

Gone to Earth

Cinematic Encounters with the British Rural Landscape:  
embodiment, enchantment, realism and myth.

Submitted by Daniel Passes to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Film by Practice  
in September 2019

This thesis is available for Library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: .....

## **Abstract**

Through a synthesis of critical and practical research, this thesis looks beyond semiotic approaches to film landscape which consistently view the representation of countryside in film as a metonym for the national. My research is concerned instead with an interaction with land which is experiential, embodied and felt. Considering the ways in which landscape imprints itself upon our physical and spiritual selves, the thesis investigates rural space through the sensorium of the body, engaging with both the elemental properties of soil and stone and the substrata of myth, memory and dream to formulate a model for an embodied and enchanted British landscape cinema.

Within a framework of film phenomenology, the thesis questions aesthetic readings of film landscape borrowed from art history and looks instead to anthropological conceptions of landscape as *dwelt* space, the result of a persistent communion between occupant and land. Considering landscape and the natural sublime from gendered perspectives, as products of a male gaze reinforcing men's domination over women and nature, the thesis proposes an alternative conception of landscape and sublimity which are rooted in material immanence rather than transcendental distance. Through this process, the work advocates a new kind of occupation of the British countryside which challenges human sovereignty over nature and resists the colonial hegemonies of ownership and possession.

My practical enquiry into landscape and rurality is informed by my work as cinematographer, sound recordist and sound editor. Through this multidisciplinary approach, the research questions the primacy of vision in cinema's representation of countryside. Contributing to discourse on

soundscape, film sound and field recording, the thesis contends that ocularcentric interpretations of landscape often estrange and exile us from the land whilst sound-led filmmaking approaches invite us towards it.

The thesis enquires about cinematic rural space from perspectives of film realism and proposes an alternative, hybridised model of realism to account for our occupancy of the countryside. Drawing from diverse magical realist film texts as well as existing discourse on magical realism, my work speculates that the imbrication of realism and fable grants access to long repressed systems of thought within the countryside and, crucially, places human creative imagination at the centre of our sensorial engagement with rural space. In their different approaches to sounding and visualising the countryside, the two films which comprise my practical research enable us, as filmmaker and viewer, to consider how imaginary, non-naturalistic representations of the rural help to reclaim the British countryside for ourselves.

## **Table of Contents**

### Introduction

- 0.1 An introduction to the research and an overview of critical and practical methodologies
- 0.2 Thesis outline by chapter
- 0.3 Overview of practical research

### Chapter One: Critical literature review

- 1.1 Chapter summary
- 1.2 Historical overview
- 1.3 Existing cinematic representations of British rural landscape, the critical discourse surrounding film landscape and definitions of rural cinema
- 1.4 Positioning my film practice in the context of existing film work

### Chapter Two: Rethinking landscape

- 2.1 Chapter summary
- 2.2 Traditional definitions of film landscape
- 2.3 Anthropological definitions of landscape and why they are helpful when discussing the cinematic countryside
- 2.4 The dwelling perspective and the importance of process and form

### Chapter Three: Producing landscape film as a cinematographer and sound recordist

- 3.1 Chapter summary
- 3.2 Overview of film phenomenology and its relevance to my research
- 3.3 Reframing rural space through immersive cinematography
- 3.4 The Thoreauvian sublime and its influence on my research
- 3.5 Embodiment, stillness and movement; a cinema of walking
- 3.6 Re-sounding the countryside from an embodied perspective
- 3.7 Perspectival qualities of film sound
- 3.8 On listening
- 3.9 In the absence of dialogue

## Chapter Four: Beyond representation: magical realism, fable and imagination

4.1 Chapter summary

4.2 Limitations of naturalism

4.3 Re-enchanting landscape through magical realism

4.4 Representing rural temporality

4.5 An invitation to dream

4.6 Beyond acoustic ecology

Conclusion

Bibliography

Filmography

### **List of Accompanying Material**

To accompany this written thesis, there are two medium-length films. These films are provided as QuickTime files on a USB memory stick.

Film One: *Valley* (44' 29")

Film Two: *Inheritors* (42' 16")

## **Introduction**

The British countryside encompasses an incredibly diverse range of landscapes; the mountainous peaks of Wales, the craggy coastlines of Scotland, the bleak fens of East Anglia and the fertile meadows of Kent and Sussex. These landscapes are also enmeshed by an intricate web of intertwining states and temporalities - the local and the global, the privileged and the impoverished, and the ancient and the modern. Films produced within the context of these British ruralities reflect not only their geographical diversity but also the variety of values, philosophies and lifestyles that they encompass. The heritage cinema of *Pride and Prejudice* (Joe Wright, 2005), which paints the countryside as a halcyon haven of traditional values; the uncanny folk horror of *The Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) and, more recently, *A Field in England* (Ben Wheatly, 2013), which reveals a Britain haunted by memories of its own pagan past; the dark contemporary realism of *The Goob* (Guy Myhill, 2015) and *Dark River* (Clio Barnard, 2018), where the rural is cast as a hinterland of decline and economic stagnation; each of these different depictions of the British countryside provides insight into our own relationship with rural space and speaks deeply to us about our own post-industrial identities.

The connection between film countryside and the national imaginary has been well chronicled by recent film thought. In *Representing the Rural: Space, Place and Identity in Films about the Land* by Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield (Wayne State University Press, 2006) [hereafter referred to as *Representing the Rural*], and *Cinema and Landscape* by Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner (Intellect Books, 2010), different filmic depictions of rurality are analysed for what they reveal to us about class, modernity and nationalism. These investigations

into the complex socio-political dimensions of rural space challenge the assumption that representations of the countryside simply provide momentary escape from the complexities of modern life. Instead of connoting the regressive and traditional, cinematic portrayals of the countryside can also express what it means to live in the present on both deeply personal and political levels.

My practice-led research allows me to contribute to this existing discourse on film landscape from a set of uniquely different perspectives. By inhabiting the countryside as a filmmaker, the thesis enquires about the private, sensuous relationships which form between occupant and rural place, asking not only how the fabric of the rural permeates our physical and spiritual selves but also how such entanglements might be cinematically conveyed. Considering the way countryside *feels* as well as what it symbolises, the thesis asks whether ideas of corporeal spectatorship can help to enrich our perception and understanding of rural space, and speculates that embodied relationships with landscape enable us (as filmmaker and film viewer) to resist - if not overturn - the political and cultural hegemonies of ownership, possession and consumption so deeply entrenched within these soils.

I formulate my model for an embodied and enchanted British landscape cinema within a framework of phenomenological film thought. In the introduction to their essay, "What is Film Phenomenology?" (Studia Phaenomenologica, 2016), Julian Hanich and Christian Ferencz-Flatz observe how phenomenology "comprises a veritable hodgepodge of theoretical positions", acknowledging the "difficulty of finding a common ground between Husserl, Heidegger and Scheler's usage of the term" (12). Whilst it is equally hard to agree on demarcation points for the



“meandering meanings” (14) of film phenomenology, the thesis uses the term simply to describe the affect and sensuous experience of perception on both filmmaker and film viewer. There are numerous accounts within recent film thought which explore cinema from perspectives of materiality and embodiment to chart the slippery and ambiguous idea of cinematic subjectivity. However, it is not the intention of this work to adhere obdurately to specific creeds of film phenomenology. Film academic Iuliia Glushneva proposes that film phenomenology can be used as a “counter epistemology” to question “ocularcentrism, rationalism, the body-mind and the subject-object dichotomies of previous film theories and Western epistemologies in general” (iii). In a similar spirit, this thesis uses phenomenological thought as part of its heuristic approach, as a network of alternative knowledge through which I can challenge existing paradigms of intellectual film scholarship.

Phenomenological approaches to film are often criticized for being speculative and subjective, based on anecdotal and impressionistic accounts of spectatorship. However, my work argues that whilst embodied experience is unique, the capacity for emotional and sensorial receptive experiences is shared. In her essay, “Embodying transcendence: on the literal, the material, and the cinematic sublime” (*Material Religion*, 2015), Sobchack observes that “as lived bodies we are grounded in the “here and now” of our sensual experience...no matter how different our cultural situations or differently organized and valued modes of ‘making sense’” (197). Echoing this idea, the thesis contends that we are all united as viewers and filmmakers by our capacity to be affected by sensory perception.

Phenomenological perspectives have often been used to map cinematic urban space and the human experiences within it. For example, *In Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film* (Verso, 2002), Giuliana Bruno develops a kind of affective mapping of her native Naples and Italian cinema based on spatial, visual and emotional readings of urban place. The thesis asks how such sensual and experiential approaches to place might be applied to rural space instead and, more crucially, how they can help unlock rural landscape for me as a filmmaker. My practical research is shaped not only by my work as a cinematographer but also as a sound recordist and sound editor. Through this multidisciplinary and multisensory approach, my work questions cinema's primacy of vision by asking what it is about rural space in particular that makes sound-led filmmaking approaches so vital, and what it is about sound that helps to immerse us within the land.

There are several key terms used throughout this thesis and it's important to define how each is used within the specific context of the research. 'Landscape' is a multifarious word, its meaning shifting subtly depending on the setting in which it is applied. In the introduction to his book, *Landscape and Film* (Routledge, 2006), Martin Lefebvre describes landscape as "a pluridisciplinary spatial object whose meanings extend from real life environments to art" (xiii), from biological science, geography and architecture to comparative literature and art history. In spite of the protean nature of the term, it is tempting to conceive film landscape within the same specifically pictorial perspectives as still media art like photography and painting. Lefebvre observes how landscape can refer to an emulation of "something that happens when...looking down from the window of an airplane, we look at the natural environment as if it were framed" (xv). Through

this process of framing, form becomes organized, land becomes landscape and “nature turns into culture” (xv).

Crucially however, this transformative process is not merely aesthetic. The visual is instead interwoven with numerous other experiential elements. As Lefebvre perceives, “the form of a landscape also corresponds to our experience of it”, incorporating a multitude of “personal, cultural and social functions” (xv). Instead of reducing rural space to a distanced object of the visual gaze, by conceiving landscape differently, as a meshing of human life and natural world, my work draws instead from geographical and anthropological readings of landscape to articulate the porous relationship between people, nature, place and time. Tim Ingold writes that “human beings do not...inscribe their life histories upon the surface of nature as do writers upon the page; rather, these histories are woven, along with the life cycles of plants and animals, into the texture of the surface itself” (198). If pictorial conceptions of landscape promote a passive, distant relationship with countryside, Ingold emphasises landscape as a process of osmosis, an ongoing communion between occupant and place.

These anthropological definitions of landscape have rich potential within my thesis and lead me to consider my film practice as an act of dwelling. Ingold’s idea of a “dwelling perspective” (152) shapes my filmmaking identity as a sole practitioner, enabling me to assess my work from the perspective of both process and form, and to consider my engagement with the countryside not merely as a singular one-off act of audio-visual recording but an ongoing, process-driven state of walking, looking, listening, breathing and being. This iterative approach to filmmaking is central to the arguments within my thesis and helps me to

systematically pose and then answer a series of interlinking, progressive questions throughout the work.

The dwelt landscape perspective also helps me to question and confront culturally hegemonic ideas of possessing, dominating and surmounting rural space within my practice. Feminist landscape scholars like Janice Monk and Gillian Rose have argued that the scenic nature of landscape invokes ways of seeing which reproduce masculine power relations. From this viewpoint, the male gaze conflates natural landscape with the feminine body, reinforcing the idea of man's predatory domination over both. In *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (Polity Press, 1993), Rose makes the colonial overtones of the female body-as-nature metaphor unambiguous: "women represent the enticing and inviting land to be explored, mapped, penetrated and known" (94).

By considering film landscape from these gendered, colonial perspectives, my thesis proposes a different type of occupation of the countryside based on tenure and guardianship rather than acquisition and capital gain. By proposing a natural sublime based on immanence instead of transcendence, this work invites us to rethink our relationship with the land and, in doing so, to resist the inequalities of rural land ownership in Britain and, more generally, to question humankind's destruction of natural ecosystems.

Another important term which recurs throughout my work is realism. The idea of cinematic realism comes under considerable pressure in the thesis and provides an important concept for me to enquire about my relationship with countryside as

a filmmaker. Film realism is highly ambiguous as a term. It regularly describes film's innate ability to produce what Rudolph Arnheim called "the mechanical imitation of nature" (158). This idea of realism is rooted in the transparency between the photographic image and its object and, for theorists like André Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, the aesthetic value of cinema is measured by how it "makes us experience aspects of physical reality." (vii). Tiago de Luca builds on these ideas in his theory of sensory realism to describe how international directors like Carlos Reygadas and Lisandro Alonso use the phenomenal world to elicit a corporeal mode of viewing in the spectator. I apply these ideas of sensory realism within my own work, asking how the material presence of countryside produces haptic, afferent responses in filmmaker and viewer. More importantly however, my research also turns to alternative forms of realism to describe our occupation of rural space. The thesis distinguishes carefully between the verisimilitudinous portrayal of countryside which prioritises the believability of characters, locations and narratives, and a cinematic representation of rurality which *feels* emotionally real. Drawing from a heterogenous corpus of international film texts where rural realism and rural fabulism overlap and blur, my research asks whether magical realism (and non-realism) succeeds in conveying an emotional truth about our occupation of the land which social realist approaches often fail to do. Inspired by Wendy Faris's analogy between shamanism and magical realism, the thesis uses fabulist techniques to resist dominant rationalist paradigms and to access alternative and long repressed systems of thought and ways of knowing the world. Referring to the poetic philosophy of Gaston Bachelard, my thesis argues that creative imagination is an intrinsic part of our sensorial engagement with rural space. Enquiring into the mythical, imaginary and oneiric dimensions of the countryside,

I propose a model of landscape cinema which is not only corporeal but also spiritual, inviting us to re-enchant and re-possess the countryside.

The placement of my work within the framework of global rural cinema is important for a second reason. My research is rooted within the British landscape and shaped by my experience as a British filmmaker. However, both my filmmaking identity and my engagement with rural space extend far beyond these ideas of the national and the regional. The research does not seek to conduct a comparative analysis between British and international cinematic rural space; it is interested instead to consider rural space outside indexes of nationhood. By opening my research up to explore European and Asian encounters with the countryside, the thesis is able to escape the narrow cultural boundaries of Englishness and Britishness and to enquire about rural space from global and human perspectives. Reflecting on contemporary writing about rural place, the author and academic Robert MacFarlane observes that:

Parochialism has really curdled as a word. It comes from 'parish' and connotes a sense of a limit, of a perimeter... but I think that tiny apertures open onto great visions. That hole at the base of a hedge, that idea of looking through a tiny gap like a parish, can open out onto incredible visions. (*Open Book*, BBC Radio 4, 12 Mar. 2015. Radio.)

Although MacFarlane talks specifically about nature literature, I would like to apply this idea of “tiny apertures” to my own cinematic rural dwelling perspective to invoke a cinematic sense of place which speaks across cultural, national and ethnic divisions. This thesis has been written against the backdrop of Brexit and the global rise of national populism. Notions of Britishness and nation have acquired sinister resonances and my work stands in defiance of this narrowing of

the world and champions instead a vision of countryside which, if rooted in British soil, is universal and without borders.

## **Thesis Outline**

To contextualise my own research and practice, chapter one provides an overview of existing representations of British rural space by cinema. I contend that the British countryside is consistently framed as a cosy and wholesome retreat from the modern and the urban, observing how these depictions prevail not only within heritage period dramas like *The Remains of the Day* (James Ivory, 1994) but also within more contemporary cinematic depictions of rurality like *Calendar Girls* (Nigel Cole, 2003). I also acknowledge the growing tendency for British cinema to depict the countryside outside of these stereotypes. Recent films like *Dark River*, (Cleo Bernard, 2018), *God's Own Country*, (Francis Lee, 2017) and *The Levelling*, (Hope Dixon Leach, 2016) reconfigure rural landscape into brooding anti-pastorals far removed from the stereotype of green and pleasant lands, and I consider these films alongside my own approach to countryside.

Chapter one also places my research within the broader context of new British nature writing. There has been a recent growth of literary accounts of rural place which describe intimate, biographical encounters with daily and vernacular aspects of British landscape. However, this writing has been criticised for failing to engage with important social questions. In their essay, "Walking a lonely path: gender, landscape and 'new nature writing'" (Cultural Geographies, 2018), Phil Hubbard and Eleanor Wilkinson note how this literature is accused of "being insufficiently critical, and occluding questions of class, race and gender" (253). My research reflects on these criticisms of excursionism within the context of my own film practice.



The first chapter also enquires about existing critical discourse surrounding cinema's representation of countryside. I refer to Andrew Higson's work on heritage and national cinema, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama since 1980* (Oxford University Press, 2000) as well as several key texts on rural cinema and rural film landscape: Catherine Fowler and Gillian Helfield's *Representing the Rural* (Wayne State University Press, 2006), Jonathon Rayner and Graeme Harper's *Cinema and Landscape* (Intellect, 2010) and Robert Fish's *Cinematic Countrysides* (Manchester University Press, 2007). These texts let me reflect on my own identity and relationship with rural space, particularly how, as an urban filmmaker, countryside is prefigured as a place of sanctuary, persistence and recovery. The thesis also proposes that existing discourse on rural cinema lacks the intimate perspectives obtained through personal experience. My practice provides a unique research tool for me to explore British countryside from embodied and affective perspectives. The key issues of identity and our complex relationship with rural space remain paramount, yet they are now refracted through the prism of subjective, first-hand experience and discussed on a human scale.

In chapter two, the thesis questions the meaning of film landscape. Referring to Martin Lefebvre's *Landscape and Film* (Routledge, 2006), I begin by considering traditional pictorial definitions of the term, exploring how scenic landscapes might be construed as products of a gendered colonial perspective. The thesis proceeds to ask whether it's possible to reconceive ideas of landscape within cinema. Turning to anthropological and geographical interpretations, I refer to Tim Ingold's essay, "The Temporality of the Landscape" (World Archaeology, 1993), particularly his idea of "dwelling perspective" (152), and

propose a model of landscape filmmaking which moves away from the pictorial objectivization of the countryside towards corporeal and spiritual emplacement within it. My practical research comprises two medium-length film projects. I use the first film, *Valley*, to apply these theoretical ideas of embodiment and immersion and to consider how ideas of dwelling can nurture my identity as a sole practitioner by inviting me to reflect on my practice from the perspective of both process and form.

In chapter three, the thesis asks how rural space can be both re-envisioned and re-sounded from embodied and dwelt perspectives. I refer to Vivian Sobchack's *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton University Press, 1992) and Laura Marks's *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses* (Duke University Press, 2000), to ask how theories like "haptic visuality" (Marks 152) can be used to invoke the tactile and sensuous properties of rural space through my practice as a cinematographer.

I place my work as a cinematographer within a secondary framework of discourse about neo-romanticism and the natural sublime. My research considers how theories of the sublime are heavily gendered within Burkean and Kantian thought to produce a binarized relationship between a masculinised sublime and a feminised aesthetic of beauty. Questioning the ideas of sovereignty over nature that are implicit within sublime thought, I refer to Ben Rivers's *Two Years at Sea* (2010) and Stella Hockenull's work on the British cinematic sublime, *Aesthetics and Neo-Romanticism in Film; Landscapes in Contemporary British Cinema* (I.B. Tauris, 2014), to help me renegotiate ideas of the natural sublime within my own

film work and to propose an idea of sublimity based on kinship rather than mastery.

As part of this process of redefining meanings of landscape and sublimity within my work, the third chapter also questions the primacy of vision in cinema's representation of countryside. Through a close reading of *Le Quattro Volte* (Michelangelo Frammartino, 2010), and by referring to Murray Schafer's *Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Density Books, 1994), particularly his concepts of "sound-marks" (10) and "hi-fi" and lo-fi" soundscapes (29), I describe how *Valley's* sound recording and sound design practices prioritise the specificity and tactile materiality of rural landscape. I also refer to Cathy Lane and Angus Carlyle's work, *In the Field: the art of film recording* (Uniform, 2013), as well as anthropologist Stephen Feld's notion of *acoustemology*, which describes "one's sonic way of knowing and being in the world" (223). Applying these ideas to my own practice, my research speculates about whether film sound allows the filmmaker and film viewer to inhabit rural space in ways that visual depictions on their own do not.

The thesis concludes by positing that film realism fails to express the full complexity of rural space and my occupancy within it. In chapter four, I consider whether magical realist and fabulist approaches allow me to engage with dimensions of rurality which I would not otherwise be able to. I place my work in the context of recent Slow Cinema. Referring to Tiago de Luca's *Realism of the Senses in World Cinema: the Experience of Physical Reality* (I.B.Tauris, 2013), I consider how my practice both conforms to and deviates from the models of sensory realism exemplified by this term. Then, drawing inspiration from the

fabulist cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul and Michelangelo Frammartino, I proceed to ask whether magical realist techniques help me to reconcile the earthy qualities of land with its innately mythical dimensions. I consider my two films, *Valley* and *Inheritors*, through close reference to Wendy B. Faris's taxonomic work on magical realism, *Ordinary Enchantments; Magical Realism and the Remystification of the Narrative* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), particularly her concepts of "irreducible element" and "merging realms". The thesis speculates that, far from being supra-natural, magical aspects of landscape are instead deeply organic constructions born from human creative imagination. I argue that story-making, and specifically mythopoesis, is fundamental to our sensorial and experiential relationship with the rural.

It is from these specific perspectives of realism and its alternatives that I return to the question of sounding countryside in cinema. Referring to field recordist Francisco Lopez's comparison between the aural ecology of Murray Schaffer and the *musique concrète* of Pierre Schaeffer, my thesis looks at the difference between using soundscapes as a tool to preserve and archive rural space and using field recordings as raw material to be creatively reimagined and repurposed. The differences between these two auditory approaches - one to document and one to create, one rooted in realism and the other in fabrication and invention – are symptomatic of a broader tension within my practice and emblematic of my relationship with landscape. Through my two film projects, *Valley* and *Inheritors*, and their very different relationships with realism, magical realism and non-realism, the thesis asks whether these apparently conflicting identities can be reconciled to convey both the corporeal and spiritual experiences of being in the land.

## **Overview of the Practical Research**

Both the films are products of my working process as a sole practitioner joined occasionally by a small collaborative crew. Both projects share a multidisciplinary approach and I consider my practice as a filmmaker from the specific perspectives of cinematographer and sound recordist/sound editor. The two films provide important points of comparison and counterpoint within the thesis. The practice-led element of my research has developed organically and in conjunction with my critical research, both eliciting and addressing key research questions throughout the thesis.

### **Film #1 – *Valley (Samuel the Shaman)***

#### **Synopsis**

A middle-aged man returns to the mountain valley he once visited with his wife. He embarks on a private pilgrimage, stopping at various places which have been made sacred by her memory. He takes a relic from each of these sites - bracken and moss from the forest, berries and water from the mountain - and uses them as ingredients to create a perfume. He applies this perfume of memory and place and travels to a hillside where he waits for his wife to return. She eventually does.

#### **Comment**

I use *Valley* to formulate a model of embodied landscape cinema, portraying the countryside as a site of sanctuary and recovery. Adopting techniques common to contemporary Slow Cinema, including reduced narrativity and dramaticity, geographical specificity and long-take aesthetics, *Valley* explores how I can create an embodied cinema through my practice as a cinematographer and

sound recordist, and lets me consider the differences between visualising and sounding rural space from dwelt perspectives.

*Valley* also explores ideas of magic, alchemy and shamanism in its representation of contemporary British rurality. I am anxious to engage with aspects of rural space where myth and fable reside. To do so, I search for alternatives to cinematic naturalism, arguing that their attention to specificity and authenticity plays into larger narratives of ecological preservation which are redolent of the museumification of natural space found within heritage cinema. *Valley* explores magical realist techniques as a way of enfolding the fabular within the tactile in my practice as a landscape filmmaker.

## **Film #2 – Inheritors (*Sister Sea and the God Forest*)**

### Synopsis

*Inheritors* is a triptych film. In part one (*Sister Sea*), a woman and her mother-in-law gather in front of an old two-way radio to listen to the village men take part in a sacred whale hunt. The woman is pregnant. The father of her child perishes during the hunt.

In part two (*God Forest*), a woman waits for a man at the edge of an ancient forest. Deep inside the forest, the man embarks on a hunt for a sacred yet deadly quarry. The woman is pregnant. The father of her child dies during the hunt.

In part three (*Inheritors*), we meet the two unborn children of the preceding chapters – now grown up into young adults. Peter is drawn to the sea, magnetised yet terrified by it. Cecile is drawn to the forest, transfixed by the tree canopy above

her. Peter is part-fish and part-human and Cecile is part-bird and part-human. On the cusp of adulthood, both wrestle with their uneasy identities and their otherness. Through a chance encounter, the awkward heroes find acceptance for themselves through their love for each other.

### Comment

As with *Valley*, I consider my practice from the perspective of both cinematographer and sound recordist. *Inheritors* differs from *Valley* photographically, using locked off, static compositions instead of moving hand-held shots. Both films look beyond the objectifying gaze of traditional landscape photography to investigate ways of framing rural space which are sensuous and immersive. However, they do this in significantly different ways. In contrast to *Valley's* meticulous eye for texture and detail, landscapes and occupants are purposefully left devoid of specificity in *Inheritors*. These landscapes provide an abstracted vision of man's ritualistic and animistic relationship with environment rather than one based in the dogmas of documentary truth.

Sonically, *Inheritors* lets me explore different approaches to sound which depart from purely realist paradigms by combining naturalism with impressionistic, meta-diegetic techniques. *Inheritors* also considers landscape as a repository for myth and fairy tale. Investigating the way nature is transformed into landscape through human imagination, *Inheritors* departs from the embodied sensory realism of *Valley* and uses magical realism and non-realist techniques like mythopoesis to explore how rural space invites us to dream and imagine.

## **Chapter One. How is the British countryside commonly portrayed within cinema?**

### **1.1 Chapter summary**

The chapter identifies the main cinematic conventions used to represent the British countryside, from the nostalgia and grandeur of heritage cinema to the realist depictions of contemporary rural drama which shows the countryside as a place of stagnation and poverty. I also summarise the main areas of critical discourse surrounding these depictions. Through this overview of existing cinema texts and critical research, the chapter establishes a context for my own work by considering how my practice corresponds to and differs from these prevailing models. I conclude the chapter by declaring my own research intentions: to explore cinematic rural space through a synthesis of practice and critical discourse to formulate a model of embodied landscape cinema which engages with the countryside from corporeal and spiritual perspectives.

### **1.2 Historical overview**

Cinema has always enjoyed an inherent kinship with the city. From city symphonies like *Études sur Paris* (André Sauvage, 1928), and *A Propos de Nice* (Jean Vigo, 1930), through American film noir and Italian neo-realism to more contemporary psychogeographic essay films like *I am Belfast* (Mark Cousins, 2015) and *London Orbital* (Ian Sinclair and Chris Petit, 2002); there are myriad filmic representations of the urban and many great critical accounts of the cinema-city which map the correlation between film and modernity. In *Cinema and the City* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), Marc Shiel believes that this cinema-city nexus enables us to chart a “relationship between the most important cultural form...and the most important form of social organisation of the twentieth century



(and for the time being at least, the twenty-first century)” (1). The cinema-city, Shiel proposes, “provides a rich avenue for investigation and discussion of key issues...in the study of society” (2). From this perspective, urbanism becomes metonymic of both the euphoric rise of industrial capitalism and the discontentment of post-industrialism, and cinema the means of chronicling its rapid evolution and decline. As Fowler and Helfield summarise in the introduction of their book, *Representing the Rural*, cinema is the invention of modernism: “traffic, people, city life all move to the rhythm of the twenty-four-frames-per-second beat, as if celluloid is providing the heart for the metropolitan corpus” (1).

Inevitably, the strong partnership between metropolis and cinema leads us to question the status of countryside in film. Here, Fowler and Helfield make an important distinction between cinema and the writing and discourse surrounding it. They note that, although “the turning of the camera eye towards the land has an equally prolific and consistent history”, it is one that has been critically neglected by film thought: “rural cinema, with its emphatic focus upon traditional folkways and more connected to life on the land, may seem retrogressive and thus not worthy of the same critical and historical focus” (1-2). Fowler and Helfield imply here that, although films about the countryside have always been an important part of cinema, there is a deficit of academic enquiry surrounding them. Citing the sociologist Teodor Shanin, they suggest that the cause of this neglect lies in a type of intellectual snobbery: “To a large number of scholars, peasant societies, which appear to disintegrate under the impact of the modernising forces of industrialisation and urbanisation, do not seem worthy of forward-looking scholarly attention” (2).

The belief that cinematic rural space has been overlooked by critical thought is echoed by Robert Fish in the introduction to his work, *Cinematic Countrysides*. Fish expresses his intention to foreground “spatialities of cinema” that have been “buried beneath existing trajectories of inquiry” (2). He notes the city’s dominance in discussions about the relationship between cinema and space, listing work by Giuliana Bruno, Leo Charney, David B. Clarke, Chris Lukinbeal and Mark Shiel to build a picture of a rich yet overworked seam within academia, concluding that “if cinema functions as both product and instrument of geographical experience, then such experience, it would seem, is of a decisively metropolitan cast” (2).

This positioning of work on rural landscape as an intervention against “dominant spatial imagery” has, however, become increasingly redundant in recent years. There are now numerous writings about place and countryside within film thought, and my practice-led research refers to a rich set of key critical texts on film landscape and rural place including the above cited work by Fowler, Harper and Rayner, Fish, and Lefebvre.

### **1.3 Critical readings of rural film landscape and definitions of rural cinema**

*City and Countryside...are categories whose meanings  
and experiences tend to configure each other*

~ Raymond Williams, “*The Country and the City*”

Within the British post-industrial cultural imagination, the rural and the urban are consistently posited as binary opposites: tradition and modernity, persistence and transience, good and evil, the prelapsarian and the postlapsarian. Rural Britain is repeatedly depicted as a place of authenticity and truth, a place to escape from the artifice, chaos and squalor of the city. Countering this polarising approach,

Fowler and Helfield propose a model for rural cinema which builds on the writings of cultural commentator and literary critic, Raymond Williams. Williams argues that the apparent binarization of countryside and city belies a far more complex relationship between the rural past and the (post) industrial present. As an early-industrialised nation, Williams believes that Britain grieves for its agrarian past. In *The Country and the City* (Oxford University Press, 1973), the writer notes that “even after society was predominantly urban, its literature, for a generation, was predominantly rural; and even in the twentieth century, in an urban and industrial land, forms of the older ideas and experiences remarkably persist” (2). Although Williams makes this point about nineteenth and twentieth century literature, his observations continue to hold relevance for us today. Fowler and Helfield apply Williams’s ideas within a cinematic context, contending that rural space, rather than representing the antithesis of urban space, represents instead a parallel universe that mirrors contemporary cultural consciousness. They conceive city and countryside as interlinking correlatives instead of conflicting opposites, noting that “whilst it is tempting to speak of the urban and rural in oppositional terms, they are inextricably linked as points of tension rather than points of contrast” (3). Recognising that a nation's depiction of rural space is an index of its attitude towards both its past and its present, the writers argue that the cinematic-rural is in fact just as capable of expressing our modern condition as the cinematic-city:

Underlying all rural cinemas is a contemporary consciousness that complicates yet also specializes its apparent attachment to the past, while at the same time drawing it nearer to the concerns of urban cinema; the expression of ongoing conflicts within a rapidly changing society or culture and the need to maintain a connection to a pure cultural or national identity, lost through urban assimilation and the dissipation or

abandonment of traditions and rituals that in the rural context had kept this identity alive (3).

The model of rural cinema that Fowler and Helfield put forward is quite distinct from other, more nostalgic depictions of the countryside. Heritage film, for example, consistently portrays the countryside as an idyll relatively unscathed by industrialization. Heritage films are predominantly set within specifically Anglo-British settings; *Howards End* (James Ivory, 1992), takes place in Hertfordshire, *Sense and Sensibility* (Ang Lee, 1995) in the South West of England and *Emma* (Douglas McGrath, 1996) in Surrey. However, these English rural (and domestic) spaces are often collaged together from multiple locations. For example, *Pride and Prejudice* (Joe Wright, 2005) moves seamlessly between Chatsworth House in Derbyshire, Lyme Park in Cheshire and Lacock Village in Wiltshire. Through the skilful synthesis of scenic countryside and National Trust stately homes, the films summon up an imaginary (Southern) English rural space of yesteryear, a green and pleasant Albion of gently undulating hills, hedgerows, haystacks and immaculate estates, a landscape which Andrew Higson summarizes as “visually spectacular pastiche which invites a nostalgic gaze” (91). Higson uses this idea of ‘pastiche’ to criticise the superficial qualities of heritage cinema. In his essay, “Representing the National Past: nostalgia and pastiche in the heritage film” (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), he notes how critical insight and narrative depth are “displaced by decoration and display” and a “fascination with surfaces” (112). If the source novels of many of these heritage films often interrogated and critiqued societal mores, “satirizing the pretentious and superficial” (120), their film adaptations remain on the surface, presenting a veneer of period detail which is visually sumptuous yet “flat and depthless” (112).

Fowler and Helfield see rural cinema as a counterpoint to this sentimentalising and 'pastiche' of the countryside. Rather than being bathed in the glory of an imagined Golden Age, rural cinema is instead rooted in the lived present:

Heritage Cinema is always set in the nation's past, and the return to the rural can be seen as an expression of venerability, going back to some kind of 'authentic roots'. Rural cinema, in contrast, may be set in the present, and the return to the rural tends to be less an expression of venerability than of vulnerability (5).

Enfolded within this proposed dichotomy of venerability and vulnerability is the implicit claim that rural cinema's representation of rurality depicts the countryside as a site of neglect and marginalisation. Within Fowler and Helfield's cinema model, the inhabitants of rural space are not ennobled through their relationship with nature. Far removed from the archetype of the happy peasant, they are instead portrayed as impoverished and enslaved by the land, "poor tragic figures who are associated with a crude and archaic way of life" (6).

Fowler and Helfield conceive their model of rural cinema as a vehicle for debate, not a genre as such but a schema of values which opposes the escapist stereotypes of prevailing depictions of rural space and works as "a kind of hub that allows for the intersection of complex socio-political and ideological issues and conflicts, such as those surrounding 'identity' and 'the national'"(11). Graeme Harper and Jonathon Rayner raise similar questions about national and cultural identity in their work, *Film and Landscape*. The co-authors cite geographer D. W. Meinig who observes that "every mature nation has its symbolic landscapes" which are part of "a shared set of memories and feelings which bind people together" (164). Many of the essays collected in Harper and Rayner's book

engage with landscape from this primary perspective of cultural identity. For example, in her essay “The Ownership of Woods and Water: Landscapes in British Cinema 1930 – 1960”, Sue Harper writes about the use of rural landscape in the documentaries of Humphrey Jennings. She explores how British rural landscape becomes metonymic of national identity, informing a sort of socialist patriotism which runs throughout the director’s work: “landscape symbolises a set of values; common ownership, a sense of beauty, the organic relationship between man and nature” (153).

This core idea of rural space as an allegory for nation and identity runs like a thread through Harper and Rayner’s text. In “Landscape in Spanish Cinema”, Marvin D’Lugo notes how the Spanish countryside is repeatedly transformed into a “cinematic ethnoscape” which “embodies competing ideologies that have shaped much of Spanish cultural history, the most prominent of these being the struggle for social and cultural modernization against the various expressions of traditionalism” (119). Similarly, in Martin McLoone’s essay, “Landscape and Irish Cinema”, the west coast of Ireland is explored for its iconographic expression of Irish nationalism and independence. McLoone focuses on Jim Sheridan’s *The Field* (1990) and notes how the film uses the narrative of land ownership to “conjure up the whole history of English colonisation in Ireland and the consequent displacement of the native Irish through conquest, dispossession and emigration” (133).

In many respects, my own film practice feels strongly aligned with these critical accounts of cinematic rural space which emphasise the deep connection between rural landscape and identity. Both *Valley* and *Inheritors* are concerned

with human relationships with land and how place shapes our identity. *Valley* explores the complex bonds between landscape and personal memory, and the role that landscape plays within processes of grieving and recovery. The main character, Samuel, embarks on a solitary journey within the valleys of North Wales to invoke the memory of his dead partner, Eleanor. Each place that Samuel travels to resonates with recollections of a shared past to produce an encounter with nature where outer and inner space intersect. In *Inheritors*, the fishing and forest communities are woven tightly into the craggy coasts and dark forests that they inhabit. The occupants of these landscapes have invested the tides, fish, trees and birds with divine meaning. They have conjured animistic religions from the ingredients of their environment which meshes them, through folk tale and ritual, deep within it. Although they employ very different approaches, the two films share a fascination with how rural space shapes human identity and are united by an ambition to depict the intimate and ritualistic relationships between people and their natural surroundings.

However, my thesis argues that there is a tendency for existing critical discourse to place these ideas of cultural and national identity within particularly semiotic readings of rural landscape. The notion of looking on rural land in film as “text in its own right” (7) is central to Fowler and Helfield’s conception of rural cinema. The co-authors read landscapes for signposts which represent social units and interactions, archetypes, customs and rituals and collate them so that together they read like “a galaxy of discursive signs that circulate...across the wider social body of the nation as a whole” (7). Drawing from a diverse collection of film, from Thai pastoralism to Brazilian Cinema Novo, the collection of essays curated in their book all share an inclination to investigate rural cinema for the ways that it

produces “indexes to cultural identity” (3). Landscape is repeatedly interpreted as a “strata of associations and connotations that are layered atop the real soil or land” (3), turning each film into densely encoded symbolic texts that need to be intellectually deciphered.

My film practice - and my engagement with rural landscape - feels estranged from the rationalist and reductive aspects of the critical discourse outlined above. In *Valley*, the landscapes of the Nantlle valley, where the film is shot, are eminently readable as palimpsestic texts on extinguished industry, unemployment and economic stagnation. With Snowdonia only a few miles away, the valley also resonates with the potential narratives of seasonal tourism, holiday incomers, second homers and the migrant workforce who cater to them. However, the film makes no overt social or ethnographic comment within the paradigms of this critical discourse. The relationship between the two protagonists and the Welsh countryside is also ambiguous. The couple resist easy categorisation; they are not apparently local (neither local farmer nor villager) and they are not readily classifiable as outsiders (neither migrant farmhand nor seasonal hotel staff nor weekend hiker).

*Inheritors* is structured as a triptych which imagines British rural space as the site of myth and folklore. The first two parts of the film are set in an abstracted ancient past and depict two animistic communities as they prepare to hunt their sacred quarry. The last part is set in contemporary Sussex and portrays the relationship between the two young descendants of these imaginary hunting groups. Once again, it feels difficult to frame the film within the cinematic models of either rural cinema or heritage film that dominate film thought on rural space. There is an



absence of historical and geographical precision which makes it hard to root the film within a particular regional or national past or present, and the protagonists defy ready categorisation by class, frustrating explicit socio-political coding.

It is imperative to explain that, although both films stand outside readily identifiable “indexes of cultural identity” and explicit socio-political critique, my film practice is avowedly political in its approach to the countryside. To clarify my precise position within existing discourse, it’s helpful to refer to the distinction Fowler and Helfield makes in their work between ‘landscape’ and ‘land’. If the former is encrypted and textual, their understanding of the latter encourages an engagement with rural space which feels intimately aligned with my own relationship to it. The co-authors describe their interest in a cinema which “extricate(s) *the land* from *the landscape*” and which “captures scenes of the land from the perspective of those who dwell on it, rather than those who stand back to admire it” (17). Fowler and Helfield are pointing towards a model of enquiry which my practice-based research is able to pursue in ways which critical theory alone cannot. Their vision of cinematized land as a “visceral evocation through the imagery of earth and sand and flesh and bone” (6-7) resonates powerfully with my own desire to develop a landscape cinema which dissolves the perceived segregation between land and landscape by talking instead about an entering into of land, an interaction with rural space which is experiential, embodied and felt, an intimate and personal encounter rather than an encoded symbolic one. Ideas surrounding identity remain central to my own research, but I am able to approach them from far more personal and subjective perspectives by considering my own bodily presence within rural space as a film practitioner.

#### 1.4 Positioning my practice within existing film work

Heritage Cinema and television have consistently placed British rural space – specifically Southern English rural space - within a bucolic Golden Age. Merchant Ivory productions like *Howards End* and *The Remains of the Day*, as well as Joe Wright's *Pride and Prejudice*, spill over with lavish period detail to produce an escapist nostalgia which plays an important part of England's marketing of its own history. Contemporary representations of countryside persist in depicting rural space as an idealised Eden, an escape from the ills of modern life. From daytime television's *Escape to the Country* (BBC One) to Sunday night's roster of cosy provincial dramas like *Doc Martin* (ITV), British countryside is repeatedly cast as a place of calm and certainty, a sentimental and simplified vision of rural life full of village greens and summer fetes. Mainstream cinema's representation of countryside often shares this tendency for prettification. In *The Holiday* (Nancy Meyers, 2006) and *Calendar Girls* (Nigel Cole, 2003), for example, the countryside is reduced to an idealised yet anodyne backdrop for the comedy-drama plot line. As I have previously established, both these historical and contemporary visions of rural England are closely tied to national identity and assessable for what they tell us about ourselves as a nation. As Andrew Higson comments in the introduction to his book, *Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking since the 1990s*, "cinema establishes a sense of the national through presenting familiar images, images of the mundane, the quotidian, the unremarkable, but which are at the same time steeped in the habitual customs and cultural fabric of a particular nation"(1).

However, beyond these dominant screen representations of rurality lies a rich alternative history of British countryside on film. The folk horror cinema of *The*

*Wicker Man* (Robin Hardy, 1973) and *The Witchfinder General* (Michael Reeves, 1968), born from the clash of pagan and Christian belief systems in a post-industrial and disenchanted Britain, mines the same uncanny, feral and visionary seams of landscape that writers like M. R. James and John Wyndham explored in their ghost stories and science fictions. And it is a tradition which the contemporary filmmaker Ben Wheatley continues to investigate in his films *Kill List* (2011) and *A Field in England* (2013).

More recently, there have been a number of independent British films whose narratives are rooted deeply within the contemporary British countryside. *Dark River* (Clio Bernard, 2017), *God's Own Country* (Francis Lee, 2017) and *The Levelling* (Hope Dixon Leach, 2016) all take place within British ruralities far removed from the chocolate-box cottages of more conventional screen representations. These landscapes are beautiful yet bleak, cold and unforgiving. More importantly, the films' protagonists are never left to sit on the surfaces of these countrysides but are dragged deep down within them. In *The Levelling*, for example, which is set in the Somerset Levels, Clover returns home to the family farm following her brother's suicide and quickly becomes weighted down by the burden of the responsibility of running it herself. The film takes place during the Somerset floods of 2014 and these desolate, waterlogged landscapes are represented with great geographical intimacy by the filmmakers to become, both visually and aurally, physical and elemental land whose sheer weight suffocates and isolates Clover.

I identify strongly with the immersive perspectives of countryside found within these new British films. Landscape is freed from its subservient role as a pretty

backdrop for storyline, becoming an important character within the drama. Furthermore, drama and landscape cohere into narratives about place rich in geographical rural specificity. Both the cinematography and sound recording techniques used within these films are rooted in a cinematic naturalism which seeks to evoke rural space from bodily perspectives, thus sharing many of my own practical research ambitions for my own personal engagement with rural space.

Over the last few years, there has been a growing flurry of publications which consider rural place, and a growing focus on the rural within contemporary British culture as a whole. Robert Macfarlane has trademarked a form of rural psychogeography in works like *The Wild Places* (Penguin, 2007) and *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (Penguin, 2012), as well as rekindling interest in several British literary accounts of landscape and nature like Nan Shepherd's *The Living Mountain* (Aberdeen UP, 1977), a meditation on the Scottish Cairngorms, and J.A. Baker's *The Peregrine* (Harper Collins, 1967), a naturalist's reflection on the marsh lands of the Essex coast.

Despite its popularity, this 'new nature writing'<sup>1</sup> has received criticism for neglecting to raise important social and ecological questions. In her review of Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places*, essayist Kathleen Jamie suggests that such literature is dominated by white, male, excursionists intent on chronicling their own journeys of self-discovery but failing to provide vital commentary on any of the environmental and socio-economic realities that these British ruralities face:

---

<sup>1</sup> The term 'new nature writing' can be traced to editor Jason Crowler's introduction in the 102<sup>nd</sup> edition of *Granta* magazine in July 2008.

What's that coming over the hill? A white, middle-class Englishman! A Lone Enraptured Male! From Cambridge! Here to boldly go, 'discovering', then quelling our harsh and lovely and sometimes difficult land with his civilised lyrical words (26).

However, my thesis argues that this new nature writing, by entwining biography and poetic descriptions of landscapes and ecosystems, can also tell stories that are synchronously personal and political. As Joe Moran notes in his article, "A Cultural History of the New Nature Writing" (Literature and History, 2014), this writing, in its combining of "elements of autobiography, travelogue, natural history and popular science", is intrinsically political. In its attempts "to explore the forgotten, and often threatened, landscapes of Britain, the writing...can be read as inherently political, combining arts and environmentalism, politics and aesthetics." It is this idea of a quiet yet passionate political perspective on the countryside that guides my own filmmaking voice and informs my own particular body-led engagement with rural space.

In its handling of rural place, my filmmaking practice also draws significant inspiration from contemporary British fiction writing. Novels like *Beastings* (Ben Myers, 2014), *The Loney* (Andrew Michael Hurley, 2014) and *Elmet* (Fiona Mozley, 2017) all bring aspects of magic and folklore into their contemporary rural fictions. Set in Cumbria, Worcestershire and Yorkshire, the results fall outside of rural horror but can best be described as a form of British folk realism for the way their engagement with rurality is enchanted by landscape and place and alive to landscape's dormant potential as a site of myth and magic. In Daisy Johnson's short story collection, *Fens* (2017), a series of fantastical events and

metamorphoses occur within the provincial towns and silty marshlands of East Anglia. In the story “Starver”, for example, an anorexic girl called Katy stops eating and eventually turns into an eel. Literary critic David Barnett summarizes this modern rural literature:

They’re not quite the magical realism of, say, Salman Rushdie or Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and they aren’t the folk horror of *The Wicker Man* or *Blood on Satan’s Claw*. They occupy a liminal space between the two, live together in a house on the borderland... They are bewitching and magical, disturbing and horrifying, and help us tether our transitory modern lives to the bedrock of all that has gone before.... Let’s, for want of a better name, call it Folk Realism. (David Barnett, Folk Realism: the literature exploring England's legends and landscapes, *The Independent*, 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018).

I hold a strong affinity with these literary engagements with British rural space. Their use of folk realism and magical realism point the way for me to weave private voice and spirit of place together within my own cinematic encounter with rural landscape. My thesis argues that it is only by slipping the moorings of customary cinema realism that we can finally engage with the full emotional truth of rural place. Ontological realism can only go so far in describing how we feel countryside. By forging new forms of cinema realism, my practice seeks to describe not only how rural space is felt on the skin but also how it might come to resonate within us, dreamt and imagined within the soul.

## **Chapter Two. How can I rethink landscape in my practice?**

### **2.1 Chapter summary**

This chapter seeks new definitions of film landscape which are compatible with my embodied engagement with rural space. I begin by exploring conventional pictorial definitions of the term, noting their tendency to objectivize countryside and put distance between us and the land. I then consider geographical and anthropological definitions which conceive landscape as lived space, lent meaning by the lives of those who dwell within it. From this dwelt perspective, I propose an embodied model of filmmaking which dissolves boundaries between land and landscape, enabling filmmaker and viewer to enter deep within the countryside rather than gaze upon it from afar.

### **2.2 Traditional definitions of film landscape**

*There is nothing obvious about  
landscape when it comes to cinema.*

~ Martin Lefebvre, *Film Landscape*

As the film writer Martin Lefebvre observes, the idea of landscape, “being so widely spread among different knowledge formations and disciplines”, makes it “notoriously difficult to define” (xiii). Within still media traditions like painting and photography, however, landscape is a specifically pictorial concept. Art historian Malcolm Andrews uses the term to describe a genre depicting vistas of natural surroundings framed from an objectifying distance, as mediated land that “has been aesthetically processed [and] arranged by the artistic vision” (7).

Accordingly, the representation of land as landscape within cinema is regularly formularised as a widescreen, deep focus, long shot. Fowler and Helfield note

how these sweeping panoramas conjure up the magisterial gaze characteristic of nineteenth century American landscape painters like Thomas Cole and Alfred Bierstadt from the Hudson River School, as well as the work of eighteenth century *veduti* artists like Gioavanni Paolo Pannini. Whether they're the desert valleys of a John Ford western or the verdant, rolling pastures of English heritage film, these landscapes are typically expansive and, taken from elevated and privileged perspectives, produce a detached "colonizing gaze" (9) not only upon the land but also upon those who reside within it. Perhaps inevitably, this objectifying perspective estranges the viewer from the countryside. As Fowler and Helfield explain, such idealised panoramic views of rural space "can be said not to take us *toward* but rather to take us *away* from the land" (9), severing any real implication in the rural space we are presented with.

This idea of "colonial gaze" needs further explanation. Colonialism is a term synonymous with Europe's colonisation of Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America. The "colonial" or "imperial gaze", conceived by E. Ann Kaplan in *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze* (Routledge, 1997), defines the world from the perspective of these privileged observers, "reflecting the assumption that the white western subject is central much as the male gaze assumes the centrality of the male subject" (78). Recognising the specific sociohistorical connotations of these expressions, the thesis uses the "colonial" and "imperial" to convey the sense of power, possession and control enjoyed by a dominant national culture, and associates the values of *colonialism* - to conquer, overwhelm, plunder and possess - specifically with the cultural hegemony of contemporary British society.



This notion of colonial gaze leads us to consider scenic readings of landscape from gendered perspectives. Janice Monk observes how landscape research consistently fails to account for female responses to nature. She notes, for example, how interpretations of the American West are repeatedly “expressed in sexual terms of conquering the virgin land...[and]...mastering the wilderness” (27) and points to work by female scholars like Annette Kolodny and Judith Fryer who show that female interpretations of the wilderness differ greatly from male ones. For a novelist like Mary Austin, Fryer explains, this land is “feminine, but a strong woman, self-sufficient, forgiving, but unwilling to be moulded by men’s needs” (28).

Feminist landscape scholars like Janice Monk and Gillian Rose interpret visual landscape as the product of a masculine gaze which conflates natural landscape with the female form to reinforce ideas of male domination and mastery over both. Monk explains that this notion of male gaze is anchored in Cartesian philosophy and its differentiation between body and mind, nature from culture. Within Western discourse, ‘nature’ is not only metaphorically gendered as feminine; woman *is* nature. Referring to Sherry Ortner’s essay, “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture” (Stanford UP, 1974), Monk posits that this “female closeness to nature”, with its basis in “interpretations of women’s reproductive biology” (24), means that, through the dualism of western thought, nature (and women) became seen as ‘other’ to culture. The scientific and philosophical revolution of the seventeenth century, “by introducing a mechanistic rather than organic view of the world, separated nature and culture and endorsed human domination over nature” (24). The scenic, linear perspectives of landscape painting create enclosed, planarized spaces which give the eye absolute mastery over natural

space, an illusion of control produced through this transformation of land into landscape and nature into culture.

In her essay, "Reclaiming Vision: Looking at Landscape and the Body" (*Gender Place and Culture*, 1996), Catherine Nash builds on these feminist critiques of landscape by exploring gender and visibility from new perspectives. Nash acknowledges that landscape's equation of body and land has been used to justify the domination of both women and the environment. However, she also observes that vision has "become equated with generalised notions of masculinism, imperialism and oppression" (149), and calls for a re-evaluation of visual pleasure within such discourse, inviting us to rethink the politics of rural representation by opening up "possibilities for difference, subversion [and] resistance" through the "reappropriation of visual tradition and visual pleasure" (149).

In her questioning of whether visual pleasure is always dependent on positions of domination, Nash provides an important line of enquiry for my own landscape research. Through a close analysis of female landscape artists, she contends that visual portrayals of land can eschew, even challenge inherently oppressive conceptions of landscape. Even more importantly, Nash emphasises that relationships between body and landscape can never be generalised, noting that "looking is never only or just masculine...its politics are always contextual; there are different types of looking" (167). As a male filmmaker, Nash's work on landscape helps me to position my own practice. Whilst aware of how landscape implicitly perpetuates hierarchical class and gender differences, my thesis remains excited by the potential for visual representations of countryside and

embraces the idea of formulating alternative techniques as a cinematographer which inspire visual pleasure whilst rejecting, even subverting, ideas of control and possession.

As well as the gendered, colonial associations of scenic landscape which extricate the viewer from the land, Lefebvre suggests that these picturesque definitions of landscape are problematic for a second reason. In the essay, "Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema", he observes film's tendency to relegate space to the role of peripheral backdrop, subordinating it to the requirements of story so that it is enslaved by "the demands of eventhood and narrative" (xi). He refers to art historian, Anne Cauquelin, who notes the absence of landscape within classical antiquity. Here, descriptions constituted only the "basic material conditions of an event, a war, an expedition or a legend, to which they remain subordinate" (39). For Cauquelin, within Aristotelian description, setting (*topos*) is merely the envelope "for the active bodies which occupy it." Above all else, "narrative comes first. Its location in space is but an effect of reading" (39-40).

This idea of space subjugated by narrative leads Lefebvre to differentiate carefully between setting and landscape within narrative film, and to propose a number of strategies through which landscape can be liberated from the causal flow of storyline. For him, landscape is the antithesis of setting, "an anti-setting of sorts...space freed from eventhood" (22). Within these terms, cinema landscape can only fulfil its full affective potential when unencumbered by narrative. Lefebvre identifies two modes of viewer activity, narrative mode and spectator mode, which come into play at different moments during a film. He recognises two main categories of film landscape within this spectator mode; 'pure' and

‘intentional’ landscapes (rural imagery employed deliberately by the filmmakers) and ‘impure’ landscapes, made independent from the narratological flow of the film by the viewer. For Lefebvre, setting can only become landscape when there is a suspension in the narrative, allowing our focus to shift from plot to spectacle, and our engagement with the film to transform from causal reasoning to aesthetic appreciation. For Lefebvre, it’s impossible for the viewer to watch the same filmic passage through both modes simultaneously, creating a perpetual “tug-of-war within the spectator between the narrative and spectacular modes” (29).

### **2.3 Anthropological definitions of landscape in cinema**

*Landscapes and nature are not there simply to be gazed at; no, they press hard upon and into our bodies and minds, complexly affecting our moods, our sensibilities. They riddle us in two ways - both perplexing and perforating us.*

*~ Robert MacFarlane, The Old Ways.*

My thesis contends that pictorial interpretations of landscape are both problematic and inadequate when used in relation to my own film practice. My research draws instead from geographical and anthropological definitions of landscape to reconceive rural space not as something to be admired from far away but as something to be lived within. This is landscape as countryside enriched and enmeshed by human experience or, as geographer Denis Cosgrove writes, landscape as “a unity of people and environment which opposes in its reality the false dichotomy of man and nature” (35).

For the anthropologist Tim Ingold, “landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are part of it” (154). From Ingold’s writing, an impression of landscape emerges

as a dialogue between human being and environment. Human life does not merely sit upon the topsoil of the land; it is instead deeply rooted within it. Pictorial conceptions of landscape, which seem initially so appropriate to a visual medium like film, emphasize a relationship of distant contemplation. Ingold's definition, conversely, emphasizes an immersive and perpetual engagement with landscape, an "ongoing process of interaction between people and their surroundings...an integration of time, space and experience" (191). Lying at the heart of Ingold's idea of landscape is the belief not only that rural space is transformed into landscape through human life but also, crucially, that it is our continuous presence within it that calls landscape into being.

Ingold's ideas are greatly inspired by the existential philosophy of Martin Heidegger. Borrowing from Heidegger's idea of *dwelling*, so fundamental to his core philosophical concept of *daesin* ['being there'], Ingold calls for the adoption of a "dwelling perspective". He explains:

To move beyond the sterile opposition between the naturalistic view of the landscape as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, and the culturalist view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space. I argue that we should adopt, in place of both these views, what I call a 'dwelling perspective', according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of - and testimony to - the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves (152).

Ingold's rethinking of landscape from this *dwelt* position helps me reframe my own cinematic representation of the countryside in two important ways. Firstly,

the idea of *dwelling* carries with it a sense of bodily and spiritual immersion in the land which leads me to question my own physical and emotional occupation of rural space as a filmmaker. Secondly, Ingold conceives landscape as something not only spatial but also temporal. This temporal perspective prioritises film as process above film as one-off event. Ingold points out the “systematic bias in Western thought... that leads us to privilege form over process” (162) and urges us to think of landscape instead as an ongoing “processual unfolding” (152) rather than as a completed entity, called into being through our continuous perceptual engagement with the environment. Within this ongoing process, lived space becomes embodied and experienced - becomes part of us, just as we are a part of it. Within this ongoing process, landscape becomes “a movement of incorporation rather than inscription, not a transcribing of form onto material but a movement wherein forms themselves are generated” (157). Through this processual, corporeal and spiritual occupation of countryside, the thesis proposes an alternative relationship with rural space based on tenure and guardianship rather than ownership and possession.

#### **2.4 The dwelling perspective – process and form**

The first film project, *Valley*, allows me to reflect on my presence within rural space from these perspectives of process. During the preproduction period of the film, I made two separate journeys to Gwynedd in North Wales, basing myself on both visits in the small hamlet of Rhyd-Ddu in the northwest corner of Snowdonia National Park. During my first three-day visit, I made the decision to explore only the Nantlle valley. During my second visit, also for three days, I explored the neighbouring Croesor valley.

As this was my first time in North Wales, I was tempted to follow an intensive itinerary which would allow me to see as much of the Welsh countryside as possible. However, I soon realised it was important for my practice to confine myself to a few small squares on the grid of my Ordnance Survey map and, in the short time available, get to know the valleys within them intimately. During both visits to Nantlle valley, I took a camera and a small audio recorder with me. I set off by myself each morning, driving through the valley with the primary motive of finding the right locations for the film; a mountain forest, an abandoned homestead, a stream etc. Taking only a packed lunch and minimal film kit in my rucksack, I would spend the whole day out on these remote moors and hillsides, filming and recording them on my own.

Despite the short duration of these stays in Wales, I noticed that my daily journeys quickly took on ritualised patterns. I found myself returning not only to the same valleys but also to a number of smaller sites within them; a forested mountain ridge which looked out across a silent *llyn* (lake) onto a hillside pocked with slate mining excavations; a narrow track threading through the outbuildings of a farm; a derelict cottage marooned in reeds and bogs; the small, quiet residential back streets of Penygroes and Talysarn.

The process of recording these bleak, autumnal valley-scapes, and engaging with the countryside through the process of filmmaking, became as important a part of my film practice as the completed film itself. It was as though the search for film locations became a pretext for me to enter within this countryside, and through the actual tasks of filming, photographing and audio recording, I gained a sense of belonging within these places. As a result of this combination of

repetition and duration, I developed a sense of kinship and intimacy with the countryside, noticing some new topographical detail each time I visited; how the *llyn* sounded when it rained compared with when the weather was clearer; how the textures of the granite hillsides were transformed by the early morning sunshine and the soft, chalky blues of dusk; how the bird song differed between highlands and lowlands; how the bleating of sheep and the barking of dogs from adjacent valleys carried on the wind. Concurrent with this process of slow immersion, and my eventual acclimatisation to the wilderness of these valleys, it was as if there was a gradual acceptance of my presence by the land, an unclenching and entrustment.



(Figures 1-4: looking for Valley locations in and around Nantlle and Croesor, Gwynedd)

This dwelt filmmaking perspective on the hillsides of North Wales reminds me of cinematographer Erwin Hillier's description of location scouting for the film, *A Canterbury Tale* (Powell and Pressburger, 1944). During the preproduction stages of the film, Hillier was able to immerse himself at length within the country lanes and fields of the Kent countryside:



There are so many things in nature that are fascinating. When we used to go out to select locations, I would spend hours by myself...I used to find out the time when everything looked most fascinating. When it has character and style, rather than shoot in a flat light. (Petrie,108).

Hillier's recollection captures my own experiences of location scouting; the practical task of looking for film locations slowly becomes a journey of self-discovery and meditation, where you are alive to each shift in light and acoustic texture.

The second film project, *Inheritors*, also requires me to think about my filmmaking process and personal emplacement within the countryside as a sole practitioner. However, it invites me to do so from subtly different perspectives. My mother's side of the family come from Seaford, a small seaside town on the South coast between Eastbourne and Lewes. The surrounding Sussex countryside is extremely familiar to me and I have walked within its landscapes countless times in my life. Preparing to film *Inheritors*, I restricted myself once more to a small and specific slice of rural space; the coastlines and rockpools of Hope Gap and Tide Mills near Newhaven; the wheat fields and chalky holloways of the downlands above Bishopstone and South Heighton, and the copses and forests near East Dean and Jevington. I returned to these sites on numerous occasions, noticing the movement of light between mid-morning and late afternoon and the changes in vegetation and fauna between spring and autumn. Instead of the few days of contact that I had been limited to in Wales, I was able to build on my years of accumulated emotional and experiential associations with these places by visiting and revisiting them prior to filming with my small cast and crew.



*(Figures 5-8: looking for Inheritors locations in East Sussex; Denton, Bishopstone and Hope Gap)*

Both *Valley* and *Inheritors* allow me to formulate a model of filmmaking which places equal importance in both pre-production and filming stages of the production. Working as a cinematographer and sound recordist on both projects are uniquely different processes. They offer two distinct engagements with rural space and I will explore the similarities and differences between the visualisation and auralisation of rural space in the following chapters of this thesis.

## **Chapter Three. How can I produce an embodied landscape cinema through my multidisciplinary practice as a cinematographer and sound recordist/sound editor?**

### **3.1 Chapter summary**

Ingold's reimagining of landscape from a dwelt perspective, as an act of communion between person and place, helps me rethink the way that countryside is depicted by film. Drawing from the phenomenological film theories of Vivian Sobchack and Laura Marks, the chapter asks whether cinematography can reframe rural space beyond the gaze so that it is understood through the body. The chapter also places my practice within the romantic-sublime tradition and explores the physiological and affective qualities of emplacement through reference to a close reading of the film, *Two Years at Sea* (Ben Rivers, 2011). Referring to Barbara Claire Freeman's gendered reading of the natural sublime, my thesis proposes an alternative model of sublimity which replaces ideas of masculine dominion over rural space with those of immanence and inherence.

The chapter also considers the role of sound in cinema's representation of countryside. British rural space is commonly framed by ideals of acoustic ecology and I explore my own work as a sound recordist and sound editor from this perspective through reference to Murray Schafer's *Soundscape; Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Destiny, 1993). Drawing from critical thought on field recording and audition, particularly Cathy Lane and Angus Carlyle's *In the Field* (Uniform, 2011) and Jean Luc Nancy's *Listening* (Fordham UP, 2007), the thesis considers the differences between hearing and listening in my practice and explores how both processes are fundamental for an immanent landscape cinema. Through close readings of two films, *Uncle Boonmee Who*

*Can Remember His Past Lives* [hereinafter referred to as *Uncle Boonmee*] (Apichatpong Weerasethakul, 2010), and *Le Quattro Volte* (Michelangelo Frammartino, 2011), I consider my own work as a sound recordist and challenge the predominantly pictorial interpretations of rural landscape.

### **3.2 Phenomenological film thought and its relevance to my research**

*The material elements that present themselves in film*

*directly stimulate material layers of the human being;*

*his nerves, his senses, his entire physiological substance.*

~ Siegfried Krakauer, *The Redemption of Physical Reality*

Embodiment film theories help me re-envision landscape film by suggesting ways to both reframe and resound rural space. In the introduction to her book, *The Address of the Eye: a Phenomenology of Film Experience*, Vivian Sobchack voices her frustration about the way that film thought is monopolised by certain theoretical paradigms: “Both psychoanalysis and Marxism – one concerned with the interior and the other with the exterior of human existence – attempt to theorise not merely the structure but also the dynamics of, respectively, the social subject and objective social formation” (xiii). Neither approach, she notes, expresses “the embodied experience of labour, alienation, engagement and transformation I have every time I go to the movies” (xv). Inspired by the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, which presents the body as the hub of all meaning-making, Sobchack develops an embodied approach to cinema which concentrates on how films are felt and understood through the sensorium of the body, considering the relationship between the spectator and the film in corporeal terms rather than intellectual ones. For Sobchack, the spectatorial experience of watching a film works as an exchange

between the seeing and feeling body of the viewer and the material body of the film itself. Within such parameters, film is intrinsically tactile, not merely ocular, presses not only upon our skin but resonates profoundly within our viscera. From these phenomenological perspectives, it is clear that the experiencing of the cinematic rural cannot be reduced to a series of objective facts. Instead, our sensorial engagement with rural space is anchored within the subjective present. As Dylan Trigg reminds us in *The Memory of Place* (Ohio University Press, 2013), “we are forever in the *here*, and it is from that *here* that our experiences take place” (4).

Sobchack’s work on embodied cinema feels very relevant to my own interpretation of land as lived space and provides the basis for me to reflect on how I, as a filmmaker, can depict rural place from dwelt, experiential perspectives to make the viewer feel as though their bodies are immersed within cinematic rural space. In *Carnal Thoughts* (University of California, 2004), Sobchack proposes a kind of bodily “phenomono-logic” (14), a corporeal understanding of space which questions the scientific certainties of cartographic space. For Sobchack, our true relationship with space is “incommensurable with the spaces engineered by the Euclidean geometry and Cartesian perceptions of perspectival space that have dominated Western culture since the Renaissance” (16). Instead, our sense of space is rooted within the human body, producing a sensorial perception of place influenced not only by the organic materiality of a place but the “intentional directedness of consciousness towards its objects” (17).

Sobchack develops these ideas to explore the “*shape and temporality* of being lost in worldly space”, to describe the dizzying disorientation of this experience

and understand it through our bodies as though we were Hansel and Gretel “lost in the forest and darkness” (9). By inviting me to think of my body as a vital measure of distance, location and direction in my own engagement with British countryside, Sobchack’s carnal and haptic phenomeno-logic represents a kind of anti-mapping perspective which challenges not only the idea that rural space can ever be planarized but also the implicit accompanying belief that countryside can ever be tamed or owned.

### **3.3 Reframing rural space - immersive cinematography**

#### *A Partaking View - Immersive Landscape Cinema*

In her essay, “Symphonie Paysanne: An Embodied and Embedded Picturing of the Land”, Catherine Fowler notes how representations of landscape in eighteenth century Dutch and German paintings broke from the privileged perspectives and elevated panoramas of the Italian *vedute* style. Inspiring nineteenth century Canadian painters like Octave Henri Julien and Cornelius Krieghoff, a landscape style emerged which used an eye-level perspective instead, as though looking from “immediate side-lines” (9). From this new viewpoint, both artist and viewer are emplaced within the landscape, “sharing rather than dominating its space” (9), inhabiting rural space on equal terms with the subject. Compared with the magisterial gaze, “which by means of the vast physical space between artist and subject suggests the social chasm”, paintings offering an eye-level perspective instead “suggest more of an equal, communal relationship between beholder and object” (9).

For Fowler, this different landscape painting perspective provides an important model for cinema. Through a close reading of Henri Storck’s film cycle *Symphonie*

*Paysanne* (1942-1944), the author proposes a type of cinematic partaking perspective that implicates instead of estranges. These implicit values of complicity, affinity and equality lie at the heart of the cinematic relationship between filmmaker and subject which develop in Ben Rivers's feature length docufiction film, *Two Years at Sea* (2011). Rivers's slow and tender cinematic encounter-cum-collaboration with Jake Williams, a hermit living deep in the forests of Scotland, is born from a mutual respect and friendship between the two men. Rivers creates an immersive atmosphere where the established demarcations between filmmaker and documentary subject become blurred. Chronicling Jake going about his daily rituals within the remote Scottish landscape, Rivers's Bolex camera always frames Jake on an intimate and human scale. In spite of the breadth of the widescreen CinemaScope aspect ratio that he uses for the project, Rivers's compositions, both out on the Aberdeenshire mountains and in the dark domestic interiors of his tumbledown home, picture Jake from the same intimate sidelines that Fowler finds in *Storck*. Ethnographic detachment is done away with; instead we are right there with him, complicit, sat at eye height by the fireside opposite Jake as he looks deep into the flames, or running behind him along a snow-covered pathway towards the forest.

The idea of a partaking perspective is fundamental to my own cinematographic approach in *Valley*. The scenes with Samuel (and Eleanor) were filmed by myself and a friend over five short, wintery days. We worked, ate and lived together during this brief period, adopting a model of filmmaking which permitted a sense of collaboration, participation and shared experience between the three of us. We join Sam on his journey, accompanying him further and further into the Welsh hillside as though by his side. To produce this sense of accompaniment

photographically, much of *Valley* is filmed hand-held using one fixed length 50mm camera lens, the focal length which most approximates the field of view of human vision. I had initially wanted to use a 4:3 Academy aspect ratio in *Valley* to create compositions which foregrounded Samuel's singular physical presence within the vast rural landscapes of North Wales. It felt like an obvious subversion of the majestic sweeping landscapes that Widescreen anamorphic 2:35 aspect ratios produce. However, after preparatory tests, the 16:9 aspect ratio offered a better balance between representing both place and the human presence within it. Like Samuel, neither filmmaker nor spectator is able to see too far ahead. Through this combination of focal length, aspect ratio and hand-held operating technique, we are denied any privileged vantage point and come to occupy these landscapes on equal terms, if not as though through Samuel's own eyes then as his immediate companion.

This hand-held operating technique emplaces us in the land in a second way. When we follow Samuel up the steep hill to wait for Eleanor, the camera image registers every furrow, tree root and boggy tract that Samuel negotiates, expressing the physicality of the landscape viscerally by betraying the sheer human effort required to move through these natural spaces. The images constantly fall in and out of focus, the distance between Samuel and camera operator becoming inconsistent and unpredictable. The camera frame lurches inelegantly, recording every footfall of the camera operator, both an expression of Samuel's own emplacement and an indelible stamp of the corporeal presence of the filmmakers within the land. The smooth, *dis*-embodied movements of a Steadicam or dolly track would not have been able to convey the material weight of these landscapes. However, the hand-held mobile camerawork, so technically



flawed, is imprinted with my own bodily presence (or, to be accurate, the bodily presence of my friend and colleague working as camera operator), betraying our own exhaustion, imbalance and clumsiness within this land.

*A Partaking View - 'Indexes of the Private'*

In her model of “filming from nearby” (135), Catherine Fowler recognises how ideas of dailiness help to create an embodied cinema by contextualising the land tangibly in both time and space. She praises Storck’s *La Symphonie Paysanne* for the “intimate, daily, specific ways in which [rural life] is captured” (136). Storck records this country life in his film through a succession of medium shots and close-ups, replete with tiny details about both the natural world and human life. In the *Printemps* chapter, for example, the sequence begins with a medium shot of a farmer dressing and putting on his braces; then a close-up of the collie dog emerging through a little door out into the yard; then a close-up of the farmer’s feet pushed into wooden clogs; then a medium shot of a horse in the stable waiting patiently for him. Not only is there a sense of the nearby, embodied gaze that we’ve already discussed, a portrait also emerges through this stream of imagery of daily life represented in “quotidian realities and as a living space rather than as a once lived in, remembered space” (146).

This emphasis on the daily and the private also lies at the heart of Rivers’s *Two Years at Sea*. Its portrait of contented rural solitude is built from glimpses of Jake’s everyday life and routines, both real and re-enacted; a medium-wide shot of Jake waking and stirring in the soft dawn light; a close-up of the coffee slowly percolating on the window sill, all condensation and steam; a medium shot of Jake sitting at his kitchen table, strewn with the detritus of his forages; a close-

up of a suspended toilet roll; a close-up of Jake taking a shower, hair, flesh, water and sunlight.

The rural landscapes of *Valley* share this geographical and temporal specificity and have been captured in intricate detail to place them within a tangible time and space. The decontextualized panoramic picturing of conventional landscape, “which refers to neither person nor place” (136), often produces a universalised image stripped of any specific detail. From these perspectives, the brooding hillsides and vast moors of North Wales become interchangeable with the mountains and dales of Cumbria or the Peak District, shorn of any particularising truth. By contrast, *Valley’s* landscapes are emplacing because they firmly contextualise the land in the here and now – asserting it as present, specific and living. With the exception of the garage-laboratory interiors where Samuel makes his perfume and anoints himself, *Valley* is filmed entirely within the small, remote Nantlle valley in north Gwynedd. Each of Samuel’s pilgrimage sites, those places which he has shared with Eleanor and which he now returns to in the film, are all located within this vale; the mountain forests, the long winding B roads, the farmstead, the ruins and the villages of Nantlle and Talysarn.

I tried to remain topographically faithful to the layout of the valley in my film, starting in the forests of Rhyd-Ddu and ending in the townships near Penygroes. Through this accumulation of detail, I intended to make Nantlle live within my film as a place and not just a backdrop, and to make the viewer experience these landscapes not as nationalised or even universalised ideas of wilderness but instead as complex, contemporary, singular geographies. The landscapes of rural North Wales are dense composites of nature and industry, oxymorons

of the idyllic and the neglected. Emerging from the sanctuary of thick mossy forests, Samuel looks out over mountain valleys bearing the brutal scars of extinct industries like slate quarrying and copper mining. He drives through towns made rich from these industries but now haunted by long-term unemployment, Victorian stone townhouses nestled next to boarded-up flat-roof pubs. He parks his car and walks through streets of small terraced houses overshadowed by towering piles of slate waste.

The specificity of this landscape contrasts strongly with heritage cinema's carefully constructed mosaics of English scenery. To help me chart these different depictions of countryside, I refer to Francois Penz's essay on cinema's representation of the city, "From Topographical Coherence to Creative Geography" (Wallflower Press, 2008). Through close readings of *The Aviator's Wife* (Eric Rohmer, 1980) and *Pont du Nord* (Jacques Rivette, 1981), Penz identifies two distinct approaches to the cinematic portrayal of Paris; "creative geography", which "infers spaces belong to the same diegetic space", and "topographical coherence", which maps "with confounding accuracy" (120) the geographical reality of place. As Penz explains, this *topographical coherence* produces an "accurate portrayal of everydayness...steeped in Bazin's spatial density of the real" (123). Although conceived to describe the urban, Penz's idea can be applied to my depiction of the rural Welsh landscape. Sheepfold, slate waste, cowshed, Co-op, terrace, mountain, llyn, playground, forest. This accumulation of detail provides a "galaxy of discursive signs" which makes the valley landscape a readable text but, far more importantly, these geographically coherent details also give the screen a spatial realism and depth which enables us to immerse ourselves within it.

### Haptic visuality

*As a material mode of perception and expression...cinematic tactility occurs not only at the skin or the screen but traverses all the organs of the spectator's body and the film's body.*

*~ Jennifer M. Barker*

There is something luminescent about the intimate, quotidian visions of Jake's home life deep in the woods in *Two Years at Sea*. Rivers's images feel normal and extraordinary all at once. They glow out from the darkness - grainy, blurry and coruscating - somehow bypassing the rational, reasoning and interpretative areas of my brain and engaging me on a sensual, embodied level instead.

I seek these pre-intellectual, pre-figurative aspects of the rural within my own practice and consider them essential to my own concept of embodied cinema as a way of emplacing myself and the viewers within the countryside. Such tactile image making can be explained better through reference to Laura Marks's idea of "haptic visuality" which she uses to describe how cinema is able to use the film camera to capture the textural and sensuous qualities of the material world:

Haptic looking tends to move over the surface of its object rather than to plunge into illusionistic depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture. It is more inclined to move than to focus, more inclined to graze than to gaze...While optical perception privileges the representational power of the image, haptic perception privileges the material presence of the image (162).

For Marks, haptic visuality engenders sensuous embodied memories of touch, movement, taste and smell within the viewer. Our eyes become metaphorical

organs of touch and engender a tactile way of seeing and knowing which directly involves the viewer's whole body. Marks applies this idea of hapticity to models of diasporic and intercultural cinema, seeing it as a way for cultural minorities to express "the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge" (1). Although my thesis does not raise these same specific questions of migrant experience, Marks's theories allow me to formulate and test out cinematic approaches to landscape cinema which foreground bodily experience and emplacement within rural space. We can speculate further that my own position within these rural landscapes is also one of inbetweenness. I grew up and continue to live in London. By occupying rural space as an urban filmmaker, I am able to consider my own liminal presence within these British landscapes on a bodily level instead of through the distancing gaze of the tourist. The raw materials of the Welsh countryside awaken sensuous responses within us; the rust of derelict cars in Talysarn; damp, glistening forest mosses; perfect spirals of unfurling fern fronds, freezing mountain stream water, condensation, steam and glass. For Marks, such pro-haptic imagery often invites a look that "moves on the surface plane of the screen...before the viewer realises what she or he is beholding" (162-3).

Marks's ideas inform my use of close-up compositions and macro-scale photography in *Valley*. When Samuel returns home, he enters a small garage where he has made a small workshop for himself. I use close-ups and macro photography to capture the intimate details of this peculiar transitory space, neither fully indoors nor fully outdoors; the glass jam jars full of seeds and berries, the windowsills thick from webs, dust and mummified insect corpses. Similarly, Samuel is shown preparing the ingredients for his perfume through a sequence

of intimately framed close-ups; decanting the stream water into his still; taking the ferns from the envelope and cutting them up; taking out a single rose bud from an old matchbox with tweezers; water forming into bubbles; steam rising in gentle evening sunlight; Samuel's shivering torso glistening with perfume in the subdued light of dawn. The macroscopic nature of many of these images delays our ability to recognise and place them, sometimes completely. Instead we absorb them as textures; soft, brittle, grainy, viscous. As Marks writes, "such images resolve into figuration only gradually, if at all" (163). The textures of these natural ingredients (moss, berries, petals), the textures of the elemental properties which they exist in (flame, water, light, steam) and the textures of Samuel's body within them (hair, skin, nails) – creates a synthesis of organic fabrics where nature and man dissolve into one, a meshing of land and inhabitant finally united as texture and touch.

### 3.4 The Thoreauvian sublime

*Nature doth thus kindly heal every wound. By the mediation of a thousand little mosses and fungi, the most unsightly objects become radiant of beauty" - March 13, 1842.*

~ H.D. Thoreau

Sobchack's and Mark's theories of affective embodiment are fundamental to my own interpretation of rural land as lived and experienced space. They make me consider how I produce a sense of bodily immersion in the viewer through my practice as a cinematographer and help me frame ideas about my own bodily presence within rural landscape. However, my engagement with rural space, and my yearning for emplacement, is also born from a specific set of private spiritual and emotional needs. I find it helpful to consider this affective relationship with

British countryside from within a secondary, interlinking framework of romantic and sublime thought. My presence as a sole practitioner within the British countryside sits within a rich cultural tradition of solitary artistic encounters with wilderness. The lonely figure of the artist as wanderer haunts both European and North American romantic sublime traditions. *Valley* is in fact set within a landscape synonymous with the British romantic sublime; the mountains of North Wales, in their vast and raw beauty, have provided inspiration to landscape painters including Richard Wilson and Paul Sandby.

Stella Hockenhull, frustrated by the application of narrative theory within film thought, approaches British film landscape through this “discourse of the sublime” (2). She cites the film scholar and screenwriter, George Toles, aligning herself with his belief that film studies were limited by narrative theories, “a factor which disenchant the moving image, and acts as a draining phenomenon, stripping it of its magic” (4). Hockenhull’s sublime perspective resonates strongly with me and both of my films enquire into the emotional power innate within rural space. Acknowledging the rather nebulous quality of the term, Hockenhull uses the idea of the sublime loosely in her research on film landscapes to refer to a belief in nature as something “divine and spiritually alive” (1). And it is on these same grounds that I use the sublime within my own practice; as a term for describing our spiritual and emotional relationship with rural space.

In her close reading of Rivers’s films, “Landscapes as Realms of Indistinction in Contemporary British Cinema”, Lucy Panthaky observes how “the sublime expresses human awe, and thus needs a face to guide us through its emotional impact” (14). In *Two Years at Sea*, the author observes how Rivers plays with

scale and duration to counterpoint human intimacy and natural vastness. Jake is repeatedly framed in wide shot within the snowy expanses of the Scottish wilderness, reducing him to a small lonely figure within the 2:35 widescreen composition, a small smudge of darkness within the wintery whiteout. As Panthaky notes, in one scene Jake carries an air mattress to a large lake in the forest and builds a makeshift boat from wood and plastic bottles. Rivers frames this lake as a wide shot to emphasize its vastness. The water dominates two thirds of the composition, outbalancing the small slither of sky which is allowed to sit at the very top of the locked-off frame. For almost seven minutes, we watch as Jake floats within his small homemade boat above the immense body of cold black water, dwarfed by the Scottish wilderness.

This sense of natural vastness and ineffability is brought to life through our bodily presence within it. In *Quantum Romanticism: The Sublime in Art and Science* (Oxford University Press, 2011), Iain Whyte and Roald Hoffman note that the soul is lifted above the mundane by being overwhelmed by nature, as though its infinite, unknowable properties mirror and resonate with our own inner spiritual depths. For Hoffman and Whyte, the sublime establishes the “significance of inner space wherein the immeasurability of physical space was metaphorically linked to the infinitude of our supersensible faculty” (109). In *Valley*, duration and scale are used to invoke the sublime in similar ways. In static, hand-held shots, we see Samuel make his journey through the mountainous landscapes. Early on in the film, for example, he leaves the forest path and climbs up the steep hillside looking for moss. In one long and unbroken shot, we watch Samuel slowly ascend the steep incline from background to foreground. Losing his footing, Samuel slips on the wet and unfirm ground. Reaching the summit, he struggles for breath, and



the physical exertion of being in this landscape is understood through the smallness of his body within the vastness of the forest, the extended duration of time we watch him for, and the exhaustion we read on his face as he finally pauses to rest in the foreground of the frame.

However, this popular definition of the natural sublime fails to fully account for my own emotional and spiritual engagement with the countryside. Whether it be the flat East Anglian fenlands, the barren Welsh hillsides or the gentle Sussex downlands, I have often found myself turning to these landscapes for inspiration and solace. They are places of joy but they are also places of respite which I have run to during periods of crisis and depression. Walking within their remote landscapes, these places become sites of refuge, recovery and healing for me, conferring a role of spiritual sanctuary and truth upon them.

My research turns to an alternative framework of feminist thought on the sublime to help me renegotiate meanings of the natural sublime within my own work. In *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (California UP, 1997), Barbara Claire Freeman identifies the presence of a “dominant ideology of misogyny that haunts canonical theories of the sublime” (7). The writer proceeds to describe how ideas of the sublime have been shaped for centuries by dichotomous gendered hierarchies which align the aesthetics of the sublime with masculinity and ideals of beauty with femininity.

Sublime thought is heavily gendered for a second, arguably more important reason. Kant defines the sublime moment as the point when a sense of vertiginous awe before the ineffability and vastness of nature is suppressed by

rationality and logic. For Kant, nature becomes sublime when seen as “a power that has not dominion over us” (28, 260). Katherine B. Attié elucidates this idea in her essay, “Regendering the Sublime and the Beautiful” (Routledge, 2018), describing the Kantian sublime as “the moment when the imagination comes under the control of reason” (48), a point in time where we recognise our physical powerlessness but also our ability for judging ourselves independent of, even superior to nature. For Freeman, this Kantian sublime, in its attempt to make nature yield to logical thought, is encoded with “gender-specific scapegoating mechanisms” (69). The interplay between female imagination and male reason reveals “a barely disguised hierarchy” whereby order is maintained through the subjugation of the former by the latter, and transcendence is finally achieved through the overpowering of female otherness.

This conception of the sublime is both symptomatic and causative of humankind’s aggressive assertion of sovereignty over nature. Such ideas of mastery have become deeply troublesome and problematic within the Anthropocene. At a moment in our history where we face irreparable climate change and ecological damage, the feminine sublime’s questioning of existing power structures helps point the way to a revisioning of the natural sublime within my own film practice. Instead of dominating nature, I am interested instead to join with it. Within this new conception of the sublime, nature is not seen at a distance but in close proximity, and humanity is not understood as disembodied mind but as lived body. Kant’s idea of the natural sublime is predicated on the experience of spiritual transcendence born from the triumph of (male) reason over nature. This notion of transcendence conveys a sense of non-involvement with, even indifference to, rural space, and it is this idea of transcendence which Patricia

Yaeger focusses on in her essay, “Toward a Female Sublime” (Blackwell, 1989). Yaeger describes these transcendental encounters as “self-centred imperialism” (192). For her, the process of transcendence enables the sublime subject to feel “aggrandised and ratified in its position of power” within a “set of institutionalised beliefs and values” (192). Through my practical research, I propose that *immanence* rather than *transcendence* can help to reappropriate the sublime in exciting new ways within my work. The idea of an immanent sublime which places us deep within nature, dissolving borders between man and nature, is fundamental to my dwelt filmmaking perspective.

in their respective depictions of a man’s solitary search for the sublime through a slow, dwelt communion with nature, both *Valley* and Rivers’s *Two Years at Sea*, are shaped by a model of natural, pantheistic sublimity that feels strongly aligned with the model of sublimity that Henri-David Thoreau articulates in his most famous work, *Walden; or, Life in the Woods* (Penguin Classics, 2016). Part memoir, part self-sufficiency manual and part spiritual quest, *Walden* celebrates a rural, hermitic existence rooted in ideas of immanent divinity:

“God himself culminates in the present moment, and will never be more divine in the lapse of all the ages. And we are enabled to apprehend at all what is sublime and noble only by the perpetual instilling and drenching of the reality which surrounds us” (95).

In their intertwining of physical and spiritual emplacement, it is helpful to think of both *Valley* and *Two Years at Sea* within the context of this Thoreauvian sublime. Through the dwelt perspective, countryside opens up to us both corporeally and spiritually, both our skin and minds becoming porous.

### 3.5 Embodiment, stillness and movement: a cinema of walking

If the cross-weaving of the epic and the intimate is indispensable for conventional readings of the sublime, then the ebb and flow between movement and stasis are fundamental to my work's conception of an immanent sublime. In their essay, "From flatland to vernacular relativity: the genesis of early English screenscapes", David B. Clarke and Marcus A. Doel emphasise the unique relationship between walking and landscape: "The connection between the picturesque conception of landscape and the history of walking is important because the former was always configured for the appreciation of a mobile spectator" (216). Film landscapes, both temporally and spatially, are in constant flux and displacement. As a result of our movement through them, at each turn of the pathway or summit of the hill or clearing of the trees, these landscapes morph and evolve. And when they do, we stop and look, remaking the world as picture.

Clarke and Doel believe that these moments of seizing the landscape as picturesque form are "practical appropriation(s) of space" (216), means of ownership through which "the masculine ego can move as fast as thought, mastering nature as far as the eye can see" (216). However, my thesis questions this idea of walking as a means of ownership and acquisition, arguing instead that our relationship with landscape as walkers has much less to do with distance and pictorialism and much more to do with proximity and incorporation. MacFarlane associates walking with the awakening of reflexive, poetic states of perception. In *The Old Ways*, he describes a walk across the Broomway, an ancient tidal path on Foulness Island in Essex:

Out there, nothing could only be itself...Similes and metaphors bred and budded. Mirages of scale occurred, tricks of depth. [...] When I think back to the outer miles of that walk, I now recall a strange disorder of perception

which caused illusions of the spirit as well as the eye. I recall becoming sensational; the substance of landscape so influencing mind that mind's own substance was altered (225).

MacFarlane is describing his bodily presence within the countryside and his relationship with this landscape as a walker in ways which exceed boundaries of picturesque appreciation and which challenge ideas of proprietorial gaze. Through his prose, a sense of perfect synthesis emerges between body and mind; through the physical exertion of walking, through the "iamb of I am" and the hypnotic "beat of the placed and lifted foot" (xxxiii), we are allowed to enter into an ecstatic, meditative contract with land. Crucially, the melding of consciousness and place that MacFarlane describes here points towards an alternative understanding of the natural sublime. Instead of being overwhelmed by nature, we are dissolved and returned to it. Our spiritual relationship with countryside is not based on awe, fear or conquest but, rather, on harmony, rejoining and coherence.

### **3.6 Re-sounding rural landscape from embodied and dwelt perspectives**

It would be wrong to assume that cinema landscapes are composed only from images. Sound is a fundamental component of film landscape and works in a multiplicity of ways to deepen the planarity of the screen. In the introduction to their book, *Cinema and Landscape*, Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner notice how cinematic landscape uses film sound in relation to what is seen on screen: "what we hear adds, questions, progresses, extends, completes or challenges the action, image, movement, colour or shape" (1). I am interested by this cross-sensory conception of film landscape which Harper and Rayner allude to. It draws

from sound theorist Michel Chion's key theory of 'added value' which describes "the expressive and informative value with which a sound enriches a given image" (4). As a sole practitioner, I regularly engage with landscape as both a cinematographer and a sound recordist. Accordingly, the thesis asks how rural space can be mapped not only through the visual but also through the aural, and questions how sound differs from image when it comes to allowing filmmaker and audience to enter into the land.

Our understanding of countryside, particularly British countryside, is constructed largely through the sonic-aural realm. In the introduction to his study, *Soundscapes and the Rural: A Conceptual Review from a British Perspective* (Newcastle University, 2005), Chris Ray observes how discussions of rural space recurrently foreground ideals of preservation and tranquillity. As Ray maintains, the importance that we place in tranquillity as an idealised sonic aesthetic of countryside belongs to a broader neo-Romantic discourse about British countryside and our industrialised society's attitude to rural space in general:

The sonic aesthetics of...rural places are constantly being worked on by discourses of rurality...prominent in the rural domain – at least in an English context – is a set of neo-Romantic ideas regarding what rurality should be like. Sometimes in collaboration, other times in conflict, with neo-Romanticism are various ideas at work in the aural realm such as environmentalism, regionalism and humanistic notions of the agency of the individual (2).

Ray's observation pinpoints a general post-industrial anxiety about the conservation of rural Britain, particularly England, as the site of calm and contemplation. The countryside is commonly valued by our urbanised culture for

its recuperative function, a sanctuary from the roar of traffic and the screeching of tube train brakes. As Ray explains, rural tranquillity belongs to a “broader therapy culture that conforms to the concept of the consumption of countryside” (2). Perhaps inevitably, the sonic nature of this ideal of pastoralism means the absence of noise, especially industrial and mechanised noise, promoting the idea of ‘getting away from it all’ and returning to a pre-modernity state of Eden.

These ideals of tranquillity are also fundamental to the concept of the ‘soundscape’, a term developed by composer Raymond Murray Schafer in his work, *Soundscape; Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (Random House, 1977). For Schafer, soundscapes are a combination of sounds that arise from an immersive environment and are comprised of all sonic elements: sounds from the natural environment (including animal vocalisation or weather), and sounds created by humans (through music, through speech and through work). Importantly, a soundscape also includes the listener’s *perception* of sounds heard as an environment or, as Schafer summarises, “how that environment is understood by those living within it” (12).

Schafer compares the urban soundscape to the rural soundscape. Through this comparative analysis, he highlights a set of unique aural characteristics belonging to the countryside which strongly influence how the rural is sounded by cinema. For Schafer, urban settings are characterizable as “lo-fi” soundscapes. The overall loudness of the city means that “perspective is lost... on a downtown street corner of the modern city, there is no distance, there is only presence” (3). This urban soundscape is characterised by “the continuous and extended sonic flat-line” (5) of mains hum, engine noise and tyres on tarmac

which produces a dissonant drone of white noise “which has no sense of duration, which is supra-biological in its longevity” (5). By contrast, Schafer classes rural soundscapes as “hi-fi”: the listener can discern subtle degrees of difference between each aural component. For Schafer, the city is noisy because of “the density and overlapping frequencies of its sonic components” (5). Rural aural space, however, is rich in the diverse and the specific. The relative frequential and temporal discreteness of each sound allows the listener to locate themselves in space. When soundscapes are degraded by noise, our sense of place—the ability to track the physicality and temporality of location - is compromised: places become amorphous and homogenous and “undermine the capacity of sonic elements... [to generate] normative mental constructions in the mind of hearers” (5). Rural aural space, with its favourable signal-to-noise ratio in which discrete sounds can be discerned, is rich in specificity, and thus powerfully enabling of a sense of place.

It is important to understand that Schafer developed this idea of soundscape as an acoustic ecologist. Within this perspective, modern, urban and industrial sounds – car traffic, aeroplane roar, tractor diesel engine – become pollutants, toxins which threaten a pristine and endangered sonic eco-system which needs to be preserved. I am wary of the ideological imperatives which underpin Schafer’s idea of rural soundscape. In many respects, this acoustic conservationism incubates the same nostalgic and anti-modern values as heritage film. However, Schafer’s model of soundscape nonetheless provides me with an important framework through which to consider sound immersively and corporeally through my film practice.



In *Le Quattro Volte*, a sensuous film portrait of human and animal life set in the Calabrian countryside, Michelangelo Frammartino uses sound to impart a profound sense of place within his viewers. Frammartino's hillside landscapes are both visual and aural, and this auralisation adheres to many of Schafer's fundamental ideals for sounding rural landscape. When the old man takes his goats from their small enclosure in the village, through ancient droveways and out onto the hill pastures beyond, we see *and* hear the landscapes and the inhabitants within them. The wind in the trees and bushes on the exposed mountainside; the footfall of the herder's collie dog in thick dewy grass; the breathing and chewing sounds of the grazing goats and the perpetual metallic clang of the bells worn around their necks: each of these textures is captured in intricate sonic detail through meticulous location recording and the soundscape of rural space is brought front and centre.

However, these diegetic sounds are never used to merely reinforce the image. Instead, they work together in union. Robert Bresson, writing in his *Notes sur le Cinématographe* (Gallimard, 1995), maintains that it is not enough to simply duplicate an image with a sound: "a sound must never come to the aid of an image.... the image and sound must each work in turn in a sort of relay" (28). In *Le Quattro Volte*, Frammartino uses sound to lend space and relief. With sound, the screen seems to deepen, fulfilling Bresson's ambition of "bringing on a third dimension" (28). It is through this marriage of the aural and visual that Frammartino conveys rural life's cyclical rhythms and through this deepened screen that we glimpse the heart of the film; the transmigration of souls, mineral, vegetable, animal and human.

In my practice as a sound recordist in *Valley*, I also try to invoke the unique materiality and texture of the Nantlle valley through an emphasis on the aural qualities of its landscapes. The notion of the “soundmark” (10) is fundamental to Schafer’s acoustic ecology. Derived from ‘landmark’, he uses this term to describe sounds which are unique to the area, those sounds which “make the acoustic life of a community unique” (101). My location recordings seek to capture the Welsh valleys in their temporal and spatial specificity and particularity by documenting Snowdonia’s own rural ‘soundmarks’. The mountain forests which open the film ring with the winter bird song of the mistle thrush, song thrush and black bird. The firs whisper and groan from the light wind and the rain falls upon the branches and quietly drips upon the forest floor below. The road where Samuel returns to his car is loud from the passing traffic of cars and vans but also the mountain stream which runs down parallel with the pavement. Beneath these dominant sounds, distant voices can be heard chatting in Welsh. Down at the bottom of the valley, a shepherd calls and whistles for his sheepdog to round up the flock of sheep and move them into an enclosure. The sheep bleat and the collie dog responds, half barking and half whining. Elsewhere in the valley, neighbouring dogs join in and bark excitedly at the commotion. When Samuel walks towards the ruins, the occasional calls of ravens and ospreys can be heard. At dawn the following morning, Samuel wakes to a December dawn chorus. Distant small-town traffic passes in the distance and domestic life starts to rouse around him as he anoints himself with the homemade perfume. Later in the morning, when he waits for Eleanor up on the hillside, the forest creaks from the wind, the dead branches of the conifers rubbing together as though in song. Although I subsequently found myself needing to supplement my own location recordings with pre-existing atmospheres from third party audio libraries, the

film's sound design is nonetheless dedicated to recreating the sonic world of Snowdonia in all its particularity.

### **3.7 Perspectival qualities of film sound**

It is not simply the profusion of local environmental sound details which immerses us within this Welsh countryside, it is also the perspectival quality of these sounds, our spatial relationship with them as viewer-listeners. In his essay, "Reconstructing Atmospheres: Ambient sound in film and media production" (SAGE, 2017), field recordist Budhaditya Chattopadhyay notes how location audio recordings encourage embodied experiences of sound by replicating human spatial perspectives:

Theories of spatial cognition also suggest that site-specific environmental and ambient sounds can reinforce spatial aspects of perception "focusing primarily on perception of sound-source direction" (Waller & Nadel, 2013: 83). These varied perspectives inform us how ambient sounds provide depth and a spatial dimension to a particular filmic sequence by establishing conducive environments to elicit the cognitive association between the auditor and the site in the diegesis (223).

Within *Valley*, the listener attaches an emotional significance to the rural soundscape by placing him or herself within the physical and temporal geography of the location. An object does not make a sound on its own; it needs air to vibrate in, wind to carry it upon and atmosphere to sharpen or muffle it. The sounds of Nantlle do not make us feel anything on their own. But we feel through our sense of place in relation to them, and our acoustic memory resonates with these carried frequencies too. When Samuel emerges from the forest onto a ridge which looks out over the valley, we hear not only the swaying of trees and the melody of bird

song behind him; we also hear the distant rumble of car traffic and the distant barking of a farm dog. It is the texture of these sounds, sculpted by the environment and our perspective to them, which emplaces us on the hillside. The dog's bark is faint, carried over the hills from far away, possibly another valley, and it resonates against the ravines of the hill, echoing endlessly amongst them. The texture of this echoing bark places us, makes us feel both the vastness of the landscape as well as emphasising through contrast the intimate, hushed whispers of the nearby trees blowing in the wind.

This cinematic emplacement through ambient sound is not born only from the process of sound location recording. It also comes from the careful mixing and layering of discrete audio elements in post-production. Chattopadhyay notes how sound practitioners use layers of ambient sound, "incorporating them in the strategy of narration in such a way that they produce a spatial realization of a presence of the site in the diegetic world" (223). He also observes that "the inclusion or occlusion of ambient sound in the sound organization determines qualitative degrees and intensities of the site's presence" (223). My work as a sound practitioner on *Valley* illustrates this point well. When Samuel returns home and settles in the small, makeshift laboratory in the back of his garage, we hear the shrill birdsong of sparrows and blue tits from the suburban gardens nearby. The brittle clarity of this birdsong, not muffled by double glazing nor absorbed by soft furnishings or carpet, emphasises the liminal nature of this work area, casting it as a space which is neither fully indoors nor outside. We also hear the quiet hum of distant traffic and the evening routines of Samuel's neighbours – snatches of television, family conversation and dinner being prepared – as though from

Samuel's perspective, and it reminds us that this extraordinary shamanic ritual is taking place on a thoroughly normal street.

The opening sequences of *Valley* provide a second example of how the careful layering and synthesis of field recordings produces an immersive sonic portrayal of the Welsh countryside. Sounds of wind on the exposed hillsides are slowly supplemented with sounds of the forest canopy and the faint sibilant drones of distant traffic. High frequencies are thickened by the mid-range and lower frequencies of the forest like the sounds of tree boughs rocking and the sonorous percussive textures of rain. The sequence closes with the sound of human presence growing louder, footsteps crunching over the foliage and human breath and the rustle of clothing slowly occluding these natural sounds. Without manipulation, this layering of sounds would soon become cacophonous and jarring, creating a flat line of white noise, each layer working against each other rather than in harmony. Only through careful equalization and mixing can the sounds be orchestrated to produce a cohesive and spatially complex depiction of natural sound.

### **3.8 On listening**

If the fine details of the sonic-aural realm, and their carefully arranged placement, are critical to producing a sense of place which embeds us within the rural, it is the process of listening, both as filmmaker and audience, that allows us to achieve an embodied response to place itself. The media theorist and philosopher, Marshall McLuhan, in his essay "Visual and Acoustic Space", argues that the predominance of eye culture, and the abandonment of ear culture, has

led humankind to “lock itself into a position where only linear conceptualisation is possible” (5). He explains this idea at further length:

We, who live in the world of reflected light, in visual space, may also be said to be in a state of hypnosis. Ever since the collapse of the oral tradition in early Greece...Western civilization has been mesmerized by a picture of the universe as a limited container in which all things are arranged according to the vanishing point, in linear, geometric order. The intensity of this conception is that it actually leads to the abnormal suppression of hearing and touch in some individuals (5).

McLuhan believes that acoustic thinking, which regards things as “having centres everywhere and margins nowhere” (162), is immersive by nature. The philosopher Walter Ong echoes this theory, declaring that “sight isolates but sound incorporates” (6). Ong expands this idea at length in his book, *Orality and Literacy* (Routledge, 1982):

Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer...vision comes to a human being from one direction at a time: to look at a room or a landscape, I must move my eyes around from one part to another. When I hear, however, I gather sound (223) simultaneously from every direction at once: I am at the centre of my auditory world, which envelopes me, establishing me at a kind of core of sensation and existence (6).

Frammartino’s film, *Le Quattro Volte*, seems strongly aligned with these viewpoints. Believing that “the eye is not more important than the ear”, the director’s work processes challenge the primacy of vision in their representation

of Italian countryside. Frammartino describes a postproduction workflow which challenges the convention for adding sound to a completed picture edit.

My image editor, Benni Atria, is a sound editor. Many times, we decided how to connect things with sound. Traditionally, you edit the image, lock picture, and then go to sound. This means that the texture of the movie, the connection, the language is made by the eye. Working our way, the ear is balanced with the eye.

(Into the Woods, *Filmmaker Magazine*, 2014)

The Thai auteur filmmaker Apichatpong Weerasethakul also places great importance in the aural representation of rural space. In *Uncle Boonmee* (2010), sound is often prioritised over image to place the viewer-listener within a sort of cinematic ‘sensescape’. Film writer Natalie Boehler observes how Weerasethakul reprioritises viewers’ senses to engage with the sensual qualities of the Thai countryside by deprioritising the visual in favour of the aural. The visuals of the Isaan forests are stygian and obscure and “as if entering a different sensescape, the characters and we as spectators must adjust to the darkness, letting our awareness shift to the soundscape” (299). A little later in her essay, Boehler notes that many aspects of the Thai forest are recorded so that they sit prominently at the forefront of the mix. This apparent close mic technique, in which directional shot gun microphones are regularly used, raises the ratio of direct-to-reflected sound, isolating sounds in their environment and “lending the scenes a strongly textured sound quality and a highly visceral feel” which “heighten(s) our awareness of the cinematic space and of the corporeal” (299).

Boehler cites Michel Foucault who, in *Discipline and Punish* (Gallimard, 1975), writes how the dominant, rationalising mode of seeing links the gaze with power,

supervision and control. The obscurity of the rain forest, by contrast, “can be understood as its Other, the irrational and sensual...the soundtrack is accented while the image, which usually is cinema’s prioritised level of expression, is obscured, causing visual disorientation” (299).

I am able to reconstruct and reconsider my own sense of self within British rural space through this process of reordering sensory perception, providing the means for me to break comprehensively from the tyranny of the gaze and, in doing so, to resist the values of control and acquisition which are so fundamentally implicit within it. The term ‘acoustemology’, a conjoining of *acoustic* and *epistemology*, describes how sound enables a different way of engaging with and knowing our environment, enabling a sort of sonic being-in-the-world; Steven Feld conceived this word as part of his ethnomusicological research of Kaluli tribespeople in *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song in Kaluli* (University of Illinois, 1986). However, I find the idea very useful to describe how hearing and sounding engender a sonic form of dwelling for me as a film practitioner. For Feld, sounding and the sensual, bodily, experiencing of sound is a special kind of knowing. We are positioned far within rural space in a way which vision, and its objectifying perspective, does not allow. From this perspective, I will consider the actual physical process of listening, as distinct from recording, in my practise as filmmaker. As I mentioned earlier in the thesis, I visited Gwynedd twice prior to the main shoot. During both visits, I set off on several long hikes to explore the remote valleys of Croesor and Nantlle. Each time, I took my camera and small audio field recorder with me in my backpack. The process of recording the vast Welsh valleys, engaging with the countryside through filmmaking, became as important a part of my film practice



as the completed film itself. I had begun these treks in search of film locations and would regularly begin each journey with my camera to hand, engaging with my surroundings from a primarily visual perspective. However, as the day wore on, I frequently found myself reaching for my audio recorder and, using its internal stereo microphones (and latterly, small Primo EM172 stereo condenser microphones), I would stop and listen to the valley at length. I recorded the ambient environmental sounds of these valleys with the intention of using them later on in the film. However, from my dwelt listening perspective within the Welsh hills, it felt as though I had entered deep into the secrets of this landscape, and the physical process of acquiring these sounds has become as fundamentally important to me as a film practitioner as the final audio files themselves.

This strong connection between hearing and emplacement is documented within recent discourse around field recording practices. In the introduction to their book, *In the Field: The Art of Field Recording* (Uniformbooks, 2011), authors Cathy Lane and Angus Carlyle note that many sound recordists place almost equal emphasis on hearing and recording and observe how, for many, the actual recording “comes much later as the last layer of encountering a place” (4). For the sound recordist and sound installation artist Felicity Ford, “recording allows me to get to the physical materiality of things in a very specific way...recording and listening are so key to understanding the physical world, the materiality of a place, the surfaces that surround you...they force you to be still in an environment” (7).

By embedding me firmly within the land as a practitioner, audition seems to work as an aggregate for a multi-sensory and bodily response to place. In *Listening*

(Fordham University Press, 2007), Jean-Luc Nancy explores the idea of listening from these haptic perspectives in great detail. He encourages a corporeal understanding of listening which foregrounds the tactile and sensuous, using the metaphor of a drum to describe his theory of listening as sonorous resonance: “a blow from outside, clamour from within, this sonorous, sonorized body undertakes a simultaneous listening to a ‘self’ and to a ‘world’ that are both in resonance” (43). Nancy’s conceptualization of listening as resonance reminds me of the inherently and emphatically tactile nature of hearing: sound literally touches our bodies, vibrating the cochlea, moving through bony and membranous labyrinths before transforming into neural signals. Throughout *Valley*, sound never simply fulfills a purely semiotic function, is never reduced to being a carrier of message and meaning. The sonorous glug of liquid leaving a bottle, the gentle tinkling of tacky fingers holding cold smooth glass, the rasping then silken sounds of skin on skin, as palms rub liquid into cheek and limb. Perhaps more convincingly than our eyes, our ears thus become organs of touch, absorbing and knowing sound for their texture and feel.

### **3.9 In the absence of dialogue**

The film soundtrack has hardened into a set of rigid conventions which operate as a normative paradigm within cinema. Film sound is divided into three discrete categories; dialogue, sound effects and music. Within mainstream narrative film, these three layers sit in a strict hierarchical order designed to privilege narrative transparency, with dialogue – the source of narrative exposition and characterization – being prioritized above all else. In this model of intelligibility versus fidelity, human speech dominates the sound mix, with other sound effects

and music subservient to it, only allowed to swell and come into their own when the human voice is absent.

Sound theorist Noel Carroll describes how this protocol enables a “flow of action [which] approaches an ideal of uncluttered clarity” (180). Being entirely without dialogue, *Valley* is unencumbered by such responsibilities. Freed from the hierarchical compartmentalization of soundtrack necessitated by the human voice, I am able to reimagine the soundtrack to create a rural soundscape where location recordings and diegetic sounds are free to become music in their own right. During the perfume distilling ritual, for example, the sounds of the natural materials which Samuel works with are brought forward within the mix: the crinkling sounds of the jiffy envelope being taken from Samuel’s satchel; the brittle, crunchy sounds of the folded bracken, the spongy moisture of the moss, the satisfying plop of the berries dropped into the flask, the calm sleepy drone of the Calor Gas flame, the agitated hiss of water coming to the boil. Largely stripped of familiar cinematic devices like extra-diegetic music, we become attuned to a highly textured soundscape comprised entirely from the natural world, each sound expressing the object’s singular organic materiality.

If human speech is absent from *Valley*, it is important to note that human sound is not. Throughout the film, we are made aware through sound of Samuel’s bodily presence within the landscapes of North Wales. Samuel’s footfall not only tells us about the terrain itself but his presence within it; stumbling and lunging awkwardly on the slippery mossy slopes of the forest, marching with determination along the stone track and squelching carefully through the waterlogged marshlands of the valley floor. More importantly still, we hear

Samuel's breath. When Samuel reaches the summit of the steep forest slope, he inhales deeply, greedy for breath, clearly exhausted from the climb. When Samuel sits Eleanor up in bed, the groan of floorboards and mattress, and the rustle of bedsheets having subsided, we hear Samuel's sighs, torn in two by sorrow and self-pity. On the hillside, Samuel and Eleanor inhale each other, finally reunited, the sound of their breathing blending with the sibilant rustle of their overcoats and the trees whispering and creaking in the wind. Rather than reigning supreme above everything else, these human sounds are instead closely interwoven within the sounds of air and birdsong, becoming an integral texture within this the natural soundscape.

*Valley* draws strongly here from Frammartino's and Agatia's auralisation of rural space in *Le Quattro Volte*. In this film, voice and speech are also denied their customary primacy. The elderly goatherd remains almost completely speechless for the whole film. On the rare occasions that we hear a voice, it is mixed down to exist as an integral textural element of the greater soundscape rather than to dominate over it. Speech, the conveyor of human thought, communicator of human reason, is denied by the director, and in so doing he allows nature to become foreground, unsublimated, and for the human world to recede. There are sighs, whoops of pain, hacks and croaks, however. The old goat man is not well. He coughs constantly throughout the first movement of the film, barely able to draw breath. These wheezes and coughs are paralinguistic. They are sounds which are innately human but not exclusively so: the cracked breath of the old herder recalls at times the breath of the goats and at others the sigh of the wind in the bows of the trees. It is both bestial and elemental, and richly expressive of the Pythagorean idea of spiritual transmigration between all living things that lies

at the film's heart. These coughs are embedded deeply in the fabric of the rural sound world, one ingredient amongst many that makes up aural rural space. The bleating of the goats, the bark of the village dog, the crackling of charcoal and the creaking of a rusting gate become just as important as human sound. It is as though man and nature are finally reunited.

This retreat from language carries with it the implicit suggestion of a retreat from society as well. As a philosopher of language, Heidegger brings insight to this relationship between wordlessness and alienation. In *Poetry, Language and Thought* (Harper Perennial, 1975) he writes, "Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion of this relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation" (146). In *Valley*, through his departure from the city and his silent pilgrimage into the Welsh wilderness, Samuel – and me as his creator - takes ownership over language by ceasing to use it. In many respects, *Valley* echoes the self-alienation that Jake (and director Ben Rivers) find within rural landscape; though we cannot escape language internally, by choosing isolation and, by extension, wordlessness, we are brought into an experience of nature as a wordless but by no means silent place.

## **Chapter Four. Beyond Representation. How can I re-enchant contemporary British rural landscapes?**

### **4.1 Chapter summary**

In this final chapter, I explore varieties of cinema realism to help me describe my emplacement within the countryside as a film practitioner. I start by considering my work through reference to Tiago de Luca's idea of sensory realism. Then, through close readings of the fabulist films *Záhřada* (Martin Šulík, 1995) and *Le Quattro Volte* (Michelangelo Frammartino, 2010), I consider magical realist approaches to articulate my affective emplacement within British rural space, arguing that they are fundamental to a sensorially realistic depiction of countryside. The thesis also speculates that magical realism enables a re-enchantment of the countryside by reclaiming it from the scientific and economic paradigms of rationalism and capitalism.

If *Valley* conforms to Murray Schafer's ideals of acoustic ecology, *Inheritors* suggests an alternative approach to sounding the countryside inspired by Pierre Schaeffer's idea of *musique concrète*. Through this rethinking of film sound, and through reference to the poetic phenomenology of Gaston Bachelard, I consider how *Inheritors* challenges naturalist representations of countryside and proposes a model of embodied cinema which recognizes dream and imagination as a fundamental part of our haptic response to rural space.

### **4.2. Limitations of naturalism**

In the preceding chapter, I formulated a model for a sensory, phenomenological landscape cinema which emphasised the material richness and tactility of rural space and which described our corporeal presence within it. In this regard, *Valley*

is strongly aligned with Tiago Magalhães de Luca's model of sensory realist cinema. In his book, *Realism of the Senses in World Cinema; The Experience of Physical Reality* (I.B.Tauris, 2013), De Luca contributes to the rich discourse on international Slow Cinema from perspectives of realism. There have been numerous recent accounts of Slow Cinema, including *Slow Movies* (Wallflower Press, 2014) by Ira Jaffe and *The Long Take: Art Cinema and the Wondrous* (University of Minnesota, 2017) by Lutz Koepnick. De Luca observes how film directors like Carlos Reygadas, Tsai Ming-Liang and Lav Diaz are united through their use of naturalist techniques, including "a camera that seems to rejoice in its ability to capture outstretched blocks of space and time," causing reality to be "perceived and conveyed through the sheer senses it emanates" (11). Through these long-take aesthetics, de Luca posits, the filmmakers succeed in creating a "sensory rendition of physical reality" animated by "the common trope of solitary characters and empty environments which provides the cue for observational scenes largely depleted of dramaticity" (12).

De Luca's idea of a 'realism of the senses' - and the filmmaking techniques employed to achieve it - provides a critical reference point for my own practical work. I use these models of slow, sensory realist cinema in my engagement with the countryside. Both films, *Valley* and *Inheritors*, contain, to varying degrees, "a penchant for...location shooting, amateur and physical acting, and improvisational modes of production – all of which assert the reality of the pro-filmic event at the expense of illusionism" (12). Certainly, both films are shot almost entirely on location within rural space (Snowdonia and Sussex respectively) with very limited budgetary resources and basic, often homemade means of technical production. Furthermore, like Lisandro Alonso's films,

*Liverpool* (2008) and *Los Muertos* (2004), and Carlos Reygadas's first feature, *Japón* (2002), *Valley* depicts a solitary character wandering at length through rural space, a technique which "delays narrative momentum and invites the viewer to apprehend images of the empty landscape...in silent and unbroken shots" (11). Samuel spends prolonged periods of time walking on the barren moors and hillsides of North Wales and the film's storyline, freed from the temporal pressures exacted by narrative causality, allows the viewer-listener to dwell within this rural space at length. Similarly, in *Inheritors*, the young protagonists, Peter and Cecile, are left to roam within the Sussex landscapes that magnetise them; Cecile wanders through the forest, hypnotised by the tree canopy, whilst Peter absorbs the sounds and scents of the seashore, staring transfixed out at the horizon.

However, my relationship with this form of modern Slow Cinema is an uneasy one. The term has come to describe a diverse range of art films which have little in common except for their refusal to conform to the commercial constraints of mainstream cinema. My thesis posits that many of the filmmakers in this canon of 'slow' filmmaking have their own unique approaches to rural space which, if rooted within a "realism of the senses", refuse to be bound by dogmas of naturalism and authenticity in their representation of place. In their own unique ways, international filmmakers like Thai directors Anocha Suwichakornpong and Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Italian directors like Alice Rohrwacher and Michelangelo Frammartino, use ideas of magic, folk tale and dream as part of their depiction of countryside. In *Valley*, and more explicitly in *Inheritors*, I find inspiration in these international film texts to seek alternative, hybridised forms of



realism which let me access the innate mythical and fabular qualities of rural space in order to re-enchant and be re-encharnted by British rurality.

### **4.3. Re-enchanting landscape through magical realism**

I would like to clarify what this idea of '(re)-enchantment' means within my research. Philosophers Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Edmund Husserl both attempted to re-enchant nature through perception. Perception, by providing a bridge between the phenomenological and the spiritual, offers an alternative to the reductionism of scientific rationalism and re-enchants a world which, as Merleau-Ponty notes, is "condemned to meaning." (xxii). At first glance, the magical and marvelous qualities of rural space seem completely incongruous within the material and physical paradigms of embodied cinema. However, for phenomenologists like Merleau-Ponty and Husserl, our affective perception provides a crucial means to cathect and re-scintillate this rural space and stands as a bulwark against materialism and, to a certain degree, secularism.

*Záhřada* (Martin Šulík, 1995) provides an important reference point for my own work by exemplifying Husserlian ideas of re-enchantment through the rural. The Slovakian film tells the story of a young man, Jakub, who lives in the city with his father. Tiring of Jakub's idleness, his father finally throws his son out and tells him to renovate his grandfather's old house in the countryside so he can sell it to buy his own apartment. Jakub gradually withdraws into this neglected house and garden. Through a series of small, quotidian discoveries, the rural dwelling's magic is gently exposed to him; through his grandfather's journal written in reverse script; through a faded map leading to a buried treasure of slivovice; and

through Helena, a young local girl who embodies the 'earthly marvellous' of this sleepy provincial backwater.

In her book, *Magical Realist Cinema in East Central Europe* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), Aga Skrodzka notes how Jakub, afflicted by boredom before his move away from the town, personifies Max Weber's proclamation about the spirit-numbing results of modernity; "the fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and above all by the disenchantment of the world" (155). Jakub becomes enchanted once in the garden, however, and Šulik's cinematographer, Martin Štrba, creates a rich tapestry of images which capture the countryside as a place of small, ordinary, tactual miracles: hands kneading dough, climbing apple trees to shake fruit onto sheets below; the cider press cogs crushing the fallen fruit. All of these work towards imparting a "sense of enchantment that [Jakub is] experiencing through renewing and reactivating his investment in the world" (79).

Towards the end of the film, Jakub's father comes to stay with his son at the house. Finally reconciled, sitting together in the wintery orchard, they turn to see Helena levitating effortlessly above the small garden table. Jakub has become completely aligned with Helena through his prolonged rural immersion and looks on calmly and acceptingly at this extraordinary vision, not batting an eyelid. In that moment, we understand that Jakub, through Helena's teachings, has finally abandoned the rationalism of modernity for the wisdom of the irrational. Jakub's father, moved by such a transcendent sight, concedes that "at last, everything is as it should be."

Jakub's rural re-enchantment is conveyed through the film's magical realist approach, soaking it in a type of fairy-tale mysticism. Each realistic detail of the house, however rotted, rusted and ragged, seems to glow from within, as though inhered with magic, just as much an embodiment of fantasy as a figurative representation of reality. This idea of using magical realism to re-mystify modernist thinking and, more specifically, to re-enchant contemporary rural landscape, is central to my own film practice. In her taxonomic analysis of magical realist fiction, *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative* (Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), Wendy Faris describes how "magical realism imbricates the extraordinary within the ordinary" through an "accumulation of realistic details to describe an impossible event" (90). By combining realistic representation with fantastic elements, my research posits that the marvellous dimensions of British rural space grow organically within the ordinary.

The term magical realism has become synonymous with the modernist literature of Latin American novelists like Alejo Carpentier, Garbriel Garcia Márquez and Mário de Andrade. For Anne Hegerfeldt, this meshing of realist and fantastical elements is rooted in the postcolonial tension between "irreconcilable opposites", specifically "a dominant rational-scientific 'Western' and a marginalized mythical 'native' world view" (63). However, my thesis proposes that these magical realist techniques are equally valid when they are transplanted to British soils. In her essay on British magical realism, "Contentious Contributions: Magical Realism goes British" (Janus Head, 2002), Hegerfeldt observes that magic realist fiction "argues for a revaluation of alternative modes of thought not only from within a specifically postcolonial perspective" but also "on a more general level" (64). For

Hegerfeldt, “marginalised modes of thought are not restricted to (post)colonial cultures but exist also in Western settings” (64). Indeed, Britain’s rural landscapes resonate with their own unique and complex processes of cultural loss and recovery. Although I would argue that Britain is a post-colonial territory in its own right (England may have never suffered the bloody traumas of colonialism on its own soils, yet it has of course inflicted colonialism on other countries all over the world including the other three nations which comprise the British Isles), my thesis proposes that magical realist perspectives offer an alternative way of knowing the world which moves us not only beyond the rational-scientific but also helps us to transcend dominant economic, political and cultural hegemonies as well.

Magical realist elements are woven throughout *Valley* as a way of re-mystifying landscape. Through its sparse narrative, the film tells the story of Samuel, a lonely widower who, as described above, returns to the mountain valleys of North Wales where he once lived with his late wife, Eleanor. He visits several different locations in the valley, all of them places that the couple have experienced together. Samuel takes a natural object from each of these; moss and bracken from the forest, water and berries from the hillside, and a sound recording of the wind and grasses from the ruins of the valley floor. Each place visited becomes a site of private pilgrimage; each natural ingredient harvested becomes a sacred relic inherited with sensory memory not only of the natural landscapes themselves but of time spent within them with Eleanor. When Samuel returns home to his small terraced house at the mouth of the valley, he sets about making a perfume-elixir from the foraged items, adding ingredients taken, we may presume, from similar, earlier pilgrimages. Finally distilled, Samuel applies this ointment to his

body and sets off to the hillside where he waits for his wife. Eleanor finally arrives, drawn by the scent of this strange perfume, and the two are at last reunited.

*Valley* occupies the same liminal territory between fabular and real which Faris identifies in her definition of magical realism, the place where the “marvellous seems to grow organically within the ordinary, blurring the distinction between them” (26). Each furrow and crag of Nantlle is intricately mapped through photography and sound to produce a cinematic geography rich in specificity. This layering of ordinary, often mundane, real world detail (the small local shops in Penygroes; the Tupperware containers; the Vauxhall Astra) with close perceptual detail (footfall on pine needles; the hiss of distillation; liquid glistening on skin) combines to promote a “strong sense of the phenomenal world” (18), one of Faris’s key requisites for magical realism, and the quality which distinguishes *Valley*’s fictional world from pure fantasy and allegory.

Within Faris’s taxonomy, the woman’s resurrection from the dead in *Valley* can be understood as an “irreducible element”, an event which “we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe as we know them” (167). In a narrative that otherwise seems to be a *representation* of reality, we become disorientated. *Valley* is built from such slippages between the real and the fabular. Each item that Samuel collects, each jam jar of water, handful of ferns and pinch of moss, is ontologically real. And yet, each item is also a sacred relic both of the landscape and the human relationship lived within it. Faris notices how we instinctively seek to interpret these instances of magic “in an otherwise realistic fiction as nothing more than allegory” (85). The magic is then easily dealt with, cauterized and explained away by rationalizing it as having a symbolic meaning

and nothing more. However, the very 'realism' of magical realism (the "non-allegorical thrust of realistic narrative conventions" (21)) works against such reductionism. The film's rural magic thus becomes readable as both symbolic and non-symbolic, sitting at the confluence of the allegorical and the actual. For example, the ointment which Samuel creates in his homemade still is made from natural, botanical ingredients such as flower buds, leaves, berries and grasses. And yet it is also made from the sensory, olfactorial memories of the places which imbue them. It is similarly understandable both as the ointment for a funeral rite to join Eleanor in death and a necromancer's potion to summon Eleanor back to life. Ordinary and extraordinary, metaphor and literality overlap constantly, creating hybrid realities which are neither fully fantastical nor fully real, allowing miraculous events to become an accepted part of the everyday.

The second practical project, *Inheritors*, explores these magical realistic depictions of the British countryside in further detail. The film references a myriad of shape-shifting and animal metamorphosis myths like the Orkney Selkie or the Korean Kumiho. The presence of this bird-girl and fish-boy in the film's third and last chapter provides an "irreducible element" of magic within a fictional world that is otherwise quite recognisable as our own. The fields of oilseed rape above Newhaven and the modern bungalows of Denton and Bishopstone place us in the approximate here and now of rural and suburban East Sussex. *Inheritors* is largely devoid of the same geographical and temporal specificity that defined *Valley*, and rural landscapes, domestic interiors and costumes are purposefully shorn of particularising realist detail. The film is, however, rich with an embodied, material realism instead. Peter's hands swaying in rockpools, Cecile's fingers digging into soil and leaf mulch, dappled sunlight endlessly shifting upon forest

floor; the two protagonists are rooted in the earth through these haptic details and exist in a landscape which imparts the “presence of the phenomenal world” (169) just as *Valley* does.

*Inheritors* also allows us to experience what Faris describes as “the closeness or near-merging of two realms, two worlds” (172). Human and animal realms intersect; Cecile is part-bird and Peter part-fish, blurring regular biological distinctions between man, woman and beast. A similar dissolution of boundaries between species exists in Frammartino’s *Le Quattro Volte*. The film is made up of four chapters inspired by Pythagoras’s theories of the transmigration of souls between all living matter; human, animal, vegetable and mineral. In the first chapter, an old goatherd becomes unwell and makes a medicine out of the dust swept from an ancient church floor; the second chapter follows the life cycle of a young goat from birth onwards; the third chapter is the study of a fir tree, concluding when the tree is chopped down to be displayed in the village square; the fourth and final chapter shows how the tree is made into charcoal for the townspeople’s fires. Through this structuring method, Frammartino gives the animal, vegetable and mineral realms as much importance as the human narrative.

The interspecies merging and overlapping of realms which occurs in Frammartino’s representation of the Calabrian countryside, as well as in my own representations of British countryside, conjure up a narrative space which Faris describes as the “ineffable in-between” (88), the space where the magical and the real co-exist with each other. Crucially, Faris points out that this space is not “any recognizable supernatural realm, such as a secret garden, heaven [or]

underworld” (45). On the contrary, the subtle magic that Frammartino implies through these cyclical movements of life between the elderly goat herd and the baby goat, and the magic we witness in Peter and Cecile’s hybridised animal-human forms, are woven from nature itself, an organic magic born from and descriptive of the natural immanence of rural landscape, where the divine suffuses every rock, plant, beast and human equally. From these magical realist perspectives, rural landscape is cast not as the site of uncanny, supra-natural transcendental magic but instead as one of natural, holistic immanence. In *Inheritors*, the past is inherited within the modern, death is inherited within life, and wakefulness is inherited within dream. Empirical classifications are dissolved and boundaries between animal, plant and human, become permeable. I am able to finally move beyond mimesis in my portrayal of the rural “to a re-representation (new perception) of reality” (140) which aims to re-enchant landscape for filmmaker and viewer alike.

#### **4.4 Representing rural temporality**

There is a second, *temporal* ‘merging of realms’ in both of my films. In its appropriation of ancient folk stories, *Inheritors* collapses past into present to create a fictional world where mythological time and contemporary time bleed together. The animist communities of the first two chapters exist in an abstracted primeval past which is geographically and historically ambiguous whilst the young descendants of these communities, Peter and Cecile, live in the present-day Sussex countryside. The peculiar and exaggerated compression of time which takes place between the first two chapters and the final chapter of the film defies naturalistic temporal plausibility. However, this concerted temporality emphasises just how much the ancient inheres within the modern countryside,



with ancient therianthropic mythologies and superstitions finally becoming flesh and bone and taking on an embodied form in the two shy heroes.

Faris see these magical realist temporalities as a liberation from realism's rigid temporal conventions. She refers to Fredric Jameson's ideas about realist temporalities: "[if] realism's spatial homogeneity abolishes the older forms of sacred space [then] the newly measuring clock and measurable routine replace older forms of ritual, sacred or cyclical time." As Faris exclaims, "even as we read Jameson's description, we sense the erosion of this programme by magical realist texts" (23-24). Indeed, magical realism, in the way that it enables time to liquidise, helps us to engage with the unique qualities of rural temporality. Rural time is quite distinct from city time. As Jameson infers, city time is clock time, rational, linear, relentlessly metric and ultimately enslaving. This is industrial time, dictating when the modern citizen sleeps and wakes, punches in and out of work, pays the rent, eats a meal, does the shopping and goes on holiday. Although not immune to this inflexible, chronometric tyranny, the countryside offers a glimpse of an alternative, less empirically measured and apportioned temporality. In *Film Trilogies; New Critical Approaches* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), Raymond Depardon discusses representations of rural time in his film trilogy *Profils Paysans* (2001), particularly the difference between city time and country time: "time functions in a different way here. People in Paris almost certainly eat breakfast more quickly...here time is connected to light, to season" (198). Depardon pinpoints the more organic qualities of rural time here, where living rhythms are not decreed by cogs or LCD screens but instead by the cyclical patterns of daylight, weather and season.

These annular patterns of rural temporality become an important focus point within my practical research. They juxtapose strongly with the linear, human conception of time, time as a social construct used to mark out the key events of our daily lives. In *Inheritors*, the linear, anthropocentric definition of time loses currency, dissolved not only by the eternally recurring ebb and flow of nature but also replaced by a temporality where ancient myths and oral tradition still haunt the contemporary landscape. These two conceptions of time appear irreconcilable. However, at key moments in *Valley* and *Inheritors*, nature's circular time and man's carefully measured chronologies intersect and bleed together. Eleanor's reincarnation, returned to life by Samuel's organic alchemy, absorbs the couple within the tidal rhythms of rural time and rejoins human life with nature's perpetual cycles.

Faris likens these disruptions and slippages in time, space and identity within magical realism to shamanism. Transitioning between different perceptions of the world, realistic and fantastical, and intertwining plausible eventhood with irreducible element, magical realist texts produce a "defocalization of the narrative" (48). Faris posits that this 'defocalisation' and destabilisation "resembles the performance of a shaman" in the way that they "imaginatively negotiate different realms, joining the everyday world of concrete reality and the land of the spirits" (75). As with a shamanic performance, these magical realist perspectives suggest the existence of "a different kind of reality contiguous to or within their ordinary one" (75). As part of her analogy between shamanism and magical realism, Faris draws an important comparison between the curative powers of shamanistic practice and the healing potential of magical realism. She describes how the shaman enters an altered state of consciousness "on behalf

of his community...to cure individuals of diseases or to heal community wounds” (80). These ideas of healing are fundamental to my own occupation of rural space as a film practitioner. In their suturing of mythical time and the material present, both *Valley* and *Inheritors* propose alternative ways to perceive rural landscapes outside of empirical explanation. Through this sensorial re-enchantment, rural space is finally returned to us and the hegemonies of ownership and possession which erode these landscapes are quietly yet convincingly resisted.

#### 4.5 An invitation to dream

*The most prevalent and debilitating cinematic myth is that of realism and naturalism – where the cinematic world is taken to be an ontological analogue of a real world.*

~ Darren Ambrose, *The Problem with Realism and Naturalism*

Building on these ideas of healing and recovery further, I use the film project, *Inheritors*, to enquire about the deep relationships between rural space, cinema practice, human imagination and dream, particularly how they invite new ways of seeing countryside and being within it. My thesis posits that imagination has been overlooked within phenomenological film thought. Writing about the phenomenology of imagination in his essay, “The Oneiric Film; Refocusing the Film-Dream Analogy from an Existential Phenomenological Perspective” (QMU, 2017), Simon Dickson observes that, “with its emphasis on corporeality, embodiment, and the outward appearance of the world, recent phenomenology has revealed very little on dreams, and by extension, the relationship between film and dream” (6). Although Dickinson refers specifically here to the discussion of dreams within cinema, his remark points towards a more general neglect of

human imagination by a “corporeally biased film phenomenological community” (6). It is as though human imagination, like dream, is too ephemeral, vaporous and recondite to be approached from such physical paradigms and is rejected because of its apparent unreality. In fact, dream and imagination carry significant ontological weight. Writing in *The Visible and the Invisible* (NWU, 1969), Merleau-Ponty contests that imagination is rooted deep within the body and that it can be understood “not as a nihilation [...] but as the true *Stiftung* [foundation] of being” (262). Similarly, in *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement* (DIHC, 1988), Gaston Bachelard observes that “the imaginary is immanent in the real. It is not a state. It is human existence itself” (4). The rich affectivity of imaginative experience makes it a vital part of my spiritual and physical engagement with rural landscape. Far from being ‘unreal’, human imagination reveals key aspects about my emplacement within the countryside, and my research places great importance in imaginative experience as a vital part of our conscious engagement with rural landscape.

I use *Inheritors* to enquire how creative-imaginative processes emplace me within countryside. Whilst the last chapter of this film triptych employs magical realist techniques, the two preceding chapters are rooted in different approaches entirely. Both episodes are set in imaginary rural communities; geographical and historical exactitude is forsaken and replaced by a primitive minimalism which boils landscape down into a set of essentialized, iconographic images and sounds. In chapter one (*Sister Sea*), the coastal landscape that the tiny fishing community lives within is presented through a series of static monochrome images; rugged rocks, waves and spray, sea caves, a remote cottage. Similarly, the woodlands in chapter two (*God Forest*) are framed as pared down landscapes

as though to resemble medieval woodcut prints or black ink drawings: forest canopy, forest floor, roots and clearings. These coastal and forest landscapes are sourced from a wide array of places; North Devon's Hartland Peninsula, County Mayo in Western Ireland. coniferous and deciduous forests in Sussex (Friston), Wiltshire (Savernake) and Cumbria (Grizedale). However, used in synthesis, they produce two hermetically sealed, fictional worlds which stand far outside of contemporary realism or romanticized past. Instead, these worlds and the mythologies which resonate within them are products of my imagination which have grown out of my own emotional and haptic experience within real rural spaces.

In his work, *Landscape and Memory* (Harper Perennial, 2004), historian Simon Schama shows how rural landscapes inspire - and become encoded by - complex networks of mythology: "To see the ghostly outline of an old landscape beneath the superficial covering of the contemporary is to be made vividly aware of the endurance of core myths" (16). Throughout his book, Schama elaborates on the idea of landscape as cultural artefact. He describes the forest primeval as the birthplace of the German psyche and how the English romantic imagination mapped the myth of Arcadia onto the rolling hills and pastures of England. These correlations between rural topographies and enduring mythologies are seen from the specific viewpoint of the cultural historian; Schama pictures "a curious excavator of traditions" within these landscapes who "scratches away, discovering bits and pieces of a cultural design...which leads him deeper into the past" (16). Crucially, I do not envisage my film practice from these same archaeological perspectives. Tracing the origins of these myths is fascinating but my thesis is more concerned with the creative processes which spawn them and

the processes by which these figments of human imagination are engendered through our occupation of rural land. Rather than using existing myths as source material for my work, I am interested instead to invent new ones as part of my dwelt experience of the countryside.

On page 44 of my thesis, I describe how Sobchack uses the story of Hansel and Gretel to invoke the phenomenological sensation of getting lost. For Sobchack, such an embodied understanding of space represents an important alternative to cartographic rationality. It is significant that the writer turns to fairytales to describe these affective experiences. Sobchack's metaphor triggers a sequence of rich inner landscapes in her reader; crepuscular forests, breadcrumb trails, gingerbread houses and talking woodland beasts. This imagery reminds us of the intrinsic bond between countryside and folk tale. Moreover, it feels strongly aligned with my own interest in the relationship between rural space and fabulation. The thesis speculates that our (re)emplacement within the land depends on this act of mythopoesis, of mythology *making*; the imaginative-creative process enables us to weave our bodies and spirits deeply into landscape and to become rejoined with it.

Mythopoesis is an integral part of my dwelt perspective in *Inheritors*. In the part called *Sister Sea*, a tiny coastal village worships a God Whale. Life revolves around rituals of devotion towards this divine animal. According to legend, the children of those who drown during the whale hunts are born part-sea creature. In *God Forest*, the inhabitants of a hamlet worship a forest spirit. Rituals of devotion for the forest dictate their lives. According to legend, the children of those who perish inside the holy forest are born part-woodland creature. These

hybrids of fairy tale and faux anthropology are the products of an imaginative-creative process which come from my extended immersion within coastal and forest landscapes. A half-remembered documentary about Alaskan Iñupiat hunting customs, a photo book of Carpathian hunters and shepherds, an old Finnish folk song played late at night on Radio Three. Sat in Friston forest, wondering across the fields above Denton or rockpooling at Hope Gap, these fragments of memories return to me and merge with my imagination. Set dreaming by the familiar landscapes of rural Sussex, I set about populating them with the characters and stories of half-forgotten memories and half-remembered stories.

#### **4.6. Beyond acoustic ecology**

In *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter* (DIHC, 1994), Bachelard explores this relationship between human imagination, memory, creativity and nature: "...mankind imagining is the transcendent aspect of *natura-naturans*. All metaphors aside, there must be a union of dream-producing and idea-forming activities for the creation of a poetic work. Art is grafted nature." (10). For Bachelard, what seems to make nature truly sublime is its ability to make humans dream and imagine. Within these terms, landscape becomes spiritual for the way it nourishes our creative imagination and creative process. As Eileen Rizo-Patron observes in *Adventures in Phenomenology* (SUNY Press, 2017), for Bachelard "nature's transcendent aspect takes on concrete manifestation...when taken as an agency of creative evolution (*litterature litteraturans*), rather than when understood simply as a created product" (202).

Bachelard's conception of nature as an invitation to dream and imagine, and this understanding that dreaming and imagining are continuous and perpetual processes, provides an important foundation for my work as a sound recordist and sound designer in *Inheritors*. As mentioned in chapter three (pp. 56-60), Murray Schafer's notions of acoustic ecology and soundscape, and the ideals of tranquility and specificity that they enshrine, influence my aural representation of the countryside. This model of acoustic ecology can be condensed into two interconnected ideas. Firstly, through notions of 'hi-fi' (as opposed to lo-fi) soundscapes and 'sound marks', Schafer's "*tuning of the world*" is in fact understandable as a call for the silencing or quietening of the countryside, as though noise was a pollutant from the post-industrial world which rural space needs to be protected against. Secondly, Schafer uses the term "schizophonia" to criticise the practice of splitting an original sound from its native source to create its electroacoustic reproduction. Schafer is suspicious of this perceptual split of sound and concerned by the way that recorded sound decontextualizes sound from its original environment to create a sort of sensual alienation: "A character in one of Borges' stories dreads mirrors because they multiply men. The same might be said of radio. As the cry broadcasts distress, the loudspeaker communicates anxiety...modern life has been ventriloquized" (91).

The sound recordist Francisco Lopez argues that Schafer's sound philosophy stands against more creative approaches to field recording. In his online essay, "Schizophonia vs l'Objet Sonore" (1997), he interprets 'schizophonia' as a negation of the "possibility of isolating sound properties from an environment and using them - by themselves alone - for any human endeavor, such as artistic creation" (12). He turns to composer Pierre Schaeffer's idea of '*objet sonore*'



[sound object] to oppose this conservative sound ideology. As Lopez explains, Pierre Schaeffer uses the *objet sonore* as part of his conception of *musique concrète* to describe how recorded sound achieves autonomy from its source, becoming an independent entity in its own right. Within this conception of sound, attention shifts away from the physical object that causes the auditory perception back towards the content of the perception itself.

This tension between Schaferian and Schaefferian perspectives that Lopez identifies sits at the heart of my cinema practice and my representation of countryside as a filmmaker. *Valley* seeks to replicate the Nantlle and Croesor valleys in all their aural specificity, producing a film sound design which is closely aligned with Schafer's ideology, particularly his idea of a "radical radio" (29) which sought for natural soundscapes to be broadcast in a field recording manner, devoid of any manipulation or editing:

The plan was to put microphones in remote locations uninhabited by humans and to broadcast whatever might be happening out there; the sounds of wind and rain, the cries of bird and animals – all the uneventful events of the natural soundscape transmitted without editing into the hearts of the cities" (29).

However, whilst this auditory approach satisfies my need to meticulously document and curate rural landscape, it fails to satisfy my need to invent and create. Rather than closing doors on the natural worlds located within the experiential world and casting us out from these rural landscapes, I contend that the creative re-arranging, re-purposing and re-imagining of rural sound - made possible by untethering sound from its source and context - opens doors to new phenomenological worlds instead. Whilst Lopez acknowledges the importance of

the real environment, he explains that “it is an essential feature of the human condition to artistically deal with any aspect of this reality”(12), adding that “what is under question here is the extent of artistic freedom with regards to other aspects of understanding our reality” (12). Lopez makes these points in relation to his own particular work as an experimental sound artist, but they are applicable to my approach to film sound as well as to my filmmaking practice more widely. For Lopez, there can only be “a documentary reason to keep the cause-object relationship in the work with soundscapes, never an artistic/musical one” (12). In *Inheritors*, I allow myself to transcend the documentarian impulse of preserving and archiving British rural sound as pristine, unmanipulated soundscape and re-purpose these field recordings to express a non-realistic, oneiric, fairytale approach to landscape instead.

Many of the sounds used in *Inheritors* are location recordings made within the same landscapes that the film is set within; the sibilant, cyclical ebb and flow of tidal waters at Hartland Point in Devon; the calm lapping of rock pools at Hope Gap; the forest atmospheres (bird song, canopy rustle, bough creek, bird song) at Friston forest and Abbots Wood; the sway of crops, bleating of sheep and white noise of crickets in the fields above Denton and Bishopstone. However, these field recordings were not made in the same identical locations as the photographic landscapes. These sounds do not seek to replicate with any perspectival or horological accuracy the positioning of the camera during principal photography. Instead, these location recording atmospheres were made weeks, even months after the filming process as I walked by myself along the many small lanes which branched off from the South Downs Way, or by the shore at Newhaven or Tide Mills. This absence of total synchronicity results in a subtle

slippage between sound and image within the film. There is clearly the semblance of a material relationship between the two, with sound and picture corresponding closely with each other up to a point. However, a slight disconnect prevents the viewer from engaging with these film landscapes fully as an 'ontological analogue of a real world'.

In addition to the synchronous-asynchronous ambiguity of the ambient sound recordings, all of the principle diegetic sound effects used within the film are recorded separately as Foley recordings. Sounds of sea water being cupped in hands and splashed over the face; sounds of the forest floor being cleared before fingers plunge in the soil to gather objects for the hunting ritual; sounds of shells and stones being lifted from the rock pools: these haptic encounters between the film characters and the land they live within are auralised by Foleyed sounds. Whilst they form a true synchronous relationship with the actions on screen, the delicate sounds, recorded under studio conditions with a closely placed directional microphone, are mixed unnaturally loud and take a peculiar precedence on the film soundtrack. These Foleyed recordings are also left untreated in the mix, neither equalized nor processed with an appropriate amount of reverb in post-production to organically embed them with the ambient location recordings. This gives the recordings a strange status within the diegesis; they proclaim to be a part of the story world, yet they call attention to their own manufacturedness and artificiality.

Perhaps most importantly, the sound design of *Inheritors* is characterised by what is left unsounded. *Valley* creates an authentic and immersive sound world through its multiple layers of location field atmospheres, sync recording tracks

and postproduction Foley effects to create a highly intricate auralisation of rural space which is rich in specificity and local detail. By contrast, the soundtrack of *Inheritors* is uncluttered and sparse. Instead of seeking to build up a naturalistic representation of place through a dense tapestry of sonic detail, the film uses a smaller palate of sounds to create an abstracted, impressionistic and musicalised sense of rural space.

The three chapters which comprise *Inheritors* each start off with a fairly conventional sound design conferring a naturalistic quality upon each of the respective narratives. In *Sister Sea*, Mary collects rocks, shells and sea water from the shore to place in her shrine as part of her prayers to the whale. The sound seems synchronous, perspectival and diegetic; ambient recordings of wind, ocean waves, gulls and the splashing and splashing of Mary foraging for her sacred items amongst the rock pools. Similarly, in *God Forest*, we begin the film with Yulia and Gregor at the outskirts of the forest, Yulia collecting items for Gregor to use in his prayers to the spirits. Again, ambient sounds of the forest sit beneath the diegetic bodily presence of the young couple. However, as each chapter progresses, the soundtrack becomes slowly detached from its rational, realistic correspondence with image, morphing between diegesis and non-diegesis, and dissolving the boundaries between synchronicity and asynchronicity. When Gregor says goodbye to Yulia before entering the innermost sanctums of the forest, the ambient location recordings are suffused with a mournful, electronic drone. This inorganic, dissonant texture cannot be assigned a diegetic purpose within the story world nor an extra-diegetic narrative function. Instead, these abstract textures are used in conjunction with all the other sonic elements of the film to produce a musical sound world which collapses the

discrete relationships between woodland environment, the characters' inner lives and our own spiritual lives as spectators into each other, making them osmotic instead.

When Gregor is alone in the dense coniferous heart of the forest, he enters into a state of profound meditation to prepare himself for the hunt. The ambient recordings of the Sussex woodland are taken in the same location that I used for filming. However, these recordings were made several weeks later during dusk and in very windy conditions. The whispering sounds of the wind in the fir trees have also been manipulated within my sound design. Instead of laying in the sounds unaltered, I pitch shifted the audio down several semitones and applied convolution reverb to the mix based on the Impulse Response of an old cathedral. As Gregor falls deeper into his prayer-trance, the amount of reverb increases to the point that it becomes an abstracted wall of noise unrecognizable as the forest atmosphere it started off as. There is no noticeable reverb in the original field recording of these creaks and sighs of the wind in the tree branches. Through processing, I have interiorized the forest within the acoustic space of a cathedral, decontextualizing their dry organic sounds and infusing them with a sense of the sacred majesty that the large, cavernous reverb tail connotes. Finally, when Gregor spots his quarry, the ambient location recordings of the Sussex forests are supplemented with jungle and tropical rain forest recordings taken from BBC natural history sound libraries made by BBC sound recordist Chris Watson. By mixing indigenously sourced sound recordings with other field recordings, we become unanchored from the specificity of the original recordings and ascend to a dreamt, imagined sense of forest and jungle instead.

Through the creative and experimental use of field recordings, *Inheritors* invokes my creative imagination as a film practitioner. I am invited to dream, invent and mythologise through sound rather than to passively record and chronicle. This re-enchantment of rural space through creative and imaginative investment returns us to the questions of realism which run throughout the thesis. The Schaefferian patchworking and reworking of rural field recordings, in combination with the dense bricolage of memories and recollections - personal and found - which *Inheritors's* mythological story world is built from, counterpoints Penz's idea of "topographical coherence" and conforms strongly instead with his idea of "creative geography". In many respects, *Inheritors* shares the same collaging of the countryside that Higson identifies within the heritage film. Indeed, within the strict paradigms of naturalism, this seems to belie cinematic realism. However, if *Valley* sought spatial authenticity as a prerequisite for haptic immersion within rural space, *Inheritors* uses these composites of place, story and sound to engender rich emotional truth within us. These mythopoetic kingdoms may not be physically real, but they hold dense ontological weight within the body-imaginary and are emotionally and sensorially real.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis proposes a new kind of landscape cinema which challenges existing representations of the British countryside and reinvigorates existing discourse about rural space on film. Recognising the tendency for film thought to read countryside textually as a collection of discursive symbols, my practice enquires about the British landscape from intimate, embodied and felt perspectives instead, dissolving the borders between land and landscape. By moving the rich discourse on cinema landscape away from figuration and engaging with the British countryside through the sensorium of the body, my research opposes ideological and symbolic readings and finds new ways of describing rural space which are sensuous and tactile instead.

The thesis applies the phenomenological theories of Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks to propose new ways of framing rural space haptically through cinematography and sound recording. Significantly, my work builds on Marks's original idea of 'haptic visuality' and proposes a kind of 'haptic listening' instead. By testing Nancy's conception of listening as "sonorous resonance", my research concludes that a sound-led rural cinema can be known by the body better than a purely image-led one. This challenging of the ocularcentric portrayal of rural space in film is critical for another reason. By placing the aural on an equal footing with the visual, the thesis subverts the colonising or imperialistic gaze which frequently accompanies depictions of the land, and in doing so, suggests a new kind of cinema that gently resists the values of British cultural hegemony. To touch rather than to grasp, to experience rather to possess, to feel rather than to control; through these dwelt perspectives, alive to soil and mud as well as dream and imagination, I propose a British rural cinema which reclaims the countryside

from the few and invites a new kind of occupation of rural space based on tenure and guardianship rather than acquisition and ownership.

Through these ideas of lived and felt space, my work also proposes a fundamental reconception of the natural sublime in cinema. Using the discourse of the feminine sublime to challenge the normative idea of dominance over nature, the thesis proposes a new rural sublime based on immanence. Facing human-created environmental crisis, this immanent sublime can help us begin to dismantle our hierarchical relationship with nature.

The questioning of cinematic realism and naturalism is a fundamental part of my enquiry into embodied landscape filmmaking and my formulation of a new kind of rural sublime. *Valley* and *Inheritors* demonstrate that, whilst sensory realist techniques might succeed in producing a sensorial immersion within rural space, they often fail to account for our oneiric and imaginative occupation of it. Dissatisfied with the neglect of the imaginary within recent film phenomenology, the thesis argues that dream and creative imagination are essential components of the human sensorium, critical not only for our sensory experience of the countryside but also our immanent relationship with it. Through the use of magical realism in *Valley*, I entwine mythical time and space within the rural here-and-now to re-enchant the British countryside. In *Inheritors*, I build hermetic rural worlds which, whilst recognisably British, resonate with their own unique myths and lore. The thesis proclaims that this rural fabulism can be shamanic and curative; the mixing of the real and the imaginary gives me a place to dream and a space to feel and allows me to re-enchant and re-occupy modern British rural space.



Rural landscapes, and the myths that they enshrine, have often been deployed by film as tools of propaganda to rouse patriotic sentiment and excite the national imaginary. In Brexit Britain, it feels vital to reclaim British landscape from the nostalgic narratives and imperial fantasies of Johnson's government. By emphasising the importance of creative imagination to our felt and dwelt relationship with the land; by arguing that (re)emplacement within land depends on an act of private mythopoesis, rather than the excavation of a pre-existing national mythology, my thesis challenges the conception of rural landscape as an expression of nationalism. Instead of constraining filmmaker and film viewer within ever-narrowing boundaries of nation and state, film landscapes unite us all in body and in spirit.

## WORKS CITED.

### Bibliography

Arnheim, Rudolph. *Film as Art*. University of California Press, 1957.

Attié, Katherine B. "Regendering the Sublime and the Beautiful." *Routledge Companion to Women, Sex, and Gender in the Early British Colonial World*, edited by Kimberly Anne Coles and Eve Keller, Routledge, 2018.

Bachelard, Gaston. *Water and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Matter*. Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1988 (originally 1942).

Bachelard, Gaston. *Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*. Dallas Institute of Humanities and Culture, 1994.

Barnett, David. "Folk realism: The literature exploring England's legends and landscapes." *Independent.co.uk*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Mar. 2018.

[https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long\\_reads/folk-realism-english-literature-countryside-legends-landscape-nature-gothic-writers-fantasy-a8234691.html](https://www.independent.co.uk/news/long_reads/folk-realism-english-literature-countryside-legends-landscape-nature-gothic-writers-fantasy-a8234691.html).

Boehler, Natalie. "The Jungle as Border Zone: the aesthetics of nature in the work of Apichatpong Weerasethakul." *ASEAS (Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies)*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2011, pp. 290-304.

Bruno, Giuliana. *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture, and Film*. Verso, 2002.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Oxford UP, 2015.

Carroll, Noel. *Mystifying Movies: Fad and Fallacies of Contemporary Film Theory*. Columbia UP, 1988.

Chattopadhyay, Budhaditya. "Reconstructing atmospheres: Ambient sound in film and media production." *Communication and the Public*, vol. 2, no. 4, 2017, pp. 352-364.

Chattopadhyay, Budhaditya. "Sonic menageries: Composing the sound of place." *Organized Sound*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2012, pp. 223–229.

Chion, Michel. *Audio-Vision*. Columbia UP, 1994.

Clarke, David B. and Marcus A. Doel. "From flatland to vernacular relativity: the genesis of early English screenscapes." *Film and Landscape*, edited by Martin Lefebvre. Routledge, 2006. pp. 213-243.

Cosgrove, Denis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984.

Dallas, Paul. "Into the Woods: Director Michelangelo Frammartino Talks About His Mesmerizing Installation Work Alberi." *Filmmakermagazine.com*. Jan. 10<sup>th</sup>, 2014.

<https://filmmakermagazine.com/83356-into-the-woods-director-michelangelo-frammartino-talks-about-his-mesmerizing-installation-work-alberi/#>.

De Luca, Tiago. *Realism of the Senses in World Cinema*. I.B. Tauris, 2013.

Dickson, Simon. *The Oneiric Film: Refocusing the Film–Dream Analogy from an Existential Phenomenological Perspective*. MA Thesis, Queen Mary, University of London.

Faris, Wendy B. *Ordinary Enchantments: Magical Realism and the Remystification of Narrative*. Vanderbilt UP, 2004.

Feld, Steven. *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics and Song in Kaluli*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990.

Fish, Robert, editor. *Cinematic Countrysides*. Manchester UP, 2014.

Fowler, Catherine and Gilian Helfield, editors. *Representing the Rural: Space, Place and Identity in Films about the Land*. Wayne State UP, 2006.

Fowler, Catherine. "Symphonie Paysanne: An Embodied and Embedded Picturing of the Land." *Representing the Rural: Space, Place and Identity in Films about the Land*, edited by Catherine Fowler and Gilian Helfield, Wayne State UP, 2006. pp.135-149.

Fox, Ken. "In Praise of the Inauthentic: The Fighting Prince of Donegal's Cinematic Landscape." *Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography*, edited by Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner. Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2010. pp.10-24.

Freeman, Barbara Claire. *The Feminine Sublime: gender and excess in women's fiction*. University of California Press, 1995.

Frostrup, Mariella. "Robert MacFarlane on Landmarks." *Open Book*, BBC Radio Four, 12 Mar. 2015. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b054pfn9>.

Glushneva, Iuliia. *Embodied Spectatorship: Phenomenological Turn in Contemporary Film Theory*. 2017. University of Kansas. MA dissertation. KU ScholarWorks.

Hanich, Julian and Christian Ferencz-Flatz, editors. "What is Film Phenomenology?" *Studia Phaenomenologica: "Film and Phenomenology"*, vol.16, 2016, pp.11-61.

Harper, Graeme and Jonathan Rayner, editors. *Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography*. Intellect, The University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Harper, Sue. "The ownership of woods and water: landscapes in British cinema

1930-1960.” *Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography*, edited by Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner, The University of Chicago Press, 2010. pp.147-161.

Hegerfeldt, Anne. “Contentious Contributions: Magic Realism goes British.” *Janus Head: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature, Continental Philosophy, Phenomenological Psychology, and the Arts*, vol.5, no.2, 2002. pp.62-86.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Wiley-Blackwell, 1978.

Heidegger, Martin. *Poetry, Language and Thought*. Harper Perennial, 1975.

Higson, Andrew. *English Heritage. English Cinema: Costume Drama since 1980*. Oxford UP, 2006.

Higson, Andrew. *Film England: Culturally English Filmmaking since the 1990s*. I.B. Tauris, 1990.

Hockenull, Stella, editor. *Aesthetics and Neoromanticism in Film: Landscapes in Contemporary British Cinema*. I.B. Tauris, 2013.

Hoffman, Roald and Iain Boyd Whyte, editors. *Beyond the Finite: The Sublime in Art and Science*, Oxford UP, 2011.

Hoffman, Roald and Iain Boyd Whyte. *Beyond the Finite: The Sublime in Art and Science*. Oxford UP, USA, 2011.

Hubbard, Phil and Eleanor Wilkinson. “Walking a lonely path: gender, landscape and ‘new nature writing’.” *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 26, 2018.

Hurley, Andrew Michael. *The Loney*. Mariner Books, 2014.

Ingold, Tim. “The Temporality of the Landscape.” *World Archaeology*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Oct., 1993, pp.152-174.

Jaffe, Ira. *Slow Movies: Countering the Cinema of Action*. Wallflower Press, 2014.

Jamie, Kathleen. “A Lone Enraptured Male.” *London Review of Books*, vol. 30, no. 5, 2008, pp. 25.

Johnson, Daisy. *Fen*. Vintage, 2017.

Kant, Immanuel. *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime and Other Writings*. California UP, 2004.

Kaplan, E. Ann. *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film and the Imperial Gaze*. Routledge, 2012.

Koepnick, Lutz. *The Long Take. Art Cinema and the Wondrous*. University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

Kracauer, Siegfried, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. Princeton UP, 1997.

Lane, Cathy and Angus Carlyle, editors. *In the Field: The Art of Field Recording* Uniformbooks, 2011.

Lefebvre, Martin, editor. *Landscape and Film*. Routledge, 2006.

Lopez, Francisco. "Schizophonia vs. l'objet sonore: soundscapes and artistic freedom." January 1997, <http://www.franciscolopez.net/schizo.html>.

McLoone, Martin. "Landscape and Irish Cinema." *Cinema and Landscape: Film, Nation and Cultural Geography*, edited by Graeme Harper and Jonathan Rayner, The University of Chicago Press, 2010. pp.131-147.

McLuhan, Marshall. "Visual and Acoustic Space", reprinted in Cox, Christopher and Warner, Daniel (editors) 2004, *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, New York and London, Continuum, pp. 67-72.

Macfarlane, Robert. *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot*. Penguin, 2013.

Marks, Laura U. *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*. Duke UP, 2000.

Mazdon, Lucy. "Profils Paysans: Raymond Depardon's Rural Trilogy." *Film Trilogies: New Critical Approaches*, edited by Claire Perkins and Constantine Verevis. Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Meinig, D.W, editor. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographical Essays*. Oxford UP, 1970.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible (Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy)*. Northwestern UP, 1969.

Monk, Janice. "Approaches to the Study of Women and Landscape." *Environmental Review: ER*, vol. 8, no. 1, 1984, pp. 23–33.

Moran, Joe. "A Cultural History of the New Nature Writing." *Literature & History*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2014, pp. 49–63.

Mozley, Fiona. *Elmet*. J M Originals, 2017.

Myers, Benjamin. *Beastings*. Bluemoose Books, 2014.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Listening*, Fordham UP, 2007.

Nash, Catherine. "Reclaiming Vision: Looking at landscape and the body." *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journey of Feminist Geography*, vol.3, no.2, 1996, pp.149-170.

Ong, Walter J., *Orality and Literacy*, Routledge, 2002.

Panthaky, Lucy. *Landscapes as Realms of Indistinction in Contemporary British Cinema*. MA Thesis, University of Kent, 2014.

Penz, François. "From Topographical Coherence to Creative Geography: Rohmer's *The Aviator's Wife* and Rivette's *Pont du Nord*." *Curating Architecture and the City*, edited by Sarah Chaplin and Alexandra Stara, Wallflower Press, pp.123-140.

Petrie, Duncan. *The British Cinematographer*, BFI Publishing, 1996.

Ray, Chris. *Soundscapes and the Rural: A Conceptual Review from a British Perspective*. Newcastle University, 2005.

Rayner, Jonathan. "Far from the Fatal Shore, Finding Meaning and Identity in the Rural Australian Landscape." *Cinematic Countrysides*, edited by Robert Fish. Manchester UP, 2014. pp.17-35.

Rizo-Patron, Eileen. *Adventures in Phenomenology*. SUNY Press, 2017.

Rose, Gillian. *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Polity Press, 1993.

Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. Vintage, 1996.

Schafer, Murray. *Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World*. Random House, 1977.

Shiel, Mark. *Cinema and the City: Film and Urban Societies in a Global Context*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.

Skrodzka, Aga. *Magic Realist Cinema in East Central Europe*. Edinburgh UP, 2012.

Sobchak, Vivian. *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience*. Princeton UP, 1991.

Sobchak, Vivian. *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, University of California Press, 2004.

Sobchak, Vivian. "Embodying transcendence: on the literal, the material, and the cinematic sublime." *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Arts and Belief*, vol.4, no.2, 2008, pp.194-203.

Thoreau, Henri-David. *Walden Or, Life in the Woods*. Penguin Classics, 2016.

Trigg, Dylan. *The Memory of Place*. Ohio UP, 2013.

Weber, Max. *Essays in Sociology*, Routledge, 2009.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. Oxford UP, 1973.

Wylie, John. *Landscape*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Yaeger, Patricia. "Toward a Female Sublime." *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, edited by Linda Kauffman, Blackwell, 1989.

### Filmography

Barnard, Clio, director. *Dark River*. Film 4, 2018.

Cole, Nigel, director. *Calendar Girls*, Touchstone Pictures, 2003.

Dickson-Leach, Hope, director, *The Levelling*. Peccadillo Pictures, 2016.

Frammartino, Michelangelo, director. *Le Quattro Volte*. ZDF/Arte, 2011.

Hardy, Robin, director. *The Wicker Man*. British Lion Films, 1973.

Ivory, James, director. *Howards End*. Merchant Ivory, 1992.

Lee, Ang, director. *Sense and Sensibility*. Columbia, 1995

Lee, Francis, director. *God's Own Country*. BFI, 2017.

MacGrath, Douglas, director. *Emma*. Matchmaker Films, 1996.

Meyers, Nancy, director. *The Holiday*. Sony Pictures, 2006.

Myhill, Guy, director. *The Goob*. BBC, 2014.

Rivers, Ben, director. *Two Years at Sea*. Soda Pictures, 2012.

Rohrwacher, Alice. *Happy as Lazzaro*. Tempesta, 2018.

Šulík, Martin, director. *Záhřada*. Czech In Film Praha, 1996.

Weerasethakul, Apichatpong, director. *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives*. Match Factory, 2010.

Wheatley, Ben, director. *A Field in England*. Film 4, 2013.

Wright, Joe, director. *Pride and Prejudice*. Studio Canal/Working Title, 2005.