

# The Edge Conference, 15-16 December 2021 – Abstracts.

## **Islands at the edge of modernity: picturing the Western Isles**

*(Professor Emeritus Andrew Blaikie, Dr Peter Moore, Matt Sillars)*

This panel discussion explores the historical relationship between the Hebrides, photography and modernity, by interrogating conceptions of peripherality. We consider the role of thresholds and boundaries in the visual record as characterised in the images constructed by a range of photographers over the past century, the reinforcement of over determined heterotopic spaces and places by early 20<sup>th</sup> Century travelogues on the isles, and the changing boundaries of image consumption and production through Mingulay as an ‘accessible periphery’.

## **The Imagined Edge**

*(Toby Carr, Falmouth University)*

This paper explores places on the edge of the imagination. Wild places, remote places, mythical places that enter people’s minds as they drift off to sleep. Each night, the familiar roll call of sea areas drifts like a soothing chant in bedrooms, ships, canteens. For shift workers, restless minds, night owls and seafarers alike, it provides familiar, constant, yet strange structures which inhabit the minds of many, regardless of connections to the real places it describes. Fascinated by this precarious space, both regular and familiar but often unknown, I set out in 2018 in a small boat to discover the edges of the thirty-one sea areas of the Shipping Forecast and immerse myself in their stories. I discovered a shared space of similar stories and memories scattered along neighbouring shores. The further towards the extremities I ventured, often the richer the tales. From the streaky edges of Skríúður, Iceland, the land forming legends and island gifts of Mykines, Faroes, to the mystical and fearful shroud surrounding Ushant, Isle de Sein and Tévenec in Brittany. Using original recordings and transcripts I will focus on the liminal space of storytelling illustrating the power of the imagination to conjure the forces of nature. Further information available on my website, Moderate Becoming Good Later [www.m-b-g-l.or](http://www.m-b-g-l.or)

## **An exploration of the perceived effect of intergenerational community coastal rowing on shared social identity and wellbeing**

*(Mari L. Todd, University of the Highlands and Islands, and Dr. Matthew J. Slater, Staffordshire University)*

Social identity has been linked to improved health and wellbeing through enhanced self-esteem. Belonging to a group has been linked to increased resilience due to enhanced availability and uptake of social support. Meanwhile, being physically active is also associated with healthier lives and an

increase in life expectancy, with some evidence that being active in blue space provides additional health benefits. Previous research focusing on the link between blue space and health has focused on urban communities. This research investigates the health benefit of using blue space for coastal rowing in a rural area, and whether rowing provides an opportunity for building shared social identity and increased resilience within rural communities, through an increase in collective efficacy and an increase in group members offering and accepting support from each other. Positive moderate correlations provided support for the link between social identity and wellbeing, physical health, group efficacy, and social support received.

These findings highlight the potential of community coastal rowing to develop a shared social identity in rural communities. The sense of belonging engendered had positive implications for enhanced connection between people and place, greater offer and uptake of social support, improvements in wellbeing, and enhanced pro-social behaviour creating active, engaged and resilient rural communities.

## **On the Rocks – Drawing at The Edge**

*(Cally Yeatman, Artist, North Uist)*

*the salt of absence,  
the honey of memory.*  
Between Mountains and the Sea, Norman MacCaig

Edge: When you say it aloud, it's a hard word in your mouth, there's an implication of something inflexible and finite. To be on edge is to be anxious, taut or tense. Something that is edgy is controversial, testing, risqué; but in reality the edge is often a soft and dynamic place, where it is tricky to pin point exactly where the boundary is; a place of compromise, and negotiation; a place of meeting and mingling, but also a place of transformation and change. This is no more so than at the shore, where tide and weather create the littoral zone, a blurred region of water, land and air. In this paper I discuss the relationship between artist, landscape and sketchbook and working in these places of transformation and change. How does my direct experience of living and practicing in Uist inform my work, and how do I use my practice to develop a dialogue about what it is to be at the edge. For me part of the process of drawing is about what is there, what's not there, what have I left out? How can I use drawing to describe not just the literal of what I can see, but also some essence of how it is to be in a place? What is the absence and what is the memory?

## **Temporal Edges**

*(Jean Newman)*

An edge can be a boundary, seen or unseen, real or imagined, between one entity and another. Thinking about an edge as a boundary, the addition of a line permits it more readily to be perceived, even if this is just a conceptual line. This line-as-edge can explain phenomena, record and capture movement, provide the score for music, and much more. It has facilitated the communication of ideas and facts ever since humans have wanted to understand the passing of time.

Musings around concepts of time and the nature of 'now' reinforce our awareness of our position within the edges of a temporal bubble. Exploring time and temporal continuity through line-as-edge, and interpreting earliest mark-making through contemporary line translation, are both key to personal creative praxis. Different kinds of time are recorded during the rhythmic repetitive process of line drawing – time as a series of moments or as a continuum, the line-as-edge of ancient marks and the creative work deriving from them becoming ciphers for time.

Line-as-edge and time intermesh to weave connections, blurring the edges between disciplines and coming together in contemporary creative responses to temporality.

## **Printing at the Edge and Over: transitional space in the artistic language of collaborative print**

*(Sandra De Rycker, Dundee Contemporary Art)*

From this *place* – ...an experiential situation ...where we are passing through... What's going on? What is taking place between the paper and the machine?...What does an event become?  
(Derrida, 2002)

Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA) Print Studio is a site for experimentation and collaboration in fine art print, inviting artists from the curated programme (often working in print for the first time) to collaborate with skilled print studio staff to explore ways to express their work through the artistic language of print. Printmaking has historically been at the edges of main contemporary art discourse, occupying a space between skilled craft, design, art and graphic processes. It is often termed problematic, or paradoxical (Pelzer-Montada, 2018) for its implicit processes of contact and removal, evoking simultaneous presence and absence. This paper will explore the role of the print matrix (the 'middle ground' such as the inked woodblock, screen or plate used in printmaking) as the often unseen interstitial layer that exists between the paper and machine, between concept and final form in selected artist's print projects at DCA. An interface upon which the conceptual and physical expressions of print converge, the matrix will be considered in both a social and structural sense, as intermediary between action and documentation, as both receiver and transmitter during the creative process. Using an ethnographic approach and considering Marcel Mauss's framework of gift exchange and reciprocity to highlight underlying linguistic structures within print practice, I will consider the studio and its mechanisms as transitional spaces where the 'problematic' matrix becomes a productive interface where such edges may be visualised, interconnected and explored.

## **Watermarks from the Water's Edge**

*(Richard Keating, Iain Robertson, Centre for History, University of the Highlands and Islands, et al.)*

“Where my skin stretches, begins the universe and the world, all that and we together and more, are a steady river of exchange, a metamorphosis.”

Herman Prigann in *Ecological Aesthetics*, 2004, page 183

This panel will engage with Watermarks made by the water’s edge. This we understand as both metaphor about boundaries between practitioners and as a physical, changing presence with its own agency, history and future.

The very multi-sensual and multi-temporal nature of the water’s edge demands a multi-disciplinary dialogue and response. Encompassing prompts and questions from both practitioners and academics, Watermarks makes and performs work that reflects this ‘edgy’ and liminal zone. What has emerged (and continues to emerge) is a dialogical, relational and shared set of responses as we separately (in time of Covid-19) walk our waters' edges. With climate crisis, absence/loss, visible/invisible, space between, touch and image making, ethics and aesthetics guiding our footsteps.

Our proposal emerges from these multi-faceted dialogues curated by Walking the Land. It will take the form of an assemblage of work and experience -in which history/future/water's edge interact in the form of an exhibition that would function equally well either online or in Inverness.

## **Nightlands: A Theatrical response to the Post-Soviet Arctic**

*(Jack MacGregor Reid, University of the Highlands and Islands)*

As part of my Master’s by Research I have written a play set in the abandoned Soviet mining town of Pyramiden, located on the Svalbard Archipelago. As a playwright and emerging academic, my research has taken the form of a creative response to the Arctic; using key texts and field work conducted in Pyramiden to provide a basis for the final creative output, the stage play ‘Nightlands’. The relic of Pyramiden not only projects an image of an all-conquering Arctic environment that outlasts attempts at human colonisation, it also shows the neglect and austerity that came with the dissolution of the USSR as these Arctic communities were emptied of their inhabitants during the 1990s. It is at once the utopian promise and lost future of the USSR, which now survives in a commodified time-capsule experience for tourists. This short paper presentation will outline the development of the stage text, relying on strong visual components of the project to provide an overview of my research. Specifically, I will be proposing a research-led, phenomenological methodology of playwriting. This conference paper aims to draw on the theme of ‘The Edge’ by highlighting the Arctic as a place of remote outposts of resilience, a place that is hostile to human interference, and how its physical landscape has evoked deeply dramatic themes through my creative practice

## **Exploring Edges: Ring Net Fishing and the word-image collaborations of Angus Martin (poet) and Will Maclean (artist).**

*(Lindsay Blair, University of the Highlands and Islands)*

I propose to look at the research which was carried out in the 1970s by Angus Martin and Will Maclean on the subject of the Ring Net Herring Fishing. This was a method of fishing which began in Loch Fyne in the 1840s and from there extended northwards to the Minches and then to the East Coast Edge of Scotland's coastline. By the late 1970s, it was all but finished. The Ring Net was a method of inshore fishing: it was developed and designed in relation to the coastline of Kintyre where the boats would fish at night in pairs, with the crews often camping on the shores within easy access of their fishing grounds.

If the first 'edge' of the paper is essentially geo-physical, the second 'edge' is formal or conceptual. The collaboration between Martin and Maclean in the far-reaching exhibition of *The Ring Net* in 1979 was ground-breaking in the way that it combined not just industry and art but also word and image. The fact that this multi-media exhibition was mounted at the contemporary art space of the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow was a radical response to the long-held assumption that art and industry were in separate categories. The fact that word (often the words of the fishermen themselves) and images were given equal significance in the exhibition was a radical questioning of the conventional 'edge' between word and image.

### **Collaborations:**

*The Ring Net Exhibition* (1978)

*The Ring Net Fishermen* by Angus Martin (1981)

*A Night Of Islands* (1991)

*One Time in a Tale of Herring* (2010)

### **Individual Pieces on Ring Net Fishing**

Angus Martin: *Selected Poems, The Larch Plantation, The Song of the Quern*

Will Maclean: *Selected Exhibitions*

## **“Whale Songs”; and the possibility of escaping the human”**

*(Emily Doolittle, Alex South, Katherine Wren, Lesley Harrison)*

Following on from the performance of **“Whale Songs”; and the possibility of escaping the human**, this discussion will deepen our exploration of themes around the human/non-human boundary, and the role that the arts can play in challenging the project of human exceptionalism.

In moving away from anthropocentrism, we artists can take a lead from the findings of modern ethology, which recognizes the existence of animal cultures and the complexities of animal behaviour, and modern zoology, which has explored the unfamiliar perceptual worlds of many non-human species. Allowing these findings to feed the artistic imagination is one way forward into new experiences which can help us (creators, audiences) empathize with the worlds of non-human animals, through by establishing or disclosing a bodily 'transitional space' which underlies and shapes both human and non-human behaviour and experience.

The discussion might include themes such as : whether artistic gesture defines us as human, and the assumption of exceptionalism this contains; composing and performing in situ; whether artistic gesture can escape 'the human'; the practicalities, ethics and aesthetics of notating, recording and/or performing with 'found sound'.

Each of the panel participants is both a creative practitioner and a performer, and can reflect on the artistic process of gesturing towards, responding to and then reframing non-human experience for a human audience.

## **To be Female on the Edge: Lived Experiences and Perceptions of Lerwick's Up Helly Aa**

*(Wilma Goodlad)*

The vibrant, innovative, and welcoming Shetland Islands are the most northerly community in the UK. Proudly independent, with a nod to Scotland and Scandinavia, Shetland's place and position at the edge of Europe is unique. A major cultural aspect of the Shetland calendar is the male-dominated, community, Viking festival of Up Helly Aa (UHA). Given its social prominence within Shetland society, UHA has attracted previous and current study, however research from a psychological perspective has, to date, been absent. This study aims to close the gap. The research presented, explores the effect of UHA and its gendering on identity and wellbeing. Evidence collected, indicates that whilst UHA offers males an infinite context to develop and deepen their identity, social standing and wellbeing, the boundaries on the roles available for females, restricts their identity and wellbeing. Although UHA is a leisure festival, it is through play we practice and reflect life's essential themes and therefore it is central to progress and development.

It is argued through this research that the gender "play-gap" of UHA keeps females "at the edge" of some aspects of Shetland life, culture, and therefore full progression within Shetland community.

## **The other landscape: holistic interpretations of place**

*(Frank Rennie)*

Rural places and islands are often woven into the myth of the pastoral idyll, and even credited with a special presence in the cultural landscape of the nation. Although those images are persistent, they are

generally also vague and very variable, conveying both positive and negative perspectives. Using the concept of 'the other landscape' popularised by Neil Gunn in his novels, the analysis of these area as 'special places' fits well into the analytical framework of human ecology, combining an interrogation of the natural environment and of social history, as well as the impacts of their interaction. Focussing the lens of enquiry on a small geographical locality, at village level, the opportunities for constructing an inter-disciplinary framework of inquiry are explored and documented in a linking narrative. Opportunities for further research and multi-media interpretation are proposed.

## **Title: Over the societal edge: a new analysis of the contemporary erasure of Gaelic**

*(Conchúr Ó Giollagáin, Gaelic Research Professor and Director of the UHI Language Sciences Institute, Director of Soillse, The University of the Highlands and Islands)*

This paper presents key data from *The Gaelic Crisis in the Vernacular Community: A Comprehensive Sociolinguistic Survey of Scottish Gaelic* (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2020) in the context of the global threat to cultural and linguistic diversity in the 21st century. Given that the Gaelic groups in both Scotland and Ireland have been subject to various forms of institutional support and official recognition, this paper analyses the efficacy of the official dispensation for the Gaelic language communities as strategic policy supports to resist language shift to English in the last remaining social geographies of the Gaelic vernacular communities (Ó Giollagáin et al. 2020; Ó Giollagáin et al. 2007; Ó Giollagáin and Charlton 2015; Taylor 2016; MacKinnon 2011; Ó Giollagáin and Ó Curnáin 2016; Ó Curnáin 2016; Ó Giollagáin and Caimbeul, 2021). This paper offers an alternative analysis to the conceptual limitations of promoting minority aspirational bilingualism without regard for societal processes of minority subordination and disempowerment, and suggests a more productive strategic approach to protecting the societal presence of minority-language groups and to sustaining the cultural diversity they contribute to the world. I argue that, in the absence of sufficient emphasis on the communal context of language-group protection, the aspirational approach to minority-language promotion is more of a contributory factor in minority group decline than being of benefit to the minority in their various societal challenges.

## **Underpasses Are Liminal Places**

*(Rebecca Lambert, University of the Highlands and Islands)*

The term liminal is derived from the Latin word for threshold, *limina*. It can signify something on the periphery of everyday society or denote the space amidst different strata of reality. I believe that underpasses can be considered liminal places.

They bear witness to ritual behaviours; drug-taking, drinking, sexual encounters, communal gatherings, initiating feelings of euphoria with the hope of achieving altered states of consciousness, of reality.

Underpasses are spaces where the everyday is challenged, where new identities and agendas can be forged, where all acts are significant, but also where interactions with forces, both benevolent and malevolent, take place. The underpass is a link between the routine everyday and the more than human world. One must approach these spaces with caution.

I would like to speak about my ongoing project, especially the current phase, where participants from around the world are recording the adventures of commissioned stickers which they have placed within underpasses and photograph every few weeks. I want to see if the stickers are subjected to ritual acts, whether veneration, desecration or even disinterest, and ascertain what this can tell us about ritual within underpasses. I would also incorporate an audio performance/soundscape.

## **Living on the Edge and Falling through the Gaps: Young vulnerability, resistance, agency and creativity in street situations**

*(Vicky Johnson, University of the Highlands and Islands)*

The paper draws on research in varied local and transnational, but globally diverse situations of uncertainty in the everyday experiences of marginalised children and youth. The evidence presented in this paper illustrates the precarity of young people living on the edge of the society in street situations. It draws on creative and participatory research with girls and young women in informal settlements in Nairobi in Kenya. Child/youth centred research tells the stories of young women falling through the gaps, cracks and crevices in the provision of social services and how their strategies are supported by peers, families and communities. The girls were previously consulted in case study research for the UN Girls' Education Initiative during 2015 that has informed consultation processes and social protection interventions of the local partner, Pendekenzo Letu. Revisiting the street connected young women during 2021 has helped to understand their experiences of social protection and their responses to the global COVID pandemic. The creative and visual methods, such as safety mapping, roads of life and support and mood diagrams have surfaced the feelings of young women and demonstrated their agency in overcoming hardships and in gaining a sense of belonging in their communities. The theorisation draws on Stoecklin's (2017) and Thomas de Benitez's (2011) in their analysis of agency in the face of violence for children in street situations. It also builds on Johnson and colleagues (2016) spectrum of vulnerability and social protection, to consider young women's relational agency in connection to their resilience and resistance.

## **The Liminal Zone: The seashore as a metaphor for the interface between teaching and creative practice.**

This round table will share best practice and positive ideas for nurturing creative and teaching practice. Several creative arts colleagues will give brief presentations about the linkages between their creative and teaching practice, each offering concrete ideas and suggestions about how we manage to maintain our creative and artistic activity alongside busy teaching commitment, or cautionary tales

about the challenges in managing the demands of both art and students. A participatory process will then encourage all participants to share their experiences, both positive and negative, following which we will explore collectively how our creative and teaching work can be mutually nurturing, and some of the findings of The Liminal Zone project, which is exploring the seashore as a metaphor for this boundary in our working lives. A senior UHI staff member will be asked to respond at the end about how they see the institution being able to support the creative practice of arts staff.

The session will be facilitated by Mandy Haggith, lecturer in literature and creative writing at Inverness College, whose research involves poetic inquiry at boundaries between arts and science, literature and forestry, and between different parts of our identities.

## **Violent borders & rhizome infiltrations: Seaweeds, mutant flows & fascist micro-assemblages in 2666**

*(Simon Ryle, University of Split)*

Spinoza's question, "Why is it that the masses stubbornly fight for their servitude as though it were their liberation?" was revisited in the 1970s, in Deleuze and Guattari's attempts to understand the flows of desire that undergird authoritarian hard right politics. This paper addresses Spinoza's question, and possible modes of resistance to servitude, by exploring the bifurcating seaweed & root aesthetics of Roberto Bolaño's *2666* (2004) alongside Frida Kahlo's paintings *Self-Portrait Along the Border Line Between Mexico and the United States* (1932) and *Roots* (1943). Kahlo and Bolaño each explore how political and economic boundaries can be sources of violence, yet also how aesthetic form can reach across, or underneath, borders – weaving together frayed edges, or initiating flows of connection between the politically divided. The paper considers the "femicide machine" that, for Sergio González Rodríguez, produces the ongoing systematized sexual violence and murder that has afflicted the maquiladora factory workers since the NAFTA inaugurated between Mexico and the US in 1987 – the most vulnerable women of the Mexican border town Ciudad Juárez (named Santa Teresa in *2666*), who supply cheap manufactured good for the US market. The paper links the "supermanagerial" structures, in which extreme wealth inequalities produce an elite managerial class in both fascist and neoliberal societies (Singh Chaudhary and Chappe) with Deleuze and Guattari's model of the political organization of desire. The paper uses the concept of the non-linear and non-hierarchical rhizome of "mutant flow" that for D&G offer a line of potential escape from fascism in order to explore the borderlands of Kahlo's root aesthetics, the relation of "violent borders" (Jones) to capitalist flows of production, migrant workers and femicide in Santa Teresa, and the ways that such flows mutate in the non-linear spatiotemporal movements of Bolaño's writing. Seeking forms of potential resistance to fascist micro-assemblages (the political organizations of individual desire), the essay considers how the seaweed that fascinates *2666*'s central protagonist – the Wehrmacht infantryman, author and thalassophile Hans Reiter/ Benno von Archimboldi – mutates, infiltrates and undoes violent borders, supplying both a model and ecology of Bolaño's bifurcating poetics.

## **Along the verge: engagement, edge effect and entanglement**

*(Caroline Dear)*

This presentation seeks to investigate the roadside verge from a variety of perspectives; scientific, philosophical and creative. I show how the verge is an important place for plants and habitats, how it provides a place for us to interact creatively with and how it can enable a deeper understanding of our wider world. The verge is a neutral space which makes connections; between habitats, between places and between people. I use the concepts of plant blindness, edge effect and shifting baseline syndrome to reflect on how we 'see' the world around us and explore how this can be altered. The verge is often a plant refuge with specific plants growing there which are relics of past landscape. As a remnant of the commons it is a place where we feel free to be creative, expressing ourselves through hand crafted structures and home made signs. From a metaphorical perspective the verge gives us a 'local' locale which, coming to know through close observation, gives us a deeper understanding of our entanglement with the natural world, with place and with each other. I argue for a deeper and wider appreciation of this undervalued edge on our doorstep.

## **Conceptualising landscape as an edge effect**

*(Rod Lovie)*

An ecotone, or edge effect, is an ecological concept which explains that as the edges of two adjacent ecosystems overlap there is greater diversity. To understand a landscape requires an appreciation of the tangible (space) as well as the intangible (sense of place). This means that landscape is made of both expert knowledge, and the meanings of those who experience it. Landscape can therefore be seen a bridge between space and place, between the objective and the subjective, between the agreed and the contradictory. If landscape is seen as an edge effect, it is no longer the exclusive property of one authentic perspective, but instead can be seen as a common – a shared resource of an ever-shifting connection between inhabitants and their environment.

The direction of spatial planning is towards more proactive community involvement through the inclusion of place planning and community planning. The conceptualisation of landscape planning as a shared interface between space and sense of place could allow innovative and participatory additions to the Local Place Planning process and encourage a more constructive relationship between communities and planners/developers.