KELLY + JONES
UN/WRITING
THE LANDSCAPE,
RE/FIGURING
THE BODY
Unwriting and refiguring artistic practice.  The subject of the lecture was the collaborative work that Jones had done with the artist Traci Kelly, as one half of the duo Kelly + Jones.  Kelly + Jones’ work together in 2014, when they were invited by Michael Pinchbeck to participate in a two-week residency for The Drawing Board, curated as part of the program for Primary Artist Studios in Nottingham. The residency took place in an old school building, where they discovered a large chalkboard on the landing of a flight of stairs that became the background for their work at the school house, albeit in a much larger environment. In early 2020, Kelly + Jones exhibited the work that came out of the two residencies alongside new works from continued site reflections at The Glass Tank in Oxford. The title of the exhibition, CaCO3, refers to the chemical compound of calcium carbonate, of which chalk is one form. In keeping with the tenor of their collaborative work, Kelly + Jones invited four women to participate in a micro-residency research project that Kelly had developed in 2012 called Seers-in-Residence. For three hours each, Janice Howard, Helen Waddington, Deborah Pill, and Kate Mahony engaged with the exhibition, moving work around, picking up chalk, and redrawing the images. Subsequently they came up with unique responses to the work including a Spotify playlist that was documented through video, photography and writing. This exchange is documented on Kelly’s website (Kelly, 2020) and published here in this unique newspaper, which includes contributions from the Seers-in-Residence as well as this essay, an exchange between Kelly + Jones, and a meditation on chalk by Joanne Lee. The folding and unfolding of the publication allows new pathways and new relationships between the writers to emerge. Leading through the newspaper the reader has the opportunity to encounter other articles of interest revealing alternative routes and the surrounding topography. In her lecture ‘Unwriting and refiguring artistic practice’, Joanne Lee notes that Kelly + Jones were interested in the notion of refiguring positions for the process of writing through the body for bringing a subject into being, in order to explore its dialogic impulses in relation to the feminine.  ‘The format of the newspaper permits readers to engage in the project of the Seers-in-Residence by engaging dialogically with the text as they fold, unfold, turn the sheet. At its best, the newspaper is an eccentric mapping, one that yields more questions than answers. For this essay, I have been charged with mapping the conversations between Kelly + Jones, the Seers-in-Residence, Joanne Lee, and myself. I am also extending this mapping to include responses written after Jones’ lecture by three of the people in attendance at that lecture. What becomes apparent is that the chalk is invisible to everyone involved in the project. Howard, whose essay engages with the meaning of the body, actually straps two pieces of chalk to her feet, mimicking We Are The Apparatus, a 2020 soundscape video from prior footage by Kelly + Jones created by tying blocks of chalk to the feet and dancing around. Waddington, a soil scientist and geographer, examined the composition of the clumps of chalk displayed throughout the exhibition, but also thinks back to her time as a teacher. I got to write on the blackboard when I was a teacher in Zimbabwe. I taught Geography and English in a remote rural school. The kids had books, but no pens. The teachers had chalk and talk but Geography was learnt through the soles of the feet. The chalk in Black African schools was coloured, dusty, snappy, made from gyspum. Gypsum (Calcium Sulphate) is a salt, it’s been dehydrated and air dried to make chalk. Kelly + Jones made us cough, the price of power (Waddington, 2020). Mahony went even further, embracing the contemporaneity of corporeal freedom with her ‘Spotify selection of songs about the body, many of which are songs for dancing and compliment the importance of space for Kelly + Jones. For Lee, on the other hand, the chalk pointed to a deep time that is almost incomprehensible if viewed through a human-centric lens. ‘Some ninety million years ago what is now the chalk downland of Northern Europe – the particular place I lived, and those through which I regularly travelled – was an entirely different physical state. Far from solid, this ooze at the bottom of a large sea was accumulating slowly from the deposition of creatures with calcite shells. Weighted and consolidated by overlaying sediment, these myriad brief lives have now become rock; hills have been raised from the remains of tiny creatures’ (Lee, 2020).

As Lee ponderes what changes might still be occurring to the chalky cliffs when I was young, she concludes that ‘matter is generative, stuff emerges, even if it is not the material expected or sought.’ Kelly + Jones echo this sentiment, writing of their work in this very essay that ‘This layering of time through the prehistoric marine life sedimented into chalk (and chalk itself, present lives (her own Agreement), and redone, which leads back to the cliffs where she once lived, she that ground me, make my existence feel natural and even ancient like to these minerals’ (Keans, 2020). This and one, from Annie Everzer, which speaks to a different kind of historical potential the work in the quarry to reconfigure the temporal. ‘The particular place that was once a active quarry now appears on the artist’s clothing in various forms, which offers the audience some historical context, but also embodies the theme of hauntings, which is referenced once again in a photograph of Jones pregnant lying on a rock at the bottom of the chalk pit ceaselessly binding past lives (the chalk itself), present lives (her own body at the bottom of pit) and future lives (her unborn daughter) into this transformative process in one single image’ (Eversz, 2020).
SEERS-IN-RESIDENCE
AN INTERACTIVE RESEARCH MODEL FOR CREATIVE PRACTICES

Seers-in-Residence is a micro-residency developed by Traci Kelly in 2012 to be a tool for her own practice and also to be an open resource for creative practitioners across disciplines.

1. Invited researchers spending a continuous 3 hours interacting with the material of the initiating artist/s.

2. All material and architectural components can be altered but returned to original state at the end of the 3 hours, unless the invite specifically gives the freedom to destroy, replace and resituate.

3. The initiating artists SHOULD NOT be present to witness the residencies first hand, so that the Seer-in-Residence does not feel encumbered or presided over in their endeavours.

4. Within 2-3 weeks of undertaking the residency the researchers submit an approximately 1000 word text. This can be in a tone and subject of their own deciding e.g. creative, academic, anecdotal, scientific. It may be reflective or a work of art on its own terms, an investigation or all of these things etc.

5. Even though the Seers-in-Residence own copyright to all their own material there is a generosity that they provide their text and documentation for circulation to fellow participants and to the initiating artists. The materials can be published online and hardcopy in talks, seminars, publications and exhibitions with the artists duly credited and CLEARLY not presented as the initiating artists own work.

6. Seers-in-Residence can be adapted to the teaching environment, enabling students to open up the dialogues present in their emergent practices and as a method of practical critique through in-action response and research-creation.

The model aims to be manageable, insightful, and unsettling, extending the scope of an individual’s practice through previously unconsidered lenses and formations.

The person or institution issuing the invitations commits to providing quality documentation so that the Seer has a resource to aid their reflection without being possibly distracted with producing their own. Publication is viewed as printed material, online material, a seminar, a public event, a further exhibiting context incorporating research contributions.

Kelly + Jones

For We Are Made of Lines
Kelly + Jones, 2020
Un/writing the landscape, re/figuring the body

the turn of the stone steps, fixed
fast, slow or gentle touch of the pad.
the corner of the stairwell. The harsh,
strains, caught in a spider's web in
in as doors open and a rusted leaf
stairs. A waft of autumn air rushes
of disinfectant washed over school
to the dominant. there is a smell
unruly. The blackness always reacts
subjectivity as the grammati-cally
register as it tangles around my
lowercase. i x ii reclaim the lower
proud assertions of the capitals and

Diagram 1. Unresolved Pressure
i x ii doesn't care much for the
proud assertions of the capitals and
will keep words to the whispers of
lowness. i x ii reclaim the lower
register as it tangles around my
subjectivity as the grammatical-ly
unknow. The blackness always reacts
to my touch. It has hidden depths.

Diagram 2. Writing on the Horizon
i x ii wills not to be the right hand
to the dominant. there is a smell
of disinfectant washed over school
stairs. A waft of autumn air rushes
in as doors open and a rusted leaf
strains, caught in a spider's web in
the corner of the stairwell. The harsh,
fast, slow or gentle touch of the pad.
It's not a note pad as I know it. On
the turn of the stone steps, fixed
to the wall, a silvery surfaced writing
board floats in time and space. i'm
wired, wired to this machine. Our
pressure points meet. Over and over
and over and over and over again.
connect, connect. My wires to
your. You can taste the dryness of
chalk carried on the air of previous
activations. an archaeology begins
even as collaborators wait to meet
for the first time to begin adding their
own residual dust to the crevices
of unwriting. You only see what is
between you and me.

Diagram 3. Dis /Connected / Mass
i x ii sways between destinations,
brushing gestures and mo-tivations
that predetermine language, before
language distils, set-in's and marks
a subject. Each black square offers
a different kind of composition. A
movement towards each other, a
movement to-wards writing – the
unwritten. i write silently, i write
through my hands in the air. i repeat
the pattern of what i have already
conducted on the keys through the
movement of my fingers. Where text
marks a subject, stuff it at the edges,
turn it in on itself, undo it so that it
does not live peacefully. It is a silent
and peaceful act. It flows.

Diagram 4. Erasure
i x ii conjures with husks and
fossils, past lives embedded in
finger tips and lungs. Where do bodies
begin and end? the discourse is
made of metal and plastic, not of
chalk and bones. Bodies of flesh
and text grapple and fail to hold
each other accountable. Create a
space. A space, between the act of
letter making and word forma-tion.
! Space. M. Space. A. Space. D.
Space. E. Space. T. Space. H.
Space. I. Space. S. Space. For
U. spaced somewhere between, as
performing political subjects. Writing
and 'ghosting' the scene destabi-lises
subjectivity and opens into new
territories cast in the moment. I am
a series of in-between. Each letter
that i touch, each word that i create,
always have to pause. Create a

Diagram 5. Undeclared
i x ii is a corporeal archive.
Writing as a material artefact em-
bodies a drive to become legacy,
something referred to, built upon,
recording transmittable knowledges.
It is a structure filled with hid-den
pressure points. We are resis-tant to
ideas of capturing. it moves. it is free
flowing, free forming, free flowing,
free flowing – though exchanging knowledge is important
for development there's a threat
to discover how else it could be in
production and circulation. it is not of
man, or matter, or of shape, or a form
that is familiar to my hand. Tap. Tap.
Tap. Space. Space. Space. Give me
a Space, create more spaces. If there
must be straight lines they will be the
edges of precipices ready to dissm
gravity. Everything has changed.

Diagram 6. Touch
i x ii flexes taut lines of snow
(fingers on left hand cannot span to
the question mark. I x ii will never
play piano). I can't change its sound.
Sharps and flats. The weight of my

Diagram 7. Finding The Edges
i x ii desires to trace through
writing's topography (ditto) – You
are reading this, yet, you do not see
all of the kinds of hidden spaces
that have taken place. resonant sites –
chalk pits and stairwells echo, they
cannot contain the words that do not
describe them. Give me a space key?
utterances travel onwards softening
information as they go. Some of what
i press is already fading away under
my touch. A. A. is disappearing.
The sound used and over used, over
touched, receding, dis. appearing
from sight. cloudy and erosions
contaminate site, writing, clothing
and flesh. Over and over
clouding and erosions

Diagram 8. Explode
i x ii am not your beast. What
the fuck has a mouse got to do
with it? The materiality of writing is
cellular, molecular and neural, building
structures and pathways in soft
tissue: Fingers turn to white powder...

Diagram 9. Evolving Organism
A Discursive Conversation
Kelly + Jones, 2020
UNFOLD THE NEWSPAPER AND OBSCURE ENCOUNTERED OBJECTS.
Western culture privileges talk and text as legitimate forms of communication, yet there may be no words or language to name and communicate certain forms of experience, particularly physical sensation and its contribution to subjectivity (Howson, 2005, p. 81).

How do I communicate my recent experience as a ‘seer in residence’ through a body of text?

In referring to Elizabeth Grosz’s argument about Merleau-Ponty’s flawed emphasis upon visibility in The Visible and the Invisible, David Brubaker claims, ‘The gulf between subject and object or intellect and material object, is bridged more persuasively by examples of touch, and less well by references to the relation between seer and seen, or between the gaze of perception and the context of visibility. Touch is a more effective as an example of the requisite medium or bridge, because the toucher is inevitably touched, whereas in traditional understandings of vision the seer sees at a distance. Touch need not be linked explicitly to a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilises over time to produce a connected body of text’ (Brubaker, 2006, p. 252).

How can’t become a ‘seer’ in relation to your body of work then? Laura U. Marks suggests the image is ‘connective tissue’ and that by ‘staying close to the surface of an event [we might be able to] trace a connection between the events material history, the event itself, me and you (Marks, 2002, p. xi).’

In Traci Kelly and Rhiannon Jones’ work for the Glass Tank, different lenses invite us to the surface events of various interactions with floor chalk, landscape and bodies. Some of those interactions manifest through engagement with the photographic, with the moving image, with found and constructed objects or through performative actions.

Apparently, limestone chalk is also used to mark boundary lines, despite its ability to stick loosely. A haptic relation is created between the work and the beholder. According to Laura U Marks’ ideas in relation to the way we experience film, ‘our self-nurtures up to the surface to interact with another surface. When this happens, there is a concomitant loss of depth – we become amodality, like, lacking a centre, changing as the surface to which we cling changes. We cannot help but be changed in the process of interacting’ (Marks, 2000, p. xvi).

I can’t help but touch the soft, friable, dry accumulated ooze, just as you, positioned, cast it down the steps towards the camera. Subjects are constructed through diverse language and other forms of representation where bodies become subjected to subject positions (he, she, I, you, me). Subject positions are, according to Grosz, ideas about subjectivity, fixed in time and space. Bodies are then become subjects in this way, sexualised, gendered, racialised. They are different or the same as others. Feminist phenomenology establishes subjectivity as necessarily based upon lived or represented experience. As a methodology it constructs a critique of what is often referred to as a nominalised body.

We are not often encouraged to touch. We are required to remain immobile on the other side of the bridge.

In challenging the fixity of a nominalised body, postmodern theories suggest a subject who is fragmented or split. Such thinking accepts multidimensional aspects of subjectivity that are both the same and different, constituted as both agents and subjects (with power but also subjected to the law of language). This perspective views subjectivity as a process open to movement: fluid, mobile and transitory.

I move around the work trying to navigate boundaries encountered through time. Paper, floor, light, a desiccated lizard, porous rock. Images of landscape, of bodies, of black holes.

Intervention with the works in the gallery through this micro-residency, it could be argued, encourage a mutual subjectivity or ‘intersubjectivity’ that integrates both subject and object in the work which we affect and which affects us. Through the lens of haptic perception we can approach the work through the senses, as an embodied experience. Through engagement with the haptic qualities of the work, we can extend the boundaries that are already blurred – seeing/touching – viewing/feeling – and encounter the ways in which the work begins to challenge traditional ideas about subjectivity.

I am being filmed as I film as I touch the work as it touches me as I see(s) and am seen.1 (Barker, 2009, pp. 2-6).

I approached this micro-residency as a ‘seer’ through the things I think about when I make my own work. Ideas about phenomenology (feminine), subjectivity, the sensory and the haptic. Because I work with a moving image, I touch upon the ‘matter of surfaces’ (Manning, 2007, p. 86) that are temporalised2, that move and are moving. Consequently, I explore forms of connection through movement and materiality as a form of becoming, to enable me to engage with non-hierarchical aesthetic conditions of embodiment. Through the process of making video works I engage with the concept of the in-between as a way of addressing the issue of binary opposition and because female bodies inherently occupy such in-between states; neither public nor private, neither cultural nor natural, neither self nor other. Through practice based research I relate the concept of this in-between to physical spaces, ideas about permeability, ideas about ‘the fear of the other within’ (Kristoforid, 1999, pp.286-287) the proximity and distance between the ‘viewer’ and the work and between subjects portrayed. I focus on themes of bodily disintegration and physical resistance and explore the ways in which subjectivity can be troubled and ideas about fixed perceptions of subjectivity can be challenged.

Like you, I think with my feet.

Horea Avram and Claudiu Turcuc describe a ‘body in-between’ as, ‘a way to take the body differently’, in the logic of the neither-nor, that is in an assumed relative (but not relativistic) mode that includes negotiations and reinterpretations,... as a discursive field for thinking about the tensions between public space and intimacy (Avram, Turcuc, 2014, pp.5-9).

Just as you lead and are being led falling backwards through time, I move in-between, ‘touching not touching’ (Marks, 2002, xii).

Janice Howard

Fine Artist

Seer-in-Residence for Kelly + Jones

References


Cristofovici, A. (1999). ‘Touching Surfaces: Photography, Aging, and an Aesthetics of Change’ in Figuring Age...


Footnotes

1. Barker suggests that ‘touch need not be linked explicitly to a single organ such as the skin but is enacted and felt throughout the body.’ In relation to the camera and considering the ambivalent position of the viewer, she asks the questions ‘who’s moving?’/‘who’s being moved?’ (Barker, 2009 pp.2-6).

2. Judith Butler discusses matter ‘not as a site or surface’, but ‘as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity and surface we call matter’. Matter as a process must therefore materialize as an inherently shifting and temporal situation. (Butler, 2011, p.xvii).
FOOTING. STAND ON TOP OF THE NEWSPAPER AND ALIGN YOUR FEET WITH THE PRINTED IMAGE. DOCUMENT.
the steps to temporarily zing it alive again against blackboard.

My father used to draw amazing maps in chalk on the blackboard at the School where he taught kids about ‘Chalkshire Wolds and Vale of Pickering. I loved making maps and writing on the blackboard as a kid, then on the whiteboard as a trainee teacher, following in his pedagogic footsteps and adopting his mantra as my own that ‘Geography is learnt through the soles of the shoes’. I got to write on the blackboard when I was a teacher, out in Zimbabwe. I taught Geography and English in a remote rural school. The kids had books, but no pens. The teachers had chalk and talk but Geography was learnt through the soles of the feet. The chalk in Black African schools was coloured, dusty, snappy, made from gypsum. Gypsum (Calcium Sulfate) is a salt, it’s been dehydrated and air dried to make a poor-quality chalk that made us cough, the price of power.

To Zimbabwe I took my ‘dustless chalk’ with me. It had been quarried, crushed, washed, ground, sifted, hydrated and baked to make smooth white calcium carbonate, representing the deaths of millions of plankton. Someone said they were disappointed not to be able to walk in the “chalk” but I could feel the impact of the ‘bloody sweat’ I had made on their shoes. They had coloured my vision but I imagined a white powdered Geisha face, delicate white measuring tape, plus a flask and waterproof trousers just in case the experience became inclement!). I have waterproof trousers just in case the measurement tape, plus a flask and water bottle. I entered the exhibition landscape with my rucksack containing the usual field gear (field notebook and pencil, Munsell soil colour chart, laminated index of grain size and roundness for describing sediments, camera, power as keepers of knowledge, which can slip into a pedagogy of oppression (Freire, 1972). Check out the chalk to open up spaces to an emancipatory pedagogy, where we are no longer differentiated into teachers and students, but co-learners, co-discoverers (Boyer, 1998). But then the film looped to blind leading the blind wandering across a borderland of novelty and ambiguity (Hill et al, 2016). ‘Who is leading who’ in the co-discoverer relationship? If there’s no power, is authentic discovery learning for both actors possible? Exploring courageous (Gibbs, 2017) and compassionate (Vandeyar, 2013) pedagogy through working in partnership. The risk is we lose a sense of direction! Fail and drag each other down? It takes too long (Mountz et al, 2015). Tentative steps, and trust seem necessary, and dialogue, and going in with our eyes wide open to possibilities.

Steps, stones and trajectory tights (with flat fish) provided the opportunity to attempt an environmental reconstruction. As the video played, the trajectoried and fractured chalk blocks were left on steps for long enough to field sketch the resting positions of 4 steps. Recreating this by moving the steps side by side and utilising the floor, provided space for correct alignments to be recreated. A passing maintenance technician, his eyes drawn to the screws that weren’t fully countersunk, admitted “It’s provoked a conversation and if that’s what art’s supposed to do then it’s done its job!” We see what we choose to. Another visitor said “We’re taught to wait to hear an expert interpretation of the text, so are reluctant to form our own opinion.” I moved the fish off socks practising her walking and dancing on single block wooden shoes or ‘Ippon geta’ in Japan. Gallery visitors associated the film of the chalk dance with ‘pain’ and ‘annoyance’. Pain empathising with one person’s own pain in walking, repeated operations on her soles (scar tissue soul).

At the end of my micro-residency, I wondered, had I been just a seer, or a subject, objectified? Writing myself into the exhibition briefly by being in the tank, all traces to be erased. The landscape is a palimpsest, continually recording and erasing the impacts of nature and humans, and traces are always left behind, at some scale. Can you find me?

Helen Walkington
Professor of Higher Education
Soil Scientist and Geographer
Seer-in-Residence for Kelly + Jones

References

JOURNEY. GIVE YOUR NEWS.
JOURNEY. GIVE YOUR NEWSPAPER AS A DEPARTING GIFT TO SOMEONE YOU DON'T WANT TO LEAVE.
Shelter. Unfold the newspaper and find different ways to ‘protect’ the body.

Un/writing the landscape, re/figuring the body

Seer in Residence — Kate Mahony
‘A SCULPTURE OF STEPS CAUGHT MY IMAGINATION.’

‘... ADORNED WITH CHALK CONFINED WITHIN HOSIERY...’

‘... SCULPTURAL IMAGES REVEAL MORE THAN THEY HIDE.’

‘THE CHALK PROVIDING THE DUST TO WHICH WE ALL MUST BECOME, LEAVING NOTHING BUT A TRACE.’
FOLD THE NEWSPAPER AND PLACE IT UNDER YOUR CHIN. WHAT DO YOU FEEL IS BELOW?
Living for a time on England’s chalk edge, my vantage point from the top of a tower block afforded a view east towards a sharp section of white cliff, which rose to an arc and dropped sheer to the sea below. On some days, the mist would roll in and cling to the land, everything becoming cloud-wrapped as the sky muddled itself with the earth and the cliffs were temporarily erased.

What we are able to know will shift depending upon where and how we look and the circumstances that surround our investigation. The matters at which we gaze may themselves change form or state. Sometimes we find clarity and sharpness, and sometimes obfuscation and uncertainty. Even these latter states can be valuable as we stay with an idea, suspend decision making and linger with the possibility that things may yet be revealed in different ways. Moment by moment matters change, as we ourselves do. There are always multiple states of knowing place, material, place and duration to contemplate. We ought to look for what matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories [Haraway, 2016]. It matters that a rigorous openness to staying with the material, stories, and meanings of chalk can be sustained, so that its matter continues to matter in multiple ways.

References

Kelly + Jones, 2020

Hollow Holding

Kitty + Jonas, 2020

Epilogue

Un/ writing the landscape, re/figuring the body

MATTER/S OF CHALK

We encounter the earth’s substance in diverse ways. It may offer soft or gritty dust to our fingertips or tongue. Coughing, we may register its finest particles in the throat or lungs. It may come through ingestion, as foods deriving minerals from the soil convey this to our own cells. It may reveal the planet’s immediate structure underground through our walking and running, or when we lie flat and heavy upon its surface, gazing down or skywards. It may come through handling hefty rock whose weight strains muscle and sinew, and through the particular chiming, clinking resonance of one piece of matter striking another. Our knowledge of the chalk lands may be subtle and intense, come at overwhelming scale or emerge much more intimately.

On other journeys, I encountered ancient or more recent hil figures, horses and humans mainly, and reckoned how the chalk craved mark-making, motivating people to draw at scale across these upland landscapes. It reminded me how, more intimately, chalk had tried to explain ideas in the classroom, provided opportunities for imaginative visualization and mapped out games on schoolyard tarmacs. Marks differ in their meaning. They might be carved deliberately into the soil or cumulatively walked along the ground. A line drawn by hand across a wall, a floor or the surface of paper varies in weight, texture and scale. The marks we make vary in meaning too, according to their intent, location, material and making. Original intention may not be known or remembered by anyone who encounters those marks made centuries before or in cultures not their own. Marks can be made during play or in order to assert dominance. They can communicate and describe and they allow or define exploration and explanation. Even erasure is a form of expression. As I write and think about the marks made in, on and by chalk, I reflect on writing’s play or in order to assert dominance. Ourselves do. There are always multiple states of knowing place, material, and ourselves.

On this shoulder of the South Downs, I grew fruit and vegetables from the thin earth cultivated above chalk. A dry and hungry soil that quickly took into itself whatever compost and manure I could give, it birthed a relentless crop of flints alongside the beans, brassicas, pumpkins and plums. Rising inexorably to the surface, their pale knobbly faces a permanent reminder of bones, and they bruised the skin as I knelt to weed.

We consider the slow time of geological and the transmission of matter and ponder how we might understand the infinite changeability of what seems permanent. I imagine the slowness of sedimentation and the turning to rock of multiple living beings and I try to fathom the process of something alive becoming stone and then the epochs through which rock endures. Of course, the stone is itself ultimately impermanent. I picture its subsequent erosion by wind and rain, and its slow but relentless splitting by water and ice. I consider how new soil is made as particles adhere with dirt and vegetal matter, and fungal hyphae and the sticky secretions of worms bind the whole to fertile humus. I think of the colonization of these surfaces by new species. I wonder what the roots of seedlings might ‘feel’ as they advance cell by cell, navigating the thin cracks in rocks. Matter is generative; stuff emerges, even if it is not the material expected or sought.

Where, in many disciplines, hypotheses are proposed and specific questions set to frame an investigation, artistic research has frequently sought other ways to go about its work. Artist researchers often refuse the acts of definition that set limits too soon on the form and direction of their work. They think and feel a way forward, employing methods that allow a mélange of pressing up against, standing on and standing back from; a process of looking, looking and listening, a possibility of being in one place and then another, a quarrying the library or a process of querying the feelings of place. They go along less trodden paths, or at least prefer to wear different glasses. They regard that familiar ground underfoot is experienced anew. They deliberately overturn the always-too-much-known-of previous practice and value the uncertainty of the next step. We are interested in the sort of thinking practiced by Pharr Jones and Traci Kelly, who recognize and sustain the multivalent potential of scale and material, refusing to fix a narrow trajectory of investigation or interpretation. They use body, material, place and duration to assemble, gather, combine and juxtapose different registers, creating resonant epistemological constellations. In the entanglements of the physical, emotional, cultural, ecological, historical and geological, there are new knowledges, but the point seems not to know things definitively, to set them down once and for all, but rather to set in motion the particular vibrations of how such stuff can and does matter.

I think of the intertwining of forms, functions and narratives in Donna Haraway’s articulation: ‘It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knows knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories’ [Haraway, 2016]. It matters that a rigorous openness to staying with the material, stories, and meanings of chalk can be sustained, so that its matter continues to matter in multiple ways.
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