

Kirsten Norrie

Wolfson College

'Cloth, Cull and Cocktail: Anatomising the Performer Body of "Alba" '

D.PHIL

Where and how can the live experience 'being there' be positioned in Scottish live art culture? Such transformatively liminal corporeity is situated in three examples of performative objects intrinsically linked to readings of Scottish identity. By collating a 'blood culture imprint' of 1970s performance art with Scottish live artist Alastair McLennan's positioning of the artist body as art, the thesis presents a revised understanding of how and where the live can be placed within Highland Gaelic culture. The specificity of this frame is intrinsically linked to the 'blood culture imprint' of Culloden and as such presents a liminal outworking in the three examples chosen which collectively portray an object body in the form of a textual anatomy of 'Scotland' or 'Alba'. Using contemporary live art discourse, the ontological origins of performance art in Scotland are situated as potentially live within the transfixed frame of the thesis itself, thereby positioning the authorship and readership of its contents as a revivifying act per se, reflecting the theoretical argument. I will argue that despite a seeming lack of performance art tradition in Scotland, this 'blood culture imprint' of the 1970s can be used to define Culloden and post-Culloden culture as necessarily animated by instances of live art. The examples chosen are James Clerk Maxwell's first colour photograph of a tartan ribbon, scalping survivor Scotsman Robert McGee's cabinet card and James MacPherson's Ossian repositioned as a post-genocide numinous wish text. Each performative object betrays its ontological origins, displaying a textual anatomy which argues that collating a performer body of 'Alba' can demonstrate a fundamental and historical performance culture.

ABSTRACT

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D.PHIL

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(Fig. 1) James Clerk Maxwell First Colour Photograph. Vivex imprint, 1937.

(Fig. 2) James Clerk Maxwell Magic Lantern Slides. Photographer Peter Stubbs, 2004.

Reproduced with kind permission of the James Clerk Maxwell Foundation.

(Fig. 3) Robert McGee Cabinet Card. Photographer E.E. Henry, 1890.

List of Abbreviations

For the ease of the reader I have discerned between Ossian the character and *Ossian* the text by placing the latter in italics.

'It is in vain to dream of a wildness distinct from ourselves.'

Henry Thoreau, Journal August 30, 1856.

I

Collating the Object Body:

Dissection

'Whether one can define the Being of some thing, without recourse to essence or a final truth. Performance, it seems, is never far from this lure. But the multiple lives of performance, dissected, represented, re-performed . . . suggest that one of performance's most consistent and returning conditions is transformation.' Adrian Heathfield - Then Again.

The structure of this thesis is designed to clarify and expound the ideas it traces by using a triptych of textual anatomies to examine Scottish performativity. The first chapter, *Performing the Object Body: Operation*, transfixes the first colour photograph by Scottish physicist James Clerk Maxwell, thematically operated on to perform multifarious, unfolding tartan embodiments. In the second, *Voicing the Object Body: Transfusion*, the hand-held 1890 cabinet card photograph of young Scots scalping victim Robert McGee is transfused with a cinematically ventriloquised Western narrative and *Grounding the Object Body - Transplantation*, culturally repositions *Ossian* as a numinous post-genocide wish text comparable to Sioux epic *Black Elk Speaks* through a lyrical repossession of James Douglas Morrison.

Transliterating these liminal corporeities that transiently fix or fixate frames of experiential Scottish identity, positions the thesis itself as dependent upon such framing and, as Amelia Jones acknowledges in reference to documentative analogies of performance culture, necessarily integrates a live trace element interdependent and contingent upon the themes explored and their subjective readership. '[. . .] no body,' she writes, 'no act is inherently

resistant to recontainment. And, correlatively, no body, no act, is inherently and fully containable.' ¹

These frames incorporate traces of anatomical and perceptual presence through three key translative technologies: early scientific colour projection understood as non-fixed photographics, nineteenth-century black and white photographic studio portraiture and typographic print as 'sounded'. Thus human technology itself is also deployed in the reception of each theme, requiring the reader to engage in specific corporeal interaction. In the final chapter on *Ossian*, the predominant somatic technology is cranial, the hearing board of teeth and bone, referenced earlier in relation to McGee and alternative readings of Elaine Scarry's speechlessness and pain, cited as soundings - pre-linguistic. The flash card reconstruction of McGee's cabinet card as flipped image and text also invites the reader to perform the theoretical suppositions of chapter two. The optical imagination is prefaced in the first chapter, asking the viewer to perceptually 'proof read' Maxwell's image of the tartan ribbon in ascertaining some of the claims made for it, thus pushing it beyond the scope of its initial functional appearance.

That such objects, metonymically and metaphorically extant as 'live' corpi in their own right necessitate a performative engagement beyond the nominal experience of disseminated reception is to invite encoded understandings of corporeity designated within material trace as performance and - in these instances - as Scottish performance art. As such, these overlapping frames are presented as a navigation of key instances where experience, by definition, becomes concomitant display culture made by perceptually vivified presence. This contribution locates Scottish objects and texts that apparently embody a keen perceptual sense of presence foregrounded in 'extreme' anatomy while appearing symptomatic of performative traces. It also questions, then, how those objects construct or magnify, complicate or eclipse an understanding

of a live act *beyond* their selves - what I will term the action impulse - which is seemingly forced to appear enacted retrospectively by dint of the revised frame of self awareness apparent in the conditions necessary to creating such artefacts. These instances include Maxwell selecting a tartan ribbon to present his tri-colour theory - one with associations so specific as to embody a compressed geology of tartan theory and culture and McGee's performative presence rattling any chronology or ontology with reference to his attack which, imported through a photographic schema, becomes rhetorical and thus performative but also subject to conditions of the imagined - errant, voluble and escapist. Against the 'live' backdrop of Culloden, MacPherson's edition of *Ossian* is particularly symptomatic of degenerative ontologies, reconstructed here to present a sithean or ghost coda, one in which chronology is collapsed, disembodiment inevitable. It is these frames which bleed, as contemporary discussions surrounding live art culture readily acknowledge; the crucibles of paper, flesh and text only just - but palpably - (re) configuring their meaning.

Consequently, whilst it is contentiously plausible that there is no definitive tradition of live art history in Scotland per se², contemporary discourse surrounding performative identity arguably enables its location in the very absence of the space it should occupy. The generalism of such a statement in verifying a seeming lack of live art history in Scotland, necessarily incorporates individual practitioners such as Alastair McLennan and Ross Sinclair. Sinclair could rightfully make claims to being the most prominent Scottish contemporary performance artist but his practice alone insufficiently substantiates a specifically Scottish movement. Similarly, McLennan, though Scottish by birth, started to make process based, durational body art only when he took up a post at the University of Ulster, contextualising the work within an experiential framework specific to Northern Irish political sensibility. It should be highlighted

that Richard DeMarco, crucial in curating seminal actions in the 1970s by Joseph Beuys and Paul Neagu, presented Scotland as a locus - 'a blank sheet of paper' for the exposure of key works, enabling international practitioners to engage with a cultural and topographical Scottish landscape. However, neither the argument against Sinclair nor McLennan convincingly dissociates Scottish art history from live corporeal identity. It is by their very *inappropriateness* in presenting performative presences of exile, isolation and temporal revivification that these islands of liveness in Scotland presciently surmise the very state of disembodied cultural experience itself - albeit manifesting at the heart of Highland consciousness.

Equally compelling and problematic is an increasing contemporary perception of the performative as latent within all fine art genres, symptomatic of aspects of human agency, for example, haptic visuality and live ontology, which can be cogently dissected to display multifarious states of embodiment, disembodiment and re-embodiment in a variety of material and conceptual contexts. These mimetic 'selves', constructed, displayed and disseminated as art works in and of themselves, but additionally as mediating entities of evident trace elements sometimes more succinct, 'live' or present than the body art work itself and always inscribed through dissemination, encounter or reception via audience authentication, are implicated with a sense of somatics, insofar as the art work has been enabled by some form of human intent. This both simplifies and complicates the argument; the immense permissiveness evident in such a position enables a vast corpus of Scottish art historical performative presence to be immediately and inventively reconstructed. Further, in tracing a sense of the physical within Scottish reinvention culture as a whole; chronologies of dissection and display, damaged and enlightened bodies, metaphoric and metonymic liminality are foregrounded within a seemingly unending variety of scientific, linguistic, literary and social contexts. That such a perspective is

reliant upon its reception is evident in McLennan's assertion that all existence, per se, is indicative of 'liveness', of 'being there'. If read in collusion with a selective partitioning of international live art culture, McLennan's statement permits a retroactive reading of what can causally be termed 'live' in Scotland.

Outside of Scotland (and mostly outside of Britain) it could be posited that the nascent moment of the live art tradition found its most prescient manifestation in the purist aesthetics of 'being there' inherent within the 'blood culture' of the 1970s. Peggy Phelan's early reductionist analysis of the relationship between the live encounter and its subsequent existence within the precepts of reproduction, highlights the contemporaneous strain on perceptions of live experience:

'[p]erformance cannot be saved, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being [. . .] becomes itself through disappearance.'³

Though now considered dated, Phelan's position is indicative of the physical premise of liminality generated through pain and the circumstance of blood which irrevocably foregrounded the actuality of a spatially and temporally delineated performance work. This type of material: blood, suggested within the limitations of art appreciation, quickly became assimilated as paint, subsumed into a doctrine of beginnings which many historians were quick to implicate. A notorious reading of the origins of live art (itself a limited understanding of the collapsible frames of presence) places it as incumbent upon ritual, theatre and action painting - specifically of the Gutai movement but also personified in the modernist flawed hero of Jackson Pollock who, observes Amelia Jones, '[. . .] has functioned in art discourse as a kind

of hinge or pivot between the modernist genius and performative subject of postmodernism.' 4

The responsive implications of his action works suggested a tail end of documentation combined with the unusual habit of painting on the floor absorbed, he said, from practices of the Navajo sand painters. Already a refutation of a position which privileges the 'live', intimate and dynamic photographs of Pollock at work seemingly corroborated this aspect of performativity, presenting a co-mingled Pollock of static painted 'evidence' and a Pollock of sentient, active or activated artist. This ' "author function" (which is understood *through* images of his body in action), is performed within 'art discourse' argues Jones, locating Pollock within a shifting site of reinvention. Ironically, the full implications of Pollock's reference to Navajo Sand Painting have not yet been examined and further extrapolate the co-served authorship of performance - one dependant on Pollock's work on both object and action. If the extent to which the Navajo perceive the sand work as sentient in its own right, replete with a ritually enacted spirituality and presence, can be applied to Pollockian process and further extended to concentrated object-action acts reliant on physical intervention, then the 'object body' is imbued with a performativity of its own - one of both contemporary liveness and documentary historicity. In this context the definition of performance as the *execution* of an action necessarily involves Phelan's position as well as any subsequent reading of trace document in relation to the live act; one in which the action is exterminated by its own existence or one in which the action is executed both destroyed and carried on by its own evidence. The interface between action and object implicit within Pollock's oeuvre seemingly collapses all originary statements pertaining to performance art as action, theatre and ritual each reliant upon the other and defacing the containment Phelan so valiantly positions around the moment, the liveness of 'being there'. Both the trace elements of Navajo investment in the artefact as sentient and in

Pollock's irrefutably 'live' paintings as document, quickened, corroborated and to an extent, displaced by the photographic theatres in which he performs the performance of painting, irrevocably place liveness as extant within specific objects and processes subject to human artistic intent.

What I will term 'transfixion' of corporeal liveness is incumbent upon this reading of the performative as transitive animism; multiplicitous, pluralised, transactive, de-centered and de-stabilised, evident, however, in instances of fixity whereby the history of performance itself is delineated by key examples of foregrounded somaticism. Thus, McLennan's perception of the performative as universally evident is equipped with privileged moments in the movement's chronology, traditionally assumed to define aspects of its own tautology. As Roselee Goldberg confers, 'the term performative has come to describe this state of perpetual animation. It is used retroactively to examine the profound role of performance in the heroic paintings of Jackson Pollock [. . .] the 1967 essay 'Art and Objecthood' by the American art historian Michael Fried is now seen as pivotal because it blamed the demise of purely abstract painting and sculpture in minimalist art that with its stage presence " approaches the condition of theatre" and demands the "work of art confront the beholder." In present-day criticism the term is used to describe the work of many, very different contemporary artists.' ⁵ Goldberg, in quoting Fried, elides some of his comments to assume that materially based work must needs be theatrical in order to be defined as live, reflecting modernist assumptions surrounding formal contextual models. Yet, this kind of discourse - both in 1967 by Fried and Goldberg in 1998 is indicative of the problematic inherent within live art writing itself as a temporal fixture; a performative moment within itself that arranges, embodies and disseminates understandings of the corpus of live art history itself. Jones, aware of the limits of such frames, highlights their inevitability in any

textual attention addressed to the subject of live art - that it is, paradoxically, made live by being re-contextualised.

Goldberg explains 'the reason for the ever-widening interest in performance art is the fact that the decade of the '70s, the nascent years of performance is now history.' ⁶ This 'nascent' imprint, at its most heightened form (and we have to remember that few contemporary critics, as Jones points out, have witnessed the actual events themselves) neatly infers the embodiedness of documentary agency, whilst ironically conveying the purist content of the actions themselves. However, the images, operating as enfleshed documents constructed of their own somatic representation, simulate a friction between the ensuing relative invisibility of their agency or signification (black and white photograph, film still), when confronted with the power of 'blood culture', the pained but aestheticized body. Works by Gina Payne, Vito Acconci and the Viennese Actionists, for example, are further extrapolated from any sense of ontological origin residing within the art work alone by the cultural backdrops against which they can be perceived to operate. 'The era following World War II saw a veritable explosion of activity which brought process and performance directly to bear as the subjects of works themselves. The line between action, performance and a work of art became increasingly extinguishable and irrelevant [. . .] the experience of massive death, atomic explosions, the Holocaust, became major references for a certain approach to 'body' 'scene' 'art' and 'experience' investigated by performers thereafter.' ⁷ This statement, read alongside the modernist origins of a Jackson Pollock action painting situated in an ethnographic body of damage, one in which Navajo culture was subject to its own holocaustic treatment by colonial America, provides an interesting premise for positioning what might historically be termed Scottish liveness. Such trace liminality of visceral presence - the subculture of indigenous American people; the Navajo

- unequivocally yet invisibly written into the way in which a Pollock was executed has intrinsic implications for the way in which a Pollock painting as document is treated but also in perceiving the neat assimilation of Native American technique. Bodies imbue, subdue, perplex, reduce and disturb one another, presenting inferences and references to each other that are inextricably intertwined but which can be read as explicit when subject to extreme subjugation i.e.; pain. It is the pained body of the 1970s which is foregrounded as a seminal period in live art, delineating purist issues of the 'live' and 'non-live'. It is also the pained body which is implicated, revised, dis and re-embodied in every subsequent reproduction of its image, its experience, creating a plethora of liveness authenticated by such pain.

Thus, by conjoining two seemingly disparate frames of performative experience: Alastair McLennan's position which universalises performativity and a perceptually explicit, blood imprinted exaction of what live art culture could constitute at the extremes of experience in the 1970s, a textual environment can be temporarily erected to house an understanding of Scottish liveness. That inflamed sites of cultural pain provide generative circumstances for contingencies of performative experience is clearly evident within Scottish culture. Assimilations of outworked corporeities, reliant on technologies of textual print, photography and scientific experiment, operate at the disjuncture between experiential embodied performance and its documented vivification. As such, in turning to an embodied *Scottish* live scene, prescient examples of corporeity, presence and performance are situated in the display culture of alternative disciplines but equally cited in objects of explicit representation.

The argument, therefore, traces a triptych of Scottish somatic identities reproduced within overlapping technologised frames of early optics, photography and printed text. The performative implications of each are intentionally considered against the cultural contexts of

affliction the object suggests, operating significantly as personal, scientific, theatrical, ethnographic and liminal. Each section is a transfixion of how the performative object can be read as a transformative corporeal trace. Inherently, many of the corporeities revised in each frame are necessarily simultaneously present and absent, focussing on the ontological dispersal of originary somatic identity and the performative or live object itself. Each section comprises an original contribution to the subject, furthering the critical discourse in the case of *Ossian*; contributing entirely new knowledge to the background of Robert McGee from primary sources whilst engaging in an elucidation of how his card can be perceived that offers new knowledge to scalping histories and offering a first art historical analysis of James Clerk Maxwell's experiment.

Performing the Object Body: Operation

James Clerk Maxwell's tricolour optic theory using a tartan ribbon is examined using Roland Barthes' delineation of photographic theory using the terms *studium* and *punctum* to denote how a photograph is read by the viewer. Stemming from his example of an image of Queen Victoria as definitive of *studium* the observational, and *punctum* that which punctures or wounds such a perception, an understanding of the blind field which he cites as emergent from the *studium* is revised in the context of Maxwell's ribbon. Arguing that the ribbon presents a photographic instance in which the *studium* and *punctum* are collapsed due to the nature of the subject, the chronological context of its imaging and its description as first colour photograph, I position the blind field (that which the startling nature of the *punctum* suggests to us as extant beyond the frame) as 'tartan' itself. Expanding on this argument, I suggest that the blind field is

poured back onto the photograph, collapsing again the whole corpus of tartan history onto this single image. Using Maurice Merleau-Ponty's description of vision as correlative and webbed, I cite other kinds of 'red' which he uses in his own example, as symptomatic of both the corpus of Hanoverian red jackets and the Highland Gaelic predilection for red tartans. Taken as a metaphor for blood, this reddedness, when extrapolated within 1746 blood culture historiography of tartan can be seen to present its opposite - the damaged, erased and so invisible body. Noting that the ribbon itself forms a rosette, I present an alternative perception of its symbolism by suggesting colourlessness and so reposition it as Jacobite cockade, further implicating the inherent violence within Maxwell's subject. Returning to tartan as a substance as recognisable as red, I present an ideological and metaphoric skin from which the ribbon is positioned as metonymic. This skin can be perceived as a damaged corpus of cross woven tartan history itself. Returning to Maxwell's experiment versus the 1930s vivex print which was subsequently made, I locate a meteorological body based on the moveable elements of his experiment in which the tartan ribbon, projected through three magic lantern slides, assimilates readings of weather, of rainbow, allowing an extrapolation of the subtleties of early dye culture and tartan relating to its Gaelic definition which etymologically incorporates 'twilight'. Citing the transfixion of a mutable body of tartans, I use the example of a bog body swatch, excavated from Culloden, to examine the symbiosis of Highland dress with landscape, returning to Merleau-Ponty to locate a skin of invisibility against certain cultural and topographical backdrops. In conclusion, I suggest, with the support of tartan scholar Hugh Cheape, that the tartan 'cockade' comprises a sett and colour called 'Royal Stewart', leading to an examination of the ribbon as directly representative of a royal rebel corpus, referencing the influence of painting on both Maxwell and recognisable setts in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries. The royal rebel corpus is contextualised as Bonnie Prince Charlie's, leading to an examination of Jacobite poetry that positions the cockade as directly metaphoric and metonymic. Finally, I return to Barthes and surmise the performative transference of *punctum* and *studium*, referencing the 'Royal Stewart' made for Queen Victoria, suggesting that the corporeal status of the photograph itself operates as a skin of Scotland.

Voicing the Object Body: Transfusion

This chapter develops the complications and issues of photographic bodiedness outlining the function of a cabinet card made for scalped Scotsman Robert McGee in 1890. The card exists dually as a text based configuration written in the first person on one side and as a studio portrait image of McGee on the other. Referencing Steven Connor's work on ventriloquism and Barthes' analysis of the caption and image I refute Elaine Scarry's position that the pained body is only capable of language anterior to speech, arguing that the body as a whole becomes a language in and of pain with its own complexities, as opposed to a vocal outworking less sophisticated than normative learned speech patterns. Building on a contemporaneous description of scalping being like hearing distant thunder, I compare this meteorological displacement of pain to an assimilation with weather precipitated by extreme physiology, to the flash card format of McGee's card which evokes a sensory device akin to experience of lightning. Combining this understanding of the image with the damaged topography of McGee's head, I examine how the image can be perceived as ventriloquised as an associative photograph alongside the thunderous contemporary account: as McGee's image ventriloquising his accompanying text and as the reader ventriloquising McGee's imaged head. Noting the use

of first person, I demonstrate how, combined with the perceptual 'breaks' or lesions the flashcard format represents if read and looked at in turn, construct a response in the reader, suspending disbelief, in which they seemingly become McGee. Considering aspects of representing 'the dead' juxtaposed with McGee's image as a motif of survival, I elucidate the ontological origins of the cabinet card: where its performative function predominantly lies. Using Philip Auslander's definition of the documented versus theatrical performance document, I excavate both within the image as interdependent, placing McGee's photograph as implicitly embodied. In understanding the multifarious journalistic and medical accounts surrounding McGee's experience, I place the textual performativity surrounding his scalping as a active interlude in which the excerpts 'operate' on the reader as a palimpsest. In concluding I examine Eric Griffith's position on the printed voice in relation to how the past and present are embodied textually, based on the contingency of readership. I argue that a number of key devices implicitly construct a cinematic experience for the viewer, that the card, as an embodied and voiced artefact constitutes a compressed, hand held performance.

Grounding the Object Body: Transplantation

In situating Jim Morrison as a modern outworking of James MacPherson's reinvention of the bardic Ossian, my final chapter suggests that Morrison's song *Riders on the Storm* is derived from *Fingal Book IV*, after exploring the implications of the other sources, namely Hart Crane's *In Praise of an Urn* juxtaposed with Wallace Stevens' *Anecdote of the Jar* to implicate colonial readings of land and wilderness in an understanding of Ossianic poetical, ideological and topographical landscape. Highlighting Morrison's Scottish ancestry through his contemporary

Michael McClure, who positions him in relation to the Highland poet George MacDonald in his eulogy to the artist, I reference Morrison's quasi-mythical boyhood witnessing of a crash of Native American Pueblo Indians. Morrison subsequently felt he embodied or was possessed after by the spirit of one dying man and this is compared to the embodiment of the wilderness in the jar of Stevens', commented on by Carter Revard, Native American poet. Subsequently, the liminal body of Ossian is equally compared to damage and landscape through theorist Joep Leerssen, who examines transference and ontology. Extending from the perception of the liminal in both Ossianic literature and the cult of Morrison, the singer and MacPherson are compared - both having witnessed childhood atrocity. MacPherson's position is newly examined as performative in his collation by hand of oral fragments in two trips to the Highlands, enabling readings of genealogical compulsion and raising questions regarding the performative ontology of the text - suggesting its roots may lie in the battlefield performance of Culloden but complicating this assertion by citing the collapsable chronologies within the text itself. I reposition Ossian as Highland seer as opposed to Homeric bard, tracing the categories back to Druidic culture in which the difference is less succinct. By citing Rory Morison, the last blind harper in Highland culture, I work from the assertion in Ossianic theory that Ossian was a Scottish bard but extend this position to suggest he operates from the collapsed position of both bard and seer, thus embodying two key performative roles in the Scottish Highlands relating to vision and sight. I examine notions of the perceptual body in relation firstly to sight. Vision is extrapolated through understandings of blindness and ulterior sight, transfixion and envisioning. This context for visibility predicates an original understanding of the poems as a Highland ghost text, replete with disembodied vocalities, reminiscent of the liminal somaticism of the 'sluagh' or a wind of malign/ malignant voices. Referencing John Gregorson Campbell's

The Gaelic Otherworld, I position *Ossian* as categorically symptomatic of liminal, numinous bodies, arguing for the ventriloquised and cinematic identity of the work. Working on the premise that the Ossian poems can be defined alternately as a post genocide wish text, I compare Black Elk Speaks, a similar Sioux tract, illuminating aspects of Native American and Highland literary performative identity as cogently inter-related, returning once again to the personified example of Jim Morrison, as Ossianic performer.

Notes

1 Amelia Jones, *The Now and the Has Been: Paradoxes of Live Art in History; Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol, New York, Toronto, 2012), pp. 11-25.

2 Craig Richardson, *Scottish Art Since 1960*, (Ashgate, 2011), pp. 138-42, however, provides an apt example of the developing historiography of live art culture in Scotland.

3 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York, 1993), p. 146.

4 Amelia Jones, *Body Art/ Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis and London, 1998), p. 15.

5 Roselee Goldberg, *Performance, Live Art Since the 60s* (London, 1998), p. 10.

6 see Goldberg (1998), p. 11.

7 Paul Schimmel, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object 1949-1979* (Los Angeles, 1998), p. 11.

II

Performing the Object Body:

Operation

*'The rose of all the world is not for me.
I want for my part
Only the little white rose of Scotland
That smells sharp and sweet—and breaks the heart'*
- The Little White Rose, Hugh MacDiarmid

Performing Photography

In 1861 (the year Queen Victoria donned black for life long mourning) Scottish physicist James Clerk Maxwell created the first colour photograph using three black and white slides of a tartan ribbon. Enlisting the assistance of photographer Thomas Sutton, Maxwell demonstrated to the Royal Institution on August 1st his theory of the primary colours creating the first automatic production of the colour image of a scene, using the additive colour principle. The presentation was the culmination of Maxwell's strategy for producing full colour projected images, conveyed to the Royal Society of Edinburgh in 1855, followed by detailed proceedings in the 1857 Transactions. Maxwell describes in his paper *On the Theory of Three Primary Colours* the succinct dissection of the spectrum involved:

"Three photographs of a coloured ribbon taken through the three solutions respectively [. . .] sulphocyanide of iron, chloride of copper, and ammoniated copper [. . .] were introduced to the camera, giving images representing the red, the green, and the blue parts separately, as they would be seen by each of Young's three sets of nerves separately. When these images were super-posed, a coloured image was seen, which, if the red and green images had been as fully photographed as the blue, would have been a truly-coloured image of the ribbon [. . .] The

speaker then proceeded to exhibit mixtures of the colours of the pure spectrum. Light from the electric lamp was passed through a narrow slit, a lens and a prism, so as to throw a pure spectrum on a screen at a distance, forming a large, uniformly coloured image of the prism. When the whole spectrum was allowed to pass, this image was white [. . .] When portions of the spectrum were allowed to pass through the moveable slits, the image was uniformly illuminated with a mixture of corresponding colours. In order to see these colours separately, another lens was placed between the moveable slits and the screen. A magnified image of the slits was thus thrown on the screen, each slit shewing, by its colour and its breadth, the quality and quantity of the colour which it suffered to pass. Several colours were then exhibited, first separately and then in combination. Red and blue, for instance, produced purple; red and green produced yellow; blue and yellow produced a pale pink; red, blue, and green produced white; and red and a bluish green near the line *F* produced a colour which appears very different to different eyes.' ¹



(Fig. 1) James Clerk Maxwell First Colour Photograph. Vivex imprint, 1937.

The subject of the image, a bow made of tartan ribbon, (Fig. 1) is described by Sutton in the lecture notes as 'striped with various colours, pinned upon a background of black velvet, and copied by photography by means of a portrait lens of full aperture, having various-coloured fluids placed immediately in front of it, and through which the light from the object had to pass before it reached the lens. The experiments were made out-of-doors, in a good light [. . .]' ²

Despite creating the first colour photograph, Maxwell did not make a print of the projected image. An elucidation of contemporaneous photographics relies on an etymology of 'photos'

from the Greek for 'light' and 'graphien' meaning 'to draw'. The laborious equipment involved in imaging the process of the photograph for the 1861 exposition proved cumbersome. As Alma Davenport notes, 'although it was a truly successful experiment, the reality of viewing colour photographs in this manner was rather inconvenient.'³ The ontological argument aligns itself to performative readings of Maxwell's process as a live one, a staged theatre of time based photographic process (as opposed to imprinted photographic objecthood) inculcating the optical ribbon with an elapsed temporality. The revivification, however, of the resultant image embodied in a re-enactment of this process is displayed in a subsequent imprint created through a 1937 vivex process in which 'three images, on suitably tinted, stretchable cellophane, are overlaid. For the print, the three were produced from James Clerk Maxwell's three black-and-white magic lantern slides. (Fig. 2) These slides were made each for a different colour, nominally red, green and blue, using filters in front of the camera lens. The plates used to make the slides were made with the ribbon in bright sunlight.'



(Fig. 2) James Clerk Maxwell Magic Lantern Slides. Photographer Peter Stubbs, 2004.

The vivex imprint of Maxwell's ribbon, subject to closer observation, involves a disentangling of contingent elements that means it cannot subsequently be perceived in the same way. The risk of de-codification, however, is not the risk of deconstruction because its

constituent parts resolve a new anatomy of the image, transfixed in revised meaning. Neither does re-embodying the ribbon occlude its veracity within Maxwell's experiment; it is lodged there in a multifarious subjectivity in any case. It is merely framed, to use Amelia Jones' definition, for the life span and purposes of the photograph as an example of how the object itself performs, how it is re-edified and how our perceptions of it determine and betray that performativity.

Perhaps a useful term to adopt in order to convey both such transient mobility and the doctrine of still photography, which, by its nature, requires a steadfast nexus of stasis; an understanding that passing *through* a photographic medium will instigate a moment of fixity; is *transfixion*. If fixity is posited as the over-arching determining element within an image that inevitably contributes to its impermanence, subsequently transience and eventual obsolescence are subtly marked within the sense of object-hood itself. Corroding the absolute, is a continual perception that what the viewer sees is inevitably in passing and encodes a small death within its auspices. Amelia Jones observes, likewise 'the photograph proves not the immortality of the body and thus of the subject - its transcendence - but its inevitable "contingency"'. The photograph exaggerates the urge built into all simply representational practices involving images of the body - the urge to delay or foreclose on death.' 4 As such, the term transfixion will be used to explicable absolve the inherent problems of citing stillness, or stasis as absolute, whilst furthering the complexities surrounding movement, re-embodiment, enfleshing, the blind field and viral ontology which equip, distil and disarray the traditional modes of seeing prescribed in this instance of early photographic process and its later imprints. The implications of this process, evident within the image itself, wield a number of contexts in which the tartan rosette becomes explicitly transformative, neatly eliding varying ways of perceiving

photography as continually re-framed by transfixion to produce re-embodied alternative readings.

A Well Dressed Wound

Roland Barthes' seminal 'Camera Lucida' introduced to photography writing the twin notions of '*studium*' observational 'application to a thing' and '*punctum* [. . .] punctuated, sometimes even speckled with these sensitive points; precisely, these marks, these wounds are so many *points*.' ⁵ In conjunction he sites the blind field, relevant to a black and white G.W. Wilson 1863 portrait of Queen Victoria, mounted on horseback and accompanied by a kilted John Brown. 'Here is Queen Victoria [. . .] (this is the historical interest, the *studium*); but beside her, attracting my eyes, a kilted groom holds the horse' bridle: this is the *punctum*; for even if I do not know just what the social status of this Scotsman may be (servant? equerry?), I can see his function clearly: to supervise the horse's behaviour: what if the horse suddenly began to rear? What would happen to the queen's skirt, i.e., *to her majesty*? The *punctum* fantastically endows this photograph with a blind field.' ⁶ The blind field, asserts Barthes, 'constantly doubles our partial vision.' ⁷ The emergence of the blind field, however, is contingent on the image's *punctum*, its de-centredness, its woundedness, where not all that passes the frame 'dies absolutely once this frame is passed beyond.' Outwith the frame, argues Barthes, a field of operation occurs suggested by the *punctum* that elevates the image beyond the *studium*; the simply observational.

The *punctum* - and *studium* - can be observationally constructed, an ideogram suggested within the constructs of the image, but all images and, in particular, photographs are dependant

on contextualising frames of the viewer who creates their own inference based on intellectual and experiential knowledge, whose perceptual presence constructs the elements defined by Barthes within and without the image concerned. Barthes himself acknowledges this 'absolute subjectivity', whilst actively withdrawing from 'its usual blah-blah: "Technique," "Reality," "Reportage," "Art," etc.'⁸ It is inevitable to recognise that the viewer subliminally further develops the image, imbuing it with these labels, whilst adding a cinematic scope to the blind field; a movement, an imagination, which I will call an internal darkroom where the perceptual instincts of the viewer inevitably encouraged in the reception of all photographic information begin an individual process of refiltering, developing, framing, editing, exposing and inculcating the image. The intuition Barthes arguably deployed in sensing the *punctum* invariably gathered about Queen Victoria's skirts may have been mnemonically suggested by a fact he may or may not have heard; that she loathed her legs and that her crinoline was once blown upward at a small country station, exposing her unsightly limbs and causing much embarrassment '*to her majesty*'. Thus the extent to which a viewer may or may not treat the presence of tartan within an objective Scottish scientific experiment in 1861 as indicative of *punctum*, therefore, is largely based upon the foreknowledge of the historiography of the cloth and its multifarious implications.

Barthes' definition of the blind field as 'dynamic'; relating to energy or objects in motion, further corroborates a sense of cinematic reconstruction suggestive of the momentary fix - the fixity of the image in passing and also the sense of perceptual injection; a heightened sensation. Operating as transfixion, an apprehension of how the image itself is momentarily suspended in vision, absorption, exposed to the precincts of the internal darkroom, conversely offers simultaneous readings of the image captured and the image released. To transfix is also to

pinion, to fix fast and to render motionless with awe. It is necessarily the blind field, the moveable, integrated image, treated by either foreknowledge, imagination or perceptual instinct on the part of the viewer that enables the transfixing of any given picturing.

The conditions of Maxwell's experiment, latterly realised in the 1937 vivex imprint, are initially defined as *studium*. The rubric of liquid filtering (suggestive of the urine fixer for plaid dyes), the brilliant and complex colouration of the ribbon, immediately recognisable and compositionally centred seem cultural shorthand for a Scottish physicist working in Edinburgh in the early 1860s. Such instant assimilation of what the object is, how it is worn and what it is used for make it a seemingly perfect scientific subject when dealing with the complexity of tricolour spectrum theory. The collapsable functional meaning into one element echoes the ribbon's clear cut but complex use of colour, while both firmly stamp Scottish 'ness' onto the eye of the viewer - and a first (rosette worthy) national development and discovery into the science of optics. However, the glossing of the ribbon as merely 'coloured' and 'striped' by both Sutton and Maxwell, despite mentioning its presentation on a velvet ground can either be read as descriptive laziness - unlikely within the specificity of the transcribed lecture, particularly as the object is intrinsic in its form and colour to the overall aims of the experiment - or as an unwillingness to acknowledge the characteristics of the ribbon within a Scottish frame. Both seem unsatisfactory responses. Indeed, the perfectly viable *studium*, the commonplace and easy symbolism of the subject as scientific object contains a certain fricative quality when the obvious presence of the *punctum* suggests alternative readings of the image both as cultural artefact and experimental byproduct. That *punctum* is, of course, the blind field of tartan itself.

Black and White Blood

Tartan scholar Hugh Cheape notes the traditional preference in Scotland for vivid cochineal colouration when it came to dyed stuffs: 'Gaelic tradition indicates that bright rather than muted colours were preferred and, in song and praise poetry of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, bright red tartan was the invariable byword for high fashion and status; a phrase such as *breac-in charnaid* (i.e. 'scarlet tartans') is a stock metaphor in praise-poetry. It is no coincidence that most of the early surviving portraits with Highland dress show varieties of red tartans.' In his 2010 essay titled *Geibhte breacain charnaid* ('Scarlet tartans would be got . . .'): *The Reinvention of Tradition* Cheape describes how eighteenth-century Highland society 'imported tartans in bright shades of red, since red was also the most difficult colour to establish or 'fix' evenly over lengths of fabric.'⁹

James Clerk Maxwell seems to have had similar problems: 'a coloured image was seen, which, if the red [. . .] had been as fully photographed as the blue, would have been a truly-coloured image of the ribbon.' Maxwell's paper *On the Theory of Three Primary Colours* references optical theory pioneered by Dr. Thomas Young, in which he suggests that three systems of optical nerves respond to three corresponding colours. 'One of them,' he writes, 'which gives us the sensation we call red, is excited most by the red rays.' He continues; 'if we could excite one of these sets of nerves without acting on the others, we should have the pure sensation corresponding to that set of nerves. This would be truly a primary colour, whether the nerve were excited by pure or by compound light, or even by the action of pressure or disease.'

10

Maxwell's position sympathetically predisposes us to an understanding of French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's unfinished but influential text, 'The Intertwining - The Chiasm' in which he illuminates the fabric of colour, creating a web of examples that illustrate how red can be seen as and in all reds, remembered, perceived and

imagined.

'The red dress a foritori holds with all its fibres onto the fabric of the visible, and thereby onto a fabric of invisible being. A punctuation in the field of red things [. . .] it is also a punctuation in the field of red garments [. . .] and also in the field [. . .] of uniforms.' He continues: 'A certain red is also a fossil drawn up from the depths of imaginary worlds', quoting Camille Claudel - 'the sea is so blue that only blood would be more red.' This reddedness is extrapolated from Merleau-Ponty's foundational definition of the 'flesh of things':

'If we took all these participations into account, we would recognize that a naked color, and in general a visible, is not a chunk of absolutely hard, indivisible being, offered all naked to a vision which could be only total or null, but is rather a sort of straits between exterior horizons and interior horizons ever gaping open, something that comes to touch lightly and makes diverse regions of the colored or visible world resound at the distances, a certain differentiation, an ephemeral modulation of this world – less a color or a thing, therefore, than a difference between things and colors, a momentary crystallization of colored being or of visibility. Between the alleged colors and visibles, we would find anew the tissue that lines them, sustains them, nourishes them, and which for its part is not a thing, but a possibility, a latency, and a *flesh* of things.' ¹¹

In relation to this description of vision that enfleshes the objects it perceives, combined with Barthes' *punctum*, an awareness of the infringement of the senses upon the image itself - a demarcation or perhaps a mimetic wounding evolves, where a perceptual recognition of what constitutes a tartan ribbon printed on a piece of paper, seizes, or hurts the image into perceived existence. If the *punctum*, as something which grasps the viewer outside the mundane observation of the *studium*, could be reversed, the explicit viewing by the viewer of the image could contribute a damage of its own, a violence of seeing. In this context, human sight 'fixes' the image, heightening its visible presence not only through a witnessing (which in itself can be said to grasp the picture), but through a knowledge of its contents beyond the representation of the object itself - though it contains the necessary elements for such knowledge to present

itself - and (questionably) the photographer; demonstrating a pouring of the blind field *onto* the photograph.

Returning again to the question of transfixion and what the vivex image *also* fixes, taking into account the violence imagined, evident and contralinearly enfleshing the red associated with the blind field of tartan, the colour soaked imprint of tartan *lodging* the associative *red* of tartan is inclusive of the 'red army', i.e., Hanoverian scarlet livery as resplendently evoked in the Jacobite songs of the forty-five: 'There'll be many a red-coat, headless, footless, unseeing.' ¹²

This may seem stretching the 'fossilised' imagination too far. However, if the dynamic of transfixion operates as a woundedness of encounter, one in which knowledge of the blind field is a construction on the part of the viewer when confronting the image that *priori* 'damages' the photograph by a visible awareness (something not indifferent to petrification but with elements of revival and a recognition that perceptual knowledge is constantly in flux) - 'damages' it into a moment of explicit perception, then any pre-description of tartan, Scottish plaid culture and redness as a metaphor for implicated violence within that context, pervades the blind field with a kind of pre-cognitive power. Further, it may not be too outlandish to suggest, as a dissective element within the vicissitudes of the image itself, that the reddedness in such a context, as an *alleged* red operates as a stand in for blood.

Conversely, the immediate counterpoint to any description of fastness or fixedness, is one of impermanence, of fluidity. The symbolic exchange inherent within the tartan rosette is suggestive of a metaphoric alchemical short-change: its status as first colour image (of tartan) is, by dint of foreknowledge of the context of the cloth as blind field, suffused with *punctum*, *becomes punctum*; a damaged skin and as such, bloodied. The mnemonics of bloodiness, as outside of contemporaneous experience, from 1861 onwards, could be said to suffuse the

brilliance of the red with a past tense of colour: and, ironically, a past tense of colour within pre-1861 photographics in general, where a document depicting blood was necessarily read as black and white. Any attempt to capture and fix the hue of blood was usually hand painted. As Maxwell is essentially a colour man of light, and not only light but *Scottish* light (and there is a case for post-*Enlightenment* light), the black and white magic lantern slide, implacably traces a corporeal liminality only available through a specific period of time *in light*. Via the predictive photographic process of his experiment, Maxwell affixes the violent colouration of essentialist Scottish symbolism to prepared ground via light and liquid, no longer subscribing the re-presentation of woundedness to dichromatic mnemonics, suggested by black and white photography. The event transfixed, is now fully spectral.

Or is it? The status of this so-called bloodied red (entirely dependent on the viewer's fore-knowledge of tartan contexts and so indicative of the numerous transmutative re-embodiments the image is capable of evoking and camouflaging), is complicated, revised and schismatically implicated in its very absence when a framework of transfixion is again introduced. When re-examining the loss of red, the lack of any colour whatever, the tartan ribbon no longer performs solely as a *tartan* ribbon or riband but as the blenched cockade of the White Rose of York - the traditional symbol of the Jacobites suffused by a hidden coda of political sympathies entirely in keeping with the whole *trompe-l'oeil* optical paraphernalia surrounding the rebel movement from anamorphic trays to rose etched wine glasses. Ironically, it is the tartan, a contemporaneously endorsed Highland motif in post Gothic Romantic revival Britain, that (re)dresses this covert symbolism. Yet, in the re-imagined fossilisation as described by Merleau-Ponty, there remains - ossified within the glaring colouration of the image - an earlier trace element of *form*. This liminal element is conversely only given presence through the very

conditions of the term fixity by which we automatically seek to rearrange and re-affiliate aspects of fixedness to its opposite - to fluidity, recomposition, transfixion and ultimately, to the blind field of Culloden.

Metonymic Moss Wool

If Merleau-Ponty's web of likeness in his example of red can be applied to the specifics of tartan itself, a cloth immediately recognisable if not by its colour, then by its sett, then tartan can be seen to adopt a metonymic function; one swatch inferring all swatches within and beyond the chiasma of plaid. Constructing a cultural mnemonics of the blind field of Maxwell's ribbon, therefore, involves a conviction that, poured into the photograph, the blind field incorporates a miasma of other tartan swatches or glimpses. Extrapolated further, the enfleshed sight of tartan as a badge or ribbon operates metonymically as representative of a topography of skin.

Ideologically and practically the large swathe of tartan 'skin' implicated in the envisioning of one ribbon is supported by the widespread use of the cloth during the 1800s. Tartan fever struck, as has been well documented, when the 1746 Dress Act was lifted, and subscribed to multifarious modes of display. Any attempt at dissection of this mis-matched skin into categories of tribal identification, genocide and social ardour, is continuously frustrated by the cloth's tendency to revert to a sense of the whole. A recent description of Alexander McQueen's autumn/winter 1995-6 show 'Highland Rape' dramatically alludes to this explicit cohesion:

'The collection mixed military jackets with McQueen tartan and moss wool, contrasting tailored jackets with torn and ravaged lace dresses and ripped skirts. On a runway strewn with heather and bracken, McQueen's staggering and blood spatted models appeared wild and distraught, their breasts and bottoms exposed by tattered lace and torn suedes, jackets with missing sleeves [. . .]' 13

If the language of damage inscribed onto tartan has become part of the fabric's re-unification, seen here in haute-couture as a meld of moss and wool, breasts, heather and bracken, 'torn, ravaged, blood spatted, exposed, tattered and missing', its web of recognition is perhaps fused by scarification. Conversely, that visuality, located within woundedness, finds its most emphatic expression within imposed *invisibility* during the culture of oppression evident within the Scottish Highlands during the mid to late seventeen hundreds. In this context, a phantasmatic body of tartan emerges, a spectral spectrum of cloth. In and of itself, the Victorian revival movement, committed to re-instigating tartan can be seen to dress the wounded phantasmic skin of tartan with tartan itself; an overlay of endorsed fabrication. Despite its disembodied status as a temporarily vanished cloth, the Highland tartan can be perceived as explicitly reified in terms of and due to exposure to the blood culture of the mid to late seventeen hundreds. This morbid Jacobite theatre in which correspondence to any aspect of Highland Dress was immediately proscribed due to the Dress Act of 1746, positions the wearing of the rebel cloth as punishable by exile; by the body exempt. The blind field as blanket, or plaid, one in which the Highlander ate, slept, fought and died, comprises a tautology of tartan itself - a practical but damaged skin for a damaged but practical Gaelic culture. Merleau-Ponty's red web, when transferred to the universal 'ness' of tartan as an exploited skin, is inherently suggestive of the corporeity that not only instigated its removal, its erasure but of the bodies whose damage ensured the inscription of the cloth and its metonymic status would thereafter include a dialogue of pain. In this context, the metonymy of tartan presents a disembodied whole ideologically and conversely, a corporeality very much embodied through structures of pain. This vicissitude in the two oppositional positions of the disembodied in tartan and the re-embodied presents a liminal schism always inherent within any references to

the cloth. Enfolded in its 'tattered' skin is the transfixed presence of absence that any fragment of tartan inevitably represents. Thus, Merleau-Ponty's web, when affixed to the metonymic visibility of tartan, collates a cloth dissective and reconstituted, present and absent.

Grafting Light: Meteoric Ontologies

The specificity of Maxwell's frame; the society papers and formal colour box presentation, corroborated by the 1937 image itself which reconstructs the cultural and scientific laboratory of the performance of his ideas, can be used to define the ways in which the corpus of the ribbon leaks beyond the frames of its own definition. Despite the undeniable ontological premise of the initial tricolour presentation, Maxwell's example and the subsequent dissemination of its vivex photographic imprint provides a useful comparison to similar implications within performance theory. Christopher Bedford writes:

'Performances [. . .] continue to assert themselves in the present, to extend their own ontology through discourse and reproduction, re-establishing their pertinence and agency over and over again. Performance is a myth making medium and as such essentially viral in nature. It extends indefinitely through history, its auratic charge often gaining traction and potency just as the originary act recedes and recedes.' ¹⁴

Bedford's description could be conveniently doctored to read tartan 'continues to assert' itself 'in the present, to extend its own ontology through discourse and reproduction, re-establishing' its 'pertinence and agency over and over again.' Tartan 'is a myth making medium and as such essentially viral in nature. It extends indefinitely through history, its auratic charge often gaining traction and potency just as the originary [. . .] recedes and recedes.'

The question, of course, concerns 'the originary'. Writing in 1977, Susan Sontag would agree with the mediumship of myth within performance, extending it to the praxis of photography.

Discussing the implications between the copy and the original she observes:

'image-making at its origins [. . .] was a practical, magical activity, a means of appropriating or gaining power over something. The further back we go in history [. . .] the less sharp is the distinction between images and real things, in primitive societies, the thing and its image were simply two different, that is physically distinct, manifestations of the same energy or spirit. Hence, the supposed efficacy of images in propitiating and gaining control over powerful presences. Those presences, those powers were present *in them* [. . .] a photograph is not only like its subject, a homage to its subject. It is part of, an extension of that subject; and a potent means of acquiring it, of gaining control over it.' ¹⁵

By skirting close to an abstract sense of 'spirit' or 'energy', Sontag displays sympathy towards a transmutable, etheric photographic and photographed body, not dissimilar to Bedford's description of 'auratic' potency. The implications of such a meteoric body temporarily created by Maxwell, comprising of prismatically tinted light that inevitably alludes to rainbow, are complex and generate a systematic appraisal of the multifarious re-embodiments of tartan history itself.

An additional reading of the blind field of the image is illuminated by a physics used to explicate the latest developments in optic theory. Maxwell's description in his paper of Doctor Thomas Young's theory is comparative to Merleau-Ponty's later philosophical treatise in outlining the behaviour of optical nerve endings in response to colour:

'Young supposes that the eye is provided with three distinct sets of nervous fibres, each extending over the whole sensitive surface of the eye. Each of these three systems of nerves, when excited, gives us a different sensation.' ¹⁶

That Merleau-Ponty's system of optical awareness in relation to selfhood should incorporate early classical theory is evident from the *De rerum natura* where, in Book IV, elaborating on vision, Lucretius writes:

'These images are like a skin, or film,
 Peeled from the body's surface, and they fly
 This way and that across the air [. . .]
 Let me repeat: these images of things,
 These almost airy semblances, are drawn
 From surfaces; you might call them film, or rind,
 Something like skin, that keeps the look, the shape
 Of what is held before its wandering.' 17

Maxwell too, as sometime poet, is drawn to etheric sensibility in revising Burns' interpretation of 'Comin' Thro' the Rye' in a piece titled *In Memory of Edward Wilson, Who Repented of What Was in His Mind to Write After Section*.

Rigid Body Sings

'Gin a body meet a body
 Flyin' through the air,
 Gin a body hit a body,
 Will it fly? and where?' 18

The subtle physiologies suggested by these texts combine to provoke a sensation of the tartan ribbon projected by Maxwell as a pellucid, transient dermis. The spectral spectrum comprised of 'bright sunlight' guided through liquid metallic compounds, altered by Maxwell to convey a range of shifting colours 'first separately and then in combination', comprised combinations of pale pink, yellow, white, red, purple blue. Blueish green, which 'produced a colour which appears very different to different eyes', not only suggests the performativity of the viewer attending the lecture and the re-embodiment of the object as an observed and observable object but highlights the 'auratic charge' of the projection and by association, the ribbon itself. The transformative mutability of the colour box projection suggests the inherent mutability of any

cloth described as tartan.

As a discrete, meteorological entity, tartan itself has a definition stemming from the Gaelic 'breac' meaning speckled or spotted, whilst Breac-shoilish is defined as 'shine faintly, glimmer as the twilight'.¹⁹ 'Breacan', refers to both the Highland cloth of tartan but also the plaid, adhering closely to the idea of outer wrapping, blanket, or skin. This additional husk, tinted using local natural dyes such as whortleberry and crotal, could be perceived as a cloak reciprocally constructed from the landscape it derived its colour from. These were mutable, often fixed with a urine or tin mordant, the resultant effects dependant on the age, health and weathering of the dye crop available and on the variable nature of the dye process itself. Master dyer and tartan historian James D. Scarlett notes the intrinsic subtleties between Highland vegetable colour and tonal definition itself;

'[t]he old colours, obtained from infusions of local plants, had been bright enough, but they were subdued, and because the colours blended well, the brightest of tartans had a softness that made them not out of place in the field.'²⁰

Most writers are agreed that any variability in early tartan, sometimes described as the simple two check of the shepherd's plaid and its later multi-coloured manifestations, can be allied - if at all - to geographical rather than familial distinctions. Dwelly observes 'In the days of Martin the tartans seemed to be used to distinguish the inhabitants of different districts and not the members of different families as at present.'²¹ However, it is these inevitable territorial divisions that variegate and to a certain extent, delineate the traditional clan lands and islands. Scarlett notes 'in a Highland village of the early eighteenth century, it might be surprising if all the people were *not* wearing the same, or recognisably similar, tartans.' The 'auratic' qualities of a cloth whose ontological genesis can be seen as mutually interdependent with the Highland landscape, tinted by its wild crops, walked and washed in its water, dried in and faded by its

fast moving sunlight, inevitably encourages a reading of a variable landscape worn, inhabited. The plaid, or blanket, would be wrapped around the body to sleep in, for example and worn to stalk and scout. Issues of conspicuity are compromised by the suggestion that early tartans, suffused with plant colours of the Highland district local to the wearer, might match those locations and inevitably betray a language of hiddenness, disguise and invisibility. This subtle covering encourages readings of a cloth temporarily transfixed in properties of landscape that itself changes, fades and dies just as its dye imprints are subject to weathering. As a substance that transmits the properties of its colouration, early tartan can be perceived as a lucid integument, as mutable as the country it was worn in.

However, the supposition that tartan was used as camouflage against the mountains, in the lochs and glens for the purposes of hunting, resting and fighting, can only be corroborated to a certain extent. Cheape's extensive dye research has evidenced imported cochineal in use within early samples of cloth: 'a length of tartan from Glencoe, of eighteenth century date, said to have been dyed with local plants, when analysis revealed Mexican cochineal [. . .]' Nevertheless, the humbler home dye system prevailed alongside such virulent hues as cochineal, combining a subtle spectrum from bracken, lichen and heather with yellow dyes, for example, that used 'old fustic' deriving from a tropical American tree.'²² The display culture of the Highlands was quick to embrace the advanced dye products of international trade and excited to don the brilliant cloth. However, it is plausible that the old clan badge system, of affixing a sprig of plant stuff associated with the relevant family to the plaid, retained a contingent element of the traditional, non-imported plant dyes alongside the virulence of imports.

Yet complicating factors arrive in the reappraisal of colour in examples such as the swatch of cloth responsible for a whole generation of tartan subsequently labelled 'reproduction'. This bog

body sample, disinterred at Culloden in 1946 was 'probably a relic of the battle, the colours were very much what one might expect of a piece of tartan buried in peat for two hundred years, dull, with warm black for true black and olive brown for green.'²³ What was verdant had been tempered by the implications of fatal warfare but revived, came to be given the curious taxonomy 'reproduction'. Reproduction of what? As replica of a mud softened, bloodied piece of cloth, its mid twentieth century inculcation invariably gestures towards both the reproduction of subsequent 'false' tracts of clan-affiliated cloth and to the inevitable but 'false' genesis of tartan as a culture in and of itself, dependent entirely on the consequences of the battle field at Culloden. Re-dyed, besmirched, waterlogged and faded by the terrain over which it was fought, this swatch and its subsequent generation of tartans unequivocally performs a mnemonics of site specificity and as such lodges a corporeity contingent upon a historicity of woundedness. Such topographically imprinted skin can be viewed as both damaged and scarred but also essentially meteorological, as if re-adopted and adapted by the elements that constituted its making. The location of a plaid fragment further implicates the field as a huge, troubled Highland badge, conversely pinned to the presence of one sample of cloth. The metonymy of this lone example is iterated by the combative performance of many cloth-wearers which leads to the assumption (or imagining) of multiple interred fragments in the peat, highlighting the invisible presence of a damaged but environmentally embraced skin: a skin which has returned to much of its own substance.

Taken in this sense, Merleau-Ponty's definition of a web of visibles now perceptually becomes a skin of invisibles, operating only as an extension of supposition and imagination, therefore corresponding exactly to the blind field, a place where - beyond the visual frame of reference - the battlefield itself connotes the damage inflicted upon it with its own set of

referents. Reproduced within that range of post Second World War, softened tartans is a site-specificity, a spectral spectrum, perhaps indicative of the colouration that metaphorically could be said to 'appear very different to different eyes', comparable the obvious spectral definitions of 'red', 'blue', 'yellow', 'green' and so on, within Maxwell's tricolour projection. Here, the transfixity of Maxwell's process foments a mutative light reading of tartan physiology and as such a subtle, etheric body indicative of or metaphorically recapitulating the ontological roots of the cloth and its concurrent status as highly visible spectral display. This translucent, shifting corpus of tartan temporarily encompasses the chameleon-like embodiments, cultural and perceptual, that the cloth can be seen to inhabit as simultaneously visible and non-visible, damaged and whole, indigenous and exotic.

Within the structure and dissemination of the experiment itself, several layers of significant imagery are perpetuated from the originary object of the ribbon, imbued with full colour projection. Its first manifestation as triplicate black and white photographic magic lantern slide is secondly subtly transfixed with the shifting hues of colour theory in optics as a meteoric body. The third manifestation of the ribbon involves its fixed imprint and one which could be aptly surmised by Amelia Jones as a body of tartan extended into and 'understood as an image - but an image understood itself, reciprocally, as embodied.'²⁴ Thus the gestation of the ribbon projected, which finds itself evident within a light-encompassed, reified process and as such can be read as a meteorologically ontological and metonymic anatomy, extending to enroll a complex history of the colouration and identity of tartan, is now re-embodied within the precincts of the apparently permanent: the embedded object body.

A Body of Pretence

'Fossilised' within the meteoric body of tartan foregrounded by Maxwell's presentation is the shadowy interplay of three black and white lantern slides, photographed by Thomas Sutton, of the tartan ribbon itself. Nominally understood as a formal sett, black and white tartans are usually the preserve of 'funeral setts [. . .] in broad outline they take the form of a clan tartan rendered in black and white and so are only applicable to simple patterns.'²⁵ Read as the potential axis of the image, the presence of the sett as funereal can be seen to presciently define the demise of black and white photography per se, positioning it as the *momento-mori* of a transitional point in photographic history. However, the extent to which claims for the death of any artistic medium can be corroborated by their subsequent demise is questionable and it seems more precise to denote this aspect of the image as a permanent trace; the ineliminable obduracy of black and white photography graphed onto colouration. Within Maxwell's experiment, this relationship can be perceived as an engrafting - one in which the spectrum filters through a ground plot of the tartan sett. Pertinent to the process - the genesis of the process - is the fundamental requirement for a black and white image to enable the form of a coloured one. As such, the *punctum* can be superficially identified as the death of black and white photography embedded within the image, only to be wholly reworked by the *studium* which coolly redresses the eclipse of black and white bi-colour process, evincing the necessity for both. It is precisely through such formal, structural elements of Maxwell's groundbreaking presentation that the primary existence of the tartan ribbon and its ultimate *vivex* manifestation are brought closer together, reiterating the materialism of Sontag's statement that 'a photograph is not only like its subject, a homage to its subject. It is part of, an extension of that subject.' Such antagonistic inscriptions of image and form within photographic culture lend themselves loosely to the paradoxes within tartan historiography which places the evolution of the fabric

alternately as authentic and inauthentic, whilst seeking to trace the interdependence of both.

As an encoded, coloured extension of the actual ribbon, the 1937 photograph appropriates a currency of actuality, reproduction and dissemination that replicates the originary object. The fixity of such modes of production have led to the misnomer that the 1937 imprint was made during the original 1861 experiment, collapsing the chronological process by some seventy-six years. This is indeed a long exposure, arguably demonstrating the fastness of tartan itself and its tendency to be affixed with misapplied meaning. No less indicative of misappropriation are the implications arising from the actual definition of the cloth, probably 'a piece of Stewart silk tartan, given the prominence it had at the time as a sort of 'Royal' tartan. 'Royal Stewart' tartan was being produced in a variety of setts, for example with the white stripe slightly larger and much more obvious, strong in silk because of the lustre quality of white silk.' ²⁶

The implications of bestowing the world's 'first colour photograph' with a specific tartan are fascinatingly brutalised by knowledge of 'Royal Stewart' itself. As a kind of container, the cage which Maxwell's image presents, debar an easy reading of the corpus which it is equally comprised of. 'Royal Stewart', as a force of invention, is seemingly clothed in spurious identity whilst stemming from a variety of apparently legitimised sources. Writing on the non clan-specific use of tartan in eighteenth century portraiture, James D. Scarlett observes:

'even if we can assume that each artist was photographically accurate, the only proof implicit in the portraits is that the chief, unlike his clansmen, was not restricted to wearing whatever run-of-the-mill pattern the local weaver turned out. There is also a persistent tale that the artist Richard Waitt took horse-loads of canvases around, ready painted except for the face; this does not prove that there were no clan tartans in existence, but only that if there were, people did not bother much about them.' ²⁷

The assumed subjectivity inherent within painting, in this case military portraiture by Swiss artist David Morier of a scene from Culloden whose tartan livery was purportedly taken from a

group of jailed Highlanders after the battle 'wearing between them twenty-two different tartans, none of which corresponds to any modern clan tartan,' writes Scarlett, adding, 'we can never expect anything like photographic accuracy from a manual artist.' Such nervousness around pigmentation that is hand-mixed extends to Maxwell himself. In his paper *Maxwell's First Coloured Light Sources: Artists' Pigments*, Richard Dougall states that 'Maxwell's earliest research on the perception of colour used daylight reflected from artists' pigments. Maxwell continually references painting in *On Colour Vision*; 'No painter, wishing to produce a fine yellow, mixes his red with his green. The result would be a very dirty drab colour [. . .] but when the pencil with which we paint is composed of rays of light, the effects of two coats of colour is very different.' 28

However, with its genesis in painting combined with the speculative adage 'Royal Stewart', the vivex print of the late 1930s begins to accumulate some of the properties underminingly described as Waitt's pre-prescribed process when it becomes evident that 'Royal Stewart' was also designated 'Victoria' alongside other collated physiognomies peering from the cloth that inevitably include Robert the Bruce and the Young Pretender, Prince Charles Edward Stuart. 'The Queen herself,' comments Cheape, 'favoured a variation of the Royal Stewart tartan in which the broad band of red is changed to white, similar to the design given in the *Vestiarium Scoticum* as 'Royal Stewart'. This Dress Stewart was also called 'Victoria'.' 29 The irony implicated in citing the infamous *Vestiarium Scoticum*, a resplendent tome created by the Brothers Sobieski Stuart, is their own inferred lineage in claiming descendency from Prince Charles. However, neither Cheape nor Scarlett attribute the Brothers with its 'invention'. Little is known of its origins but it is cited as 'following immediately after No. 73 or Prince Charles Stuart's Tartan' early in the second part of William Wilsons' 1819 Key Pattern Book'.

The 'Royal Stewart' appears to define a cloth that has its most explicit manifestation in the hands of Queen Victoria but which also traces a relationship to family of tartans which include 'MacDuff', 'MacNaughton', 'Sinclair', 'Prince Charles Edward Stuart', 'MacPherson', 'Caledonia' and two alternate versions of the same cloth; 'MacBeth' and a black grounded version of the 'Royal Stewart'. If 'Victoria' tartan can be seen to have evolved from the scarlet 'Royal Stewart' it presents a more anaemic cloth in appearance than its vivid predecessor which betrays the old Gaelic preference for red brilliance. Nevertheless 'occasionally the Royal Stuart tartan appeared, for Her Majesty always maintained she was an ardent Jacobite'. Doubtless, subject to royal endorsement, Maxwell's selection of this ribbon in particular, must have seemed politically sentient. Murkier and tentative attempts to ally the name Maxwell James Clerk appropriated after ceding lands in that name to the Maxwells of Traquair House (traditionally a Jacobite stronghold) appear contrived in the context of his presentation as one of tricolour optics and not the first colour photograph. However, in fabricating a swatch of the many coloured costume skin of Jacobite descent, 'The Royal Stewart' ribbon alludes - as Maxwell's choice - to the disembodied pelt of Bonnie Prince Charlie himself. Further, in a mythopoeic transfigurative process, the Jacobite rose becomes the body of Bonnie Prince Charlie in William Ross' lament 'The White Cockade'.

'Farewell to the White Cockade . . .
 Now my heart is broken, weak,
 And my tears run like a stream,
 Though I hid this at the time,
 It's broken forth, I do not mind.' 30

Thus the ribbon photographed in 1937 can be seen to neatly embody Prince Charlie as cockade badge, disinterred from the sodden grounds of the battlefield and inferred with the

perverse and ideological endorsement of subsequent Victorian royalty whose intentions in acquiring a plaid associated with rebellion were tie-dyed with a safety of prominent spectacle and the re-enactment of questionable political survival.

Barthes' original description of *punctum* and *studium* is collapsed into an enfleshed reading of the image as performing both. His allusion to the early image of Queen Victoria, with her horse held by Highland retainer John Brown is cohesively re-embodied by the vivex image of Maxwell's experiment. As a royal corpus denoted by 'Royal Stewart' and a Highland Gaelic rebel cloth, evident in its reference to Prince Charles Stuart, Maxwell's experiment pre-dates the social figuration of G.W. Wilson as embodying Victorian aspects of Highland culture implicated and disavowed by the presence of individuals disposed to performing them. Maxwell's photographic image as an abstracted symbol can be perceived to perform as a technologised, contemporary version of Duncan Ban MacIntyre's definition of Highland dress as described by Hugh Cheape: 'Suicheantas na h-Alba - the badge of Scotland', in a compressed and revised ontology of imprinted Highland skin: the world's first colour photographic swatch.

Notes

1 James Clerk Maxwell, W. D. Niven, ed., *On the Theory of Three Primary Colours; Lecture at the Royal Institution of Great Britain May 17, 1861; The Scientific Papers of James Clerk Maxwell* (Cambridge, 1890), pp. 449-50.

2 Thomas Sutton, *Lecture Notes, On the Theory of Three Primary Colours; August 9, 1861 The British Journal of Photography* (Liverpool, 1861).

3 Alma Davenport, *The History of Photography: An Overview* (Albuquerque, 1991), p. 24.

4 Amelia Jones, *Epilogue: Bob Flanagan's Corpse, Self/Image, Technology, Representation and the Contemporary Subject* (Abingdon and New York, 2006), pp. 244-5.

5 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London, 2000), pp. 26-27.

6 see Barthes (2000), p. 57.

7 see Barthes (2000), p. 57.

8 see Barthes (2000), p. 55.

9 Hugh Cheape, *Geibhte breacain charnaid (Scarlet Tartans would be got . . .): The Reinvention of Tradition* (Edinburgh, 2012), p. 26.

10 see Maxwell (Cambridge, 1890), pp. 447-8.

- 11 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Intertwining - The Chiasm; The Visible and the Invisible* (London and New York, Routledge), p. 250.
- 12 John Lorne Campbell, ed., Nighean Aonghais Oig (MacDonald) *A Song on the Coming of Prince Charles; Highland Songs of the Forty Five* (Edinburgh, 1984), p. 29. This song is of particular note composed, as it was, by a woman.
- 13 Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (London, 2007), pp. 141-42.
- 14 Christopher Bedford, *The Viral Ontology of Performance; Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol, New York, Toronto, 2012), p. 76.
- 15 Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London, 2000), pp. 154-55.
- 16 see Maxwell (Cambridge, 1890), pp. 447-8.
- 17 Daniel Tiffany, *Toy Medium* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 2000), p. 202.
- 18 Campbell, L. and Garnett, W. *The Life of James Clerk Maxwell with a Selection from his Correspondence and Occasional Writings and a Sketch of his Contributions to Science; James Clerk Maxwell In Memory of Edward Wilson, Who Repented of What Was in His Mind to Write After Section* (London, 1882) p. 320.
- 19 Edward Dwelly *The Illustrated Gaelic-English Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp.117-119.
- 20 James D. Scarlett, *The Tartans of the Scottish Clans* (Glasgow and London, 1975) p.76.
- 21 see Dwelly (Edinburgh, 1993), p.117.
- 22 see Cheape (Edinburgh, 2012), p. 26.
- 23 James D. Scarlett, *Scotland's Clans and Tartans* (Guildford and London, 1974), pp. 79-80.
- 24 see Jones (Abingdon and New York, 2006), p. 8.
- 25 see Scarlett (Guildford and London, 1974), p.77.
- 26 Hugh Cheape, *personal email correspondence*, August 2012. Working from the assumption that the tartan used was probably Royal Stewart, I contacted Cheape to see if he could confirm this.
- 27 see Scarlett (Guildford and London, 1974), p. 66-67.
- 28 Richard Dougall *Maxwell's First Coloured Light Sources: Artists' Pigments* (International Journal of Design & Nature and Ecodynamics, Vol. 4, No.3, 2009), p. 300.
- 29 Hugh Cheape, *Tartan, the Highland Habit* (Edinburgh, 2006), p. 81.
- 30 see Campbell, ed., William Ross, *The White Cockade; Highland Songs of the Forty-Five* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 287-291.



E. E. HENRY, Photographer.

ROBERT MCGEE,

Scalped by Sioux Chief Little Turtle in 1864.

(Fig. 3) Robert McGee Cabinet Card. Photographer E.E. Henry, 1890.

'In the summer of 1864, when I was a boy 13 years old, while driving a government team across the plains to Fort Union, N.M. our train was attacked by about 100 Brule Sioux Warriors under Little Turtle, their Chief, who captured me and held me to witness the massacre of all my comrades. After a short parley they concluded to kill and scalp me also, the old chief claiming the honor. He knocked me down with his spear handle and as I fell shot me in the back with a pistol, the ball being now lodged against my ribs, then cut my scalp loose in front only, put his foot on the back of my neck and off my entire scalp, the piece torn off being about 8 x 10 inches. He then thrust his spear entirely through me seven times, then tomahawked me twice on the head, each stroke chipping off a small piece of my skull, then struck me on the left-breast with his tomahawk and cut off one of my ribs. He then turned me over on my face and shot two arrows into my back, they passing through me, pinning me to the ground. I with the others was left for dead and lay over three hours, when I was picked up and was found to be yet alive, was sent to Fort Larned, where under Surgeon H. H. Clark my life was saved. I have suffered terribly for over 23 years, and now offer this my photograph to help support myself and family.

(Unfortunately) yours,

Robert McGee 1890' 1

III

Voicing the Object Body:

Transfusion

*'while no pain was perceptible,
the removal of his scalp sounded like
the ominous roar . . . of distant thunder.'*

- James T. Shields, *Border Wars of Texas*

Hearing Bones

'My voice,' challenges Steven Connor in *Dumbstruck, A Cultural History of Ventriloquism*, 'can be [. . .] a bruise, a patch of inflammation, a scar, or a wound.'² In performing Scottish Robert McGee's printed voice 'through the transmission of its vibrations across the bones of the skull', we have only our own internal vocality as reader to equip us with the projected and imagined tones of his account. How we 'hear' this description is necessarily co-dependent on how we 'see' its results constructed on the reverse side of an 1890 cabinet card (Fig. 3). The carefully composed head and torso portrait comprises a near profile image of McGee, whose sightline extends beyond the far right hand side of the frame. The extent of his cranial injury is fully apparent; the stitched skull displaying a bold, Frankensteinian quality in sharp contrast to McGee's full beard and handsome moustache, tweed suit and white shirt complimented by a loosely tied neckerchief. The normalcy of McGee's apparel simultaneously heightens and reconciles the viewer's response to the impact of his physiognomy. This is a temporary assurance, however, when confronted with the graphic description on the flip side of the card

that negates any attempt to reconfigure McGee's daily life as comfortable.

Connor's allusion to a damaged vocality complicates and invigorates the position Elaine Scarry takes when describing the voice in and of pain as pre-linguistic;

'physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned.'³

It is precisely this kind of voice however, both immediate and involuntary, that undergoes an act of transformation to be incorporated as a physical act, to implicate the whole of the body as catalyst and therefore mouthpiece whilst conversely displaying the voice as *of* body, of a body language. In this context, the vocalic 'reversion', associated with the primitivism Scarry presents belongs to an entirely different somatic category - one that is enfleshed. It is the complexity of how to 'read' or 'hear' this body that is graphically represented in the flash card format of McGee's text.

In this context, Shields' sensory description forming part of a narrative surrounding Josiah T. Wilbarger, another scalping survivor can only be a theoretical approximation of McGee's own experience. It seems obvious to concur that the meteorological reading of Wilbarger's attack is neither supernatural nor human; not an agency of his own vocality or a numinous message 'the voice that is heard in thunder', but the result of blood pounding in his own ears. What can be suggested however, is that it is the blood itself that ventriloquises Wilbarger's perception of what the scalping sounds like and so explicitly depicts and conveys his own damaged head as abstractly but additionally voiced as 'weather'. Thunder tends towards endarkenment, a low register; enboned, distant and therefore ominous, a precognition of storm. His own damaged

physiology is, in fact, in the eye or at the head of this storm, its components comprised of muscle, blood, sweat, tears and bone, the skull forming a sonic crucible which is metaphorically implicated as explicit weather. What is most relevant in revising Scarry's definition however, is the assertion that 'no pain was perceptible'. The implications of this description superimposed onto McGee's own experience as textually silent and therefore more receptive to contemporaneous meteorological metaphor, can be seen as a resilient form of imprinted ventriloquism. This weathered interpretation of the physiognomy of McGee's skull is reiterated by the (un)witting composition of the flash card structure of the image developed from horn card readers which forces the reader to flip back and forth causing an experiential sensation of realisation which, when contextualised by the account of Wilbarger, approximates the counterpoint action of lightning. It is, furthermore, difficult to ascertain in which order to absorb the information given - whether to corroborate what is seen with what is written or what is written with what is witnessed of McGee's damaged head. In addition, the reader, who internalises and 'hears' McGee's description seemingly ventriloquises the text itself reading it out, through, for and back to McGee through his own skull - if read out loud - and as an internal imprint, if not. Yet this very dynamic is undermined by the suspicion that it is not the text - as heard - ventriloquising the image but McGee's own head and therefore assumed voice which is inevitably silent of its own accord but which stems from the peculiar damaged geology of his patched and parted skull. As an ossified pate, its photographic presence is enboned by the flash card form which references the horn reader, which in turn visually recapitulates as scar tissue, the lightning fork line of contemporary cartography of the area the attack took place in along the New Mexico border. Further highlighted by the cropping of the photograph which appears as a bust, thereby foregrounding the head, the reader's internal voice which necessarily

performs the task of speaking and hearing internally 'McGee' as a damaged and damaging voice-piece. For the description is written in the first person and the reader quickly assimilates the 'I' and 'me' as himself: involved, tainted, considered and to a certain extent, confessional. The peculiar dynamics of the image come full circle to question who is confessing to whom, corroborated by the plea for alms at the end of the 'letter'. The only device which saves the reader from utterly absorbing and therefore becoming subject to or instigator of possession is the use of past tense which determines a certain slippage. This chronological lapse enables the reader, along with the enforced flipping of the card to get at its visual elements, to detach from wholly becoming McGee himself, as Clive Scott writes;

'the caption never coincides with the image, never exists in the same time: it either precedes the image, as it may do in a rebus - the image is called upon to enigmatic the caption - or succeeds it, also as a reaction. Consequently, the meaning itself is displaced, removed from the image: the image is either only part of a metaphor, or the instigator of a presiding voice which, in return, endows it with a justification.' ⁴

In the case of McGee's calling card the extent to which this is true operates as relief on the part of the viewer but already the both-ways ventriloquism is specifically prescribed through the visual subject itself as a corpus of language. Scott continues;

'the caption, as meditation, offers the promise of a contact between the viewer and the viewed. Many commentators would argue that this is a mirage, a pathetic bandage on the wound of photography, that would bring the photographic images inescapable pastness. It may be that photography is a desperate clinging on to life which paradoxically kills what it tries to keep animate [. . .] titles [. . .] measure these distances.' ⁵

In the case of McGee, however, by belonging to the fascinating 'should be dead' category of photographic portraiture, the 'title' or epistolary note is preceded by his evident survival. The chronology of this realisation is complicated on a number of levels in the retrospection of his

attack and recovery by viewers who encountered McGee himself in the flesh during the 1890s and by subsequent viewers who are aware that, despite his unusual survival, McGee is now long dead and that the inscription of his mortality is rehearsed within the contents of the card itself that ironically outlives him. Insofar as 'being there' goes, this is a watertight presentation of representation. Nevertheless, within the context of viral ontology, the card presents a perceptual personification which generates the frame in which the live act, if there is one, becomes more difficult to place. An image 'taken' of McGee is an image 'taken' of the reality of a singly identifiable moment; that of the studio portrait. As a necessarily captioned image, Scott is aware of the implications in the observer's interpretation of its meaning:

'[w]hat the image depicts is what we see it depict; the title does not identify so much as create certain kinds of optical awareness [. . .] but the risks are huge [. . .] the deception of the spectator and the suicide of the image.' ⁶

A language necessitating pain is adopted by Scott, extemporising Barthes' *punctum/studium* binary:

'it is not just that the photograph has access to our deep selves, helps us to discover our inner terre natal, becomes a repository of our desires, sensations, mentalities; the photograph does not just remember us, as we remember it - it remembers itself, too, because the *punctum*, the point at which the photograph lacerates us, is the instrument of its own resurrection.' ⁷

Subscribing consciousness to an image reflects back on Sontag's description of the myth making capabilities of the photograph in its ability to confront and possess the reality of its subject. Nonetheless, it is perhaps more the blind field as an agent of circumspection, imagination and cinematic 'filler' on the part of the imaginative viewer that contributes any such independent thought to a photograph. As such, it is only through the subjective internalisation

of McGee's image presence, coupled with the text that balanced, weighed and interdependent on the other, are mutually ventriloquised in the mind's eye and the mind's voice of the viewer.

Printed Instincts

How we hear McGee's voice highlights our dependency on the image and text whilst forcing us to contribute our own inner fleshly vocality, a supposed inference of a male voice of resolved or resolvable suffering and any additional information we may equip the scene with. In this sense, as live reconstruction, the image creates a forensic context - one in which the 'crime' is replayed through the evidence displayed but in which it is up to the viewer to resolvably retrace those elements, conjecturing the events. The judgement is not of 'Sioux Chief Little Turtle' (fictitious or real) as much as it is of McGee himself; whether the viewer considers or judges his story worth the requested remuneration of the extended 'title' as

'the middle man, the identifier of the danger, the circumscriber of the shock-factor, and the shop assistant who ensures we are sold the commodity rather than that we buy it of our own volition.'⁸

This compulsion, perhaps mimicked in McGee's own compulsion to show, is revived by our complicit re-enactment of the image: hand held, possessed (both financially and performatively, secret (although undeniably reproduced), witnessed - both seen and heard - and imagined. The *punctum* here operates like the practical shock factor in magic to produce an instantaneous suspension of disbelief and functions roughly as follows: having perceived the image or text, the image or text is again re-examined and the *punctum* occurs where, in internalising the text, the viewer repeats over and again 'I' and 'me' until he reaches the point

where the narrative seemingly informs him of himself i.e.; '*I have suffered terribly for over 23 years, and now offer this my photograph to help support myself and family.*' The viewer is momentarily offset from his own detachment by occupying the internalised voice of McGee in the present tense, offering 'my photograph', inevitably collapsed into a now semi-hypnotic understanding of the photograph as belonging to the viewer himself and *he has* suffered, albeit as a surrogate within the context of voyeuristic curiosity because he *has wanted* to suffer in order to realise that he must give a financial exchange either to commodify and contain this suffering (because suddenly he is naked in the moment - exposed as having empathetically concurred to becoming, performatively, perceptually, McGee) or because he has enjoyed it and will remunerate the act of suffering itself. The *punctum* is the realisation of this subtle exchange which 'lacerates' the viewer back into the knowledge of his (in)difference, returning to him his original, internal voice and enabling him to return the suffering to its rightful owner.

Conversely, however, the *punctum* is not painful. It is a *punctum* of neutral realisation and a release from the overall pain described and witnessed within the image. The *punctum*, like 'distant thunder' is a realisation that something momentous is happening. Not only has McGee imaged his pain, he has encouraged an internalisation on the part of the viewer of that pain both through his portrait and the inner soundings of the imagined printed voice on its reverse. Our speaking head becomes his, our cranium sounds his damaged cranium, we are located as a corporeal map within his corporeal map: one which has survived. As such, the scar outlined by Gilles Deleuze as 'the sign not of a past wound but of the present fact of having been wounded',⁹ collapses chronologies so that all we hear is the speaking voice of McGee operating through the here and now of our own skulls.

If the scarified voice of McGee is continually present because reliant upon ventriloquy by

subsequent readers it can be seen to inherit qualities of spiritual and corporeal selfhood that give it a liminal co-operation between embodied and disembodied experience. The complex interplay within the mediumship of the image presents complications when realising a performative 'control', to use spiritualist terminology. It is difficult to realise where the control lies, whether it is located solely within the text and by implication, within the supposed precincts of McGee's 'voice', or whether that voice is animated by the presence of McGee's image as a reworked personified 'spirit' of the medium of language. Such complexities are to a certain extent overruled by the presence of the reader/ watcher/ listener who encounters the object of image and text, awakening it from silence and darkness by stepping into the role of McGee. A first instinct, operable through the printed voice, is one of McGee speaking to the reader through the image followed swiftly or concurrently by the image of McGee ventriloquising the text itself. These printed instincts, 'heard' within the physiognomy of the reader/ watcher/ listener themselves, are constantly subject to affirmation and subjugation reflecting the complexities of identity and survival encountered (we suppose) by the imaged McGee per se. At such moments when the intertwining with the image identity of the object peaks, the reader is inevitably reminded of the scaffolding of its construction; that it is merely a piece of paper with dichromatic imprints adhering to English words and a variegated picture of a man whose scalp looks sewn together. In other words, the printed instinct, the fact of the experience being holstered in a small, hand held piece of paper reminds us of our own frailty through the corroboration of touch but also in the modesty of its composition, that the performative element within this call for alms relies solely on the reader as experiencing it to determine action. As such, it is explicit in its own execution, its own scaffolding, and by displaying the bare and modest elements of its parts which engenders a sympathetic reading. To experience our own

and McGee's printed instincts is to determine a temporary, heightened performative relationship in which experience - as 'proof, experiment' of 'having learned by trying' in 'trial, danger, peril' is emblazoned with both the politics of the lone self and the community of selves (albeit implicated by the image and word experience itself) activated through the cabinet card. It is simultaneously a topography of isolation and collectivity as demonstrated through the colonial impacts of early white America on earlier Native American America. In this context, McGee presents an instinct of place, a topos, in which a geography of violence is inscribed, and therefore embodied, on his skull relating to the etched, scraped, scratched or engraved associations with the Latin 'scalpere' from which the word scalp is derived.

Infernal Delight in Blood

In determining what corroborates a status of the real; the 'being there' of performance, insofar as McGee's experience is delineated as performative; Philip Auslander outlines the fricative relationship between photography as documentary and photography as theatre. A sense of 'the real' is succinctly placed as the ontological act, the 'performance' subsequently framed by its imaging. He writes: 'It is assumed that the documentation of the performance event provides both a record of it through which it can be reconstructed and evidence that it actually occurred.' Auslander confronts the ideology by which the photograph no longer presents a plausible account of an originary account but instead becomes it, allowing it 'to be treated as a piece of the real world, then as a substitute for it.' ¹⁰

Considering events to which the viewer has not been participant he continues; 'the space of the document becomes the only space in which the performance occurs.' This outworking of

evidence that mimics, or is subject to mimetics whilst operating mnemonically as a device, in some senses a *momento-mori*, is immediately revised in Auslander's positioning of such documentation as phenomenologically live in its own right. The extent to which it carries the germ of the original experience it references is no longer available or relevant to the new reprise it occupies.

Inherent within a discussion of liveness, performativity, 'being there' and real life is the problem of how to position McGee's supposed experience. Certainly we can corroborate the creation of the 1890 cabinet card as embodying performative instincts. Framing the ontological event, however, is more complex as the explicit understanding of the image made as artefact is inherent within the performative status of the object itself. Does this, then, create the nexus of the live, the enacted, as contextualised by the image or is there a symbiotic relationship between the attack retrospectively understood through the lens of the photograph as a type of 'sideshow' to the main, rehearsed event - that of the image itself? To a certain extent, the seemingly nefarious and shadowy events of July 1864 that are clearly ordered and represented textually in the card, inevitably present a reworked narrative complicit within McGee's own subjective experience. If we position the image as both documentary and performance, i.e.; an image that performatively behaves as document or a document that in itself houses or becomes the artefact of performance we can potentially locate the cabinet card commissioned by McGee as the most explicit instance of actioned document in the timeline of events. Rebecca Schneider, commenting on the 'equation of performance with disappearance' observes that 'such statements assume that memory cannot be housed in a body and remain, and thus that oral story telling, live recitation, repeated gesture, and ritual enactment are not practices of telling or writing history.'¹¹

The implications of such a statement are far-reaching in the instance of McGee whose unique position houses all such possibilities. The format of cabinet card that contextualises a performative reading is entirely dependent on the 'recitation, repeated gesture' of external and internal reading on the part of the viewer and subsequently 'the ritual enactment' of his attack, symbolic of frontier politics. Thus a contemporary acquirer of the card is rehearsing topical prairie propaganda of the day, of which McGee represents a 'living' part. This elemental documentation suggests that the 'enactment' or the 'trial' suffered by McGee formed part of a wider theatre of warfare in which the necessary casualties, as survivors, betray the performance of victory in merely staying alive. In this context McGee not only re-embodies and performs his own personal experience but becomes subsumed in the rhetoric of contemporary wild west historiography which is, in turn, acted out through the internal voice of the reader.

Returning momentarily to the possibility of reading the attack on McGee as performative within the context of land rights and colonial acquisition; the topography of his documented physiognomy as scarified, brutalised and fought over, directly reflects the geography of conflict being outworked during the New Mexico Border Wars. As an invocation of this severe situation and as a survivor of such struggle, the emblematic signification of McGee's presence performs as a body of damaged success and so, conversely, a body of redoubled merit, of 'winning'. The casualty within McGee emphasises the cost of such achievement in quashing indigenous resistance to prospective land possession, by graphically positioning its embodiment as costly: that such endeavour requires sacrifice.

His position as driver, as involuntarily involved in formal warfare, exaggerates this incumbent role of an innocent young boy victimised by 'savages'. On a grander scale the image works as a luminous trophy card marking the larger event which the spectator is made aware of

but need not endure the pain of. In this way it is the inherent presence and absence of physical pain that is the explicitly performative condition displayed within the attack itself, its subsequent description and the photographic document of McGee as evidence. Pain as a condition of this transaction is imprinted as a body language upon McGee's wounded head and spoken through layers of positioned meaning to a variety of sources, thus embodying both documentary and performance; the performance *of* documentary and vice versa as legitimised and cohered through real and imagined pain.

The extent to which the site of the object is 'pained' as documentary and theatre is simultaneously the extent to which it is painless to the viewer. However, this does not foreclose shared experience. The assimilation of such pain as imagined on the part of the viewer enacts a significant re-embodiment. Though the description fails to imprint a physical sensation of intense pain on the viewer, the realisation of this intense physical state creates, through the *punctum*, its absence, leaving a puncture, a tear or a wound that enables the viewer to become complicit in the recounted actions. This explicit absence of sensory agony, presents a field of experience in which the viewer is possessed by McGee as personified, evoked and transposed through the inherent powers of the viewer's own inner voice in reading the back of the card and the re-assimilation of his speaking head - now the viewer's own - on the reverse.

The financial exchange that accompanied such cards, paid in this case for the viewer's lack of pain and thereby operating as compensation, returned the object body as a fulfilled document back to itself, the theatre of display over. '(Marx)', observes Scarry, 'throughout his writings assumes that the world made is the human being's body and that, having projected that body into the made world, men and women are themselves disembodied, spiritualised. A made thing remade not to have a body, the person himself is an artefact.' ¹² McGee as artefact thus operates

within this exchange as multifariously *re-embodied*, as an object that necessitates a contract of exchange in which the textually possessed reader is housed but which also perversely houses McGee himself during the explicit moment of being summoned. The performative frames attributed to McGee's experience as document or theatre, knowledge or trace, are therefore succinctly infiltrated with the 'live' that permeates and transposes each relative stage of reintegration as a vivid 'body'.

Papier-Mache Palimpsest

The proliferation of voice implicit within McGee's account forms part of a wider mid-western journalistic narrative; one responsible for the invention of Buffalo Bill as a characterisation of William Cody by dime novel author Ned Buntline. Examples of such lucrative reinvention were readily serialised through contemporaneous pulp fiction, a kind of crude desert papier-mache palimpsest in which the anatomies and actions of the protagonists were reworked repeatedly into recognisable archetypes. McGee was vulnerable to such acquisition. His fourteen other wounds alone later earned him the tagline 'The Man with Fourteen Lives' here described medically in the 1892 report submitted by Fort Larned's post surgeon, H. H. Clarke, in support of McGee's Congress petition:

'[w]hen he left the hospital he was very weak and fully two-thirds of the surface of the skull was not healed, being covered by a very delicate coat of granulation and which bled upon the slightest friction; also a wound of the left elbow and in left groin was still open. How he survived is unaccountable. When he reached the hospital he was unconscious from shock, loss of blood, and want of food. It was several days before he could whisper so as to be understood. He was handled by raising him in the sheet, his many wounds - some fourteen in number - about chest, arms, and abdomen, prevented us grasping in the ordinary manner.' ¹³

This sober account is markedly different to the newspaper adventure story constructed alternately in an 1896 article written by pioneer woman journalist, Isabel Worrell Ball, who goes so far as to suggest McGee was nearly buried alive, not by 'savages' but by the rescue team of troops. 'When they undertook to put McGee underground' she dramatises, 'they found a lively corpse, despite the fact he was scalped and had fourteen distinct wounds'. The piece itself is divided into a 'thrilling story' of seven sub-headings; *Seeking His Fortune, The Perilous Journey, Expensive and Ungrateful, A Thousand Deaths, A Lively Corpse, Recommends \$500,000 and Campaign of Revenge*.¹⁴ The semi-biblical tone, artfully adhered to when Worrell Ball explains the 'reservation was set apart for them [the Sioux] in South Dakota, but they only used it as were the cities of refuge used in Bible days', is personified in McGee himself. Slightly deranged, suggests Worrell Ball - 'his mind, which had been remarkably clear to that time, began to cloud', McGee performs his wilderness duty: 'for a dozen years after receiving the injuries, McGee was a wanderer'. The irony comes when, aside from the supposed fact 'he became possessed of a desire to hunt Sioux to the death', Worrell Ball reports 'he sought the companionship of various tribes of Indians, learning many languages and dialects, friendly to all and favoured by all except the Brule Sioux'. In a bizarre morality tale finale, Worrell Ball asserts that McGee's gun barrel was notched up with one large mark which 'commemorated the full measure of his revenge. A long mark for the chief, and nine shorter ones for the nine under chiefs who had bitten the dust at the command of the trusty rifle that never failed to fire when pointed at a Brule breast.' This gun of magical properties that seems to operate independently of McGee is the tool by which he regains his sanity, the totemic turning point objectified in a righteously vengeful firearm. She concludes: 'After Little Turtle had gone to the happy hunting grounds, McGee's mind began to gain its equilibrium until at last he

became perfectly sane.'

The implications of such a description do not necessarily flatter the prospects of McGee. Insanity, however temporary, while it may have excused his own private massacre in the eyes of the press, apparently cost him, referenced in other parts of the article where Worrell Ball states 'in one of his frenzied spells the pass and letter of President Lincoln, and the order of General Curtis were stolen from him, and neither President nor the army took any notice of him.' Mr Lincoln had sent McGee a pass and letter by special envoy in October 1864, requesting - like Johns Matthews, his presence in Washington. It was following this that McGee embarked on his so-called killing spree. Worrell Ball also notes that 'no hair has ever been induced to grow upon his head, though he has been made the subject of many experiments by eminent surgeons on both continents, and the medical colleges of this country are familiar with the "man with fourteen lives" Apparently McGee was also resident in or nearby Topeka some six years later as a second newspaper article in the Kansas Democrat, September 14th 1889, states: 'He is going to stay in Topeka and attend the fair through the week. He is now broken down in health and unable to work.'

It is interesting to note Worrell Ball was, at the time, assistant secretary to the State Historical Society of Kansas where journalist Henry Inman was Director on the Board. Further, she acted as 'amanuensis when he came walking out to our farm late at night. I wrote in long hand the greater part of his first book "The Old Santa Fe Trail." ' It was this original text which lacked financial aid; 'In 1895 while Colonel Inman was working on his [. . .] book, he offered several men in Topeka a half interest in it if they would furnish food and clothing for him until it was completed. The proposition was not accepted until William F. Cody "Buffalo Bill" came to Topeka with his show [. . .] The two men had been friends on the frontier. Inman told of the

circumstances in which he was placed. Cody volunteered financial aid, the two men went to New York and the book was soon completed.' ¹⁵ Cody was to write the preface to the second version of Inman's Santa Fe Trails, which includes the account of Robert McGee:

'On the 18th of July, the caravan arrived in the vicinity of Fort Larned. There it was supposed that the proximity of that military post would be a sufficient guarantee from any attack of the savages; so the men of the train became careless, and as the day was excessively hot, they went into camp early in the afternoon, the escort remaining in bivouac about a mile in the rear of the train. About five o'clock, a hundred and fifty painted savages, under the command of Little Turtle of the Brule Sioux, swooped down on the unsuspecting caravan while the men were enjoying their evening meal. Not a moment was given them to rally in defence of their lives, and of all belonging to the outfit, with the exception of one boy, not a soul came out alive. The teamsters were every one of them shot dead and their bodies horribly mutilated. After their successful raid, the savages destroyed everything they found in the wagons, tearing the covers into shreds, throwing the flour on the trail, and winding up by burning everything that was combustible. On the same day the commanding officer of Fort Larned had learned from some of his scouts that the Brule Sioux were on the war-path, and the chief of scouts with a handful of soldiers was sent out to reconnoitre. They soon struck the trail of Little Turtle and followed it to the scene of the massacre on Cow Creek, arriving there only two hours after the savages had finished their devilish work. Dead men were lying about in the short buffalo-grass which had been stained and matted by their flowing blood, and the agonised posture of their bodies told far more forcibly than any language the tortures which had come before a welcome death. All had been scalped; all had been mutilated in that nameless manner which seems to delight the brutal instincts of the North American savage. Moving slowly from one to the other of the lifeless forms which still showed the agony of their death-throes, the chief of scouts came across the bodies of two boys, both of whom had been scalped and shockingly wounded, besides being mutilated, yet, strange to say, both of them were alive. As tenderly as the men could lift them, they were conveyed at once back to Fort Larned and given in charge of the post surgeon. One of the boys died in a few hours after his arrival in the hospital but the other, Robert McGee, slowly regained his strength, and came out of the ordeal in fairly good health. The story of the massacre was related by the young McGee after he was able to talk, while in the hospital at the fort; for he had not lost consciousness during the suffering to which he was subjected by the savages. He was compelled to witness the tortures inflicted on his wounded and captive companions, after which he was dragged into the presence of the chief, Little Turtle, who determined that he would kill the boy with his own hands. He shot him in the back with his own revolver, having first knocked him down with a lance handle. He then drove two arrows through the unfortunate boy's body, fastening him to the ground, and stooping over his prostrate form ran his knife around his head, lifting sixty-four square inches of his scalp, trimming it off just behind his ears. Believing him dead by that time, Little Turtle abandoned his victim; but the other savages, as they went by his supposed corpse, could not resist their infernal

delight in blood, so they thrust their knives into him, and bored great holes in his body with their lances.' ¹⁶

Although there is no specific evidence to suggest that McGee's sideshow occupation made him employable by Buffalo Bill, whom he almost certainly met, it does specify the calling card as an appendage of travelling fair life. This contextualisation as show gift card provides a telling inflection in McGee's own self-awareness as live performer, re-enacted through cabinet card dynamics. That he avoided the type of rhetoric employed by the big showmen of the day is indicative either of his own status as side-show relic, necessitating a more sober account to offset a potentially live description of his sensational experience; or that he resorted to begging. The attenuated circumstances he found himself in point towards the latter and contribute to a demonstration of how the blind field can be corroded, rearranged, damaged and explicated through foreknowledge of circumstance and context. Such information also potentially repositions McGee as a professional beggar or side show attraction, displacing the naturalness of the cabinet card narrative and suggesting its position as an emphatic hallmark.

Wild West Wound Man

Auslander's assertion the 'space of the document becomes the only space in which performance occurs' ¹⁷ as the hand held performance of McGee's cabinet card is complicated and revised from a number of critical contexts. 'Writing has no smell' writes Roland Barthes, for example, in *Image, Music, Text*, 'having accomplished its process of production it falls, not like a bellows deflating but like a meteorite disappearing it will travel far from my body.' ¹⁸ Eric Griffiths too, from the perspective of Victorian poetry (which, to a certain extent McGee can

unwittingly seem to embody with epic themes and dramatic cadence) is convinced that 'oral discourse shines forth as 'interpersonal', 'somatic', 'situational', and writing is cast into the shade as 'autonomous', 'minimally dependent on the contribution of background information' on the part of the reader.'¹⁹ He is of course, referring to *The Death of the Author* in which Barthes writes '[. . .] it is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, though a prerequisite impersonally [. . .] to reach that point where language only acts, 'performs', and not 'me'.'²⁰

However, as collapsible frames where several vocalities; heard through the inner, the printed voice and *imagined* out loud (we as internal readers recollect, perhaps even hear our own voice reading silently back to ourselves, sounding in the bone); to an enfleshed interiority that extends beyond the precincts of the private internal that *actually* trembles in the bone; conjoined with a stain or sentience in how the printed voice carries something of the cadence of the spoken voice of the author in how he allows the printed letters, the phrasing and tone to emanate through and from this palimpsest of voices; to a final aural recognition that the form of such voicing, its *shape* in grammatical structure and subsequent signification carries a meaning and a projected, imagined sound if not literal, then acquainted with any additive descriptions of gender, age, occupation, etc.; to finally concur that the mouthpiece of several characters (irrelevant to us here) further revises and complicates all of the above but without ever detracting from the compressed and enmeshed layers of auratic and printed corporeal matter housed in any one reading.

Returning to the Marxist position that a 'made thing remade not to have a body, the person himself is an artefact', Rebecca Schneider usefully confronts the mortality rate of several genres and movements 'death of the author, death of science, death of history, death of literature, death of character, death of the avant-garde, death of modernism',²¹ suggesting that the 'increased

technologies of archiving, may be why the late twentieth century has been both so enamoured of performance and so replete with deaths.' She concedes, 'killing the author, or sacrificing his station may be, ironically, the means of ensuring he remains.' Griffiths, too, remains sceptical of the complete expiration of this quasi-phantasmatic personified male presence Barthes has invented. We are aware, as readers, of his rebuttal, stigmatism and therefore prurient uprising, even in this negated form. 'Meaning', concludes Griffiths, 'is always a derived form of intentionality. Those who presume that because the author is missing from the text he is therefore dead are overhasty; his very absence may be something he creates and so over hasty.'

22 For Griffiths, 'intention determines relevant context,' emphasising the startling properties of Freud's diagnosis 'writing has in its origin the voice of an absent person.'²³

If the inscribed and pained body is McGee himself, a surviving wound man displaying a physical palimpsest of survival and the author (from a modernist perspective), ghosted, shadowed, then it may be possible to suggest that any such absented authorship as original catalyst was Native American and that McGee's diagnostic account on the 'reverse' side of the card rests on the initial engraving actions performed by the Sioux. This position somewhat refutes Griffiths suggestion that 'writing does somehow detach itself from context, as speech does not [. . .] no spatio-temporal or meteorological location for the reader to check and determine intention from',²⁴ particularly when supplemented, as the cabinet card is, with a graphic portrait. Arguably, in the same way that the body in pain is not merely a body without sufficient means of sophisticated self description as defined by Scarry but a body revised as a language in and of itself; McGee's body, as evidenced in the artefact, enables a site in which several re-worked temporalities are pronounced within the meteorological body, the body that becomes enthundered and one which momentarily (or for the duration of the encounter)

enthunders the reader also. The anatomical topography is foregrounded in the skull as scalped, enboned and uttered. It presents, as such, a meteorological corpus, a physiognomy that operates as the result of confronting and as such *performing* that landscape.

The multifarious temporal shifts, chronological, eternal, retro-active, concurrent and instantaneous as well as specified, contribute a layer of more complex anti-narrative structure to the embodied artefact and can be contained, to a certain extent, ideologically within the blind field of the image. The collapsing temporal frameworks in the text can be identified in chronological order as follows: 'summer of 1864', 'a boy of thirteen', 'over three hours', 'over 23 years', '1890'. The overlay of such wide spans of time concurs to an overriding sense of the past manifest in the present, as imperilled duration as Stuart Brisley succinctly outlines; 'the issue here is not one of the ephemeral versus the permanent. Nothing is forever. It is the question of the relative durations of the impermanent.' His position is supported by Adrian Heathfield:

'The past returns repeatedly within the present. An event thus emerges as a kind of rupture in experience, knowledge and history. Whilst notions of eventhood are often recursive, then, they do suggest a bracketing of time, a designation of "uneventful" times through which the event as heightened experience must necessarily be constituted.'²⁵

Though these observations juxtapose the live with the documented, they provide useful ways to designate a sense of temporal performativity within the auspices of McGee's artefact.

Elements of transfixion appear to pause the reader's progress, 'voice-walking' through the image. Such moments occur in the acknowledgement of the supposed heat of that afternoon; McGee's boyhood age of thirteen; the duration of his liminality, lying damaged in the prairie; the subsequent length of his suffering and the date of his signature, marking all time events but

the last as retrospective. Yet the device used which incorporates the static portrait of a McGee contemporaneous with his dated signature appears to conflate all such data, representationally poured into his damaged head. The blind field, described by Barthes as a perceptual phenomenon precipitated by the *punctum* within any given photographic image, appears cohesively infiltrated with an authorship that defies his rebuttal of any attributable significant voice of intent outlined in *The Death of the Author*. This occurs not only through the explicit point-counterpoint of the card itself which not only insists - begs - for recognition of authorship but seemingly ventriloquises the image itself with its own narrative blind field.

It could be argued that read consistently within Barthes' definition, the blind field might alternately operate as the fact of McGee's own death whilst being preserved as revived in the image, or in the presence of his well made tweed suit as corroborative of his attempt to reintegrate into (wild) western society, yet when extrapolated all other suggestions of the blind field return to his scalpedness as contrasted with such designated elements. Formally, the blind field relies on its existence beyond the photographic frame and as replete with or born out of a sense of *punctum*. McGee's card as embodiment artefact displays both the *punctum*, the *woundedness* which is necessarily laid out in the blind field of the reverse side text in order that not the *studium* per se, the presence of a document image (although the artefact does betray a feeling of McGee's 'qualifications' or 'papers') - but a causal need for healing, for alms, for succour, for *treatment* is transformatively evident. The diagnostic element of the text addresses this need by simply and succinctly laying out the animation of events that afternoon which read steadily and chronologically:

'He knocked me down with his spear handle and as I fell shot me in the back with a pistol, the ball being now lodged against my ribs, then cut my scalp loose in front only, put his foot on

the back of my neck and off my entire scalp, the piece torn off being about 8 x 10 inches. He then thrust his spear entirely through me seven times, then tomahawked me twice on the head, each stroke chipping off a small piece of my skull, then struck me on the left-breast with his tomahawk and cut off one of my ribs. He then turned me over on my face and shot two arrows into my back, they passing through me, pinning me to the ground. I with the others was left for dead and lay over three hours [. . .]

The extent to which the blind field can be said to exist as the text on the flip side of the flash card as an imaged but blinded state, voiced and boned by subsequent readership is contingent upon the image itself which equally ventriloquises its presence through the reader, equips it with a sense of progression, of movement. The performativity of the artefact as enabled in the hands of subsequent viewers, forces a more explicit understanding of the contract entered when experiencing 'McGee'. Elements within the sensational literature of the day dealing with McGee's case, those of tag lines in journalist Isobel Worrall-Ball's heady account, for example, determine a sense of progression, of lively narrative that is neatly eclipsed by McGee's photographic artefact. This is, in part, due to the 'literary' form either takes; the newspaper spread or dime novel desperate to evoke drama, packs as much as possible into the tight knit coda of brazen titling. The textual image of McGee, however, whilst allowing the viewer respite, formally initiates curiosity by the simple device of disabling the ability to view the image whilst reading the text. The presence of simple, diagnostic language as opposed to racy, heated tracts is one reliant on factual information alone. McGee's testimony is puritan and to the point. (Contestably, the 'raciness' could be determined as the culminating request in the 'letter' for money). It is the device of the blind field as narrative description, coupled with the 'flashing' or 'flipping' image that begins to foreground motion, activation and therefore possession on the part of the viewer - he can manipulate the object to suit his curiosity. As acquisitional goods, this subtle animation of an otherwise dormant, placid, lifeless object (seemingly more so than

the turning of pulp fiction or newspaper pages) may designate the viewer a temporary owner of McGee's experience and therefore, subliminally, of McGee himself as extant within the image.

McGee as author reclaims his power, however, when the toy-like automata of the speaking image, the ventriloquised scalp contingent on the viewer, starts to assimilate the gravity of the description which is inferred by the 'I' and 'me' of the text, gradually penetrating the viewer with a sense of their own selves 'shot', 'tomahawked', 'struck' and 'cut'. The wonder factor or curiosity further enables such an exchange, emphasising the thunderedness, the lack of pain as transplanted into a wondrous, or overwhelming event. The inner voice performing the printed voice of the text tells itself that these acts are happening, have happened, will happen each time the card is reviewed and that they are also happening to the viewer. This renders the card redoubly cinematic; cinematic in the mind's voice, creating for the mind's eye a significant series of moveable images and concurrently, through the use of the first person, a filmic situation where the viewer is not only watching the events but has become the protagonist, talking himself through them, reminding himself of what has happened; how he was wounded. The viewer, equipped with a sense of what he should look like - described by the portrait, is given a visual qualification that enables him to understand how he could and should behave as instructed through directive mnemonics on the flip side of the card. The cabinet photograph is thus explicitly performative and engages a clear series of internal devices on the part of the viewer whose inner vision becomes the lens of the camera, enabled by a 'script' that details the precise actions he must perform, and a character description given visually on the front of the card of what kind of persona he must inhabit. This device would work less successfully, if both image and text were concurrently printed side by side. Neither would the image alone, or the text, manifest such specifically performative designations on the part of the viewer. The blind

field as cinematic is repeated, is returnable, each time the object/image/text is confronted and as such depicts a consistent spatio-temporal location in which Robert McGee is performed and performable. Demonstrably, with its puritan, directorial language and clear imaging, the impact of McGee's cabinet card is far more sensational than contemporaneous dime novel and newspaper pulp fiction by the re-enactment culture implicit within any transactive experience of this miniaturised, hand-held, western.

Notes

- 1 Robert McGee, reverse side of 1890 cabinet card (Washington D.C., 1890)
- 2 Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism* (Oxford, 2000), p. 5.
- 3 Elaine Scarry, *The Body In Pain* (Oxford, 1985), p. 4.
- 4 Clive Scott, *The Spoken Image, Photography and Language* (London, 1999), p. 53.
- 5 see Scott (1999), pp. 54-55.
- 6 see Scott (1999), p. 64.
- 7 see Scott (1999), p. 73.
- 8 see Scott (1999), p.73.
- 9 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (London and New York, 2004), p. 98
- 10 Philip Auslander *The Performativity of Performance Documentation; Live Art in History* (Bristol, New York, Toronto, 2012), p. 48.
- 11 Rebecca Schneider, *Performance Remains; Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol, New York, Toronto, 2012), p. 140.
- 12 see Scarry (1985), p. 244.
- 13 H.H. Clarke *Post Surgeon Report No. 1810, 54th Congress, 1st Session, 1896.*
- 14 Isabel Worrell Ball, *Has Fourteen Lives*, The Larned Chronoscope, May 23rd, 1896.
- 15 Robert Maxwell, Thesis, *A Study of Henry Inman, 1837-1899*, (excerpt from an original letter to the Kansas Chronoscope, 1928) (Fort Hays Kansas State College, 1966), p. 26.
- 16 Henry Inman, *The Old Santa Fe Trail: The Story of a Great Highway* (New York, 1897), p. 259.
- 17 see Auslander (Bristol, New York and Toronto, 2012), p. 49.
- 18 Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (London, 1977), pp. 204-205.
- 19 Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford, 1989), p. 35.
- 20 see Barthes (1977), p. 143.
- 21 see Schneider (Bristol, New York and Toronto, 2012), p. 144.
- 22 see Griffiths (Oxford, 1989), p. 47.
- 23 Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (London, 1963), p. 8.
- 24 see Griffiths (1989), p. 50.
- 25 Adrian Heathfield *Then Again; Perform, Repeat, Record: Live Art in History* (Bristol, New York, Toronto, 2012), pp. 27-30.

IV

Grounding the Object Body:

Transplantation

'Bullet proof coat . . . After a battle, the soldier would shake off the bullets from his coat, the way he'd shake off snowflakes, because he carried a small round stone from the head of an otter.' - Alan Lomax, BBC 'Clearances Notebook'.

Riders on the Storm

Riders on the storm,
'Riders on the storm,
Into this house we're born,
Into this world we're thrown,
Like a dog without a bone,
An actor out alone,
Riders on the storm.' ¹

Positioning Jim Morrison as a modern personification of the blinded, visionary bard Ossian is arguably made more plausible by the song *Riders of the Storm* which appears on the seminal 1974 album *L.A. Woman*. Usually considered an adaptation from *Praise for an Urn* by American poet Hart Crane, wherein 'the thoughts of the poet are described as his inheritance', it is the seminal line 'Delicate riders of the storm' resolving the second stanza, that is thought to have inspired the singer. However, the prospect of Morrison's acquisition sourced alternately from *Fingal Book IV* translated by James MacPherson, transitively presents performative embodiments that pervade the perceptual textuality of *Ossian*.

'His thoughts, delivered to me
 From the white coverlet and pillow,
 I see now, were inheritances -
 Delicate riders of the storm . . .
 The slant moon on the slanting hill
 Once moved us toward presentiments
 Of what the dead keep, living still,
 And such assessments of the soul' 2

'[. . .] ye children of the storm. Come to the
 death of thousands [. . .] that his fame may rise in song [. . .]
 O ye ghosts of heroes dead! ye riders of the storm [. . .] !' 3

Perhaps lesser known as a poet, Morrison engaged in surprisingly sober Scottish subject matter, evidenced in his 1969 collection *The Lords, Notes on Vision*, demonstrating an early pre-occupation with the genesis of photographic and cinematic technology. 'Robert Baker, an Edinburgh artist,' writes Morrison, 'while in jail for debt, was struck by the effect of light shining through the bars of his cell through a letter he was reading, and out of this perception he invented the first *Panorama*, a concave, transparent picture view of the city.' 4 The inconsistency in the name Barker to Baker (and in describing Barker as an Edinburgh artist) feasibly supports an alternative context in which 'riders *of* the storm' could be perceived, if grammatically cross-germinated, as 'riders *on* the storm' to accommodate poetical instinct as opposed to translative error. Morrison's use of *on* rather than *of* suggests a meteorological detachment from functional corporeity and one which foregrounds vision, symptomatic of the artist's lasting interest in cinema; 'You cannot touch these phantoms [. . .]'5 he writes, '[. . .]the appeal of cinema lies in the fear of death.' 6

Morrison's contemporary, the poet Michael McClure, retrospectively places the artist not only within a Scottish context but a Highland one in a 1979 eulogy written to 'James Douglas Morrison, a poet of Scottish-American descent [. . .] as George MacDonald said: "Death alone from death can save. Love is death, and so is brave. Love can fill the deepest grave. Love loves on beneath the wave." ' 7 This verse, strangely Californian in its re-contextualisation, is reiterated as McClure cites MacDonald in relation to Morrison. 'Jim's presence and artistry,' he writes, 'created a vibrant wave, and he is there as a bright, singing statue in the light-shows and amplification. But his poems and songs stand proving, in fineness, that *Death alone from death can save*.' 8 That a Beat poet should quote MacDonald seems particularly idiosyncratic and yet McClure's intuition in claiming such a text for Morrison situates the deceased poet within a Highland Gaelic sensibility. Further, MacDonald's inoculative treatment of death illuminates the tragic within the Ossianic tradition itself, replete with its own waves of sorrow and suffering yet suffused with the transformative properties of epic sublimation. Morrison more bluntly acknowledges his Scottish heritage; 'I am a Scot, or so I'm told. [. . .] Snake in the Glen [. . .]' 9 yet certain meanings in the imagery of his poetry unwittingly epitomise a thematic Ossianic scene:

'My wild words
slip into fusion
& risk losing
the solid ground

So stranger, get
wilder still

Probe the Highlands.' 10

Wallace Fowle, contributing to the more colourful list of additives used to describe Morrison, proffers 'a general term designating in Greek a young man, an adolescent: *kouros*.' ¹¹ This presence of personified or objectified containment is suggested by varying readings of *Riders On the Storm* and its sources, evident, for example, in Crane's treatment of the urn as functional subject in his poem *Praise for an Urn*. John T. Irwin argues that this produces a phonic container, the ashen elements contained in and by those 'thoughts, delivered to me [. . .] I see now were inheritances.' ¹² This 1921 linguistic re-embodiment, liminally tracing his friend's 'self', curiously echoes a work by Wallace Stevens, written slightly later in 1923, titled *Anecdote of the Jar*.

I placed a jar in Tennessee,
And round it was, upon a hill.
It made the slovenly wilderness
Surround that hill.

The wilderness rose up to it,
And sprawled around, no longer wild.
The jar was round upon the ground
And tall and of a port in air.

It took dominion everywhere.
The jar was gray and bare.
It did not give of bird or bush,
Like nothing else in Tennessee. ¹³

The acquisitional properties of the jar, evident in the last two lines of the opening stanza: 'It made the slovenly wilderness/ surround that hill' are indicative of a Western monumental order and as such have grave repercussions for Native American Medieval scholar Carter Revard who writes; 'One of the poem's crimes [. . .] is its dandiacal condescending to the great abstract

"state" of Tennessee - which, before that Jar arrived, was some sort of Tabula Rasa, but after its arrival is cowed in to cooliedom, kowtowing to the Imperial [. . .] Artist. Just one bit of European Craft [. . .] has turned an entire country into a subdued and self-alienated place [. . .] It is of course a "classic" European notion that setting a Jar - or a cross, or a crown, or a writ - upon a hill allows one to "take possession" of the whole "territory" surrounding that artefact.'

¹⁴ In the context of Revard's terse analysis, an infamous account by Morrison of childhood possession when witnessing a desert crash, both displaces and re-embodies the 'wilderness' - the 'other' - which, within Western Cartesian dualism, can be seen to treat the body itself as jar or urn.

'It was outside Albuquerque, while traveling with his parents on the highway from Santa Fe, that Jim experienced what he would later dramatically describe as "the most important moment of my life". They came upon an overturned truck, and saw injured and dying Pueblo Indians lying where they had been thrown on the asphalt.

Jim began to cry. Steve stopped the car to see if he could help and dispatched another onlooker to a telephone to call for an ambulance. Jimmy . . . stared through the car window at the chaotic scene, still crying . . . He became more and more upset, sobbing hysterically. "I want to help, I want to help . . . They're dying! They're dying!" Finally his father said, "It was a dream, Jimmy, it didn't really happen, it was a dream." Jim continued to sob.

Years later Jim told his friends that as his father's car pulled away from the intersection, an Indian died and his soul passed into Jim's body.' ¹⁵

This body, metaphorically, can be detached from the more journalistic definitions of Morrison, to be perceived as the 'bright, singing statue', 'kouros' or 'jar' of the bardic rock poet himself, mixing Scots, Greek and Native American mythopoiesis. The vicious dislocation of physicality and the emblazoned inheritance of perceived soulful power indicated in the account can be read in a proprietary frame, rendering the 'jar' as a body of significant adoption and

adaptation. The bloodedness of the account and the microcosmic culture of pain that is implied in the scene - deeply cinematic in its description as indeed Morrison would have wanted it to be - appears to legitimise both the embodied nature of the encounter and conversely enhance an etheric reading. The transference of 'passing', the parental insistence that it was only a dream, subscribe to a narrative locked into the privacy of the jar as metaphor for Morrison's emphatic internalisation. Such alienation of the corporeal container, the secrecy of its confines as a performance of damage but also of a conscious sentience *damaged by* the performative transaction situates it as taboo, personal and internal. The inevitable subjectivity of Morrison's experience and his subsequent use of it as both invocation and evocation on stage, moulds the general - the Pueblo Indian - to the specific; the visionary bardic figure of Morrison. In this way, Revard's précis of *Anecdote of the Jar* precisely delineates elements of the wilderness of damage evoked in the crash passed by Morrison which in turn act as a compacted cinematic moment iterating the possession of aspects of Native American culture by Western colonisation. Morrison has painfully situated this dilemma within himself, both embodying and encoding the exchange. His acquisition, like Stevens', undeniably presents a colonial perspective yet the chiasma of the scenario seemingly places Morrison as subject to other, liminal forces - forces of possession, and as such presents him as an unwilling recipient of perceived Native American etheric sensibility, insofar as subsequent performative musical and literary reconstruction enables. Repercussive hauntings of the scene, textually embedded and orally invoked, litter Morrison's work, in songs such as *Peace Frog*, *Ghost Song*, *Dawn's Highway* and in these three verses taken from *Wilderness*:

'The Crossroads
 a place where ghosts
 reside to whisper into
 the ear of travellers &
 interest them in their fate.' 16

'Indians scattered on dawn's highway bleeding
 Ghosts crowd the young child's fragile eggshell mind' 17

'Like our ancestors
 The Indians
 We Share a fear of sex
 excessive lamentation for the dead
 & an abiding interest in dreams & visions.' 18

This physical landscape, numinously evoked as 'Crossroads', 'night', when positioned against a biographic knowledge of Morrison's witnessing of the crash as a child, is de-routed and experientially wounded, presenting a heightened perception of environment and selfhood.

Similarly, the liminal body of the character Ossian in James MacPherson's collated fragments could arguably be termed a numinous body. Identified by Joep Leerssen as one of the first literary texts to 'draw on [. . .] emotional unease and destabilisation to make the mind more receptive for [. . .] the sort of material which requires a suspension of disbelief, a responsiveness to emotion recollected or a receptiveness to overflows of powerful feeling', he continues:

'Ossian is not a member of human society but rather a remote ambassador to the ontological outer fringes, relaying messages from other spheres to his audience [. . .] the most famous passages describe how it is the wind itself which plays his harp strings like the spirit of the dead, its music interpreted by Ossian as messages from beyond the grave. This is not just a metaphorical objective manifestation of inner feelings, as if one's tears are metaphorically likened to falling raindrops, but quite the reverse: inner feelings are literally a registration, a communication from a remote outside sphere.' 19

Taken out of context, there is a useful ambiguity implicit within Leerssen's final statement

which obscures exactly whose 'one's tears' might belong to; as a readerly transaction or more obviously as a literary device indicative of the Sublime. Fiona Stafford points out that '[t]he very notion of being blinded by tears, for example, which could be interpreted as a sign of primitive passion, also suggests the contemporary emphasis of sensibility.' ²⁰

Leerssen sources a definition of liminality, 'from the Latin *limen*, "threshold"', linking it to anthropological readings of transference, shamanism and ritualistic transformation of *Ossian* within a framework of historical literary construction comparable to Eliot, Dickens and Wilkie Collins. This essentialist approach, whereby *Ossian* (as indeed it should) is treated foremost as an influential work of formal literature, *entrenching* aspects of the liminal, is, however, intrinsically reliant on the subjective reception of its readership. Despite its contemporaneous international frame it might be useful, therefore, to position such Ossianic devices suggested by Leerssen within a more fully Highland Gaelic perception of the liminal not so much in, of and against aspects of Scottish Gaelic literature per se, as has been extensively explored by Derick S. Thompson and others, but to treat the liminal as a subtext for the poems in which to present transformative corporeality or bodies 'at the threshold'. In this context a revised understanding of the definition of the liminal as a twilight position situated 'at a sensory threshold' can be seen to demonstrate the 'barely perceptible', where the historiography of Highland numinous physical experience eclipses a drier textual appreciation of the poem cycle. This position is inevitably re-situated by a subjective demographic understanding on an individual and collective scale as Rebecca Schneider points out; 'the body, read through genealogies of impact and ricochet, is arguably always interactive,' ²¹ placing Ossianic sites of the body in an other-worldly system, whereby the coda embedded in the work adheres to a phenomenology of asomatous Gaelic awareness.

It is more challenging to locate the 'barely perceptible' in relation to Morrison; his perspicuity in constructing performative identity cultivated a highly visible display body. What may be intrinsic to an underlying sensibility within Morrison, tallied to an Ossianic register of somaticism, is a keen sense of the transformative locked into disaster narratives ultimately redolent of aspects of traditional Scottish bardic culture - one which Morrison barely perceived in himself.

In another sense the transitional referenced by Leerssen symbiotically frames the corpus of land, then subject to Clearance, to 'disappearance [. . .] the wind itself which plays [. . .] like the spirit of the dead.' The sense in which this Clearance landscape in particular typifies the tragic emotions grounded within the text, is heightened by a taxonomy which situates Ossianic landmarks in real topographical locations. Here we have a number of transformations, operable as both real and textual, ghostly and embodied, possessed and dispossessed, requiring *Ossian* to undergo constant revision as referent, performance, evidence, revival and lens. The ways in which Highland terrain is perceived by the character of Ossian are irreducibly subject to the reciprocity with which the terrain operates upon Ossian the bard as configured through the oral descendance within Gaelic poetry itself. As 'enboned' oral tradition relayed generationally, the extent to which spoken culture such as this is latterly personified by MacPherson's work, becomes tautologically explicit within the many complex readings of *Ossian*, all of which implicate the paradoxical situation of present absence. It is possible, in such light, as the bardic Ossian perceives in literary terms that which was contemporaneously still evident within the actual cartography, description and topography of the Scottish lochs, glens and 'plains' - thus engendering a 'fictional' character gazing onto 'real' territory, to perceive the poems as a potent cultural performative not only as an epic art form within a European literary framework but as a

post-genocide wish text, a live work manual for the survival of a near-decimated culture: one which continues to 'probe the Highlands'.

Reluctant Bard of the Deer People

Ossian is commonly understood to personify a melancholy high-magic bardic presence which comprises a polymorphic Homeric Greek, generally Celtic Druidic (present in Miltonic allusions to blindedness in relation to inner sight), Old Testament desert prophetic and as 'the disinterred personality of a blind old Highland bard' - the archetypal male, Gaelic Scots visionary. In the prefatory *Dissertation Concerning the Antiquity, &c. of the Poems of Ossian the Son of Fingal* MacPherson situates Ossianic bardic culture as central to a comprehension of his own claims through translation for a primordial poetic narrative, referencing 'the bards, who were an inferior order of the Druids'.

'[t]he poems that celebrate Trathal and Cormac, ancestors to Fingal, are full of particulars concerning the fall of the Druids [. . .] A few that remained, retired to the dark recesses of their groves, and the caves they had formerly used for their meditations.' ²²

MacPherson then adds 'It is then we find them in the *circle of stones*, and unheeded by the world.' ²³ He continues, increasing a sense of normalcy by outlining the functional, familial occupation of the role of bard: 'the poems concerning the ancestors of the family were handed down from generation to generation; they were repeated to the whole clan on solemn occasions.' ²⁴ Yet the extent to which the process involves entrenched ancestor worship is sharply highlighted, as MacPherson acknowledges in not only the genealogical inheritance of

each bard but in the detailed repetitions and oral re-enactments of past heroes directly related to the chief sanctioned bard. As such, oral bardic culture kept a precise and far reaching catalogue of local history as well as the rekindling of mnemonic devices in relation to real, actual and supposed triumphs and disasters of the clan itself.

One of the more prosaic models for James MacPherson's presentation of the blind bard Ossian may have been Roderick Morison, (Rhaidhri Mac Mhuirich), known as the Blind Harper and Scotland's last minstrel. Born in the 1600s, relatively little is known of his life except that he was 'a poet attached to a MacLeod Chief' and as such, spent significant periods of time at Dunvegan Castle. He makes a brief appearance in *The Costume of the Clans* by the Sobieski Stuarts - John Sobieski Stolberg and Charles Edward Stuart, in which they paraphrase an account by Roderick's descendant, Alexander Morison. An interesting description is given by William Matheson who cites the professional abandonment of Morison by Clan Chief Roderick MacLeod, inciting Morison to compose an embittered piece *Oran do Mhac Leoid Dhun Bheagain: A Song to MacLeod of Dunvegan*, whose sentiments pre-date MacPherson's Ossianic reconstruction and yet convey much of the phonic melancholy characterised in the poem cycle:

'Echo is dejected in the hall where music was wont to
sound, in the place resorted to by poet-bands, now
without mirth, or pleasure, or drinking, without merri-
ment or entertainment, without the passing round of
drinking-horns in close succession, without feasting,
without liberality to men of learning, without dalliance,
or voice raised in tuneful song.' 25

Of equal interest is Matheson's comment on Morison's ill-use by MacLeod; 'the most

striking testimony of all is provided by subsequent history, in the light of which some of what he says seems almost prophetic.' It becomes clear that Mattheson is alluding to circumstances concerning post Culloden Clearance when he continues, 'This must certainly be considered a fairly early date for anyone to fear and condemn the dereliction of the people by their traditional leaders. Others came only to discern the signs of the times long after the Harper's day.' 26 A subsequent reading of Ossian, as abandoned bard, is contestably redolent of the above composition by the last blind bard of Highland Scotland, Roderick Morison, subconsciously revived through MacPherson's pen as a lonely melancholy figure in *Fragment X*:

'[i]t is night; and I am alone, forlorn on the hill of storms [. . .] I sit in my grief. I wait for morning in my tears. Rear the tomb, ye friends of the dead; but close it not till I come [. . .] My life flieth away like a dream: why should I stay behind? Here shall I rest with my friends by the stream of the sounding rock. When night comes on the hill; when the wind is upon the heath; my ghost shall stand in the wind, and mourn the death of my friends.' 27

The very mouthpiece of the Highlands, evident in Morison, whose 'Echo' operates as a pre-cognitive definition of eighteenth-century diaspora, finds a retro-cognitive sounding in MacPherson's Ossian who reflects back on the loss not only of bygone corroded oral culture manifested in the prescient predicament facing entire Gaelic speaking communities in his own lifetime.

Yet taints of the occult always infringe upon a functionality and presence imagined of the Druidic bard. Fiona Stafford, surmising Norse scholar Paul-Henri Mallet's position on Scandinavian poetry presents his 'extraordinary condemnation of contemporary poetry', useful to foreground in relation to functional numinous practice. She quotes:

'[t]he moment the soul, reflecting on its own operations, recurs inwards, and detaches itself from exterior objects, the imagination loses its energy [. . .] what is become of the magic power which the ancients attributed to this art? It may well be said to exist no more [. . .] No longer essentially connected with religion [. . .]' 28

Stafford in outlining this response, surmises the normative expectations of successful ancient revival verse. 'The early poet had special gifts; he was often associated with prophecy and divine inspiration and fulfilled a crucial role in society.' 29 However, as Stafford rightly points out MacPherson's seeming disdain for 'a quaint fairyland of giants and magicians' 30 apparent in his response to traditional Gaelic balladry; 'Giants, enchanted castles, dwarfs, palfreys, witches and magicians form the whole circle of the poet's invention', 31 he laments, seeking a different world of classical heroism that incorporates both male and female noble suffering. Whilst it is impossible to argue that Gaelic poetry was not suffused with such imagery, a more precise understanding of the second sight as intrinsically linked to *sithean* or fairyland existence is problematised when it becomes apparent that the core nature of an *Da-Shealladh* engages equally with templates of human anatomy as with alternate personifications or persons of more extraordinary presence. This not so much posits a defence against Stafford but suggests the extent to which MacPherson himself, symbiotically engaged with his aged hero, adopts a barely perceptible sub-text in which Highland phonetic culture is intrinsically implicated in both otherworldly presence and human disembodiment. Ossian, for example, is traditionally born from within the deer community, closely associated with the twilight world of the *sith*:

'On the lands of Scalasdal in Mull a deer was killed which turned out afterwards to be a woman. It is perhaps this belief in metamorphosis of Fairy women and deer that was the origin of the tradition that Ossian's mother was a deer. In Skye it is said that after the poet's birth his mother could touch him but once with her tongue on the temple. On that corner (*air an oisinn sin*) a tuft of fur like that of a deer grew, hence the poet's name.' 32

Other accounts relate the same information on Ossian or Ossian being of the deer people:

'[i]n the tale of "Dearg" reference is made to Oisein's mother having been enchanted, wooed and won under the form of a deer, and in regard to this the late Rev. John Forbes of Sleat, Skye, mentions some of his notes in connection with this, as yet unpublished translation of Ossian's poems, that he, in 1858 interviewed at Kirivig, Callanais, Isle of Lewis, one Murdoch McKay, aged ninety-six, who recited to him the take of Ossian being born of a doe:

"Cha chluinn mo leanna mo gluth
Ma's tu mo mhathair gur fiadh thu
Ma's tu mo mhathair gur fiadh thu
Faiceal Ort o ghnìomh nan con

My love will not hear my voice
If thou art my mother, a deer thou
If thou art my mother, a deer thou
Be on guard from deeds of dogs" ' 33

It might be possible to elucidate ways in which this functional numinosity - 'the magic power', impacted on the Ossianic cycle, meaning that not only its imagery and contents alluded to ghostliness through uttered displacement but tractually operated as a type of alternative manual of Highland somatic identity; one which became necessary and evident soon after the severe attack on its language and culture in the mid to late-seventeen-hundreds. As such, despite MacPherson's own classical reconstructions, formal education and literary ambitions, elemental aspects of reconfiguring fragments of orally conveyed texts may display trace elements of the interactive systems of ancestor worship, genealogy, bardic recitation and second sight. Further, the extent to which MacPherson himself trenchantly engages with the figure of Ossian, cited by Stafford as 'the sympathetick Bond' and in particular, the attack not only on the writer himself but on contemporary issues of inauthenticity by *printing* such a bardic figure such as Ossian, generates more of the disaster epic narrative, the anti-hero status which - as viral ontology - can

be framed through Roderick Morison (abandoned Dunvegan bard), the loss of the Battle of Culloden, the decimation of subsequent Highland culture, the rebarbative treatment of MacPherson in certain literary quarters and the attendant 'loser hero' status of the young poet's literary imprint - Ossian. This aspect of the barely perceptible; one of an engaging discourse of the lack, loss and absence of firm, uncontentious patriarchal poetical survival is, of course, redressed by European literary concerns at large during the seventeen-and-eighteen-hundreds. MacPherson's own position was strengthened, in retrospect, by his reluctance to defend the text, allowing the Ossianic mouthpiece to ventriloquise its own liminal presence, its own status of being 'barely perceptible' in the vein it was originally conceived. As a typographic bard, the transition MacPherson implicates for Ossian, through his own conflated background and sensibility as a young writer, is remarkably successful. The mechanism of bound, printed word, the multifarious reproductions of bardic messaging, infer an altogether different phonetic culture, one in which the printed voice, contingent upon the reader-audience is always reconstructed, as described by Eric Griffiths:

'[. . .] the work of reconciliation in the 'mediate word' takes place largely in the printed voice, itself mediate between speaking and writing, able to embody the shifting relations between normative institutions, whether literary or more broadly social, and the world they are held to represent [. . .] acknowledgement of the printed character of the poetic voice in most texts involves a recognition of the very conditions of poetic meaning. The reader must inform writing with a sense of the writer it calls up - an ideal body, a plausible voice ' 34

As phonetically registered through printed voice, the bard becomes internalised, is heard within the landscape of the skull and thus is repositioned as a universal signifier; a gramophone of inscribed voice. This collective bardism was a risky venture; the European reader didn't have to speak the Gaelic, didn't have to be site-specific, sitting on a rock or in a great hall. Doubtless,

when MacPherson swithered with regard to re-housing a sense of the private, the interior of the landscape - the inside of the '*circle of stones*' previously 'unheeded by the world', he was functioning within a new mode of display which, to a certain extent, personified the Highland bard. Napoleon kept a copy on his person at all times, demonstrating the hand-held, the compacted - the *portable* nature of this poet-band tome. In some senses, this transportive re-appropriation suited the very definition of oral culture itself as mutable, evolving and temporarily fixed by the skill and instinct of the mouthpiece of each bard engaging with the material of hand-me-down poetics. The dichotomy, of course, lies in a pronunciation of antiquity which finds a prescient form in a technology which forces idiosyncrasies in the form, misunderstandings in the inherent structure, dissemination and reception of alternate corporeal technologies: memory, recitation, pronunciation. In this respect, it is a little like comparing the transfiguration of elf shot arrows to Sheffield steel replacements - not only the form but the function betrays inconsistencies that can seem illusory; unconvincing. The frame of printed text not only fixed and fixated the latest in bardic invocation; it was now destined for repetition which, while not exact, was more defined than the previous system of oral delivery. Further, it could be *seen* as read, as well as listened to and envisaged, presciently demonstrating that 'the poem is both song and picture at once, and the relation of scanning and hearing lies at the heart of all textual (rather than purely oral) poetry.' 35

Despite the certain danger in presuming, as to a certain extent Johnson did in thinking that there were no Gaelic manuscripts over a hundred years old, that nothing in the Highlands was traditionally written down, for a first time in *reproduction*, the bard as MacPherson-Ossian (not dissimilar to Conan Doyle-Sherlock Holmes), presented as a slippery anatomy of co-mingled authorship by dint of MacPherson's tribal inheritance (heard and related through the bones), his

experiential and educational background and by Ossian as fictional and one-time real character, all of which which melded *barely perceptibly* to create a corporeal presence who blinded, speaks, through age, through pain, in a 'new' language and in print, creating typographical dream tracks back along which the Gaelic notion of double vision could just be traced.

'Presentiments of What the Dead Keep'

The essential condition for Scottish visionary perception is altered perspicuity or sight. Understood in the Gaelic as 'an Da-Shealladh' the two sights and commonly known as second sight, this Highland phenomenon is often described as demonstrative of alternate vision. The Reverend Robert Kirk in his remarkable and unique text *The Secret Common-Wealth* gives an extensive inventory of supernormal optics:

'[t]hat as the sight of Bats and Owles transcend that of Shrews and Moles, so the visive faculties of Men are clearer than those of Owles, as Eagles, Lynxes, and Cats, are brighter then Mens: / And again that Men of the Second Sight (being design'd to give warnings against over secret engyns) surpass the ordinary vision of other men; which is a native habit in some, descended from their ancestors, and acquired as an artificiall improvement of their natural sight in others; Resembling in their own kind, the usual artificial helps of Optic Glasses (as prospectives, Telescopes, and microscopes) without which ascititious aids, those men heer treated of, do perceive things, that for their smallness, or subtlety, and secrecy, are invisible to others (tho daylie conversant with them; They having such a Beam continually about them; as that of the Sun; which when it shines clear only, lets common eyes see the atoms in the air, that without these rayes, they could not discern [. . .]' 36

Definitions of optics and optical illusion run the full gamut in the MacLeod and Dewar *Dictionary of the Gaelic Language* published in Edinburgh in 1864:

'[s]ealladh: A sight, a spectacle, a view; sight, the compass of vision, extent to which one can

see; sight, eye-sight, power of vision; a look, cast of the eyes; a sight, a glance; a vision, a dream.' This comprehensive guideline ranges from what may be perceived ranges to the appearance of the seer themselves in the 'cast of the eyes.' ³⁷

Such a prosaic delineation suggests statuary, fixity; a blankness encompassed by what is observed and so to some extent, an indication of a temporary state of blindness to other sights. A sense of outsider vision is clarified by the type of appearance a seer takes on whilst engaged with a vision; 'perceiving him to stare a little strangely, I conjectured him to be a seer' ³⁸ writes Kirk and of another encounter; 'I perceived the other to look oddly toward me, from this look, and his being an Islander, I conjectured him to be a seer.' ³⁹ A letter from the Highlander Lord Reay to Samuel Pepys dated 1699 describes a woman 'not born blind, but become so by accident, to the degree that she did not see so much as a glimmering; yet saw the Second-Sight as perfectly before.' ⁴⁰ Reay, a keen proponent of the second sight, found other supporters in the figure of Lord Tarbat who wrote to Robert Boyle, outlining the temporary physiognomy of a seer having a vision. 'The sight is of no long duration, only continuing so long as they keep their eyes steadily without twinkling. The hardy therefore fix their look that they may see the longer, but the timorous see only glances, their eyes always twinkling at the first sight of the object.' ⁴¹ Martin Martin in *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland* comments that 'The Second-Sight is a singular faculty of seeing an otherwise invisible object, without any previous means used by the person that sees it for that end; the vision makes such a lively impression on the seers, that they neither see nor think of anything else except the vision as long as it continues; and then they appear pensive or jovial according to the object which was represented to them.' ⁴² Of witnessing the seer in a state of vision, he describes 'eyelids erect over

unblinking eyes.' 43 Accounts in which the eyeballs have rolled far back into the head are commonplace, often requiring the help of another to slide them back into focus. The pseudonymous Highland writer Theophilus Insulanus discusses 'the waking dream' as most often enabled by males, often 'weak-sighted' with 'minds of a melancholic cast'. 44 Very occasionally women were gifted and, in keeping with the pastoral theme of *Ossian*, John Gregorson Campbell asserts that it is the 'shepherds of the Western Isles [who] are usually credited with the largest possession of the gift', adding 'People noted for second sight have been observed to have a peculiar look about the eyes. One of them, for instance, in Harris, was described as 'always looking up and never looking you straight in the face.' 45 Such definitions are representative only of a cross section of the multiple literary and pseudo-scientific responses to the Scottish phenomenon, all invariably incorporating individual summations of sensory perception involved in experiencing the visionary. Interestingly, Mallet's definition of contemporaneous poetry as functionless if artless, provides a neat summation of the conditions which threaten envisioning: 'The moment the soul, reflecting on its own operations, recurs inwards, and detaches itself from exterior objects, the imagination loses its energy.' All accounts, contra to sceptical supposition, place the experience of seeing as focussing on the exterior and detached from inward invention, emphasising the performativity of the envisioned as being in some ways placed upon the seer who is subject to the conditions of the vision as opposed to controlling them. As a transfixed cinematic experience the vision seems, by all accounts, to be reliant upon the receptive qualities of the seer but nevertheless is perceived to *happen* to the individual so much so that in extreme cases, the seer would undertake folk medicinal procedures to have the gift removed by applying St. John's Wort or by standing in the air passage created by repeatedly flicking through the pages of a bible held at the back of the

afflicted person's head. Those wishing to acquire the gift would be required to stand on a seer's feet so that it might be passed on haptically, thereby '[t]hey can let others see very strange things in the Bone by setting their Foot on the persons Foot, to whom they make the discovery.'

46

Not all visions were disaster scenes but both the inventory of corporeities and the numerous accounts of malaise, negative predicaments or death, led many to relinquish the gift, afraid of the unannounced and uncontrollable 'spirit vistas'. The sight, therefore, was one implicated with disastrous emotion - a vision of despair, fear, melancholy and death.

Interposing an Ossianic register of alternative vision within such understandings relies on an acute metaphoric reading of his blindness. The dual aspects of aurality and orality are superficially foregrounded by explicit references to the old bard's descriptive self awareness as blind and by the juxtaposition of the harp as an allegorical prop alluding to an singularly Ossianic sense of hearing, albeit a potentially disturbed one. Here the harp is an implement of revised significance in immediately and conspicuously heightening the relationship of Ossian's hearing to his co-performing characters whilst emphasising their vocality but also in creating a sense of silence in any reader, equivocal to the effect of a supposed musical performance. Ironically, the harp is sounded by or as the wind, a metaphor in Highland culture for death, and so as 'death' plays on the harp strings, the silence ultimately provoked is indicative of the finality of human morbidity. Ossian's blindness, however, is active. In alternatively situating this seeming sensory deprivation as envisioned, a reworking of the more trite assumption that hearing (or other sensory perception) is necessarily heightened when accompanied by blindness is fundamentally revised. As Highland seer, a temporary fixation or alternative vision - the other sight of the two - is implemented and takes over. This then, implicates the harp

(simultaneously indicative of death) as a sub-object explicitly associated with bardic phonic culture but necessarily dependent not only on blindness but with the juxtaposed status of heightened alternate vision. As potentially culturally intertwined, the roots of bardic aural/oral culture and the visionary perceptions of the seer are uniquely collapsed into the story telling personification of Ossian. An appreciation of Ossian as blinded by what he envisions, or rather by what visually comes upon him, reconfigures a temporality to the poems that seemingly last for the duration of this waking dream. Moreover, as a retro or pre-cognitive device, fore-knowledge or historicity as opposed to linear chronology, the visual within the text can be simultaneously perceived as collapsed post and predicative oration.

Printed Sighs, Seeing Trees, Speaking Storms

Live art theorist Eleanora Fabiao sites 'lingua', the Portuguese for both language and tongue, relating word and flesh, writing and muscle, speech and taste, questioning 'what are, or can be, the reciprocities between history and performance? How does performance art challenge, change and charge [. . .] historiography?' Fabiao's position confronts historical tradition as a form of conservation, adding 'historical narratives are verbal fictions, the contents of which are as much invented as found and whose forms have more in common with their counterparts in literature than they have with those in the the sciences.'⁴⁷ Interesting dilemmas are thrown up retrospectively onto the accusation that MacPherson constructed a fraudulent, largely fictitious and inauthentic historical account, when the text itself can be read as just that - through a schema of explicitly non-physical anatomies with non-chronological experiences. Already redolent of a phantasmic society, James MacPherson's presentation of *Ossian* seemingly

typifies a ghost society that ironises the very notion of fakery by barely being there at all. As a 'field of graves', its disembodied inhabitants cannot convincingly be perceived as authentically corporeal. They are flawed epic characterisations, dubious anti-heroes. Against the mudscape of bog and heath Culloden, any reader of the late seventeen and eighteen hundreds might have suspected these voices, which emanate in a foreign tongue from the 'winter house' of the battle-field, may not know they are dead. They call and question, vocalities now turning on wind, now appealing to the rocks, trees and weather, interspersed with dynamic shifts in breeze. Sometimes, the admission that ghosts stalk the text is transparent: 'At times are seen here the ghosts of the deceased,'⁴⁸ at others, the sifting anatomies become meteorological; 'thine arm was like a storm'⁴⁹ or implicitly replaced by natural configurations: 'thy height, a rock on the plain [. . .] when mid-day is all in flames, and silence is over all the hills.'⁵⁰ The corporeities glimmer in and out of perceptible focus, at one turn defiantly enfleshed whilst in the same moment dissolving into a disembodied narrative of simultaneous demise. The voices flicker, building in abstruse layers abstracted constructs of corroded presence, mouldering into vivid ambience (notably through pain) before seeping, decaying into silence. 'Soon shall my voice be heard no more, and my footsteps cease to be seen. The bards will tell of Fingal's name; the stones will talk of me',⁵¹ *Fingal Book V*. Equally, the barely palpable scenography is subject to seismic shifts on an epic scale creating a vertiginous sense of skirting through or looking from within time. Daffyd Moore provides an excellent example of this:

'[m]any of the elements work in concert in "Dar-thula". The temporal structure of the poem is created through the image of the moon: as the aged Ossian projects his grief and loneliness onto the "daughter of heaven" this moon dissolves, in what is almost cinematographic technique, into the moon that looked forth onto the hapless sons of Usnoth and Dar-thula as they tried to flee Cairbar.'⁵²

The cinematic evocation of the cycle is somewhat resistant to any clear notion of printed voice, often dispersing succinct directional and possessive indicators of utterance into the domain of wind. As such, the reader at times feels caught within a subtle storm of weathered voices. A critically collaged *précis* of this sensation might be usefully constructed as '[b]leeding in an atmosphere of continuous meteorological metaphor and simile', '[t]he body is not located, so much as distributed in space' ⁵³ and 'the unsubstantial existence of poetic voice in print creates the chance of a polyphony, the chance of an eluded soul to speak [. . .]' ⁵⁴ But the wind speaks in a classical tone of voice, as does the rhetorical phrasing of the ancient bard reflect epic lyric poetry, evocative of Pope and Dryden. This brutalised field of dreams, a waking vision of shock (one which still rocked the collective consciousness of late seventeen hundred Highland Gaelic society and which certainly laid a deep imprint on the literary aspirations and social conscience of the young poet MacPherson) is edified and re-enacted as a ghost theatre, enabled by the unceasing momentum of topographical animation, and performed rather delicately to an English speaking demographic in its own language - both stylistically and linguistically. Moore points out,

'it is frequently noted that the distinction between the living and the dead, the here and the now is muted to the point of non-existence within Ossian. As Adam Potkay puts it "Ossian elegises; therefore he is. Not surprisingly, he observes no steadfast distinction between reminiscent cries and the sounds of the present. [. . .] For Ossian, as for the characters he laments, the past is as likely to speak as the present.' ⁵⁵

Essentially, as field-poet, MacPherson collated the fragments of his own choice of literary landscape, voice-walking through a post-war terrain of manuscript and recitation. The editorial decisions presented a dichotomy of fragmented, chipped pronunciation, sheathed in the

watchful (and listening) Highlands. Certainly *The Fragments* can be typified as a lament, replete with coursing deer, 'fleet' with 'feet of wind.' Voices recur as natural phenomena; '[t]hy voice was like stream after rain', 56 'thy voice like the sound of a string of music' 57 - but they are also subject to the elements: '[c]ease a little while, O wind! Stream be thou silent a while! let my voice be heard over the heath.' 58 Yet the overwhelming instinct on the part of the reader, apparent in *The Fragments* and confirmed in *Fingal*, is that this is an internal dialogue, a disjointed vision, recounted by Ossian himself; 'I sit in the mournful shade. The wind sighs through the grass; and [. . .] memory rushes on my mind' 59 and that the collapsed temporality evident within the cycle, weaving between evoked, recollected and possessed voices is saturated with Ossian's own textual self awareness. This, to a certain extent, has its origins in MacPherson's boyhood experience culminating in the impetus to draw together a corpus of Highland anti-heroism, to de-stabilise the role of loss on the part of the Jacobites by reconstructing a poetical nobility of wraiths. 'For the losers,' writes Moore, 'it offers a way a palliative for defeat, a way of assigning the responsibility for their fate to some higher authority.' 60 Perhaps the most succinct image, found within *The Fragments*, that both epitomises Moore's assertion and captures a portrait of a nine year old Macpherson is the moving line; 'Warriors fell by thy sword, as the thistle by the staff of a boy.' 61

Additionally, and less perceptibly, the warp and weft (although unthreaded, at times entangled, in some places thread worn and barely tangible) of intertextuality - the glimmering half-heard, unknown voices, the barely glimpsed figures, the constant, flickering movement of elements in the landscape, connotes a weatherbeaten schema. There is an underlying structural mimesis in the fabric (and fabrication) of this textured linguistic imagery to elemental aspects of the triptych of Highland culture so recently under threat of expulsion: of arms, language and

tartan. A definition of tartan from Dwelly's *Gaelic Dictionary* 'suanacia, suan' can be etymologically traced to surmise 'sleep, deep sleep, from the sleep of death.'⁶² The subtle implications of this transition for the enshrouded language and imagery of *Ossian* may be too spurious to focus on but offer a provisional metaphoric reading of the symbiotic nature of armament, the Gaelic and tartan as elemental features in Highland cultural consciousness of the seventeen hundreds. The deep sleep of Ossian is configured as an admissible nightmare - one in which he knows the implications of incessant violence. As a waking dream, the fabric of his vision is punctuated by such aggression and met with rueful and tearful regret, as he ruminates on the dying and dead of his people. Forcefully, the panorama survives, overturned by the aeromancy of passing voices; indicative of the very real state of desolation soon to afflict Highland crofting communities in the 1800s. Here too, is the warrior spirit evocative of ancient clannishness as a whole; where inter-fighting between tribes was redolent of the continuum of daily existence. Tragedy ensues, *Ossian* suggests, when such warrior culture is reduced to disembodied re-enactment giving rise to the readerly impression that a whole society of the unwitting and apparently impotent dead, repeatedly perform their demise caught in the wind swept hills of an imagined vista of glens, burns and mountains. The cycle, in this sense, incorporates a limitless and unending rotation of skill in moving images of repetition; endless swords raised, endless voices caught on the air, recurring bands of wandering deer - laced with narratives that suggest mutability, individual existence and portraits of change. This textual weather system of itself is portentous in summoning a comparison to the supranormal Highland belief in the 'sluagh' or the 'Spirit Multitude' and delineates a literary frontogenesis between conditions of phonetic masses of air and currents of 'real' wind that create a subdued and mournful turbulence.

'The west wind was believed to bring in its train the "sluagh" (spirit multitude) which descended on the Western Highlands and the Hebrides from time to time. Few have seen the spirit host that follows in the wake of the west wind; but on clear frosty nights many have heard their conflicts in the sky - the shouting of combatants and the clashing of their armour. The "sluagh" was believed to consist of the spirits of men, and it was said to hover over the places where the individuals composing it had transgressed when in human form. This aerial army might easily invade a dwelling house unobserved, though every precaution was taken against them. They often come down to earth; and when the night is dark and the sea roars with anger on the rocks, the people of Barra and South Uist declare that the "sluagh" is seeking shelter in the grasses by the shore; and queer tales are still told in Benbecula of human beings carried off by the spirit host.' 63

Intrinsically linked to sith culture, the Reverend Robert Kirk has this to say about them:

'the sith's or Fairies they call sluagh-math or the good people . . . and are said to be of a middle nature betwixt man and Angell . . . of intelligent, studious spirits and light changeable bodies (ilk those called Astrall) somewhat of the nature of a condensed cloud, and best seen in twilight. These bodies be so playable thorough the subtlety of the spirits, that agitate them, that they can make them appear or disappear at pleasure. Some have bodies or vehicles so spungious, thin and defecate, that they are fed only by sucking into some fine spiritous liquor that pierce like pure air and oil [. . .] Their bodies of congealed air, are som times carried aloft, other whiles grovel in different shapes [. . .] Seers or men of the second sight [. . .] have verie terrifying encounters with them, even on highways; [. . .] and thereby have made it a custom to [. . .] sene [. . .] themselves [. . .] from the shots and stealth of these wandering Tribes.' 64

Theophilus visits Lucretian theory to define how it is possible to incur such visions which in some aspects, reflects Merleau-Ponty's philosophic treatment of the flesh of sight. Theophilus writes of Lucretius;

'[he] tells us that the surfaces of all bodies are perpetually flying off from their respective bodies, one after another; and that these surfaces of thin cases that included each other, whilst they were joined in the body like the coats of an onion, are sometimes seen entire, when they are separated from it; by which means we often behold the shapes or shadows of persons who are either dead or absent.' 65

These definitions of meteorological bodies, codified as sithean counter culture, present a

startling alternative historiographical subtext to Ossian as one of subsumed 1746 military defeat, transplanted as a document of numinous return. The lingua, or flesh of the text, is the stuff of *vocally* 'congealed air' recomposed of 'subtlety', 'condensed cloud', 'light changeable bodies' - a 'spirit multitude' of printed voices, transformable and transformed by the immediate terrain but also constitutive of its elements. Thus a geography of elemental disaster surmised and carried out by conditions of weather imbues the text with an *atmosphere* of corrosion that manifests articulated landscape. Symbiotically inferred is an instinct of place, whereby the bardic melancholy remonstrations of Ossian, conjure and relinquish a revised possession of land. This position is symptomatic of Highland attitudes to landscape itself but also infers the poems with a tongue of wind and water; a sonant territory. Such performative vocality, treated textually, transmits the then recent historical disaster of Culloden as a reconfigured performance in and of itself extant within the literary chimaera of the Ossianic poems. 'It is precisely the phenomenological sense of history as experience, as active involvement and awareness (all necessarily corporeal) that animates the approximation between historiography and performance,' 66 concludes Fabiao, ushering a sense of the experiential as essential to tools of historical reconstruction. In this context, perhaps subconsciously, James MacPherson can be credited with creating historiographic aesthetics that reconfigure Culloden as a vivified and potent tract of shades. If such ghost-narrative collapses linear temporality, it is an exacting structure subject to the subsequent living responses of rebuttal, celebration, diffidence and revival. As a coda of historical re-enactment it can be perceived to function within the legitimate authorial instincts of MacPherson and should be received as literature within the precepts of traditional criticism. However, this position is necessarily complicated and reworked by aspects of transmutative numinosity within theatres of poetic oral Highland experience. Further, as a

rebel ghost text - one in which the faint somaticism of the dying and recently deceased is encoded as a community outside of the normal political auspices of the British literary dead; a succinctly Highland sub-culture of walking, talking spirits, the Johnsonian perspective is even more endorsed: it *is* a fake posturing of anything like antiquity because it collapses the ancient and modern, it *is* an inauthentic presentation of solely traditional Gaelic poetry because the ghosts now speak through MacPherson's own mouthpiece of Ossian (and as such, something of a child-seer; at least one which is reconstructed from boyhood experience) and it does display several rebel devices in operating through a *barely perceptible* sub-narrative of alternative Highland vision, one so embedded (and Johnson should have detected this) that any reference to Gaelic ghostliness is immediately inferred. It is a text fresh with spirits, extemporised within a *living* landscape; one which breathes and moves, suggesting that the next wave of repletion, one in which the society MacPherson so keenly felt, would never be rendered obsolete in terms of the lochs and mountains. This transmutability, in which the landscape affixes itself to personified voice suggests an extraordinary rebel territorialism in which the terrain seemingly overcome, in itself can conjure meteorological instances of its former self. As the sluagh, the wind mounts a rebel campaign. The impact of *Ossian* then, as an outsider epic full of enfeebled, defeated, anti-heroic phantoms, was to cause a seismic front between contemporaneous consternation among its detractors and a grounding European artistic possession by Highland Gaelic ghosts.

Cinema of Disaster

Whilst not exclusively the domain of Highland folkloric practice, instances of the second

sight were so prolifically recorded that certain characteristics of that society have come to be known by its presence. An Da-Shealladh alone, is simply the ability to see both the living and the dead but forms the basis of a series of more complex definitions, some of which are particularly relevant here; potentially anatomising the Ossianic cycle as a sophisticated wraith text, occupied by dead protagonists envisioned through the misted seeing eye of Ossian. The implications of a revenant performative historiography, one which arranges an alternative imprint of disembodied vocality, against the simultaneous contemporary back drop of disempowered, deboned Gaelic-speaking lingua are far reaching. An Da-Shealladh involves a complex taxonomy specific in its description of particular giftedness, best outlined by John Gregorson Campbell, in *The Superstitions of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland*, published in 1902. In it, he systematises a category of encounters. A basic understanding of *Ossian*, for example, within the context of oral visioning is 'bruadar' an ocular sense of both retrocognitive and precognitive dreaming, particularly relevant to the collapsed chronology within the poem cycle as an overwhelming simultaneity of timelessness and figurative presence that combined, create the subliminal suspicion that the text may indeed be occupied by taibhs.

The taibhs - a credible source for the first description of the doppelgänger in James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* - comprises a double of the individual to whom some strange, ghastly or fatal incidence is about to or has already happened. The taibhsear, then, is the one who sees this double and does his best to navigate the experience, either by remaining silent - and avoiding prolonged enforced contact with the spectre, or by keeping clear of specific places and objects. The ghost, within the Gaelic system is called the 'tannasg' and is perceived specifically as the taibhs of the dead. For the living, the term 'tamhasg' is used for differentiation and is still generally categorised as within the overall description taibhs. The following three

definitions are succinctly concerned with the effect of the taibhs, commonly through presence or sound. The 'tasg' is normally known as the death wail commonplace at the time of passing. A manifestation of sound, the 'tasg' is still perceived metonymically and by definition as an 'apparition'. More figuratively, the 'taslach' is the unseen taibhs - specifically the 'tamhasg' and corresponds better to the notion of a ghost except that it is actually more often the unseen doppelgänger of the individual in question and identified by the sounds it makes, called 'taradh'. The other explicitly defined phenomenon connected with second sight relevant to an alternative of reading of *Ossian* features within the text itself is 'dreug', Gaelic for meteor or fire; from Dwelly's Gaelic Dictionary we find - 'cruas na criege is luathas na driage the hardness of the rock and the speed of the meteor'. 67

The most obvious analogies to the above definitions place Ossian (and to a certain extent MacPherson) as the 'taibhshear', subject to 'bruadar' in witnessing the double - the dead: the taibhs and the live: the tamhasg - images of Gaelic heroes and heroines, operating through the cinematic lens of retro-cogniscent depictions of Culloden. Replete with allusions to the 'tasg', albeit fainter renditions of 'cries' rather than 'wails' (although arguably the two are interchangeable), the 'taradh' provide evidence of the 'tamhasg', giving us a complete directory of dead and undead presences and sounds within the text, performing within the collapsed temporal framework of the 'bruadar'. The particular attention given to meteors within this succinct catalogue relates not only to the supernatural status given to the meteor itself but to categories of Yeatsian green fire or flame, finding a parallel in the 'greenish bright lights' seen before death. In the context of *The Gaelic Otherworld*, additional aspects of meteorological significance on a superstitious register are inferred in concurrent systems of belief which seep into the definition of second sight by association, for example, the 'sluagh'. Other bizarre

elements within accounts of spectral encounters is the tenet of the second sight: 'never to be first to speak on meeting an acquaintance at night till satisfied that the figure seen was of this world.'

A terrible (if slightly humorous) situation would ensue if the seer told

'others whose figure it was that haunted him. If he did so, the anger of the spectre was roused, and on the following evening it gave him a dreadful thrashing. When he resisted, he grasped but a shadow, was thrown down repeatedly in the struggle and bruised severely.' ⁶⁸

Somewhat reminiscent of Jacob wrestling the angel and therefore of Kirk's description of the sluagh, or sith as manifesting between angel and man, this account by John Gregorson Campbell situates Ossian's constant reverberating rhetorical question - who is that voice I hear and the subsequent dramas of extreme violence (albeit not against himself) in a slightly different context. By Lacanian definition, this panoply of wounded shadows demands a fixed gaze - an acute register of the barely perceptible; 'the gaze as the instrument through which light is embodied and through which I am photo-graphed', ⁶⁹ he explains. Joanna Lowry elucidates this position further, claiming 'Lacan's description of the gaze constructs the 'visible' as a kind of theatrical space, a space in which the subject, rather like an actor on the stage, enters the light of the gaze and performs his or her desire within that light. It is a theoretical description of the subject's relationship to visibility which is dependent on a metaphorical inscription of spatial and temporal dimensionality: a theatre of the gaze. It is also a description which invokes the image of technology: the subject is 'photographed'. The space of the visible is described here, metaphorically, as a kind of camera.' Obviously any parallel to such a description within the context of *Ossian* recognises the gaze as blinded or altered perspicuity and the theatre as inherently textual. Lowry continues: 'Lacan's description of the subject's position within the field of the gaze implies an understanding of the act of looking as fundamentally 'performative',

and [. . .] the idea that this very 'performance' of looking takes place within a field of the visible that is haunted by the spectre of technology: 'visuality is staged within a kind of apparatus.'⁷⁰

By deliberately hyphenating photo and graph, Lacan is of course referring to the act of drawing in light and if we refer to the Greek root for technology as *technologia* systematic treatment of an art, from *technē* art, skill + -o- + -logia -logy, we begin to comprehend a tighter meaning, a technology of optical somatics in which the body as machine or apparatus is itself involved in the act of grafting or drawing in light. Further, by extrapolating Kirk's definition of weightless organisms, 'bodies of studious spirits and light changeable bodies' there seems some justification in aligning an art or skill (techie) of the body as *drawing in light*. Initially, this refutes Mallet's consternation over an inward construction of poetics as opposed to an outward, exteriorised application: 'the moment the soul, reflecting on its own operations, recurs inwards, and detaches itself from exterior objects, the imagination loses its energy' and reflects Johnson's equivocal definition of the second sight as 'an impression made either by the mind on the eye or by the eye on the mind'. However, light drawn in could merely reference optical illusion, vision - the sight which the seer is subject to - as opposed to actively sought out and filtered through conscious membranes of wishful thought. Light drawn in also appears to register the nimble, light-inflected forms that sithean bodies comprise - close to 'breac', speckled, entities, that are comprised of:

'condensed cloud, and best seen in twilight. These bodies be so playable thorough the subtlety of the spirits, that agitate them, that they can make them appear or disappear at pleasure. Some have bodies or vehicles so spungious, thin and defecate, that they are fed only by sucking into some fine spiritous liquor that pierce like pure air and oil.'⁷¹

These bodies of 'congealed air' adhere to ideological and anatomised understandings of personified weather and if applied to Ossianic figuration (despite wielding weapons and

displaying normal seeming limbs) the whole presence of sithean culture, co-walking textually within the pages of the cycle, presents a corpus of shaped air, only vaguely decipherable from the landscape (indeed sometimes obscuring it in mists of voice and presence) and in that context barely perceptible.

As a symbiosis between printed landscape and printed etheric corporeity, MacPherson has propagated a text based race that traces the vicissitudes of manifested vocal wind and ruinously placed anatomic rock. In the fragile monumentality of the entire damaged setting of the piece one is consistently aware of the outdoors as the elements pour onto the page, suggesting an external setting per se, or the fallen architecture of the book itself as a frame in which the remaining ghostly characters intermingle with gale, rain, stream, meteor and range free between the odd tomb and cave. In this sense, the liminal romantic Highlands mooted by Leersen are evident per force, yet appealingly rove beyond the containment of the text. 'Like crystal, like metal and many other substances, I am a sonorous being, but I hear my own vibrations from within', ⁷² Merleau-Ponty writes, reflecting the immediate contract placed on the reader - to sound the spook text in his own corporeity: to become possessed and envisioned. Merleau-Ponty in reference to ocular perception, unwittingly offsets Johnson, concluding 'finally one cannot say if it is the look or if it is the things that command.' ⁷³ He adds; '[i]t suffices us for the moment to note that he who sees cannot possess the invisible unless he is possessed by it, unless he is *of it*.' ⁷⁴ These dual sensory catalysts intermingle so succinctly within the text, morphing in an out of invisible, de-centered, disembodied voice (a voice of wind - the sluagh) to corpi seemingly flocked through the barely visible, as 'congealed air'. Thus the invisible takes in aspects of the sounded which are performed through the reader as indicative of the processes of printed voice and re-stabilised - drawn in light - by the inner gaze, which reflects Ossianic

visionary vision, through the understanding and absorption of the reader who hears their 'own vibrations from within.' In some senses, moving beyond the authorial I of Ossian - which frequently shifts to third person description, the reader finds himself bewildered and led about by these elemental shifts, ceaselessly re-organising or tirelessly allowing the chronological collapses, interfaces between emphatically stated and self-aware ghosts, supposed spirits, phantom phonetics, 'real' humanly formed bodies (which bleed and cry and shout), hearing trees, sympathetic rocks and red deer herds as fleeting witnesses. The scenography, replete with narrative sub-cycles, violent scenarios, corpusculent love scenes, is continuing but moveable: a myriorama of disorienting landmarks, always the same, always different. Yet these liminal exchanges are seamless, barely extinguishable. One white bosom becomes all heaving white bosoms, one raging meteor suggestive of a stray phenomenon from the shower that litters the book. Ossian, himself vague in the initial pages of *The Fragments*, only really developing into a secure form by Fingal, as subject to a waking dream, distressed, elderly and tired, is the closest link between readerly awareness of an authorial voice and the tempest of utterances that intermingle in the rest of the poems. This bard of 'acute spirits' if not already weary enough, carries the burden of recounting his vision through a theatre of the gaze, inscribed onto his 'blind' eyes in light: light bodies, light voices and the sparkling light of moving water, aerated trees, reminiscent of the twinkling eye of the inexperienced seer. It is a meteorological register of the properties of light drawn in and through the textually rendered gaze of the bard, typographically imprinted as a feral, numinous landscape, seeping out of the frames of the epic, the romantic, by the failed self-recognition of its characters and the continuously moving currents of accentuation that temper any sense of fixity. Despite its position as a monumental work of and about failure - failed sight, failed life, failed vision - as a ghost catalogue the

surprising success is that we, as readers, are able to perceive the imprints of a vision at all, transformed as they are into the litigious frame of the printed word. The bardic personification of Ossian enables us to encounter this schema, performing through our very reading the act of his 'sightlessness'. As such, within a binary context, one is aware of the collapse, the demise of an Da-Shealladh into one unsettled lens, that this very 'performance' of looking takes place within a blind field of the visible that is haunted by the spectre of technology: visuality is staged within a kind of apparatus. That apparatus is conceivably the failed vision of Ossian himself.

Black Elk Speaks

'My friend,' types John G. Neihardt, referencing his daughter Enid's handwritten transcript 'I am going to tell you the story of my life, as you wish; and if it were only the story of my life I think I would not tell it; for what is one man that he should make much of his winters, even when they bend him like heavy snow? So many other men have lived and shall live that story, to be grass upon the hills.' ⁷⁵ The voice is not his, but documented over a number of sittings as that of the elderly Black Elk, a holy man of the Lakota Sioux, who recounts a boyhood vision for his people, later to suffer the consequences of Wounded Knee.

Neihardt - or Flaming Rainbow's account - has been subject to a number of concerns regarding authenticity and an equal number of confirmations of the genuineness of the collaboration maintaining the integrity of Black Elk and Neihardt's role. Paul A. Olson, for example, has to some extent clarified the role of Neihardt as editor, explaining the traditional Lakota response to:

'interpret, apply and reapply iconological resources of their culture through ritual, myth, storytelling, symbolic action and clothing [. . .] This Sioux symbolic tradition is one context in which John G. Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* (1932) must be understood. Conceptualising it as an epic may assist both Western and non-Western readers to clarify the uses to which a culture's symbol system may be put in mediating conflicting values, especially those deemed significant in times of cultural crisis. 'It was a period when an old culture appeared to be dying and a new one was, in Matthew Arnold's phrase "powerless to be reborn". It is possible that Neihardt shaped *Black Elk Speaks* as a kind of epic composed from the Lakota perspective to accompany his *Cycle of the West* which was written, at least in the initial books, from the perspective of the conqueror. A second, more likely possibility is that Black Elk as a religious thinker and master of ritual speech, acted at that moment in the life of the Sioux nation when epic as the meaningful combining of allegory and history was possible and had a function in assisting the culture to survive. Black Elk, like the Homer portrayed in Alfred Lord's *Singer of Tales*, was caught between the recurrent, ritualistic, and formulaic aspects of the old culture and the record keeping and linear progression of the new. He chose Neihardt as his scribe just as an oral-formulaic master may have chosen a literate collaborator at some point in the development of the Homeric epic. Neihardt's task was to set down the relationship between the old and the new in Lakota culture. He could communicate Black Elk's vision to others because he was himself a writer for whom the juxtaposition of allegory and historical example which teaches of religious faces and historic actions, was a possible mode.' 76

Equally, Lakota academic and author Vine Deloria in his 1979 introduction to the text had this to say in support of the validity of *Black Elk Speaks*;

'[p]resent debates centre on the question of Neihardt's literary intrusions into Black Elk's system of beliefs and some scholars have said that the book reflects more of Neihardt than it does of Black Elk. It is, admittedly, difficult to discover if we are talking with Black Elk or John Neihardt, whether the vision is to be interpreted differently, and whether or not the positive emphasis which the book projects is not the optimism of two poets lost in the modern world and transforming drabness into an idealised world. Can it matter? The very nature of great religious teachings is that they encompass everyone who understands them and personalities become indistinguishable from the transcendent truth that is expressed. So let it be with *Black Elk Speaks*. That it speaks to us with simple and compelling language about an aspect of human experience and encourages us to emphasise the best that dwells within us is sufficient. Black Elk and John Neihardt would probably nod affirmatively to that statement and continue their conversation. It is good. It is enough.' 77

Neihardt himself, as a poet working to complete his own seizable work *Cycle of the West*, a

long narrative poem structured around the Messiah craze which culminated in the South Dakota Wounded Knee massacre of 1890, had wanted to visit Black Elk as a significant individual prevalent in the ghost dance culture as second cousin to Crazy Horse. This initial meeting with Black Elk, his 'near-blind stare fixed on the ground', was successful, documenting the Oglala priest 'talking about a vision that had come to him in his youth. It was his power-vision, as I learned later, and his fragmentary references to it were evidently intended only to arouse my curiosity, for he could not speak freely about a matter so sacred before the assembled company. It was like half seeing, half sensing a beautiful landscape by brief flashes of sheet lightning.' ⁷⁸

Though potentially less critically exposed than *Black Elk Speaks*, Neihardt's *Cycle of the West* for which, initially, he was embarking on field research, comprises the scale and grandeur of a work reflective of the 'genuine epic period' in American western culture, with (questionably) no 'thought of synthetic Illiads and Odysseys.' As a significant representative of Lakota Sioux concerns, the implications of this research, housed in the pages of *Black Elk Speaks*, arguably comprise more than a vivid narrative history. Deloria asserts:

'The most important aspect of the book, [. . .] is not its effect on the non-Indian populace who wished to learn something of the beliefs of the Plains Indians but upon the contemporary generation of young Indians who have been aggressively searching for roots of their own in the structure of a universal reality. To them the book has become a North American bible of all tribes. They look to it for spiritual guidance, for sociological identity, for political insight, and for affirmation of the continuing substance of Indian tribal life, now being badly eroded by the same electronic media which are dissolving other communities.' ⁷⁹

In placing *Black Elk Speaks* outside of a classical epic tradition, the implications of an American imported voicing become clearer, suggesting that Neihardt derived literary inspiration from the already substantial body of wilderness writing created by authors such as Thoreau,

Emerson and Whitman. Less well established is the supposition that a tribal tract of literary vocality can be traced back to Ossianic roots. In a cultural climate of the seventeen hundreds where Highlanders were deemed, for better or worse, by literati tourists 'savage', it is less surprising that such a textual anatomy - an outline of what might constitute noble savagery - was exported aesthetically and evolved in the United States. On their tours of Scotland, for example, we find Boswell noting, at Auchnasheal;

'We had a considerable circle about us, men, women and children all M'Craas, Lord Seaforth's people. Not one of them could speak English. I observed to Dr. Johnson, it was much the same as being with a tribe of Indians. There was great diversity in the faces around us: some were as blank and wild in their appearance as any American Savages.' ⁸⁰

It was Professor Hugh Blair, however, who concretised this passion for assimilating the two tribal cultures in an Ossianic context in his 1763 *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian*, thematising the link between ancient Ossianic Highlanders and American Indians. A few years later, 'Glaswegian Professor William Richardson moved easily from his long poem on North American Indians to his Ossianic drama *The Maid of Lochlin* and his 1778 dramatic poem *Agandecca*.' ⁸¹ Similarly, 'Sir Walter Scott had an English judge liken Highlanders to North American Indians in his 1827 story *The Two Drovers*.' ⁸² A recent conference paper presented in Skye by Christopher Whyte posited the cinematic tendencies in Scott's work as inspiration for American Western narratives in James Fenimore Cooper. Cooper, however, may well have been more directly influenced by Ossian; 'James Fenimore Cooper gave his Indians Ossianic traits and had them speak an Ossianic language. Longfellow, Emerson, Thoreau and Whitman were affected by it.' ⁸³ In *Last of the Mohicans* Cooper has his Native American protagonists and villains adopt the semi-rhetorical tone of statement as here:

'Where are the blossoms of those summers! - fallen, one by one; so all of my family departed, each in his turn, to the land of spirits. I am on the hilltop and must go down into the valley; and when Uncas follows in my footsteps there will no longer be any of the blood of the Sagamores, for my boy is the last of the Mohicans.' 84

If inherited from the Ossianic prose poems, this rhetorical position (later adopted, adapted and simplified by the Hollywood movie studio spaghetti western), is potentially symptomatic of an absence in the Gaelic for 'yes or 'no'. Alternatively, a question would be answered using the affirmative or negative form of the verb used, sometimes involving a repetitious sounding adaptation of what was asked. Without this succinct, binary mode of statement, aspects of circuitous and transitory meaning are quickly established within subtle shades of meaning that neither absolutely confirm nor deny the question posited. An example might be, 'are you going to the mountain?' to which the positive response would be; 'I am going to the mountain,' or, more interestingly, simply 'I am'. The neutrality of 'I am', stated in relation to the verb 'to go, going', arguably implicates a barely perceptible infiltration of mountaineering to the mountainous and of becoming mountain. Here too, the clumsily self-negating pronouncements of Hollywood scripts; 'me, no' or the confirming 'he say yes' are stylised off-shoots of this twilight implication, never quite meeting a fluent yes or no; the quiddity of such statements bluntly equated through bad translation. Whether Neihardt drew special influence from *Ossian* is debatable, but several passages strongly reflect not only the language and form of the Gaelic cycle but the content.

'[. . .] now that I can see it all from a lonely hilltop,' writes Neihardt for Black Elk 'I know it was the story of a mighty vision given to a man who was too weak to use it.' 85 Such an opening confession strikes a resonant chord with the Ossianic position in *The Fragments*,

presented as the first part of MacPherson's poem cycle in which the bard states; 'I sit [. . .] on top of the hill of the winds [. . .] Sad are my thoughts alone.' ⁸⁶

Mimesis in the register of tone and incantation is apparent in this cry from Black Elk: 'I send a voice [. . .] the voice I have sent is weak, yet with earnestness I have sent it. Hear me!' ⁸⁷ of Ossian: '[c]ease a little, O wind! Stream, be thou silent a while! Let my voice be heard over the heath!' ⁸⁸ The voices proliferate in *Black Elk Speaks* in a spirit cacophony: 'when I first heard the voices [. . .] it was like someone calling me [. . .]' ⁸⁹ 'In a sacred manner they are sending voices [. . .]' ⁹⁰ 'Behold a sacred voice is calling you; All over the sky a sacred voice is calling.' ⁹¹ A culminating sorrow in the text relates to failed vision as Black Elk is recorded: 'with my tears running, O Great Spirit, Great Spirit, my Grandfather - with running tears I must say now that the tree has never bloomed. A pitiful old man, you see me here and I have fallen away and have done nothing [. . .] hear me in my sorrow, for I may never call again. O make my people live!' ⁹² The 'holy tree that should have flourished' is 'a people's vision that died in bloody snow' and has enormous reverberations in the Jacobite code of Ossian who is frequently symbolised as the wounded Druidic badge of the oak. MacPherson, witnessing 'the failure of a bloody attempt' at Stuart restoration, presents a tree 'uprooted [. . .] blasted by lightning', repeatedly damaged throughout the text. The oak 'had been the Stuart clan badge [and] was pinned to the plaids of those who fought in 1745.' ⁹³

Further, the presence or subjugation of such symbolism in both texts to devastating or portentous similes of thunder and lightning, accompanied by meteorite imagery creates a tentative relationship between oral descriptions of the Wounded Knee massacre and the propaganda poetry surrounding 1745-6 indigenous rebel warfare.

'A thunder storm was coming from where the sun goes down' ⁹⁴ recalls Black Elk, on the

brink of his childhood vision. Latterly, many eye-witness accounts of Wounded Knee include a gloss of a volley of gunshot as meteorological; 'Yesterday [. . .] there was a flash of lightning [. . .] the flash or crash we heard was worse than that,'⁹⁵ recounts George Running Hawk through interpreter Henry Standing Bear. 'I heard him give some command and right after the command it sounded like a lightning crash,' Afraid of the Enemy recalled in 1932. Frank Sits Poor, via Henry Standing Bear, describes how 'he was sitting in a tepee and all at one it sounded to me like a crash of lightning.'⁹⁶

Here, in an extract from *A Song to the Prince*, Jacobite Alexander MacDonald includes reference to the 'thundering of bombs and canons' and in *The Song of the Clans* he writes exuberantly 'blue blades flash like lightning-flame [. . .] As granite hard and meteor swift.'⁹⁷ Whilst it is necessary to remember the succinct difference between the the Wounded Knee massacre where, during parley peace operations, a 'mis-fired' shot led to the wholesale slaughter of men, women and fleeing children and that of Culloden; a fully mounted battle campaign whose precedents lay in the forty-five one year earlier - the tribal, indigenous and 'rebel' culture surrounding both Sioux and Highland Scot experience demonstrably precludes the extent of active decimation of their respective societies. Thus we find alternate references to thunder and lightning as incorporated into the vision of a hero prepared for war: 'He mov'd in the lightning of steel [. . .] His armour rattled as thunder; and the lightning of his eyes was terrible.'⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the comparable aural imagery of thunder, lacerated with lightning flashes and accompanied by intense visualisations of natural phenomena, display a marked similarity in ascribing meteorology to understandings of corporeal experience. 'Then the vision went out, and the thunder cloud was coming on with lightning on its front and many voices in it,'⁹⁹ is a moment in the exposed dream ascribed to Black Elk.

These descriptive punctuations are present in both *Black Elk Speaks* and *Ossian* as part of the inherent language of atmospheric symbolism and are notably objectified in references to meteors which held special significance for the Sioux, forming not only their sacred stones but the temporal marker by which their great annual Winter Counts could be chronologically deciphered. As we have already seen, the meteor played a significant part in numinous Gaelic experience as the 'drueg', Gaelic for meteor or fire. Dwelly's entry interestingly mimics MacDonald's Jacobite song where 'granite hard and meteor swift' is given an expanded definition as 'cruas na criege is luathas na driage the hardness of the rock and the speed of the meteor'. The 'plenty stars winter' (White Cow Killer) of 1833-34 saw a resplendent meteor shower on November 12th. Similarly, MacPherson's *Ossian* is filled with descriptions of meteors; 'with a thousand meteors', ¹⁰⁰ 'terrible as a meteor of fire' ¹⁰¹ and the striking image of a stag with a meteor caught between his branchy horns. It is difficult to discuss the use of meteor stones within Sioux culture as directly relevant to Scottish Highlanders but certainly stones in correlation with charms were used as a pre-battle mantel to dissuade bullets from reaching their designated target. Alan Lomax, in his 1952 BBC notebook titled *Clearances*, cites the use of an 'otter stone' which he may have derived from John Gregorson Campbell's description of the magic 'jewel' in the head of a king otter which 'made its possessor invulnerable.' This belief prevailed on Raasay, near Skye. Elsewhere it was thought that:

'a piece of its skin [. . .] renders the soldier invulnerable in battle by arrow or sword or bullet, and - placed in the banner - makes the enemy turn and fly. "An inch of it placed on the soldier's eye," as a Lochaber informant said, "kept him from harm or hurt or wound though bullets flew about him like hailstones [. . .] When a direct aim was taken, the gun refused fire." ¹⁰²

Alternative accounts of Gaelic charm recitation with the express purpose of preserving warriors from the bullet, as follows:

'There was a persistent Highland tradition of battle charms that provided magical protection against [. . .] musket balls. In 1890, Alexander MacBain described one such eighteenth-century *sian*. The charmer placed a hand on the kneeling warrior's head and walked twice in a circle in a sunrise direction while speaking the first part of the charm, then completing two circuits in the opposite direction while chanting the second part. The charmer had to stand with his eyes shut until the warrior departed out of sight. If the rite was conducted successfully, the charmed one was protected against force of arms until the charmer saw him again. MacBain commented: "Men so protected, for instance, at Culloden, had only to take their plaids off their shoulders and shake out of them the bullets that hit them." A specific example is given in Alexander Carmichael's monumental collection of Gaelic Lore, *The Carmina Gadelica*. A woman from Bearnasdale in Skye placed a *sian* on MacLeod of Bernaray, an island between North Uist and Harris in the Western Isles. MacLeod was the laird, and the suggestion is that such magic was only reserved for the elite. At Culloden 'the bullets showered upon him like hail, but they had no effect.' When MacLeod threw off his topcoat in the retreat, it was picked up by his foster brother Murdoch-Macaskail, who found it riddled with bullet-holes. After several adventures with the redcoats, MacLeod is reported to have returned safely to his island.' Additionally, a new plaid cloth itself, after being fulling was sung over seven times by the women who had worked on the fulling. 'During the singing they kept time to the music by raising their hands simultaneously and beating the cloth with the tips of their fingers:

'Let not the wearer of the cloth be wounded
And may he never be torn [. . .] when he goes to battle or conflict.' 103

The Proud Plaid by Alexander MacDonald presents an inverse situation whereby the body of Prince Charles is potently woven into Jacobite Highland sensibility, suggesting the inextricability of a corpus of lament and the enfolded source of spiritual, military and symbolic protection:

'Though you tear our hearts out,
And rend apart our bosoms,
Never shall you take Prince Charles
From us, till we're a-dying.

To our souls he's woven,
Firmly waulked and tightly locked,
Ne'er can he be loosened
From us till he is cut away.' 104

Whether prescribed to the rebel elite or (in keeping with Highland sense of equality through clan membership; clan being 'children') any Highland fighter, many of the charms proved pervious to bullets as at Wounded Knee where the Ghost Dance culture also demonstrated its fallibility. The accounts of visibility - that an inch of the otter skin charm was placed 'on the soldier's eye' and aspects of incantation which involved the innovator closing his eyes to his subject until out of sight which was revoked when the charmer saw the protected again, provide a useful alternative précis to the second sight of double vision evoked by Ossian. 'Blind' to his subject, once the textual 'spell' of enabling the characters (demonstrably elite) to outwork their *presence* as survival; i.e.; the organisation and reification of fictitious entities as indicative of 'being there', Ossian then sees or mnemonically revisions them, releasing them from any charm of existence as the reader penetratingly realises their status as a corpus of disembodied voices; a corpus of ghosts.

Traditional Sioux culture employed the use of sacred songs to activate proofing against the relevant weapon, as Brave Buffalo's account in *Teton Sioux Music* by Frances Densmore demonstrates:

'The whole tribe came to see whether anyone could wound him. Many tried with arrows, but could not do so. The arrows did not penetrate his skin. Several years later the test was repeated with guns, and Brave Buffalo stated that they were not able to injure him.' ¹⁰⁵

In keeping with the oral spell or charm - the spoken protection, lies a positioning of the corporeity of the subject in relation to how the charm is *worn* as an aspect of vocally pronounced numinous mantel, skin or blanket that the subject walks away to fight, sleep or die in. Such invocation arguably reflects the other definition of tartan cited earlier as 'suanacia, suan' as 'sleep, deep sleep, from the sleep of death' and as such suggests a sleep walking through

bullet fire both as an act in and of itself and as a metaphor for the failed incantation of both Wounded Knee and Culloden. It embraces both the potentiality of sleep walking, in altered consciousness and surviving and walking into sleep or death, in dying. Donald Blue Hair, a Wounded Knee survivor describes the smoke as fog, heightening both a sense of the meteorological and the impenetrable; the sensation of being *within* the conflict, redolent of dulled vision, of somnambulistic conditions.

Attitudes to the structure of songs among the Teton Sioux practically implicate these binary understandings, removing their function from that of a work of art: 'Almost always the result of a dream, the song is, as Kenneth Rexroth says, "holy . . . an object of supernatural awe, and as such, an important instrument in the control of reality on the highest place":

(I)

*where
the wind
is blowing
the wind
is roaring
I stand
westward
the wind
is blowing
the wind
is roaring
I stand*

The first song was given by wolves to a Teton Sioux [. . .] If the dream songs are sometimes cryptic, and their meanings obscure, it is because their esoteric significance is concealed from the uninitiated [. . .] The songs are at one and the same time the words brought back verbatim

from the dream encounter with the divinity, and the path by which the singer can return: an instrument for recreating the numinous experience.' ¹⁰⁶

To some extent it is true that the reverse may be possible, that having engendered a dream state the poem song then provides a way *back* to solid ground. This reading suggests, as with the Highland sian charms for battle, that the pronunciation of vision had important implications both in Sioux and Highland culture for the actions and sentient awareness of those involved. A typical sian taken from *The Carmina Gadelica*, for example, includes the lines: 'From the crown of thy head, to the soles of thy feet [. . .] From the edge of thy brow, To thy coloured soles, To preserve thee from behind, To sustain thee in front [. . .] To shield thee in battle and combat of thine enemies.' ¹⁰⁷ The emphasis on dream encounter as walked; treaded through and into the active landscape is cogently interwoven with supernatural and literal return.

Similarities in the action impetus and use of animal pelts as protective charms within Iron Hawk's account, in *Black Elk Speaks* offers further insight into such inter-relationships: 'There was a very brave Shyela with us [. . .] he had on a spotted war bonnet and a spotted robe made of some animal's skin and this was fastened with a spotted belt. He began undoing his spotted belt, and when he shook it, bullets dropped out. He was very sacred and the soldiers could not hurt him.' ¹⁰⁸

These references to the act of bullet proofing necessitate a shaking out; as Alan Lomax notes: 'After a battle, the soldier would shake off the bullets from his coat, the way he'd shake off snowflakes, because he carried a small round stone from the head of an otter.' This action reflection of the storm-like structures and language surrounding accounts of war in *Ossian* and *Black Elk Speaks* provides a textual analogy that is performatively replete in the assumed real act of shaking down a protective garment; similar to the shaking out of the thunder, lightning

and meteoric presences in *Black Elk Speaks* and *Ossian* and in post-battle accounts of Wounded Knee recollections and Culloden song here for example, where the sound of that first volley (presumed to have been set off by a young deaf and dumb boy) is recounted as 'much like the sound of tearing canvass'.¹⁰⁹ Properties of cloth - plaid, ghost shirt, tepee and the wood pulp of paper - in *Black Elk Speaks* and *Ossian* are imprinted with the the weathered ghost talkers whose implements are wands of lightning and distant thunder. 'All this time,' observes Black Elk, 'the bullets were buzzing around me. I was not even afraid. It was like being in a dream about shooting.'¹¹⁰

Failure is intrinsic to both texts. One ghost shirt survivor, Afraid of the Enemy, recounted on May 25th, 1932; 'I have my old cloak and it has nine bullet holes in it. I am shot all through the body [. . .]' ¹¹¹ Numerous sian, if spoken over the Highland chiefs at Culloden, also seemingly proved too weak to de-fatalise casualty numbers and the fricative aspects of such numinous preservation culture seem evident within *Ossian* as an epic lament in lines such as '[no] more shall I see thee, fair-moving by the stream of the plain; bright as the bow of heaven; as the moon on the western wave.'¹¹² Black Elk, too, laments his failed vision; "with running tears I must say now that the tree has never bloomed. A pitiful old man, you see me here, and I have fallen away [. . .]'¹¹³

'When I first met Black Elk he was almost blind,' notes Neihardt. 'Recently he has become so, a fact of which he informed me quite casually and apparently without sense of affliction. Is he not thus released from "the darkness the eyes," and so a little nearer to his visioned world of reality?' ¹¹⁴ Neihardt's footnotes assert that 'Black Elk's impaired vision, according to oral accounts, resulted from his practice as a medicine man.' In one context this failed vision, coactively apparent both in Black Elk's supernatural role and in the everyday loss of sight is

further complicated by the practical elements of his medicinal role: '[a]s a demonstration of his power, he would hide charges of gunpowder in a fire, which allowed him to cause seemingly spontaneous explosions; one time the powder exploded in his face.' 115 In this type of showmanship we witness not only gain a sense in which 'the deeds of old are like paths to their eyes'; of re-conjuring dream paths but of firework demonstrations subject to a display of controlled and miniature meteorological metaphor. The practicalities of evincing shamanism are as troublesome as the concurrent visionary ideology. Shifting this model of costly transaction to the sphere in which MacPherson was critically received also demonstrates the price in a literary prowess or showmanship necessary to rebuild and execute the enormous editorial task in drawing and constructing the collated fragments of Gaelic poetry. As a self aware conduit of aged Gaelic culture, MacPherson resorted to necessary devices; structural, vocal and thematic - including a stamp of the 'ancient', much in the way that Black Elk produced spurts of strange weather from a fire. What he envisioned, flawed as it is, can potentially be read as the reconstruction of a number of paths as dream, as social history, as linguistic and literary reinvention, cross-cultural collusion, translation and as supplication. Both Black Elk, who received his vision at nine years and the nine-year-old MacPherson whose horror spectacle - an inverse vision, perhaps more a terrible incentive - of his family and others returning wounded and defeated from Culloden, display tools of invention necessary to refabricating, embodying and voicing the inevitable transformation of defeated indigenous culture.

Stirring Stones, Singing Stones, Bards of Stone

Intrinsic similarities within both Highland Gaelic and Native American Sioux cultures in

relation to adamantine supernal properties are easily evolved to establish understandings of practices of premonition and healing. As with the Gaelic system of An Da-Shealladh, the Sioux definition of how sacred stones have been utilised is both comprehensive and pellucid. The use of stones as visionary and protective implements is well documented in both Teton Sioux and Scottish Highland culture. Frances Densmore, an early pioneer of Native American tribal field recordings, described the Sioux relationship to sacred stones in great detail in her book *Teton Sioux Music and Culture*. The differences between what the stones are capable of themselves and in collusion with the owner vary from account to account, some suggesting performative contingency, others suggesting that the stones act of their own volition. Often the stones were an unpolished native brown sandstone, ovoid or slightly flattened and free from any markings from a tool. However, Brave Buffalo's description is more suggestive of the collection of meteorites;

'not found buried in the earth, but are on the top of high butts. They are round like the sun and moon [. . .] if it were possible to follow the course of the lightning, one of these stones would be found embedded in the earth. Some believe that these stones descend with the lightning, but I believe they are on the ground and are projected downward by the bolt.' ¹¹⁶

Dreaming of a small stone was highly significant to the Sioux enabling 'an ability to cure sickness, to predict future events' and, crucially, '*to tell the location of objects beyond the range of his natural vision*.' ¹¹⁷ There then follows two systems or functions of the stone. The first is an aspect of perception, whereby the sacred stone is also capable of visually manifesting and de-manifesting as in this description: 'White Shield came, and in giving the performance held the stone in the palm of his hand, saying. "This will disappear." Bull Head said that though he watched it very closely, it suddenly vanished from before his eyes. The length of time that a stone is absent depends on the distance it must travel in finding the lost object.' ¹¹⁸ This power

of transportation is described as:

'too subtle in essence to be perceived by the human senses [. . .] associated with *'Ta'kuskanskan'*, this term being composed of *ta'ku*, 'something', and *skanskan'* (defined by Riggs as "v. red of scan; to stir, move about, change place") The Four Winds, for example, are sent by 'the something that moves' and symbolised by the raven and a small black stone, less than a hen's egg in size.' 119

The second relates to phonetics and human presence as an awareness that '[. . .] the sacred stone may also appear in the form of a person who talks and sings many wonderful songs.' 120

Another account by Charging Thunder relates how 'his father, while on a buffalo hunt, was thrown from his horse, falling on a pile of stones and injuring his head. He lay unconscious almost all day and was found in the evening. His wound was dressed, and when he regained consciousness he said that all the rocks and stones "were people turned to stone." After this he found some stones. He could talk to them and depended on them for help.' 121

Discrete details of these assertions are evoked in the use of stones in relation to Highland second sight. Coinneach Odhar Breacacadh, commonly known as the Brahan Seer was said to have acquired his gift of divination having fallen asleep on a fairy mound. When he woke, his head was resting 'on a small round stone with a hole in the middle of it. Looking through the hole with one eye, he found that he could see what was hidden from other men, but at the same time he became blind in that eye.' 122 Alternately, another account relates that he acquired the gift from

'the possession of a stone which he found in a raven's nest. He first found a raven's nest with eggs in it. These he took home and boiled. He then took them back to the nest with a view to finding out how long the bird would sit before it despaired of hatching them. He found a stone in the nest before him, and its possession was the secret of oracular gifts.' 123

This latter description is resonant in the Sioux depiction of 'the something that moves'

symbolised by 'the raven and a small black stone.' That sight was exchanged for sight similarly evokes the ability in Sioux culture, having acquired one's power, 'to tell the location of objects beyond the range of his natural vision', suggesting a binary system in both cultures of everyday and extra normal perception. Further, the interaction between stone and performer encountered orally in Sioux and Highland testimony, is curative; 'if the sick person wished to hold the stone in his mouth he was allowed to do so, as this produced an internal effect' ¹²⁴ and as part of the transaction in which the ability to see is a mouthing or tonguing of the orifice of stone: 'Mary MacIntyre [. . .] had a blue stone called Clach na Lieg, with a hole which she thrust her tongue through before making a prediction.' ¹²⁵ These accounts collectively contribute, however, to a sense in which the sacred stone and the bullet are interchangeable. Thus the stone implement belonging to the Brahan Seer is described as bullet-like, or shaped like a bullet, measuring one and a quarter inches long, with a hole running through the centre. Similarly gentle bullets in the form of non-fatal Sioux stones have been responsible, in numerous accounts, of hitting those who suffered from disbelief: 'flying through the air in [a] darkened tent'. ¹²⁶

The 'something that moves [. . .] too subtle in essence to be perceived by human senses' intractably elucidates an Ossianic characteristic in which textual trees, water, hair and voice are acted upon, seemingly by the presence of the wind. Alternately read as a numinous enactment, one in which the register of phantasmic presence is given movement, momentum, by the 'something that moves', clearly associated with properties of the visionary, subtle Ossianic dynamics within the text can be perceived to be possessed by a property akin to the essence of second sight itself, as a barely perceptible action impulse. That this vision within Sioux and Highland culture might incorporate the manifestation (at least textually) of bullets-as-stones or identified flying objects, suggests that the limits placed on the visions themselves implicated

positive and negative aero-dynamic presences. It is possible to configure the visionary bullet shaped stone and the travelling ball of shot as co-dependent upon one another - each embodying the liminal transaction of mortality. Thus, metaphorically, what may be shaken off the plaid is that performative transaction itself placed at the interface - in battle - between the subtle, barely perceptible difference in performing life and death. Enfleshed in this plaid are the punctuations of the deep sleep: meteoric, moveable and symbolically replete with the imagery of survival. In this context, MacDonald's song which fabricates or clothes the rebel prince in the waulked cloth of Highland consciousness, also leads us to recognise that the potent image of a shaken down plaid, free of ineffective bullets contains a vicissitude of damage - that despite survival of the prince, the Jacobite legacy suffered subsequent demise. Perhaps what 'moves' in this sense is the poetic reconstruction of loss, activated retro-actively by MacPherson's collation but necessarily implicated in a system of pre-cognition. In this way, the elements MacPherson collected are unavoidably construed as a distorted lens - one in which the historiography of the Ossianic ballads becomes subject to a classification of fore-knowledge, of pre-fabricated events. Each associated weapon in such a category thus functions in tangible textual time of the MacPhersonian reconstruction, in the real or imagined sources and in the actual collation of a mirage of weapons alluded to as active within Gaelic history.

Theophilus 'likens the faculty' of second sight 'to a mirage', writes Elizabeth Sutherland in *Ravens and Black Rain*.¹²⁷ This slight descriptive indiscretion betrays the brokerage between the function or property of second sight and that which it perceives. Considered as a mirage itself, the illusion of sightedness other than that which is ordinary and which passes, under special circumstances to and from the viewer, could be prescribed as 'barely perceptive', a liminal optical transaction were it not for the underlying potency of what is perceived. The

contents of perception disallow a near-invisible acknowledgement of possessing or being in possession of the faculty. With such strong imprints, the collation of what might be termed the 'something that moves' with a travelling stony corpus, the ruinous trajectory of Ossianic temporality and textual substance, is improbably juxtaposed. This abstruse definition is clearly focussed however, under the condition of the oak and further, of the oak as petrified bard.

Varying degrees of stoniness equip *Ossian* initiated by MacPherson's editorial insert in the introduction on *The Antiquity, &c. of the Poems of Ossian* which describes the druids as 'unheeded by the world [. . .] in the circle of stones'.¹²⁸ If the sentiment is reversed to read in the stone circle and the druidic, bardic tradition situated within that extemporised space; Ossian with his dead children potentially vocalises the position of the last of a clan of poet-seers. 'Often by the setting moon,' he ruminates, 'I see the ghosts of my children. Half-viewless, they walk in mournful conference together. Will none of you speak in pity? They do not regard their father.' Further extrapolated by the abstract sense of a world and so spherical, properties of Hugh MacDiarmid's reading of the earth as hurtling headstone of the universe, has resplendent implications here. In *The Eemis Stane*, MacDiarmid writes of an unsteady corpus of rock, wreathed with moss, much like the 'Ossianic furniture (moss, fallen ruins, desolation, thistles, sighs and tears)' identified by Moore.¹²⁹ Such stoniness also betrays subtle shades of meaning made more revealing when based on a Sioux comparison. As such 'a stone from the stream amidst the song of bards' can just be reconfigured to mean a stone taken from the midst of the song of the bards as a liquid construct of vocalic tempero-spatiality. Alternately, the fabric of sound encompassing the presence of the stone, not dissimilar to the metaphor for deathly sleep etymologically reconstructed within tartan, foments a palpable presence of its own, seemingly tactile in relation to haptic visuality. The stone as interchangeable bullet, as silencer, seeded in

the depths of the song is contingent upon readings of Culloden in which bullets are not shaken out of a living plaid but a dead, bloodied skin. If the stone as bullet as central to the song is placed as the visionary device; the adamantine lens of the seer, then it conflates a reading of weaponry which in itself heightens perspicuity through the intensive categories of pain and subsequent re-visioning required. This movement - the barely perceptible momentum of exchange can be surmised in another instance from *Fragment XIII*, 'As leaps a stone from rock to rock, so blow succeeds to blow', ¹³⁰ mimicking both the flying bullet of Culloden and the ability of the stones (if re-situated in a Sioux understanding) to create a dynamic energy of their own. To push this analogy even further, the blows and stones could be read as co-dependent: the stones flying toward the source of the blows (here transliterated as Hanoverian attack) in a repeal against a system of disbelief; a lack of perceptual credence and understanding of Highland numinous experience. This may be corrupting the lens too greatly however, in treating any Ossianic conflict as directly descriptive of Culloden.

Nevertheless, there are other craggy instances that suggest the prowess of the object as in this strange action which purportedly creates a hand-held stone, one small enough to grasp and not a large rock or boulder: 'As she fell, she plucked a stone from the side of the cave, and placed it betwixt them, that his blood might not be mingled with hers.' ¹³¹ As a device to separate blood this unlikely practical measure can only be read as magical, as a charmed divider.

Comprehending a codex of petrification, as understood to be a state of transfixion, is extant within the whole shifting scheme of Ossian as a mirage-like series of visions. Locked to the core of significant sightlessness is the totemic bardic figure of the old seer-poet himself as defined by Moore:

'[a]s his story ends, Ossian begins to shift time between the remembering now and the remembered then [. . .] until we settle finally back in the "present", leaving the Fingalian past at the moment of Oscur's greatest triumph, forever frozen with that sword upraised in celebration, as the old man slips into sleep.' ¹³²

This de-activated state mirrors the opening stages of Fingalian Ossianic consciousness as a vista of inert presence: '[b]y the side of a rock on the hill, beneath the aged trees, old Oscian sat on the moss; the last of the race of Fingal. Sightless are his aged eyes; his beard is waving in the wind. Dull through leafless trees he heard the voice of the north. Sorrow revived in his soul: he began and lamented the dead.' ¹³³ He *began*, is stimulated into animation by the 'voice of the north' but we already know he is, or is like a tree as we are told in *Fingal* 'I, like an ancient oak on Morven, I moulder alone in my place. The blast hath lopped my branches away.' ¹³⁴ Not only is he transfixed and alone but as an ancient oak has become the symbol of the dynastic Stuarts and thus not only a royal mouth-piece but a convergent aspect of ancient druidic bardic culture. Whilst other instances of oak are brutalised around him; '[t]he family grew like an oak on the mountain [. . .] but now it is torn from the earth.' *Fingal V*, '[h]e falls like an oak on the plain [. . .] he fell like a mountain-oak covered over with glistering frost'. ¹³⁵ Ossian's most clearly manifested presence in *Fingal*, as opposed to *The Fragments* in which his voice still occupies variable personifications, is like an ancient oak.' Thus the wooded becomes fossilised as the stoney through the transfixion, the petrification of dazed substitutive visionary sight. Collapsing such analogies necessarily precludes a reading of the seer-corpus of Ossian as mediating through cosmogenic substance and providing a multifarious lens whereby the seer-body itself as Jacobite oak becomes the terror vision of Culloden, petrified through the transfixity of Ossianic visionary stone, and vocalised as if from the central space of that stone itself - from the something that moves; the barely perceptible.

Riders of the Storm

'From his shoulder Hiawatha
 Took the camera of rosewood,
 Made of sliding, folding rosewood;
 Neatly put it altogether.
 In its case it lay compactly,
 Folded into nearly nothing;

But he opened out the hinges,
 Pushed and pulled the joints and hinges,
 Till it looked all squares and oblongs,
 Like a complicated figure
 In the Second Book of Euclid.

This he perched upon a tripod -
 Crouched beneath its dusky cover -
 Stretched his hand, enforcing silence -
 Said, "Be motionless, I beg you!"
 Mystic, awful was the process . . . ' 136

This somewhat trite parodic rendering of Longfellow's *Hiawatha* by expert photographer and infamous author Lewis Carroll, lightheartedly circumscribes much of Morrison's own pre-occupations with cinematic and photographic imagery alongside an abiding self-awareness of the camera as illusory object. Morrison too, was intrinsically studied when acting as progenitor of his personal and public mythology. Much of the thematics of this performer identity are revealed, although perhaps in arch fashion, in his unpublished poems. A degree of displaced knowledge within Morrison's autobiographical position, renders pieces such as this, with a latent context of Highland anthropology, if situated against an alternative Gaelic backdrop:

'Like our ancestors
 The Indians
 We Share a fear of sex
 excessive lamentation for the dead
 & an abiding interest in dreams & visions.' 137

As such, the predicament he outlines could offer a neat summation of the Ossian cycle, whose varying circles offer constant bloody intercourse, both sexual and martial, all the while decried and described by disembodied voice, lent - ironically - a cinematic (or photographic) discourse of blind alternate vision. As such, Carroll's sing-song pastiche, replicating Longfellow's use of trochaic tetrameter, unwittingly provides a contemporaneous cultural insight into the photographic and envisioned cartographic visualisation of some societies by others. Here, he reverses the lens, providing a fixed stare by an indigenous (and literary) namesake. That the apparatus is *barely there*, folding into nothing, but can be extricated to create a 'complicated figure' that 'like a complicated [Greek] figure [. . .] lies beneath its dusky cover' is further ironised by the command 'Be motionless! I beg you, mystic, awful was the process . . .' Of course, within the auspices of a largely 'stilled' culture - or at least one subject to the awful process of implicating such stillness, Carroll's 1857 jangle presents a strange surmise of subsequent Native American history. It is, however, as much a mild mockery of Longfellow's narrative epic. What makes it interesting is the collusion of observable culture, cogently flipped to instigate Hiawatha as the viewer, the photo-grapher. By allowing Hiawatha to engage directly and successfully with the trappings of modern culture to turn that culture upon itself, Carroll presents a useful delineation of what may seem ridiculous, ingenuine, parodic and suspicious.

Though not a wholesale savage - although some of the literati were keen (and still are,

judging by a recent University of Cambridge publication on Ossian) to present him as such - it was James MacPherson who salvaged the remains of an oral discourse, translated it through a then modern frame - using the establishment expectations of a firm classical ground - and transposed it back to the cultures that had seemingly supported the demise of Highland society as a keen eye - a steady gaze. Unpacking the complexities of bits and bobs of gathered material alongside his own (well earned) instincts as author-editor-translator, MacPherson as much *represented* as reinvented the bardic tropes inherent within the fragments of Bardic poetry he collected. Perhaps the need for (or lack of) permission was what enraged certain critics. Yet MacPherson's timing was key to the framing and reception of the work. His redoubled efforts in collating yet more material after publishing *The Fragments*, demonstrates the burgeoning necessity within him to further publication - to build on success but also to complete the cycle of momentum he had engaged in.

The extent to which MacPherson and Morrison are comparable as artists - as performance artists - is intrinsic to boyhood similarities in witnessing the tragic. Both 'delicate' riders of the storm, the young MacPherson and Morrison register transformative thresholds that acknowledge a pre-pubescent awareness of violence contributing to an impacting, imaginative and dynamic presentation of subsequent bodily presence. Morrison was explicitly impacted by a Hopi car crash on a 1940s highway in an America indifferent to the fate of the Native American. MacPherson was more forcefully implicated as witness to the atrocities committed against Highland Gaelic culture in the mid to late seventeen-hundreds. Yet it is perhaps in the most unlikely guise that their relationship is fused to acts of embodied reinvention. MacPherson necessitated that the dead and dying of Culloden walk noisily through the pages of his poetic cycle, transliterating what was already Ossianic into a devastating contemporary treatise and

forcing any source material to operate as pre-cognitive, predicative foresight of the near ruination of Highland Gaelic society. He did so in a very fashionable fashion, using the latest developments in poetic language and creating a slick editorial presence. Whether he built in the seeds of contention deliberately to forestall the reception of another gloomy epic in British literature, we cannot say, but the puncture within the text is its very real foregrounding of deliberate cultural decimation. Instinctively, then, it can be framed as a live work, dependent on the barely there, the perished, the exterminated but also as a type of work book; a practical and numinous manual for retrieving the dream route by which 'the deeds of old are like paths to their eyes', providing a context, a function for not forgetting - at the very least. In this context, the most succinct appraisal of *Riders on the Storm* equipped in the recorded release with a downpour of thunderstorm as the song begins, is one of continued momentum. As an Ossianic figure, Morrison inherits an instinct of the bardic which he propels through Native American experience, fused with a firsthand boyhood knowledge of real pain. This cultural re-enactment, embodied repeatedly on stage, presents its own cycle of Highland diaspora, inherited and subtly activated in Morrison - continually seeking out the freeze-frame shaman, the power of perceived possession. As a rider on the storm, Morrison embodies a modern performative extrapolation of those ancestral instincts, as a kuoros, a speaking stone: 'a bright, singing statue in the light-shows and amplification.'

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V

The Object Body Betrayed:

Post Mortem

*The streets of soho did reverberate
with drunken Highland men
Revenge for Culloden dead
The North had rose again
But it turned out wrong
The North will rise again*

Mark E. Smith, The Fall lyrics The NWRA

Invoking and evoking the performative within Scottish culture, as framed here in three interlocking constructs, necessarily betrays a sense of the original - of origins that are corruptible, dis and re-embodied to generate a multiplicitous corporiety evidenced in a variety of media. That this live culture can be adequately located and described only now is, in part, due to contemporary discourse surrounding what and how the body performs itself and is performed upon as manifold reifications. Perceptually, this body is contagious, imprinting and adhering to all contexts implicated by its inference and interference. Perhaps what changes more succinctly is the variable mode of perception used to indicate upon what such a body is contingent. A reliance on perception, as a visual and experiential form, is indicative of the frame of live work. Nevertheless, invisibilities, traces, liminalities and incidences of 'between-ness', surmised by Frances Densmore as those that shaped Sioux awareness, operate not only at the interface between transformations of somaticism and the theatres of flesh indicated in these chapters but

as wholly grafting a sense of the 'barely there' onto entire experiences of liveness. As such, a body only just existing becomes a body shaped by many alternative densities of transcription. Whilst this is not just true of liminal forms - more succinct imprints are exemplary of the same definition - the nature of the historiography of corporeities actively engaged in startling attempts to retain, revivify or transform their identities which are indicated through textual, photographic and other frames become wholly traced and are subject to forces of reinvention dependent upon the viewer. In this sense, it is us as viewers who contain, refute and construct what might be termed Scottish 'liveness' within and without the recognised formal arenas of theatre, live art *per se*, film and other forms of visual art. However, before embarking on any such conclusion, it is crucial to remain aware of the severity of circumstance which provided the genesis, the ontological origin for subsequent daring acts of confirmation prevalent within Scottish culture of which there are too many to be covered here. Any culture faced with its own demise that falters on the liminal brink of a twilight operation whereby, not fully exterminated, it uses methodologies to reconstruct its own ideologies, histories of defeat and reappraisal, is a culture exposed to extreme creativity. This paradox, heeded in the cliché of artist-sufferer, is evidenced within Scottish culture *perforce* and the attendant assimilations of what can be considered sentimental, romantic, are often permissible voice-pieces in light of more serious societal strains. Nevertheless, the whole picture of what can be considered Scottish produces an interesting anatomy. In examining the ways in which the interface between brutality and performance can be seen to operate a system of Scottish appreciation, as opposed to Scottish *art* appreciation provides a useful denominator. When such Scottish 'ness' is either perceived as 'barely there' within the context of tartanry or barely there at all; the action impetus, the post-mortem information requires a live sensibility on the part of the viewer who can reconjure those

elements necessary to make such documents of live trace exist. This situation in and of itself places the live in Scotland as interminably current, relying on an interface between viewer and viewed.

One such alternative position ready to be occupied is a reversal of tragedian aesthetics surrounding a site of extreme performativity - Culloden. Clearance culture as such, in this sense, is a culture of the irascible, generating an outward inflexion of responses to the liminal - the 'barely there' landscape of desertion. Early attempts to define anything like a revivification which generated a spirit of performativity were, in the end, quashed critically as fraudulent, expendable and ridiculous. This emphasis on the real (an unobtainable condition) placed on Scottish Highland aesthetics, forced a retrospective climate which constantly required proof. As cultural antithesis to the non-binary position often displayed within Highland thinking of the sixteen, seventeen and eighteen hundreds, this bizarre demand held a sense of the Highland in 'the headlight' as a type of counter-cultural attack on small attempts to celebrate aspects of Highland arts. A typical example might include the Sobieski Stuarts. By putting a culture under such duress to prove the 'authenticity' of its origins, having suffered extreme attempts to kill it off, a state of continuous post-mortem is demonstrated, one in which the exact conditions and circumstances of death are continually re-examined but one in which the necessary elements which necessitated vivified existence *within* aspects of expiration are no longer perceived as relevant. Whilst any examination in such a context extricates a succinct methodology of extinction, subsequent tautologies of revival are considered part of an alternative system; one which must necessarily return to the subject of vivification, in this case a pre-Culloden continuum.

Therefore, in relation to Jones' assertion outlined in the introduction it is possible to adduce

that the textual-temporal-spatial-frame of the thesis is a performative engagement in which both its authorship and reception attenuate themselves to an explicit performativity. In this sense, any re-working of the subject matter considered within a Scottish context, necessarily re-activates itself as performative leading to the conclusion, in keeping with Alastair McLennan's assertion that we are live art, extant: 'each person already IS art.'¹ What might be positioned initially as the performative in writing and reading the three frames presented, can now be considered documentary - a textual aftermath - but one which might also utilise the Teton Sioux frame of a return path to the objects themselves: the ribbon photograph, Robert McGee's calling card and *Ossian* as implacably *performed upon*. In this automatic live context, the performativity of Scottishness is not merely described or demonstrated but intrinsically dependent on the modes of reception, critique and development arising from any engagement with the three frames presented. It is, in this sense, possible to consider the thesis a live work.

By accentuating the backdrop within 1970s performance culture, based in some accounts on Jackson Pollock's actions in relation to Navajo Sand Painting, a specific metre, epoch or era of explicit physicality is positioned to align a keen sense of Scottish 'pain' as a politics of culture but essentially as a vigorously live site of encounter. As such, within this specific context, a parturitive ideology in which aspects of what cogently defines Highland Gaelic culture are ascertained as necessarily algogenic by dint of their perspicuity - their explicit performative visibility, heightened by the difficulty of the circumstances in which such a society came to be most exposed within an international frame, artistically, from the late seventeen hundreds until present. Despite such a wide-ranging temporal definition, aspects of this hurtedness have never been rendered fully obsolete but besmirched by additives of sentimentality; kailyard romance and the hard-sell softened aesthetics of tartanry. That this visual contamination necessarily

forms part of the dialogue surrounding the Highland diaspora, is essential to understanding the conditions of survival. It is perhaps evident that such cultural and aesthetic movements were evolved specifically in relation to the performative blood culture of the battle itself, after which, no such imprint could prove as graphic. The reason then, for locating pain as a truism of performative centredness is not one of latent voyeurism or overtly heightened national sentiment but subscribes specifically to registers of the instigation of new movements within Highland experience as subject to extreme pain and in this way utilises the decade of 1970s performance culture as a container in which to microcosmically reflect such issues. It is easy to treat Culloden as performative due to the very documentation inherent within historiography itself, whereby - as with any imaged work of a live artist - the trace elements are all culturally one has left to implicate in any reading. As such, the efforts of those who attempted to revise and altercate such structures - denting them with their own authorial or performative identities such as Walter Scott, the Sobieski Stuarts and MacPherson himself, perhaps found their startlingly rapid responses to the situation of Highland exile and near-decimation, invented too soon after the fact. If any such work were made in contemporary art it would be legitimised by the very understanding of the subjectivity and contingency placed upon historiographic artistic relationships. This space can be cogently understood as now occupied by sole Scottish practitioners, still operating as disparate entities in keeping with performance artists of the seventeen and eighteen hundreds, specifically, Ross Sinclair and Alastair McLennan amongst a few others. Yet the scope within this cartographic anatomy suggests a resonance in all forms of corporeity prevalent in Scottish visual art, merely requiring renewed seeping frames to temporarily transfix, perform and define it.

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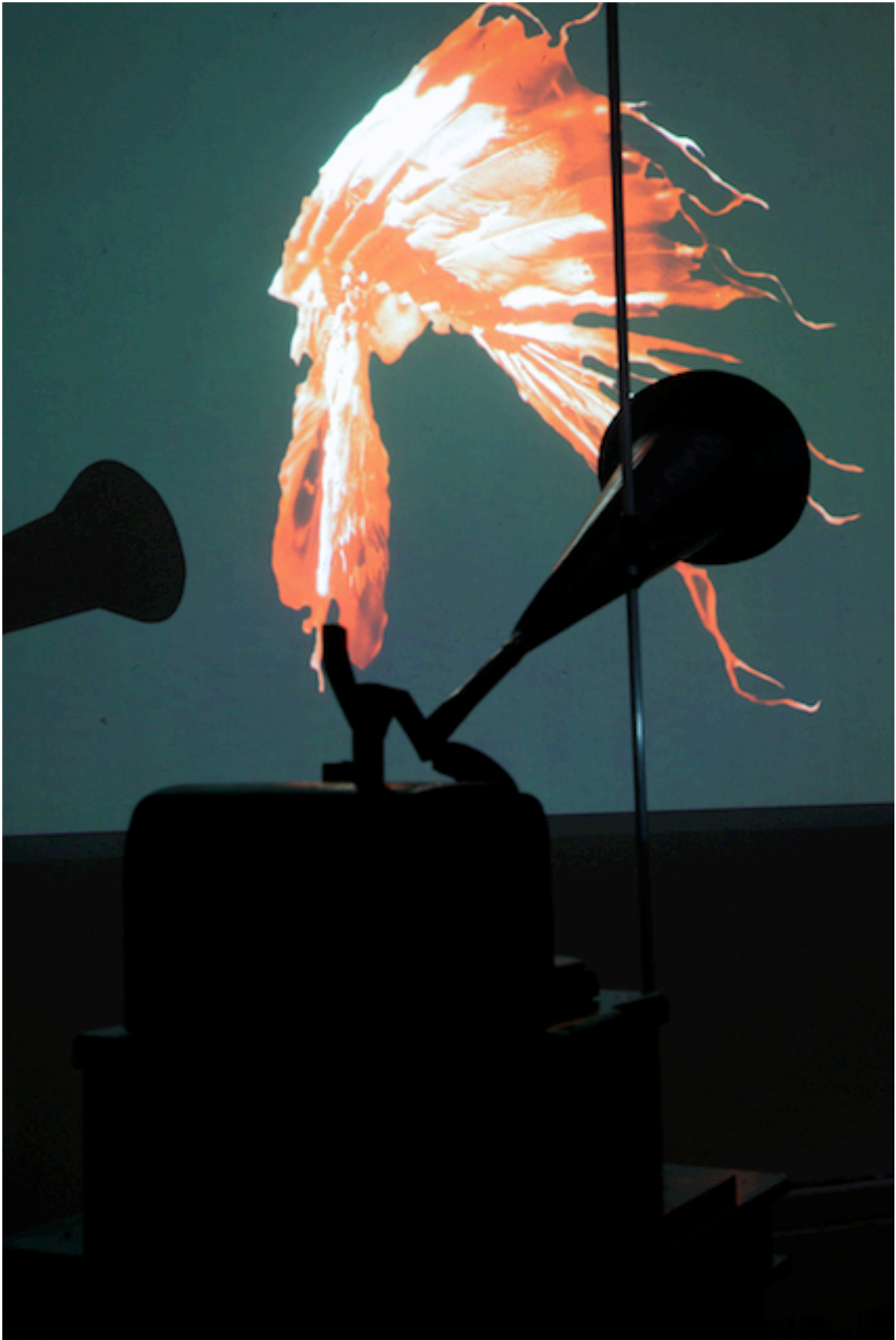
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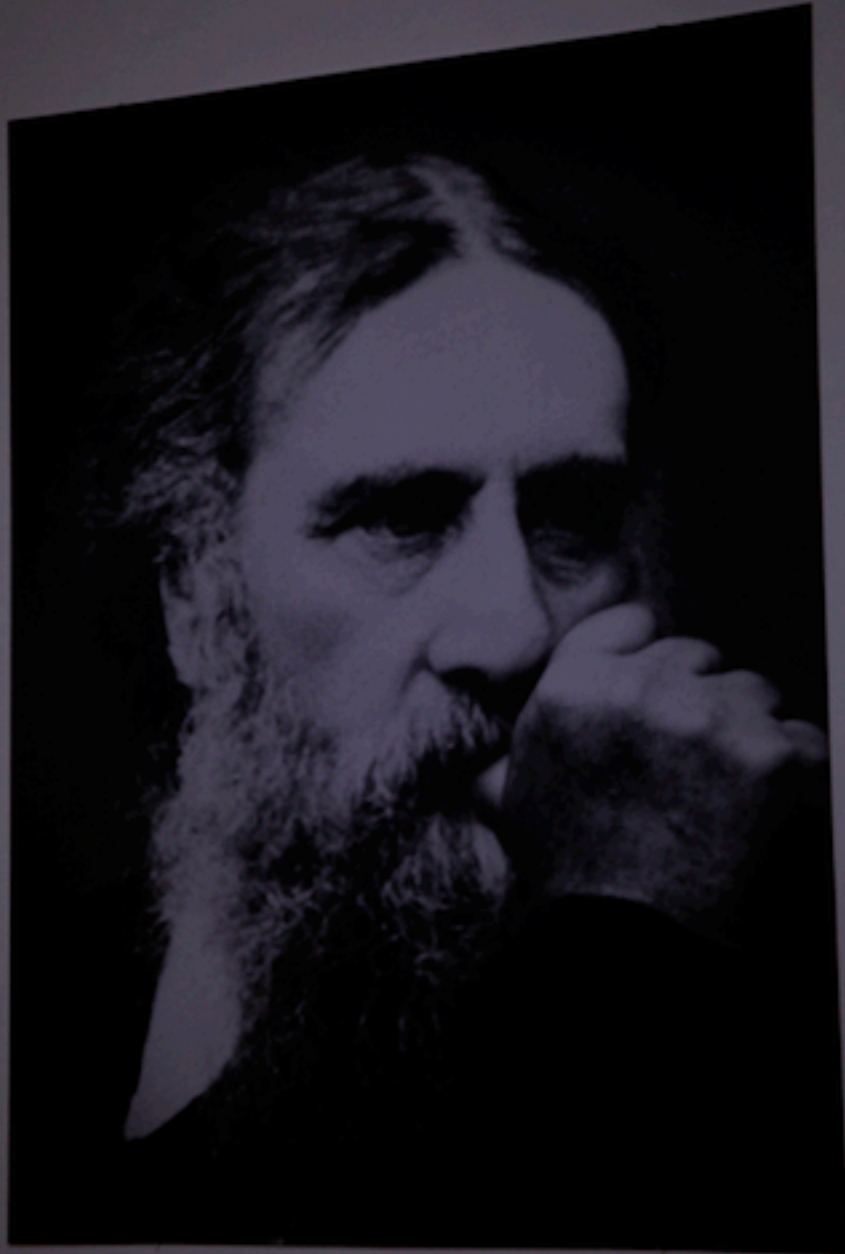
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D.PHIL EXHIBITION

a *Piper Penguin*, installation shot. Sun-bed and digital photographic print of Gilbert Kerr piper on the Scottish National Antarctic Expedition, 1904..

b *Distant Thunder*, installation shot. Video projection and video on monitor.

c *Densmore*, installation shot. Projection and objects based on Edisonian field equipment used by field ethnographer Frances Densmore.

d *Thumbsucker*, installation shot. Digital photographic print of George MacDonald.

e *Coming Events Cast Their Shadows Before Them*, installation shot. Taxi windscreen, jute stretched canvas to the same dimensions as the Landseer painting, car headlight and paper pasted reproduction of Landseer's painting.

f *Tribe I*, photograph of Culloden battleground taken through magic lantern slide of Sioux warriors in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show Touring Scotland.

Installation photographs courtesy of David Tolley.