

*something somewhere sometime sensed*

*I*

*ideas float, held by water, already artefact<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> from *Beyond Silence Listened For*, Anne McAlarney Artist Talk, Ulster University, October 2022.

The truth is fragmented without beginning. I was ten when I answered the phone to the British Army that night, on New Year's Eve 1976, to inform us that my aunt had been blown apart, a victim of a 'no warning' car bomb on Joy Street, Belfast. Forty-six years later, I respond to how that felt. *Lessons in Invisibility*, influenced by post humanist work of Hito Steyerl, and exhibited in Catalyst Art, Joy's Entry, Belfast in January 2023, developed from this personal link to our troubled past. I also won the Dale Farm Suki coloring in competition the year before. Both these events are pivotal. I learn that traces left within me want to respond.<sup>2</sup> Both writing and painting evolve from making space and the lived experience.

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<sup>2</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty *Phenomenology of Perception* Translated by Douglas Lande, London: Routledge, 2013. The central tenant of Merleau-Ponty theory of Phenomenology is that understanding of the world leads back to our experiences. Here our own experiences are reawakened encompassing meaning bestowed on aspects of our own experiences.

*IV*

*did you draw this picture yourself or did you*

*trace it*

*she learnt to write her name by  
tracing out  
the letters<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup>Excerpt from *Trace* (2022). Poetic exploration of my art practice. Poem accessible at <https://annemcalarney.com/work-2022/trace/>

Work moves in space and time, in equations of past and future where change, in-betweenness, thresholds, ambiguity, indeterminacy are irresistible constants.<sup>4</sup> The period of transition, where normal limits of thought, self-understanding and behaviour are relaxed, lead to new perspectives. Clarity comes in traces and cyphers, words in the wake, understanding when I meet the spectre of experience coming back.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>“ Agnes Martin, *Writings* New York early 1960s Accessed on 10 October 2020  
[https://archive.org/stream/AgnesMartinWritings/Agnes%20Martin%20-%20Writings%20-%20Agnes%20Martin\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/AgnesMartinWritings/Agnes%20Martin%20-%20Writings%20-%20Agnes%20Martin_djvu.txt)

<sup>5</sup> George Szirtes, *The Budapest File*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe Books, 2000), 120. 'As I was going up the stair, I met a woman made of air'.

V

*we see  
the caul*

*separate*

*we hear  
the essence*

*come*

*with muslin dripping verbosity*

*retaining body and seeds  
of truth as long as*

*pieces of string and dark things  
hidden in the crevice of your hand* <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Excerpt from *Trace 2022* poem accessible at <https://annemcalarney.com/work-2022/trace/>

Wittgenstein, (a philosopher I have carried like a badge of honour), reinforced my belief of existing parallels and tensions between language and art. I underline the similarities and marked differences within my practice.<sup>7</sup> ‘This sentiment remains important, as I doubt both the efficacy or capacity of written texts to describe or distil the essence of visual artworks.’<sup>8</sup> Yet now I take off the badge and search for a larger definition of communication, separate from written texts.<sup>9</sup> When I am not painting, I am playing with words in my head, returning to uncertainties that need actualization.

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<sup>7</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 3rd Edition, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1953. Reprinted 3rd Edition, 2001), 293.

Wittgenstein’s beetle in a box was a thought experiment in which the reader is asked to think of a box and in that box, there is a thing that everyone refers to as a ‘beetle’. He asks us to suppose that we only know what a ‘beetle’ is by looking in our own box and we cannot look inside another’s box. Wittgenstein suggests that supposing each person had something different in their box, the meaning of the word beetle becomes irrelevant. As such Wittgenstein argues that if we can talk about something then it is not private, and if we consider something to be private then it follows that we cannot talk about it.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Valéry quoted in Jamshid Mirfenderesky, *David Crone: 1979-2009*. Belfast: Fenderesky Gallery, 2009, p.74. ‘One must always apologise for talking about painting.’, Ambroise-Paul-Toussaint-Jules Valéry (1871-1945), was a French poet, essayist, and philosopher.

<sup>9</sup> Tjibbe Hooghiemstra, John Brown & Arno Kramer. *Walk the Line*, (Portadown: Millennium Court Arts Centre, 2011), 16.

A text accompanying a drawing exhibition, *Walk the Line* suggests: ‘Word power exceeds, politically or socially speaking, drawing power... Words name drawing. Words shame drawing (convert its silence into speech). Words speak for, or to, drawing (in art theory texts). Words may even replace drawing. The contention that drawings theorize is-even in an age saturated with images-weaker than the assertion that theories draw.’

XII

*talking about painting  
is  
allow and almost  
cat coal dissolve  
doesnt dont door  
dry engrave  
fall far  
feeding flame filled  
fire flickers from  
grows hard  
have haven't high  
in into  
is joyful knowledge  
last level let like lucid  
man moment notched  
of off on  
ourselves  
page passes radiant  
risen rolled  
stature still stillness  
slowly song stoker sub  
stance  
to the though thought  
tooth trumpet truth up  
voice void  
we what white wisdom  
yet you<sup>10</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup>Anne McAlarney poetic response Accessed on 02 March 2023 poetic response to *Don't Allow the Lucid Moment to Dissolve*. By Adam Zagajewski Translated by Renata Gorczynski.  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57090/dont-allow-the-lucid-moment-to-dissolve>



I explore light in darkness.<sup>11</sup> I reflect on how my work operates in my understanding of the metaphor, illumination in darkness.<sup>12</sup> In collaboration with archaeologist Sam Moore and uilleann piper Stephen Porter, places of darkness, both historical and natural, monuments to place and time, to past and present, are entered, sensed, words spoken, music played.<sup>13</sup> Art becomes archaeology; archaeology, art.<sup>14</sup> I begin to see new work as translations where sediments settle, spaces excavated, and thoughts are distilled.

## IX

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<sup>11</sup> Robert McFarlane, *Underland*, (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 17.

‘Darkness might be a medium of vision, and that descent may be a movement towards revelation rather than deprivation. Our common verb *to understand* bears an old sense of passing beneath something to fully comprehend it.’

<sup>12</sup> Mikel Bille, Tim Flohr Sørensen, An Anthropology of Luminosity: The Agency of Light, *Journal of Material Culture*, (2007), 12; 263.

This article surveys conceptions of light within philosophy, anthropology, and material cultural studies. It is argued that light may be used as a tool for exercising social intimacy and inclusion.

<sup>13</sup> *Inscape*, (2022) video made documenting my research on this trip can be accessed at [www.annemcalarney.com](http://www.annemcalarney.com) Gerard Manley Hopkins believed that everything in the universe was characterized by what he called inscape, the distinctive design that constitutes individual identity.

<sup>14</sup> Colin Renfrew, *Figuring It Out*, (London: Thames Hudson, 2003).

Archaeologist Colin Renfrew’s work has been relevant to my development, particularly his work on the parallel visions of artists and archaeologists.

*trust begins in the aesthetic  
not in the argument or what is said or shown  
something feels right smells right even when  
186000 miles a second is a difficult concept*

X  
*to understand*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Excerpt from *Trace* (2022). Poetic exploration of my art practice. Poem accessible at <https://annemcalarney.com/work-2022/trace/>

On my studio desk, translations are relived and recorded. I trace these marks using clear vinyl with acrylic paint. They begin to take on a language of their own, with a hint of their past lives, removing them from the past and into the present. Process becomes retrieval. Understanding happens when painting and poetry's spatial trajectories give voice to the unspoken story. I excavate fragments diffusely, reliving their recording.<sup>16</sup> This correlation between landscape and inscape is expressed as a correlation between concealment and revelation, absence and presence and becomes 'a bright nowhere' from which presence emanates.<sup>17</sup> The tracings become magnified in oil paint, awaiting revelation, their paths intersect; meaning visceral, a ghost in every space.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Tim Ingold, *Being Alive Essays on Movement, Knowledge, and Description*, (London, Routledge, 2011). This nexus permits communication of the remembered and unremembered, within a landscape of personal and collective narrative. This interrelation has been influenced by anthropologist Tim Ingold, particularly his essay on the ephemerality of landscape.

<sup>17</sup> From *Clearances* by Seamus Heaney. Accessed on 02 May 2022

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/57042/clearances>

'Its heft and hush become a bright nowhere,

A soul ramifying and forever

Silent, beyond silence listened for.'

<sup>18</sup>*Inscape*, (2022) video made documenting my research. Accessible at

<https://annemcalarney.com/work-2022/inscape/>

XIII

*in the movement of translation  
and rotation*

*it comes down to this*

*to slow the passage*

*a ray of light passed  
through me when it met you*

*perhaps*

*life is like light like*

*sometimes a wave*

*sometimes a particle*

*changing*

*when passed through one medium*

*to another*

*to a last refracting*

*spectrum of silent like*

*recurrences*

*a freshwater curve in space<sup>19</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> from *Beyond Silence Listened For*, Anne McAlarney, An Artist's Talk, Ulster University, October 2022.

I prepare ground on a hard surface (Zinzer Bulls Eye vs Gesso, MDF vs ply) following conversations in Shilliday's, the local hardware merchant, with a history of helping people build and destroy since 1926. Stand oil, my friend, is replaced with Spectragel, a quicker drying medium which conducts ultrasound waves, and contains ghosts. I hear the silence of the painting as it talks to me *keep things simple*. Between the shed skin and dog hair of those I live with, the paintings are vulnerable as they dry. I construct a drying room with tomato soup tins and MDF. I think about Andy Warhol and the very different work I will have if the tins succumb under the weight. In my efforts to keep them looking wet, I care for my paintings. I nurse them and tuck them into pizza boxes as they whisper, *intersect a path between the equations of past, present, and future. wait. hear.*

Joan Mitchell and Patrick Michael Fitzgerald, both painters I admire, seem to be with me in the studio today. They too are dancing. Here Agnes Martin sits with my mother and father and the dead ones I miss. Octopus have three hearts. It can be a challenge when you just have one to truthfully articulate these boundaries of which I cannot speak.<sup>20</sup> So I choose to use one large brush, to delineate the experiences that never truly recede, to make visible ridges and troughs like isobars, in paint. Choosing colours, I go to those that today excite me.

My struggle to understand who comfortably sits with who, leads me to move between insider and outsider positions, before the paintings are thrust in front of other eyes, no longer a democracy. I become aware of the argumentative, defensive position from which I am willing to back down only when I learn. Here words and paint are sparring and passionate, seeking economy of expression.

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<sup>20</sup> Desmond Gillmor, *A Systemic Geography of Ireland*, (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan Ltd. 197), 5.

This was my first geography book at school. I went on to study Geography at QUB. I loved this book. I found it recently in a secondhand shop. The trace of reading it is still in my mind, it fed my imagination. 'Many Irish farms consist of a single tract of land within a continuous boundary and sub divided into several enclosed fields. The small irregular fields of the west serve not only as field boundaries but also places to put the large number of stones cleared from the land.'

*in a contrary place  
colours will be mixed  
you will not look away*

*tri chromatic acts*

*make shapes*

*make acts*

*blue & yellow not the language of victory where dominant wavelengths of cochineal & kermes  
from inside out drain flesh & in ternal logic of red pouring grief before loss & words are whitened  
by mixing<sup>21</sup>*

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<sup>21</sup>Excerpt from *Trace* (2022). Poetic exploration of my art practice. Poem accessible at <https://annemcalarney.com/work-2022/trace/>

A silence is created inside me. I want to name this birthed work, Otolith.<sup>22</sup> Whether the equation of effective communication is balanced, or they become empty signifiers, is beyond my understanding. The process of painting these offers me peace. I get into them and rest. When I need to dance, I listen to Detroit Techno, and paint new work (3.5 x 1.5 m acrylic on vinyl). Will I show this large painting I had such a buzz making? I listen again. And the tide and title change, my miss is my mercy. Wren, blackbird, robin, bluetit, painting, evolving, curving, singing, feminizing.

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<sup>22</sup> Otolith is a calcium carbonate structure found in the inner ear. These structures along with the saccule and utricle allow an organism to perceive linear acceleration both horizontally and vertically, allowing balance.

XVIII

*i go out with a coffee to sit and watch he comes to tell me its time hes always there first cadmium  
red chest i get the empty feeder down and pour in the breakfast seed usually the one with cerulean  
and lemon comes next hes seen me i watch then they all come taking turns respectfully i think  
about how they found out they came from nowhere they hadn't seen me fill it how did they know*

*something somewhere sometime sensed*

*i paint to find out what i am painting*

*i am not my mother i am not my daughter*

*i reflect and refuse and reiterate*

*i push tentacles into a voiceless vacuum to unravel why*

*i develop a new perspective*

*i paint*



Here is the atavistic space I crave and the solar plexus of my work.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Noël Arnaud, *L'état d'ébauche* quoted in Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1964. Translated by Maria Jolas. Original work published in French 1958), 156.  
'*Je suis l'espace où je suis.*' (I am the space where I am).

XX

*4 choosing birth edit redact so no issue put by or racked all talk stopped -*

*3 you may might bleed for return but then for what another day its late now*

*2 now to yet forget intent lie down with freedom to cite perfected metric*

*1 second to count falling away changing there nothing you should do*

*Zero out you sleep no days to add none from divide*

*separated left on face forward all mirrored back*

*a denial right to our root here we are without begin<sup>24</sup>*

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<sup>24</sup> Poem influenced by Hito Sterly, *How Not to Be Seen: A Fucking Didactic Educational .MOV File*. Accessed on 02 December 2023

[https://www.moma.org/learn/moma\\_learning/hito-steyerl-how-not-to-be-seen-a-fucking-didactic-educational-mov-file-2013/](https://www.moma.org/learn/moma_learning/hito-steyerl-how-not-to-be-seen-a-fucking-didactic-educational-mov-file-2013/)

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