*Let Us Not Be Afraid Of Words.*

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For *Beyond The Fields.* An event coordinated by Paul Chaney (Falmouth University) and Dr. Lauren Adele Holt (Cambridge University), hosted at End of the World Garden, Penryn, August, 2018.

1. Transect.

“If a transect could be 9 miles long and function as such, what would you be sampling along a 9 mile line? People, place, ecology, specimens, land use, land ownership, a culture, a country, or would the space created by the footsteps become an opportunity to sample that which is truly mine and mine alone, to stroll through my own perception, to let go of the mind and see where it went, to explore the labyrinth of my own though, and use the footsteps as a rhythm for the mind and the landscape as a canvas for the imagination...”

I wrote that in 2008, without too much thought, rather free flowingly from a walk, scrawled across a large map of south Devon, a line drawn and walked and talked into being from my front door to the edge of Dartmoor and back again.

At the time I was doing an MA in Arts & Ecology at Darlington College of Arts, an experiment in collaboration with Schumacher School of Holistic Science. A mash up of methodologies, a field experiment, with a mycologist, an economist, a buddhist, a microbiologist and an artist at the helm. It was a strange and experimental time. The sort of shit you couldn’t get away with at art school much anymore, though I’m still trying.

Walking Home blew this up again, enhanced the scale and the time frame, a straight line, drawn from London back to the house I was born in, another line, drawn then walked, then talked and made into being through the process of a practice based PhD project that was taken on in the guise of a Sebaldian approach to research...

Sebald said of his work that “I never liked doing things systematically, not even my PhD research was done systematically. It was done in a random, haphazard fashion. The more I got on, the more I felt like that, really, one can find something only in that way-in the same way in which, say, a dog runs through a field. If you look at a dog following the advice of his nose, he traverses a patch of land in a completely unplottable way. And he invariably finds what he’s looking for...

2. Transecting.

Transecting is a gerund. Yes, a gerund. A precocious and pretentious latinate phrase I happened upon through the process of my PhD whilst working with a Professor of Performance Writing who cut his teeth in a different paradigm of education. The process of a noun, transect, becoming enacted, an action, a verb. The practice of transecting being the performative enactment of a transect over a significant geographic and or temporal distance, a transect being a noun that denotes a line or a belt of land along which a survey is made of the flora, fauna, or other features of a given location.

To undertake transecting you’ll need a map, a permanent marker, somewhere you care about, a good pair of boots and a generous amount of time. You might need other things too, like faith, and hope, cheese and bread, a tent and a camera, a notebook and a pen.

Transecting is an act of interpretation a muddling of the intuitive approach of a dog in a field and a scientist in a laboratory. For interpretation is a word that could so often have the suffix mis- appended to it during its undertaking, bye which I mean we spend far too much of our time presenting our uncertainties as certainties as to have fallen into a state of disrepair. Language is a tool, used so often it has become blunt in our mouths, casually appropriated, abused and misused, that we have indeed forgotten it is a tool at all.

3. Translate.

Let us not be afraid of words, but let us be at the very least aware that we are using them, and that they can be cheeky scamps, that they can do things we did neither intend nor wish them to do, that as we unleash them into the world they may become once again the feral things they are. Leaves dropped from a single tree of language some several mysterious thousands of years old.

The best way then to understand a word is to try and translate it, to take it from one home and put it in another and see how it treats the furniture, make sure it doesn’t piss on the carpet, or use the cutlery in the wrong order.

Seeing as we’re in a field in Cornwall, England, Britain, the UK, and we’re all here to talk about what we do lets try Embarassment. I am as nominally British as anyone who would claim to be such a thing, generations of peasants dying in the vicinity of increasingly small patches of countryside for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Embarrassment comes up when we talk about death, personal experiences of grief, you’re father died, oh I am sorry, oh, I don’t know what else to say. Followed by awkward silence, and perhaps the intervention of the weather. No, neither do I, neither does anyone else, but I am pretty sure I want to say, something.

In French though, the root of the word means “to encumber, to hamper” and in Italien, *imbarrare* means to block, or to bar. So by translating this word we have learned something about that awkwardness, that embarrassment, that appears amongst British people when they talk about a death they’ve

touched, about where it might come from, and what it might mean, and then we can get round that. Without getting all meteorogical.

4. Transcend.

We tell each other stories in order to live.

Stories become myths when they generate a founding substance that a group of people come to depend upon, the myths we live by are necessary, but they are not true, they are merely myths we have collectively settled into, like a comfortable sofa.

Stories are not information, they are not accumulations of data, they are not reductionist in their methods or means of distribution.

Stories empower us to transcend the existing and historically entrenched notions that the powers that be would have us continually aligned to. Stories step beyond the realm of mere data or anecdote, and this is a strength not a weakness. They are fluid.

*Walking Home* and the stories it produced, the walking the reading the writing the talking the walking the reading the writing and the talking were composed out of researching an arbitrarily drawn line that was then walked into being. Through transecting two points on the surface of the earth I found shadows of myself in places to which I had never been, ways of telling a story through places I had never seen and would never have seen were it not for a randomly drawn line, a manipulation of a field method appropriated from ecology and the generosity of a small group of strangers who still live in a house approximately 1000km that way...

5. Transdisciplinary.

I want to finish with a little bit of time spent with that word, ecology. To spend a moment or two blowing it up, expanding it to the scale of the myth it deserves to be at.

Ecology is composed of eco, derived from the ancient Greek, Oikos, meaning ‘home’, to which the suffix -ology is attached. And an -ology denotes a subject as a branch of knowledge and branches do all sorts of things, as regular visitors to the Garden, or indeed the countryside will know. They grow, they die, between and beyond those two most pressing of stages, life and death they do all sorts of leafing, living, loving and rotting and falling and breaking and turning.

Ecology is a relatively young science, one that is still pleasingly malleable and urgently of concern to artists, scientists, and those who like to think they’ve fallen into a very pleasing nook in which they might be able to construct a new form of home. The Oxford Dictionary of Science would have us believe that ecology is the study of the “interrelationships among organisms and between organisms, and between the and all aspects, living and non-living of their environment” and here’s where we forget that language is a tool, in that sentence where we use “their” and “them” suggesting that the authors, readers and mis-interpreters of that bastion of civilisation the OED are beyond the realm of the study of ecology, that we, are conductors, rather than participants. The emergence of the green movement in Western Civilisation expanded the framework of the green movement somewhat putting us inside the picture frame and in rapid pursuit of an eco-sophy, or ecological philosophy that would enable us to generate a holistic vision that sidestepped the looming position of an increasingly dominant global form of capitalism. Felix Guattari, translated into English in

2000, stated that “ecology must stop being associated with the image of a small nature-loving minority or qualified specialists.” That it has entered the main stream dialogue of our society can certainly be seen here and there but it is a long way from becoming the primary paradigm through which the web of civilisation is perceived and concocted.

I would argue that if you swallow ecology whole, it gives its hue to everything, that there is an ecology of record labels, or housing markets, or archaeologists, as much as their is an ecology of butterflies, or foxes, that there is no being that is not a form of being with, that there is no way any more of simply studying one thing without considering its contexts and the endless nature of those possibilities over time.

I do not know where this ends, I am merely sure that I am not sure and all I really wanted to say was that we should no longer be talking of multi or of inter-disciplinary activity, but of trans-disciplinary activity. That the actions we take in the field are beyond disciplines, that they transcend disciplines, that they go across, to or on the farther side of, beyond... over where the lines blur and all that remains are to uncover the hidden connections in the web of life.