cosmos, the created and creative universe. Ruskin's method of looking is investigative (observational/empirical), deconstructive (partial to a larger system), and reconstructive (imaginative and prophetic). The handwritten graphite inscription "vines" (figure 22) confirms a sense of ravaged Eden, no longer the sacred *hortus conclusus* harbouring holy strawberries. This is nature distressed in all possible permutations one can imagine: private, public, mythological and ecological – the garden as ordered benign system has been disrupted by unexplainable violence. But one has to remember also that such acts were also prophecies, divine signs. The ambivalent relationship of Ruskin to chaos unleashed, the *Storm-Cloud*, is a theme to be further examined.



Figure 22: John Ruskin (1861–3) *View of a Cliff-side with Buildings*, watercolour over graphite on paper; 25.7 x 36.2 cm. Private Collection. Permission for reproduction given by DTT Works of Art Ltd.

Inscriptions: graphite, *espalier/ vines, grand [?] many [?] rock steps* reference to inscriptions from Newall (2014) Cat. No. 82, p. 253.

Ruskin muses about distressed nature and distressed wilderness when contemplating an untended (neglected) part of his own garden, where nature herself in all her “*free doing*” (*Works XV*, p. 298), was in need of “human help and interference in her business” to restore it to some order. Yet he marvels that there “was not one plant in the whole ruinous and deathful riot of the place, whose nature was not *in itself* wholesome and lovely; but all lost for want of discipline” (*Works XV*, p. 293; my emphasis.) The happier type of wilderness “composed itself”, without further human need for organisation, on top of fallen limestone. Ruskin illustrates this further with the example of Malham Cove: “there is a fair and perfect freedom, without a diseased bough, or an unwholesome shade” (*Works XV*, p. 293).

The parable of the good wilderness (moss aligned with strawberry) illustrates the kingdom of plants as benign social organisation. Similarly, Ruskin talks about the ‘fruit’ of the tree as *legacy*: the wood of a tree is the substance of creative beauty, hence a correct use of wood offers the potential to create *good* architecture. In chapter VIII “The Fourfold State” (*Works XV* pp. 499-512) Ruskin typically links botany with culture, spirituality and moral goodness. Here, knowledge of craftsmanship creates enduring structures. Medieval knowledge is deemed superior to that gained by industry’s machinery. The analogy of stem (wood) of the tree becomes subsumed in the noble purpose of the wood. The botany of stem leads to economy (good use of noble materials) serving a morally good society (*Works XV*, pp. 502–507).

Creation finds endless ways to evolve and adapt to the most hostile conditions; therefore, in the wider scheme of things (divine/spiritual), life will survive and find novel and marvellous forms of survival. This appears unduly optimistic – or should one say, it is a projection, a desire, a hope, rather than a fact or conviction. Ruskin’s dark side, expressed in thorny wilderness gone awry, stripped of its essential natural

goodness, becomes a stronger driving force for ideas of social and environmental reform. And it seems that Ruskin's legacy is most potent where he is darkest.

**29th/30th December 2014**

**Notes from the journal**

**Wintertoughts**

*It's hard to miss either dawn or dusk this time of the year. Catching the few hours of sunlight, if it doesn't rain. In these barren winter months one goes in search of tangible structures, something for the eye to hold on to. Taken in by the twisting of tree branches, all I want to draw is the complexity of these lines criss-crossing, making the empty spaces in between stand out, embroidered patches of sky. On a rare, clear frosty day, like yesterday, the impossible network of branches becomes flattened into readily graspable silhouette. The art of drawing is about learning to turn space into flatness, illusionistic or abstracted. I still flatten, a kind of imagined naturalist putting specimens into an archive or album. It doesn't really matter whether these specimens are fictitious.*

*During the winter months I try to beat the internal clock of the birds; I step outside and put food into their various feeding stations in my garden. Sometimes a robin or a tame female blackbird is there before me, in the early dusky hours, and sits motionless, waiting and watching, sometimes so close by that it takes me by surprise. Like yesterday morning, when walking up to the dustbins at the back of the shed, I had felt observed. Turning my head, a robin balanced a mere five inches away on the washing line.*

*This morning, waiting for the light to rise from the Castle Park over to the east, from the edge of my eye I watch through the window. Only then I hear some bird singing. Inside the house my pet finches are already up, they are early risers, oiling their little*

*finch trumpets. My other pet birds, the cockatiels, hang about lazily like sleep-drunk teenagers, stretching and grooming for perhaps half an hour before lifting off their perches.*

*This season I have been looking, searching, beyond the sea, for what frames it; in Carson's words, the edge of the sea. How the landscape brings together land, and intertidal spaces of sometimes water, sometimes rock or sand. I now see the ever-reflecting pattern of the waves wherever I look – in the sky, in cloud formations, even in the twisted branches of the trees. Unified by some underlying rhythm, a structure of mutability. Trying to draw waves appears as futile as drawing branches of a tree, or shapes of clouds. How Ruskin had the patience? As much as I love Lord Leighton's lemon tree,<sup>90</sup> it's not the answer.*

*In winter the landscape appears emptier. One notices flocks of geese, a murmuring of starlings – drawings in the sky. These swarms, congregations, murmurings – their waving rhythmic patterns as impossible to hold with pen or pencil as the pattern of waves. Last night I saw a gathering of oystercatchers lift from the ocean for a few inches, circulating over the surface of the sea in a long flapping procession, the white undersides of their wings optically blending with the upper black. What's the point of drawing such a ballet, likewise the acrobatics of the gulls?*

*The coastal path was frozen over – a rare occasion. Normally at dusk the path is sparsely populated, but today despite the ice it is more busy, with shovelling humans walking their more able-footed dogs. Mostly good-humoured kind warning words were exchanged ahead of slippery passages. In the sky hovered the bass drone of a*

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<sup>90</sup> During a visit to Capri in 1859 Lord Leighton completed a detailed drawing of a lemon tree over the period of a week, as an attempt to implement Ruskin's methods of drawing. Further information in "Unseen Drawings by Frederic, Lord Leighton, Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery" *Culture* 24 (2007).

*helicopter. This sound was my greeting sound on arrival in Ulster nearly ten years ago. Then, in the notorious month of July, helicopter surveillance was the norm. Most of this has changed for the better; so one hopes, is led to believe. All the more surprising, then, to listen to the familiar but forgotten sound, here at Strickland Bay, Bangor West. (Not a troubled area, if pondering over the affluence of the real estate here at Ulster's "gold coast".) But now, here, men in high visibility jackets were combing the shore. A coastguard vehicle inched its way along the path barely wide enough to accommodate its width. A pair of seals appeared directly beneath the searching helicopter, and for a while, watching the spectre of mutual interest, men eyeing up seals, and seals eyeing up the winged object in the sky, I wondered whether this was an end of the year ritual, an exercise. Eventually the helicopter withdrew and subsequently also the bobbing black bodies of the seals. The high visibility jackets continued to glow amongst the rocks, searching for someone, some body. An absence creating all this presence.*

*I sat down on a frosty bench overlooking the darkening sky, and drew the silhouette of the pine trees, at a loss of what to do, and feeling guilty about drawing trees, with this slow sad drama unfolding around me. The search party passed me, and one of them commended me on the drawing, saying how nice the landscape was, a fair-weather small talk, a fragment from a different time and place, absurdly collaged into the situation. I asked predictable questions in turn – whether there might be a chance of rescue, whether one could help somehow. Unlikelihood of rescue in these cold conditions was making the coastguard's task a futile act, at best a recovery of sorts, so I was told. Recovery. I mused about the meaning of this word on my way home, and the ethics of having to return to an ordered state of human rituals and structures for*

*the departed. An act of obedience. Cover, recover, uncover, what exactly? The despair of the missing?*

*The next morning the frost had gone. Bangor's mild coastal microclimate had returned, allowing tender plants to continue to find shelter in suburban gardens. That sense of absurdity, reversed into the normality of an Irish winter morning with clouds slowly moving to recover the brightness of a sunny day. My neighbour's curtains still drawn, I watch the banality of the 1940s terraced houses, the George Shaw-ness<sup>91</sup> about them, their comforting rows of Cordyline trees, with their lancet leaves surging at slow pace, anchored firmly to the soil of the front garden. A starling inspects a chimney pot opposite. Mostly this morning the birds fly from east to west, or left to right. I wonder why that is.*



*Figure 23 Doris Rohr (2015) section taken from Marine Scroll III 'Sinken', graphite on lining paper, overall dimension of scroll 56 x 1000 cm, detail 56 x 200 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the Artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*

*This sequence of drawing juxtaposes the bleak graphic patterns of deciduous winter trees with imagined and real encounters between wildlife and events in world history. During the period of making I became very involved with listening to Schubert's Winterreise. The subtext of melancholy, of unmet desire, of futility and thwarted aspirations weaves a substructure into the interpretation of nature.*

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<sup>91</sup> George Shaw, contemporary painter of mundane housing estates. See Douglas Hyde Gallery (2015).

## **Umber**

*The umber darkness of defiance is what remains of a blackbird, a female I found injured on the way home along the railway track. A commuter train just emptied out the ends of a working day, spilling it onto the platform. Keen to maintain my advance, I tried to rescue the injured bird in my jacket, abysmally failing, terrorising the creature further, and making passersby avert their eyes. The back of the bird was bloodstained, showing a deep wound; the bird's posture was that of a dead bird, or ossified, but the eye showed signs of life. When all commuters had passed I managed to wrap the bird in my fleece. I noticed her beak parting in self-defence. The nearest vet was still open, and when pushing the door open with my elbow, I noticed the concerned look of the receptionist with some relief. Wildlife rarely recovers in such situations, and man-handling drives wild birds sooner into death through shock. This dilemma an eternal one – should I have left the blackbird to her fate? The check-over determined that nothing was broken, but the wound was deep and gashing, and antibiotics would not prevent long-term infection, and only prolong agony and suffering. I was advised that it were best to 'let her go'. Reluctance and grief conflicting with what one might call being sensible, but the genuine concern of the vet took the upper hand. I looked into that fearless resigned umber eye, and when turning away, tears shot into mine.*

*I was thinking back to Ruskin's bedroom, there on top of Brantwood, his final home. The single bed struck me as humble, and the opened drawer revealing his christening robe made me think of Demeter, or Proserpina. After my father's death my mother took her part of the twin oak beds with her to her retirement flat, separating hers from the twin of my father's. Nowadays all beds are queen, or king-sized; as television sets*



*get larger and larger, houses, and even scones and muffins have grown bigger; it seems that we are slowly drowning in our own excess. Sometimes I imagine God having to remove the cling film from Planet Earth before devouring the remains.*

## Chapter 5 Contrails

Between the slashing hail squalls borrowed from Canada's winter, I kept an eye on the sky above the mountain, looking for contrails speeding far too fast against the sunrise (Michael Viney, *The Irish Times* Sat 7th March 2015).

Maverick ecologist and *Irish Times* nature column writer Michael Viney introduces contrails as a lead into discussing symptoms for climate change. Viney grazes over 'validated' science writing (academic reports) and coffee-table publications alike, and welcomes readers' observations, above which he presides with humour. All these different contributions aim to mediate the everyday engagement of humans with the wider environment, and reinforce the importance of mutual interdependence. Viney's columns are impeccably composed; they occupy the same line space, demonstrating the rigour of a near-identical column width and word count week by week. These mini-essays make sense without a dictionary and help readers to see environmental matters in a new light. Issues raised are rarely discussed in black and white terms. But in this particular article they are. Ice white and sea black. Announcing "The Perfect Storm", the title given to a one-day conference of the Irish Meteorological Society held on 28th March 2015 in the National Botanical Gardens Glasnevin, Dublin, Viney muses on the oxymoron of perfection in disaster. The conference's keynote speaker, Professor Jennifer Francis, links "rapid Arctic warming" with "weird extremes of weather in North America, Europe and Russia". This is Viney (paraphrasing Francis):

As white sea ice retreats in summer, for example, (by an extra 40 per cent in three decades) some 2 million sq km of dark ocean absorbs more of the sun's heat. Released back into the atmosphere in autumn, this has raised temperatures by 2–5 degrees C. As the high latitudes warm more than mid-latitudes, Dr Francis argues, the slackening difference between cold polar air and that from the south makes the waves of the jet stream not only deeper but moving eastwards more slowly, so that weather gets "stuck"

for longer periods, especially in autumn before Arctic sea ice freezes again. In her latest paper, published online last month in *Environmental Research Letters*, she warns that as the Arctic continues to warm faster than elsewhere in response to rising greenhouse gas, “the frequency of extreme weather events caused by persistent jet-stream patterns will increase” (Viney 2015).

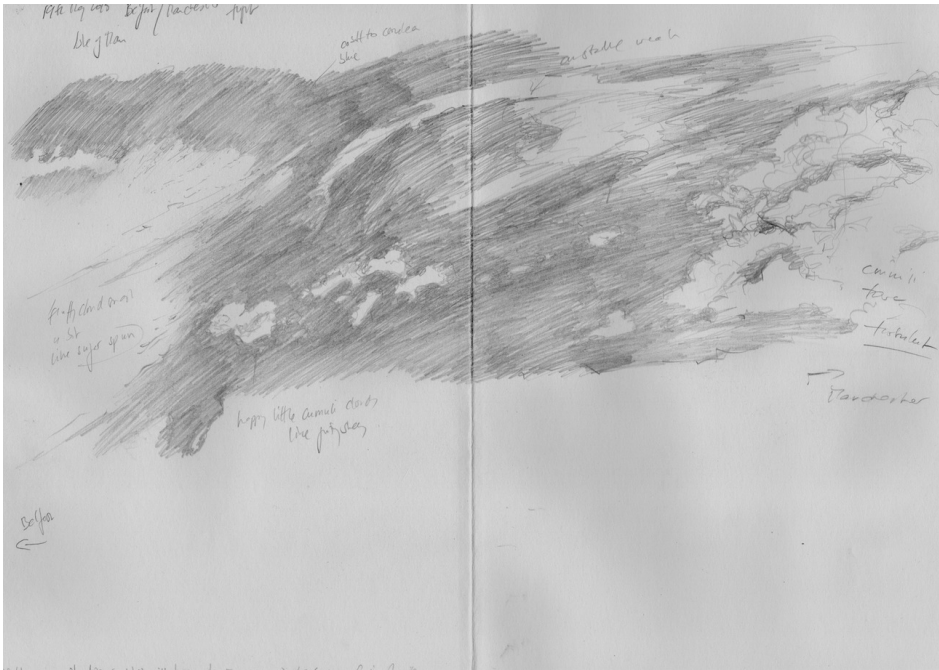


Figure 24 Doris Rohr (2015) *Concertina Sketchbook*: Cloud drawings from aeroplane journeys, graphite on cartridge paper. *Concertina* overall dimensions: 14.5 x 500 cm, detail 14.5 x 29 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.

### *Weather as metaphor*

Although weather is not controllable, it nevertheless bears witness to human action. There is little point in underestimating the relational character of climate and ecology. “Weird weather” has impact on wind speed, and extreme wind speed – storms – have become associated with climate change and environmental degradation. In turn, storms create extreme conditions to respond to: flight to shelter, survival and rescue, loss and lamentation. Great storms cause great floods. The collective memory of the Great Flood of 1958 remains marked not only in the ancestral memory of people living on the eastern coast of England, the coastlines of the Netherlands, Belgium and Northern Germany, it also has become etched into the dykes and irrigation systems of the coastline, into the fabric of the landscape, shaped in response to prevent further floods. Like those indexical marks below bridges telling of flood levels at different points in history, one great storm relays the next.<sup>92</sup>

The Great Storm of 1987 is featured in W. G. Sebald’s *The Rings of Saturn*. One could regard this as a digression about climate, diverting attention from the travelogue of histories associated with feudal estates in East Anglia, or perhaps a device to bring actuality into a script otherwise composed reflectively on memories and on retelling

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<sup>92</sup> The recording of the effects of storms has a long history, and both Sebald and Ruskin follow in the tradition of mixed metaphors – empirical observation becomes conflated with mystical readings, of divine messages, supernatural with natural, science with faith. Alexandra Harris in Chapter V “Method and Measurement” of *Weatherland* (2015) refers to poet Anne Finch expressing her distress about the effects of the great storm of November 1703. “It remains the most violent storm recorded in England”, says Harris. At this point, weather observations are frequently accompanied by detached observation, methods science continues to use (calendar recordings of temperature, wind, rainfall, etc). But the new empirical world is also old, moral and superstitious, immersed in belief in divine cause, searching for human fault and repentance. “In her ode ‘Upon the Hurricane’ she [Finch] considered the fates of birds, ships, buildings, and thought of man’s exposure in this world that now lacked shelter. Even the poetic form she used, an irregular Pindaric metre, strained against coherence. A long stanza scanning the wreckage ends in the simple line: ‘all defence has failed’” (ibid, p. 170).

of histories. Sebald's emphasis is historical rather than scientific, but why segregate what may be of mutual interest? This integration of science with the social and ethical world underpinned Ruskin's thought. Notably also, Ruskin frequently digresses in his writings; anecdotal insertions (at times in aggrandised footnotes) become more revealing than the main body of text (*Modern Painters IV* in *Works VI*, pp. 342–344).<sup>93</sup>

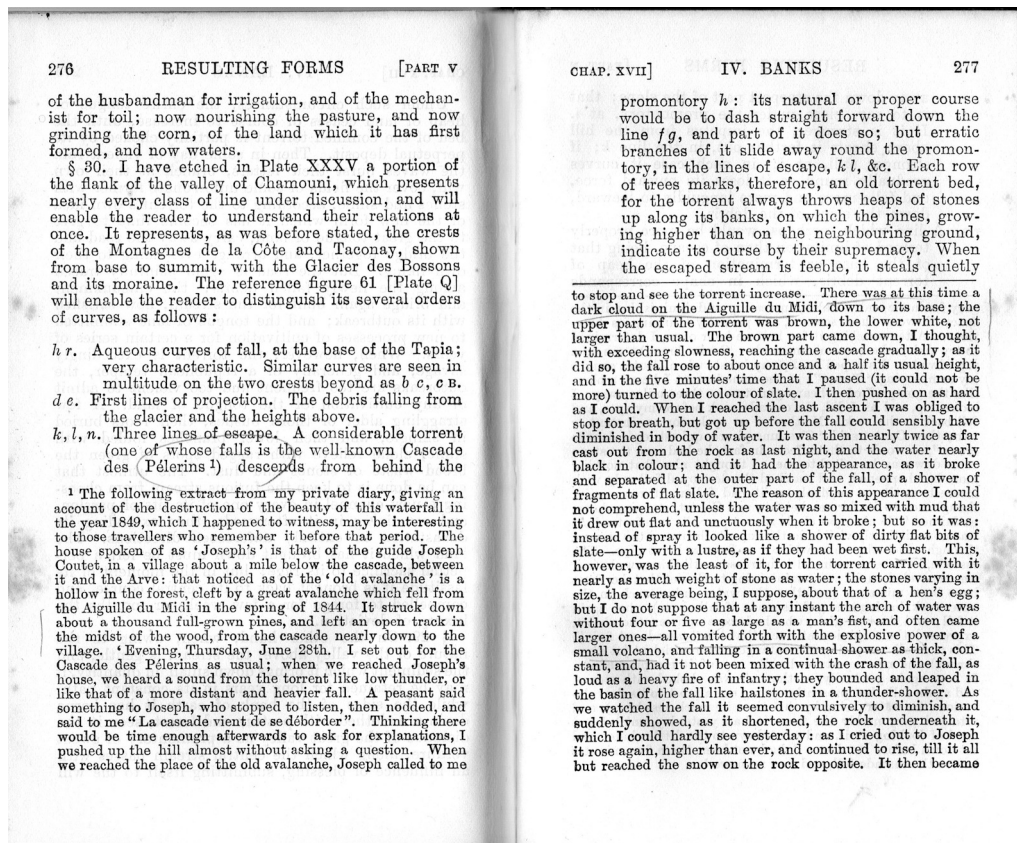


Figure 25 John Ruskin (1900), Chapter XVII "Resulting Forms: Banks" Footnote 1 *Modern Painters IV*, London: Waverley Book Company Edition, pp. 276–8.

Sebald accumulates such anecdotes, located in personal experiences reflected upon in a travelogue similarly fond of referring to literary and historical contexts. So for example, in Chapter 9 of *The Rings of Saturn* Sebald introduces the reader to the

<sup>93</sup> Cross-reference to scan from John Ruskin (c.1900), *Modern Painters IV*, London: Waverley Book Company Edition, pp. 276–8; see Figure 25.

historical character of Chateaubriand, a blow-in from France during the Napoleonic Wars. The scene for this is the Ditchingham estate in East Anglia, where Chateaubriand is offered shelter and an invitation to marry into the estate (subsequently declined, as he was married already). In between narrating the melancholic turn of events of Chateaubriand's life, Sebald muses about the English garden style at Ditchingham. Those trees, once planted as status symbols, then come to reveal a multitude of connotations, ranging from trauma therapy to disaster index.<sup>94</sup> Sebald contemplates the surviving trees of the estate, their volume already greatly diminished by Dutch elm disease, but catastrophically decimated by the Great Storm of 1987: without prior warning the storm appeared during the night of 16th–17th October. Conflating Sebald's own memories of the event with his actual observations of the estate during his later visit, Chateaubriand's historical life becomes interspersed with descriptions of Sebald's acutely experienced autobiographical sensations: at 3 am he awakens from the "peculiar warm air and rising air pressure" (2001, p. 315; own translation), watching the storm from his bedroom window waving and weaving through the crowns of the trees, an image Sebald likens to "water plants in a stream" (ibid, p. 316,; own translation). Only a moment later the scene of devastation is complete, all trees were laid to the ground, evoking the image of a wind-destroyed cornfield. Sebald re-enters the scene through memory recall in stream-of-consciousness narration using the present tense. Such heightened senses create atmospheric porousness.<sup>95</sup> Sebald is puzzled most of all by the untimely warmth of the air and the absolute silence. The scene is of catastrophic biblical dimension. "It

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<sup>94</sup> Chateaubriand on return to France plants an arboretum; perhaps as a form of horticultural therapy (not unlike Ruskin, not unlike my own father, the founding of a garden in later years serves as a positive contribution to cope with loss).

<sup>95</sup> I am indebted here to Thomas H. Ford (2011) drawing attention to the importance of atmosphere in relation to weather and breath in nineteenth-century fiction and science.

seemed as if someone had pulled a curtain to one side to reveal a formless scene that bordered upon the underworld” (Sebald 2002, p. 266; cp. Matthew 27:51: the “torn veil of the sanctuary”). Over the following months, Sebald witnesses the unfolding of an ecological disaster: remedial action involves overturning the soil alongside the removal of the remaining tree stumps and their subsequent burial underground; the absent canopy of trees causes the loss of shadow-loving ground cover; the multiple losses of habitats turns birds and mammals into exiles. Sebald closes the episode with reference to the aural senses: after an intermittent period of the deafening noise of chainsaws, an eerie silence remains.

### *Dust, ashes and moral culpability*

In the preceding chapter, Sebald describes the forced evacuation of the Anglo-Irish Randolph family in southern Ireland during the Civil War in 1920. The Ashburys inherited the estate from the Randolphs in 1946. Although located outside the earmarked territory of his pilgrimage, Sebald frequently uses stream of consciousness, connecting present experience with associated memories and disparate events. This device of frame-within-a frame is typical for Sebald’s labyrinthine narrative technique. Many other connections inform the intricately woven narrative, crossing present with past, history with personal memento. Sebald describes his stay at the Ashbury family home, who were forced by economic necessity to turn the manor house into lodgings. In a key passage Mrs Ashbury acts as ventriloquist to relieve Sebald’s sonorous voice: “It seems to me sometimes that we never got used to being on this earth and life is just one great, ongoing, incomprehensible blunder” (2001, p. 262, in English within the original German text). Sebald, on departure, is invited to

stay on by Mrs Ashbury (at this point ‘Catherine’).<sup>96</sup> The relations had subtly turned, become intimate and cloying. Sebald politely declines the offer. This scene embodies the recurring motif of disappointment, that of refrained consumption, and of missed opportunity foreshadowing, in parallel perspective, Chateaubriand declining to marry into his host’s family.

Chapter 8 concludes with Bawdsey Manor in Orford Ness. During World War II it served as laboratory for research into radar systems for defence headed by Robert Watson-Watt, providing a historical foil of muted oppressiveness. When walking in the vicinity of the estate, Sebald tells the reader that the wood of Rendelsham had also fallen victim to the Great Storm of 1987. What follows then is an eyewitness recall account of tempestuous weather as experienced during the time of writing, of heightened consciousness in the face of disaster. Within seconds the sky darkened, the wind took on momentum, and with spooky presence blew in circular motion across the field. Daylight dimmed into a colourless opaque darkness. Taking shelter, Sebald endures a sandstorm – in his words, a ‘dust storm’. Sebald pictures himself as lone survivor emerging to note the phenomenon of motionless silence, unmitigated by the sounds of birds or the scurry of mammals, revealing a leaden sky obscuring the sun behind layers of dark *dust*.

Gasping for breath, my mouth and throat dry, I crawled out of the hollow that had formed around me like the last survivor of a caravan that had come to grief in the desert. A deathly silence prevailed. There was not a breath, not a birdsong to be heard, not a rustle, nothing. And although it now grew lighter once more, the sun, which was at its zenith, remained hidden behind the banners of pollen-fine dust that hung for a

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<sup>96</sup> Sebald presents a latent subtext of frustrated sexual attraction as a running theme, a theme already noted previously here in relation to Ruskin and his contemporary Stifter.



long time in the air. This, I thought, will be what is left after the earth has ground itself down.” (ibid, p. 229; Hulse’s translation).<sup>97</sup>

Such dystopian descriptions of weather are contained in the parenthesis of the journey. This journey – a pilgrimage – is a tormented reflection on futility and absurdity of human endeavour. This is more apparent in the German original of the *Rings*, which is subtitled “*Eine Englische Wallfahrt*” (“An English Pilgrimage”). Further, there is the preamble to the book quoting from Joseph Conrad’s letter to Marguerite Pradowska, 23–25th March 1890: Conrad asks for forgiveness to all *pilgrims* wandering about the shorelines of incomprehensible horror of battle and ponders the profound despair of the defeated (“le pèlerinage à pied, qui côtoient le rivage et regardent sans comprendre l’horreur de la lutte et le profond désespoir des vaincus”).<sup>98</sup>

Going back a century or so, John Ruskin, in his lecture *The Storm-Cloud of the 19th Century*, delivers intimate and detailed ‘naturalistic’ observations of the weather, entrusted to his faith in the “power of observation”. “[H]e always insisted on the value of eyesight and insight”, Clive Wilmer reminds the reader in his foreword to a recently re-issued *Storm-Cloud* (2012 [1884], p. 6). Wilmer states that Ruskin’s

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<sup>97</sup> Hulse’s translation does not manage to fully capture the subtlety of language of the German original in my view, for example Sebald’s self-reflexivity, reminding the reader that he is re-imagining this apocalyptic scene (“so dachte ich mir”) is fully omitted. Then there is the difficulty of translating German use of “Gerundium” (infinitive) in the final relative clause, which encapsulates an endlessly grinding entropic dimension not matched in the English translation, hence the German here: “Atemlos, mit ausgetrockenem Mund und Rachen, kroch ich, der letzte Überlebende, so dachte ich mir, einer in der Wüste zugrundegegangenen Karawane, aus der Kuhle hervor, die sich um mich gebildet hatte. Ringsum war es totenstill, kein Hauch rührte sich mehr, kein Vogellaut war zu hören, kein Rascheln, nichts, und obgleich es nun wider lichter wurde, blieb doch die im Zenit stehende Sonne verborgen hinter den lange noch in der Luft hängenden Fahne aus dem blütenstaubfeinen Puder, welcher zuletzt übrigbleibt von der sich selber langsam zermahlenden Erde” (Sebald 2001, p. 273).

<sup>98</sup> In the German text, Sebald quotes Conrad partially, omitting the “joy of the victors” – this is corrected in the Hulse translation (2002) where Conrad’s “joy of the victors” has been reinserted (“le joie de vaincre ni le profond désespoir des vaincus”). Secondly, in the German version Sebald offers *three* quotations as preamble, the first a verse in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* quoted in English: “Good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably.” This appears a significant omission from the 2002 English translation of the *Rings*. The second quote is by Conrad. The third quote is a scientific dictionary definition of the meaning of Saturn’s Rings. Oversights or deliberate omissions that seem to make little sense.

renewed contemporary relevance is due to his prophetic insight based on the intuitive knowledge that aberrations of weather patterns and abnormalities in climate were indicative of a much larger problem, larger than the sciences alone can tackle. Peter Brimblecombe (ibid; introduction) claims, furthermore, that environmental concerns during Ruskin's age are easily overlooked from our perspective, more difficult to detect and understand, "because we live so much in an age that adheres to a reductionist approach to the understanding of air pollution and climate" (Brimblecombe 2012, p. 7). Ruskin's *relational* mind is, in Brimblecombe's view, typical for "an artist or social thinker" (ibid, p. 9). He concludes that Ruskin's "refreshing" views have helped his re-emergence, "because they free us from the limitations of reductionism and allow us to indulge in the wealth of our perceptions" (ibid, p. 11). As prophet-poet, Ruskin "makes us look closely into the hearts of things and to be unsatisfied with superficial appearances" (ibid). Ruskin's method is located in sensory perception, a commonly used approach for the naturalist philosopher of the period, who would "rely on the accuracy of his own eye" (Hewison 1996, p. 31).

The leaf hears no murmur in the wind to which it wavers on the branches, nor can the clay discern the vibration by which it is thrilled into a ruby. The Eye and the Ear are the creators alike of the ray and tone... " (Ruskin: *Storm-Cloud*, in *Works XXXIV*, p. 27).

Human perception becomes divided into separate sensory organs. The above passage gives greater autonomy to what one might call phenomenological description,<sup>99</sup> but one suspects that capitalisation of 'Eye and Ear' is a method of linking divine with human perception for Ruskin. So he says: "The 'Fiat lux' of creation is therefore, in the deep sense, 'fiat anima,' and is as much, when you understand it, the ordering of Intelligence as the ordering of Vision" (*Works XXXIV*, p. 27). *Fiat anima* also evokes

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<sup>99</sup> Fitch draws attention to Ruskin's use of phenomenological description on "how to see natural forms" in *Modern Painters II* (1982, p. 65).

breath as life-giving spirit, which gives further credibility to Thomas H. Ford's thesis that Ruskin's storm cloud lecture was pre-eminently about the destruction of community through the poisoning of language:

[I]f atmosphere is a medium of communication, then communicative practice have climatic effects. Beginning with the Franco-Prussian War, Ruskin contends that the shared medium of communication is being torn apart. And because he had posited the atmosphere as the modern medium of aesthetic and moral experience, engaging with the cultural climate of Romanticism, this destruction of human communality manifests itself to him as climate change. (2011, p. 296)<sup>100</sup>

But beyond breath, or air, there is the ear with its listening capacity that Ruskin draws attention to. With Ruskin, the disembodied sense organs are metonyms for divine intimation. This also applies to Sebald, although the divine is bracketed further into the realm of Heidegger's Gods-under-erasure. The discussion of erasure, absence by necessity, implies a presence. Negative space.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, under erasure, Sebald evokes biblical context: his meditation on the incongruity of the parable of the Gadarene swines in Chapter 3 is provoked by a profane encounter with a farmed pig in the Norfolk landscape, prompting Sebald to deliver a tender "unwonted" caress to which the pig responds with a nearly human sigh. Further, all descriptions of weather and storms are apocalyptic and demonstrate Sebald's biblical literacy; the constant deep bass voice of guilty human pathos another such legacy.

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<sup>100</sup> Ford argues that standard interpretations of *Storm-cloud* fall into three categories: 1) proto-environmental (pollution due to industrial revolution); 2) psycho-biographical (delusion/pathology); 3) and eco-phenomenological (pathetic fallacy closing gap between environment and man). All three he disregards as wrong – an overstatement perhaps, to validate his own thesis? His thesis being "that atmosphere is a medium of communication and perception", thereby "the first modern medium" (2011, p. 289). Ruskin recognises that 'cloudiness' has become a symptom of modern landscape (*Modern Painters III*), so in that sense Ford's interpretation is congruent. However, it is hard to see why environmental (anti-industrial) sentiments need to be excluded, considering the strong views Ruskin had on division of labour and mechanisation of work, as well as his dislike for speed (railway). Ruskin's writing is sufficiently multi-layered to allow for double or treble readings.

<sup>101</sup> This applies to the erasure or bracketing of the gods with Heidegger, who by implication remain, even if absent, possibly in the sense that an absent family member will still be remembered and imagined even if no longer with us.

For Sebald as in Ruskin, references to the body are to be read as emblems, and become images of sympathy and suffering. It is painful to listen, painful to feel the pressure; a picture of utmost sadness is recounted in description of the devastated forest after the storm. Although Sebald describes this Great Storm of 1987 from memory, he nevertheless speaks in the present tense, describing the colour of the sky, the warmth of the atmosphere; the bulging window of the bedroom, hardly containing the atmosphere; the silence; the absence of what constitutes normality. The impression of immediate experience is graphically evoked through a phenomenal focus on being present, on colour, tonality, and atmospheric pressure acting on body and surroundings. Sebald takes recourse to quasi-scientific terms to describe with utmost clarity the perceptual environmental impact on the body and sensory apparatus. This is further enriched by a vocabulary one might expect to find in mythology, reminiscent of biblical pathos.

Ruskin's moral vision treats pollution as matter of personal debt and guilt *and* as a waste product of industrialisation.<sup>102</sup> This preoccupation with pollution as manifestation of immoral conduct ('sin') is further explored when Brian Dillon investigates the metaphorical function of *dust* in Victorian Britain as a Victorian leitmotif. For Dickens, dust also stands in for moral decay (Miss Havesham), as for Ruskin, "perhaps the nineteenth century's most refined (but also anxious) connoisseur of the cloudy, the gaseous, the particulate, and the friable" (Dillon 2009, p. 7). Beyond the dust caused by the Industrial Revolution, dust becomes a larger category,

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<sup>102</sup> Brian J. Day (2005, p 918) expands here on Ruskin's 'moral ecology': "The ecological implications of the lecture rests on Ruskin's belief in the interrelatedness of the divine, natural and human economies, his belief that nature polluted by human economic activities signifies humankind's alienation from both God and nature, and the need for moral reformation." Day asserts that this pollution is internal as much as external, and that Ruskin's environmentalism addresses both the inner workings of the mind and actions implied in industrial pollution.

“visionary and prophetic, attuned to the utopian and apocalyptic possibilities that inhere to earth and air” (ibid).<sup>103</sup> This, so Dillon continues, finds a prominent outlet in his late lectures on ‘*The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*’ where “he finally tried to face down the modern demon of dust” (2009, p. 8).

Even though Ruskin’s weather observations are presented as if they were scientific notes (dated, directly observed, *not* from memory recall), the retrospective overall insertion of such journal entries into a larger framework – in Ruskin’s case, a moralistic lecture on the changed nature and appreciation of clouds – bears affinity to Sebald’s insertion of remembered witnessed experiences of extreme violent weather. These are emblematic ‘modern’ landscapes, emptied of life to reveal a deep-seated pessimism about the human condition. Man is culpable, for Sebald as much as Ruskin.<sup>104</sup>

Blanched Sun, - blighted grass, - blinded man. – If, in conclusion, you ask me for any conceivable cause or meaning of these things – I can tell you none, according to your modern beliefs; but I can tell you what meaning it would have borne the men of old time. (*Works XXXIV*, p. 40)

Ruskin relates abnormal weather patterns to wider environmental and human degradation (“blighted grass”), and this forms part of a chain reaction where human

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<sup>103</sup> Dillon further expands on this theme: “the morally inspiring process of crystallization” (2009, p. 8) with reference to Ruskin’s *The Ethics of Dust*.

<sup>104</sup> For example, Ruskin’s use of George Gordon Byron’s poem *Sardanapalus* [1834]:

The day at last has broken. What a night  
Hath usher’d it! How beautiful in heaven!  
Though varied with a transitory storm,  
More beautiful in that variety:  
How hideous upon earth! where peace, and hope,  
And love, and revel, in an hour were trampled  
By human passions to a human chaos. (Byron quoted in Ruskin, *Works XXXIV*, pp. 13–14)

blindness<sup>105</sup> and moral inadequacy ultimately stand as the cause. “All Greek, all Christian, all Jewish prophecy insists on the same truth through a thousand myths” and “the answer is plain. Whether you can affect the signs of the sky or not, you *can* the signs of the times” (*Works XXXIV*, p. 41). Ruskin urges the reader on to find fault in the self, to re-establish moral integrity. Here Ruskin makes explicit reference to war (mankind’s struggle with one another) as an underlying cause of moral corruption. This rather Sebaldian moment *seems* untypical for Ruskin, who rarely comments on politics, but nevertheless frequently expresses sympathy for those who are suffering.<sup>106</sup> From one such socially concerned piece, *Fors Clavigera* (1871), he is quoting: blaming “poisonous smoke” – pollution caused by emissions of factories – the coal-powered Industrial Revolution taking its toll on the quality of air and thereby on the patterns in the sky, with “dead men’s souls” somewhat suspended in limbo, caused by the atrocity of human battle, more specifically the Franco-German War: “digging [...] a moat flooded with waters of death between the two nations for a century to come” (*Works XXXIV*, p. 33).<sup>107</sup> As the expression ‘bad air’ aptly evokes, lack of harmony, lack of compassion and stuffy atmosphere devoid of oxygen

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<sup>105</sup> Compare with Charlie Gere “Ruskin’s Haunted Nature“ (in Mays, Sas and Matheson [eds.] 2013). Blindness here with reference to Gere’s interest in connecting Derrida with Ruskin; the connection with Benjamin’s angel of history is also made by Dillon (see below).

<sup>106</sup> For example: Turner’s *Slave Ship, Modern Painters I* (*Works III*, p. 571–2). In *Modern Painters III*, he makes reference to peasants being divorced from a leisurely appreciation of nature, due to feudal management of land in modern landscape, let alone his many social and educational references to the working class in his later writings, for example *Fors Clavigera*.

<sup>107</sup> Cosgrove in Wheeler (1995, p. 100) and Dillon (2009, p. 10) who both remark on Ruskin’s attribution of (one source of) air pollution to the Franco-Prussian War. Fitch (1982, p. 102) traces Ruskin’s preoccupation with dust back to *Modern Painters II*, where in an apocalyptic post-judgement scene, the ‘firmament’ is described as being filled with the “dust of human souls, that drifts, and floats and falls in the interminable, inevitable light” (*Works IV*, p. 277).

seemingly separate causes – conflate and create a period of climate change with more than one meaning.<sup>107</sup>

Both Gere (2013) and Dillon (2009) evoke here Walter Benjamin's allegorical reference to the angel of history:

But we ought surely to read too in Ruskin's anguished account of the way the cloud has overcome him in recent years an image of history that contends with Benjamin's more celebrated motif of the "angel of history." Like Benjamin, Ruskin sees the rubbish of the world accumulating about him; but where Benjamin's angel looks dolefully at its feet, the Victorian prophet looks to the sky, because he knows that the atmospheric and historical catastrophe will emerge, like a swirl of dust, out of the air itself. (Dillon 2009, p. 10).

Gere furthermore establishes Ruskin's relevance and legacy to contemporary art and philosophy in addressing the super-natural, describing the conflation of "meteorological phenomena [...] as the actions of an unknowable God" (2013, p. 212).

Thus, unsurprisingly perhaps, Ruskin's proto-ecological polemic is cast in eschatological, apocalyptic and messianic terms, and his apocalyptic proclamations are also thoroughly ecological. In his short address *The Mystery of Life and its Arts*, Ruskin presents an apocalyptic view of our relation to time in terms of judgment which also invokes cloud-like and spectral images, especially of our lives as a vapour liable to vanish away. (2013, p. 214)

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<sup>107</sup> One need only think of the meteorological and political situation of climate change in 2015, where carbon dioxide emissions remain an obstacle to cleaner air and contribute to the further build-up of greenhouse gases, with ecologically disastrous consequences, combining (metaphorically speaking) with the bad air of several political and religious conflicts simmering and coexisting next to the storm cloud of catastrophic dimensions of a European Union incapable of living up to its promise to ensure peace, economic stability and solidarity amongst nations.

<sup>109</sup> Fitch refers to Frank Kermode's definition of apocalyptic fiction as "the sense of an ending". Fitch points out that scientific or empirical observation has a much lesser weighting in *Storm-cloud* than Ruskin may want the reader to believe. The amassing of observational 'factual' detailed description of weather conditions is a smokescreen: "Ruskin's real interest in the work is more nearly eschatology than meteorology" (1982, p. 10). This view is contested by Day (2005) and Ford (2011).

Both Ruskin and Sebald are unable to separate the natural from the state of mankind. As Fitch points out in *The Poison Sky* (1982, p. 79), Ruskin's weather observations are a subtext for *expounding truth* and take on the form of apocalyptic writing.<sup>109</sup> And as such, Sebald and Ruskin complement each other in their overwhelming recourse to the necessity and simultaneous impossibility of good moral conduct.

Ruskin, like Sebald, writes with images; texts contain diagrams, illustrations alongside and with the narration of words. "Writing with images", in James Elkins's (2008) definition, is a particular form of presentation where text and image relate to each other, but image is *not* illustration and text is *more* than caption or interpretation. The complementary character of image and text, where one cannot substitute the other but each throws up new meanings to the other, is significant. Elkins devotes a whole chapter to Sebald's idiosyncratic use of images.<sup>110</sup> Noteworthy here is that Elkins connects ecological disaster with that of human slaughter and with ethical concern. In this sense Sebald is congruent with Latour (in Harman 2009, p. 26) who warns against compartmentalisation and easy categorical distinctions: "Those who wish to *separate* the 'symbolic' fish from its 'real' counterpart should themselves be separated and confined."<sup>111</sup>

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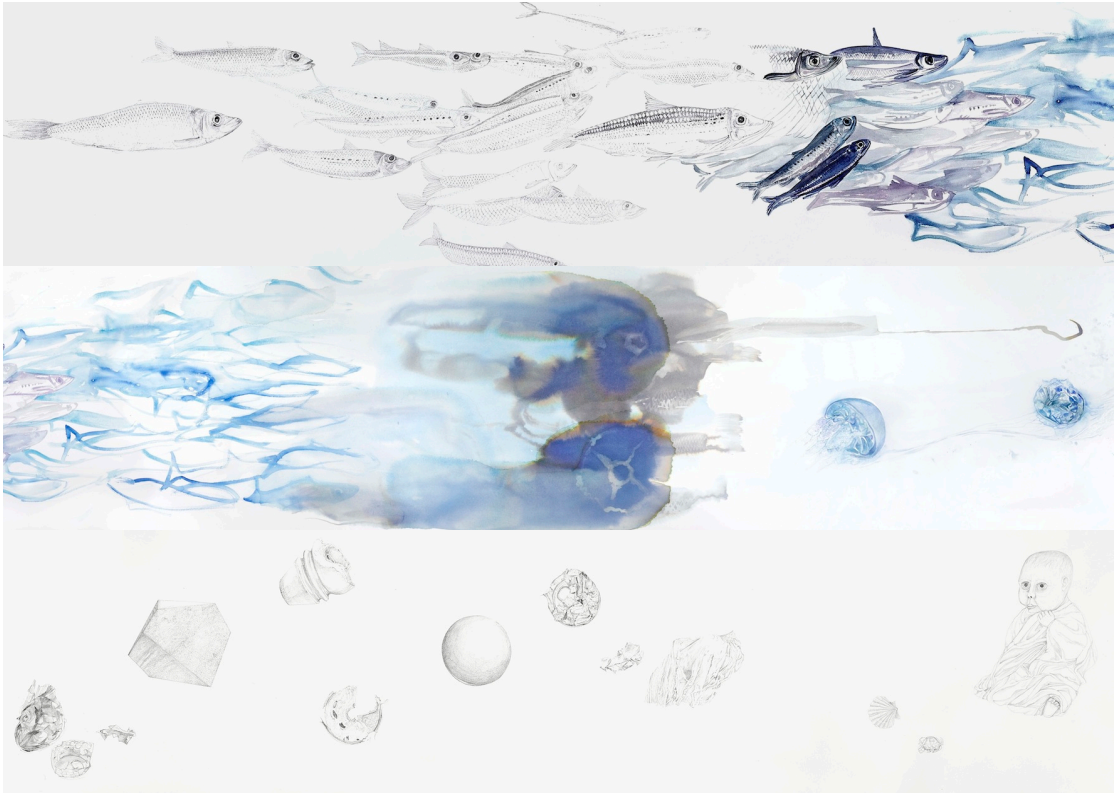
<sup>110</sup> The narrative framings of image glide into each other, thereby co-presenting different strata of time and consciousness – an observation Elkins makes in regard to the photograph of the *Chinese Quail*: "So there is a kind of Chinese box here: the quail is imprisoned in its cage, the representation of the quail is imprisoned in its photograph, the photograph is imprisoned on the page, between two disparate thoughts, and the recognition of 'dissolution' is imprisoned between evocations of the past. When I first encountered this image, I thought it was a good model for a tightly constructed imbrication of photograph and text: frames around the image hold it in place, and those frames continue within the image (or, in the inevitable reversed logic, begin from it)." (Elkins 2008)

<sup>111</sup> Haman quotes Latour's *The Pasteurization of France* (1988, p. 188) in *Prince of Networks* (2009, p. 26). Haman summarises: "What is shared in common by marine biologists, the fishing industry, and tribal elders telling myths about ichthyan deities is this: none of them really *knows* what a fish is." Compare this with Sebald's passage on the herring in *The Rings of Saturn*. After paraphrasing erroneous scientific accounts of natural historians about the presumed fearlessness of the herring due to an alleged inability to feel pain, Sebald concludes: "But the truth is that we do not know what the herring feels". (Sebald 2002, p. 57)



Elkins's interpretation of Sebald's description of the plight of the herring acting as a precursory motif to the holocaust evokes such a double consciousness:<sup>112</sup>

Those parallels and others will occur to a reader as she reads the two or three pages after the image has appeared, creating—for me at least—a double consciousness. One part of me follows the narrator as he continues with funny stories of an eccentric aristocrat (the one who, when he was young, had helped liberate Bergen-Belsen); another part of me keeps thinking of the image, and collecting parallels and echoes from the preceding pages on the herring industry.



Figures 26 a–c: Doris Rohr (2014) *Marine Scroll 2: Melencolia*, graphite, watercolour and ink on lining paper. Overall dimensions of scroll 56 x 1000 cm, sections approx. 46 x 300 cm. © Doris Rohr. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge

The narration of ecological disaster found its way into this *Marine Scroll*. Prompted by Sebald's melancholic ode to the herring, the initial impulse was to draw a dead herring from observation. Packed on ice, this resulted in the beginnings of *Marine Scroll 2*. The rendering of the herring soon became subject to invention and fabrication, mutations of biological impossibility eventually exploding in a sea of quink ink (quink, incidentally, was historically made from cuttlefish, but thankfully no longer). The dispersed forms, then reorganising in jellyfish and the ghost memory of herring shapes, were concluded by geometric forms borrowed or quoted from Dürer's engraving of *Melencolia I* (1514).

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<sup>112</sup> “Sebald has just described how herrings look in life and in death, how they suffocate, how they were tortured for scientific purposes, how they have been poisoned by modern industry and agriculture, and how they looked in the sea when they swam in vast shoals.” (Elkins 2008)

Sebald's pilgrimage starts with such an image of double consciousness. The journey has been ill-starred, so he tells the reader, presenting a photo of a cumulus cloud apparently caught in a grid of safety glass, the view from his hospital bed in Norwich, in recovery from an illness that had aborted the previously attempted journey. Thence onwards, the *Rings* contains frequent references to sky, heaven, planets, dust, clouds; and there are at least four weather descriptions, two already mentioned above describing the Great Storm of 1987.<sup>114</sup>

My anachronistic and asymmetrical reading of Sebald via Ruskin, or vice versa, has its starting point in the aforementioned bell jar, the object in Ruskin's study containing moss on rock. This bell jar is a metaphor Sebald also uses, albeit not for benign wilderness, but for evil weather conditions reminiscent of Ruskin's *Storm-Cloud*. Sebald describes the precise moment of calm *before* the storm: "It was as if the world were under a bell jar, until great cumulus clouds brewed up out of the west casting a grey shadow upon the earth" (Sebald 2002, p. 59; Hulse's translation).<sup>115</sup>

The motif of calm before the storm is one Adalbert Stifter also describes. He narrates the importance of quiet listening to the natural world, in particular to the birds. Birdsong serves as indication of impending weather conditions and change. A thunderstorm will be met with foreboding silence, but if the birds were to continue their song, no violent weather conditions would occur in the near future. Stifter uses the theme of a weather forecast as a pretext for the meeting of the two main

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<sup>114</sup> Mention of clouds: (2001, pp. 201, 205, 272, 315). Further cloud descriptions: volcanic ones (Pinatubo likened to an atom cloud: p. 111); Mount Pelée's eruption destroying St Pierre (p. 134); followed by petroleum clouds (p. 117).

<sup>115</sup> "Es war, als sei die Welt unter einen Glassturz gerückt, bis aus dem Westen mächtige Quellwolken heraufkamen und langsam einen grauen Schatten über die Erde zogen" (Sebald 2001, p. 77).

protagonists in his novel *Der Nachsommer* (1970 [1857]). Metereological description  
ription

follows from page 123 onwards. Significantly, Freiherr von Risau explains to young Heinrich the superior capacity of wildlife to connect with weather conditions and to act in anticipation. Heinrich agrees that science failed to develop a branch of knowledge devoted to this type of research (p. 125). The reliance on observational methods of science (Prussian geographer and scientist Alexander von Humboldt) on one hand, and the lasting legacy of poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's theories of science and the arts form the subtext to this novel.<sup>116</sup>

In *Storm-Cloud* Ruskin quotes frequently from earlier observations taken from his journals.<sup>117</sup> The perfect thundercloud of 1858 is illustrated in the publication of the lecture as a woodcut executed by J.D. Cooper, based on a watercolour Ruskin had completed in 1858 (*A July Thunder-cloud in the Val d'Aosta; figure 27*). The vocabulary Ruskin uses to describe a typical "old-fashioned" storm or thundercloud is loaded with positive attributes and moral values: "every form of it, every action, every colour, magnificent:– doing its mighty work in its own hour and own dominion" (*Storm-Cloud*, in *Works XXXIV*, p. 30). Ruskin speaks of its "perfect form, [that] proceeds unchanged. It is not an explosion, but an enduring and advancing presence" (*ibid*).

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<sup>116</sup> A theme explored in relation to Ruskin by Paul Wilson in Wheeler (ed.) 1996, *Time and Tide – Ruskin and Science*, pp. 65–84.

<sup>117</sup> In *Storm-cloud* Ruskin offers eyewitness accounts of the black bile detestable storm-wind over a period starting in July 1871 (Matlock) to February 1883 (Brantwood), a period of more than 11 years.



Figure 27 John Ruskin (1858) *A July Thunder-cloud in the Val d'Aosta*, graphite and watercolour heightened with white bodycolour on paper, 24.2 x 53.5 cm (irregularly shaped). Private Collection. Permission for reproduction given by DTT Works of Art Ltd. This watercolour was the original used for monochrome woodcut illustration figure 4 in *The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century*.

Figure 27 illustrates “an example of a good old-fashioned healthy storm” (Ruskin, quoted in Newall 2014, p. 297). The old-fashioned storm clouds Ruskin related to the appreciation of clouds in classical antiquity, where the Greeks associated clouds with deity and with irrigation; the benefit of rain to agriculture in arid climates (*Modern Painters III*, in *Works V*, pp. 313, 318). The example of the ‘modern’ phenomenon of what Ruskin calls a ‘plague-cloud’ could not be more different.<sup>118</sup> His first sighting is dated 4th July 1875 and located at Bolton Abbey (*Works XXXIV*, p. 30). This weather description resonates with Sebald’s account of the advance of the Great Storm of 1987. First there is the utmost quiet, “entirely calm”. This is followed by disaster.

But, an hour ago, the leaves at my window first shook slightly. They are now trembling continuously, as those of all the trees, under a gradually rising wind, of which the

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<sup>118</sup> Ruskin refrains from illustrating it, which may give further credibility to the view that the plague-cloud is visionary rather than meteorological (see Fitch 1982, p. 10, fn 14). This also gives credence to Ford (2011) that the plague-cloud amounts to *ekphrasis* – classically defined as describing a non-existing image in evocative terms of language.

<sup>119</sup> Pathetic fallacy is a form of anthropomorphic projection. Often this leads to an imprecise and false use of English. Yet a more sophisticated use of animating nature seems permitted, even by Ruskin’s standards (see Landow, 1971).

tremulous action scarcely permits the direction to be defined, – but which falls and returns in fits of varying fore, like those which precede a thunderstorm – never wholly ceasing: the direction of its upper current is shown by a few ragged white clouds, moving fast from the north, which rose, at the time of the first leaf-shaking, behind the edge of the moors in the east. This wind is the plague-wind of the eighth decade of years in the nineteenth century; a period which will assuredly be recognised in future meteorological history as one of phenomena hitherto unrecorded in the courses of nature, and characterized pre-eminently by the almost ceaseless action of the calamitous wind (*Storm-Cloud*, in *Works XXXIV*, p. 31).

Further incidences are quoted: a first sighting of the plague-wind in Oxford 1871; and then on 1st July 1871 in Matlock, Derbyshire:

For the sky is covered with gray cloud; –not rains–cloud, but a dry black veil, which no ray of sunshine can pierce; partly diffused in mist, feeble mist, enough to make distant objects unintelligible, yet without any substance, or wreathing, or colour of its own. And everywhere the leaves of the trees are shaking fitfully, as they do before a thunderstorm only not violently, but enough to show the passing to and fro of a strange, bitter, blighting wind. (ibid, p. 32–3)

Then follows a polemic against scientists: “busy as ants, examining the sun, and the moon, and the seven stars, and can tell me all about them” but the true knowledge Ruskin seeks. He would much rather know “where this bitter wind comes from, and what it is made of” (*Works XXXIV* p. 33). This is a somewhat rhetorical demand, as Ruskin proffers his own spiritual reading of smoke as polluted air, responsible for the changes in weather patterns and climate, of social, moral and historic consequence.

Out of the five generic qualities of stormy weather Ruskin establishes from his numerous observations and dated entries, the first three are particularly noteworthy:

1. It is “a wind of darkness” and does not tolerate sunlight, the sky becomes darkened “instantly”.
2. It has a “malignant quality of wind” changing direction frequently, and attaching all its bad moral qualities to proper wind.

3. It “always blows *tremulously*, making the leaves of the trees shudder as if they were all aspens, but with a peculiar fitfulness which gives them – and I watch them this moment as I write – an expression of anger as well as of fear and distress. You may see the kind of quivering, and hear the ominous whimpering in the gusts that precede a great thunderstorm; but plague-wind is more panic-struck, and feverish; and its sound is a hiss instead of a wail” (*Works XXXIV*, pp. 33–4; Ruskin’s emphasis).

Ruskin changes from a human-centred perspective where nature is set apart from man, to one where nature is animated and personified (perhaps unwittingly subscribing to pathetic fallacy.)<sup>119</sup> The plague-wind is a coward, a weak despicable character, unfit even to unleash a real storm with crescendo and bravura.<sup>120</sup> Ruskin contrasts this with “natural weather”, that is “healthy and lovely,” “form steady” and “stationary” in character (*Works XXXIV*, p. 35).<sup>121</sup> This notion of natural weather is set in distinction to unnatural, or caused by man, and therefore a divine response – a plague sent to punish, endowed with malignant qualities. Yet the plague-storm is ineffective, does not unleash its potential, returns and endures, resulting in enduring darkness. These dark forces “blanch the sun instead of reddening it” (*Works XXXIV*, pp. 38–9). So is the divine message one of warning rather than consumed catastrophe? One suspects Ruskin didn’t know himself. Oscillating between moments of darkness and personal despair and ambitious educational schemes to better the sensibilities of future generations through drawing, the studying of art and nature, one senses that Ruskin did not want to give up on making amends, a legacy arising from his own interpretation of Christian duty.

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<sup>120</sup> “[F]ilthiness of lurid, yet not sublimely lurid, smoke-cloud, manufacturing mist; fearful squalls of shivery wind [...] but only two or three claps of thunder, and feeble [...] I never saw such a dirty, weak foul storm”. (Entry 22nd June, 1876: cited in *Works XXXIV*, p. 36–7)

<sup>121</sup> Ruskin’s preoccupation with steadiness, and at times a contradictory but mostly disapproving relationship to change (“slippage, instability and impermanence”) is a topic Francis O’Gorman develops in “The Eagle and The Whale? John Ruskin’s argument with John Tyndall” (Gorman in Wheeler (ed.) 1996, p. 49). This topic is also of relevance to the discussion of Ruskin and entropy in the next chapter.

In Sebald's writings the absurdity of the human condition is so overwhelming that rational or scientific explanations become also completely insufficient, and seen from an agnostic perspective, a mythical dimension offers a fluidity to accommodate what makes so little sense overall. Significantly, the absurdity of human behaviour does not remove the need for penance, or pilgrimage. With Sebald myth offers no religious truth nor salvation, but a puzzle, a point of quizzing the nature of humanity and of the divine (the parable of the Gadarenes in the *Rings* illustrates this point; see above). With Ruskin there is a renewed urgency to consider the signs of the times, the prophetic writing on the wall, within the graphically drawn message of the clouds, earth's protective atmosphere – the *firmament*. The desire to educate occludes the inadmissible doubt that one can also find in between Ruskin's lines – that perhaps there might be no divine order behind chaos.



Figure 28 Doris Rohr (2015) Detail from *Marine Scroll IV – European Storm-Clouds*, watercolour and pencil on lining paper, overall dimensions of scroll: c. 56 x 1000 cm, detail 46 x 45 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.

This image connects observational research of clouds in sketchbooks with found imagery of clouds in media. Media images of forest fires that devastated the surrounding area of Athens during the summer of 2015 fused with political European crisis, a European parliament struggling with European identity and monetary necessities. More prophetically, in hindsight, considering subsequent further crises of European identity. The blending of found imagery and media topicality of politics and history with observational aspects formed a key strategy of *Marine Scrolls III and IV* – both referencing images of contemporary disasters in sympathy with Ruskin interpreting environmental signs as moral messages.

## ***24th/25th March 2015 Notes from the journal***

### ***Gravity***

*Yesterday a walk to Ballymacormick Point. Near Groomsport, a short walk along the shore from Ballyholme, now part of Bangor. Stepping out of the car into cold thrashing wind, to take a stroll around the beach. From the distance I could see what looked initially like balloons, or kites, but on getting closer I recognised the shape as those of paragliders, connected with surfboards below skimming the turbulent sea. At enormous speed the surfers rode along the crests of the waves, running parallel to the beach, and when nearly hitting the breakwater, twisting the stirring cords to turn around their sails as if a rudder to a ship. Every so often, unbelievably to me, the surfers defied gravity and with the upwind taken into air, lifted several metres high into the sky, only to crash back into the waves, losing their footing at times. I had never seen anything like this, neither parachuting nor hang-gliding, these wet-suited surfers effortlessly jumping into the air, dancing into it, like some springy bouncy ball. Skilful and breathtaking to watch, making a joyful game out of Icarus' earnest fanaticism. The other species enjoying this weather were the dogs, racing oblivious to the strength of the wind with fur slicked back aerodynamically, chasing for the sake of it. One of the dog walkers told me about the surfing school in Ballyholme. But, the young woman added, while her partner continued to take photos of the spectacle, she had never seen it like this, and surely these must be instructors, too good for learners.*

*Leaving dogs, walkers, observers and surfers behind, I walked on into the wind to pick up the coastal path leading past Glengannach Farm. When turning a corner the farm's stone wall offered shelter, and then soon after prolonged by the wind-shadow*



*of the blossoming gorse and budding blackthorn. The scent of the gorse all over, and the shiny luminous yellow studded into the cliffs and sandy coves. Braving the weather brought life back to me, invigorating my winter's inertia into some new senses. Lying down into a hollow I tried to draw the racing clouds, and then the surf of the waves crashing into the rocks, with little success in translating the mood of that late afternoon. Moving on to catch the view of the farm at Glengannach I had drawn during a previous visit, as it cuts beautifully against the sky on top of the wave of the hill. An ominous-looking black large Storm-Cloud enveloped the farm, and the western setting sun lit up the roofs at a shiny angle. The air was cold and lovely and clean, and the high sky azure and Naples blue, lit up by a strengthening sun post-equinox. For Ruskin these fast drifting dark clouds were omens, the result of bad human behaviour, responsible for pollution. I was reminded of W. G. Sebald talking of all things burning to cinder in The Rings of Saturn. Now, are these strange weather patterns the result of an altered jet stream, of thinning layers of ozone? One wonders. Linking unusual weather patterns with prophecy, climate scientists are the augurs of our day.*

*On return the surfers were still 'at work', untiring, intent to lift into the air given the opportunity to defy gravity for a moment's breath. That rush of adrenaline.*

*Meanwhile, a thousand miles away or so, across the land, in the alpine mountains, a pilot gives in to gravity.*



Figure 29 a & b Doris Rohr (2015) *Concertina Sketchbook: Storm-Cloud over Glengannach Farm 1 & 2, 24/25th March 2015*, watercolour and graphite on cartridge paper. Double page dimension (each) 14.5 x 18.5. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.

*The rapid moving clouds on 24th March perfectly illustrated Ruskin's storm cloud, acting as omen for unexplainable and inhumane behaviour.*

## Chapter 6 Chaos and Order

### *Part 1 Entropy*

It was a spring without voices. (Carson 1963, p. 4)

In the voice of [Virgil's] birdless lake, of the sibyl who rejected the embraces of Apollo, Ruskin heard a message that seemed to fix his own destiny as a teacher. The life-world must be saved, for if we lose it to poisoned air and ashes Paradise goes with it. It followed also that a religion that would cast away this world in hopes of another was merely a snare and pious delusion. That his thoughts should turn toward 'living myths' was inevitable. (Fitch 1982, p. 46)

Effects of global warming include acidification of oceans, destruction of coral reefs, extreme weather, refugees from climate change, threats to food security, and biodiversity, and pollution. (Nobel laureate Jean Jouzel; quoted in Marlowe, 2015)

Fact and fiction, science and myth interweave in all three of the above quotations. The most factual in tone, that of contemporary scientist Jean Jouzel, describes in sober terms a hellish future as consequence of global warming. Jouzel's "loss of biodiversity" rhymes with Carson's "strange stillness" of a "spring without voices" (1963, p. 3–4), and with Virgil's "birdless" lake.

Fifty years prior to Jouzel's augural warning, Rachel Carson introduced her groundbreaking study on the effects of pesticides with a fable of rural America:

There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surrounding. The town lay in the midst of a checkerboard of prosperous farms, with fields of grain and hillsides of orchards where, in spring, white clouds of bloom drifted above the green fields. In autumn, oak and maple and birch set up a blaze of colour that flamed and flickered across a backdrop of pines. Then foxes barked in the

hills and deer silently crossed the fields, half hidden in the mists of the autumn mornings. [...] <sup>122</sup> (p. 3).

The fairy-tale style of introduction implies another fiction, the myth of innocent rural Northern America, <sup>123</sup> in accordance with the ‘American Dream’ that cultivated the wilderness as frontier. This backdrop was desirable to ensure readership. Carson tells her suburban and rural reader that the consequence of chemical warfare on nature is death; intensive farming promoted to feed a post-’45 generation of Americans efficiently, aimed to rid ‘nature’ of undesirable invasive (foreign) species: death of insects, death of birds, deaths and more deaths, including humans who inadvertently had contact with the newly adopted pesticides. Myth becomes conflated with science to present *truth*. <sup>124</sup> Carson’s prophetic journalistic tone delivers a sermon, sending out a warning. *New York Times* journalist Eliza Griswold argues that this mission was particularly directed to ordinary housewives who took pleasure in feeding birds in

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<sup>122</sup> To continue: “The countryside was, in fact, famous for the abundance and variety of its bird life, and when the flood of migrants was pouring through in spring and autumns people travelled from great distances to observe them. Others came to fish the streams, which flowed clear and cold out of the hills and contained shady pools where trout lay. So it had been from the days many years ago when the first settlers raised their houses, sank their well, and built their barns. Then a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community: mysterious maladies swept the flocks of chickens, the cattle and sheep sickened and died. Everywhere was a shadow of death.” (1963, p. 3)

<sup>123</sup> Carson’s memorial website (<http://www.rachelcarson.org/>) suppresses revelatory details about her upbringing. It evokes the mythical American landscape as if an extension of Carson’s fictional introduction to *Silent Spring*. But Carson’s life was far from idyllic. She was in the final stages of cancer when she testified before the *Science Advisory Committee* and before the *US Senate Science Sub-Committee* in 1963. In an article for *New York Times Magazine*, Eliza Griswold (2012) reveals: “The sea held an immense appeal to a woman who grew up landlocked and poor as Carson did. She was born in 1907 in the boom of the Industrial Age about 18 miles up the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh, in the town of Springdale. From her bedroom window, she could see smoke billow from the stacks of the American Glue Factory, which slaughtered horses. The factory, the junkyard of its time, was located less than a mile away, down the gently sloping riverbank from the Carsons’ four-room log cabin. Passers-by could watch old horses file up a covered wooden ramp to their death. The smell of tankage, fertilizer made from horse parts, was so rank that, along with the mosquitoes that bred in the swampland near the riverbank called the Bottoms, it prevented Springdale’s 1,200 residents from sitting on their porches in the evening.”

<sup>124</sup> The unravelling of this seeming contradiction (myth versus science) is a subject of Michel Serres’s philosophical writings. Editors Harari and Bell state in their introduction to *Hermes Literature, Science, Philosophy by Michel Serres* (1983): “[N]ot only does science *not* exclude myth, but in certain cases it can be enriched by myth: ‘the unexpected and disturbing result: the science in question is diffused along paths belonging to myth. It is grasped as myth, it becomes myth’” (Serres (1975, p. 40) *Feux et signaux de brume*, quote reference Harari and Bell 1983, p. xix).

their suburban gardens: many examples of horrified readers' letters inform the narrative of *Silent Spring*, lamenting the disappearance of habitual feathered visitors or the findings of their contorted tortured bodies. Nothing could be more effective than the appeal to the 'good innocent' American whose values had thus become corrupted:

*Silent Spring* begins with a myth, "A Fable for Tomorrow", in which Carson describes "a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings". Cognizant of connecting her ideal world to one that readers knew, Carson presents not a pristine wilderness but a town where people, roads and gutters coexist with nature — until a mysterious blight befalls this perfect place. "No witchcraft," Carson writes, "no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves". (Griswold, 2012)

Ruskin's *Storm-Cloud* is a related literary genre. A good prophet has to be a brilliant polemicist to make the bitter message heard. The use of storytelling with a symbolic dimension – the parable – is one Ruskin would have been as familiar with as Carson, possibly due to their Protestant upbringing, sharing a grounding in Gospel reading.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, Ruskin's parable *The King of the Golden River* evokes as a backdrop a benign agri-culture where land and people are in harmonious relation, prior to becoming corrupted by bad governance. In *The Poison Sky*, Raymond Fitch explicitly refers to *The King of the Golden River* when he introduces his theory of the "vital-lethal antithesis" as a dominant polarity of Ruskin's thought (1982, p. 59).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Eliza Griswold (2012) notes that Carson "reflected the mainstream Protestant thinking of [her] time, which demanded personal action to right the wrongs of society. Yet Carson, who was baptized in the Presbyterian Church, was not religious. One tenet of Christianity in particular struck her as false: the idea that nature existed to serve man."

<sup>126</sup> Fitch provides a Freudian and a Jungian reading (see introduction to *The Poison Sky*). The *eros/thanatos* or *vital/lethal* polarity is expressed in Ruskinian principles: "[T]he idea of the conflict of life with greed; the view that the first law of life (in organic as in social existence) is help; and, significantly, his view that the spiritual or moral landscape and physical landscape are interdependent." (1982, p. 59)

Eschatology – the ‘science’ of endgame – implies its other: the cosmogenic myth of origin. Whether order precedes disorder (chaos), or vice versa, whether order arises out of chaos, are questions of interpretation and of philosophical speculation.<sup>127</sup>

Certainly Ruskin had a morbid fascination with chaos’ truly demonic<sup>128</sup> quality, inviting here further speculation on the concept of entropy.<sup>129</sup> In *Modern Painters II* (1846) Ruskin describes a melting world, vortex, dust of human souls, atomic life, and drifts of horrors.<sup>130</sup> *Modern Painters IV* (1856), preceded by the publication of *The Stones of Venice* (1851), gives ample examples of Ruskin’s preoccupation with chaos and order. Fitch interprets Ruskin’s eschatological style as a means of imposing (divine) order onto the decline of Venice politically, culturally and historically:

Within the profusion of architectural detail, Ruskin discloses the development of the Venetian spirit in art in such language that the historical process becomes a vehicle for the revelation of divine judgement upon a society; a Gothic paradise blooms and is lost.

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<sup>127</sup> Michel Serres’s “concept of disorder does not mean to establish a dialogue between two symmetrical ontologies but rather to rethink the relations between order and disorder in a such a way as to show how everything begins, ends, and begins again according to a universal principle of disorder” (Harari and Bell 1983, p. xxvii). “The great philosophical and theological systems that we know have always been build around this relation, privileging order over disorder. In the traditional perspective, to posit disorder as primordial is absurd; but in the context of recent scientific enquiry it becomes possible” (ibid, p. xxviii).

<sup>128</sup> In Greek mythology, Typhon, the son of Chronos, is described as demonic (ibid, p. xxxi).

<sup>129</sup> Fitch’s interpretation of myth (chaos/order) directed me towards investigating Ruskin and entropy further. See: Allan Smith’s “Entropic Steps: Rocks, Ruins, and Increase in John Ruskin, Robert Smithson, and Per Kirkeby” (2012).

<sup>130</sup> “The river of the wrath of God, roaring down into the gulf where the world has melted with its fervent heat, choked with the ruin of nations, and the limbs of its corpses tossed out of its whirling, like water-wheels [...] blinded yet more, as they awake, by the white light of the new Heaven, until the great vortex of the four winds bears up their bodies to the judgment-seat: the Firmament is full of them, a very dust of human souls, that drifts, and floats and falls in the interminable, inevitable light; the bright clouds are darkened with them as with thick snow, currents of atom life in the arteries of heaven, now soaring up slowly and higher and higher still, till the eye and the thought can follow no farther, borne up, wingless, by their inward faith and by the angel powers invisible, now hurled in countless drifts of horror before the breath of their condemnation” (Ruskin quoted in Fitch 1982, pp.100-1).

Furthermore, the Venetian “Fall” serves ultimately as a mirror in which Victorian society might perceive darkly certain grim lineaments of its own destiny. (Fitch 1982, p. 141)<sup>131</sup>

Whether Ruskin had been aware of Clausius’ concept of entropy<sup>132</sup> is uncertain, but he does not appear to mention the term as such. Entropy is defined as a “lack of order or predictability; gradual decline into disorder” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). Disorder as a state of flux is congruent with a scientific understanding of chaos; the mythical dimension of chaos also intimates primeval soup, pre-creation.<sup>133</sup> But in recent philosophical examination, chaos – or *chaotics* – stands for a new type of *order*.

Katherine N. Hayles, in her introduction to *Chaos and Order*, states:

The impact of chaotics derives less from specific theories than from the general awareness it fosters of nonlinear processes and forms. [...] The Newtonian paradigm emphasized predictability. Such a mindset is exemplified by Laplace’s famous boast that, given the initial conditions and an intelligence large enough to perform the calculations, he could predict the state of the universe at any future moment. By contrast, chaotics celebrates unpredictability, seeing it as a source of new information (Hayles 1991, p. 7).

Hayles concludes: “chaotics concentrates on complex irregular forms and conceptualizes them [...] through fractional dimensions that defeat tidy predictions” (ibid). Whereas the clock might be considered the most appropriate Newtonian

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<sup>131</sup> Venice becomes the apocalyptic city – a revelation of God’s mystery (Fitch 1982, p. 145). It is also interesting that Fitch picks up on the format of *travel writing* in Ruskin – “idiom of travelogue” (ibid, p. 167) – considering the contexts of Macfarlane and W. G. Sebald in previous chapters.

<sup>132</sup> “The concept of entropy provides deep insight into the direction of spontaneous change for many everyday phenomena. Its introduction by the German physicist Rudolf Clausius in 1850 is a highlight of 19th-century physics” (Drake, 2015).

<sup>133</sup> During the nineteenth century ‘Neptunism’ became a theory “which holds that the sea is the *Ur-Suppe*, the fundamental soup, that is to say the matter from which all other material things originated. [...] The Neptunian *Ur-Suppe* becomes what we would call today the prebiotic soup. The marine mixture, the primal liquid state, is the original state of life” (Serres 1983, p. 30).

emblem, “chaos theorists are apt to choose the waterfall” (1991, p. 8).<sup>134</sup> Ruskin’s travel diary “account of the destruction of the beauty of this waterfall [Aiguilles du Midi] in the year 1849” illustrates this point.<sup>135</sup>

*Modern Painters III* and *IV* were both first published in 1856. George P. Landow explains that these two later volumes of *Modern Painters* offer a whole new perspective in Ruskin’s thought, the critical concept of the pathetic (or emotional) fallacy. Landow explains the difficult position of the poet-artist who needs to maintain feeling, emotion and expression, but who also has to be “in command” because giving in to self-centred emotionality would be at the expense of a balanced conception of nature, of the wider world (1971, pp. 387–8). This expense is at the heart of Ruskin’s dilemma.

In *Modern Painters IV* a large section of text and its images are devoted to the characteristics of rocks and their formation. The subject of enduring fascination to Ruskin, rocks embody socio-aesthetic stratification in Chapter VIII (*Works VI*, pp. 128–145).<sup>136</sup> In awe of the grandeur of the Alps, Ruskin describes the most “noble” features and mountain ranges at great lengths, thereby making a further transition from description to aesthetic characterisation (Chapter XII, *Of the Sculpture of Mountains*). Mountains are treated as quasi-architectural features, scrutinised for

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<sup>134</sup> Hayles also remarks that weather is another good example to illustrate the working of chaos theory: “Because the weather is a dynamic nonlinear system, small fluctuations can and do result in large scale unpredictability” (1991, p. 12).

<sup>135</sup> Ruskin: “The following extract from my private diary, giving an account of the destruction of the beauty of this waterfall in the year 1849, which I happened to witness...” (Aiguilles du Midi), *Modern Painters IV*, Chapter XVII, *Resulting Forms:—Fourthly, Banks in Works VI*, p. 342 (Footnote to Cascade des Pèlerins). See also Figure 25 in the previous chapter.

<sup>136</sup> The lesson of “the different characters of these rocks” expressed in “the state of perfect powerlessness and loss of all beauty” in gravel; those who show a “greater degree of permanence, power and beauty” due to “affection and attraction for each other,” and finally the ones who demonstrate the highest degree of beauty and permanence, where “the several atoms have all *different shapes, characters, and offices*; [...] inseparably united by some fiery, or baptismal process which has purified them all” (*Works VI*, p. 132; Ruskin’s emphasis).



underlying laws of organisation. Ruskin observes that all beautiful matter is in decay. This applies as much to Venice as to the Aiguilles range of mountains (Chapter XIV *Resulting Forms* in *Works* VI, pp. 216–240). Nature’s mountains as much as Venice’s architecture suffer from the inescapable tendency towards decay and dissolution; however, the *nobler forms* of mountain *or* style of architecture adhere to intrinsic laws of beauty, divinely authored. Ruskin’s dilemma here is to reconcile phenomenal appearance with eternal laws of order, considering that one of those laws is that of “fracture” (*Works* VI, p. 239ff).

She [Nature] is bound to produce a form, admirable to human beings, by continually breaking away of substance. And behold – so soon as she is compelled to do this – she changes the law of fracture itself (ibid, p. 240).

Ruskin then lets ‘Nature’ speak in the first person:

Devastation instead of nurture may be the task of all *my* elements, and age after age may only prolong the unrenovated ruin; but the appointments of typical beauty which have been made over all creatures shall not therefore be abandoned; and the rocks shall be ruled, in their perpetual perishing, by the same ordinances that direct the bending of the reed and the blush of the rose. (ibid; my emphasis)

If a conservative definition of entropy concerns *irreversible* processes, then Ruskin is tracing such in nature and in civilisation. All in all, what his discerning eyes reveal is dark matter: wherever he casts his eyes, there is moral and physical deterioration at work. Yet, giving in to this inevitable pessimism is not an option for Ruskin (neither from the perspective of maintaining or attempting to maintain his mental health, nor from an ethical point of view). So all devastation, fracture, disorder or seeming disorder, if it demonstrates *typical* beauty, becomes evidence that deeper laws are ruling supreme. Typical beauty becomes the silver lining in Ruskin’s cloudscape.

Ruskin writes about “the great laws of change, which are the conditions of material existence, however apparently enduring” (ibid, p. 176). This introduces another dilemma – what might have been “first created forms” and the cause of their change, deterioration? “Was the world anciently in a more or less perfected state then it is now?” he asks; are we facing the “wreck of Paradise?” (ibid, p. 177). Ruskin does not fully commit to an answer. A once-perfect state now dishevelled directs towards Platonic laws of ideal form; nor can Ruskin the observer agree with this. Yet Ruskin holds on to divine origin as source of all underlying order, which encompasses laws inexplicable to human eyes. So corruption has to be a veneer. Ruskin’s entropy is one in parenthesis – he considers the law of fraction irreversible – but human understanding is limited, it cannot see clearly, and does not fully comprehend; it requires redemption through divine laws shrouded in mystery, “laws of birth and endurance, death and decrepitude” (ibid, p. 209). This is implied when Ruskin describes scenes of variable degrees of visibility, due to weather conditions and obscuring fog and cloud. Hence, clouds become the emblems of divine agents, shrouding what human eyes are not fit to see:

If, therefore, we venture to advance towards the spot where the cloud first comes down, it is rather with the purpose of fully pointing out that there *is* a cloud, than of entering into it. It is well to have been fully convinced of the existence of the mystery, in an age far too apt to suppose that everything which is visible is explicable, and everything that is present, eternal. (*Modern Painters IV* in *Works VI*, p. 180).

Allan Smith argues that Ruskin “distances himself from the view that cycling pattern of destruction and renovation will ensure humans always have a future on the planet” (2012, p. 183). This is congruent with the above interpretation that Ruskin was not prepared to share a view where destruction was balanced out by restitution, a law of equivalence. This might not be so far removed from a contemporary take on chaos

theory. Hayles points out that *contemporary* chaos theory<sup>137</sup> falls into two branches: one is “concerned with the order hidden within chaotic systems” (Feigenbaum and Mandelbrot are given as examples), the other “branch focuses on the order that arises out of chaotic systems” (Prigogine and Stengers are examples) (1991, p. 12). Both these branches of contemporary chaos theory consider order as the necessary other to chaos. It might be that the organising principle has not been recognised yet, but order there has to be, even if it manifests itself in unorthodox ways. The second branch in particular, according to Hayles, challenges the belief held by nineteenth-century thermodynamicists of a “universe that is constantly running down” (ibid). Self-organisation allows for the view that the world is renewing itself.<sup>138</sup> According to Hayles, the Second Law of Thermodynamics has become re-conceptualised through the work by Prigogine and Stengers. One observes this reconceptualisation as being in contrast to the continuous increase of entropy leading to heat death, or total combustion, the poetic vision Sebald endorses in *The Rings of Saturn*. By contrast Prigogine and Stengers argue that “entropy as an engine driv[es] the world toward increasing complexity rather than toward death” (Hayles 1991, p. 13).

French philosophers Michel Serres and Bruno Latour justify the non-specialist (writer, artist, student) applying, testing and affecting scientific theories. This permission is apt when considering that this thesis is not attempting to prove science right or wrong, as it could not argue from a scientific base, but instead is concerned with how far myth, science and religion concur in producing socio-aesthetic theoretical standpoints

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<sup>137</sup> In Chapter XII of *Modern Painters IV* Ruskin disputes that there might be a scientific law of equivalences, which somewhat foregrounds Hayles’s more recent concept of entropy as being non-linear, potential, not yet defined order. Ruskin refers to geologists of his era, who claimed that “destruction and renovation are continually proceeding simultaneously in mountains as well as in organic creatures”, yet he cannot bring himself to agree with this.

<sup>138</sup> This is perfectly illustrated in the capability of glass sponges to renew their silica structure, even if put through a mince-masher (Attenborough, 2012).

(*theoria* for Ruskin, in contradistinction to Sebald's literary entropic pessimism).

Likewise, Hayles points out that the purpose of her investigating the relevance of chaos theory to literature is to retrace the interrelationship between scientific theories and cultural studies (ibid, p. 14). One such example is given by Michel Serres's interpretation of Lucretius's poem *De rerum natura* (1982, pp. 98–124). Serres "identifies the straight fall of the atoms with the reign of Mars; the swerving paths [... with] the order of Venus." This demonstrates a preference of Western culture for "war over love, order over creativity, abstraction over embodiment, aggression over sympathy, death over life" (Hayles 1991, p. 18). Whereas the birth of Venus indicates another possible regime:

The ocean from which she came, unruly in its turbulence and unknowable in its depths, hints that this reign will delight in the fecundity of disorder. Shunning linear reason and fragmented analysis, it will take as its emblems the vortex, the wave, the cloud, the waterfall (Hayles with reference to Serres: 1991, p. 18).

What could be more Ruskinian than the wave, the cloud and the waterfall?

## ***Part 2 Endurance***

In its mysterious past [the sea] encompasses all the dim origins of life and receives in the end, after, it may be, many transmutations, the dead husks of that same life. For all at last return to the sea – to *Oceanus*, the ocean river, like the ever-flowing stream of time, the beginning and the end. (Carson 1953, p. 161)

Entropy's mythological dimension is *chaos*. Ecological disaster is chaos. Out of chaos all things come, and to chaos, to undifferentiated matter, non-matter, all things will return. Chaos is non-organisation, formlessness. This triggers deep-seated fears in the human mind: the idea of ecological disaster is an *Ur-Angst* – a primeval anxiety.

Myths of great floods, described in the Old Testament of the Bible or in the Epic of Gilgamesh testify to this. Myths make sense of disaster, as Rachel Carson suggests in *The Sea Around Us* when she refers to geological evidence of glacial retreat after an ice age:

As for the man who escaped, perhaps in their primitive way they communicated this story to other men, who passed it down to others through the ages, until it became fixed in the memory of the race (Carson 1953, p. 54).

This she exemplifies through the folklore of seafarers sending out birds to ascertain the direction of land: "Tradition and written records tell us that primitive navigators often carried with them birds which they would release and follow to land" (ibid, p. 158). This 'Noah technique' continues in modern accounts of coast pilots. Carson refers to as a "pleasing blend of modernity and antiquity [...] by which we may trace their lineage back to the [...] the sagas or the *peripli* of the ancient Mediterranean seamen", including "the flight of birds and the behaviour of whales" (ibid, p. 160). Ancient folklore, myth, the old ways even find their ways into commercial modern industrial instruction manuals for seafaring. These resort to 'local knowledge' in pursuit of exploiting and exploring the boundaries of knowledge and power, and thus

connect modern man with the “feel of the unknown and the mysterious that never quite separates itself from the sea” (ibid, p. 161).

When referring to the timeless existence of the deep oceans, Carson, like Ruskin, evokes the mysterious, the unknowable: “Probably the sea’s first children lived on the organic substances then present in the ocean waters...” she mythologises, and then continues to twin Creationism and Darwinism: “All the while the cloud cover was thinning, the darkness of the nights alternated with palely illumined days, and finally the sun for the first time shone through upon the sea” (ibid, p. 6).

A citation from Darwin’s journey on the *Beagle* joins what is customarily divided:

The sea from its extreme luminousness presented a wonderful and most beautiful appearance. Every part of the water which by day is seen as foam, glowed with a pale light. The vessel drove before her bows two billows of liquid phosphorous, and in her wake a milky train. As far as the eye reached the crest of every wave was bright; and from the reflected light, the sky just above the horizon was not so utterly dark as the rest of the Heavens. It was impossible to behold this plain of matter, as it were melted and consumed by heat, without being reminded of Milton’s description of the regions of Chaos and Anarchy. (Darwin, quoted in Carson 1953, p. 26)

Ruskin’s editor E. T. Cook reminds us in the introduction to *Proserpina* that the circularity of creation, death and recurrence likewise is an important motif to Ruskin, as evident in the myth of Demeter (*Proserpina*):

The myth of Demeter and her daughter Proserpine (or Cora) is a symbol of the earth-mother – at once the origin of all life, and “the receiver of all things back at last into silence. And, therefore, as the most tender image of this appearing and fading life, in the birth and fall of flowers, her daughter Proserpine plays in the fields of Sicily, and thence is torn away in to darkness”; returning, however, in each year from the underworld, and thus becoming a symbol of the miracle of Spring. (E. T. Cook: Introduction to *Proserpina*, in *Works XXV*, p. xlvii)

According to Cook, Ruskin connected the two kingdoms of Cora and Chronos with the two orders of annual and perennial plants. There were three major reasons for Ruskin to engage with plants' mythological and spiritual significance: firstly, their existence was a celebration of life, giving cause to "wonder, in the presence of the Spirit of Life"; secondly, they embodied typical beauty; and thirdly, plants provided invaluable references to "the place which they have held in the thoughts and fancies, the mythologies and the literature, the art and the religion of the civilised world" (ibid, p. xlvi).

Further, in *Modern Painters V* Ruskin extends the 'taxonomy of rocks' (Volume IV) to plants, starting with leaf arrangements, where growth patterns of buds and overall organisation of leaves on trees inform an understanding of the vegetative gothic (*Modern Painters V* in *Works VII*, p. 32 ff: trees as builders). Leaves stand for social organisation. The section on leaves reasserts Ruskin's faith in order, the restorative order of nature (which here trumps the less gracious 'social' organisation of crystal formation). Leaves, buds, branches, followed by stems, conclude in 'leaf monuments' (*Works VII*, pp. 85–100). Ruskin extends the classification of all things natural to the clouds as formations, and the symbolic and mythical meaning of wind and weather. *Proserpina* reiterates many of the 'vegetative' themes in the initial chapters of *Modern Painters V*. It is obvious that Ruskin reworked his favourite themes, adding new complexities, revisions and interpretations to each representation of a subject. All subjects are intertwined. Ruskin operates here similar to a composer of music; a motif or key theme is 'borrowed', recycled, reworked, and reappears in a different guise in a later publication all over again. Change of heart, of argument, and of opinion is permitted, inevitable in a personality so devoted to growth.

Regardless of whether one is considering mountains, rocks, clouds, or plants, Ruskin's 'Nature' is all-encompassing. For Ruskin, 'Nature' cannot be separated from 'Culture'. "All what is wild or merciless in nature," he says in *The Stones of Venice* (*Works X*, p. 7), "Time and Decay as well as the waves and tempests" support ornament as adornment: beauty *contains* decay. Decay fulfils a complex role in Ruskin's universe. It may be bad, or ominous, a warning sign, but then it may also be part of the overall plan, and nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in Ruskin's admiration for the founding fathers of Venice, whose spirit overcame all dark dimensions of decay, at least during the golden age of Venetian culture:

[T]hat all which in nature was wild or merciless, – Time and Decay, as well as the waves and tempests, – had been won to adorn her [Venice] instead of to destroy, and might still spare, for ages to come, that beauty which seemed to have fixed for its throne the sands of the hour-glass as well as of the sea. (*Works X*, p. 7)

Venice becomes Ruskin's own myth. He investigates its origin in a context akin to Genesis, the building of the city forms an analogy to the founding of the promised land and Jerusalem. Ruskin locates Venice on several levels – geographic, historic, mythological: in its intertidal existence Venice is a mirage and miracle, a vision more so than a reality. Ruskin situates Venice's birth in the lagoon, the sea, shaping its formation. The conditions nature provides accommodate the coining of a specific vernacular. The vernacular of the sea must be Venice. Ruskin marvels about the special conditions, the "peculiar arrangement of this great belt of sediment in the earliest times" (*ibid*, p. 11). Describing the tidal exposure of the land surrounding the islands of Venice, his language brings to mind Macfarlane's description of the Broomway. At "high water" the mud is covered "to the depth in most places of a foot or a foot and a half", at low tide it is "nearly everywhere exposed", "but divided by an intricate network of narrow and winding channels, from which the sea never retires"



(ibid). These channels provide an umbilical cord with nature, the sea, never disconnected with the existence of the city of the lagoon; “the city of Venice itself, is built on a crowded cluster of islands”. There follows an intricate examination of tidal patterns. This is no ordinary guidebook – Ruskin refrains from advertising famous places; instead, he initiates the reader into reflection through his musings on gestation, of how place can be formed in a confluence of nature and civilisation.

At high water no land is visible for many miles to the north or south of Venice, except in the form of small islands crowned with towers or gleaming with villages: there is a channel, some three miles wide, between the city and the mainland, and some mile and a half wide between it and the sandy breakwater the Lido, which divides the lagoon from the Adriatic, but which is so low as hardly to disturb the impression of the city’s having been built in the midst of the ocean [...] But the scene is widely different at low tide. A fall of eighteen or twenty inches is enough to show ground over the greater part of the lagoon; and at the complete ebb the city is seen standing in the midst of a dark plain of sea-weed, of gloomy green, except only where the larger branches of the Brenta and its associated stream converge toward the port of Lido. (*Works X*, p. 12)

Ruskin’s tone then changes to “paradise contaminated”. He describes a “melancholy plain” (ibid, p. 13), and asks the traveller to dispense with (“let him remove”) the vision of a luminous bright city, “until the bright investiture and sweet warmth of the sunset are withdrawn from the waters” (ibid, p. 13), confronted with a primordial existence of formlessness that evokes simultaneously the universe before the creation of the earth, after the Fall, *in limbo*:

[T]he black desert of their shore lies in its nakedness beneath the night, *pathless, comfortless, infirm, lost in dark languor and fearful silence*, except where the salt runlets splash into the tideless pools, or the sea-birds flit from their margins with a questioning cry; and he will be enabled to enter in some sort into the *horror of heart* with which this solitude was anciently chosen by man for his habitation (ibid, p. 13; emphasis mine)

These are images of pathetic fallacy, of desert, desiccation, salt – they conjure Sodom and Gomorrah, expulsion and destruction, apocalyptic ‘gnashing of teeth’. The desert, the endless sea of Noah, the ever-changing rhythm of dry land in readiness to be made fertile, and the threat of punishment (when land is rendered infertile) is hanging over man as a consequence of ill-conceived moral action. Biblical themes of water are plentiful: folding and unfolding, water as force to nourish, to irrigate, to yield abundance of nourishment (shoals of fish in the Gospels of the New Testament), water’s capacity to heal (through a fish’s gall bladder in *The Book of Tobit*, Old Testament; holy water given by Christ in the New Testament), and yet fearsome for its power to annihilate (Noah and the Flood, Exodus, the Red Sea aiding the exodus of the twelve tribes of Judah, but closing over the Egyptians). All the above are evoked in the above Venetian passage: Lot, whose wife turned to salt; the augurs of seabirds lamenting loss; the “tideless pools”. Ruskin is the prophet of ecological disaster, of a post-apocalyptic vision of a fully degraded ecology, where all has collapsed in entropy (the ‘old kind’ of overheating). This *horror of heart* – it is familiar. It is Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. It can be found in Sebald’s writing all over again. It’s the horror of the twentieth century: the trench war, the camps, rainforests disappearing in smoke, glacial melting and the loss of all that is familiar, warm, alive. Not only of humanity, but beyond human. So why evoke this scene when introducing the reader to Venice?

To set the scene for the enduring quality of the type of people who dared to set place in this devastating scene, to found a city. This city has a quasi-foundational – to use Bruno Latour’s term – a *constitutional* role to play, a New Jerusalem subtext, the city, *polis*, enshrining the “common good world” (Latour 2004, p. 99 ff). A motivation so pure that it was not even spurred on by the reward of future inheritance, as these

people allegedly thought little about the fact that “their children were to be the princes of that ocean and their palaces its pride” (ibid, p. 130).<sup>139</sup>

[I]n the great natural laws that rule that sorrowful wilderness, let it be remembered what strange preparation had been made for the things which no human imagination could have foretold. (ibid, p. 130)

Ruskin admires the prescience of those Venetian settlers, their instinct to locate in a place where the tidal patterns were just right to protect the future city from destruction, from invasion or from pestilence (although Venice would suffer both from black death and cholera). This idealised mythological reading of the origin of Venice is more than a historical or travel account – it is a fantasy of hope for haunted Ruskin, who feared the destabilising impact of darkness over beauty, over ‘Nature’ altogether.

When introducing the island of Torcello, Ruskin uses a succession of metaphors and adjectives to describe it amidst “sunburnt weeds whitened with webs of fucus” on “shapeless mounds” next to a “stagnant pool”. An island amidst a “waste of wild sea moor, of a lurid ashen grey”, “lifeless, the colour of sackcloth, with the corrupted seawater soaking through the roots of its acrid weeds, and gleaming hither and thither through its snaky channels” (*Works X*, p. 17). Ashes, repentance, corruption, sin and snakes are woven into this description as a subtext and emblematic ornament, a landscape as *memento mori*. Despite the absence of human habitation, “no living creatures near the buildings” (ibid, p. 18) there is evidence of cultivation and there is the promise of the blue-distanced mountains, and so the language subtly shifts to calmer things: “momentary intervals” of surf, a “calm lagoon” and then a group of buildings of great simplicity and spiritual strength, amongst those the *Palazzo*

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<sup>139</sup> Perhaps another analogy to Exodus, as the Jewish People on leaving Egypt did not know for certain whether they were to reach the Promised Land, but their faith and ambition surpassed doubt.

*Pubblico* and the octagonal church of Santa Fosca (ibid, p. 18). A mother–daughter relationship is created between Torcello and Venice, and now Torcello has become “that little space of meadow land” (ibid, p. 19).

Ruskin praises the early Venetian buildings; they form an extension of his botanical taxonomy. As much as Ruskin analyses the moral quality of wild flowers, so here the character of these buildings is part of the *raison d’être*. Although sin (or its equivalent – a theme of punished earth/sea) there must have been in the first place, as the inhabitants or settlers of Torcello were stranded in a desert of water and mud, but their moral strength, and not least their humility, helped to redeem their situation. Ruskin makes explicit the analogy of chosen people blessed by divine intervention when quoting from Genesis: “The sea is His and He made it; and His hands prepared the dry land” (ibid, p. 35).

[A]nd the first strong impression which the spectator receives from the whole scene is, that whatever sin it may have been which has on this spot been visited with so utter a desolation, it could not at least have been ambition (ibid, p. 20).

Perhaps this is still ambivalent – so Ruskin leaves us in suspense a little longer as to what is to come. But then he leaves no doubt in any reader that these people who might have been in “flight and distress”, searching for refuge, found “shelter for their earnest and sorrowful worship” (ibid). “Simplicity”, “dignity”, “luminousness” and the “touching” quality of “sunshine thus freely admitted into a church built by men in sorrow” (ibid, p. 26). Deep dark melancholy must not become stagnant and paralysing, as one needs to invite the light, because those who are already in darkness do not require further darkness, and “they could not perhaps bear it” (ibid). This search for promises, comfort and hopes to which Ruskin attributes the underlying motivation for creating an architecture of internal lightness and external strength,

nobility and defence makes one think again about what architecture means to Ruskin. Indebted to Spuybroek's (2011) interpretation of Ruskin, architecture is all that grows and builds.

## ***Findings Notes from the journal (undated)***



Figure 30 Doris Rohr (2014) *Marine Scroll I 'Fundsachen' (Findings)*, watercolour and pencil on lining paper, Overall Dimension 56 x 1500 cm, detail 56 x 170 cm. © Doris Rohr. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.

*This drawing, although from an earlier period of research, demonstrates the arbitrary qualities of taxonomy to which Adalbert Stifter refers in his childhood collection of precious stones (see below text). The findings from a seashore, often remnants of human activities, appear to mingle with natural organisms, creating a false aesthetic harmony on first appearance. Like Latour's quasi-objects, however, the initial seductive appearance of plastics or glass found at the seashore comes to reveal a toxic otherness incompatible with survival. Yet there is appeal in this dark matter, and despite its apparent corrosiveness, it also encompasses a strange entropic beauty.*

*Finding smoothed glass or scratched aluminium cans when walking on the shore is a disturbing encounter, and the presence of the 'incorruptible' plastic even more so. Yet infinite scratches, fine marks made by living organisms, colonisation with infinitely small marine life forms, all temper the severity of the impact. Small wildernesses envelope a micro level, no moss and strawberries, but their analogies under water offer small gestures of survival, even superior vitality of life nestling on human imperfection and structures. Dead matter, inanimate matter is colonised and inhabited. The cause of death in turn may feed the life of another organism.*

*For Adalbert Stifter the inclusion of less valuable matter, like that of corroded glass in his collection of minerals, was not a problem of false taxonomy, as he explains in the autobiographical introduction to his collection of darkly sombre short stories *Bunte Steine* (1853), telling us about human fate in the geological context of mountains. In Stifter's own 'geological' collection the fragmentary piece of glass qualified, because*

*of its iridescent beauty. Even if scientifically ineligible to be a mineral, aesthetically it joined Stifter's 'order of things' (1975 [1853], p. 16).*

*My own rationale for including man-made waste in the taxonomy of nature in my drawings (somewhat congruent with Stifter's detection of qualities of beauty in entropy), is that the inclusion of man-made pollutants in the marine environment as a subject matter for 'decoration' is necessary, not as a complicit or misguided act of lack of aesthetic sensibility, but because these dark insertions are a matter of poetic truth. In Marine Scroll 3, man-made disasters find their way into otherwise pastoral landscape depictions; likewise these fragments, the objects of human waste, become stumbling stones, my interpretation of Latour's 'quasi-objects'. Quasi-objects are ambiguous: initially positively loaded substances considered to be aiding progress (asbestos, DDT, uranium, plutonium, oil, gas.... where to stop?) when feeding and housing an ever-exploding humanity, these objects then backfire, turn into monsters. This process of oscillation between positive and negative attributions of value is reversible – and there is always the possibility that such quasi-objects may regain their positive charge, so they can be either 'good' or 'bad', depending on how and when one looks at them. Perhaps Ruskin's Storm-Cloud is such a quasi-object? Irrigating power, awesome envelope of divinity, plague-cloud – Ruskin's clouds are capable of changing from one to the other. The state of looking is not fixed. It is possible to see beauty in terrible things, or there is indeed a compulsive aspect to beauty that is dark.*

*But Ruskin has a point in asking for nobility in ornament (The Stones of Venice). The shortcoming of all prophetic sublime art is that it does not lead to looking beyond misery, it does not try beyond, but gets torn away with the dark state of environmental affairs. Prophecy goes two ways: it can either foretell doom and gloom (disaster) or it*

*can offer promises of better (utopia, paradise). Sebald succinctly reminds us that paradise is harder to conjure than hell; it has always been easier to terrify mankind with images of wrath, guilt, evil, terror and utter destruction than to construct a plausible image of a good future. As a result the art of the sublime has somewhat now become an aesthetic of terror and fear, where the idea of human survival becomes dwarfed into insignificance (Dark ecology).<sup>140</sup>*

*Ruskin's aesthetic of the picturesque, by contrast, acknowledges the fragmentary character of human existence, contains the measure of the human within the wider environment, the noble framework of 'Nature' and its incomprehensible mystical laws.*

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<sup>140</sup> Morton (2009) introduces the term 'dark ecology' as a concept that withdraws romantic association from nature and presents ecology as the enmeshing of human with all other. Ecological catastrophe is by definition built into a dystopian reading of nature as us, and our own nature bearing our consequences. For the purpose of the journal entry here, connecting dark ecology laterally with entropy (see Sebald envisioning the world glowing in embers: 2002, p. 229) is further articulating the difficulties of reconciling awe and spiritual reverie in relation to a view of ecology which does not split the human from mutual invasion of environment.

<sup>141</sup> Serres analyses Jules Michelet's *La Mer* (1861) as introduction to an encyclopaedic understanding of science encompassing natural sciences, geometry, mechanics, physics, chemistry and biology aside from mythical accounts of the ocean as origin of life. Michelet's text, says Serres, unwittingly constructs a metaphorical chain of beings. Serres' task is to reconstruct this chain – a task which "represents an ontogeny and a phylogeny, each incomplete and displaced". This becomes the genesis of knowledge: "the theory of the origins of knowledge is presented as a by-product of the origins of being. By turning back upon itself, nature is the source of self-knowledge, it is itself the origin of the science of nature" (Serres in Harari and Bell 1983, p. 29).





*Figure 31 Doris Rohr (2014) Entropic Cycle, watercolour, white body colour and pencil on artisan handmade paper, 56 x 45 cm. © Doris Rohr. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*

## Chapter 7 Disclosure

“[T]here exists a passage (or passages) between the exact science on the one hand and the sciences of man on the other. This thesis in itself is not new. Since the pre-Socratics and Plato, there have always been attempts to link these two domains, to overcome an unfruitful division.” (Harari and Bell 1983, p. xi)

“By turning back upon itself, nature is the source of self-knowledge, it is itself the origin of the science of nature.” (Michel Serres in Harari and Bell 1983, p. 29)<sup>141</sup>

The preceding chapter largely concerned a return to mythology as a method of approaching the mysteries of the cosmos. Despite Ruskin’s Protestant ‘indoctrination’ during childhood, he was increasingly attracted to Greek mythology with advancing age. The fascination with the Greek ‘model’ of nature becomes apparent in *Modern Painters III*, in the lengthy analysis of *Classical Landscape* (Chapter XIII). Here Ruskin offers a cultural history of how the ancient Greeks understood and celebrated landscape as cultivated, agricultural, quintessentially pastoral. But more so, this chapter allowed Ruskin to develop his ideas about Greek deities. Although he admits that it is not possible for us to enter into the Greek mind fully (*Works V*, p. 223), he soon endeavours to convince the reader that one needs to leave behind puritanical conceptions of Greek gods being idolatry, and he begins a journey into the spiritual universe of classical Greece.

Characters from Greek mythology are introduced, Mars and Diana as complementary antinomies of war and wisdom (*ibid*, pp. 225–7) and celestial struggles for supremacy with Diana and Juno (*ibid*, p. 229). Ruskin compares the mind of the ancient Greek to that of his contemporaries. Unlike modern man, who separates<sup>142</sup> the conceptions of

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<sup>142</sup> “With us, observe, the idea of the Divinity is apt to get separated from the life of nature; and imagining our God upon a cloudy throne...” (Ruskin, *Works V*, p. 207).

the divine from nature, “the Greek never removed his god out of nature at all; never attempted for a moment to contradict his instinctive sense that God was everywhere” (ibid, p. 207).

Ruskin anticipated the need to deconstruct modernity. The pre-empirical understanding of science during antiquity makes necessary this next excursion or *passage* (in Serres’ sense):<sup>143</sup> to accommodate twentieth-century philosopher Martin Heidegger’s reflections on nature. In Heidegger God becomes subsumed, bracketed, subjected to a process of erasure. This provides an analogy to a deconstructive drawing process, a drawing process where iconic images become overwritten and dislocated or displaced,<sup>144</sup> with relevance to the act of drawing as a form of seeing.

Like Ruskin, Heidegger is not ‘anti-science’ but critiques the way modern science has cut itself off from integration into a wider philosophical framework, an argument which connects him with the more recent philosophy of science and environment by Serres (1982) and Latour (2004). Translator and editor of Heidegger’s writings Günter Figal sums up Heidegger’s *critique of science*: it “directs itself against the ‘general rule of the theoretical’ and thus also against philosophy” (2009, p. 4).

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<sup>143</sup> Voyage, passage, journey are all related in their actual and metaphorical sense (Serres 1983, p. xxii), also retrospectively applied to Chapter 2, *Passage*.

<sup>144</sup> For example, the collage process as both additive and deconstructive process; or the ‘iconoclastic’ aspect of layering paint, overpainting layers which make invisible or obscure the previous historical layer, whilst informing the subsequent layers. Deliberate ‘attacks’ on drawing or artwork can be a creative form of vandalism (see Duchamp), and through this contribute to the interrogation of value. Iconic images invite this interrogation. A succinct example of a deconstructive approach where the actual additive painting process becomes reversed and translated through drawing is Brian Fay’s drawing research on Vermeer. Siân Bowen (2012) in the *Nova Zembla* project works with the consequences of disaster, a reversal of undoing where fragmentation becomes pieced together and offers opportunity for reconstruction, thereby commenting on conservation and the passage of time. This type of deconstruction can be dramatic or a slow erosive process.

<sup>145</sup> Here Mulhall gives an account of Heidegger’s critique of Descartes and Kant; this also links with Martin Jay’s critique of *ocularcentrism* in Western philosophy (Jay, 1995).

A philosophy that proceeds in an objectifying fashion, that conceives of everything as thing-like, existing only to be observed, researched, and determined, misses the original access to things, according to Heidegger. This access does not consist in scientific observation, but rather in the experience of things in their originary context; it lies in life, in so far as this is the experience of the world (Figal 2009, p. 5).

Experience discloses, and this holds for science and art; Heidegger does not separate these from each other, as they compliment and reinforce understanding. This can be related to Ruskin's proposal: to understand and appreciate nature, seeing and by extension drawing increases the capacity for aesthetic sensibility, thereby it performs a role inseparable from the scientific holistic gaze Heidegger advocates.

A scientific theory or a work of art does not primarily discover individual things anew but rather lets things as a whole, or at least as a region of things be seen anew. In order that such a sight can be opened, however, the openness of all things the openness of the world as such, must be experienced. It is an experience in which all that exists is 'bracketed,' set in an *êpoche*. Here, what matters is no longer what shows itself, but only the possibility of something showing itself, and therefore also of other, unknown self-showings. (Figal 2009, p. 13).

Heidegger splits knowledge into *ontic* and *ontological*: the *ontic* is disciplined knowledge reduced to objective fact (separately presented disciplines like physics, chemistry, biology, literature, etc), whereas *ontological* knowledge is overarching, entwined, holistic knowledge; wisdom, philosophy. Philosophy operates through critical reflection; it is therefore not the role of philosophy to question ontic knowledge on factual or discipline-specific grounds, but to test the premises (Mulhall 1996, pp. 4–5). What Heidegger brings to the questioning process is an awareness of everyday being, and the interconnectedness of the human being (*Dasein*) with one's surroundings.

Ruskin 'shares' with Heidegger such a concern for the world around him (*Lebenswelt*). Ruskin's spiritual encounter with nature provides access through

looking; this penetrative gaze seeks manifestation of 'good' form within creation. Heidegger stresses the necessity of human interconnectivity with the rest of the world, the environment. That this state of connectedness is troubled and expressed through a state of alienation, is another point of convergence between Ruskin and Heidegger (Ruskin *Works V*, p. 207). This convergence is muted, however, as nature is flawed (human corruption), yet for Ruskin God manifests in natural order in mysterious ways (as a result order is not always comprehensible, or discernible, and needs to be sought for diligently). For Heidegger God is absent – under erasure – revealing chaos (time before God, time before time). Yet Heidegger leaves open the possibility of temporary connectedness with nature as a spiritual encounter – and this is described as *authentic*, as the rare moments when a human being can overcome alienation and separateness from being part of nature through *caring* for the environment. *Care* and the state of *anxiety* are the two remaining possibilities to overcome alienation from environment and to allow for momentary authentic existence (Figal, 2009; Mulhall; 1996).

### ***Critical visibility as a means of understanding and protecting nature***

If Ruskin's approach to *understanding nature* is read through Heidegger, this adds another dimension. If drawing-as-see(k)ing becomes imbued with his philosophical critical questioning process, then akin to this there has to be a critical visibility, performed through the activity of drawing. Besides the experience of reverential awe resultant from immersion in nature, the system of gaining knowledge is one of seeking a better understanding of human beings within the network of relations of their surrounding or environment, Heidegger's horizon of assignment relations:

[B]ut the world is not a possible object of knowledge – because it is not an object at all, not an entity or a set of entities. It is that in which entities appear, a field or horizon ontologically grounded in a totality of assignment-relations; it is the condition for the possibility of any intra-worldly relation, and so is not analysable in terms of any such

relation. What grounds the Cartesian conception of subject and world, and thereby opens the door to scepticism, is an interpretation of the world as a great big object or collection of objects, a totality of possible objects of knowledge, rather than as that wherein all possible objects of knowledge are encountered. (Mulhall 1996, pp. 96–7)

Philosophy customarily “explore[s] the nature of human contact with the world from the viewpoint of a detached observer of that world, rather than as an actor within it” (Mulhall 1996, p. 39). Heidegger changes this – the human being ceases to be in the detached position of observer and becomes an *actor*. The world is no longer perceived as a collection of “objects of vision”, nor as a “spectacle” (ibid).<sup>145</sup> Objects, or in Heidegger’s terms, material things, exist independently from human perception and existence (*Dasein*), but if humans were to disappear, “the capacity to understand beings in their Being” would vanish with them (ibid, p. 98). This position is vulnerable to critique, as Heidegger ascribes to human beings the sole form of *Being* capable of making knowledge-claims, and the ability to critically reassess their conscious relationship to existence (*Being*). More recent philosophical positions embrace that ‘nature speaks back’ and regard the distinctive separate position of man in relation to cosmos as unhelpful, creating a false consciousness (Latour 2004, p. 47). Man is not to be separated from his or her environment: Latour proposes the “reunification of things and people, objects and subjects” (ibid, p. 57)<sup>146</sup> and questions the privilege of humans to speak. Non-humans and humans interact and bear relation to each other and non-humans also speak or murmur or utter, with mutual impact. Participation of non-humans is an act of *translation*, but the question remains as to “how can we go about *getting those in whose name we speak to speak for themselves?*” (ibid, p. 70).

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<sup>146</sup> Traditionally political ecology focuses on crises, on species or habitat loss set apart from man: “the concern for the environment begins at the moment when there is *no more environment...*” (Latour 2004, p. 58).

As soon as we stop taking non-humans as objects, as soon as we allow them to enter the collective in the form of new entities with uncertain boundaries, entities that hesitate, quake, and induce perplexity, it is not hard to see that we can grant them the designation of *social actors*. (Latour 2004, p. 76)

Latour proposes to go *beyond language*, as “language has obsessed philosophy for too long, and it makes access exclusive to humans”:

In order for the *logos* to return to the centre of the City, there cannot be language on one side, and the world on the other, with reference in between, establishing more or less a correspondence between these two incommensurable entities. (Latour 2004, p. 84).

Propositions become articulations free from subject/object connotations (ibid, p. 86).<sup>147</sup> Timothy Morton (2009) also questions the privileging of human over animal sensibilities.<sup>148</sup> Some contemporary philosophy and the branch of anthropology concerned with animals (ethology) have revised the human-centred views on consciousness being a privilege of *homo sapiens* (Rothenberg, 2011; Singer, 1975).

Can such questioning of anthropocentrism be traced back to Ruskin? Obliquely perhaps; Ruskin offers a perspective where waves, clouds, leaves, stems, ornamentation, buildings, paintings can reveal an identity other, larger or beyond human. One might say that Ruskin’s ‘Nature’ at best (when not corrupted) embodies the divine that mankind is subordinated to, and of which the human subject can

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<sup>147</sup> “Let us recall that a proposition\* is not a term from linguistics; it designates the articulation through which the world is invested in words. A river, a black hole, and a fly fisherman’s union, as well as an ecosystem or a rare bird, are propositions. They are all similarly made of a still uncertain mixture of entity and speech” (Latour 2004, p. 267, fn 11) “Inanimate objects, do you then have a soul?” asks Latour and answers himself (and in response to Singer): “Perhaps not; but a politic, surely” (ibid, p. 87) .

<sup>148</sup> Morton refers to a greater degree of emancipation of co-inhabitants of the environment (plants, animals, organisms) and their ethical rights and presumed consciousness; Heidegger has a traditional Western philosophical attitude towards man solely capable of self-conscious being, distinct from the unconscious being of all otherness. “The debate about environment and world – between humans who are able to contemplate their needs aesthetically (with distance), and animals that make do with whatever is around them – is thus a red herring. Marx’s own version is that humans are animals who make their own environments...” (2009, p. 181).

partake through fragmentary and incomplete participation. Ruskin preaches humility, thereby cautioning any form of over-valuing the position of the human. Further, Ruskin's tendency to animate inanimate nature (evident in his love of geology, clouds, climate and sea waves) cuts across perceived hierarchies about living, conscious beings, and unconscious life forms (vegetative, etc.) and inanimate or non-living creation. It is as if Ruskin's consciousness imbues all with *anima*, with spirit, and so subjectively provides connectivity with the cosmos. A fallacy, but one worth making as it positions the subject, and ceases to pretend that there can be a rational stepping out of 'things', a neutral or objective position when speaking about or interacting with 'nature'. And ironically, perhaps, despite their differences, exactly this provides some common ground between Heidegger and Ruskin, in the sense that the act of *critical seeing* supports a larger project: that of gaining self-knowledge, positioning humans in sympathy *with* nature. Care and anxiety need to form part of this. This leads to a renegotiation of one's ethical position: how to act. According to Mulhall, Heidegger's understanding of our everyday mode of *Being* is inevitably *inauthentic*:

In short, Dasein's average everyday disclosedness is inauthentic. Uprooted by its absorption in the 'they' from any genuine concern for its world and solicitude for its fellow human beings, it is also uprooted from any genuine self-understanding – any grasp of which possibilities are genuinely its own, as opposed to those which 'one' has. (Mulhall 1996, p. 107)

There is a fragmentation of existence, a lack of concentration, in our everyday experience of environment. “[A]n authentic mode of Dasein's existence requires overcoming its self-dispersal” (Mulhall 1996, p. 109). One of those modes is 'anxiety' (*Angst*) about one's own state of being, that of being “thrown” to fate (*Schicksal*). Anxiety offers redemption of some sort to Heidegger as it individualises and creates self-knowledge, in turn leading to the other mode of overcoming distractedness: 'care'



(*Sorge*) (ibid, pp. 110–111). Caring for the existence of self, embroiled in the world, is linked to the creation myth of Cura:<sup>149</sup>

So, by invoking this tale, Heidegger emblemizes the conditionedness of human existence – the human condition – as fundamentally a matter of being fated to a self and to a world of other selves and objects about which one cannot choose not to be concerned. (Mulhall 1996, p. 112)

But, as *care* is conditioned by *time* (Saturn and Chronos), this links *Being* and *Time*.

Time leads to history. Heidegger says in the “Indication of the Hermeneutical Situation” (1922):

Caring is looking around, and as circumspect as it is at the same time concerned with the cultivation of circumspection, and with safeguarding and increasing familiarity with the objects of one’s dealings [...] The caring dealings do not only have the possibility of giving up the care of orienting, but on the basis of a primordial tendency of movement within factual life, they have an inclination to do so [...] The circumspecting acquires of a bare *looking at*. In and for the care of looking, of curiosity (*cura, curiositas*), the world is there not as the with-what of the performative dealings, but merely with regard to its *appearance*. The looking is accomplished as an observing, addressing and discussing determination, and can organize itself as *science*. This is thus a way of concerned, observing dealings of the world, a way that is brought forth by factual life. (Heidegger, in Figal 2009, p. 44)

Above is the care of Cura, a science that indicates an openness and non-directed seeing, which is nevertheless *insufficient* as concerned solely with *appearance*. (It reminds one of Ruskin rejecting aesthetics based on sense experience, thereby lacking a deeper motivation, a moral ground when apprehending the environment.) Heidegger hence proposes to go *beyond* the classical distinction of subject and object, observer and observed, to enable a ‘release’ from directedness:

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<sup>149</sup> Mulhall (1996, pp. 111–112) summarises Heidegger’s use of the Greek myth of Cura, who shaped human beings from clay or earth (*Humus, Homo*), and with the help of Jupiter becomes animated. Saturn names this *Homo* – Saturn henceforth controlling man through time (see Sebald). This, Mulhall declares, emphasises human beings’ connectedness with the world, the earth; it asserts “Cura’s shaping of Dasein impl[ying] that Dasein is held fast or dominated by care throughout its existence.”

In being released from the tendencies of directing, the dealings take a *pause*. Observing itself becomes an autonomous dealing, and as such it is defining [kind of] *pausing* [*Sichaufhalten*] with what is objective by abstaining [*Sichenthalten*] from accomplishment. The objects are there as *significant*, and it is only in determinately directed and layered theorizing that what is objective (in the sense of what is simply object-like and thing-like) arises from the world's factual character of encountering (i.e. from what is significant). (Figal 2009, pp. 44–5)

The key issue for Heidegger here is the problem of directedness; instead of *dealing* (classifying, discussing, directing), observing becomes autonomous, decoupled from direction, an act in itself – and this type of looking/observing/seeing defines a *pausing*. This connects with Ruskin's plea to slow down, to *pause*, wanting the reader to let go of analytical looking for a single-minded scientific purpose:

There was always more in the world than men could see, walked they ever so slowly; they will see it no better for going fast. And they will at last, and soon too, find out that their grand inventions for conquering (as they think) space and time, do, in reality conquer nothing; for space and time are, in their own essence, unconquerable, and besides did not want any sort of conquering; they want *using*. A fool always wants to shorten space and time: a wise man wants to lengthen both. A fool wants to kill space and kill time: a wise man, first to gain them, then to animate them. (*Modern Painters III*, in *Works V*, pp. 380–1)

### ***Illumination***

In “The Projection of Being in Science and Art” (Figal 2009, pp. 104–107), Heidegger proposes looking as an act of seeing, a form of illumination. This is a concept that bears affinity with Ruskin's method of seeing. Heidegger's clearing (*Lichtende*) where light illuminates understanding – light standing in for the idea – is related to Turner's

alleged last words, “The Sun is God”.<sup>150</sup> Although Heidegger removed God from the philosophical universe, this is replaced with *something* outside of oneself: the *idea* (*logos*) – this idea is beyond human capacity<sup>151</sup> to understand or to control. It is a graceful encounter, and it is release, and this links with Ruskin’s search for light and mystery as God – as ordering principle beyond human understanding.

Further, as Raymond E. Fitch (1982) points out, Heidegger’s penetration of appearance through authentic moments of *being* fits with Ruskin’s theory of imagination: great imagination, then, is vision, apocalyptic seeing, in which the object presented is an ideal thing but is to the seer an existing thing. At this point Ruskin is near to connecting being with appearance as opposed to the objectively ‘real’.

Heidegger reminds us that being and appearance were one in Greek thought, that:

[F]or the Greeks standing-in-itself was nothing other than standing-there, standing-in-the-light. Being means appearing. Appearing is not something subsequent that sometimes happens to being. Appearing is the very essence of being (1961, p. 134).<sup>152</sup>

True imagination is appearing, for Ruskin it is “seeing” and is, as he will frequently emphasise, “involuntary”. This seems to mean that a great artist like Homer is the passive conductor of vision: “the choice, as well as the vision, is *manifested* to Homer. The vision comes to him in his chosen order. Chosen *for* him, not *by* him, yet full of visible and exquisite choice” (Ruskin *Works V*, p. 118). This complex of choices only *seems* to be an imposed order of human rules; actually the form is ordained by the vision. True invention is never the product of such rules; it “must be the involuntary

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<sup>150</sup> Ruskin frequently discusses the sun and the importance of the sun as illumination in the context of modern landscape painting, with special emphasis on Claude and of course with respect to Turner (*Works V*, p. 402). Turner’s alleged last words, “The Sun is God” (see Collings, 2009), were also used in the film script of Mike Leigh’s *Mr Turner* (2014). Sun, atmosphere and Turner’s relationship to Goethe’s colour theory is the subject of an homage to video artist Paul Pfeiffer (2004), New York.

<sup>151</sup> *Modern Painters III*. Fitch makes explicit reference to Chapter VII § 5 when asserting that Ruskin proposes artistic seeing as a revelatory and imaginative act (1982, p. 236).

<sup>152</sup> Fitch quotes Heidegger’s *An Introduction to Metaphysics* (1961, p. 134).

occurrence of certain forms of fancies to the mind in the order to be portrayed”

(*Works V*, p. 119, in Fitch 1982, p. 236).

Heidegger’s “illuminating view” gives the artist the privileged role of mediating the supernatural ideal and human perception.

[T]he artist possesses the essential insight for the possible, for bringing the hidden possibilities of beings in to the work, and thus for making humans see what it really is with which they so blindly busy themselves. (Heidegger in Figal 2009, p. 107)<sup>153</sup>

Arguably, this can be reconciled with Ruskin’s appreciation of Turner as mediator, yet one hesitates to put Ruskin into the same mould here as Heidegger. Overall, Ruskin does not elevate the artist to the same degree as Heidegger; the focus remains on ‘Nature’ as educator (a theme Ruskin endorses in *Modern Painters* and in *The Elements of Drawing*.) Nature as educator is a theme Heidegger meditates upon in response to an untitled poem by Friedrich Hölderlin which has become posthumously published,<sup>154</sup> “As When on a Holiday...”<sup>155</sup>

Nature is presented as the source of imagination and of art, perfectly congruent with Ruskin in this instance:

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<sup>153</sup> Figal has partially retranslated the original text, “The Projection of Being in Science and Art” [1931–1932], based on a previous translation by Ted Sadler (2002) in *The Essence of Truth: On Plato’s Cave Allegory and Theaetetus* (New York: Continuum, pp. 45–48). Reference based on Figal, 2009, p. 104.

<sup>154</sup> Published posthumously 120 years after its conception in 1800 through Norbert von Hellingrath’s editorial work in 1910 (see Figal 2009, pp. 156–7).

<sup>155</sup> “As When on a Holiday...” (Heidegger in Figal 2009, pp. 151–176). Figal’s translation is based on Keith Hoeller’s (2000) translation of Hölderlin’s poem, which forms the introduction to Heidegger’s essay *Elucidations of Hölderlin’s Poetry* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books). Figal (footnote) (2009, p. 151): “Though I have consulted Hoeller’s version in preparing the present chapter, and taken over Heidegger’s footnotes from that version, much of it has been translated anew from the original. Through the chapter Heidegger cites the historical-critical edition of Hölderlin’s works begun by Norbert von Hellingrath and completed by Friedrich Seebass and Ludwig van Pigenot: Hölderlin’s *Sämtliche Werke*, 6 vols (Berlin: 1923, 1943). Bracketed numbers refer to the pagination of GA 4; the chapter opens at page 49. – Tr.”

Nature ‘educates’ the poets. Mastery and teaching can only ‘inculcate’ something. By themselves they can achieve nothing. In contrast to human zeal and human activity, something of a different nature must educate differently. Nature ‘educates’ ‘wonderfully all-present’. She is present in all that is real. Nature comes to presence in human work and in the destiny of peoples, in the stars and the gods, but also in stones, plants, and animals, as well as in streams and thunderstorms. The omnipresence of nature is ‘wonderful’. She can never be found somewhere within the real, like an isolated actual thing. (Heidegger “As When on a Holiday...” in Figal 2009, p. 156)

Heidegger scrutinises further the role of the poet-seer’s gift of revelation. “This unity of omnipresence is that which displaces [*das Entrückende*]. All-present nature captivated and displaces [*berückt und entrückt*]” (Heidegger in Figal 2009, p. 157). It is the task of the artist-poet to respond and mediate an illuminated understanding of nature.

Heidegger reminds the reader that the Greek term for nature (*natura*), *physis* [φύσις], also means growth.<sup>156</sup> Yet it is important to realise that this is not a quantitative increase, a development, not even the succession of a ‘becoming’, but that φύσις is an emerging and opening [*Hervorgehen und Aufgehen*]: a self-opening that, in opening at the same time, turns back into the emergence and thus fuses with it, giving each present thing its presence” (ibid, p. 159). Heidegger’s concept of ‘clearing’ (*Lichtung*) is a place of revelation through presentness. So “φύσις is the opening of the clearing

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<sup>156</sup> “Nature, *natura*, is called φύσις in Greek [physis] [...] But the translation of φύσις by *natura* (nature) already transposes subsequent elements into the beginning, and replaces what is solely proper to the beginning with something foreign to it. φύσις, φέρειν, means growth. But how do the Greeks understand growth? Not as a quantitative increase, nor as “development,” nor even as the succession of a “becoming”. φύσις is an emerging and opening [*Hervorgehen und Aufgehen*]: a self-opening that, in opening, at the same time turns back into the emergence and thus fuses with it, giving each present thing its presence. Thought as the fundamental word, φύσις means the opening into the open: the lighting of that clearing into which something in general can enter and appear, present itself in its outline, show itself in its “look” (εἶδος, ἰδέα), and thus be present at this or that. φύσις is the opening returning-to-itself; it names the coming to presence of that which resides in the opening as the open. The clearing of the open, however, becomes most purely discernible in letting the transparency of brightness shine through: in “light” (Heidegger in Figal 2009, pp. 159–160). Heidegger further connects light with hearth, and fire, a glowing blaze. See here Michel Serres’s fascinating essay “Turner Translates Carnot” (Harari and Bell 1983, pp. 54–62) – according to Serres, Turner painted the end of geometry and the beginning of thermodynamics.

of what is cleared, and is thus the hearth and the site of light” (ibid, p.160). This in turn becomes associated with the brightness of fire, the spark and glow and glowing aspect of fire, illuminating from within. So nature then becomes the all-present which sets everything “aglow”, and this connects with Hölderlin’s conception of “nature” being “all-creative” and “all-living” (ibid, p. 160). This closes the gap between art and nature – the fecundity of nature impresses the creative mind, and through the creative force nature reveals itself.

Hölderlin’s poem, so comments Heidegger, intimates the vision of nature *sleeping*, awaiting (as referred to in the poem as the quiet before the storm, or the quiet before a period of growth – for example, winter):

Nature, which in a “light embrace” keeps everything within its openness and clearing seems at times to be sleeping. At these times, what has been lighted has retreated into itself in mourning. The mourning that seals itself off is impenetrable and it appears as darkness. But this mourning is not merely an arbitrary darkness, but rather an anticipating rest. The darkness is the night. Night is the resting anticipation of the day. (2009, p. 60)

Nature’s cycles of sleep and growth are contained in Ruskin’s interpretation of the Greek myth of *Proserpina*. The metaphorical subtext of light and dark Ruskin frequently comments on via the concept of *chiaroscuro* when analysing drawing.

### ***Artist as prophet***

Anticipating dawn, Heidegger posits that the poet’s task is to name the unnameable – what is to come – and this is holy. Heidegger’s close reading of Hölderlin’s manuscript with its subsequent revisions (the script indicates that Hölderlin was not

content with the term ‘nature’ any longer and crossed it out [!]: Figal 2009, p. 161)<sup>157</sup> indicates that Hölderlin had overcome the term ‘nature’. Its substitution appears to be closer to the idea of unveiling, or revealing an inner or higher truth: “In awakening, nature unveils her own essence as the holy” (Heidegger in Figal 2009, p. 161). Nature is of its own time and beyond human time:

Nature is older than those ages [*Zeiten*] that are measured out to humans and to people and to things. But nature is not older than ‘time’ [*Zeit*]. After all, how could nature be older than ‘time’? (2006, p. 162)

Yet “Nature is prior to everything real and to all action, even prior to the Gods”. And further: “The holy is not holy by virtue of its divinity; rather the divine is divine because it is ‘holy’ in its way – for Hölderlin also calls ‘chaos’ ‘holy’ in this stanza” (ibid, p. 162):

And from high aether down to the abyss,  
According to firm law, as one, begotten out of holy Chaos,  
Inspiration, the all-creative,  
Again feels herself anew.  
(Hölderlin, quoted by Heidegger in Figal, 2009, p. 162)

Heidegger then questions the compatibility of *chaos* and *nomos* (law): “Chaos, after all, means for us lawlessness and confusion” (ibid, p. 165). Hölderlin in the same breath refers to chaos as “wilderness”, “holy wilderness” and “clumsy wilderness” (ibid). Ruskin’s and Heidegger’s understanding of nature contains chaos and order,

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<sup>157</sup> “Yet a pencil revision, the poet subsequently crossed out precisely these lines; Hellingrath points to this (IV, 337ff.) with the remark that from now on, the name ‘nature’ no longer suffices for Hölderlin. But as a fundamental poetic word, the name ‘nature’ is already overcome in the hymn ‘As When on a Holiday...’ This overcoming is the consequence and sign of a saying that begins from a more primordial point.” (Heidegger, “As When on a Holiday...” 2006, p. 161).

<sup>158</sup> Displacing = *ent-setzend*; awesome = *Entsetzliche* (2009, p. 165).

wilderness; both champion the mediating role of the artist. They use at times similar vocabulary – not surprising, considering the roots of origin in many of the above terms lie in Greek philosophy. Also shared is that the concept of nature is infused with a larger meaning, a sense of divine, no matter how oblique, which reveals itself in Heidegger as a state of diffusion, of chaos; whereas for Ruskin this is less a certainty, but more often a dreaded horizon, a plague-cloud, a divine message causing considerable anxiety to Ruskin, rather than the pathos-ridden elation it promotes in Heidegger. For Ruskin, storm, wilderness, destruction and chaos remain ambivalent terms, encompassing *the possibility* of holy order in mystery, but also representing a demonic quality, indicating sin and punishment as response to the fallen nature of man, as discussed previously in Chapters 5 and 6. For Heidegger, nature becomes absolute, surpasses and precedes the idea of the holy, thereby cancelling itself out and giving over to chaos as origin of pre-existence, the absolute, the law-giving: the sublime. For Heidegger the sublime manifests in holy displacement, and the awesome is inherent to the holy,<sup>158</sup> a quality which nevertheless is (hoped to be?) contained in the enlightenment offered through the poet, the artist, who due to initiation divines knowledge (ibid).

Heidegger essentialises the role of artist as a privileged messenger or prophet, endowed with special powers to overcome the awesomeness of nature – this is part of the miraculous quality of experiencing nature, a sense of delight; indeed, an educational and also humbling experience. The poet makes possible a moment of living in the present.

Ruskin avoids the demand for such total concepts of philosophy, partially as he cannot resolve his own dilemmas. He wavers, is inconsistent. Also, he does not claim that he writes philosophy; although his ideas are referred to by himself as *theoria*, Ruskin



wants the reader to access nature but not through *theory*. Sharing with Heidegger the emphasis on experience, and on *sympathetic* relationships with nature (care and anxiety are concepts one may also apply to Ruskin's view of how to act in respect to living with nature), Ruskin's texts – not philosophy, not theory; more so meditations, notes for guidance, for (self-)education – imply a critically deconstructed view of philosophy. Ruskin's social and educational ideas were intended to be pragmatic, hands-on; he attempted to make readers grow in understanding through practices of looking, of discerning, of drawing, by applying, through doing, in experiencing nature (botany, for example, in the early chapters of *Modern Painters IV*; looking as drawing in *The Elements of Drawing*; allegedly road building as social practice).<sup>159</sup> This is evident in Ruskin teaching drawing to everyone, *not* to nurture elevated notions of becoming an *artist* (thereby fostering privilege or specialist positions), but to *see better*; hence, he argues for visual literacy as a subject in children's school education (*Modern Painters III* Chapter XVII "The Moral of Landscape" in *Works V*, pp. 376–378)<sup>160</sup> as knowledge of nature is and has to be open to all. In Ruskin's moral cosmos, there is thus no place for a neo-Platonic separation of agencies.<sup>161</sup> Not even for poets (with the exception of Turner, perhaps).

Now in all this observe how the higher condition of art (for I suppose the reader will feel, with me, that Turner's *is* the highest) depends upon largeness of sympathy. It is mainly because the one painter has communion of heart with his subject, and the other only casts his eye upon it feeling-lessly that the work of one is greater than that of the other. (*Modern Painters IV*, in *Works VI*, p. 19)

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<sup>159</sup> Road building at Hinksey, to which he recruited amongst others Oscar Wilde, then not the languid aesthete we like to remember. Reference to Hinksey scheme taken from Hunt (1982, p. 349).

<sup>160</sup> "While also the art of drawing, which is of more real importance to the human race than that of writing [...] – this art of drawing [...] should be taught to every child, just as writing is..." *Modern Painters III* Chapter XVII "The Moral of Landscape" in *Works V*, p. 377.

<sup>161</sup> Latour (2004) proposes non-separation of agencies or interdisciplinarity in political terms rather than educational ones, though I am not sure how one can fully separate education from politics.

But Turner – as prophet, mediator, whatever special role Ruskin allocates to him – is elevated to his *highest* ‘condition of art’ through the quality of sympathy, and if this *is* related to Heidegger’s concept of anxiety and care, it needs further consideration.

Heidegger claims “the holy shares a god’s suffering” (Heidegger quoting Hölderlin 2009, p. 174). This idea of suffering, that it is the artist’s (poet’s) role to express this suffering, through the *intimacy* of the encounter with the holy that has surpassed nature,<sup>162</sup> is related to Ruskin’s sympathy as manifest in vital beauty (*Modern Painters II* in *Works IV* p. 161ff).

Ruskin divides between the lower picturesque ideal, which is “heartless” and is characterised by a “delight” in sights “of disorder and ruin” (*Modern Painters IV* in *Works VI*, p. 12), and a higher category of picturesque. The poor social conditions concomitant with a picturesque representation of a labourer’s ruined cottage (as an example) are ignored in the lower category of pictorialism. But Ruskin also indicates that the ascension into a higher order of pictorial representation is a matter of degree rather than of clear-cut attributes, that there “is no definite bar of separation between the two; but that the dignity of the picturesque increases from lower to higher, in exact proportion to the sympathy of the artist with his subject” (*Works VI*, p. 23).<sup>163</sup>

Yet Heidegger’s concept of suffering is not Ruskin’s sympathy – it is originary in character: “it suffers primordially” (Heidegger in Figal 2009, p. 174). It’s a different suffering from Ruskin’s sympathy, as *compassion* is written into Ruskin’s empathy,

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<sup>162</sup> “Because the intimacy that once was, the remaining within the undamaged ‘law’ is a suffering, the eternal heart suffers from its essential beginning. That is why it also “shares a god’s suffering” (2009, p. 174).

<sup>163</sup> Needless to say, Turner reigns supreme in this ability, hence warranting its own category of ‘Turnerian Picturesque’. Whatever poetic imagination Hölderlin personifies to Heidegger, Turner likewise embodies for Ruskin, so it seems.

part of an understanding of fallen nature in need of the quality of mercy. Heidegger translates suffering into endurance, a heroic superhuman act:

By offering itself to the decisiveness of the ray that is a suffering, the holy nevertheless abides, radiating in the truth of its essence, and so it suffers primordially. Yet since this originary suffering is not a sacrificial tolerance, but instead the intimacy that gathers everything to itself, it does not share the god's suffering in a pitying and compassionate way. Suffering means to remain steadfast in the beginning. To the beginning, opening and bestowal are never equivalent to loss or completion, but are always only a more magnificent beginning, a more primordial intimacy. (2009, pp. 174–5)

Ruskin's sympathy is imbued with a sense of loss, the notion of fallen humanity, fallen nature. Heidegger directs us somewhere else here with his interpretation of nature (under erasure) via Hölderlin: the primordial becomes the precondition for timeless *History*, for *Being*. And it also predestines: "The holy primordially decides in advance concerning humans and gods: whether they are, and who they are, and when they are" (ibid, p. 175).

## **Conclusions**

***Christmas Day 2015      Notes from the journal***

*Although it should snow, it rains. Over the last year my thoughts have frequently returned to weather. Prompted by John Ruskin's lecture "The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century" (1884), clouds became one of my subjects. Filmmaker Peter Greenaway organised an exhibition in 1992 entitled "Le bruit des nuages [The Sound of Clouds]: Flying out of this World." Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, translators of Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind*, draw the reader's attention to this coincidence:*

Now it just so happens that Greenaway is the writer and director of the film *The Draughtsman's Contract*, a film about the differences between drawing, painting, and sculpture, about allegory and ruin, about masks and funeral monuments, about strategies and debts, optics and blinds, about living statues and sounds represented in drawing. But above all it is about witnessing and testimony, about legacies and inheritances. And these, it just so happens, are the very themes of *Memoirs of the Blind*. (Brault and Naas in Derrida 1993, pp. viii–ix)

*They further quote one of the characters in the film, Mrs Tallman: "I have grown to believe that a really intelligent man makes an indifferent painter, for painting requires a certain blindness – a partial refusal to be aware of all the options" (1993, p. ix).*

*Why does one require blindness in order to be an artist? We talk about tunnel vision, needing shutters (horses in the time of the advancing Industrial Revolution and mechanisation of road traffic). Being someone who draws or paints on paper in an era of mass communication, instant messaging and virtual vision invites thoughts of kinship with those horses, anachronistic in their being, needing partial vision to keep them on track. If the concept of the simulacrum has prompted us to question any sense of truth, then being blind, the old metaphor for not knowing or refusing truth, is*

*perhaps forgivable. Blindness features as a theme in numerous drawings in the history of art, depicting events in mythology (Plato's Cave; Oedipus; Narcissus) and biblical scripture (Tobit; Jesus healing the blind). The blind seer is also acting as visionary, or prophet who presents insight rather than appearance – the “phenomenal prison of the visible world”. Plato, scared that his soul would be blinded if he “looked at things with [his] eyes”(Derrida 1993, p. 15) resorted to logos as his saving grace. Logoi – so Derrida expands – are “ideas, words, discourses, reasons, calculations” (ibid). This old problem of truth and representation returns to haunt those who draw or paint or film, because art making is about revealing what one believes in. Even if agnostic, or mistrustful of truth, we still want to air our belief in disbelief.*

*Editing – the blotting out of superfluous marks, signs, words – is an act of constant re-vising (a form of altering the truth of the initial version). Such also involves a reflexive relationship to a sense of self (auto-bio-graphy) as presence and absence in the artwork. The great Irish writer and co-inventor of the stream-of-consciousness narration technique, James Joyce, closes the short story “The Dead” with the following words: “His own identity was fading out into a grey impalpable world: the solid world itself, which these dead had one time reared and lived in, was dissolving and dwindling” (Joyce, 1968 [1914], p. 220). John Huston's film *The Dead* (1987) is a masterpiece, translating the closing paragraphs into a scene of twilight, where snow draws grainy greying marks across the camera's eye, blinded yet freed to reveal another vision, a scene of draining colour, reduced to saturated blacks and nightblues, snow erasing the memory of shapes, the drawing (or writing) of the white flakes akin to an editorial process, laid onto the amorphous underpainting of the clouds.*

## ***Project conclusion***

This thesis set out to evaluate the legacy of nineteenth-century art critic, theoretician and artist John Ruskin with special reference to the agency of drawing as a method of equal importance to that of verbal discourse. To promote Ruskin as a champion for visual practice-based research may sound anachronistic, yet on numerous occasions, as has been shown in this thesis, Ruskin advocated drawing as means of learning to look, penetrate and gain deeper understanding of the world. Beyond sourcing references and images in support of this thesis, the text aimed to examine relevant philosophical and literary texts of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to establish continuities. The idea of relevance is based on shared affinities rather than that of influence or shared knowledge of each other. One such shared aspect is the desire to integrate the understanding of nature into a larger belief system, defined through spiritual respect for natural systems going beyond empirical, reductive scientific methods. In the search for underlying laws of beyond-human relevance in establishing the patterns and order of the natural world, insight about human behaviour and responsibility becomes a necessity. Ruskin asks for a necessary moral desire to care for our environment both social and natural, voicing anxiety when this has gone out of sync (see Chapter 5), a sentiment that foreshadows Martin Heidegger's assertion that authentic existence was available as a momentary state only, expressed through the state of anxiety and of care (Chapter 7).

Ruskin was keen to critique his own society and culture for omitting to take care of the environment, human and non-human. This failure of moral responsibility is echoed in the way nature responds, through disorganisation and loss, at times reacting and acting to human moral failure like the proverbial writing on the wall. As indicated

in the introduction, Ruskin analyses moral failure and gives positive moral counterexamples, for example his examination of the historical and mythical genesis of Venice out of the lagoon (Chapter 6). Ruskin's key concept for positive action is that of sympathy, a quality of deeper engagement with one another, human and non-human, natural *and* man-made. Sympathy deflects from personal points of view and engages profoundly with the other. Although beyond the remit of this thesis, this could be classed as an intersubjective relationship that removes the idea of self-constituted inner being unique to one's own persona, instead making the sense of self reliant on *other*, providing interaction and relational reconstitution. Ruskin's proto-intersubjectivity of non-human with human relationships is of a different order from Heidegger's conception of nature. Reference has been made to Jacques Lacan, when recalling the complexity of nature–human–self–other relationship as retold in the anecdote of the sardine can (fn 66). Bruno Latour further offers a contemporary radical perspective on investigating ecological relationships, eroding traditional human-centred hierarchies. The diminished status of humans as actors in a wider world is implied in Rachel Carson's lyrical scientific account of the oceans and their origins. Radical action through publishing research and court action was her moral response to seeing natural resources ill-treated through human ignorance. German post-war writer W. G. Sebald connects surprisingly well with Ruskin when interpreting the signs of nature as a message to remind us of human wrongdoing. Ill-treated nature forecasts atrocities of mankind. Moral responsibility in facing a depleted world becomes the connective trait across the diverse written and visual sources consulted throughout this thesis. But if morality is such a key aspect in understanding our own role within nature, how can the visual practice of drawing contribute?



In the introduction the proposal was made that drawing would act as a key method for this research project, more specifically “drawing as a form of penetrative looking, providing insight”:

Ruskin promoted drawing as a method and agency, a tool that could sharpen penetrative examination of the environment and pay homage to the beauty of creation, a creation perceived under threat from metaphorical and actual forms of pollution (*Introduction* p. 4).

Promoted by textual investigation and comparative analysis, drawing as tested throughout this project became another level of *text*, providing an integrative vision performed through my practice of drawing. This practice, far from being unique or special to me, has to be a transferable method and skill, accessible and understandable to others. When Ruskin advocated self-taught looking in *The Elements of Drawing*, this was with the aim of aiding a process of slowing down, aiding mindful concentration, underpinned by the moral requirement to exercise *sympathy* when we draw. This sympathy requires a sense of immersion and full appreciation of trying to understand the organisation of what one draws. Furthermore, drawing as method need not be confined to marks on paper, although this has been one of my preferred methods of documenting a state of reflection, immersion and meditative appreciation of nature, deemed necessary as a condition for making the drawings. The act of performing a drawing *in situ, en plein air*, through heightened senses, stationary or when walking, can liberate drawing to be an act that may not have been documented on paper alone. The various walks along the coastline informing my collections and recollections of found objects, jetsam, flotsam, quasi-objects, and of views, landscapes, details of living or non-living organisms – these walks already perform drawing, with my body being fully engaged with my environment. Let it not be

forgotten that sympathy implies respect, which in turn means moral responsibility, anxiously caring for the natural environment.

Maryclare Foá is quoted in the introduction of this thesis, indicating a shared philosophical understanding of interconnectivity, another word for sympathy in my estimation. What I miss in much contemporary discourse about drawing is not an awareness of moral responsibility, as artists frequently draw attention to injustices or tragedies (and have done so historically), but an acknowledgment of the need for an aesthetic based on morality. Ruskin, disliking the connotations of aesthetics, substituted this with the term *theoria*, thereby making a claim that, to use contemporary language, art practices need to have a conceptual underpinning. In contemporary terms, however, Ruskin's implicit anti-materialism is easier to reconcile with theories of deconstruction than his search for divinity in nature. Dismissable as romantic, the spiritual quietude Ruskin sought appears inappropriate in a global culture of rapid and constant live-streaming. Advocating quiet withdrawal to learn to draw a humble pebble, or a small plant in the niche of a crevice, appears out of date. Yet evidently, this is exactly what Michael Landy did when reinventing his practice as contemporary artist by turning to drawing. Drawing skills are increasingly in demand in art education, and the resurgence of drawing research (*TRACEY*, University of Loughborough; *Drawing Research Network*; *Drawing Research Theory and Practice*, for example) attests to the importance of drawing as a form of visual cognition, presenting an argument for the visual as text.

In addition to defining or attempting to define moral drawing, Ruskin also allowed me to contemplate further the relevance of beauty in moral drawing, understanding that in Ruskin's *theoria* one is reliant on the other, or that beauty would not be possible without moral concern. I proposed that the works of Ellen Gallagher exemplify a

wonderful infiltration of natural form to express moral necessity. Her drawings are beautiful in a most profound way, celebrating the organisation of underwater specimen, colour, and their strangeness. Strange beauty, otherness, this is the subtext of her work, drawing attention to racial prejudice and a history of ill-understood and mistreated cultures of ethnic difference to white supremacism. Is Gallagher's moral subtext relatable to Ruskin's appreciation of Turner's *Slave Ship*? (Ruskin, *Works III*, pp. 571–2).

Terrible beauty is of contemporary relevance. Ruskin knew that visual artworks could effectively communicate the oxymoron of beauty and terror, in which terror compromises nature. These acts of visual description are honest, as they reflect on human moral shortcomings, and remind us of the ideal of an uncorrupted view of the world as paradise and as utopia.

The way I understood Ruskin's method has been adhered to in my visual research approach. Privileging humble acts of observational drawing in the initial stages of research, my key aim was to create a better understanding of selected natural forms, primarily connected to the coast and marine environments. Soon I found that pollution, in particular plastics, intervened with ideal natural form and a more complex argument emerged – particularly as some of the jetsam, the findings or pollutants, demonstrated visual attractiveness as objects. This is akin to Latour's definition of *quasi-objects* led on to a wider form of story-telling. Influenced by Sebald's narration technique of weaving phenomenological description together with history as legacy, and voicing prophetic unease about the state of the cosmos, my own visual narrations began to envelope world events communicated through media images within my own visual observations, alongside images generated by science methods (e-microscope and digital images), to create images generated through fusion

and imagination. Hybrid drawings like the series of *cloud drawings* (Appendix 1, figure 4 a–c) were partially generated by relying on observational drawings from aeroplanes, and partially generated by translating media images of explosions in war zones; they indicate the degree of reinvention or imagination connecting a dualistic understanding of nature as good (paradise, uncorrupted) and nature as bad (compromised, destructive) into a system of interconnectivity. This is something Ruskin had fully realised in the lecture *Storm-Cloud*. Likewise the diagram *Debris Curvature* (Figure 2) a visual prompt to reinvestigate the concept of entropy in Chapter 6, fulfils hybrid intentions of destructive and constructive forces in the environment.

Poet Tim Dee proclaims in *The Running Sky*: “... the idea of man as a fallen creature who has acquired knowledge but lost feeling [...] this is Adam’s curse...” (2009, p. 87). Like Ruskin, Dee also provides a virtuous positive case study exemplified through British ornithologist John Buxton. Captured by German troops in Norway on the 10th May 1940, Buxton became prisoner of war in a camp in Eichstätt (Bavaria) near Solnhofen: the very place where the Archaeopteryx fossil was first discovered.<sup>164</sup> In Eichstätt, Buxton “watched birds, which came through the camp wire to breed” (ibid, p. 78). Dee, as if to continue Ruskin’s project, draws attention to Buxton’s method of mixing science with poetry:

The prison fence and the redstarts coming and going through it proscribed the parameters of his research. Their much longer journeys beyond Buxton’s view, on their migrations to and from Germany, become a kind of shadow book to the actual study. He literally cannot go with them, but nor can he scientifically, and this opens his mind. He doesn’t stop being a scientist, but as with his studies hedged with doubts on the

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<sup>164</sup> Several finds, actually: 1855, 1861 and 1877, and then three subsequent discoveries, presumably in the twentieth century – see Gemeinde Solnhofen (2016) <http://www.solnhofen.de/index.php?id=0,82> accessed 3rd February 2016.

breeding birds, he writes about redstarts in Africa with a curiosity accompanied by what seems like a generous shrug. [...] And Buxton's book now seems both ahead of and behind the idea of the series he was writing for. Ahead – because the book makes an account of our separation from nature (metaphorically dramatising it even since the watchers were prisoners), and it records a yearning to close the gap between us while knowing that no such closure is possible. Behind – because it appears not to want to know everything, wants indeed the unknowableness of the redstarts to be part of what a redstart is. This is Buxton as romantic poet. He wanted to be an amateur because he knew the etymology of the word, that an amateur is a lover, and that his love for his redstarts lay at the heart of his experience of them. (2009, pp. 80–81)

Ruskin lived at a time when there was no clear separation between scientific invention or discovery as result of being a trained scientist (professional) in distinction to the self-educated. Interested in geology from early childhood, Ruskin developed further interests in the arts and architecture, culminating in a command of expertise in art criticism and aesthetic evaluation that led to the publication of the five volumes of *Modern Painters*, establishing his public writing career. His interest in geology, however, enabled him to make unusual lateral connections, to describe landscape in proto-psychogeographical terms, to study nature in relation to the aesthetics of representation in the arts. This form of lateral thinking opens up discourse and enables fresh insights into a discipline. Buxton's personality was defined by having more than one narrow direction of interest. His capabilities as poet and writer of fiction, his imagination, helped him to overcome the restraints of scientific methods, of established taxonomy. It also permitted a temporary escape from the pressured and dehumanising environment of the prison camp, at least in the mind. Dee expresses this perfectly:

I think of Buxton as a man of 'negative capability' in Keats' term, 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'. This needn't imply the hackneyed polarities of science and poetry – it could be, as with Buxton (a scientist and a poet), a way of bringing both together and letting each inform

each other. Science makes discoveries when it admits to not knowing, poetry endures if it looks hard at real things. Nature writing, if such a thing exists, lives in this territory where science and poetry might meet. It must be made of both; it needs truth and beauty. (Dee 2009, p. 86)

This “territory, where science and poetry might meet” requires morality. And morality entails love and compassion, or sympathy – a sharing of suffering in adverse conditions, a wish to put right or to improve. Latour points the finger towards false premises of modernity, an ideology prescribing that specialist knowledge leads to truth (1993). This obsession with constant splitting of facts, an over-preoccupation with analysis, is held responsible by Latour for the devaluation of a moralistic way of perceiving and acting in the world. The split between facts and values made moralists redundant in modernity; hence Latour invites moralists to participate in the new parliamentary system that makes them “indispensable again”. “In the old framework, the moralists cut rather a sorry figure, since the world was full of amoral nature and society was full of immoral violence” (2004, p. 160), whereas in the “new framework the moralists help to keep porous the fragile membrane that separates the collective from what it must be able to absorb in the future if it wants to produce a common world, a well-formed universe, a cosmos” (ibid). Latour therefore extends the ethical premises of ‘love your (human) neighbour like yourself’, of ‘do not do to others as you want done to yourself’ to the wider life-world:

We can define morality as uncertainty about the proper relations between means and ends, extending Kant’s famous definition of the obligation “not to treat human beings simply as means but always also as ends” – *provided that we extend it to the nonhumans as well*, something that Kantianism, in a typically modernist move, specifically wanted to avoid. (Latour 2004, p. 155)

Here Ruskin helps to furnish and complement Latour’s vision, as Ruskin offers art a larger stakehold in his parliament of nature. Whereas science pretends to provide

‘neutral’ facts (science as things in themselves), art is concerned with relations: with eye-witness. “Science has to do with facts, art with phenomena“ (Fitch 1982, p. 194). Fitch recognised that Ruskin anticipated a difference between *conceptual and relational awareness* (ibid, p. 203). Renaissance art was a cul-de-sac for Ruskin, as it was grounded in observed factual relationships of an emerging modern science; its formalism was unable to appreciate the “faithful naturalism of the Pre-Raphaelites or the penetrative symbolism of the medieval painters” (ibid). This asserts the argument for the importance of symbolism in imagination and fiction, in the arts:

When he says that the modern [contemporary to Ruskin] artist wants emotion and perception, not experience and science, he appears to be making a distinction between conceptual and relational awareness, between representation and expression. The artist’s fundamental concern is *not with direct copying of the object, but with enabling the object to say what it must say*; yet to supply the object with its necessary language the artist must be aware of what it has said to others, be a speaker of the symbolic language of past ages. This competence cannot be given by analytic knowledge of the object or by techniques of representation. What can science tell the artist about the ways in which a natural object, say an olive tree, has traditionally been perceived or “intended” by observing consciousnesses? To the artist, the olive tree is not merely a living thing perceived in a neutral way *but a living symbol, and object-for-consciousness that includes not only his immediate perception of the real object but also any awareness of its mythic or symbolic significance* he may possess. (Fitch 1982, p. 203; emphasis mine)

The method of making sense of phenomena requires always more than the statistic, the mere observable and quantifiable data, and this becomes no more evident than when it comes to clouds, weather and climate, as we consider the ungraspable, untouchable and elusive, the effects of something which we cannot pin down, nor cage, nor preserve in formaldehyde. Alexandra Harris sums up such sentiment:

As the anthropologist Tim Ingold observes, we can feel warmth but we cannot touch it. We can see where a cloud is and where it is not, but we cannot run a finger around its edges. Shakespeare thought of clouds as ‘dislimning’. To ‘limn’ is to delineate, but

weather in inimical lines, dissolving them as soon as they are made. Meteorological phenomena are serially elusive. Winds and air-fronts reveal their characters only in the effects they have on other things. (2015, pp. 9–10)

Harris furthermore suggests that the very elusiveness of wind, weather, storm and cloud has inevitably become associated with the divine.<sup>165</sup> Landow also argues that such “imaginative conception of truth” is “derived from religious sources”. Further, says Landow, Ruskin escapes (or attempts to do so) the pitfalls of a romantic science through the equation of the great artist with prophet, divine seer. “Although he makes use of the romantic description of the poet as a sensitive, emotional man, extending it to include the painter as well, Ruskin paradoxically distrust the effects of emotion on art” (1971, pp. 377–8). Landow guides the reader through various stages of Ruskin’s thinking on emotion in art. In *Modern Painters II*, he dismantles Romantic thought as unreasonable, as emotion gets in the way of reasoning “shrewdly, yet I doubt if, except when we feel deeply, we can ever comprehend fully” (Ruskin, *Works IV*, pp. 180–181, in Landow 1971, p. 378). This dilemma causes unease, but nevertheless “emotional and imaginative perceptions contribute more than reason to human existence” (ibid). In *Modern Painters III*, Ruskin explores the ill-effects of emotion on the artist’s vision, thereby defining the idea of ‘pathetic fallacy’ as a false understanding of nature. Ruskin’s discussion of the pathetic fallacy “contains his most direct confrontation of the problems of a theory of art centred on the feelings” according to Landow (ibid).

Yet Ruskin wanted feeling, asserting that sympathy is a quality larger than reason, as it is the heart that reaches out to understand, comprehend the external world – nature –

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<sup>165</sup> This elusiveness, combined with tremendous power, means that in almost every culture the weather has at some stage been thought divine. It has in turn provided the imagery by which deities are known. The Christian God, everywhere present but nowhere visible except in His workings, is often represented as a figure emerging from cloud or air. Speaking out of a whirlwind to put Job in his place, God defined omnipotence through His command of weather (Harris 2015, p. 10).



and internalises nature this way. Here Ruskin is astonishingly contemporary – a point Landow also makes, at least indirectly,<sup>166</sup> when explaining that Ruskin avoided the problem of subjectivity or solipsism by doing away with such terms as “objective” and “subjective” (ibid, p. 379). Tempered by intersubjective understanding, poetic fallacy becomes a complex concept less easily dismissable. As emotion, thinking with the heart, is a precondition for contemplation, and as only contemplation can lead to deeper understanding of truth through a mystical union with nature, human vision becomes temporarily suspended, or rather, elevated to a higher state of perception in sympathy with the divine. But beyond “fancy”, imagination requires that “deep heart feeling” (Ruskin, *Works IV*, p. 298, in Landow 1971, p. 382):

In other words, considered in relation to the interior state of the speaker the pathetic (or emotional) fallacy tells the truth, for by presenting the world as experienced by a man under the influence of powerful emotion, this device can tell us much about the inner life of another. From this point of view, then, the distorting effects of emotion, once understood correctly, are not solipsistic, are not isolating. Rather, by manipulating a portion of reality which both speaker and listener share, the pathetic fallacy allows one to glimpse the passions within the consciousness of another human being (Landow 1971, p. 383).

This leads to a perhaps surprising conclusion: that pathetic fallacy becomes a truth, not understood as provable and measurable, but as an inner truth relating man to the world. This, says Landow, is what “Ruskin takes to be the role of art, which is to present things, not as they are in themselves – the role of natural science – but “as they appear to mankind”.

Science studies the relations of things to each other: but art studies only their relations to man: and it requires of everything... only this, – what that thing is to the human eyes

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<sup>166</sup> Yet “[t]he truth conveyed by the pathetic fallacy is phenomenological truth, the truth of experience, the truth as it appears to the experiencing subject” (Landow 1971, p. 384).

and human heart, what it has to say to men, and what it can become to them. (Ruskin *Works XI*, p. 48, in Landow 1971, p. 384)

Ruskin works through the idea of emotion gradually, revising it, allowing for emotion if it enables greatness of vision, but admonishing the artist carried away by feeling.

Needless to say, there is no resolution to this pathetic tendency of representing oneself. Momentarily, perhaps, one can escape the tyranny of self, when immersed in full concentration, the act of seeing or drawing, being consumed by nature, rather than one's own feelings and thoughts. In that sense Ruskin shares with Heidegger the precariousness of authentic moments. Perhaps these are the moments of blindness we require for drawing, according to Derrida – a momentary blindness to the self. This can be related back to Ruskin's demand to recognise the trap of the self, and the attempt to escape it recognising the incarnation of the divine, manifest in redstarts or clouds or moss on rock.

**28th December 2015      *Notes from the journal***

*I was struck by Derrida's comment of sight being breath. Breath is life. If sight is breath, and if our capability to see is impaired, as we are blind or partially blind to perceive fully, then we constantly hover at this threshold of life/death. Is life nothing but an amazing endurance act? I was watching a documentary on Alaska over the Christmas break featuring the indigenous Alaskan ground squirrel. It hibernates to get through the fierce winters, and in its dormant position is akin to a human being in a coma. A tiny little organ switches the life force back in this endearing creature, more reminiscent of a dormouse than a squirrel. Every so often, this switch sends a shiver through the squirrel, and vital blood is pumped to the brain to keep all functions healthy. Then the temperature of the squirrel returns to below zero and it is back in hibernation. This knowledge I owe to the allegedly dispassionate observing eye of science. Yet the stepping in and out of consciousness speaks to me on a poetic level.*

*Derrida, in the paragraph about breath, talks about his own illness. Coincidentally (but there is no coincidence for Derrida), he had suffered from a rare virus resulting in one of his eyelids not being able to perform its important blinking function. This led to facial paralysis. He describes the "loss of the 'wink' or 'blink', therefore this moment of blindness that ensures sight its breath" (1993, p. 32). Derrida muses over the kinaesthetic explorative 'gaze' of contemporary science where sound and wave patterns explored the lack of sight in his affected eye. Any medical attention brings us to contemplate mortality as we become the subject of such detailed interrogation through instruments and machines, and the human end receiving these data to help us back to health.*

*Ruskin, I believe, offers instructions on how to live a life worth living, a responsible life which gives due respect to the beauty of nature. Despite all his fears and anxieties about moral and physical pollution, Ruskin wanted his reader to search for the inner core, the certainty of divine mastery behind all corruption and disintegration. In that sense, he invested entropy with that power to mask change, revealing the possibility of becoming. It is important not to let darkness wipe out everything. On the graphite leaden surface of marks deleting their own distinctiveness there are light nuances of life. Winnie, my pet rabbit, breathing softly with a minute sigh when licking her own paws. A pair of blue tits visiting my newly acquired bird feeder. I feel more comfortable counting these blessings. They are by no means trivial. These are my redstarts. This is the stuff in-between the blinks.*

### ***30th December 2015      Notes from the journal***

*At dusk, the flight of gulls sailing in the afterblowing of last night's heavy winds. A rainsodden dark morning where ink slowly changes into a milky grey suffused with a light blue, the slightest. The admirable capacity of gulls to benefit from conditions adverse to most. Their elegant opportunism cheers me.*

*This time the storm did not frighten me as much as previous ones, perhaps not at all. Maybe it sounded less serious than others, a bit like one gauges the sincerity of a parental rebuke by considering the likelihood of it posing as an empty threat. It's the tone of voice that gives away the dimension of anger. The sincerity scale.*

*On a dark rainy December day the light levels only change imperceptibly, the reverse process to dusk. Slowly letting light bleed into the night until the eye can perceive colours. The stale wintergreens of shrubs, the watery orange from the street lamps*

*reflected in the opposite house's window. The colours have the quality of hand-tinted photographs from a bygone era.*

*I am writing in the semi-dark, writing without full control over the marks. Derrida writes about his writing (trait) without looking. The scribble of the annotation – that moment, if not trapped into some form of memory device (text/drawing), will elude and vanish. Disliking the violent starkness of artificial light, much of the twilights and nights I experience awake are accompanied by candlelight and the comforting glow emanating from the fireplace. In the morning's twilight dawn take care of my movements and perceptions. At times I practice twilight drawing and writing in the morning, when the space in my head is free from preoccupation and the ballast of a day's impressions and concerns. Like this morning: the increased lumen makes me begin to recognise my own handwriting. A deliberate choice not to switch on the computer, but to let everything emerge in its own natural pace, pen on paper. To gently let the black and white rods in the eye 'hand over' to colour vision. The circularity of time in day and night, in the seasons, the reliable movements of the planets, the rotation of the earth and credible certainty of sun, moon, stars; this is all soothing me. Many things appear 'unfaßbar' – ungraspable, beyond my capacity to emotionally or intellectually comprehend. This applies most to linear time and its consequences on being. But the regular movements of the tides, the rhythm of withdrawing and recurring, the waxing and the waning, dusk and dawn, these are kindred to the capacity of drawing in offering solace: Trost.*

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## Appendices

### *Notes on documentation of visual research in Appendices 1–3:*

Appendices 1 and 2 describe the project journey through drawing. In particular the *Marine Scrolls*, giant notebooks or scrolls, narrate the journey of my drawing practice in a continuous format. Alongside these sequential formats of laying bare a visual stream of consciousness, other drawings, compressions of iconic imagery into layers of narration, provide more reflected and premeditated solutions to how successive or parallel states of perception and representation may be visually represented.

For example, the drawing of *Coelacanth* (Appendix 1, figures 6 a–c) is formed of three layers, two of those fusing the beginning and end of this quasi-mythical creature referred to as a fossil fish as it survived from a paleontological past into the present, with a third layer sandwiched within, describing one of Latour’s *quasi-objects* of the present determining the future: the irritant pollutant (a golf ball, for the sake of easy illustration, but it could be anything, including invisible plastics or formless chemicals or radioactivity).

The series of *Cloud drawings* (Appendix 1, figures 4 a–c) also aim to fuse parallel visions: weather observations with allusions to climate change, and another more graphic man-made interference in the objects of the sky or heavens, clouds of detonations, missiles and bombs.

Earlier drawings of *Algae* (Appendix 1, figures 1 a & b, 2 a & b, 3 a & b) also attempted to fuse states of alternate appearance and evoke the soft wafting movement of these organisms equipped to withstand radical changes in temperature, states of

tides, wave pressure, exposure to sunlight and ultraviolet rays, salinity and acidity of its surrounding medium, water.

To represent faithfully these extraordinary survivors in a hostile world demanded more than freezing into one static drawing. Installation techniques of letting these drawings float freely, suspended via line and clips, attempted to communicate this, in preference to traditional framing under glass, somewhat endowed with negative associations of a science of taxidermy and preservation of dead creatures as a means of advocating knowledge. (Installation documentation is contained in Appendix 3.)

**Appendix 1** presents my visual research through continuous drawing (*Marine Scrolls*) and through layered drawings (*Coelacanth*, *Melencolia*, series of algae and rock pool drawings).

**Appendix 2** Artist book *Jetsam* was a result of reworking images from *Marine Scroll 1* into layered drawings. The book has been professionally bound by artisan bookbinder Eilis Murphy (*Folded Leaf* <http://foldedleaf.ie/collection/artists-book/>), who designed a protective case (not reproduced) from Rohr's visual material. The book contains Rohr's pencil and watercolour drawings on linen paper, alternated with pencil on interleaving papers, with a book cover of one of Rohr's blind printed embossings, based on a drawing of a fossilised fish skeleton.

### **Appendix 3**

**3.1** Group show: *Line – An Ambiguous Journey*, curated by Anna Marie Savage and Joanne Proctor. Contributors: Craig Donald, Joanne Proctor, Doris Rohr, Anna Savage. Part 1: *Institute of Art and Design and Technology*, Dun Laoghaire (September 2013); Part 2: *Crescent Arts Centre*, Belfast (November 2013); and Part 3: *An Culturlann*, West Belfast (January–March 2015).

**3.2** Two-person show: *Dwindling Abundance* by Rohr/Geddis (accompanied by public workshop “Flotsam/Jetsam”, proceeds in aid of local seal sanctuary), hosted by public gallery *Ards Arts Centre*, Newtownards in the Georgian Gallery. This exhibition was the result of a joint proposal with Michael Geddis, subject to peer review. The public workshop was intended to disseminate findings further through hands-on drawing engagement (29th January–21st February 2015. Workshop 21st February 2015).

**3.3** Group Show: *Paper, Wall, Table and After*, curated by Siân Bowen and Chris Dorsett, Northumbria University. Part 1: *Gallery North*, Northumbria University (1st December 2014–23rd January 2015); Part 2: National Taiwan University of Arts, Taipei (30th November–6th December 2015). Part 1 exhibited a notebook (not illustrated), *Melencolia* (layered) and *Coelacanth* (Appendix 1, figures 5 a–d and 6 a–c); Part 2 included a specially commissioned folded drawing to the dimensions of a standard Ordnance Survey map (Documentation of *Homage to Rachel Carson*, Appendix 1 figure 1.11).

Project documentation can be found on the blog of *Paper Studio Northumbria*  
<https://paperstudionorthumbria.wordpress.com/exhibitions/paper-table-wall-and-after/>

**3.4** Research student group show: *In-Betweenness*, Lancaster University Institute of Contemporary Arts (LICA), at the Storey Institute, Lancaster (24–28th November 2015).

**3.5** One-person show: *Jetsam* (PhD exhibition 29th March–4th April 2016) at the Storey Institute Lancaster, with LICA, Lancaster Institute of the Contemporary Arts, Lancaster University.



## *Appendix 1*

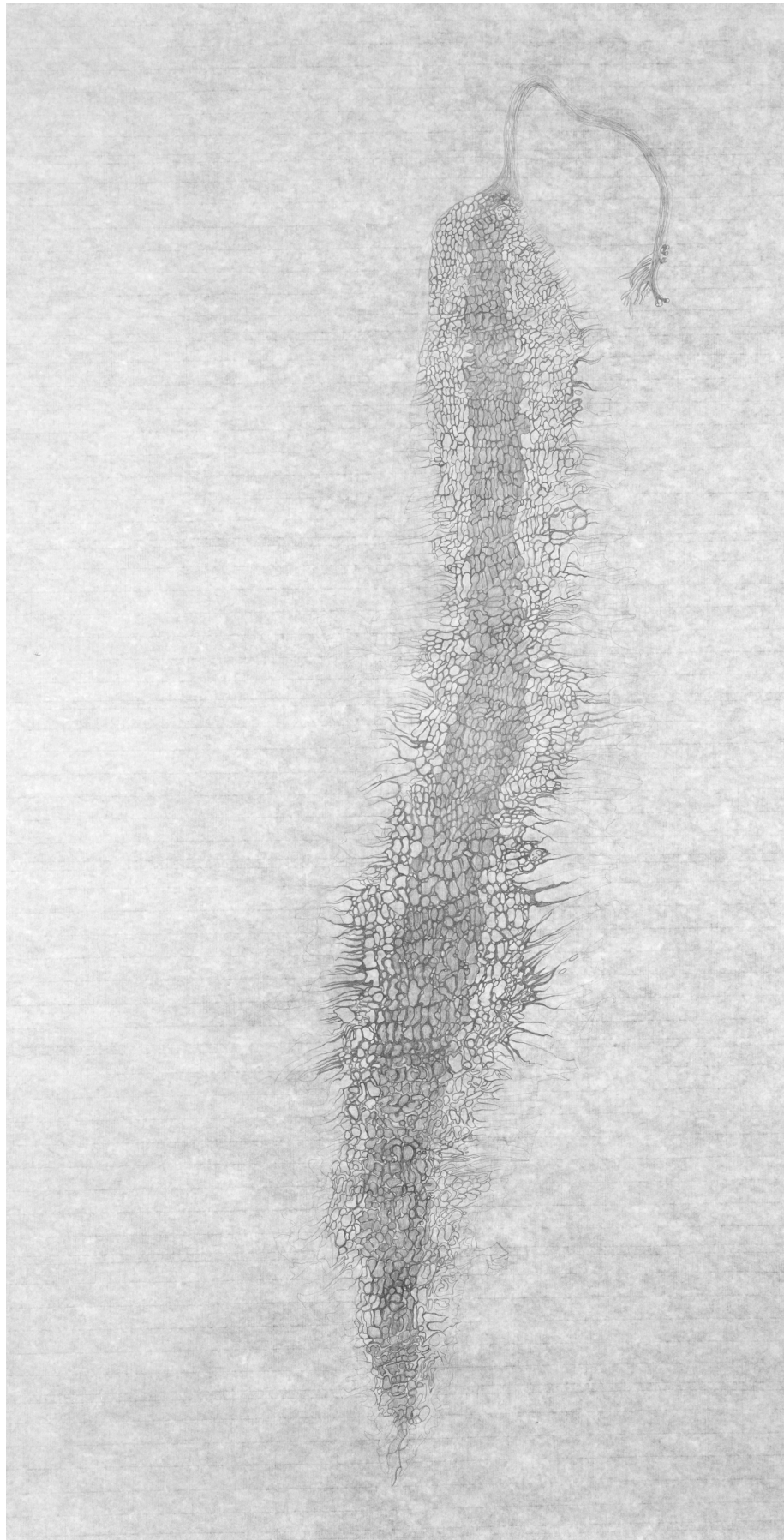
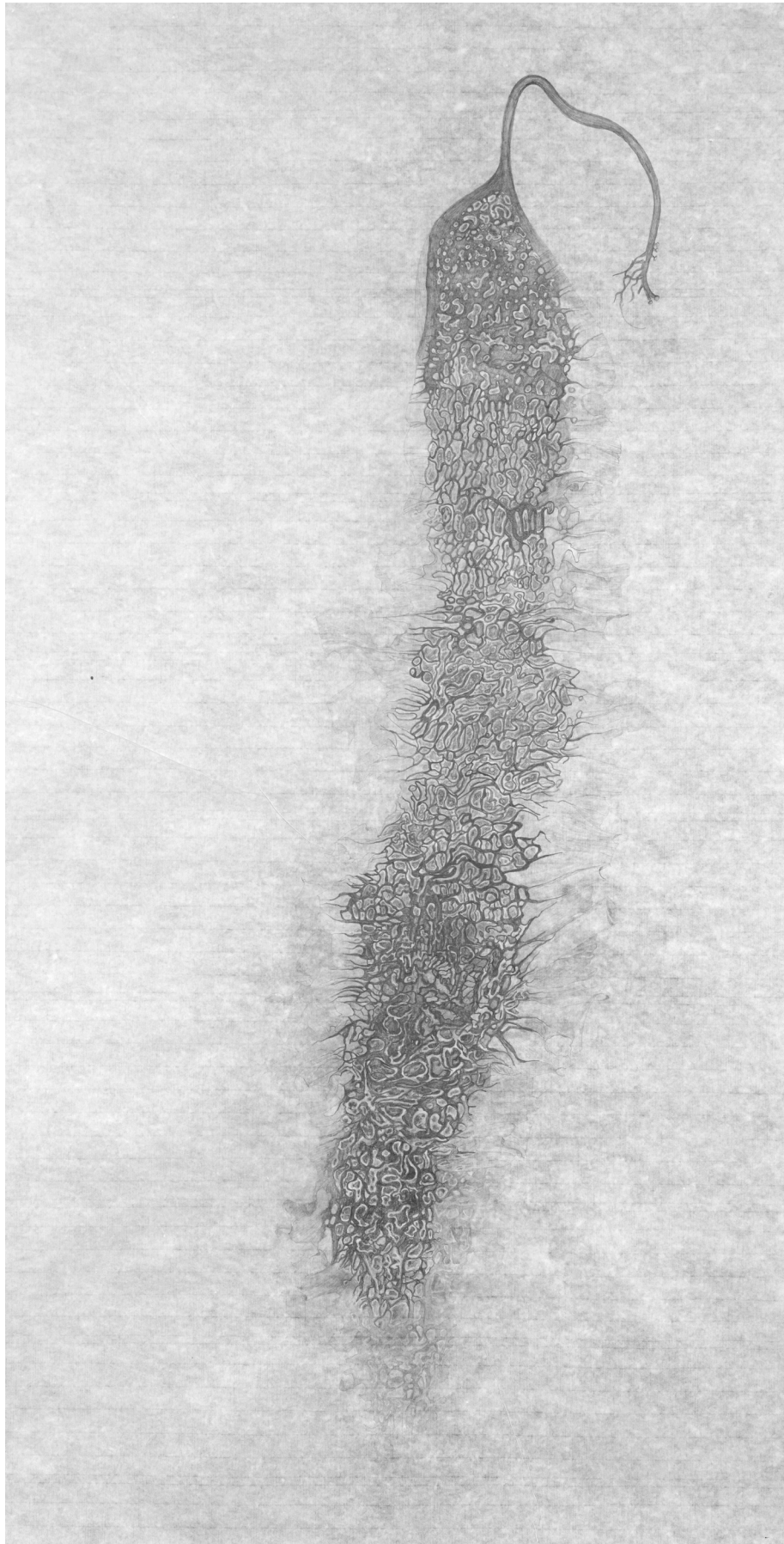
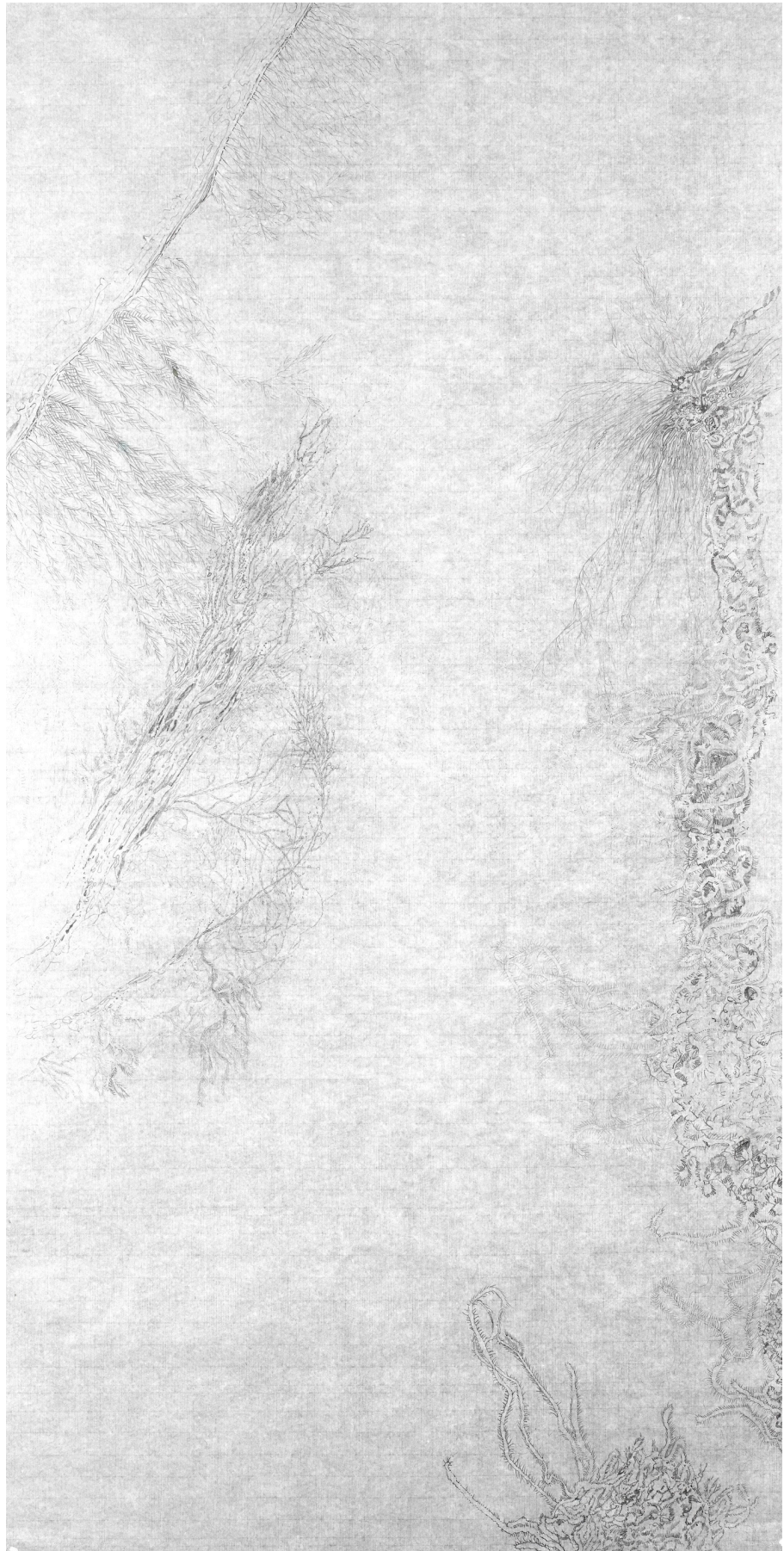


Figure 1a: Doris Rohr (2013) *Saccharina latissima*, pencil on Chinese paper, 137 x 70 cm, © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.



*Figure 1b: Doris Rohr (2013) Saccharina latissima, pencil on Chinese paper, 137 x 70 cm, © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge*



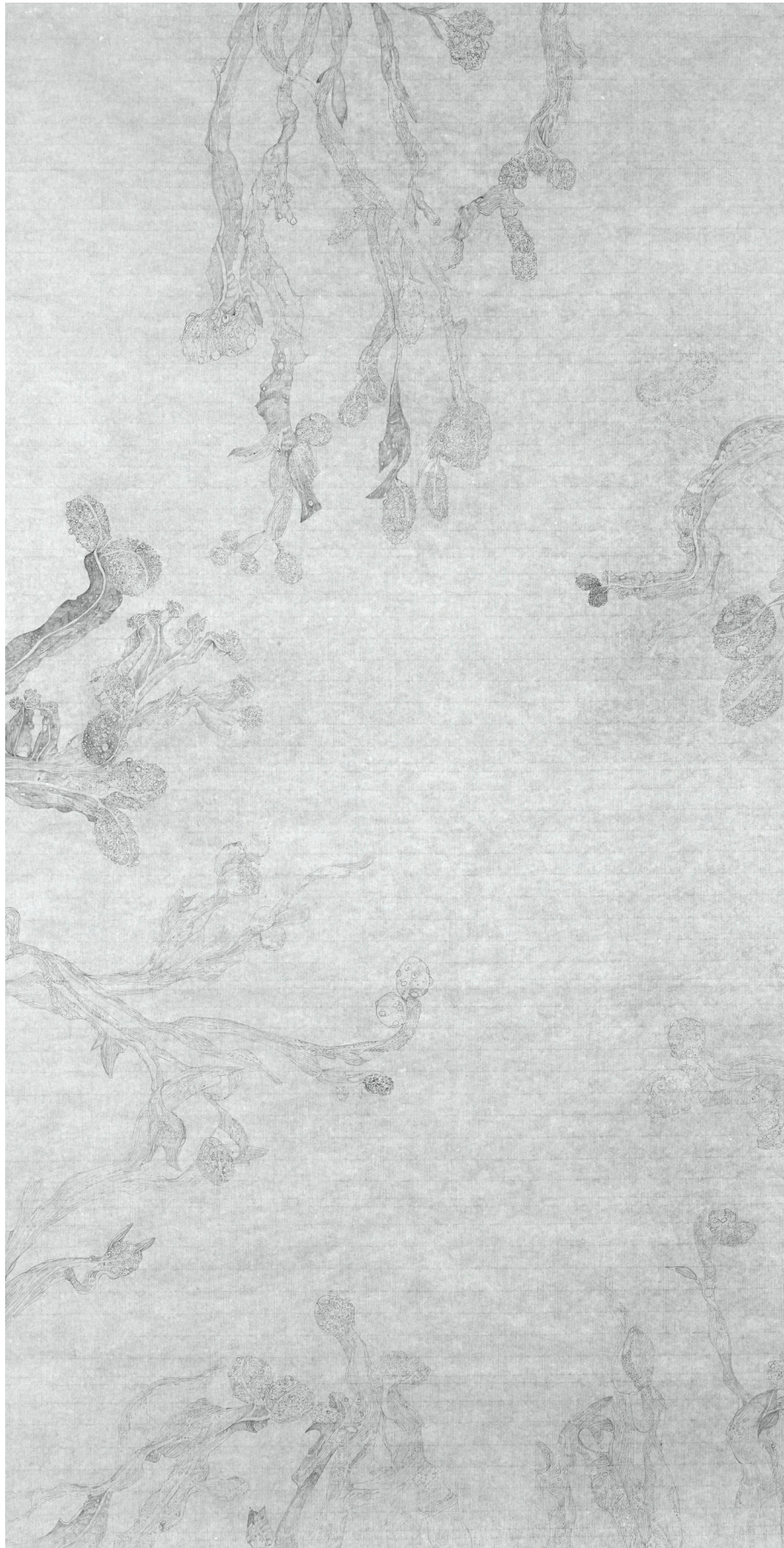
*Figure 2a: Doris Rohr (2013) Rockpool, pencil on Chinese paper, 137 x 70 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge*



*Figure 2b Doris Rohr (2013) Rockpool, pencil and watercolour on Chinese paper, 137 x 70 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo Credit: © Bryan Rutledge*



*Figure 3a Doris Rohr (2013) Bladderwrack, pencil on Chinese paper, 137 x 70 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo Credit: © Bryan Rutledge*

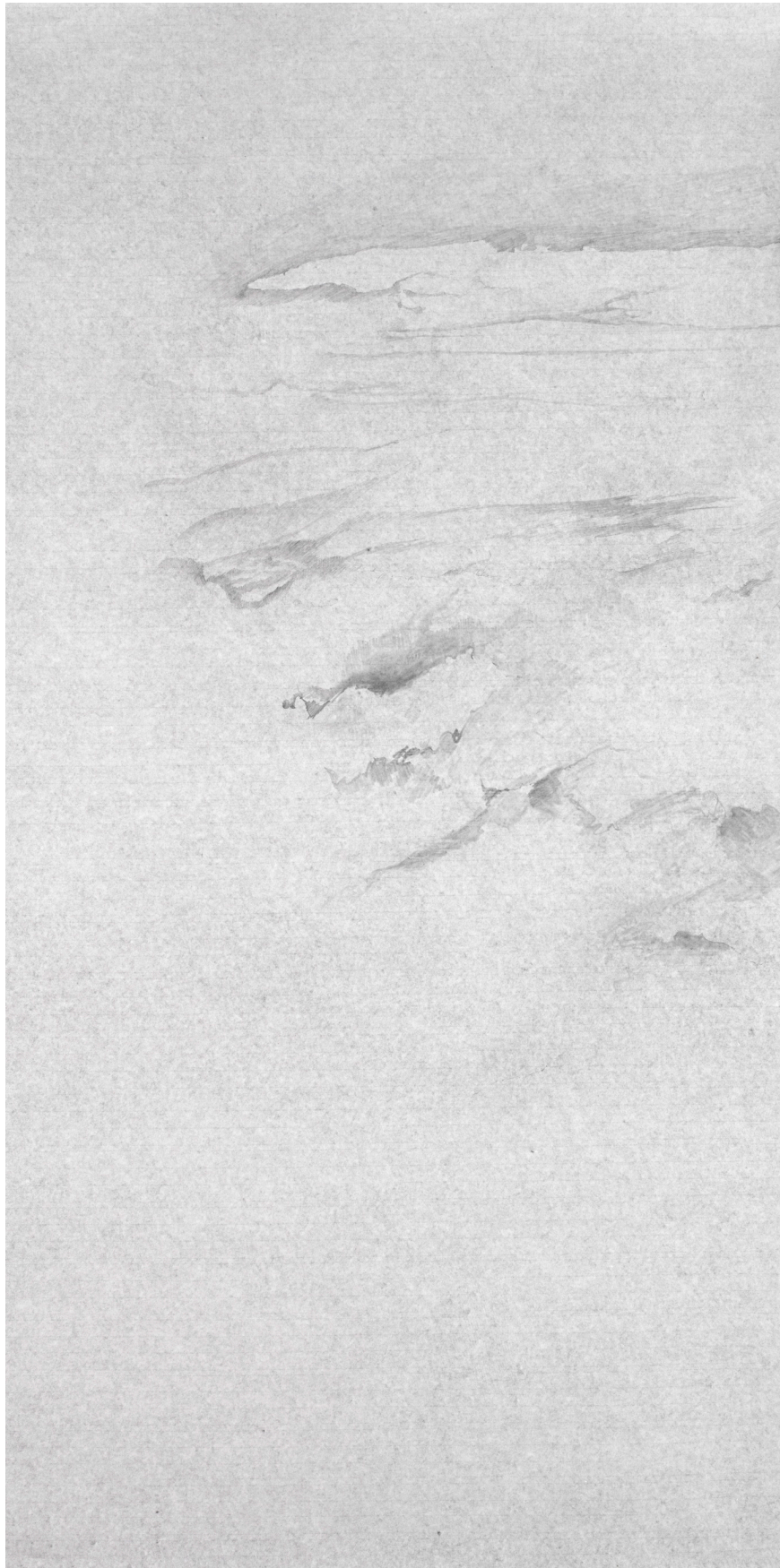


*Figure 3b: Doris Rohr (2013) Bladderwrack, pencil on Chinese paper, 137 x 70 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge*



*Figure 4a: Doris Rohr (2015) Clouds (layered), pencil on Chinese paper, 137 x 140 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*





*Figure 4b Doris Rohr (2015) Clouds (layered), pencil on Chinese paper, 137 x 140 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo Credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*



*Figure 4c Doris Rohr (2015) Clouds (layered), pencil on Chinese paper, 137 x 140 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo Credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*



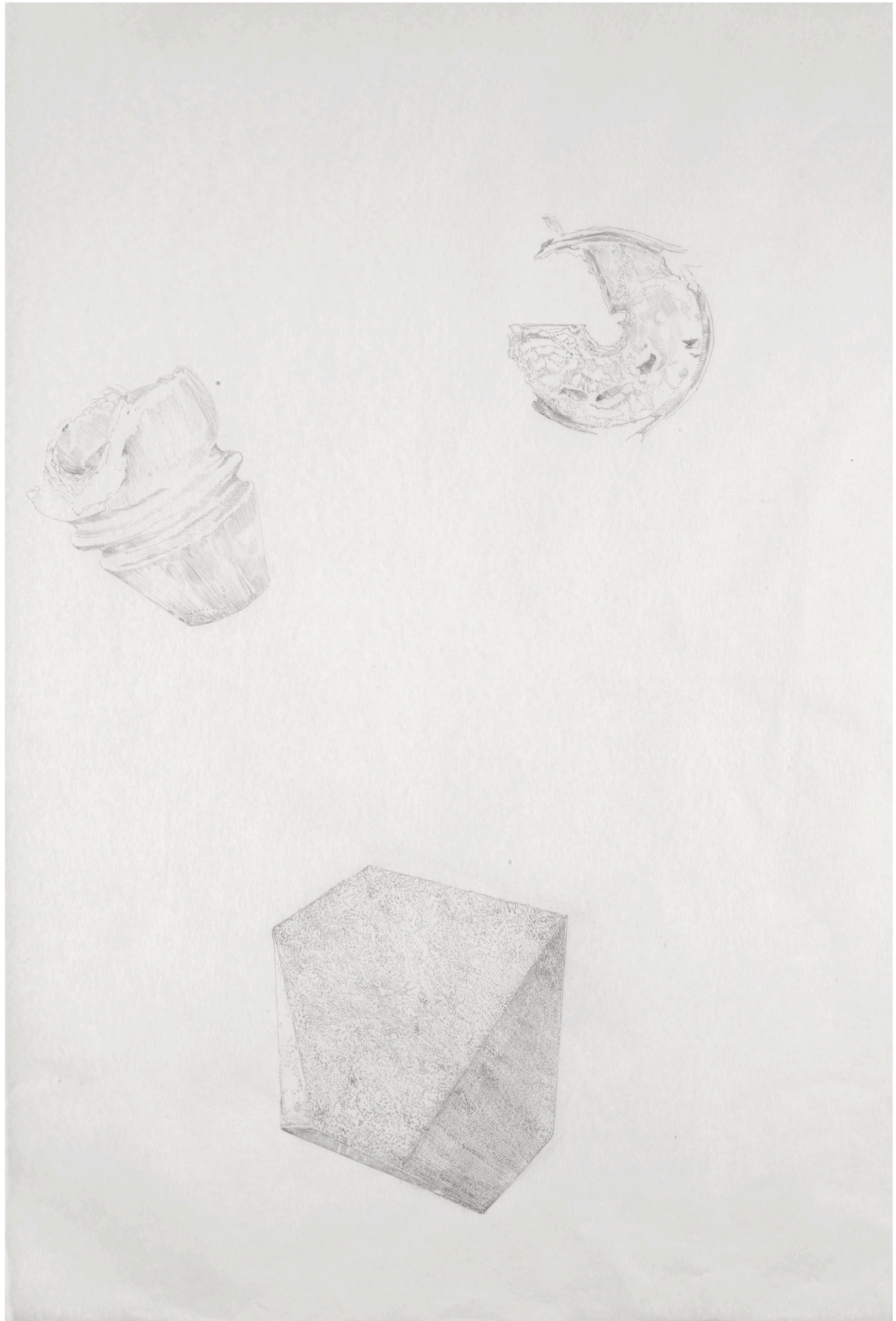
*Figure 5a Doris Rohr (2014) Melencolia, composite drawing in 4 layers, pencil on Modelspan paper, 70 x 50 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge*



*Figure 5b: Doris Rohr (2014) Melencolia, composite drawing in four layers, pencil on Modelspan paper, 70 x 50 cm.  
© Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*



*Figure 5c: Doris Rohr (2014) Melencolia, composite drawing in four layers, pencil on Modelsipan paper, 70 x 50 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*



*Figure 5d Doris Rohr (2014) Melencolia, composite drawing in 4 layers, pencil on Modelsapan paper, 70 x 50 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo Credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*



Figure 6a Doris Rohr (2014) *Coelacanth*, composite drawing in 3 layers, graphite on interleaving paper, 50 x 70 cm.  
© Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo Credit: © Bryan Rutledge.



*Figure 6b Doris Rohr (2014) Coelacanth, composite drawing in 3 layers, graphite on interleaving paper, 50 x 70 cm.  
© Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo Credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*





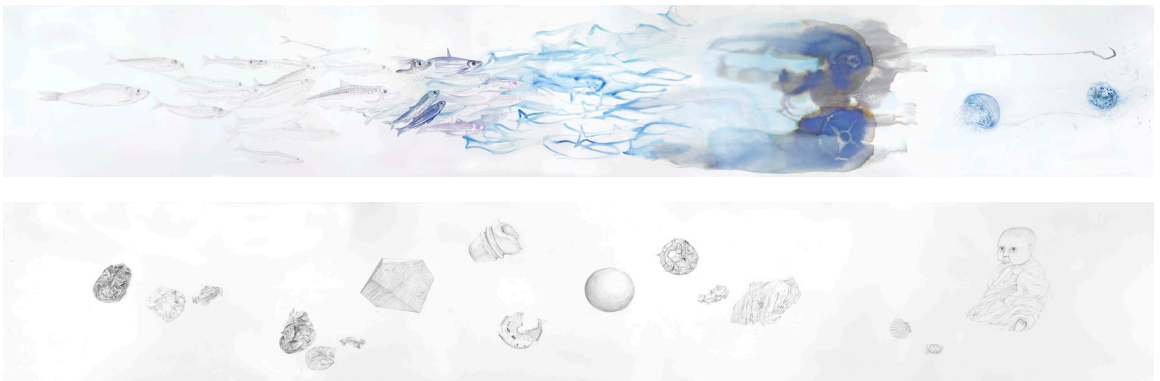
Figure 6c Doris Rohr (2014) *Coelacanth*, composite drawing in 3 layers, graphite on interleaving paper, 50 x 70 cm.  
© Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo Credit: © Bryan Rutledge.

*Marine Scroll 1*



*Figure 7 a–d: Doris Rohr (2014) Marine Scroll 1: 'Fundsachen', four sections from scroll, graphite and watercolour on lining paper, overall dimensions 56 x 1500 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*

*Marine Scroll 2*



*Figure 8 a & b Doris Rohr (2014) Marine Scroll 2: 'Melencolia', two sections from scroll, graphite and watercolour on lining paper, overall dimensions 56 x 1500 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*

*Marine Scroll 3*



*Figure 9a–d: Doris Rohr (2014–15) Marine Scroll 3: 'Sinken', four sections from scroll, graphite and watercolour on lining paper, overall dimensions 56 x 1500 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*

*Marine Scroll 4*



*Figure 10a–c Doris Rohr (2015) Marine Scroll 4: ‘European Storm-Clouds’, three sections from scroll, graphite and watercolour on lining paper, overall dimensions 56 x 1500 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist. Photo credit: © Bryan Rutledge.*

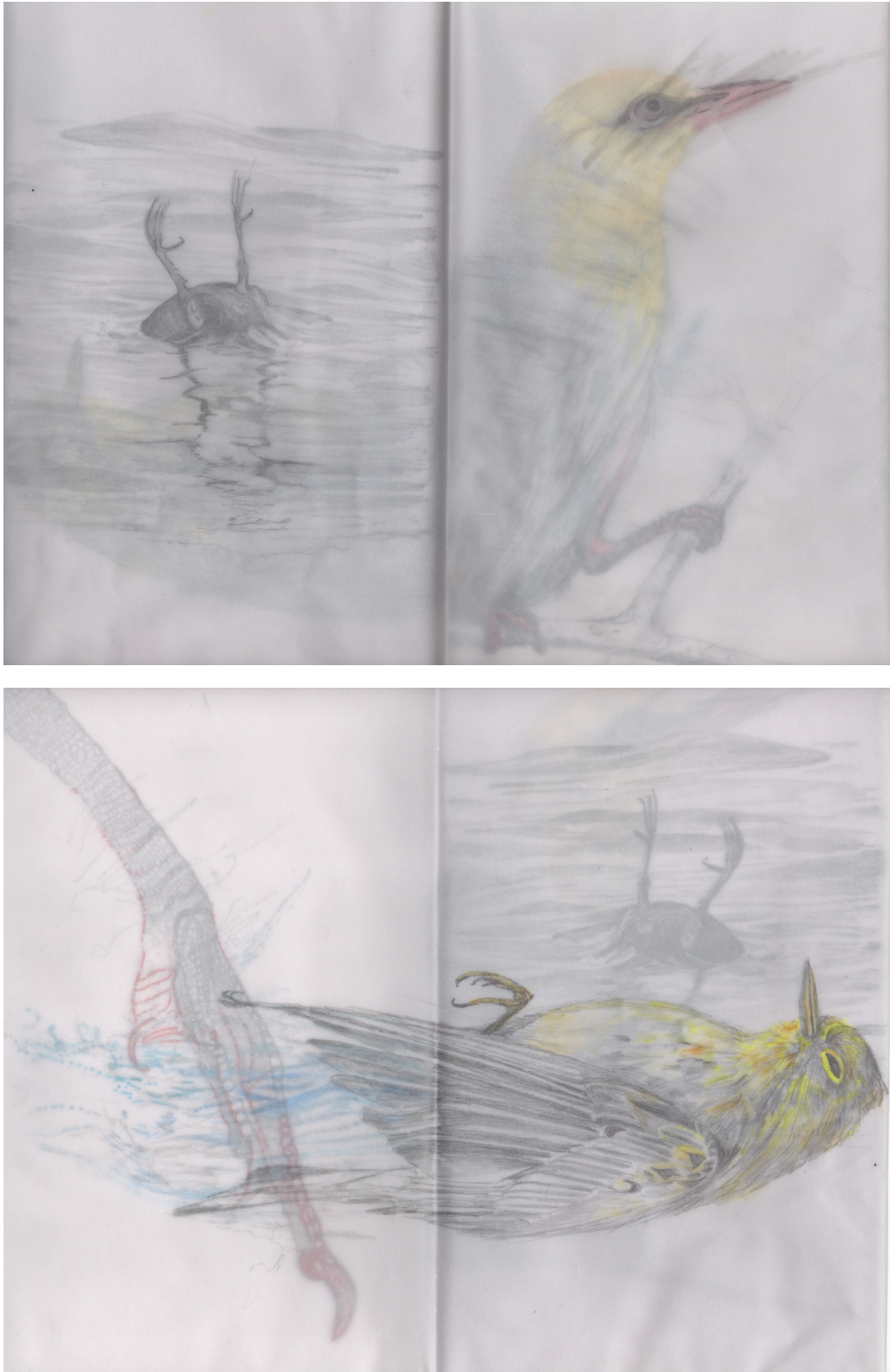
*Concertina Sketchbook Clouds*





Figure 11 a–m Doris Rohr (2015) *Concertina Sketchbook*: cloud drawings, graphite, watercolour and body colour on cartridge paper, *Concertina* overall dimensions 14.5 x 500cm, double page section details 14.5 x 29 cm. © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.

*Homage to Rachel Carson*



*Figure 12 a & b Doris Rohr (2015) Homage to Rachel Carson, pencil and watercolour on tracing paper, Sections from folded map each 24 x 27.5, overall dimensions 24 x14 cm (folded). © Doris Rohr. Collection of the artist.*

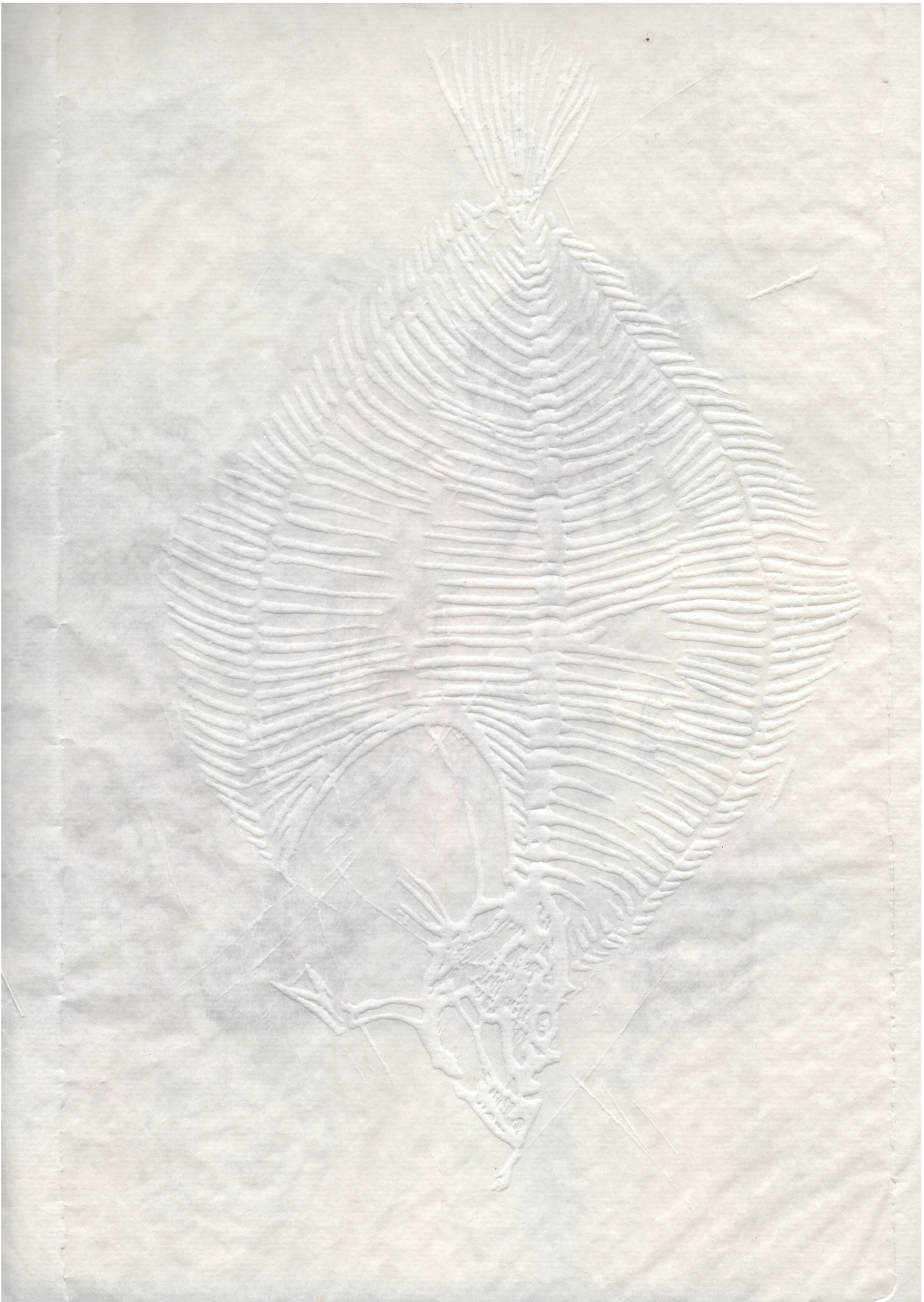


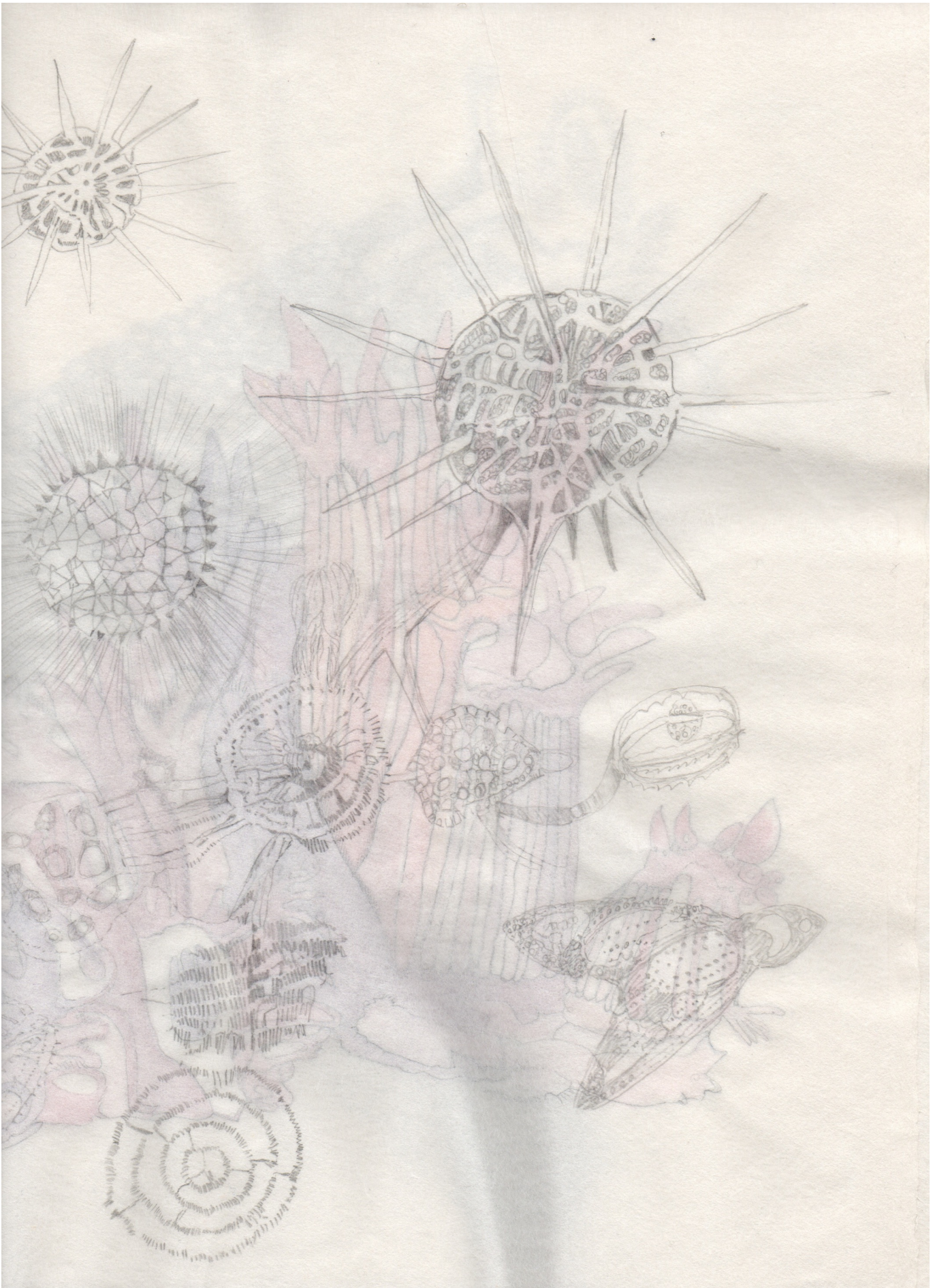
## *Appendix 2*

Doris Rohr (2015–16) *Artist book 'Jetsam'*, pencil and watercolour on alternate linen and pencil on interleaving paper, embossed cover. 26 sheets reproduced to original scale, 25 x 35 x 1.5 cm. © Photo copyright Doris Rohr.

In collaboration with: Eilis Murphy (2016) for Rohr (2015–16) '*Jetsam*', design of protective case (not reproduced) and artisan book binding. Further information *Folded Leaf* <http://foldedleaf.ie/collection/artists-book/>

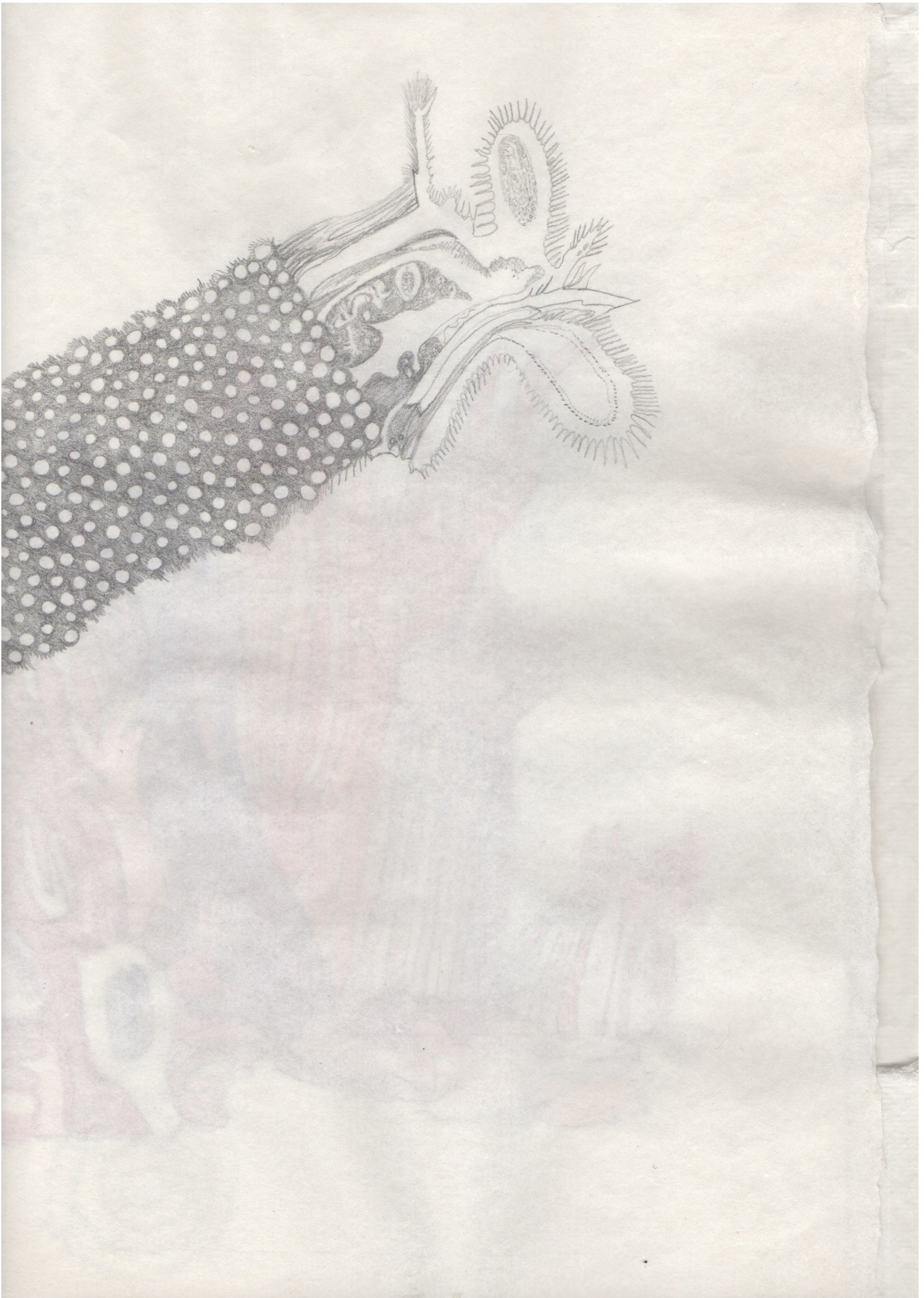
© Book binding and protective cover Eilis Murphy.











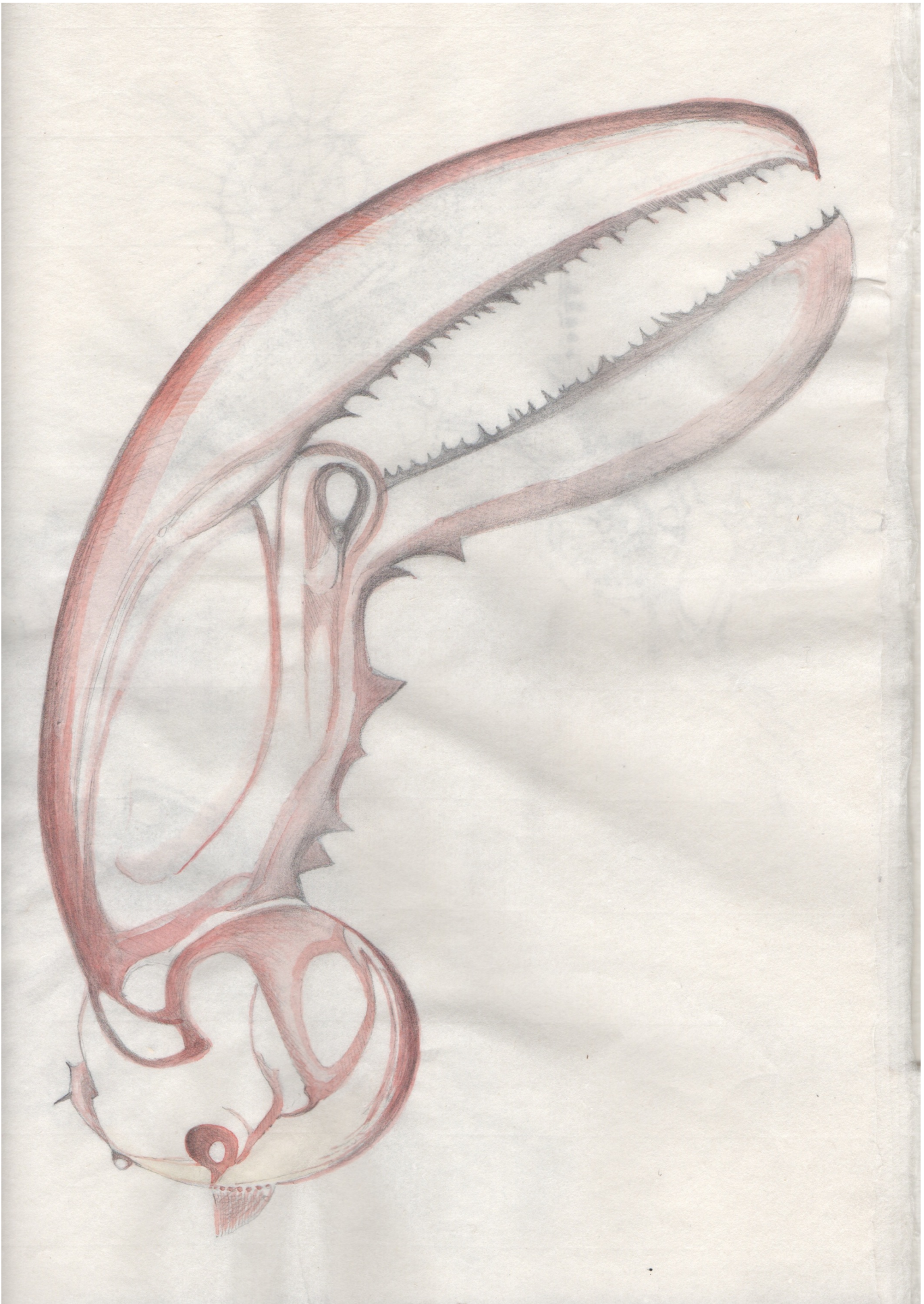




































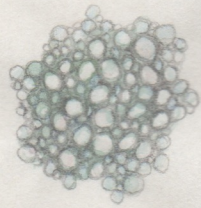












## *Appendix 3*

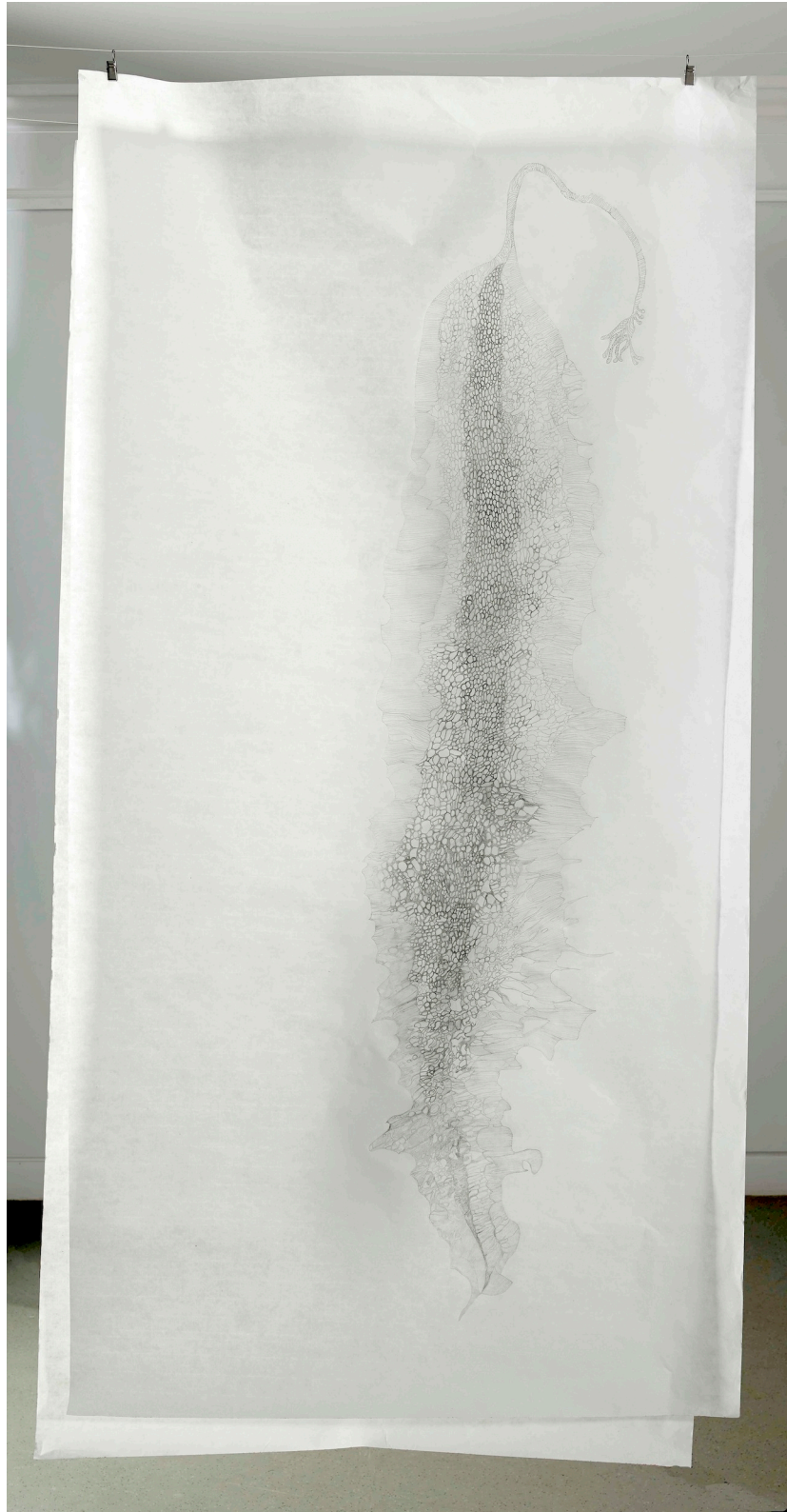
### *3.1 Group show Line – An Ambiguous Journey (touring 2013–2015)*



Figure 3.1.1a Rohr (2013) PhD drawing material was tested as installation in *Line and Ambiguous Journey* (part 2) at Crescent Arts Centre Belfast



*Figure 3.1.1b Rohr (2013) PhD drawing material was tested as installation in Line and Ambiguous Journey (part 2) at Crescent Arts Centre Belfast.*



*Figure 3.1.1c Rohr (2013) PhD drawing material was tested as installation in Line and Ambiguous Journey (part 2) at Crescent Arts Centre Belfast.*



*Figure 3.1.2 Rohr (2015) Testing installation for Marine Scroll 1 in Line and Ambiguous Journey (part 2) Culturlann, West Belfast (January – March 2015).*

**3.2 Two-person show (Rohr/Geddis) – Dwindling Abundance (2015)**



*Figure 3.2.1 a Rohr (2015) Dwindling Abundance featuring Michael Geddis viewing Doris Rohr's installation. The Georgian Gallery, Ards Art Centre, Newtownards (29th Jan 2015 – 21st Feb 2015).*



*Figure 3.2.1 b Rohr (2015) Dwindling Abundance, The Georgian Gallery, Ards Art Centre, Newtownards (29th Jan 2015 – 21st Feb 2015).*



### 3.3 *Group Show Paper, Wall, Table and After (2015)*

*Wall, Table and After* (group show curated by Sian Bowen and Chris Dorsett, *Paper* Northumbria University).

Part 1: Northumbria University, Gallery North: 1st December 2014 – 23rd January 2015

Part 2: National Taiwan University of Arts, Taipei, 30th November – 6th December

Full documentation through:

<https://paperstudionorthumbria.wordpress.com/exhibitions/paper-table-wall-and-after/>

### 3.4 *Group show In-Betweenness PhD research student show (2015)*



*Figure 3.4 In-Betweenness PhD student group show Lancaster University Institute of Contemporary Arts (LICA) at the Storey Institute, Lancaster 24–28th November 2015 Private View. Background shows drawings and sketchbook work in progress for Marine Scrolls 3 and 4.*

3.5 *Solo Show (Rohr) Jetsam PhD exhibition (29th March – 4th April 2016)*



*Figure 3.5a Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5b Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5c Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5d Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



Figure 3.5e Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).



Figure 3.5f Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).

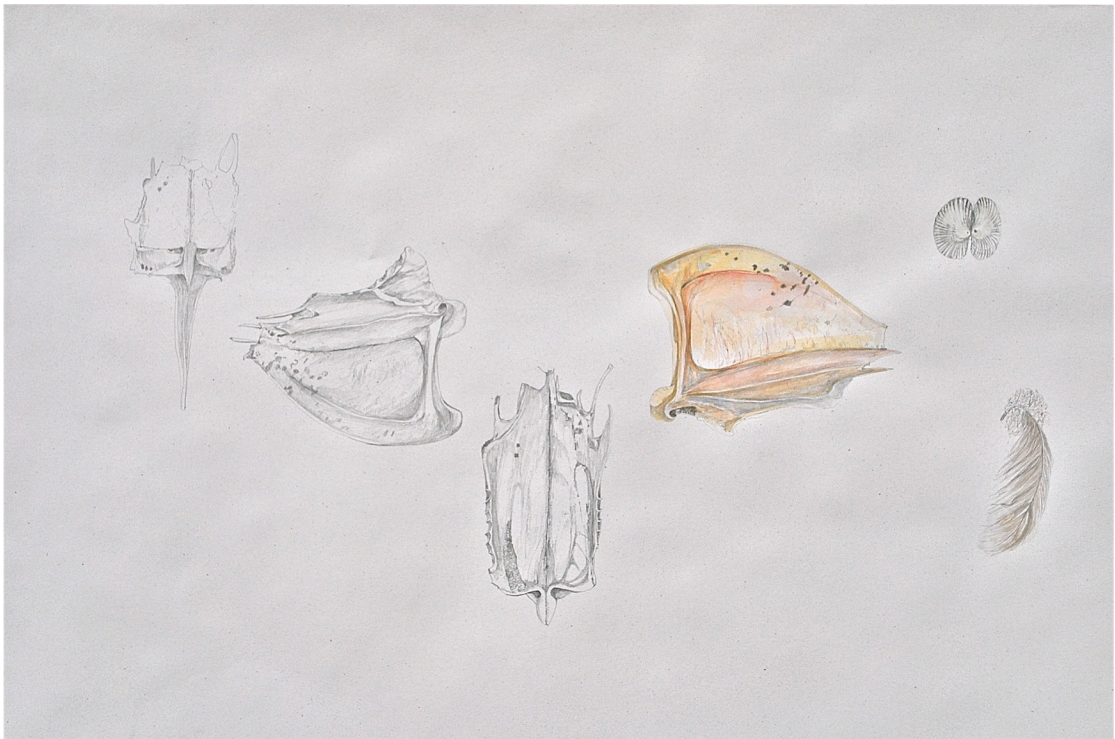


Figure 3.5g Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).



Figure 3.5h Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).



*Figure 3.5i Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5j Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5k Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5l Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5m Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5n Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*

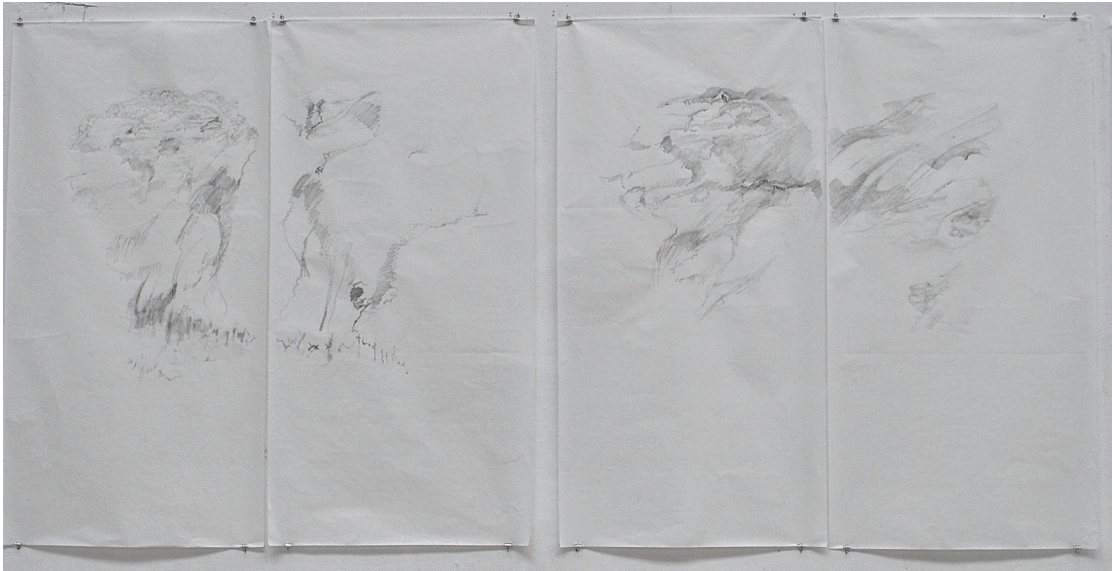




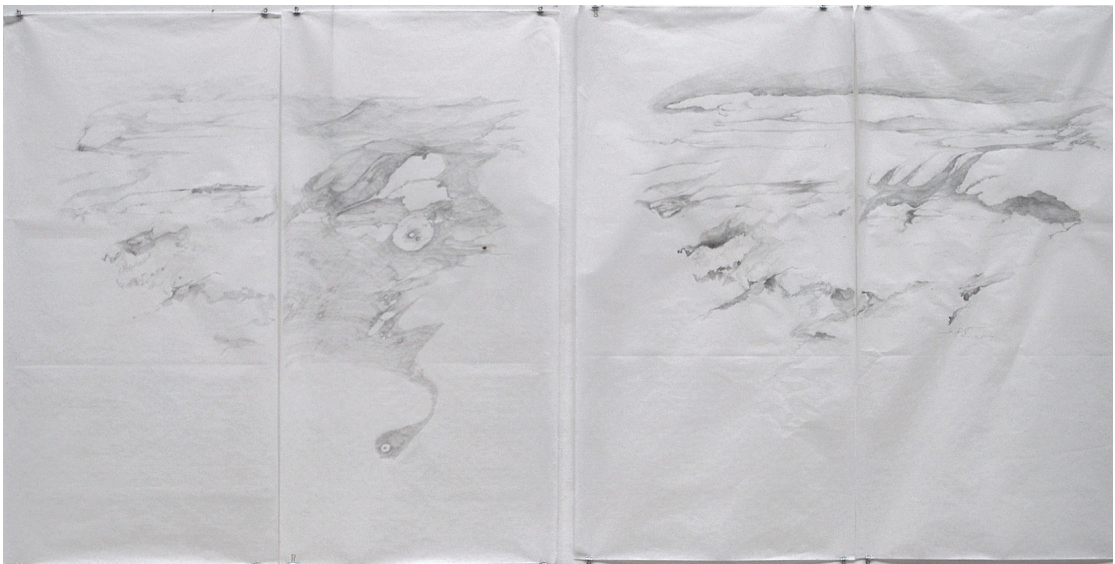
*Figure 3.5o Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5p Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5q Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5r Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5s Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5t Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5u Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5v Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5w Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5x Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5y Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*



*Figure 3.5z Rohr (2016) Jetsam PhD exhibition, Storey Institute Lancaster in conjunction with LICA, Lancaster University (29th March – 4th April 2016).*