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Sounding Grief: The Severn Estuary as an Emotional Soundscape

Abstract

This paper explores sound infused creative responses to grief and related emotions of loss and landscape in the context of the tidal Severn Estuary (UK) and its particular sonic qualities. We draw principally on the practice of artist Louisa Fairclough, linking to wider discussions of emotion, sound and the body, in shared autotopographical explorations of self and family in landscape. Like other estuaries, the Severn Estuary is a deeply rich (in socio-ecological terms) landscape which includes the tidal liminalities of the lower reaches of the Severn river, the mid estuary, and the lower areas which merge into open sea. The whole estuary, in geomorphological, ecological, and related social terms, is particularly dynamic as it has the second highest tidal range in the world. This means that vast volumes of brackish water wash up and down the estuary in a series of rhythmic cycles which play across and between day, month and season, mixing physical spaces and processes (e.g. land-sea; salt-fresh water). This ceaseless ebb and flow brings marked spatial, visual and aural richness to the estuary and places along its shores. This includes the Severn bore which, when at maximum height, is a powerful tidal wave washing up the upper estuary and tidal river with a loud sonic richness. Owain Jones (geographer) has previously written on this landscape and its memorial emotional qualities in relation to his family history and challenged geographical self. Louisa Fairclough (artist) has re-turned to it as performative art practice, to sleep by the River Severn, and produces a series of works consisting of field recordings, drawings and a series of installations of expanded films. These use river sounds and vocal recordings to interact with the tidal landscape and its margins in creative expressions of grief. This paper sets out these works, their background, shared responses to the estuary, and explores in particular the sonic registers of the landscape which, for us, listen, and speak to, loss and trauma.

Key Words: sound; emotion; loss; grief; landscape; Louisa Fairclough (artist)

Often at the time of the full moon, with my young son in tow, I cycle to the Severn to pitch the tent on the riverbank. A tidal river, the Severn is strangely compelling: as we stand at the edge of the river listening to the roar of the oncoming tide rushing in from the sea, I am (in my head) shouting across the river into the night. The tide carrying with it my grief to the river's source before being pulled out to sea. (Louisa; notes from Ground Truth).¹

Introduction

This paper offers interacting autotopographical (Heddon 2008) explorations of landscape, loss and grief by the two authors, Owain Jones and Louisa Fairclough (Owain and Louisa from here on), with a particular emphasis on the sonic qualities of the tidal Severn Estuary (UK) (figure 1) in relation to emotion (grief) and affect. The paper draws principally on artworks (field recordings and expanded films) made by Louisa along the River Severn between 2008 and 2012 and then staged in a series of works and exhibitions.

¹ From *Ground Truth - Prologue*, by Louisa Fairclough (Danielle Arnaud Contemporary, London 2011)

We first set out the background of the authors' relationships with the estuary, and then explore, through Louisa's work in particular, aspects of the sonic registers of the landscape and its potential to speak to, and of, loss and trauma both have experienced in different ways and, for Louisa, to serve 'as a powerful metaphor for the inconceivability of death itself' (Smyth 2011; online).

In what follows we introduce the Severn Estuary and its tides, as the nature of this landscape has an agency which folds into the work of Owain, Louisa, and other artists and writers (some of whose work is also briefly referred to). We then focus on the estuary as a soundscape and offer a brief note on method more generally and in relation to Louisa's practice. Then we discuss in some depth three works by Louisa, *Body of Water*; *Song of Grief*; *Bore Song*, including commentaries on these works by art critics. The accounts of these works are interspersed with reflections on landscape, sound and emotion; and sleeping, breathing and the body. In the last sections more recent sound related work by Louisa is briefly set out, and the subject of her grief given voice. There is a brief set of concluding comments.

A few points of authorial clarification are needed at this point. The voice in this paper switches on occasion from shared voice (we) to individual voice (signalled by "Owain" and "Louisa") when more individual accounts are in play. This paper has arisen out of a number of conversations and brief collaborations between Owain and Louisa, as their shared interest, and in some ways, emotional inflection of the estuary, became apparent to both. Owain's direct work on the estuary and tidal landscapes and memory/loss (2015, 2011, 2010, 2005, Palmer and Jones 2014) is briefly discussed, but the focus here is more on Louisa's work. Bringing this to light (in academic terms of emotion, grief, sound, landscape) is part of Owain's ongoing collaborative works on the estuary with a number of artists and academics.² Louisa's expressions of grief with-in the landscape in response to the suicide of her sister are compelling, and differing in form and scale to that of Owain's mourning. But both have, on many occasions, sought out the banks of the estuary for solace, and built this into their work.

The Severn Estuary and its Tides

The Severn Estuary (South West UK) (figure 1) is one of the largest estuaries in Europe and forms the mouth of the UK's longest river - The Severn. Facing west, it opens into the Bristol Channel and Eastern Atlantic and its funnel shape is what creates the extreme tidal range. Viewed from the

² The Severn Estuary Art Atlas (SEAA) compiled by Owain maps many of these artist responses to the Severn Estuary. <http://severnestuaryartatlas.wordpress.com/2011/03/03/hello-world/>

shore it is a vast and ever-changing space of complex intertidal zones, and ebbing or flooding tidal flow.

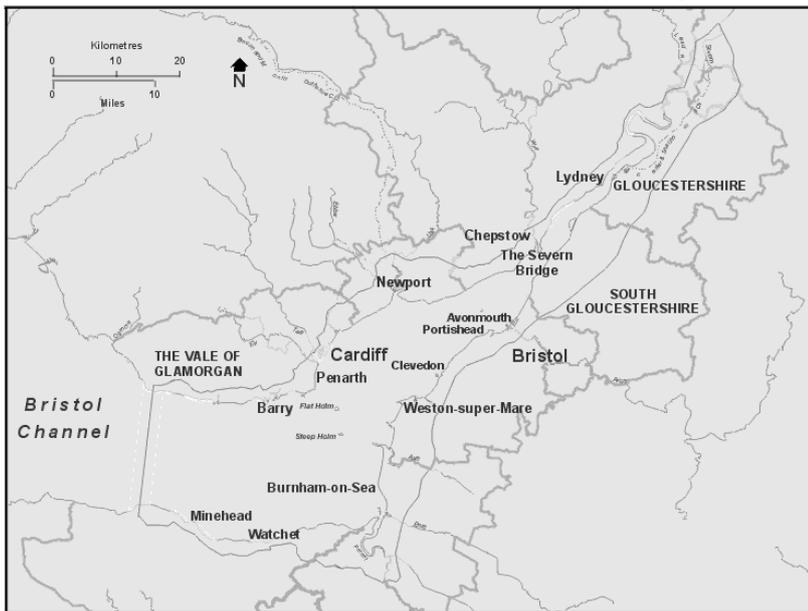


Figure 1. The Severn Estuary, South West England. (Source Severn Estuary Partnership).

It feels a profoundly ‘other’ space to the social (urban and rural) landscapes it interrupts. Around 18% of the estuary’s 557 km² is intertidal (100 km²). These areas vary markedly in type, but many are large expanses of shifting mud and sandbanks, only exposed at low tide, and almost uniquely inaccessible to human visitation. Views of such, and over the estuary, have been recorded by Owain in a series of photographs over many years (figure 2), and many other artists have been drawn to depict this flexing spatiality³.

³ The Severn Estuary Art Atlas (SEAA).



Figure 2. The Mid Estuary with Severn Road Bridge. (Owain Jones; circa 1978)

As it has such a high tidal range, with the sea level rising and falling as much as fourteen metres at the perigee spring tides which occur at the equinoxes, the whole estuary, in geomorphological, ecological and cultural terms, is particularly dynamic. Approximately 80% of the estuary's 370 km shoreline is lined with sea walls (regular, grassed earth banks in rural locations; concrete walls in ports and towns). These stop the very highest tides flooding low lying surrounding land and settlements. These sea walls are, in many places, open access and used for recreational purposes, the route of long range footpaths (The Severn Way), and accessing (here possible) and viewing the intertidal areas more generally.

The dramatic tides, and the intertidal areas they repeatedly expose and inundate, are a fundamental and unifying feature of this place's spirit. They are extraordinary visual and aural phenomena in themselves. A key specificity to the processes of this place is that the body of water rhythmically switches flow of direction and is subject to great turbulence and periods of calm depending on the 'state of the tide' and weather conditions. It is this tidal dynamism that makes such landscapes so rich. As Sanderson (2009: 143) says of the Hudson estuary, Manhattan (prior to development) 'the estuary [and its tides] is the motor, the connector, the driver, the great winding way, the central place that gathers all the old neighbourhoods together and makes the rest possible.' The Severn Estuary's intertidal areas and their margins are home to a rich combination of internationally important natural and culture heritage. The estuary is a celebrated place for bird life

and salt marsh flora throughout its landscape, and in and around these heritages of lost ferries and small tidal harbours, local sailing craft design, and tidal fishing techniques abound (Wildlife Trusts 2010).

Even with its ports, transport infrastructure, and nuclear power stations, the estuary remains a ‘wild place’, an edge land, through the agencies of the tides and the ever-changing spaces of mud, sand, water and sky. The sensory richness of the estuary/river is very much aural as well as visual – or, as in all landscapes, a distinct weave of the two (with other sense stimuli thrown in too, touch; smell; say, of mud) in what Thrift (1999) calls the ‘ecology of place’. This notion expands the traditional notion of ecology in the biological sense to create weaves between nature-culture; material-non-material; body-sense-movement-affect; past (memory)-present-future.

As Jones (2011) and Palmer and Jones (2014) discuss, the semi-diurnal tides (rising and falling roughly twice every 24 hours) created by the never-ending gravitational *pas de trois* of earth, sun and moon, bring an otherness of rhythm to this place in both space and time, and how tidal ecologies follow these lunar temporalities. The dramas of the tidal areas are the focus of a number of artists, writers/poets - notable recent examples being: *The Water Table* by Philip Gross, winner of the 2010 T. S. Elliot poetry prize; Alice Oswald’s *Sleepwalk on the Severn*; Gillian Clarke’s, *A Recipe for Water*, and many other writers and artists⁴.

The higher tides wash up the estuary’s constricting channel, to create the famous Severn Bore, a tidal wave, which, at the higher tides, runs over seven miles up the Severn river above Gloucester (making it “the river that sometimes flows backwards”). This event attracts scientists (Rowbotham 1964), tourists, surfers and, again, artists to the river, and has a number of websites dedicated to it⁵.

The ceaseless ebb and flow of the tides and the climax of the Severn Bore brings marked but differing aural as well as visual and richness to differing parts of the wider landscape. These registers of place have become grounds for creative explorations of emotional becoming for many, and, in the case of the authors, explorations and expressions of grief of loss in relation to sound, flow, water.

⁴ The Severn Estuary Art Atlas (SEAA) <http://severnestuaryartatlas.wordpress.com/2011/03/03/hello-world/>

⁵ There are many easy-to-find websites dedicated to the Severn Bore and where and when to see it and its cultural history.

“Listen”

Listen this is not the ordinary surface river
 This is not river at all this is something
 Like a huge repeating mechanism
 Banging and banging the jetty

(Oswald: 2009: 3 emphasis added)⁶

Alice Oswald must have visited the estuary – on the occasion of penning those particular lines – in stormy weather - a west wind whipping up waves - maybe at night. Her journeys to write the long form poem were often nocturnal as is clear from the opening narrative (p.5) – and sound has differing qualities at night – differing in both acoustic and emotive terms we feel. But for water to be banging the jetty, the tide must have been high - at low water most of the estuary’s jetties just reach hopefully out to mud or sand.

Sound often features in poetic renderings of the estuary, as illustrated by the quote from Oswald, and this from Phillip Gross who stresses the complexity and subtlety of the soundscape created by the ever moving waters

..... I hear [] – the flow,
 The under-hush of water, tide-drag, friction with itself –
 Though it’s only one thread of the chord (too broad, too low

For human ears) the whole estuary is.

(Phillip Gross 2009: 44)

As we have witnessed on numerous occasions, combinations of rhythms and forces energise this landscape into an enveloping soundscape - wind, waves, turbulent water – other sounds too - industrial noises; the drone of a nuclear power station or the clanking of fading docks (Oldbury - Sharpness); the thunder of passing goods train (Purton); the frapping of the halyards⁷ of moored

⁶ Alice Oswald – *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* (2009)

⁷ Frapping is the distinctive noise made by halyards (ropes to pull up sail) rhythmically beating against the masts of boats at mooring when it is windy.

boats (Lydney Harbour); the hiss of the motorways crossing the great bridges which did for the ferry crossings (closed in 1966); all buffing through the sounding wind. Upstream, the surge and fall of the Severn bore's⁸ crashing wave as it passes, and the run of the following tide. It can be a wild place, with a wild soundtrack.

On other occasions – maybe on a sleepy summer's day at a low (neap) tide, the whole place is very different – visually and aurally. Quiet, spacy, hissy, even trippy - indistinct channels draining seaward out in the haze of mudflats, occasional distant bird calls, the soft clatter of a local train on the other, far shore, the tolling of village church bells further along the near shore. The sounds envelop the figure on the shore as much as the space does. The body opens, the potentials for affective transmissions of feelings, from body to landscape, and landscape to body, open.

On Method

Louisa for many years lived locally to the estuary and her work interacts with the tidal landscapes and their margins in attempts to describe and move through her deep grief after her sister's suicide. This tragic loss is the central subject of the works set out below so is not elaborated on at this point.

Owain grew up on a beautiful farm partly on the Wentlooge levels between Cardiff and Newport, South Wales, which included land adjacent to the tidal estuary. Subsequent to compulsory purchase by the local state, the entire farmland and farmyard was erased for extensive housing developments and a large landfill site from the late 1970s onwards. The landfill site was on intertidal saltmarshes that the farm used to graze livestock on in the summer, thus giving the farm an intimate relationship with the tides (Jones 2015, 2005). Prompted by the displacement of his family from their home, Owain has lived on both sides of the estuary and crossed its great bridges, and traversed it below in the great rail tunnel, on many occasions. These journeys being entangled in a long and complex personal/ family history in which the loss of home, place and landscape is still playing out in his sense of self and wider family decades later.

Owain's grief from the loss of the home / farm landscape through its enforced development is of a different kind to that of Louisa's. But like Louisa he has sought solace in the wider estuary landscape. So, at the heart of this paper, and the histories it reports on, are shared feelings that somehow, visiting the shores of the estuary, and witnessing the shimmering voids of space, the remote blowy seawalls, the ceaseless ebb and flow of the tides, and being affectively immersed in

that landscape in aural, visual and other ways, is a balm of sorts. An opening and a possible closing.

Overall the meta-method in the background here is simply being-in-the-landscape. To explore, find locations, spend time in them, reflect, feel, draw (Louisa), photograph (both), leave, reflect, plan returns with more defined purposes such as making sound recordings/drawings (Louisa). There is a sense of wandering and wondering, of not being too directed in terms of space and time in the first instance. This is about opening up affective transmissions by letting the body being in place, even sleeping in place (Louisa) – discussed below.

More specifically, in relation to the artworks discussed below, for a period of four years (2008-12) Louisa made many cycle journeys throughout the summer and winter to sleep along the River Severn (on occasions with her young son), producing field recordings and drawings. Working in collaboration with sound recordist, Christine Felce (Figure 3), together they return to sites along the river that have been identified on earlier journeys. Mainly working with analogue equipment (reel-to-reel Nagra), these recordings remain unedited and are frequently performed live from the master tape in subsequent artworks. These form a series of expanded films (or film-sculptures) which draw upon voice(s) in the landscape, and the sound of the river's tidal waters as expressive media. Thus the empirical 'fact' of the soundscape over a certain duration at a given point in space and time becomes central to the work and other sounds, images and constructions are folded around them in specific exhibition spaces.



Figure 3. Recording *Body of Water* on the River Severn (2010). (Louisa Fairclough).

***Body of Water 2010*⁹**

Body of Water is a field recording made the night following the full moon on 1st March 2010. There are two main events you can hear in this recording: one is the surge of the tidal wave along the river, the second is the ringing of church bells in the distance which are swallowed by the immense noise of the wave. Around this are details: a dog barking in the distance, something that sounds like a helicopter (but wasn't), the glop and gurgle of the water as it rises up the muddy bank. A sound file of *Body of Water* can be heard on line¹⁰.

(Louisa) We set one microphone on a stand facing away from the river to gain a sense of the wider landscape and another microphone was handheld on a boom following the line of the tide, gently moving the mic to capture the details of the eddying water.

Standing on the banks of the river, waiting for the bore tide, there was the insistent circular tune of bell ringing practice a mile or so away. The sound carried by the wind. At the time we remember wishing the bell ringers would stop, however the presence of the bells is key. As a counterpoint to the tide, you come to hear the water and other environmental sounds more clearly.

Whilst recording, an otter that had swum up with the bore scurried out of the river a metre or so away. This was one of a series of recordings made in Elmore Back (OL14 77/17).

The field recording *Body of Water* was performed in the dark at Camden Art Centre in 2013 as part of the talk series accompanying Guy Sherwin's curated exhibition *Film in Space*¹¹. In an email to Louisa, Gina Buenfeld (Exhibition Organiser) writes of the experience, 'the sound of the Bore was incredibly compelling, not just as an illustration of the unrelenting force of burgeoning emotion, but an embodiment of that feeling.'

(Louisa) A further field recording, *From Across the Water*, was made with Christine on a sunny August afternoon in 2012. A twenty-minute recording made from under a railway bridge on the far side of River Severn in Gatcombe. The recording is made at the point of the tide turning. Close to, you hear the gentle buzz of flies, a sharp in-breath, and the trains

⁹ Archived online at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/fairclough/archive/body-of-water>

¹⁰ <https://soundcloud.com/louisa-fairclough/body-of-water>

¹¹ Louisa also showed the film-sculpture *Song of Grief* as part of this exhibition.

winding approach along the water's edge, and the noise as they thunder overhead. From across the water you can hear the tune of an ice cream van, the hum of the M5 motorway, a dog's bark and the sound of some heavy industry from Sharpness docks (Hear online)¹².

The two recordings were pressed on either side of a vinyl record: thus representing the duality of space that dominates this and other bodies of water landscape – that of the near and far shore, which speak of divisions and connections, of longing, in memory - in time and space.

For Louisa's field recording performances, *Body of Water* and *From Across the Water*, with the room in darkness, the recording is played directly from the Nagra field recorder used on location through an amplifier and two speakers. In the 10 minute unedited master recording, a slice of time/place unfurls. The audience lie on the floor and close their eyes. Through this process, there is dampening down of the visual senses, and the aural senses are awakened and sharpened, the entire body listens. For the gallery installation the recording is pressed onto vinyl with instructions pencilled onto the record sleeve: "put the record on, lie down and listen from beginning to end". Connections are made between the body in the landscape and the enveloping soundscape of night and that of the listeners in the gallery. There are shared and layered modes of listening and space unfolding, with, in the end, the audience listening in the dark to Louisa's initial site listenings, which through a process of feeling were then selected for recording. In relation to the artwork Gina Buenfeld points out that

To listen requires humility - opening us up with equanimity to the world, placing us out amongst things as they arise, a counterpoint to the agency of looking in which we can avert our eyes, or direct our focus at will. Where light provides determinate clear space filled with distinct objects, true darkness dissolves into a mysterious depth that emancipates the body from the framework of objectivity. In *Body of Water* (2010), immersive darkness and sound carried audience members on a journey to the Severn Estuary, by way of attentive listening. (2014)

The creative process is then is a folding together of innumerable voices - poly-vocal (Maddrell 2010) manifestations of processes, presences *and absences* – both of nature and of culture – which give this place sound a powerful 'sense of place' *and* of listeners.

As Wylie (2007, 10) states, landscapes are matters 'of movements, of biographies, attachments and exiles' in which 'motifs of absence, distance, loss and haunting' abound. The business of voicing – both human and non-human – and listening (and the absences thereof) need to be added

¹² *From Across the Water* <https://soundcloud.com/louisa-fairclough/from-across-the-water>

into this performative view of landscape. Louisa's work seeks to think/feel landscape through sound, and to connect that to emotional and affective registers of becoming.

Sound, Landscape and Emotion/Affect (grief)

The need for deeper engagements with geographies of sound has previously been articulated 'What we lack is not contact with the sounded world, but a sensitivity to sound, a curiosity about how it operates, how it affects us' (Smith, B. 1999: 22). And as Susan Smith adds;

What would happen if we thought about space in terms of its acoustical properties rather than in terms of its transparency or its topology? What would happen to the way we think, to the things we know, to the relationships we enter, to our experience of time and space, if we fully took on board the idea that the world is for hearing rather than beholding, for listening to, rather than for looking at? (Smith, 2000: 615)

These sentiments have particular purchase in relation to Louisa's experience of sleeping on the banks of the River Severn. Being in a small tent has the distinctive affective qualities of both openness (to the sonic and ambient world) and vulnerability, and of course being in a tent means an emersion in the local (night) soundscapes. Enclosed in the womblike tent, unable to *see* the landscape, one's ears prick up and, it seems, that the sense of hearing is heightened. The drop in temperature also makes night sounds clearer as the noise of the day (traffic, human hubbub) falls away and the quieter sounds of nature are audible. *The entire body listens*. Breath becomes more noticeable – even visible.

(Louisa) I feel the energy from the ground and the pull of the tidal river.

We would caution against the suggested creation of an inverted dualism of sound against / instead of vision in Smith's statement; both are always folding together in affective becoming. But it is clear that the senses are differently geared with emotions and affect – not in simple, linear ways, but through complex affective interplays of senses, brain, (memory, emotion) body function and environment. The differing orientation of ears and eyes in human physiology (and of other animals) is testament to the different ways we are in space through the senses they orchestrate. Hearing operates very differently to sight both in how it affectively constructs space and time and how it links to emotions and other aspects of embodied becoming. Hearing is, in one way, a defensive sense, which can pick up possible danger in the environment (even when we are asleep).

Emotions and affect are here taken to be deeply interrelated but also distinct aspects of individual neurological/bodily becoming in environment. We sometimes use these terms in tandem and on other occasions on their own. Generally the animated, affective landscape of everyday becoming becomes the ground of emotional affective practice of landscape-self, as users are immersed in the space and sound of place, and within this particular emotions play out, grief, joy, love, hate and so on.

How sound, space, time and affective (bodily) states intermingle is illustrated by the already mentioned transformation of sonic affectivity at night. Composer Pauline Oliveros talks of walking at night so silently “that the bottoms of your feet become ears”. She continues,

Deep Listening [] is listening in every possible way to everything possible to hear no matter what you are doing. Such intense listening includes the sounds of daily life, of nature, or one's own thoughts as well as musical sounds. Deep Listening represents a heightened state of awareness and connects to all that there is (Oliveros 2014, webpage).

Humanity's profound relationship with music (of one kind or another), which is a deeply pre-rational affective / emotive experience, is testament to how sound as experience ‘bypasses’ rational thought and immediate consciousness and penetrates into the subconscious and affective realms of becoming.

It could be argued that the ‘emotional turn’ in geography has been subsumed by the wider affective turn (Pile 2009; Anderson and Harrison 2010). But the specific focus on emotions still has importance as they are a profound part of how we become moment to moment in what Damasio reckons is a sort of musical becoming

feelings of pain or pleasure or some quality in between are the bed-rock of our mind. We often fail to notice this simple reality [] But there they are, feelings of myriad emotions and related states, the *continuous musical line of our minds* (2003: 3, emphasis added).

Anderson and Smith (2001) write that ‘to neglect the emotions is to exclude a key set of relations through which lives are lived and societies made’ (2001: 7). This parallels Thrift's (2004) discussion of the role of affect where ‘emotions form a rich moral array, through which and with which the world is thought and which can sense different things even though they cannot always be named’ (60).

If we are emotional, affective beings then these forces are not generated in isolation but within a body which is always in place and sensing (hearing) and moving/resting in that place (Casey 1993, 1998). Horowitz (2013) considers how sound as the ‘universal sense’ (we are always in it) is intimately entwined with the fundamentals of becoming moment by moment in terms of emotion and affect.

The implications are that sonic emotional dynamics of the social need serious consideration and that the reflexive turn in research needs to incorporate an element of emotional sonic reflexivity. We suggest that it is important to ensure that this focus on the emotional does not remain within the human, social, realm alone. Emotionality is relevant to the interrelations, the hybrid geographies, which connect humans, non-humans and things (Whatmore, 2002). As Abram observes,

My life and the world’s life are deeply intertwined. [] The world and I reciprocate one another. The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly a determinate object; it is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in turn. (Abram, 1996: 31).

Sound has come into play in emotional geographies, but given the Oculocentrism of Western knowledge, coupled with object focused knowledge, it is not surprising that landscapes have been primarily ‘seen’ as a visual, material manifestations, (and visual representations of such). Sound has featured much less in our understanding of place. But with growing interests in the senses more generally, and an interest in rhythm which are often sound linked (if not sound based), then this now is being addressed.

The World Soundscape Project was initiated by R Murray Schafer and others at the Simon Fraser University, BC, Canada in early 1970s, and marks an important step in the recognition of field recording as an artistic practice. Brandon LaBelle describes the soundscape as such:

From mountaintops to city streets, lakesides to sidewalks, glaciers to small villages, the soundscape is that which exists and of which we are a part as noisemakers, as listeners, as participants. It locates us to that very close to us - under our feet and at our fingertips - while expanding out to engage the far away: bird calls from above the winds. (LaBelle 2006, 6)

The intention behind Schafer’s project was based on capturing environmental sound in all its breadth and diversity and preserving important “sound marks”. Schafer used the term “soundmarks” to refer to a geography of sound which is unique or possesses qualities which make

it specially regarded or noticed by the people of that community. In casting a net of microphones across the globe, Schafer's ambition was also to locate the mythological beginning of sound. This he referred to as the Ursound, and described this as the collective unconscious of our aural memory, the location of unity and instinct.

One of those involved in the project was Hildegard Westerkamp, known for her involvements in sound walking and field recording. A key work is "A Walk Through the City" from 1981, which oscillates across the real and the imaginary. What marks her recordings apart from others, and could be seen as connecting her approach to feminist artists working at that time, is her accentuated presence (often her own voice) in the recordings.

There have been some recent confluences of geography and art (Hawkins 2012) possibly because the latter is steeped in traditions of seeking methods of Non-representational expression through which to explore self, emotion and affect in space and place, through a range of intersecting creative processes and media. There has also been a movement to explore grief in relation to landscape, notable being the work of James Sidaway (2010) and Maddrell (2010). Sidaway's account of a walk (also along the shore of a body of water) is startling mix of geo and local politics and geographies. It is also a cry of the very deepest grief. To be human is to suffer losses (of various types and timings) of loved ones. Often grief is privatised by various cultural mores. It seems that this might be damaging to the self and *also limit caring for and between people who survive loss*. So a turn to geographies of grief, including opening up deathspaces to empathetic study which Sidaway has developed with Avril Maddrell (2010), is welcome. Maddrell has also written on landscapes of loss and consolation stressing the 'need to focus critical attention on the contextualized interface between the representational and more-than-representational, embodied and affective practices that surround them.' (2013: 501). Creative art practice can, we feel, inform geography in relation to grief. If there has been an emotional turn in geography, we suggest that Louisa's work plays a part in an emotional heightening in some contemporary art (see Gould 2010).

Another striking example of an artist drawn to the affective agencies of the Severn Estuary as an active medium of grief is Davina Kirkpatrick. Working with close friends/artists she shredded the shirts of her suddenly deceased partner and tied them to fencing in the intertidal area at a location called 'Back Rock' (also the name of the artwork 2014). These strips of fabric have slowly faded of colour over a year as they were repeatedly washed by the tide, and rain, and blown by the wind (figure 4). They have also been joined by tide washed debris. Subsequent visits to the site have

been recorded in words, drawing and photographs as an ongoing body of work addressing mourning and remembrance¹³. Here again there is a sense of letting grief wash away in the ever changing flows of the tides and the striking atmospheres of the estuary.



Figure 4. Drawing by Davina Kirkpatrick. “Black Rock” 2014.

Song of Grief (an element of Ground Truth)

Louisa’s sculptural installations with 16mm film and sound (expanded films) are explicit explorations of emotions, in which a length of film becomes a line of emotion, a single sustained pitch (vocalised note) holds the weight of grief and a breath is a measure of time. Performed and recorded on the banks of the Severn, this work is an emergent call and response between the artist and place that experimentally unfold as they are distilled into film loops.

(Louisa) Standing at the water’s edge and listening to the roar of the oncoming tide, I shout across the river into the night. The tide carrying with it my grief to the river’s source before being pulled out to sea.

¹³ A film and pdf of a talk by Davina on this and related matters can be found at <http://tidalcultures.wordpress.com/workshop-4-sense-of-place-terschelling/> accessed 18 12 2014

I am film. From which the image has slipped away. And all that is left is the voice which has fought its way from the sideline and now funnels its way along the very centre of my being.

I am sleep in which the body is being pulled deep into the earthy ground.

I am tented breath.

Compositionally, *Song of Grief* consists of Gesture, Voice, Tidal Water, Line and Light. Formally, *Song of Grief* consists of two transparent filmstrips *without an image* - each filmstrip is identical and on each soundtrack is the same shout. The two projectors are taken out of focus and stand on plinths – facing each other (figure 5) – the lens is situated at the height of “my” mouth (Louisa). The two filmstrips are hung from the ceiling. The loop functions as a drawing throughout a space. A line of film, a beam of light and a channel of sound are experienced physically and aurally.



Figure 5. *Song of Grief*; the projector's running film loops.

Poet and critic Cherry Smyth describes, *Song of Grief*

The wild fury of the piece encapsulates the rage of separation and futility of death and gives over to the permission to howl and to keep howling. The blank frames accentuate the absence but also the eradication of the memory of the absent one. If the blankness replicates the loss, the noise activates it. Unresolved, unresolvable, this arduous, staggering blast of a work invents a sculptural space for grief to do its exhaustive and exhausting work. (Smyth 2011, online)

So what is the shout we hear in *Song of Grief*? It is a roar of grief thrown across the River Severn. Musically, it is a sustained pitch that seems to glissando onto a *Gsharp*¹⁴. In emotional terms, it is what Alice Oswald describes as the 'death-howl'¹⁵. Oswald describes her poem as a translation of

¹⁴ A note on the musical scale

the Iliad's *atmosphere*, not its story. In common with lament, it is invocative, and written as if speaking directly to the dead.

(Louisa) It is a shout in the head, so clearly heard but impossible to give voice to. A shout that roared through “my” body on discovering that someone I loved, someone so alive, and had become so someone dead.

This raises the whole question of sound ‘heard’ inside and outside the head. In order to give voice to the shout, Louisa returned to the river to work with performer Nancy Trotter Landry. Nancy’s instruction was to be/become this emotion. It took more than one journey to the river with sound recordist Christine Felce until Nancy realised and voiced *the* shout of grief.

While singing resonates according to a particular musicality, contoured through melodic lines and structures, the shout of pain and struggle (not to mention the scream) is a sheer effort of raising not so much the voice, but its essential condition, its existential need: to manifest emotional presence (LaBelle 2014: 56).

In the physical space of the gallery, the two identical shouts fight against one another as if the voice of life and the voice of death were attempting to reason with one another across the breadth of the river.

The filmstrips were processed as transparent - absent of image – so the light would pass through the filmstrip and draw a beam of light across the space and, as Malcom Le Grice describes,

...the wave patterns reflecting off the filmstrip [] were very engaging...I liked the simplicity of the materials - producing a magic - like the conjuror, the illusion can be even more pleasurable when you can see how it is done... (Le Grice *pers com*)¹⁶.

In terms of the transparency of the filmstrip: the absence of image, Louisa writes

After years of making films about what ‘I’ was seeing. And after a long period where I thought I could never put another image into the world - I found myself making work about how I was feeling about something that I had not seen¹⁷.

In the process of showing this work, Louisa become interested in the affective force of sound, and how it seemed to be experienced by the entire body and heard through the pores of the skin; the intensity of emotion it could evoke and the charge of that sensation.

¹⁵ (‘death-howl of the father finding him gone’) in ‘Memorial’

¹⁶ Email from Le Grice to Louisa.

¹⁷ Louisa; talk at Camden Art Centre, 2013.

(Louisa). On the day just prior to the *Ground Truth's* opening in London, a young woman spent hours alone with *Song of Grief*. She lay on the floor between the two speakers. She left the gallery and then returned again and once again lay amidst the howling. Someone, she said, had forwarded her the press release and she recognised the shout (in the head) that I had described. She had been to a number of wide, open places across London in attempt to shout (or howl?) in the weeks after her parents' death but found herself remaining mute, too afraid or unable to make this noise. In experiencing the work, she said, she had found a release.

Perhaps the installation/s could be considered as an alternative space for mourning and consolation? Perhaps this touched on the shamanistic power of the non-verbal voice (and in this case the disembodied voice) to be healing? Sarah Maitland (2009: 280) writes how all non-linguistic vocalisations – laughing, sobbing, moaning, shouting in pain - are controlled not by the cerebral cortex (the language zone) but by the subcortical areas and this is a different level of consciousness: “the seedbed of the self”.

Ciara Moloney (2011 online) writes in her review of *Ground Truth*

their anguished cries resembling a kind of primal therapy which strikes a chord at an instinctive level. How can words articulate absolute annihilation? These ‘songs’ are more articulate of profound grief than the most carefully scripted eulogy and highlight the inadequacy of language in the face of the sheer nullity of death.

R Murray Schaffer (1977) wrote of the “materiality of sound and its impact” and of his belief in the power of sound to either harm or uplift an individual. This speaks to sound as potentially therapeutic, but also of sound as haunting or even damaging.

Artist Noah Angell's *Crying in the Ethnographic Field Recording*¹⁸ is a performance-lecture written around selections from the artist's own record collection. He pinpoints and plays moments of weeping and wailing as they appear in lullabies, mourning songs, laments, and spontaneous outbursts of sobbing as captured in the process of documenting oral transmission. A salient point that Angell makes is that ‘in the end crying is a bodily function, yet how it occurs varies significantly from one culture to the next.’ He plays a recording of a Zongo woman's lament from 1964 saying he seeks an ‘anti-reductive analysis, one that complexifies rather than explains away the material’ (online sound file).¹⁹

¹⁸ <http://noahangell.net/>

¹⁹ <http://noahangell.net/ce.mp3>

Zongo are a displaced people of Hungarian origin, who lived in Romania from the Fourteenth century and were forcibly repatriated in the 1940s (ibid). Now having a status much like the Roma people, they are seen as neither belonging to one place or another (Hungary or Romania) and their basic human rights are routinely violated. At the start of the recording the woman is asked to sing a lament, ‘she begins with that other innate human call, laughter, and says, ‘for whom shall I lament?’ (ibid) She decides to sing to her family left behind in Moldavia. Both the lyrics and the melody are improvised and as the (record) notes say, the structure of the melody following the intonation of the singer’s sobbing gathers momentum as the act of sobbing intensifies. The heaving of her distressed nervous system is not a disruption but rather the dominant structural element, a rhythm of tense sorrowful swells upon which her lament builds. She sings to her mother who isn’t there –

beloved mother, how long is it since we parted from one another and how long is it since I became a stranger in a foreign land, it’s thirteen years since I left my homeland, my country, three of my brothers died so I could see them again, how I long to see where your body is buried, my sweet mother they are taking you away through the forest far from me (ibid extract starts at 26.10).

‘As the singer addresses those no longer living, the ethnographer acts almost as a medium in the sense of facilitating and making audible an act of communication which takes place between the living and the dead’ (ibid). Through the act of lament, performed emotion becomes actual emotion. It seems that by visualising the landscape of her homeland, a forest in particular, deep grief swells and rises up through her body and is given voice.

This expressions and discussions of grief of loss/displacement in sound, and through sound, speaks both to Owain’s form of loss through family displacement and Louisa’s ongoing grief for her lost sister Hetta.

Sleeping in the Landscape. Body-Sound-Emotion

This section explores in more detail Louisa’s process of sleeping on the banks of the River Severn, and the notion of this practice as gesture and sustenance for the ongoing body of work. As already intimated, Louisa conducted a series of journeys along the estuary shore over a number of years. These journeys involved cycling (embodied effort) and sleeping in found locations in a small tent (figure 6) with her young son in some instances.

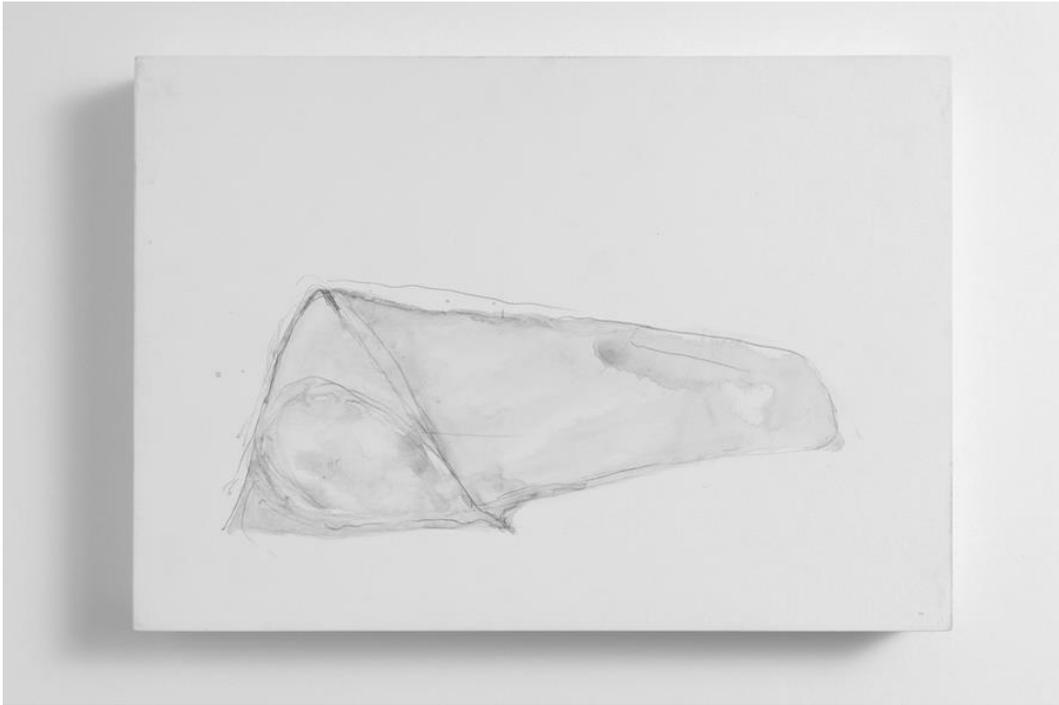


Figure 6. Ground Truth. Pencil and watercolour on gesso, Louisa Fairclough 2011.

Louisa draws upon Blanchot's writings about sleep and night where he says 'sleep transforms night into possibility' (1982 265), and 'sleep belongs to the world; it is a task' (1982 264). For Blanchot sleep can be an act of vigilance and also:

sleep is intimacy with the center. I am, not dispersed, but entirely gathered together where I am, in this spot which is my position and where the world, because of the firmness of my attachment, localizes itself. Where I sleep, I fix myself and I fix the world. My person is there, prevented from erring, no longer unstable, scattered and distracted, but concentrated in the narrowness of this place where the world recollects itself, which I affirm and which affirms me. Here the place is present in me and I absent in it through an essentially ecstatic union. My person is not simply situated where I sleep; it is this very site, and my sleeping is the fact that now my abode is my being (1982: 266).

Louisa is interested in this act of sleeping in a place in order to become that place, this impossible proposition. Night (darkness) has its affective implications too on terms of the body's relationship to space (and sound) – as Minkowski (1970: 429) puts it 'night does not spread out before me but touches me directly envelops me, embraces me, even penetrates me, completely.'

Sleeping is both an act of trust and vulnerability; also an act of desire and acquiescence. To sleep in the open (tented) is to put the body in a relationship with ground, air, and sound. Sleep and falling asleep, hearing in one's sleep, (dreaming) and waking up are adjusting sensing registers in which affect transforms. The potentials here for grieving, and possible recovery, for self-calming

perhaps, are clear; and also an openness to the world (temperature of air and ground, sound) folds vulnerability into this centring.

Bore Song 2011

(Louisa) At the edge of the river, a woman sings a single pitch at the point of the bore tide passing, her voice following the surge of water. In the gesture, she marks my sister's last breath and my own attempt to throw my grief into the river, the tide carrying breath/voice to the river's source before it is pulled back out to sea²⁰.

Bore Song is an attempt to describe distance, time and emotion in physical terms: the filmstrip as a measurement of the time it takes for the bore tide to pass, the length of a breath and the weight of grief.

Formally, *Bore Song* is a suspended 16mm film loop running through a film projector perched on the floor, up to the ceiling; the film image is projected onto a small (postcard size) rectangle of float glass placed on the floor (figures 7, 8, 9).



²⁰ Exhibition text; *Bore Song*; 2011; online at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade/fairclough/archive/bore-song>; accessed 17 12 2014

Figure 7. *Bore Song*. Installation at Danielle Arnaud. (Louisa Fairclough 2011).



Figure 8. *Bore Song*. A still of the projected image on glass. (ibid)



Figure 9. *Bore Song*. The cry (by the river), which repeats as the film loop cycles. (ibid).

The film loop is the exact length of a single take on a clockwork Bolex camera (28 seconds/ 16ft). Approaching *Bore Song* you initially hear the approach of water and the woman's call. You hear this before seeing the film image that seems almost contained within the glass drawing the viewer down to a crouching position.

Cherry Smyth writes of *Bore Song*,

this is the Severn River, where twice a day nature reverses itself and the sea enters the river, charging in a massive surge upstream towards the source, confounding the bucolic calm and

hijacking the contemplative passage of river-time. [] Louisa responded to the counter-intuitive movement of the bore, using it as a powerful metaphor for the inconceivability of death itself. [] She films a young woman by the banks of the Severn, emitting a single note to battle against the roar of the wave, appearing both to emerge from within it and rage against it at the same time. We are of death and yet always believe we are beyond it. The single note sounds almost mechanical and Louisa explains that she asked the performer to mimic the pitch of the sound that once marked the end of transmission of analogue TV broadcasts. It evinces a familiar, uncompromising finality. [] When the wave passes it does not collapse but continues, leaving swollen turbulence and a shattered reflection. The piece of glass onto which the image is projected increases the shimmering intangibility of the place and the visceral volatility of the persona's emotional space. Her open mouth becomes a dark hole, a nothingness." (Smyth 2011 online)

Being in a landscape – such as the Severn Estuary - and immersed in its space and sound is not only to be in the present but also to be immersed in a whole memory or mythology of sound. Wind sound of course alludes to all kinds of cries and calls. The call of death in the light of day is present in the image/sound of *Bore Song*. Jane Ellen Harris writes on the mythological siren (one of the great myths of unsettling sound in landscape); 'the song takes effect at midday, in a windless calm. The end of that song is death' (1922; 199).

Pierre Schaeffer (1966) coined the term 'acousmatic' to describe a sound one hears without seeing the cause. Despite the perfect synchronicity of voice and image, there is a sense of the acousmatic with *Bore Song*. The performer's voice seems to wander along the surface of the glass, at once inside and outside, as if seeking a place to settle. Perhaps this is to do with the necessity to record sound and image a month apart due to the infrequency of the high bore tide and the noise of the Bolex clockwork camera? The voice and body don't belong together.

In February 2011, around the time of the full moon Louisa returned to Epney with Nancy Trotter Landry and sound recordist Christine Felce. Nancy knelt on the ground and waited as the bore tide passed she sang a single sustained pitch across the river. A month later, when the tide was high once again, they returned to the same spot to film the image. Nancy knelt at the same spot once again and we waited for the bore tide. The filming demanded a precise synchronicity of performer, tide and filmmaker, as Nancy's vocal gesture had to be timed exactly with the point of the bore tide passing and this to be caught in the single 28 second take of the clockwork camera.

An important aspect to both these expanded films, *Bore Song* and *Song of Grief*, is the works' relationship sculpturally, acoustically and psychologically to the physical space they inhabit, as well the works' relationship to one another. For example, when installed at Danielle Arnaud gallery (a domestic set of spaces), *Bore Song* was located in an alcove at the end of a hallway, and

it was not possible to experience its soundtrack without also hearing *Song of Grief* in an adjoining space (and vice versa). There was a call and response between the ‘hollow song’ of *Bore Song* and the deeper cry ‘sad, full of sorrow and doubled’²¹ of *Song of Grief*. However it was not possible to see both works at the same time, you had to walk from one room to the next to see *Song of Grief*. Thus when installed in this context, the source of one of the voices would always be out of sight, thus unsettling the senses, bodily space and emotive responses, and bringing us back to Schaffer’s notion of acousmatic voice.

On the subject of musicality, when heard together it transpired that the two (*Bore Song* and *Song of Grief*) formed a minor sixth interval. Composer Richard Glover writes, ‘Yes - it’s a minor sixth! What’s nice is that the lowest note seems to glissando onto its G#, so you just about get a nice cadence from an A minor to an E major, for what it’s worth!’²² This led Louisa to consider the works as modular and the potential for them to be devised as a choral group.

Lines of Thought, Lines of Emotion, Lines of Tension

Since making the works discussed above, Louisa has made further series of works which use sound in landscape – both live performance and installation. This still circles around the loss of her twin sister Hetta, but the process of grieving in place has moved on to new (tidal) landscapes and to new emotional conditions.

(Louisa) As I slept, my twin sister slept on the far bank. My sleep was provisional, hers was final. She became my mute collaborator. We met at night. Calling across to her, I thought she replied.

The recent discovery of Louisa’s deceased twin sister’s sketchbooks marked a shift to a more studio-based practice. In these sketchbooks Hetta returns to rivers, bodies of water, lines of thought, lines of tension and lines of emotion (in a series of drawings that resonate with Ingold’s (2007) work on lines. Studying the sketchbooks, Louisa was surprised at the correlations between her sister’s thoughts, and the work she had been making since her death.

At times, fragments of Hetta’s writing allude to vivid imaginings:

²¹ The two quoted phrases are from an art review blog, Back to the Wurst, <http://backtothewurst.blogspot.co.uk/2011/12/londons-white-cubes-and-walls-part-3.html> (accessed 06 01 2015).

²² Email exchange between Louisa and Richard Glover.

Vision: distance – focusing in close to – magnetized – far away – landscape/seascape – standing at a height overseeing a huge stretch of land/water - kneeling down to absorb an object/ small insect...

It was as if the sketchbooks were the script for the body of work that comprised *Ground Truth*, and the above words could indeed be describing *Bore Song*.

Louisa's current work has arisen from a dialogue with these sketchbooks where her sister's drawings have become the basis for sonic and spatial scores for an expanded film or a live performance. Often these sketchbook drawings hover between a concrete poem and a visual score and give voice to her experience of living with the acute highs, lows and anxieties of manic depression. The work has become a conversation between the two sisters (both artists, one who lives and one who has died).

(Louisa) In the drawings she calls, and in the film-sculptures, I reply.

Gina Buenfeld, in her essay, on Louisa's more recent work writes,

The (sketchbook) drawings are instructional and imperative and Fairclough's response is not tentative in its approach. It pushes up against you insisting: this is how it is; this is what I am; don't look away; don't seek distraction; don't soften my edges. It is intensely demanding and intimate. In it, emotional disturbance is felt as a material component – space is re-described not just formally but socially and psychologically (Buenfeld 2014, online)

Louisa has drawn upon Hetta's words and images,

often present in the sketch books in delicate quite faint pencil and collage assemblages, to produce a further set of works extending out of the above in some formal terms.

Can People See Me Swallowing - a film for a stairwell, Spike Island, 2014.

(Louisa to Hetta) You come to me only in glimpses with shards of your voice cutting off as I want to hear more. I can't fix an image of you but I can hear your voice. If I listen too long, it becomes my voice.

On the sketchbook page, threads wind around an almost absence. Not quite, it's as if there's something that's caught in the throat. Wanting to swallow this impulse to swallow. Penciled phrases caught in

clusters: “Oh God, Oh God, Oh God. Can people see me swallowing?” To see such phrases of bodily distress from Hetta’s hand was (still is), for Owain, a shock.

The films loops running through the projectors were mainly black, with projector light emitting through clear sections when a few sung words punctuated the mute film. With a single sung phrase on each length of film, the voices fell together in harmonic clusters. At moments there was only the whirr of film projectors humming in the throat of the building (Figure 10).



Figure 10. Can People See Me Swallowing? - a film for a stairwell, Spike Island. (Louisa Fairclough 2014).

Compositions for a Low Tide (2014)

Louisa has more recently worked with the composer Richard Glover in devising new works which have been performed by a solo singer or choristers. Glover’s approach to working with voice is through sustained tone textures, his minimal compositions investigate perception and temporality within music. This lends itself to further compositions taken into ‘the field’ for live performance.

The work returned Louisa to a tidal landscape at the water’s edge, with the performance at low tide in Whitstable (south east UK). As day turned to dusk, a group of choristers walked out with a group of guests along the line of The Street, an ancient shingle spit that stretches out a mile out into the sea at low tide (figures 11 and 12). As the group made their way out to the distal end of the spit and back, the choristers performed two works, their voices sometimes lost in the wind. As *Bore Song* and *Song of Greif* there is a sense of the voice, the cry - the human and all ‘its’ emotions and longings - being dissipated out into the living atmospheres of the world. The act of singing, of throwing a call out into the space of the ocean and its sky, it at once forlorn and

releasing.



Figure 11. Compositions for a Low Tide. Louisa Fairclough (2014).

The choral performances took two drawings from one of Hetta's sketchbooks as the starting point. The choristers sang text taken from the notebooks, "What shall I do with my hands? I do with my hands what shall? With my hands what shall I do?" creating an overlapping succession of anxious refrains, the harmonies rising and falling in a pattern that echoed the rhythm of the tides.

This new body of work continues to take loss and consolation as the theme, and insists that the loss of one person can be relevant to many, and that loss can continue to impact the present in a hopeful way. The works can be imagined and felt as dynamic, collective and celebratory process of mourning.



Figure 12. Compositions for a Low Tide; Louisa Fairclough (2014).

Conclusions

Collectively, the ideas, writings and artworks discussed above explore interplays of landscape, emotions (grief in particular) and sound, in the context of a very particular landscape – the Severn Estuary. The practices discussed, we suggest, are based upon reflective affective-emotive becoming in landscape and memory-grief re-articulated and conceived of as art forms. They offer powerfully expressive articulations of emotion /grief in landscape with sound as a central register of experience.

Crucial is the interplay of the affective airs of the landscape in question, personal narrative and memory, sounds in the landscape and cries of/to the heart. Works such as *Ground Truth* seek to offer foldings of night-sleep-breath-movement in a range of registers and media:- voice(s)-note(s)-recordings-lines-points-times-water-memories-grief.

Of course there is no certainty in the playing out of sound and emotion in landscape. Others have used this landscape as a place to articulate other emotions (See Antony Lyons Sabrina Dreaming project²³

²³ <http://sabrinedreaming.blogspot.co.uk/>

and a range of works by the artist Iain Biggs²⁴). For the authors, this powerful landscape somehow helps them to live with grief.

A key point we have sought to make is that sound has particular and complex relations to emotion and affect within the tensions of self-in-landscape. This is so of sounds received through the senses and sounds made through cries and other means. These can be multi-register and multi-directional - from land to self and from self to land, and to others and affectively transmit grief and of course other emotions too – for example joy. As in the audio of the Zongo lament and hinted at in Louisa's summaries of her more recent work, the expression of grief through sound, cry, voice, song, while not transforming grief to joy, changes the tone of grief, perhaps to something with traces of joy within it.

More generally, heeding and practicing sound in place can be an opening out into an ecology of shared feeling and knowing. Various ways of bodily being-in –the-landscape, including wandering, walking and sleeping can bring specific bodily inflections to this. We are drawn back to Noah Angell's "anti-reductive analysis, one that complexifies rather than explains". This approach applied to place and landscape offers openings for yet further explorations of the inter-foldings on memory, sound, grief, ecology and space/place in both art and geography.

“Sounding - the action of measuring the depth of a body of water”

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²⁴ <http://www.iainbiggs.co.uk/2016/01/>

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