**Hiraeth:**

**An Audio-visual and performed Meditation on Exile, Migration, and Memory.**

**Introduction**

*Hiraeth* is a Welsh word meaning grief, yearning and longing. It is also used to speak of homesickness, and sense of lost rootedness to a homeland and landscape. It has resonance for me from my childhood growing up in the Welsh valleys, being denied access to the Welsh language so that only traces and odd words remain, being exiled to boarding school, an unhappy place full of foreboding and laced with the ambivalence of beautiful music and then, leaving to work in other parts of the UK. From the valleys you got anglicised, got up and got out.

For exiled, displace people, refugees and migrants issues of identity and memory arise, and the tendency to memorialise the past in both positive and negative ways. It is not necessarily a false memory to miss what one has never had and to imagine it as a possibility. It is expressed up well in the poem by Louise Gluck*, Unpainted Door* in which she returns to her childhood village and finds things both the same and completed changed, and in turn her memory and remembering itself is transfigured into “I remember my childhood as a long wish to be elsewhere. This is the house; this must be, the childhood I had in mind”. Here is the complex layering of memory, loss, imagination, attachment and wayfaring — moving, becoming, changing in time and space and re-membering the past as it constantly re-creates its meanings in the light of the present. The constantly rewritten story. My experience is trivial compared to the challenges and tragedies faced by those who are displaced, and migrate to survive. Ruth Padel in her book, ‘We are All from Somewhere Else’ combines a celebration of migration through the natural world, a restlessness and curiosity fuelled by an innate necessity with our choices and forced displacements, visitng places in the world, witnessing movements and writing poems about exodus and migration.

The current geo-political displacements are many and numerous: from the walls that divide Israel from Palestine, the US from Mexico; to those making the long journeys by sea in hope or desperation or both, and refugees fleeing violence and war as in the Ukraine.

I wanted to express the episodes of a journey into exile and I use the organising concept of ‘atmosphere’ and try to capture some of the qualities and tones of the various. Hiraeth is a multi-media opus structured in four Atmospheres. The video has a soundtrack which I created with Nick Virgo from many sound files that I have made over the last few years. I have composed various musical motifs which have been transcribed for guitar by Roberto Versluys and these will be played in a semi improvised way over the soundtrack in a live performance. I am also considering using the Atmospheres as a backdrop to poetry readings about the theme of Exile. The Atmospheres are also used to provide the visual (and soundtrack) inspiration for the musicians of the HARK Collective to improvise with. This an approach derived from the work of Karl Heinz Stockhausen. So this is work in progress towards a number of performative possibilities.

A with all my work there are no people present but the viewer taking part in the episode. All of the video is shot on an IPhone 12. The structure of the piece has echoes of both church liturgy and musical sonata form, four ‘movements’ which move through: an ambivalent departure; through endeavour; the face the obstacles the suffering that these choices entail; and finally to a non-utopic urban space of some civilisation and return to the open space-time of the standing stones. The pilgrim moves through optimism, confession, sacrifice and some kind of blessing, wandering still am long way from Eden, the archetypal lost place and condition.

**Structure.**

The IV Atmospheres are:

I: **“Exile”:** A sense of migration, setting out with a sense of trepidation/expectation it is therefore ambiguous. This has the guitar piece Exile being played in sections that alternate with the sounds of calling and departure, bells and singing bowl strikes. The sea, a constant point of reference in the whole piece, is where we are heading. It relates to the liminality of the coast, setting out on the sea. Water will be a key theme throughput and is a symbol for sensuality, danger and even thought itself, see later. At present about 15 mins.

II: **“Wayfaring”.** “Keep Walking to the Well” is the name of the guitar piece. This Atmosphere attempts to evoke the recursive habitual world of quest, of repetition, of moving through a landscape – the repeated drudge which becomes the beat of progress, beginning with walking across fields a journey onward to some unknown destination. It begins with an animal watchfulness attended by the dawn chorus. Images follow of walls, of train tracks, of roadways, as do images of security and confinement suggesting that this journey is fraught with danger of capture. ‘Wayfaring’ derives from Heidegger and elaborated by Ingold. At present about 17 mins.

IV: “**Sacrifice”,** Death in the After-Life was the original tile. This episode is intended to create the sense of an encounter with the depths of entrapment in a sinking boat/building. Dark, industrial sounds, tappings from elsewhere, desperate attempts to cobble some machinery together. The guitar piece is called Dtread and is slow, simple but deadly. Water is again a potent symbol with the evocation of capture and a ‘waterboard’ torture. Breathing sounds reassure us that someone survives. At present about 15 mins.

IV: **“ Born to Ruin”,** Salvage… the return, paradoxical homecoming to a ruined landscape, the building of memoria. The ‘pilgrims’ walk up into the light from the earth (Walter Benjamin’s grave) into the only peopled image of a crossing in Tokyo. The emergence/destination in ‘Born to Ruin’, is not to paradise but to a salvaged ruined landscape, it is reprieve, certainly not salvation. Here is an ‘ending’ in time and memory helps the building of altars and the preservation of archetypal images which help us both recount experience and also by going below their surface (their symbolic nature) to feel the brush of the Real. This is symbolised by Standing Stones. At present about 14 mins.

**Creative Process.**

For the Hiraeth project I am working with a range of people: Roberto Versluys, guitarists from Chile at the Royal Scottish Conservatoire: with John McCaffery and Aasta Eik-ness videos editors, with a digital acoustic composer Dr. Nick Virgo on the sound layers, with Richard Ingham (Saxes), Robin Mason (Cello) and two voices Melissa Jones and Patrick Cairns from the Renaissance singers, and Alex Waber percussion.

Hiraeth invites both a narrative response and also a form of deepening visual and cognitive attention to evoke a contemplative state that can accompany the liminality of the journey, entrapments and threats.

The whole piece is intended as an ethnography and as an art-work within the discipline of sensory anthropology, that is how our being in the fluidity of the world of sound and image creates synasthetically, a bodily resonance and engenders associations and sensations that move from perception to a sense of significance and ‘knowing’.

Hiraeth is part of a wider research program addressing the question ‘how do we move from senses to sense-making: how does perception move towards interpretation? How do participants in these creative projects articulate and express their experience? This bodily knowledge arises perhaps from the way in which our senses and perceptions can become transfigured by the way in which we imaginatively construct what we are experiencing, in this case the material we see and hear.

So this is a living phenomenology of perception that may lead in places to a sense of significance (I do not use the concept of ‘meaning’ here because that implies the ability to give an account of it in words) and this significance as played out on the surfaces and in the depths of the sound and visuals dramatizes our concerns and allows us to be aware of them and notice their interpretive qualities. There is no description only interpretation, but interpretation at the level of the body/spirit/intuitive which is a noetic/cognitive ‘being-in-the –world’. I am not avoiding hermeneutic questions of interpretation and meaning, but I want to revalorise the preverbal sensory sources of deep listening, and explore the perceptual-cognitive processes that move senses to sense-making.

**Sources, Inspirations and Theory.**

A comprehensive bibliography is attached to my paper ‘Ways of Listening’ available on the HARK website but some sources can usefully be named here:

a) On thinking about ‘thinking’ and how we work perceptually with ‘wholes’ and ‘parts’ and create significance, value and meanings: Iain MacGilchrist *‘The Master and the Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Modern World’,* and *‘Logos’* by Raymond Tallis. Seminal works would also include Merleau-Ponty *‘The Phenomenology of Perception’*, and Jean-Luc Nancy *‘Listening’.*

b) On considering listening as a repertoire of play: Gemma Corradi Fiumara: *‘The Other Side of Language’.*

c) On listening and sound: *‘Sonic Possible Worlds* by Voegelin; ‘*Site of Sound #2: Of Architecture and the Ear*’ by Labelle and Martinho ; ‘*Sound. An Ecological Treatise’* by Chion; ‘*Sonic Agency’* by Brandon Labelle; ‘*Overheard and Interrupted’* by Bandon Labelle; ‘*Sounds Like Silence’* by Dieter Daniels and Inke Arns, and of course the works of John Cage.

d) On silence and the spiritual senses: ‘*Silence’* by Maggie Ross, *‘The Spiritual Senses’* by Gavrilyuk and Coakley.

e) On sensory anthropology: All works by Tim Ingold.

f) On ruins by the photography of Ambroise Tezenas and the work of Anselm Kiefer.

g) On musicology the work of Lawrence Kramer, Michael Spitzer in particular.

This Hiraeth project builds on the interpretive hermeneutic exploration work HARK undertook with the composer Errollyn Wallen in 2017 when we performed an ***Ethnography of Listening***. Here 60 listeners produced with me a dialogical written Ethnography of Listening which was performed with the music: *Photography.* This illustrated the process of *ekphrasis,* the engendering of one art-work from another, in this case sounds into words and sensory experience articulated as image and metaphor. It locates significance in these expressions whilst questioning the matter of meaning, or even the meaning of the matter, and for this I root some of my explorations in Lawrence Kramer’s work. Some of the influences are shared. I wrote then:

I find useful some of the ideas and work of the Situationists and the meanderings of the *derive.* How we compose ourselves for listening and how we move in music.This links with the work of Ian Sinclair, Sebald and other ‘psychogeographic’ writers, and particularly with the films of Patrick Keiller and his Robinson sequence. This ethnography could be a contribution to the fictitious Robinson Institute! This is not new territory and indeed Jacques Brissot produced a film along these lines with a ‘music concrete’ soundtrack by Pierre Schaffer on the 1950s. Here I am exploring in a small way the relationship between sound/music and movement through a visual landscape.

Hiraeth, described above, is an attempt in sensory ethnography to present the conditions for the possibility of elemental relationships between the seeing/listening body and a constructed audio-visual environment which uses these primary source of water, sky, movement etc. So these engagements can include breathing; the sense of co-sentience; presence; enclosure; disenclosure; fluidity; entrapment etc and these can move as *gestalts* – the relationship between figure and ground and a holistic view, and also move as perceptual transfigurations – and these are both visual and aural. The ‘utility’ or ‘intention’ (though those constructs are not useful in this creative process) of Hiraeth is to create a perceptual play-space in time where embodied experiences may be possible, bringing into awareness a range of sensory features which allow themselves to be reflected upon in terms of their significance and value to the participant, Where these experience constellate as words )or any other ekphrastic expression) then they can be shared with others and differences and common patterns explored.

The Hiraeth piece has three layers: first a layer of sounds, recorded and edited. This layer also contains the traces of the music compositions which are the next layer and will be played in live performance over the recorded sounds. These are composed for guitar but may be orchestrated for additional violin and flute. The acoustic elements are the primary basis of engagement and the final element of visual ‘video-art’ is intended to sit as a visual reverie, or associations that arise in word pictures from the listening experience. No representation is intended between the visual and the aural elements and they are not edited to ‘fit’ in that sense. Each atmosphere will fade to black at it completion, and this will create linking periods of silence.

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