I Cannot Sing You Here, But For Songs of Where: Contemporary Alt-folksong and Articulations of Place.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy

By John R. B. Lamb

University of the Arts London.

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Contents

Abstract

This practice-based research questions the potential defining characteristics and status of contemporary alt-folksong and its role(s) in the articulation of place through a collection of twelve original songs with accompanying written research. The thesis relates the term 'place' to the notion of subjectivity, autobiography and the performance of identity as they relate to geographic experience (Tuan 1997; Agnew 2005). Place is addressed from the perspective of a subject both re- and dis-located, and as such, diasporic neurosis concerning home and authenticity leads to a focus on aspects of place related to my past (Shetland), heritage (Ireland), present (Cornwall), and 'in between' (Augé 1995). Methodologically, songs respond to, and inform, written/ read/ listened research, with a 'diarist' mode of writing linking audio and text. Songs are generated through engagement with these research methods, and through field trips and recordings, influencing the directions of page-based enquiry.

Early chapters draw on theories of Popular Music (Moore 1993; Eisenberg 2005) and Postmodernism (Jameson 1998), but also look to ethnomusicology of Folksong (Gammon 2008; Boyes 1993), and interviews with practitioners (Hayman 2011; Collyer 2010), characterising the relationship between traditional music and contemporary Alt-folk. Chapter 2 introduces psychoanalytic theory (Lacan 1977; Minsky 1998) in locating the three places within development of the subject. Each place is subsequently addressed respectively through appropriation of Lacan's Imaginary, Symbolic and Real as a means of investigating the subject's relationship to each. Chapter 3 discusses autobiographic theory (Marcus 1994; Anderson 2001), assessing the value of such a songwriting method, and aspects of musical 'meaning' (Small 1998; Moore 1993). Chapter 4 investigates the use of production/recording technologies as themselves sources of meaning (Doyle 2005; Barthes 2000). Conclusions, in songs and text, work towards articulation of the 'outside' nature of the itinerant in these aspects of (non)place, and the capacity of Alt-folksong to voice this state.

Introduction

A Virgin train, then a bus to the Airport, the branded jet across the Irish Sea to the third home-made studio of the week, as I tie down the loose and sparse collection of musicians I need to help me make these recordings. Reading on the train takes the form of hysterical dystopian Marxism, and violent rhetoric concerning postmodernism. How strong the disagreements of theorists as the trees and rivers remain, how furious the dialogical yells as the cliffs and hills I pass stand unswayed by any argument. I lock eyes with an uncaring crow at Newton Abbot and neither he nor the town seem to be worried about the great sadness of late capitalism pressing upon them. But the debris is everywhere. And there I am, so embedded in both worlds, the landscape of woodland and rock, of arable crop and marsh, and too the motorways and hypermarkets. I play gigs understanding their role in the selling of physical and digital product. I photograph a pastoral scene on a smart phone adding a digital filter that makes the image appear to be old and analogue. Embedded in, but not wholly a part of. How could anyone be? I, like many I suppose, know more people in the city I am going to, where I have never made any kind of home, than I do in the village I live in. That seems strange to me. I have known only one person who lived and died in the place they were born. We are surrounded by paradox, contradiction and isolation, but this is not new or frightening, but simply the culture in which I have grown up. That artworks should be full of self-reference, mockery, irony, sarcasm is hardly surprising. I wonder if the disparate band of musicians playing in different rooms at different times might constitute some idea of collective or community, even a folk? I consider that the answers must lie somewhere between reconciling philosophy on a mountain and buying donuts in a Tesco Metro.

My thesis aims, through an autobiographical focus, to investigate the relationship between alt-folksong and place as a potentially formative factor in the performance of identity. In doing this, I aim to make articulations of place that demonstrate its role and status in identity and also the potential of

songwriting as a means to make these articulations. I shall be focusing my autobiographical methods on place in the full knowledge that it is just one of many potential factors in the formation of identity. I will also be addressing notions of authenticity as a means of scrutinising my work and also the practice of alt-folk. The aim here is to find a means of discussing the role of my songwriting as research, as well as analysing the potential cultural status of alt-folk: in short, to try and uncover, in my own practice, what is appropriate, when trying to write articulations of place.

The main objectives of the project are to provide a published and cohesive album, with accompanying written work functioning together as research explicating the potential for song to articulate a subject's negotiation with these various aspects of place. I am seeking, through the research, to contribute to the growing body of work that forms a musicology of Popular Music, isolating particular characteristics of Alt-folk and finding a relationship to both traditional music and contemporary culture. The recorded part of my thesis also makes a contribution to the body of work that makes up the contemporary practice of alt-folk.

My research, being concerned with the writing of Alt-folksong as a means of articulating the experience of place, poses several questions. Firstly, is there a working definition of Alt-folk, and how does it relate to traditional music? Answering this should involve enquiry into the current practice and cultural position of the folksong, resulting in a working definition of the contemporary folksong's historical and cultural 'location'. A further question is: how is alt-folk song and its practice informed by ideas of place, including situations of diaspora or geographic dislocation? Indeed, what does it mean to be a writer of 'folksong' now? Moreover, the word 'place' also requires attempts at definition within this context, which might run variously from culturally occupied spaces to fictionalised narrative locations.

As a practising songwriter, whose work has long been concerned with place and migrancy, often with explicit reference to home, coastal contexts and aspects of maritime cultural history, this is a practice-based PhD project. It is

concerned with roles and meanings of 'place' within contemporary, alternative or 'alt' folksong (by which I refer to the body of contemporary song which exists outside the sphere of traditional repertoire). This practice reflects British and/ or Irish traditions of music, song and lyricism, containing the geographic locations of the research as well as the site of my life and practice. This will necessarily involve engagement with questions of migrancy, itinerancy and cultural displacement. Research concerning the term 'place' will involve recourse to a number of discourses, such as (cultural) geography and contemporary theories of place, autobiography, memory and identity construction, as well as those directed more explicitly towards folk music. The title prompts both a musical and cultural response and it is the potential relationship between these two that interests me. There are also questions relating specifically to music and song lyrics concerned with nostalgia, loss, memory and romance and how these are addressed in both music and written language.

The research has taken a broad and sometimes surprising shape. And the results reflect adaptation to methodology as knowledge of the appropriate route through this field is accrued. I draw from several areas of theory and employ fluid and cyclical methods in order to generate both song and text. The lines between are blurred and should be recognised as such. All aspects of this work are engaged with the same chronological process of research and no part should be given any more weighting than any other, but rather taken as a shifting whole, each part of which informs the others towards an attempt to address the questions articulated above.

Methodology

The methodology employed in the project reflects how my continuing practice has become geared towards a testing of methods that investigate how contemporary Alt-folksong might attempt to articulate a subject's relationship with place. The central method of this project is the writing and production of a collection of twelve original songs. These songs are written in response to, and contain material gathered or generated at the selected locations, as well as being autobiographical, engaging in an exploration of my songwriting methods. The strategies outlined below are employed with the intention of deepening understanding of place and displacement, and the personal and cultural value of a song's engagement with these themes. Each selected place has its own particular relationship with 'the (folk) tradition' and some musical techniques, forms, and choices of instrumentation reflect this. However, it is important to state that these songs should in no way be seen as an attempt to copy or emulate existing material, with the exception of those written with some symbolic purpose of employing or making a pastiche of traditional form or style as a means of highlighting difference or displacement. Rather, the method of songwriting in my research looks towards an engagement with, and *ghosting* of, traditional forms in an attempt to make new work, firmly rooted within the contemporary as well as acknowledging the chronology of folksong, hence the adoption of the prefix 'alt'.

The means and methods employed in the work's recording are also in question here. The techniques and technologies used in the recording and production of songs have as much relevance contextually as the methods of composition. Indeed, production decisions should be viewed as compositional in themselves and have a role to play in the final product's perceived cultural place. The practice part of the thesis is an album, and in this context, the songs submitted might be considered as 'definitive' in their recorded/produced form (notwithstanding the fact that they can of course, in principle, be performed elsewhere and by other players). It should be noted

that field recording and production have been employed throughout the songs (submitted in this form as part of this thesis) as a method of generating and reinforcing meaning. It has been necessary to question the idea of the studio in some detail as to how it relates to the practice(s) under discussion in this work. It is also worth noting, that the form of the submission of this practice is the 'album' and, as such, the songs should work together in this form. There should be a cohesive link between the songs, their arrangement, and their production, just as there should be a cohesive link between the chapters of this written part of the submission. It is important that the songs work together as a collection of related compositions. The objective is to provide a releasable 'whole' that represents the process of composition and writing throughout the duration of the research.

Informing the process of writing/producing these songs - and responding to it - is a process of expository writing that draws on and attempts to explicate relevant written, recorded and spoken material. This involves reading within both the theme of place and into the 'genre' of contemporary folksong. As this is a field of study that is largely unwritten, despite its strong relationships with other fields, it has been necessary to develop an area of reference from these related fields that frames the research in terms of theoretical context, establishing my position as it relates to critical writing and culture. This area of reference must have recourse to a certain level of subjectivity but comes about through a critical analysis of the potential definition of contemporary folksong and how I see/use the term. Also the method employs reading and analysis of relevant ideas of place and a sustained critical discourse around both my own songwriting and some other relevant traditional song and new material by artists working in a similar area as myself. This part of the research also includes a number of interviews with other practitioners working in various ways within the broader field of folksong. The broader field includes traditional singers, political singer songwriters and other songwriters that might be considered, like myself, to be 'alt'-folk songwriters. I am then afforded the opportunity to compare and assess my songwriting methods against those of others and also to test out any potential

arguments I hope to make towards answering the research questions outlined in the introduction. This has proved be a valuable way of working out how writers of new songs see themselves, their motives for appropriating folk music into their practice, and how they might define contemporary folksong as it relates to their practice.

Working alongside and between the songwriting and the academic writing exists a further mode of writing which is a largely diarist form (presented in a different font, aligned right and slightly indented). It is employed to make initial articulations of places visited during field trips, the writing process and the making of recordings, as means of documenting and opening discursive areas around my memories of place and my formative experience of these various geographies. This mode of writing also serves as a way to 'think through' other ways of 'knowing', specifically as they relate to experiences of live music, folk sessions and landscapes, as a way of investigating written songs through text, and as a catalyst for starting new ones. The diarist mode has proved a useful method for bridging spaces between my read and written research and the songwriting itself. It has also brought up certain issues around the research that have then been explicated further within more academically focused research. For example, my observations of a folk session in Devon contributed to my critical thinking and reading around the status of the contemporary practice of folk, and subsequently my ideas around the shift from social music-making to more isolationist practice. Much like the process of songwriting itself, this method aims to increase my understanding of place or being placed/displaced, and it further serves to help me articulate the connection between place, song and performance (although in this context 'performance' will most often refer to that which occurs in the process of recording).

I have a methodological interest in both field recordings and material properties of place as part of the songwriting/arrangement and production methods and the extent to which the inclusion of these recordings, or the use of objects' and environments' sounds/ sonic properties can be helpful or suggestive to the overall sense of place within produced songs. This can

manifest in several ways, from simple inclusion of sound recordings from site, to the musically onomatopoeic recreation of specifically located sound and the using of material things, sounds or sonic properties from particular locations.

While aspects of popular musicology and ethnomusicology play a part in this research, they cannot usefully comprise a whole in this methodology, so the literature is broader, and the research draws from several useful areas of discourse to find cohesive arguments. It is clear from the methods employed that there is a strong aspect of autobiography here, and so, it has been necessary to study the nature of this mode and its potential as knowledge and research. There is also a Lacanian psychoanalytic model employed to situate each chosen place as part of the development of a subject. It is important to note however, that I do not attempt a psychoanalysis of myself, or of the songs. This method is employed as a tool for situating each place within a useful area of a subject's development, as that relates to the subsequent performance of identity. I apply the terms Imaginary, Symbolic and Real each to a place (one term for each place). It is inevitable that there are characteristics of all three terms to be found in all of the different places, and that in the development of the subject there is overlap (particularly when considering song, music and language), but one should remember that this is simply a frame on which to structure discussion, not a series of absolutes. The terms are selected to demonstrate the subject's relationship with the place, and how it has formed. The songs then articulate this relationship. This should not be considered a Lacanian thesis, but rather one that uses and appropriates Lacanian terms in order more clearly to express the autobiographical whole. This model coupled with this use of autobiography has suggested a part of the structure for this thesis, which encompasses three significant geographies of my life: The Shetland Islands, Ireland, and Cornwall. I will also be writing from the itinerant musician's perspective about the in-between. The division between places is evident in both the album and the written work, with three songs and a chapter devoted to each.

These methods are used in an iterative fashion and inform each other as an on-going process. The songs are not a result of the writing or vice versa. Rather, as the research has progressed, each method has altered and coloured the nature of the other methods. The songs presented here could not have been composed without the writing, nor could this written work have taken the form it now does without its relationship to the songs. Initial research colours the nature of early songs, and then dictates the direction of subsequent research, which in turn, informs later songs. Due to the nature of this mutually informative methodology, my thesis is not designed to be a submission of practice with an accompanying report. Rather, what is presented here is a chronological process moving towards a greater understanding of the themes of the research. Consequently, it is useful to consider all of what follows as further exposition of method.

Chapter 1. Towards Definition: Folk to Alt-folk

I remember being in Oban waiting for whatever Caledonian MacBrayne ferry would take us across the water. It was a time when my father still held sway over music. I would grit my teeth through long Celtic reverbs waiting for 'Sound the Pibroch' (Makem and Clancy 1990) so I could listen to Liam Clancy tell me all about the battle of Culloden, and fancy myself in tartan amidst the cry 'Rise and follow Charlie!' But there was something more exciting on this journey: MacGowan. He sang songs about corncrakes, drinking and fighting and the ghosts of sailors. He shouted and swore and his singing was impassioned, drunken, abrasive, sometimes off key and unruly (which for reasons I couldn't understand, my mother would tolerate, although anyone else that profane and to her mind, unmusical, would have been banned from the cassette player for sure. I later realised this was entirely due to his 'Irishness'). It was clear to me that this was, at source, the same music as the Clancys' and Tommy Makem's; they were kin and they knew each others' form. The songs could speak to each other, the instrumentation and language instantly recognisable as coming from the same histories or traditions, but now the rules had changed, the subjects and motives somehow different, but not. They were no longer just songs about old battles, 1916 or charming, comedic sing-alongs about drink. The songs were happening now in the pubs and cities that surrounded me. They were brutal, profane and romantic. I was fascinated by these second generation songs of dislocation, London, struggle, Behan and shipwrecks and I too wanted to drink whiskey with Frank Ryan in a Spanish brothel (The Pogues 1985).

The Crisis of a Noun

I would like at this early stage to make an attempt towards a working definition of what I mean when I use the term 'Alt'-Folksong. This is not to discredit other potential definitions or to say that journalistic use of the term

might in someway be 'wrong'. Rather, this should serve as a means of contextualising the practice that comprises a part of this research, marking out the parameters of this field and also to mark my position within that field, placing a territorial flag upon my songs, that attempts to highlight their place within the culture that I both occupy and write about.

Due to the casual ease with which the word 'folk' and its accompanying terminology are spoken, attempts at solid definition are immediately slippery, even when geographically restricted to the United Kingdom and Ireland. The written and assumed histories of folk music themselves are various and subject to opposing political and cultural readings. This, together with ideas around genre or style - the 'rules' and descriptions of which are as problematic as the term folk itself - means that fixed definition is an improbable achievement. Part of the problem of this definition is within the simplicity of the noun. The meaning of the term as laid out in dictionaries cannot ever hope to encapsulate such a broad cultural history, instead reducing the practices of nations to finite and often unhelpful genericism. However, folk music is the subject of a considerable body of scholarship and in order to commence the process of defining my particular subject matter, I shall begin with a definition of folk itself, and more specifically, folksong. An appropriate starting point, I feel, is the 'official' definition of folk music as drafted by the 'International Council for Traditional Music' in 1954, included in Britta Sweers' *Electric folk: The Changing Face of English Traditional Music:*

> Folk music is the product of a musical tradition that has been evolved through the process of oral transmission. The factors that shape the tradition are: (i) continuity which links the present with the past; (ii) variation which springs from the creative impulse of the individual or group; (iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives. (Sweers 2005: 45)

The question of 'oral transmission' is quite obviously one of technology and literacy rather than choice. The songs and music we regard as being

'traditional' often predate printing and recording technologies and so within the assumed 'peasant' or rural communities presented as the 'folk', oral transmission would have been the obvious or indeed only way to share songs. That this process is the genesis of the continuation and practice of folk music and song is, I think, unquestionable. However, the written histories of the lineage of folksong are problematic: a topic discussed by both Dave Harker (1985) and Georgina Boyes (1993). It would seem that the tunes and songs included within the collected and written histories of folk music have been variously subjugated to aesthetic, geographic and moral agencies, meaning that what is or is not included in the repertoire, or termed as 'real' or 'authentic' folk music, has been the victim of subjective selection. In this criticism, it is Cecil Sharp who is often brought up as an example. Sharp, despite his attempts at the 'preservation' of this music and its practices, as a figure-head of the 'first revival' (1903-14), had created a middle-class interest in folk song and dance entirely at odds with what he perceived to be its authentic cultural 'place'. C.J. Bearman writes:

> He harnessed folk music to the educational preoccupations of the time, and these - overwhelmingly nationalistic and patriotic as they were - gave the material a definite cultural value and a political stance. (Bearman 2002: online)

Vic Gammon extends this critique further:

> Put briefly, Sharp took from the singing repertories of mainly older country people in Somerset, Appalachia and other places those pieces that conformed or came close to his preformed notion of 'English folk song'. Simultaneously he rejected much else that was in common usage because it failed to meet his criteria of authenticity. He then served up the part for the whole. (Gammon 2008: 3)

Sharp is by no means the only collector of note but he is a useful figure when questioning the traditions and boundaries of what might be termed folksong. While his motivation and political agenda may differ markedly from, for example, that of Ewan MacColl or Albert Lloyd, the subsequent

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disruption of and hierarchical process of selection that surrounds the collection, 'preservation' and indeed practice of folksong remains of note.

There were two fiddle players, an old woman with an inaudible concertina, a young man flitting between tenor banjo and bodhrán, a bouzouki player and one man playing what appeared to be a miniature tambourine. The bar filled with the reels and jigs often reserved in my mind for the harbour-side pubs of remote west-highland coastal villages. But, I suppose that is not really how it works. I am in the South West of England and the players a mixture of scholars, students, those educated in folk music as children and the man with his drum, like a giant Oskarnello[1] desperate for the inclusion that shared language would bring him, reverting always to his toy. He was frowned upon, this man, for he was disruptive and irritating. A stain or scuff in the repertoire. It was knowledge that was of value here and the ability to re-produce it within a group. Those not participating surely expected a certain standard to be met by the players? They are the ones who are supposed to know. I would not join them, how could I? But, our Oskar; was he not a 'folk' player? The communal workingman sharing music with whatever material and skill he had at hand? No? Was he just in the way, rendered culturally mute because his time, if ever he had one, was long over? Past any living memory and his treatment perhaps no different then as now. Would the call of request not always fall to those of memory and skill? You. You there. You sing us a song. Not you. Nobody wants to hear you. Oskar is not there anymore. They froze him out. The bar is empty save for the 'real' players and their mute and passive audience.

Oral transmission in the British Isles and Ireland, within the context of specific geographic community, is an even less tangible and more various

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[1] Gunter Grass's dwarfed narrator of 'The Tin Drum'.
[2] For example the BA Honours degree in Folk and Traditional Music at Newcastle University.
[3] Please refer to appendix 1 on cd for this collection of songs.
[4] Hefner formed in 1995, disbanding in 2002. For a full biography of Darren Hayman visit http://www.hefnet.com/biography/
[5] An Album where all material relates in some way to a single theme.
[6] The narrative of some versions of American whalers' song 'Shallow Brown', although the woman being

practice within contemporary practices. Many practitioners of traditional music are specifically educated within its rules and techniques and whilst musicians may share their repertoires, the culture surrounding our listening habits and our technologies has devalued any urgent need for this particular kind of creative exchange[2]. Indeed, many of the traditional songs I know, I have learned from recordings or sheet music, often at the suggestion of other musicians but rarely directly from their playing. This is not to dismiss the idea of musician-to-musician teaching, but simply to illustrate that it is not necessarily the primary currency of folk music's current progression. As an experiment I made a collection of recordings of songs that I have learned from touring with other bands, rather than from recordings or sheet music. None of the songs I recorded for this exercise necessarily fall into the category of folk music, but nevertheless do, as a result of this conscious method, fall within the boundaries of oral, or rather, aural transmission. The results differ wildly from the original versions I heard and do give credence to the changeable and fluid nature of this kind of learning.[3] I will address ideas around technology and the appreciation of music later. But firstly, we must look at the idea of folksong as something that continues to be composed. When its 'authorship' is known what does that mean for folksong and how does that work within the arena of 'revival'?

We accept, as a culture, with little questioning, the status of many songwriters as being 'folksingers' despite their practice being contrary to the definition, provided by the 'International Council for Traditional Music' previously mentioned. Here, one thinks of artists such as Christy Moore or Alistair Roberts, but why? Do we award songs inclusion within the remit of folksong simply because that is what they *sound* like they are? Or are there some other criteria for acceptance within the genre? Because both Moore and Roberts perform traditional songs as part of their sets, does it then follow that what they write must also be folk music? This is a sentiment echoed by Allen F. Moore's writing on 'neo-folk' where he talks of 'what was perceived as authenticity, due largely to the use of the acoustic guitar'. (Moore 1993:

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[2] For example the BA Honours degree in Folk and Traditional Music at Newcastle University.
[3] Please refer to appendix 1 on cd for this collection of songs.

96) Moore acknowledges a shift in the nature of perceived authenticity through the different revivals, noting that in the English folk revival of the 1950's 'the emphasis was very much on using material from earlier generations'. (Ibid) For Norm Cohen this broadening of the term is permissible; we understand that it exists, and continue our use of the term knowing that sometimes we mean different things:

> Clearly we have two different types and music labelled "Folk Music". The English-speaking world can survive with this handicap; it has endured with two (or more) definitions of "ballad" – one from the scholarly world, the other from the contemporary commercial music industry – without self-destructing. (Cohen 1987: 206)

I agree with Cohen's assertion, as we understand without discussion that to describe Billy Brag as a folk singer is not to imply that he engages with any traditional repertoire at all. I would suggest that there are considerably more than two different types of folk music though; so many in fact, that use of a prefix has become a necessary means to distinguish between them. Philip V. Bohlman offers some useful information on the potential classification of folk music while acknowledging that: 'Folk music has often demonstrated a peculiar resistance to systematic classification – or, stated more accurately, to classification systems.' (Bohlman 1988: 33) Bohlman cites three methods of classification falling into either inductive or deductive camps: textual, melodic, and the use of musical instruments. (Ibid: 35) All of these are useful in establishing temporal and geographic location for song. But these methods work on the assumption that the music available for classification is indeed folk to begin with. If the author of a song is known, it is immediately at odds with the accepted meaning of the term. It seems then that folksong refuses to function under the definition set up for it, as a contemporary practice or as a historical exercise. Nor can it be fully separated from the traditional songs that spawned its continuing practice even though its use as a descriptive term for the kind of acoustic music that somehow sits outside of 'general' popular music terms cements its sustained use in current musical language. There is also simply the use of the word to inform a potential audience of the

kind of sounds they might be hearing. In interview, Alt-Folk artist Laurence Collyer of the Diamond Family Archive said:

> We also established that the term 'folk music' and 'folk singer', when applied to us, is a buzzword for other people to easily kind of, understand what we're doing, because, well, how else do you describe it? 'Not pop music', the Diamond Family Archive are playing tonight.' You know, how do you do it? 'Not Glam Rocker, Laurence Collyer.' So I don't know. (Lawrence Collyer (5) 2010: 21:47)

Darren Hayman, formally of post-Britpop band Hefner[4], now engaged in series of concept[5] Alt-Folk albums about places such as Harlow or the Essex countryside, further problematises the term and this use of it in interview:

> When you describe what you do, especially something creative, you temper that description. This is interesting actually, to talk about how you describe yourself, on who's asking. So, for instance, if I met you in the Cecil Sharp house let's say, the way I would describe what I do to you might be a completely different way to meeting a friend of my wife's at one of her teacher 'dos'. And so consequently, a guy last year was coming round and he was fitting a carpet in my house and he must have seen a guitar or something, and he was learning guitar, so he was very keen to talk about it. And he said 'well what do you do?' and normally with a lot of people I just say 'rock', and I don't think what I do is rock at all, but it's just the easiest way to just end the conversation, say 'it's pop' or 'it's rock'. With this guy I said 'oh, um, folk' you know, and I used that kind of secondary definition of folk, in that I'm saying 'well I've got a violinist in my band and I use banjos.' And his reaction was like 'oh! Mumford and Sons?' and of course I had to go 'yeah… yeah.' Because it was, wasn't it? As far as he was like listening to radio 2, if I wanted to give him an idea of what I do then actually, no, you're right. We're probably not going to get any closer than that. Me and the Mumford and Sons, we're pretty much the same thing. (Darren Hayman interview 2011: 20:05)

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[4] Hefner formed in 1995, disbanding in 2002. For a full biography of Darren Hayman visit http://www.hefnet.com/biography/
[5] An Album where all material relates in some way to a single theme.

The obvious irony of Hayman's last sentence is an important one. Where meaning and use is so various, it does Hayman no harm to allow this association to be made, and if the carpet fitter was to hear Hayman's work, he would probably not be surprised by what he heard instrumentally. However, the idea that he and Mumford and Sons really do the same thing is not the case for Hayman, 'I would like to have spent longer with him and made the nuance, the difference clear.' (Ibid: 21.40) Indeed, Hayman is quite scathing of the band, particularly in terms of authenticity, 'Absolutely shocking, I find that band. That, you know, that Tarquin and Jeremiah can honestly sing and dress that way, it's a hair's breadth from blacking up isn't it?' (Ibid: 17.18) This being said though, the idea that either Hayman or Mumford and Sons would be accepted into the 'tradition' is highly unlikely. But, when the carpet fitter was presented with the noun, his association was immediate, and to some extent, correct, because folk *is* the word deemed most appropriate to describe all of these different musical offerings.

The word folksong is at once a full and empty term and its potential meanings are always in flux. As a signifier it contains a wealth of readings but there is nothing signified which can be cited as a fast definition in contemporary practice. Its meanings are implied and assumed, but not fixed. History and appropriation have rendered its practice and methods both mythological and dysfunctional: an historical act supposing the rituals of an alleged people with whom the current practitioners of folksong have little common ground. A reticence to allow formal change in its practice is contrary to any potential evolution of folksong. But of course everything has changed around it, as it must, and so has the folksong itself without its recognisable meaning changing with it. This folksong must be awarded meaning as a term; it cannot revert to its historical status, nor can we assume that any of the recognised characteristics of folk still apply. This is not to dismiss them, but merely to start with an 'empty' term and inscribe its meaning as appropriate. There are two words here: folksong and folksong. One historical, one contemporary, both can happen now and both would seem to mean more than one kind of music. One has an apparently (although questionably) fixed meaning and one does not. I will try and decipher the thematic, compositional and cultural

criteria (if there are any) by which song might transcend nostalgic imitation of a form and find itself an actual part of that form, or at least its close relation.

And so harmonium drones. I write 'harmonium' but it isn't one really. I have been told that it is Italian by manufacture. Perhaps, I couldn't say for sure. 'Chord organ' would be better. Whatever, the fan is electric; leaving me both hands free and it has the suggestion of accordion buttons. But it sounds much like a harmonium and so this is what people, and subsequently I, refer to it as. Maybe that is the wider point. Anyway, the drone is a fifth and around it somehow formlessly against the words and without meter I revolve my hands around tonic, dominant, subdominant and relative minor with the inherent suspensions that come with the drone. Through the stanzas and without chorus, the song remains simplistic and with no other arrangement. This sound via microphone spills into the Hanbury Ballroom from the ceiling-mounted speakers as I sing about my old home, as a means of articulating dissatisfaction with a later home (now also in the past). It is the work, the wages and the loves of the town that send me back. Back to the beaches, jetty and inevitable 'drowning' of/in that first (or rather second) place. After the performance I am approached by a drummer (somehow famous for his hat, and a string of top ten pop songs in the mid/late 1990's), who asks me where I learned this particular song; did I sing it growing up there or did I learn it after the fact? I tell him that in truth, I had written the song. He removes his hat, buys me a drink, mutters with shaking head something about 'standards' and makes his way towards the stage to drum for It's Jo and Danny.

Traditionally, and the word seems somehow ironic here, folksong has taken on a seemingly recognisable set of themes and contexts for its delivery. We have become familiar with songs of work, death, love, betrayal, place and drink. These six 'headings' are inclusive of a number of 'sub-headings' including for example: murder ballads, disaster songs and rebel songs.

These can contain any number of the previous subjects within them. A song might concern itself with a love story between a freed slave and his still captive partner whom he will never see again, as he signs up to work on a whaling ship while she is sold to the Spanish traders in his absence.[6] There are two glaring issues with this attempt at classification. Firstly, I think it would be hard to find a song of any genre (outside of sacred music, but even then) that does not in some way fit within these themes, and secondly, it is rare now for working songs to serve their purpose within their intended context. Indeed, the last shantyman, Stan Hugill, left his profession under sail in 1945.[7] The purpose and need for these types of song is lost outside of formal or informal repertory contexts (concerts or sessions) within the geography under scrutiny here. So what, when it comes to revival or re-appropriation of song or style, is the place of these dead themes? Where the song is no longer sung as a description of or functional soundtrack to familiar actions (as with a shanty), are past forms and styles invoked and re-used by the contemporary songwriter as metaphor, as romantic symbol and perhaps as some kind of 'magic realism'? (Here I might cite The Decemberists' Colin Meloy as a writer who has employed narratives of rakes, bachelors, dockside prostitutes and chimney sweeps, set in some kind of imaginary quasi-Victorian landscape, as means to remark upon the 'dolor and decay' (The Decemberists 2003) of contemporary west coast America.)

So, what then of melodic or musical characteristics? Can folksong be defined, for example, by its employment of particular modes, forms or drones? If said mode, form and drone are used with instruments relating to specific geographic traditions, then perhaps acceptance is likely. However, it is the apparent 'meaning' of *sound* in some cases that suggests a piece of music's genre, a classification of association with preceding musical compositions, leading inevitably to a system of classifying music against what it is not. There is a question of authenticity here, especially when faced with the prospect of contemporary songwriters engaging in acts of 'revival'.

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[6] The narrative of some versions of American whalers' song 'Shallow Brown', although the woman being sold 'for that big fat Spanish dollar' is absent from some versions.
[7] http://www.stanhugill.com (01/02/10)

This word, 'authenticity', is the cliff that each wave of this study crashes against and it is an on-going concern throughout the study of folk music, from whichever direction one approaches it, be that from a traditionalist standpoint, or from a progressive perspective. Having invoked a hierarchy of authenticity here, it is plausible to assume that the 'inauthentic' takes a lower status, and is in some way flawed. However, ideas of where these divisions lie are as plural as the term folk, and one set of criteria for authenticity might equate to inauthenticity by another. As I am working with a broader and more slippery relationship with the term than the one outlined in the previous paragraph, it is appropriate to consider Adorno's notion of a 'cult of authenticity' (Adorno 1973: 5) here as 'this language molds thought'. (Ibid) While Adorno is addressing a philosophical preoccupation (post-Heidegger), the application of his ideas here is useful when considering this complex term as it relates to my research. He clarifies the term, while introducing a sense of danger relating to its employment:

> "[A]uthentic" – already to be used with caution – even in an adjectival sense, where the essential is distinguished from the accidental; "inauthentic," where something broken is implied, an expression which is not immediately appropriate to what is expressed. (Ibid: 7)

This idea of the inauthentic as something 'broken' is worth considering as this thesis unfolds, and where authenticity lies in various guises throughout. When thinking of the contemporary practice and writing of new songs that appropriate aspects of the tradition, this broken thing arguably becomes material and sets up a different (in terms of folksong and then alt-folksong) set of potential principles on which to found adjusted notions of authenticity. This authenticity, which remains throughout the further discussion of my thesis, concerns itself with integrity, ideologies of instrumentation and production, aspects of truthfulness and what it is that it feels appropriate to write about in the first place.

For Adorno, authenticity is concerned with a 'fractured relationship between the individual and the social' (Paddison 2004: 199), demanding a 'high degree of self-consciousness and self-reflexivity to the work of art at a structural, technical level'. (Ibid) This renders art works that are not self-reflexive and are 'content to comply with traditional stereotypes' (Ibid) as inauthentic. I think that a self-consciousness and self-reflexivity have some bearing in the adaptation of form and partial revival of folksong. Perhaps, though, we should also consider a question of integrity, with motive and engagement a more valuable currency than any vague and unclassifiable idea of what is authentic, by which I mean an integrity to writing rather than sound (hence the terms motive and engagement).

I'll attempt to further explicate this idea, as my thesis develops, with the understanding that 'authentic' is the term most used when writing about these aspects of folksong, however problematic that might be. There are several different shades of authenticity at play within this work within this research, but perhaps none of them entirely useful when attempting to make definition.

It is worth clarifying here that one musicological notion of authenticity, which is concerned with the knowledge of the historical and contextual 'facts' of a composition's development resulting in what Christopher Small describes as an 'even totalitarian' attitude (Small 1998: 117), where: '*this* is the only way in which a concerto by Mozart can be performed' (Ibid) is only a small part of what the term comes to mean here. I would suggest that this is a very intangible aspect of authenticity, where, as Raymond Leppard suggests, authenticity 'comes to resemble the mythological bird that flies around in ever-decreasing circles, eventually disappearing into its own feathers'. (Leppard 1988: 74)

Michael Brocken suggests a potential motive for practitioners' appropriation of these traditional forms: 'The presentation of folk music assumes something more than just a musical style. It is a point of identification, an expression of something "authentic"'. (Brocken 2003: 141) Is it perhaps this

implication of authenticity that draws songwriters towards tradition? Is there a sense of reclaiming or owning one's heritage when writing a folk song, and if so, what about this actually implies authenticity? Or, are we engaged in a cultural activity that has its roots located outside of this lineage of tradition? The practice of folksong in this contemporary era is by its very nature both a revivalist act and one that romanticises past form. Georgina Boyes argues that:

> A revival is inherently both revolutionary and conservative. It simultaneously comprehends a demand for change in an existing situation and a requirement of reversion to an older form. (Boyes 1993: 10)

Having considered the fluid nature of folksong itself, what is its status as a term within the practice at the centre of this research? This will involve some investigation into Boyes' idea of what I'll reduce to 'revolutionary conservatism'. But first, let us focus briefly on the adoption of the prefix.

The Application of Prefix

The 'alt' is short for 'alternative'. Alt-folk meaning alternative-folk, but not I think, alternative *to* folk, for that would not be folk but something other. Rather *an* alternative folk, which must at once have characteristics of folksong and yet have fundamental differences to it. There must be definite dialogue between the two, even as they co-exist and as one follows from the other. These seemingly contradictory dualities have already become apparent within this writing and it is by unpicking them and examining the 'why' of them that a definition of this particular alternative (for there must surely be any number of them) would become plausible.

What matters here when considering this 'revolutionary conservatism' is motive, whether it is the political motives of MacColl [8] and his contemporaries or the collision of traditional song and post-punk aesthetic delivered by The Pogues[9]. The decision of songwriters to embrace forms of song from previous times is a specific one. Most of the practitioners that I have worked with who make work that is described as 'alt' or 'new' folk have not come from a background of performing traditional song. Variously, they have come from experimental music, electronic music or from more generic forms of rock music. Folk song is often something they have grown up with (or around), but not something they have played regularly as musicians until later. There is, I think, some other motivation, some other reason for a songwriter's choice to adopt the themes and practices considered to be folk in recent times.

One issue is reclamation; not just reclamation of national or regional identity and culture, but perhaps reclamation of power and of independence; reclamation of the artist's space outside of industry and finance. What I mean by this is that the trend towards folk and lo-fi music seems potentially part of a wider multi-genred cultural reaction against the major-label appropriation or adoption of 'indie' culture. After 'C86'[10], 'Madchester'[11], the subsequent success of US alternative rock bands and later 'Britpop'[12], a generation (my generation, though this model applies, of course, at other times) of musicians and fans alike are left with the feeling that the credible has become major label product, their music cheapened and made disposable and their elitism levelled out and accessible to everyone in a diluted and mass produced form. A bitter and adolescent attitude indeed, but perhaps enough to begin a change and start action against a status quo,

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[8] We might consider this in two ways; firstly the preservation of repertoire evidenced in MacColl's recordings of broadside ballads for example (MacColl 1962), or in his own songs where he introduces contemporary political narratives, as displayed in songs like 'The Ballad of Derek Bentley' (MacColl 1998).
[9] Best evidenced on the first album, 'Red Roses for me'. (The Pogues 1984).
[10] 'C86' was a cover-mounted cassette given away by the New Musical Express. Now the term is used to describe a certain, naïve aspect of the fledging 'indie rock' scene in the British Isles, particularly Scotland. It has, to some degree, been awarded the status of a 'movement'.
[11] A term coined by the 'Happy Mondays', descriptive of the late 1980's early 1990's 'indie/ dance' scene in Manchester, spearheaded in no small way by Tony Wilson's 'Factory Records' and 'Hacienda' night club.
[12] A mid 1990's period of dominance of British guitar pop bands over the UK charts. Arguably, it was this period that catalysed the major label consumption of 'indie' culture.

thought of as negative or culturally damaging (or at least, culturally cynical). This tallies with Lyotard's thoughts on capitalism:

> But capitalism inherently possesses the power to derealize familiar objects, social roles, and institutions to such a degree that the so-called realistic representations can no longer evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery, as an occasion for suffering rather than for satisfaction. (Lyotard 1984: 74)

That 'independent' culture in popular music is a 'victim' of capitalism, in as much as it is also defined by it, is certainly a plausible notion, and a nostalgic appropriation of the modes and techniques of a previous time a potentially reasonable response. So musicians and songwriters take an ideological approach to their craft, appropriate (as it always is) to the surrounding culture. Indeed, if capitalism 'derealizes' the familiar social role of folksong, then perhaps the nostalgic tendency in appropriation of its styles is inevitable, as the expression of an 'occasion for suffering.'

To attempt to return to music that reflects the roots and cultural heritage of the individual and make it contemporary, giving it meaning in its temporal setting is perhaps fundamental in this process of 'revolutionary conservatism'. So this current re-contextualising of folk song is perhaps quite deliberate, as in previous revivals of the form. Béla Bartók wrote:

> That part of the population engaged in producing prime requisites and materials, whose need for expression – physical and mental – is more or less satisfied either with forms of expression corresponding to its own tradition or those which – although originating in another culture – have been instinctively altered to suit its own outlook and disposition. (Bartók 1981: 6)

Somewhat out of context, but if I might use Bartók's words here for my own purposes; consider 'our own' folksong 'altered' to articulate our lifestyles and politics, our own social classes, and biographic sensibilities as an absolutely appropriate chronological step for the practice of folksong. This leads to a fundamental question; contrary to the definitions of folk we have, which place the songs within a frame of 'traditional' music pertaining to an

acquired repertoire of pre-existing materials, should folk not represent the community it comes from and subsequently be as much of its own time and furthermore its own place as it is of its past? Perhaps a clear distinction should be made between 'traditional' song and 'folk' song, each allowing the other to co-exist on its own terms.

Reaching for the Postmodern

I want to reduce and clarify the field here, as it would be easy to include any number of musical genres from hip-hop to current British guitar pop, all of which arguably display aspects of these arguments and are chronologically traceable back to origins within what we may plausibly refer to as folk music, and also could be said to be voicing the concerns and identity of contemporary communities. However, I am not writing here about the music that logically forms through the progression of culture, or that actively 'sounds' community, but rather music that knowingly references folksong and seeks in some way inclusion within the 'assumption' of traditional form. For where revival must take a type of music forwards it must also acknowledge its sources. It must justify itself through recognisable signatures, both musical and textual. The instrumentation, while often embracing new technologies, remains for the most part acoustically based and just outside the expected 'rock' format. Studio production tends towards simplicity and is often defiantly analogue, as though that italicises the authenticity of the work, the hiss of tape and the distortion around the edges of cheap microphones, lending a politicised and deliberate aesthetic of the outsider. This is by no means a defining feature of contemporary alt-folk, but it is a commonly used aesthetic, at odds with the electroacoustic cleanliness of many new recordings made by traditional players. These techniques and the (often inaccurate) implication of the songwriter's 'outsider' status suggest the presence of the artist outside of industry, but yet, by being outside, somehow closer to community; a member of a 'people'. At least, that would seem to be the intention. Whether or not this is really the case, or is even possible, I am not sure, as to try to put some kind of realistic frame

around the idea of a 'people' that relates to the distribution of popular music (or indeed in general terms) would be to assume that the existence of a 'folk' in the historical sense, (as problematised by Harker (1985) and Boyes (1993)) is a manageable notion for folk or for alt-folk. Whatever the reasoning, what we end up with is a deliberate and considered trans-historicism presented as a means to at once make an attempt to exclude the peripheral contemporary and declare something new.

To return again to the theme of reclamation, there is the aforementioned question of identity or culture. Not, I think, a question of nationalism as such, but simply a means to feel belonging within what might tentatively and problematically be called an 'international' society, a means of reducing the size of the cultural world to a less dizzying scale, attempting to engage in the atavism that denotes a sense of cultural belonging (if that can actually mean anything in the culture we occupy):

> The need to belong. Considered as a feeling, this might be called nostalgia. When one feels nostalgia for a time one has lived in or wishes one had lived in, cultural objects are a fairly dignified tonic. What is really wallowing in atavism can pass for appreciation of timeless beauty. (Eisenberg 2005: 15)

What Eisenberg refers to here, specifically, is the collection of cultural objects and more specifically in this case, vinyl records. But the collection of song (in whatever form) is rife within folk, and I would argue that there is a very thin line between the collection of song, the learning of repertory material and the writing of new songs. This sequence of events seems in some way inevitable and surely, one might say, symptomatic of tradition?

This line of argument cannot be presented as fact, being bound as it is, by the same subjectivity that songs themselves inhabit. Indeed, the motives for writing songs in any given fashion are complex, personal and often largely unrecognisable. I understand or consider the sounds of folksong, instrumentally, verbally and aesthetically as something personally formative, pertaining to imagined geographic grounding as much as the sonic heritage

around which I was raised and which I have subsequently pursued. There is as much an act of knowing or rather writing oneself, woven through these questions, as there is written history, cultural lineage and politics. But it is through subjectivity that my research must pass, and given that, and the cultural context of my practice, the above suggestions seem a most plausible reason for the nature of any current revival. This proposed aesthetically and ideologically motivated trans-historicism might seem on the face of it a particularly postmodern course of action. The rejection of the characteristic 'rules' of folk lineage with the nostalgic inclusion of recognisable instrumentation or aesthetic might seem to support this, though perhaps this is a necessary step, as with any development within a creative practice:

> Those who refuse to re-examine the rules of art pursue successful careers in mass conformism by communicating, by means of the "correct rules," the endemic desire for reality with objects and situations capable of gratifying it. (Lyotard 1984: 75)

It is perhaps this 're-examining' that lies at the source of folk revival at its current (if not all of its) stages. There is, within my thinking, and within my practice, a conscious defiance around what Fred Woods described as 'an error in historical perspective' concerning 'that of imposing an essentially middle class judgment as to what should constitute a singer's repertoire' (Woods 1979: 103), which is not, of course, to lay claim to being a member of any kind of fabricated 'peasant' class that can seize authority over the right of selection. Rather an assertion that the presentation and subsequent acceptance of a folksong contains a cultural exchange between writer and audience exclusive of prescribed ideas around authenticity, an opinion that echoes almost exactly with point three of the definition cited earlier in this chapter[13] but seemingly ignored by the likes of Cecil Sharp.

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[13] '(iii) selection by the community, which determines the form or forms in which the music survives.' (Sweers 2005: 45).

I went to his second gig. I knew that he had made music with dictaphones, four-track cassette recorders and viciously scratched and doctored records, but now he was playing songs. He took to the little stage in the upstairs room of the tattered urban bar in characteristic archaic, brown, rural and almost feminine attire, sat like a child puppet with a nylon string guitar and said, "I'm shitting myself". Amidst nervous laughter he started to play. It was utterly unlike his earlier music, but soaked heavily in the same menace. But the music seemed ancient, littered with the same major/ minor changes one finds in old English carols or renaissance masses, plucked and pretty like a lutenist's playground. His voice was changed entirely from the weary sarcasm of his speech to a psychotic chorister. His mild Dorset accent caricatured to an almost unrecognisable degree, the vowels stretching out as shapeless moans echoing himself as he sang with wordless utterance of desperate inarticulacy. Repeating into silence before inhaling towards the next phrase. The broad baritone smashed against falsetto in instantaneous crack. The stories revelled in horror, grotesque chimeric characters and their sickly crimes told in language more suited to an Elizabethan phantasmagoria. "I fed thee rabbit water, as if you are a king trapped in a jar", he told us as we sat confused and fascinated. Despite the sound reaching, as it did, backwards through centuries, this music could only happen now. It drew from all of those eras it passed on its backwards journey. The freak shows, the animals, the landscapes, it collects and arrives back in its present to mock and satirise both itself and us. Birdengine is a deliberate and conscious excavation presenting us with a folksong of metaphor, fantasy and critique. He sat outside tradition, reflecting it back as a deadly serious pastiche. I realised that he was an artist entirely of his own time.[14]

Continuing with this theme of postmodernism, the idea of pastiche is significant. To consider Alt-Folk as a postmodern practice is to begin to

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[14] An account of Birdengine live at the Prince Albert in Brighton. 01/08/05.

understand where it differs from repertory material, and also to begin to mark the cultural changes that demand a different approach to the idea of folksong. Frederic Jameson's writing on pastiche in postmodernism is a useful:

> Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique style, the wearing of a stylistic mask, speech in a dead language: but it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without parody's ulterior motive, without the satirical impulse, without laughter, without that still latent feeling that there exists something *normal* compared with which what is being imitated is rather comic. (Jameson 1998: 5)

Terry Eagleton describes Jameson's take on pastiche as 'the appropriate mode of post-modernist culture.' (Eagleton 1986: 131) This 'mimicry' of a 'dead language' seems an ideal way of considering the kind of practice I write about here. There is indeed no 'satiric impulse' within my songwriting practice, but I must acknowledge that certain contextual aspects relating to technology, reproduction and the nature of 'the folk' itself must radically shift the parameters of my practice away from folksong as it is largely understood. Though, as Eagleton says of postmodernism:

> Jameson is surely right to claim that in reality it is sometimes blankly innocent of any such devious satirical impulse, and is entirely devoid of the kind of historical memory which might make such a disfiguring self-conscious. (Ibid: 132)

Very few practitioners within this archipelago have any tangible experience of the practice of folksong within its supposed historical context, although the atavistic reimagining is not rendered insincere by this fact. Notions of authenticity become next to useless when considering a contemporary practice, '"authenticity" having been less rejected than merely forgotten.' (Ibid: 132) It might well be convincingly argued that no practice of folksong, repertory or otherwise, has any real claim to authenticity, notwithstanding the alleged authenticity of songs themselves. (One could say that groups such as the Copper Family have more claim than most, given the lineage

and tradition present, but even so, surviving members live now and do not carry out the pastoral lifestyles detailed within their repertoire). But, to argue that this 'inauthentic' folksong thereby has no cultural currency or integrity would be an error. This discourse of authenticity is not qualitative in and of itself. A claim of authenticity does not make a song 'good', and any series of negative adjectives might reasonably by levelled at an 'authentic' work.

The recording and reproducibility of music has inevitably had a profound effect upon the learning and delivery of music. Much of the music I know, and indeed much of my ability to play comes from playing along to recordings. Is this not simply a technological shift in the nature of oral transmission? If we change oral to aural, there is little conceptual flaw in the notion. Eisenberg considers the tying of art to media:

> The irony is in the facts, the contradiction only in the metaphor. Wings mean to slip earthly conditions, one of which is mortality. That is why we picture our angels with wings and why the Greeks saw their gods, including the muses, airborne. In reality, though, winged creatures are not known for longevity. The really durable things (tortoises, stones) are precisely the most earthbound and inert, the most thingly. So in reality, the best way to set something intangible safely beyond time is to reify it. (Eisenberg 2005: 10)

Eisenberg's point here might also apply to the idea of collecting folk songs. For practitioners such as myself, the reified form of recorded music is the norm. Without it I might never have discovered folksong at all. For practitioners of Alt-Folk it is not preservation or tradition that is the driving force, but rather the making of new work. With the means of learning and delivering music so radically altered from the framework that describes folksong, it stands to reason that different kinds of practice emerge. The community that I occupy as a songwriter is comprised of a remote set of likeminded musicians, rather than the people who happen to live in the same place as me. These musicians I have met touring or in small club nights dedicated to the booking of this kind of music. This has led to much collaboration and the sharing of songs, but not, I think, in a way that does not

happen within other styles or genres of musical practice. Rather, it seems that the postmodern aspect of this practice is the most convincing, a pastiche of creatively useful forms or aspects that artists can appropriate to further their creative practice. Stephen Burch of 'The Great Park' offers:

> I think that when describing music in order to promote it one often has to be economical - I like the bluntness of the word and the suggestions it throws up. I think that often my stuff is story based, it uses elements of other people's work in terms of names and references, it's adaptable and can be rewritten - these things to begin with could be called 'folk' qualities to me. When I make albums the songs to me aren't set down in stone, but rather recorded in a particular state at a particular time. Sometimes I've recorded songs a number of times as I feel they've changed and have reached a different form or tone that's interesting. I think of 'folk music' as something that could be malleable - it can take this kind of treatment. (Stephen Burch email interview 21/01/11)

It is worth noting that Burch's songs all take place within 'The Great Park', a semi-fictitious version of the park of the same name in Windsor. His instrumentation is acoustic and his writing style is one of longwinded narrative without chorus or modulation. Often he employs a repeated refrain to end each stanza. It is a form of song instantly recognisable as the same as many folk ballads. We see here very clearly the mimicry discussed above, present in all of the artists I cite in this research, whether in the use of musical form, instrumentation or the use of archaic language, which in most cases is knowing and considered. Darren Hayman sings on his 'Bluegrass' album 'Hayman, Watkins, Trout and Lee' (Hayman, Watkins, Trout and Lee 2008) 'I was born in Alabama, I was raised in Bermondsey', a deliberate nod to his appropriation of this 'dead language'. (Eagleton 1986: 131) The boundaries and rules relating to the practice of folksong cease to be of value and the artwork begins to flux, using and discarding aspects of its genesis as deemed appropriate:

> Postmodernist culture will dissolve its own boundaries and become coextensive with ordinary commodified life itself, whose ceaseless exchanges and mutations in any case recognize no formal frontiers which are not constantly transgressed. (Eagleton 1986: 141)

While I find it hard to acknowledge postmodernism in terms of epoch, certainly these ideas set against what Eagleton calls 'late capitalism' (Ibid: 134) seem to usefully describe the practice under scrutiny here. Jameson usefully makes the postmodern plural, citing a 'list of postmodernisms' (Jameson 1998: 2) and acknowledges the difficulty in isolating specific characteristics that might make postmodernism a singular study, 'since the unity of this new impulse – if it has one – is given not in itself but in the very modernism it seeks to displace.' (Ibid) This fragmentation in style and material within alt-folksong mirrors Jameson's question that:

> Society had itself begun to fragment in this way, each group coming to speak a curious private language of its own, each profession developing its private code or idiolect, and finally each individual coming to be a kind of linguistic island, separated from everyone else? (Jameson 1998: 5)

There is no one set of principles with which to define alt-folk, and much like Jameson's 'postmodernisms' it must be set against the things it seeks to displace, the fragmentations of style and the varying reliance upon traditional music being simply part of the methodologies involved in the making of new work. One might consider here David Thomas Broughton's 'Ain't Got No Sole' (Broughton 2011), a song that seems to embody this notion of a postmodern approach. The song is at source very much a pop song, but its instrumentation and language seem to locate it within, or close to, folksong, although as soon as we become accepting of this the language shifts and pulls us to present; from the archaic description of a river, 'See how it does eddy' to the glaringly contemporary 'I felt like one of those mental bastards'. Instrumentation is largely acoustic with notable use of accordion and acoustic guitar, but there are also kit drums and electric bass. Its production is simple and unpolished (as is often the case with this kind of work). This song neither mocks tradition, nor seeks inclusion within it, leaving behind any need to engage within historicism or lineage. Eagleton expands further on Jameson's ideas:

> The depthless, styleless, dehistoricized, decathected surfaces of postmodernist culture are not meant to signify an alienation, for the very concept of alienation must secretly posit a dream of authenticity which postmodernism finds quite unintelligible. (Eagleton 1986: 132)

It is difficult to describe or to fix on a page what the conditions are for a song's acceptance by an audience as being a folksong let alone an 'alt'-folksong, the distinction between the two being an unlikely one to make for most listeners. Though I would argue that the criteria (instrumentation, style etc) for each would be the same up to a point: folksong, but where authorship is known and the composition recent. These conditions must also vary depending on any individual. There may be some listeners who might assume a song is folk simply because of its use of acoustic guitar, or its use of certain melodic motifs, or the presence of a fiddle. There may indeed be some who might consider a song to be folk without any instrumental or sonic similarity to tradition just because of thematic content, or the means of its derivation. But to narrow the field once more and to try to shackle it to the practice that lies at the centre of these ideas, a contemporary alt-folksong must relate to its historical genesis. For Jameson, this backward thinking pastiche is inevitable and symptomatic of contemporary culture:

> Cultural production has been driven back inside the mind, within the monadic subject: it can no longer look directly out of its eyes at the real world for the referent but must, as in Plato's cave, trace its mental images of the world on its confining walls. If there is any realism left here, it is a 'realism' which springs from the shock of grasping that confinement and of realizing that, for whatever peculiar reasons, we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about the past, which itself remains forever out of reach. (Jameson 1998: 10)

Alt-folksong is a postmodern symptom of this condemnation, seeking an elusive authenticity in an already inauthentic arena where supposition, conjecture and misinterpretation are treated as fact, and its form fused and shaped by the rupturing effect of the popular music cannon that predates and exists alongside it. This folksong is, like all others, tied to the geography of its catalyst. The writer may not occupy these geographies, but the work is

situated inherently within them, perhaps one might argue that the 'folk' is less the 'people' and rather the 'place'? 'Place' in this short body of writing must refer to literal geography and also the immediate and contemporary culture(s) that occupy its space. As such, I propose a folksong conscious of its origins, but not restricted by them. A folksong aware of and embracing the influence of other music, one that takes on or traces traditional forms as signifiers of heritage, location and belonging (or not) rather than instruction or rule, and one that tackles ideas of heritage thematically as a necessity having adopted this trans-historical method.

Chapter 2. An introduction to 'place' and a method of writing it

Sitting on the wall at Hays dock, I fancy I am as comfortable as I have ever been. There is a fishing boat with the wheel house in the stern to my left and in front of me an upside down 'Fourareen' of the same build as 'Tama', my father's boat, the red inboard engine from which he has taken with him ever since we left these islands without occasion to use. As a child I would go into the garage and turn its handle imagining myself at sea. I have long believed that on the day my father dies I will find the engine seized. For it is his metal heart. But this place has made me sentimental.

I have always wondered at my disproportionate attachment to these islands, given that they have left so few tangible memories, but yesterday, after these twenty-five years I understood. These years of displacement, variously located as they are and punctuated by recklessness and itinerancy, have all been a blind attempt to recapture the very thing I did not know I was without: the very sense of thrill present for me here. I have had glimpses of it in the Western Isles, Ireland, Cornwall and California, but not enough it seems to jog the memory into 'knowing'. It is not simply the culture that has held me here (culture in this case taking the form of photographs and some strange sense of 'men', bearded and parka'd with their work dictated always by the sea), but the land itself and as much, I suppose, its weather. Quite simply the sensory assault on a headland in high wind, with the sea up around and the rain so that you can barely open your eyes. The intoxicating collision of threat, fragility, romance and mortality is what births my lack of interest in the 'real' (at least as it seems to me in daily life). This place had made me a mystic, a nostalgic, separate from the lands I came to inhabit and removed from these where I fancy I began, never wholly a 'part' of either, but consumed by the fictitious personal mythology of both or all. I licked the rain from my beard and it tasted of tears, the salt being so thick in the air. I watched Gannets plunge for fish by the Knab and I was the only one there.

Walking and reflecting on how I feel as outside of the place here as I do anywhere else, despite my clinging on to this land, I was suddenly filled with regret at our helpless following of those who spawn us. Strictly itinerant? Often, we don't have a choice. A boy in a grey T-shirt and fingerless gloves on the wrong side of a safety barrier dances on the wet rock, clapping his hands and shouting unheard words at the sea. I stop to watch. Bewildered. Three miles or so round the headland, I find it very hard to keep from doing the same thing. But I do not sound like where I'm from, but rather, where I have been since, so early were we removed. And so in that sound, the 'from' comes to mean nothing. It is always the same with my songs.

Considering the Term

'Place' like folksong, is a term of much fluidity. Throughout the history of philosophical and geographical thought it has remained an area of constant redefinition and the literature that surrounds it in the contemporary is extensive. I want to establish here what I mean when I use this term, and how also to employ its use both in theory and in practical work during the processes of this research. What is the 'place' or sense of place that matters here? What is it that I seek to investigate with my research methodology? What are the key ideas around this research that inform its direction? Having established this, a methodological testing of these ideas, their relationship to songwriting and more specifically the practice that seeks to articulate them can be better defined and (de)constructed.

The relationship between 'space' and 'place' is by no means fixed, but perhaps a useful route into considering place might be to think of it as space that is culturally active or occupied. I'll take as an appropriate starting point here, John Agnew's essay 'Space: Place' taken from *Spaces of Geographical Thought* where some attempt is made to compare different approaches towards definition of these terms:

> Space is about having an address and place is about living at that address. Sometimes this distinction is pushed further to separate the physical place from the phenomenal space in which the place is located. Thus, place becomes a particular or lived place. (Cloke and Johnston 2005: 82)

To extend this assertion somewhat, in order to begin writing about the particular aspects of place I want to focus on, consider perhaps, that 'place' might not necessarily need to be lived 'in' but rather lived 'through', a notion supported by the writing of Wendy Joy Darby:

> Place is indubitably bound up with personal experience, [….] by contrast, space is unnamed, unhistoried, unnarrativized, at least in the mind and eye of the dominant culture which colonizes space – across both geological and class distances – by exercising power in the form of naming, mapping, mensurating, and dwelling. (Darby 2000: 50)

While introducing the necessity of culture, and language (significantly in the form of naming a place, which I will write more about shortly), the idea of 'living through' place also underscores the now inevitable dimension of time and of event, furthermore, one that is reliant upon the action and relationships of others. This is perhaps the foundation of thinking about the point where the 'abstract' or cultural emptiness of 'space' becomes 'place', where it joins (subjectively) with memory and therefore, with the identity. It is here, in analysing the potential of this notion of place being defined by being lived 'through' with specific reference to subjectivity and identity (and with those terms that naturally go alongside them) that I hope to set out my own position within the question(s) of place and establish the efficacy of this work.

I choose the word 'through' here to describe a relationship with place as it seems, in this context, to best articulate aspects of time and therefore past and memory somewhat better than simply saying 'in'. Gaston Bachelard takes up this point when discussing the properties of a house (relating specifically to its poetic treatment):

> He experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality, by means of thought and dreams. It is no longer in its positive aspects that the house is really "lived," nor is it only in the passing hour that we recognize its benefits. An entire past comes to dwell in a new house. (Bachelard 1964: 5)

Bachelard's idea here that we carry with us and impose our pasts and experiences onto a place, at once creating a symbiotic relationship with our surroundings and our identities, is one worth pursuing, especially given his assertion that 'all really inhabited space bears the essence of the notion of home.' (Ibid: 5) But, if I am to continue down this route, I'd like to further clarify the difference between 'space' and 'place'. If space can be said to be best understood as Agnew argues, then place takes a far more cultural and specifically mapped position. I cannot help, even in writing this, but use words that seek to locate. 'Seek' is an appropriate word here too, as rootedness or a sense of geographical belonging becomes increasingly fluxed:

> The presumed certainties of cultural identity, firmly located in particular places which housed stable cohesive communities of shared tradition and perspective, though never really a reality for some, were increasingly disrupted and displaced for all. (Carter, Donald and Squires 1993: vii.)

I think it may be also be reasonable here to suggest that our relationship with place is frequently within the realm of the subjunctive: a mood to 'express a command, a wish, a suggestion or a condition that is contrary to fact'[15]; describing what is hypothetical rather than actual. For example stating: 'if I were to live there,' rather than 'I live there.' Again we encounter the aspect of time, by introducing the hypothetical, but plausible idea of wishing oneself in a place where one is not. The thinking about a place may be past, present or future, so this idea is particularly appropriate for the dislocated and the itinerant, for whom place is frequently passing away or

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[15] Taken from an online source available here: http://www.grammar-monster.com/glossary/subjunctive_mood.htm (Accessed 16/07/13) While I have chosen to use this particular description, it should be noted that the OED provides the more succinct, and perhaps better recognised: 'Relating to or denoting a mood of verbs expressing what is imagined or wished or possible.' http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/subjunctive.

coming towards, and where home is often somewhere else. Our sense of home as it relates to our identity is frequently caught up with desire or wishing, and it is this that lands place within the subjunctive, a means of describing a state that does not (but could) exist. We construct a mythology of inclusion relating to places not necessarily apparent, using those people associated with it, perhaps in order to validate our right to belonging:

> Yet, though the 'homes' which ground and house identities can be denied people physically by enforced exile or lost through chosen migration, they still continue to resonate throughout the imaginations of displaced communities. (Ibid: vii.)

I do not seek, with these ideas, to describe a universal experience, but rather to engage with a common, but by no means inevitable, shared experience of place and what that might mean. Perhaps when I type 'we' or 'our', what I really mean is 'I' or 'my'. Not as simple a thought as it may seem. It is difficult to pinpoint a specific demographic here to which I might apply this 'we', and harder still to unpick personal experience from the findings of research. It could be that the 'we' here is simply an assumed conceptual majority occupying the archipelago that the research is addressing (the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland), or the potential audience for the songs that come out of it, but always it seems to return to a pre-formed 'I', generated by experience, that informs the research as much as any other material. These are not statements of 'fact', and as such, these assertions must be unpicked. In doing so, I hope to establish a position within or upon the various and fluid term 'place' and from there, begin to articulate its possible relationship to a contemporary folksong. In seeking to look at place's involvement in the formation of identity, I have employed a strategy that might be considered to be similar to G. C. Spivak's notion of 'strategic essentialism' (Ed. Landry & MacClean 1996: 204), in that the subject (me) has 'chosen' to identify geographic experiences as somehow formative. That identification with place, or indeed, the significance of certain places, has become a large part of the subsequently performed identity. I acknowledge that there may of course be any number of factors in the formation of a subject, and my methodology might be

shifted by someone with a different relationship to their own identity to suit those too, but for me the significant idea is place. It is worth noting that much like Spivak's subalterns who are 'aware of their complicity with subaltern insurgency' (Ibid), I too am aware of my own complicity in the weaving of an identity so bound to the places that have become significant. This fact and its frailty have become significant over the course of my research, as will become clear in the following chapters.

Referring back once again to the essay 'Space: Place', John Agnew talks of the various possible distinctions between the two terms 'space' and 'place', offering the possibility that 'Place is specific and space is general' (Cloke and Johnston 2005: 82). He also asserts that place 'is often associated with the world of the past and space with the world of the present and future' (Ibid: 83), suggesting that it is potentially 'nostalgic, regressive or even reactionary' (Ibid), before adding the idea that:

> Place is being lost to an increasingly homogeneous and alienating sameness. Placelessness is conquering place as modernity displaces traditional 'folkways'. (Ibid: 83).

The 'sameness' of urban spaces is perhaps an undeniable symptom of a globalised economy, and a sense of 'placelessness' an arguably inevitable response to more frequent and often global travel and/or migrations. But the idea that place is potentially associated with just the past is more troubling; something can be said for a sort of forward-thinking nostalgia directed at the future that we frequently associate with place. If place is nostalgic, though, must it be 'conservative' or 'reactionary'? Can this nostalgia, when articulated from a certain perspective, not attempt a description of a contemporary situation of place(lessness)? Can the same romance be offered to the situation of displacement that is afforded to the idea of a past 'landscape continuity'? Can the longing for place not also be concerned only with an imagined future?

I also want to address the role of proper nouns (names) when considering place. Places have names, and the role of these names is often multiple.

They are descriptive, sometimes explicitly so: one might consider Stratford Upon Avon, for example, a name that locates the place at its proximity to the river, but they also invoke its culture, landscape and character. Tuan notes:

> In distinction to the schematic worlds in which animals live, the schematic worlds of human beings are also populated with particular and enduring things. The particular things we value may be given names: a tea set is Wedgewood and a chair is Chippendale. People have proper names. [….] A city such as San Francisco is recognized by its unique setting, topography, skyline, odors, and street noises. (Tuan 1977: 18)

More than this perhaps, place names are complex signifiers, and a name may produce notions of beauty, notoriety, wealth, poverty or any number of meanings. Those proper nouns ascribed to places become whole narratives, as culture inscribes history and meaning to them, like the cultural connotations of Paris for example. Songs, and particularly folksongs, frequently make use of place names or named locations: 'In Scarlet Town where I was born, there was a fair maid dwelling' from 'Barbara Allen' (Alasdair Roberts 2010), 'I went down to Sammy's Bar. Hey, the last boat's a leaving' from 'The Ballad of Sammy's Bar' (Cyril Tawney 1972), and 'Farewell ye banks o'Sicily' from 'Banks of Sicily' (The Clancy Brothers with Tommy Makem 1997) to name just three.

The songs I have written for this research also use place names. Sometimes simply to make a place explicit by its name, this, as discussed above, might suggest various aspects of the place. 'The Ballad of Cootehill' takes this approach, naming the town and siting the narrative in a particular location. 'Helen's House' takes a slightly different approach, as the house is named, but not its location (though other places are named in the song). The place of the title is suggestive of refuge, and my friend Helen's name is a happy accident, allowing me to obliquely reference Samuel Beckett's 'Mercier and Camier' (Beckett 1970), where the two central characters, despite their repeated attempts to leave the unspecified town, repeatedly find themselves back at 'Helen's' (Ibid: 70). These proper nouns locate the songs, and invite a listener to either apply knowledge of a place or to

imagine its characteristics. Of course, these perceptions may be different to mine, any place name perhaps taking on an aspect of Roland Barthes's Eiffel Tower, which, being so pervasive a symbol comes to mean nothing in itself:

> [A]s a matter of fact, the Tower is nothing, it achieves a kind of zero degree of the monument; it participates in no rite, in no cult, not even in Art; you cannot visit the Tower as a museum: there is nothing to see inside the Tower. (Barthes 1979 : 7)

But, for Barthes, this lack of meaning allows for the inscription of other meanings: 'This pure - virtually empty – sign - is ineluctable, because it means *everything*.' (Ibid: 4) There are common meanings here though, which relate to the paragraphs above:

> The Tower is also present to the entire world. First of all as a universal symbol of Paris, it is everywhere on the globe where Paris is to be stated as an image; from the Midwest to Australia, there is no journey to France which isn't made, somehow, in the Tower's name, no schoolbook, poster, or film about France which fails to propose it as the major sign of a people and of a place: it belongs to the universal language of travel. (Ibid: 3)

We do not need to see the Tower for it to produce these various meanings. They are present in its name, and this is the potency of the proper nouns for places. As the Eiffel Tower will behave as a pluralised symbol, so too will the names Dublin, London, New York and so on.

On Itinerancy

There are also different aspects to these questions. Place, from the perspective of the itinerant, is different to that of the static, and different again to that of the migrant, especially when removed generationally. Furthermore, when in frequent transit it is often the 'places' between that loom significant over the potential destinations.

The second-generation migrant might be raised with an implied cultural or geographic heritage they have never seen. The site of this heritage must then take on an imaginary and/or symbolic quality available to be either embraced or rejected. When faced with the hard fact of this 'imaginary' landscape/culture rather than a sense of inclusion, there is often (and certainly for myself) a creeping sense of shame: an alienating danger of exposure, of being a fraud or imposter, but also of being the only one who would care. This differs from the experience of the itinerant returning to a place only to find themselves, or it, irreversibly changed, by the fact that the connection here is only of blood and kinship but with the exclusion of location as a binding factor. This diasporic complication is dealt with similarly to musical classification by the use of a prefix or a hyphenated term, indeed the joining of words. For example, a person can be 'London-Irish' without ever having seen Ireland. So the sense of what it is to be from a place or to be part of a race distorts like a Chinese whisper. The result is often the refusal to accept where one is, coupled with a dislocation from where one is not. In Lourdes López-Ropero's essay, 'Roots and Routes: Diaspora, Travel Writing, and Caryl Philips's Sounding of the Black Atlantic', she identifies a 'fluid notion of identity' (Ponzanezi and Merolla, Ed 2005: 167), one not concretely defined by a fixed geographic history, but rather one built variously upon the 'cultural productions affected by colonisation, migration, multicultural policies, and global dynamics.' (Ibid: 167) These ideas serve to strengthen the notion that a part of one's identity might be informed as much by what is not present physically as what is. A person's relationship to place might well have its foundations in parental or social influence as well as other literal lived experience. But this leads to an issue of legitimacy. Misinterpretation and assumption about a remote geography lend a sense of inauthenticity to a diasporic subject from the perspective of the 'native'. Indeed, these things apply also to the itinerant. It would be a mistake, I think, to imagine one's identity as having being fixed at any kind of origin, place, or any other potentially fixed state at one's birth. Each site, in turn, has a potentially formative influence upon the itinerant, but perhaps the task of identifying these influences is what begins the process of dislocation? The inability to express clearly one's roots (or indeed routes, to

return to López-Ropero) can lead in its way to the sense of loss, nostalgia or melancholy common to those that are displaced.

At its root, perhaps, our thinking around place is best described as pertaining to a sense of 'home', to which we readily attach a sense of what might be shakily referred to as being one of the foundations of cultural identity. What we consider to be home is very much at the centre of our individual cartographies. Yi-Fu Tuan addresses this idea quite explicitly:

> Human groups nearly everywhere tend to regard their own homeland as the center of the world. A people who believe they are at the center claim, implicitly, the ineluctable worth of their location. (Tuan 1977: 149).

But Tuan makes sure that he addresses potential re/dislocations within human behaviours, aligning the 'attachment to homeland' to the people themselves rather than simply the land they occupy:

> With the destruction of one "center of the world," another can be built next to it, or in another location altogether, and it in turn becomes the "center of the world." – A spatial frame determined by the stars is anthropocentric rather than place-centric, and it can be moved as human beings themselves move. (Ibid: 150).

But if a community can move, readjusting its sense of 'centre', what of the itinerant, the migrant, the exile? 'Home', 'Rootedness', where one is 'from' or belongs, becomes where one is not. 'Do they long for a permanent place, how is this longing expressed?' (Ibid: 158). It seems natural to me for this 'longing' to be expressed in artworks, and frequently it is, in song. From shanties and forecastle songs, to prison songs and way beyond, the themes surrounding dislocation and the longing for home are ever present within the folksong tradition of this archipelago (and those sites diasporically related to it). This is one point where traditional repertoire seems to meet with contemporary writers within 'alternative' trends of contemporary folk music. But does the nature of the longing change as our cultures and geographic patterns change? This is perhaps a key point when considering new or 'alt'

songs and their uneasy relationship with the tradition. As culture, politics and economy change, so too must the nature of folksong. If the folksong makes attempts to describe or articulate a sense of located experience then the motives, contexts and indeed subjects of the songs adapt to the time of performance or writing. This includes the traditional repertoire also, with old narratives shifting meaning to become relevant to the present. (Here one thinks, for example, of MacColl's political purpose). But I am getting ahead of myself.

How to Engage

The writing so far in this chapter is a beginning, an initial glossary: a combination of assumed knowledge, ideas and sourced or read material used to support these notions. At this stage, I want to begin to isolate the theoretical material that is useful in approaching the practical research. Researching the various characteristics and contexts of one's relationship with a place helps gather the means to articulate the subjective experience or personal meaning of a place. This is something Lucy Lippard describes as 'an archaeological rather than a historical process' (Lippard 1997: 25), a process that seeks to locate the artist's position within the narrative of a place and how they and others might relate to it:

> Every landscape is a hermetic narrative: "Finding a fitting place for oneself in the world is finding a place for oneself in a story." The story is composed of mythologies, histories, ideologies – the stuff of identity and representation. (Ibid: 33)

Lippard expands on this, pointing out what is necessary for the writer when attempting to find an intimacy with a place. Indeed, when trying to find or write this narrative of place/self:

> All places exist somewhere between the inside and outside views of them, the ways in which they compare and contrast with, other places. A sense of place is a virtual immersion that depends on lived experience and a topographical intimacy that is rare today both in ordinary life and in traditional educational fields. From the

> writer's viewpoint, it demands extensive visual and historical research, a great deal of walking "in the field," contact with oral tradition, and an intensive knowledge of both local multiculturalism and the broader context of multicenteredness. (Ibid: 33)

In my research, where the role and actuality of writing is pluralised (academic prose, a more diarist deconstruction of experience and motive and the writing of songs themselves), there is also a plurality of place. There is the place of ethnicity (further complicated for me as someone who is half Irish, half English), the place of past and the place of present. All of these, for me, being different, geographically, yet connected in some way by the spreading and hybridised exchange of folksong. Within and between these three there are more specific locations to be focused upon within the articulations of the songs, and each of these will serve to address different aspects of relationships to place. But the ideas outlined in this brief text should serve as a methodological starting point from which to further excavate and analyse a contemporary folksong's relationship to, or rather articulation of, place.

Returned to the campus for a conference following the run of gigs taking in the South East of England. On the steps, I try to rationalise my thoughts, fevered, upon the motorways and service stations of that now past region. I can play the voice, here, on this page that sings laboured language and hackneyed melody to the inebriated few in the bar in Leipzig, the live music pub in Leicester, wherever. But in an ethnographic sense, that must mean turning this gaze (and I am aware as I write this of the loaded potential of the term given what may follow) inward. Inward at the songwriter, the alt-folk singer, the 'self', which is a frightening thing. But it is in this thinking or this direction of thinking at least, that I might unlock the model, the method, the elusive notion of authenticity that my research seeks for its legitimacy. That I seek for my legitimacy, against the inaccurate mythologies of the music press, and of those music bloggers, each anxious for a stake in whatever romance-tinged back story that comes their way. My own story runs thick through this research, it has to,

this is part of it, and through the unravelling of my beliefs and stories in/of my geographic life, perhaps, what follows is a useful contribution to songs of place? Too soon to say, but maybe.

So I begin to question the making of this identity I have assumed. My identity as songwriter is more skewed still than the 'true' identity of my 'real' life. Within the song I can choose, as one might in conversation with a stranger, what to omit, what to exaggerate, especially if there is some general narrative or absolutist point to be made. I meet with the triumvirate of Imaginary, Symbolic and Real. Each place must be given its place within them, as I move closer towards an explication of 'past', 'heritage' and 'present'. But in inhabiting the voice of practitioner in this most blurred of academic contexts, what is it when the practice, my practice, my songwriting becomes the analysand?

I acknowledge, despite the preceding text's partial anthropomorphising of my songs, that they surely cannot ever be the analysand. Not really, for arguably they have answered before the question. If the song can be the subject of enquiry, it is not necessarily the 'Subject'. But then, am I? Or, is the place? Which brings me once again to the direction of these questions. What am I asking, and from where? This is changeable, of course, but always it is, like the kind of text above, heavily ingrained within autobiography. The status of this as research is found then in various places, and these places within the various (other) places that play site to the research. But this is the aspect of place that interests me. Place as part of the formation of the subject, and the subject's subsequent performance of identity. As such, drawing selectively from texts concerned with this particular branch of psychoanalysis would seem to be an appropriate course.

What I propose here, as previously stated, is not a psychoanalysis of my songwriting, but rather, a methodological model with which to understand or

negotiate my relationship with the selected places that are at the root of this work. A model that places each of the three geographies within a theoretical model that best demonstrates its position in the formation of this subject. The particular concepts of Psychoanalysis I wish to focus on here are Lacan's Real, Imaginary and Symbolic orders which Stephen Ross introduces by writing, 'The intersection of the RSI constitutes the whole of the mental life of humans, whether in a cumulative way or in the various effects it produces.' (Ross 2002: online). And so it is the relationship between these three that I intend to explore, through the work of several writers who have focussed on this Lacanian theme, setting each up as the conceptual model for one of the significant places. As such, the Imaginary will be used to address the Shetland Islands, The Symbolic, Ireland, and the Real might be found or indeed not found (this is most significant) at Cornwall. The reasons for this can be explained by my particular relationship with each place, and the significance that each has within my identity, or at least how I present or perform my identity.

In order to do this, I will unpack these Lacanian terms, and attempt to show their value, not just in this more generic sense, but as the previously mentioned methodological model with which to negotiate the three significant locations under scrutiny here, my relationship with them, and their subsequent role within my songwriting, or at least how I present or perform my identity. This is why, in order to clarify my use of place, it is also necessary to explicate ideas around autobiography, and how this method relates to song, production, and musical meaning.

Chapter 3. Questions of Meaning and the Value of Autobiography

What is it to write my life in this way? How is it that a sense of authenticity can only be mustered in the acknowledgment of authenticity's collapse? Of what interest can this be to anyone? I'd had such designs of writing these places, of sounding the rocks and describing the coast, only to discover that I had no claim on them. Whatever hold they had on me, they would not return the favour. My location only within, and the without, only in my telling, and whatever I declare (truthfully or not). As 'folksong' crumbles, so too does my heritage, my ethnicity, and my right to narrate these places as anything other than a part of what I have performed throughout my life, in other places. The songs become confessional, they become in a topsy-turvy way what they should be: articulations of place. I wonder if the personal nature of these songs is a problem. Is there something for the listener, or do they remain things of selfishness? I wonder too if this question matters at all. The song does not spell out the details to the listener, rather it describes a state, or a feeling, and it is music too. The words to a song need not be on the page, sometimes they don't even need to be audible. I even think that it might be that the more simple a song appears to be, the more complex its ontology. Is there ever a 'correct' response to a song? Probably not, but surely that doesn't negate the motive for its writing. In wanting to write the details of a place, in the end I can only sing that I do not see it. I must try to resolve these questions through autobiographic method, and an investigation of what that might mean. Also, to look at the possibilities of musical meaning, and the voice, as my voice is there, audible, across the songs. The story is not told only in text.

Considering Meaning

This chapter is an attempt to present the possible positions that popular songs occupy within the wider field of music because of its inclusion of

language as a fundamental part of its make up, and subsequently how autobiographical songs can be of use as both research and as articulations of place. 'Song' is not the only form of music that employs language as a part of its form (I am thinking here of opera and some religious music for example). It would seem that the inclusion of music symbiotically with words must serve some particular artistic, creative or cultural function. Allan F Moore writes: 'For instance, can the meaning of a rock song be reduced to the meaning of its words, in which case why bother to sing it? If it cannot, then what purposes are the music serving?' (Moore 1993: 154) If it is meaning that is of interest here, what is music's capacity to convey meaning? How can I use music to better articulate my experience of the places of this research?

This is a huge and much discussed area of musicological thought and it is necessary to get a sense of the field by introducing key ideas that deal with the problem before narrowing my search to find useful texts for my explicit research. Carl Dahlhaus (Dahlhaus 1989: 6) attempts to undo the tendency to romanticise music as a 'language of the heart'. Dahlhaus champions music that carries no text, and no specific reference outside of itself. He writes:

> The idea of "absolute music" – consists of the conviction that instrumental music purely and clearly expresses the true nature of music by its very lack of concept, object, and purpose. Not its existence, but what it stands for, is decisive. (Ibid: 7)

This idea of an autonomous music is of relevance when set against my work. Considering this attitude towards instrumental music, what changes when the music is not instrumental? There is a sense that what I should be doing in my research, is to try to make a music that exists specifically in order to articulate, or at least facilitate the articulation, of something solid, a definite idea. It seems that my purpose is contradictory to Dalhaus's ideas, and so if music resists representation through a 'lack of concept' for Dalhaus, I must make it licit, to do the opposite. There is also a very useful return here to Christopher Small's *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*

(1998) where Small outlines the social role of composer, performer and spectator as they relate to potential 'meaning':

> – The listener's task is simply to contemplate the work, to try to understand it and respond to it, but that he or she has nothing to contribute to its meaning. That is the composer's business. (Small 1998: 6)

He later asserts:

> Each musical performance articulates the values of a specific social group, large or small, powerful or powerless, rich or poor, at a specific point in history, and no kind of performance is any more universal or absolute than any other. All are to be judged, if judged at all, in their efficacy in articulating those values. (Ibid: 133)

Small raises the point that the idea of emotive meaning in music comes from aspects of at least partially fixed historical placement:

> Actually the idea that a piece can be sad or happy at all belongs exclusively to the representational style that has been dominant in Western operatic and concert music since the seventeenth century. It depends on a system of musical signs that has evolved during that period and so can have no claim to a place among the universals of music. (Ibid: 138)

Perhaps the influence of this system of signs can be said to hang heavily over any potential practice of contemporary folksong? It is a system with which I, as a songwriter, am completely familiar. Most of the music I have ever heard conforms to these emotional triggers and I am conditioned to interpret them. Compositional choices that I make, however arbitrary they might seem, are always informed by these 'emotional signs' and the subject matter of any song is frequently a slave to this musical suggestion, or vice versa. Small goes on to say:

> But a piece of music appears to have no reference to anything outside its own sound. Apart form onomatopoeic reference to natural sounds, like the birdsong and the thunder of Beethoven's *Pastoral* symphony, it can only be perceived as abstract and

nonrepresentational, at least of anything but itself. What then is it about? Is it about anything? (Ibid: 138)

This idea of onomatopoeic reference is useful. Methodologically, one might consider building or scoring music from material properties and common sounds of a place so as to suggest it quite specifically, although, this must depend upon some knowledge existing within the listener before the time of listening. Also, consider the use of field recordings within songs (rather than as a discipline in its own right). Actual sounds rather than using instruments to create representational sound, adding a descriptive aspect, so as to encourage an "accurate" listening of a song. This is a notion similar to what Darren Hayman calls 'dressing the set' (Darren Hayman interview 2011: 26.00) which extends also to lyrical description and the use of place names. Consider the recording from the train station Kiel on 'The Snow in Kiel' for example, or the sound of rain in 'The Wolf on the Shelf'. Continuing these lines of thought, I have attempted to find contemporary ethnomusicological input into this area of musical discourse.

In *Postmodernism and Globalization in Ethnomusicology: An Epistemological Problem* (2002) by Andy Nercessian, the author spends some time considering ideas of musical meaning and the problems surrounding it in current ethnomusicological thought he tackles the notion of musical 'polysemy':

> Is it advisable to speak of the correct meaning here? This is music's polysemy, its capacity to mean many things. The importance of this idea for the present work stems from the fact that these meanings cannot always be separated into correct and incorrect, since such separations do not seem to correspond to the efficacy of the music. (Nercessian 2002: 7)

Given this, Nercessian attempts to define the nature of the problem of meaning and ethnomusicology's role within the debate:

> Music is viewed as somehow reducible to meaning, yet to understand the meaning processes, we must separate music from

meaning theoretically under the conditions required by semiotics. The role of ethnomusicology in this debate is seminal, yet the postmodern attitude denies that music and meaning are separate. - Before coming to the issue of the *meaning* of meaning, we must clarify the *problem* of meaning (in music) and locate it historically. The meaning debate is usually misinterpreted as a dispute over whether music can mean or not. Instead, I believe the real uncertainty to be over *how* and *what* music can mean. Or, to formulate it differently, the uncertainty has been over the *distance* between music and meaning. (Ibid: 59)

Nercessian goes on to make the important distinction that music is not language, despite its often being treated as such:

Music "presents" the inner world of human feeling in a way that language cannot. It gives form to these feelings and their changes over time. But music in no way represents specific feelings, and the idea of representation itself is as foreign to it as language. (Ibid: 66)

It is certainly worth dwelling a little on these points. The 'how and what' is significant here. We are taught to understand certain semiotic properties in music (happy, sad, violent for example), the properties of which are dependent upon place, in this case the West, so I recognise these musical signifiers within the chronology of Western Classicism and subsequently Popular Music. The compositional decisions I make depend upon this knowledge, and in a more dissolved sense, upon the music I have listened to throughout my life. Subsequently my songs are, before any intent comes to the fore, already a matrix of accidental autobiography, telling a narrative of my listening habits, my education and perhaps even certain leanings or predispositions within my character (these certainly having to do with taste). The sound of the music I write will inherently inform a listener of details relating genre, cultural location, aesthetics and ideologies. The use of these things as material becomes significant when considering meaning and autobiography, particularly within this context methodological explication and research.

Voice

A further aspect of the generation of meaning to consider when writing or writing about song, is the voice. The voice in this context contains a complex set of characteristics including language, grammar, timbre, accent, tone, gender and melody. Each of these contains numerous potential meanings. There is also a musicality of language and voice through pitch, rhythm and prosody. Don Ihde writes:

> The "music" of language and the "grammar" of music remain caught in a metaphysical classification. There is a sense in which, phenomenologically, spoken language is at least as "musical" as it is "logical," and if we have separated sound from meaning, then two distinct directions of inquiry are opened and opposed. But in voiced word music and logic are incarnate. No "pure" music nor "pure" meaning may be found. (Ihde 2007: 157)

It is significant in songs that there is usually voice, and significant in my songs that it is mostly my voice. I try to sing as I talk, without affecting accent, and as such the sense of place suggested by my voice is not that which belongs to the places I am writing about. My accent is a reasonably neutral 'English', which a small betrayal of the West Midlands, Brighton and the West Country revealing themselves across vowels and consonants, but perhaps only to the close listener. However, the casual language that I use particularly amongst family and friends relates much more closely to the places that my research covers, another of the contradictions that seem to run throughout this study, drawing me back again to authenticity. There are the more physiological aspects to voice too. Is the voice strong, thin, brash or gentle, high or low? Meaning is also engendered here: 'The difference is sounded. The strong voice commands where the thin and wispy voice does not.' (Ibid) Ihde considers that the context of what is said becomes prominent and the 'sounding withdraws' (Ibid) but when language is sung this is less convincing. The point though is to recognise this physicality, as Cavarero observes:

> Unlike thought, which tends to reside in the immaterial otherworld of ideas, speech is always a question of bodies, filled with drives, desires, and blood. The voice vibrates, the tongue moves. Wet membranes and taste buds are mixed up with the flavour of the tones. (Cavarero 2005: 134)

Melody, delivery, and embodiment remain perhaps, as the musical properties of the voice are afforded a raised status, when speech becomes singing. Indeed, musical trope and technique can carry a kind of narrative purpose in themselves, beyond the physical properties inherent in the voice of the individual body. Where the acoustic is dragged from Imaginary into the Symbolic, becoming a codified system, whose signifiers we recognise and interpret. A 'conversion' I will later deliberately make within my thesis, even as I write and sing songs in an attempt to sound some part of the imaginary.

When considering the classification of song, as folk for example, then the style or technique employed can suggest a song's inclusion in one particular genre or another. I perceive Mary Hampton to be a folk singer of sorts (an alt-folk singer most likely, given the properties I outline earlier in the thesis) and one of the significant aspects of my thinking of her as such, is her voice. She adapts certain vowel sounds, lending a strangely pastoral aspect to her singing, and the frequent ornamentation in the form of trills, grace notes and turns is lifted knowingly from old a cappella styles which instantly site her work as being related to the tradition. This is achieved, in spite of her appropriation of chamber music, contemporary western classicism and rock music as well as English folk music. This is apparent in all of her work, and the collision of styles with folksong emerging as the apparent victor is well evidenced by 'Benjamin Bowmaneer' on her second album 'Folly' (Hampton 2011)

It is not just technique and delivery at play here, of course. Hampton's voice contains those other things that we should consider. The ever-present breath that seems to sit above every note as a parallel timbre, the almost birdlike nature of her crystalline soprano, the subtle nasal quality that seems

to underscore Englishness to my ears, coupled with the occasional betrayal of London in her pronunciation. Her voice is a complex thing, some parts considered, and some a result of her body, and in considering this we get close to what Barthes describes as the 'grain'. (Barthes 1977: 179)

Barthes clarifies a specifically musical context for his writing on the grain, stating that his thoughts are concerned with 'the grain of the voice when the latter is in dual posture, a dual production – of language and of music.' (Ibid: 181) this dual production is where my thinking of the voice (my voice) in my research is necessarily focussed. My voice is untrained, often inaccurate and not particularly strong, but in the terms set by Barthes perhaps my approach to singing might be of some value to the research, if 'the grain is the body in the voice as it sings', (Ibid: 188) then the deliberate use of taught technique only goes to cover up the presence of tongue, saliva, lip, throat or nose. Those voices I most admire (Shane MacGowan (1985) and Stephen McRobbie (The Pastels 1993) for example) have an unmistakable quality, their very lives and habits present in their singing and their performances a huge part of how convincing I find their narratives. Their voices are part of the writing:

> The 'grain' of the voice is not – or is not merely – its timbre; the *significance* it opens cannot better be defined, indeed, than by the very friction between the music and something else, which something else is the particular language (and nowise the message). The song must speak, must *write* – for what is produced at the level of geno-song is finally writing. (Ibid: 185)

For Barthes, the geno-song is 'the space where significations germinate' (Ibid: 182) and arguably, if my songs are to speak, or write, in this way then the voice must play its part, as a self-portrait, forming a partial foundation to autobiography.

Autobiography

Given that the places that I am writing about are of personal significance to me, I want to consider the role of autobiography in my songs. There is considerable discourse on the nature of autobiography. Suzanne Nalbantian traces the course of this history:

> Simple curiosity about people's lives may have first led critics into such theorizing, but then more sophisticated questions of referentiality, mimesis and the issue of ontology of the self began to dominate the inquiries. (Nalbantian 1997: 26)

If we consider the early idea that 'an understanding of the work could be reached through simple investigation of its source – the author,' (Ibid) what remains of interest (and of particular fascination to me particularly within popular song) is the frailty of what is knowable of the author. We often make assumptions around songwriters, assuming a personal and confessional nature to their work. In fact we have no real way of confirming or denying whether or not this is the case. Indeed, the literal truth behind these songs is all but irrelevant: one might be inclined to lean towards the statement that 'The self does not pre-exist the text but is constructed by it.' (Marcus 1994:180) To provide an example, Vic Chesnutt's bleakly confessional 'Square Room' in which he sings 'Just a tired old alcoholic, waxing bucolic. Shivering and homesick, staring at a wooden floor.' (Chesnutt 1998) The 'fact' of these words is little more than a ghost, but the first person nature of the narrative and the visibility of the author/singer bind the words to Chesnutt; they become autobiographic in his delivery and in the music that surrounds it. The publicly troubled man in the wheelchair (whose suicide only seems to seek to underscore the autobiographic potential of his writing), ceases in some way to be the man, and becomes only the songwriter, and in doing so reflects us back at ourselves. But this is something that autobiography must contend with. Robert Elbaz writes:

> Indeed, autobiography is a discourse not about the 'I' but about a series of 'he's', because a 'he' does not conform to the mystified

consistency of the 'I': the narrative is made up of a multiplicity of personae. The narrative is always a 'third person' phenomenon. (Elbaz 1987: 11)

This shift in the type of self, instantly problematising ideas of 'truth' is the point where autobiography becomes a useful research method and also a worthy method for the writing of song. Elbaz clarifies that, 'The autobiographer always writes a novel, a fiction, about a third person.' Continuing:

What does this third person (or series of third persons) which defies the myth of continuity tell us about the world? What subjectivity, what role, does it incarnate in its relationship to the world? (Ibid: 12)

The articulations of the subject, given their inevitable status as fiction, might very well be seen as useful means in order to understand or at least analyse wider cultural questions surrounding whatever subject that articulation makes, despite the constant grinding paradoxes surrounding accuracy, truth and authenticity. The reader, or listener (in this case) of autobiographic work has a potentially active role, in the discernment of the value (if any) and meaning of the narrative, as Tessa Muncey suggests:

Engagement with another's experience then requires imaginative participation, but this still perhaps leaves some important questions unanswered such as, is the story truthful? Is it coherent and, given that many stories are told in retrospect, to what extent does memory play a part in the veracity and accuracy of the story? (Muncey 2010: 90)

But, what then is the importance of truth here? Does it matter at all past its use as a methodological starting point for an artist to begin articulating a chosen subject?

Autobiography is an imaginative arrangement of the world, and at the same time it repeats experiences as they were lived. This paradoxicality is dictated by ideology, for one cannot concede that the mind – at least the mind of the artist – is a Xerox machine, yet

at the same time one has to posit, for the sake of the *status quo*, that reality is the same both within and without the text. (Elbaz 1987: 9)

Elbaz introduces the crucial word 'posit' here. An audience must make the assumption of truth, an assumption that seems to differ little from the surrender to narrative that one might be said to make in all instances regardless of genre, or indeed media:

> The question is not whether a given genre can replicate reality, but whether reality can be replicated in principle – whether truth is 'found', or 'created' within a social praxis. (Ibid: 9)

Making the assumption that truth or (perhaps more usefully) knowledge can be found/created within a situation such as songwriting, taking autobiography as a starting point then the work's usefulness as research/knowledge is dependent upon what it manages to convey in relation to what is outside of itself, and what the subject relates to it. Leigh Gilmore writes that:

> Every autobiography is the fragment of a theory. It is also an assembly of theories of the self and self-representation; of citizenship and a politics of representativeness (and exclusion). How to situate the self within these theories is the task of autobiography which entails the larger organizational question of how selves and milieus ought to be understood *in relation to each other.* (Gilmore 2001: 12)

But the song is not the page that we usually associate with autobiographical text or narrative. It is a different narrative form, one that relies for the most part on brevity of language, and a musical form. There is no room within song for explanation or introduction, little space for description. The song (in a similar way to some poetry) must manage to 'say' rather a lot, in a small number of words. This form imposes a certain looseness with fact in order to tell narrative without having to describe details at length. Marcus quotes Starobinski on Rousseau:

> He paints a dual portrait, giving not only a reconstruction of his history but also a picture of himself as he relives his history in the act of writing. Hence it scarcely matters if he uses his imagination to fill in the gaps in memory. The quality of one's dreams, after all,

reflects one's nature… we have moved from the realm of (historical) *truth* to that of *authenticity* (the authenticity of *discourse*). (Marcus 1994: 196)

This is authenticity of a different type to that which unhelpfully surrounds the practice of folk music; this is an authenticity that has to do with meaning and motive, with integrity. It is of course an authenticity that is perceived though, given the assumption that the listener 'posits' the assumption that the song's narratives lie within a site of integrity. The autobiographic articulation of place within song, such as those that I try to make in this research are concerned primarily with this 'authenticity of discourse'. The layers and complexities of autobiography notwithstanding, the songs contain truth, but a frequently manipulated truth in order to begin a discourse about the subject's relationship to place. The subject (despite the fact that the subject is nominally me) has no name, the places (despite the inclusion of street and place names) are rarely confirmed or cemented, and the songs make no claim to literal fact. Indeed, frequently, the songwriter (perhaps as a result of the brevity of the form as much as anything else) will use metaphor as a means of saying a great deal with few words. Marcus suggests:

> Metaphors adopted by the self are a way of mediating and objectifying the inner self as an *experience* of that self and, via the mediation of metaphor, the experience of the self can be communicated to others.' (Ibid: 187)

None of these things seem to corrupt these songs' status as autobiography, nor the authenticity of discourse contained within them. In fact, one might suggest that with the admission of inauthenticity relating to each place, the authenticity of the surrounding discourse is strengthened, which is an unexpected consequence of this methodology. There is a confessional aspect of this work where I am forced to make admissions about my relationship to these places that I find uncomfortable and would not have previously articulated even to myself. This suggests that the songs have helped to further my understanding of my own relationship to place, and through the use of subject as subject matter, to open up a useful discourse surrounding the song as articulation of place. This is most apparent in 'The

Truth of the Matter', where the whole song is an acceptance of the flaws in my relationship with the Shetland Islands given the length of time since my family re-located: a fact that only really revealed itself to me upon my return to that place for the purposes of this research, and now there is a sense of my internal autobiography being re-written over the course of writing this thesis. So the seemingly hyperbolic self-mythology of the first person songwriter feels as though it is only ever a kind of metaphor for a cultural subject of whatever shape, becoming (to borrow from Nercessian (2002)) a 'polysemic surface of empathetic meaning'. It is precisely these reflective qualities within songs that can make an autobiographical method a plausible direction for research.

But I must extend this notion of autobiography beyond what might be seen as lyrical. The music itself carries, as it always does, a woven narrative of compositional decision-making, which inherently tells its own story of heritage, taste, place and cultural context. That I allow the presence of guitar sounds that I like, or use particular styles of vocal harmony, or have a preference of cadence, reveals a kind of autobiography of listening. The music that soundtracks my life is to be found, ghosted into the music I write about my life. One might identify 'The Old Main Drag' (MacGowan 1985) as a maternal figure for 'Home Faring', characteristics of Bonnie 'Prince' Billy (Oldham 1999) in 'The Wolf on the Shelf', or the sinister shadow of 'Country Death Song' (Violent Femmes 1984) in 'The Streets I Staggered Down' for example. This notion of composition extends further still, beyond melody, harmony and other facets of arrangement, to encounter media, production, fidelity and instrumentation. All of which are as much a part of the autobiographical purpose and its complex ideologies as any set of words within any of these songs. So, the means of recordings and production now come into question, before looking to the specific nature of these songs themselves.

Chapter 4. The Beginning of Discourse on Recording

How best to capture? How best to present? How best to listen to these places? Where to sing? Where to play? Where best to put syllabic emphasis on this word, re*cord*? *Re*cord? However I write, it will also be the playback in the end that confirms success or failure.

I consider those new albums of traditional music that I hate, all clarity and virtuosity, repertoire, and technique, 'exciters' and mystic reverbs; are these to be heard as the production signifiers of 'folk' and 'heritage'? Or is it just that the capture of 'Tradition' is as far as the engagement with recording technology goes? My God, make them stop. Isn't it enough that they sing the way they do? The performed ghost of MacColl it may be, but where did he dig it up from? Some bastard version of 50 inaccurate rural accents squeezed through a larynx of faux Scottish stereotype, 'Ye Jacobites by Name' (MacColl 1993) indeed. Surely there is no convincing benchmark. Pass me an Aran sweater and watch me put my foot upon the chair, and a self-conscious hand against my right ear. The authentic becomes as skewed and unrecognisable as the real, an occasional imposition into how I can process my surroundings and experience. When it comes, it is a surprise. The source of which defies location. If I could leave the word behind, I would. I'd write only of integrity and sincerity. Must the grain need such explication?

I find my songs must negotiate a different kind of 'authentic' than the one implied by the choice of tune, or the level of musicianship. Different, but no less constructed. Recording on tape: old reel to reels or cassette, this is deliberate, aesthetic and ideological on my part (as are all decisions relating to this subject); how could it be otherwise? Whether for the particular way that tape behaves, or as a way of underscoring the cultural resonance of lower or vintage fidelities, the choices of capture carry with them as much recognisable meaning as a suit, or a pair of shoes, and much like clothing, or any other performance of identity, I can

construct as I please. Which is not to say that I am doing things as I should. The listener does not know where these technologies are employed, and I make considerable use of the DAW[16] as both recording tool and mixing environment. The multi-format nature of my recordings at once fetishises these marginally older technologies and obscures their presence. I love the idea of recording on 4 track cassette, but in truth, those fragments remain because of how they sound (the handclaps in 'Veesik for the Broch' for example), rather than my personal relationship with the machinery, although, its use in the first place stems from that place. There is also the plain truth that I am working with what I have. I don't have a digital simulation of tape compression, but I do have tape. I crash against, as I seem to so often, the part of my thinking that seems to want me to find a gap between research and practice. The space where it does not seem legitimate for a song to be research, but this is wrong. This is the epicentre of it all. The point where theory, writing, field trips, singing, playing, touring, and recording come together and are sounded, 'produced', in every sense of that word. And always we return, however much we theorise, to 'sounds like'. But that is so much greater than I had imagined. 'Efficacy' is the word I write down again, and stare at.

How then, do I inscribe my own recordings with this integrity? I am no longer concerned with the fashion or anti-fashion of lo-fi, as I was when I first started calling myself Thirty Pounds of Bone, but I want to hear myself as I heard the records I identified with so much as a teenager. I want to make that declaration of 'this is what I sound like.' But, of course, what I sound like is, at least partially, constructed. Such complexities are found in the giving of options and the ability to so minutely control aspects of production. Because now, the cassette will not suffice, and neither will the glossy magic of the higher fidelities, both of which I have on demand. Appropriately, I find myself asking, 'where am I?'

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[16] DAW: Digital Audio Workstation. (the DAW used for this research is Cockos Reaper).

The purpose of this chapter is to map out and consider methodological choices around the means and technologies of recording the practice that drives various aspects of this research. Given that the format for part of this submission is what can often usefully be framed as an 'album' or LP, the methods of its construction, as they relate to the practice of contemporary popular song and alt-folksong are necessarily brought under the scrutiny of research that marries with the theoretical and cultural contexts that run through the wider territories of discourse. With the significant fact that since the invention of multi-track tape, the methods of recording and producing music have 'acknowledged that the performance isn't the finished item, and that work can be added to in the control room, or in the studio itself', (Brian Eno in Ed. Cox & Warner 2004: 128) scrutiny of this environment and its use is inevitably of significance to my thesis.

It is important to say that despite my own pre-existing prejudices against what might unhelpfully (and perhaps inaccurately) be described as a 'professional recording studio', that 'the studio' as I had imagined it, as some kind of narrative stripping architecture, a transparent 'un-place' supposedly washed of signification, robbing me of pathos and meaning even as I sang, does not exist. Nor is there much use here in considering the mythologised, named studios, whose reputation alone seems signify certain qualities or characteristics (Abbey Road for example). I don't think even as ideas, those kinds of argument will stand close scrutiny. However, I do think that it is fair to say that no matter what the efforts are to minimise the character or the imposition of real ambience or discernable locative context in a space, the means of recording can be as great a signifier as the sound itself, from the potentially high fidelity of a 5.1 electroacoustic composition to the bland mythologies of the supposedly 'lo-fi'. In writing this, I am applying thoughts that are practical, aesthetic and ideological, and analysis of recorded music must surely reckon with these.

Previously, while making initial writings on this subject I had written this:

The studio's erasures of the outside, or even the 'here' seem as a by-product to erase the very narratives I seek to tell, or at least whatever aspect of them which had convinced me that I should pursue them. There is a sense here of having turned up to a casual social event dressed for a formal dinner and in doing so forgotten my own name, becoming a body of no sense and no discernable context.

I should have written *this* studio, for I am referring only to one. Much in the same way Roland Barthes accepts this fact within Photography:

The Photograph is never anything but an antiphon of 'Look,' 'See' 'Here it is;' it points a finger at certain *vis-a-vis,* and cannot escape this pure deictic language. This is why, insofar as it is licit to speak of *a* photograph, it seemed to me just as improbable to speak of *the* Photograph. (Barthes 2000: 5)

The writing of this text leads me to the conclusion that 'studio' is not a defensible term when considered as an idea or indeed ideal. Rather, if we consider the studio more broadly, as simply a place of gathered technologies where the recording and production of sound can occur, especially given the nature of more portable and affordable technologies now easily available, then definitive characteristics of the nature of these spaces are thrown wide open. There are no rules as to how recording or production should occur, or indeed where. It seems, on reflection, strange that I have been so unwilling to allow that the spaces I have used to record in before my arrival at a university campus were in a basic and definitive sense as much of a studio as any other 'professional' space I might be thinking of. Certainly, they have been more cheaply and simply equipped (I had to stop myself from writing 'worse' there), they have not been sound proofed or acoustically treated, but nevertheless, however temporarily, they have been studios.

The issue perhaps is one of (on my part) an assumed hierarchy of what is 'good'. What is a 'good recording'? I believe now, that the failure, in my eyes at least, of some of the recordings I have made during the course of my research and practice, stems partly from decisions I had made on the grounds of what I was 'supposed' to do with this technology. I could/ should

have assumed that a clean signal, treated with digital reverb would not achieve the results I wanted for songs concerned primarily with specific location and some kind of auto-ethnography, but I used them anyway, because I was there and because they were there. Subsequently, the presence of that technology becomes all that I can hear. There is much in production that can be done to synthesise or imply space, or even place (given the potential of convolution reverbs, use of field recording, samples, or indeed just by implication. One might consider here the use of a convolution reverb or a 'Cathedral' reverb preset), but more interesting to me and perhaps more useful, is the idea of not synthesising space, but allowing it instead to inscribe recordings as they are with carefully selected technologies that seek to be as much a part of the aesthetic and ideological meaning of the work as the arrangement, instrumentation or indeed the lyric. How much, I wonder, of Fleet Foxes (Fleet Foxes 2011) supposed authenticity is implied by the cavernous plate reverbs that mirror the desolate wildernesses of a mythologised notion of Americana? (And how much of that changes once we acknowledge the presence of these plates, analogue or otherwise, within a professional recording context?). This is something particularly interesting once we know from the record's producer Phil Ek that: 'there's no natural reverb at all. Not one single bit.' (Doyle 2011: Online) We are happily lulled and deceived by certain romances within music's making, which sometimes are told rather than heard. I might reference the media attention of the Bon Iver (Iver 2008) album recorded in some log cabin or another in self-imposed isolation, the truth of which when considered purely in the world of audio, is at best unclear. (I will exclude specific details of the story here to highlight the eventual uselessness of the 'truth' within or without the existing legend). We might also consider Efterklang's 'Piramida' (Efterklang 2012) where the use of field recordings from the deserted mining town of that name were heavily present in the album's promotion, despite relatively small musical use of them in the album itself[17]. It seems that when the means of a recording's production are audible (or just made public), then they are as necessary a part of its

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[17] A promotional video for the album can be viewed here:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiKK7ehFYtA

critique as any other aspect of its sound. If we are to give some credence to the notion that a definitive aspect of some contemporary practice of popular music production might be this very idea of 'craft', coupled often these days, with an ideological practice of the 'home-made', then the straitened circumstances of some recordings may well be worth consideration? (But this is not an argument of analogue versus digital; I would suggest that in the arena of open source software and its availability, digital has the upper hand on analogue as far as DIY recordings are concerned). I would argue rather for a use of technology that performs practically, conceptually and symbolically in the music's best interest, by which I mean a highly personal decision-making process that conforms with a methodological motive for whatever sound or aesthetic the composer requires in order to articulate to an unknown public the meanings within and around both writing and performance. In saying this I do not suggest that DIY aesthetics necessarily form a part of what is definitive within alt-folk, despite how commonplace it is. Chris T-T when asked about this, offered via email, 'Absolutely not, I think it is a red herring. They're trying to bend the definition to include their own work in the 'folk' classification (when what they really make is DIY acoustic pop/psych/indie) but exclude more establishment artists.' But he did concede, 'I totally acknowledge how damagingly sceptical this position is, by the way.' (Thorpe-Tracy 2011). This is worthy of mention though, despite the scepticism, because it is an area that is quite difficult to name, where a shared aesthetic becomes a tool of classification, and there is to that end significant evidence to suggest that T-T is wrong, but further more, I would be unhappy excluding someone like him from the canon of songs that fall within my research, because he uses a professional studio and producer when he makes records, and releases them through a large well-known label. So, we fall back towards a sense of propriety, amidst the endless greys of definition.

Ian Reyes writes that, 'A "good" recording aligns a material object with a social object.' (Reyes 2010: 325) and I have set my mind to thinking about a record that seems to do just that, but in the way I have tried to outline

above. An ideal work to consider in this case is Bruce Springsteen's *Nebraska* (Springsteen 1982). The album as we hear it was intended as a demo and was re-recorded by the E Street Band. The demo was eventually favoured over the band recording. It is interesting too, to note the sophisticated mastering process undertaken to deal with the low level of the recordings and subsequent noise on the increase of level. This is only a record of lower fidelity at one stage, not entirely on its final release. But it is none the less, a four-track cassette recording, with all of the restrictions and character that go with this, despite the mastering process attempting to eliminate some of the more problematic characteristics that we might associate with this technology, as Toby Scott describes:

> So I gave that cassette to an assistant and told him to copy it onto a good piece of tape. Then we went around to four or five different mastering facilities, but no one could get it onto a lacquer - there was so much phasing and other odd sonic characteristics, the needle kept jumping out of the grooves. We went to Bob Ludwig, Steve Marcussen at Precision, Sterling Sound, CBS. Finally we ended up at Atlantic in New York, and Dennis King tried one time and also couldn't get it onto disk. So we had him try a different technique, putting it onto disk at a much lower level, and that seemed to work. In the end we ended up having Bob Ludwig use his EQ and his mastering facility, but with Dennis' mastering parameters. And that's the master we ended up using. (Keller 2007: Online)

It is a landmark album for Springsteen, which seems to contain sonically, much that his writing attempts to inhabit. The song's narratives are those of isolated, downtrodden characters and explicitly American. There are empty roads, crying waitresses in truck stop diners, old time tunes danced to by blue-collar workers in unfulfilling jobs. The landscape of this record is neither pastoral nor urban in total, but a fusion of speeding blurred cultural and literal wilderness disappearing in the rear view mirror. It is dust and heartbreak and running away, but it is located, heavily placed, and it is folk song. Little wonder that the musical excesses of the E Street Band were shunned in favour of the bleak simplicity of the demo.

These songs would arguably still be songs of the same compositional quality had they been rendered in a more conventional professional studio context (when performed live they do not fail in their narrative purpose), but the easiness of the previous adjectives comes not entirely from the narratives, arrangement or writing (although there are many melodies on this record that seem to be a slower version of recognisable tropes within the American folk canon), but also from its sound. It is not just the enforced sparseness of the TEAC four-track Portastudio, or the particular behaviour and quality of cassette tape that brings this sound, but the aspect of wilderness, of travel and of isolation is also brought to the ear by Springsteen's use of the Gibson Echoplex (a vintage tape delay, now sadly digitised for mass consumption, with little of its original sound preserved). This echo spills over the songs liberally (and as I understand it, almost in direct homage to Suicide (Suicide 1977), in particular 'Frankie Teardrop', one of the most harrowing narratives of destitute America I can think of); it is a cold sound, in contradiction to the clichés of analogue 'warmth'. *Nebraska* is not a warm record; it is a record of hopelessness and loneliness. Springsteen's backing vocals, when they occur, seem distant in a way that is spatially staggering, hollered down a vast blackened virtual canyon of maybe less than a few inches of tape. It seems alarming that such great cavernous distance can be so microscopic and close. The semiotic signification of space in produced audio happens in an ironically tiny ontological location. Peter Doyle writes:

> If place, space and physical form were to be perceived or described in terms of their acoustic and aural properties, a rich substratum of signification might be accessed. This layer of meaning might contain, in surprisingly unproblematic form, many of the attributes of place that lie just below the surface of conscious perception. (Doyle 2005: 39)

Springsteen's album seems somehow to fulfil and successfully articulate this 'unproblematic form' of meaning. *Nebraska* seemingly manages to not just be a document of songwriting on this located/dislocated culturally floored subject, but also to sound it convincingly, to become this space (if a recording might be said to have any kind of tangible, however fluxed,

ontology). The restrictions of cassette become metaphor to the restricted lives of the subjects and the Echoplex gives image and experience in real time to the implications of landscape, travel, and emotional state simultaneously. The tunes and arrangements further place this record within both actual and implied geography and located musical tradition. This is perhaps one way in which technology (of the home-based low fidelity type and the laboratory high fidelity kind) and material conspire to make a "good" recording. There can be no absolutist statement concerning what constitutes 'good'. We must allow for the subjective imposition of what any individual may find emotive, resonant or of quality. Returning to Barthes, we might apply his opinions concerning the reduction or elevation of photographs to a generic term of 'photography':

> Looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be a primitive, without culture. So I went on, not daring to reduce the world's countless photographs, any more than to extend several of mine to Photography: in short, I found myself at an impasse and, so to speak, 'scientifically' alone and disarmed. (Barthes 2000: 7)

To return again to Barthes assertion of 'deictic' language (cited above), in this particular section, he cannot diminish some photographs or elevate his own to sit within the same notion of photography, with recording, as with the photograph, the 'good' is always dependent upon the context of its use (hence deictic). A recording is always a cultural act, with any number of motives or contexts for playback, all of which must carry their own unfixed ontologies. Like Barthes' impasse, one cannot consider a highly professional symphonic recording in the same way as a child making their first attempts at song on a cassette recorder. Though, both may indeed be wonderful.

At this point, I would like to consider the notion of transparency, or rather to think about the best way round to discuss 'transparency'. It seems to me as though we could employ the term from either direction: to convey the idea of a transparency where the presence of technology is (apparently) inaudible or not present (which perhaps has a metaphorical value, despite certain

problems of plausibility), or as though a transparent recording might openly display the media of its capture. I should stress here, that within writing and practice that discourses on this subject, it is the first of these potentials that is taken as the norm:

> This debate tends to focus on the transparency of the transduction of sound from airborne vibration to recorded medium and back again rather than on the transparency of other elements in the information code, such as meaning and while the advertisers seem to be in a perpetual state of discovering the holy grail of transparent reproduction (and have been since around 1910), 'producers' will tend to acknowledge the shortcomings of the technology they are using while still using the notion of transparency as the benchmark against which to aspire, frequently invoking it as a means by which to judge the quality of equipment, technique etc. (Prior: 27/09/2011)

This discourse of realism notwithstanding (by which we might consider the idea of an accurate and little mediated capture of 'live' sound or performance), if we begin with Simon Zagorski-Thomas's assertion that, 'the judgment of what makes a 'good' or even an 'accurate' recording is as much a culturally determined decision as a perceptual one' (Zagorski-Thomas 2005: online) then the reverse approach to transparency becomes increasingly viable. The visibility, or rather audibility of the means of production when rendered transparent in the second sense that I describe here, means that the signification possible extends beyond what is strictly 'musical' (and I use the term problematically: where does one become the other?) to allow a further reading of ideological and aesthetic factors that run concurrently to the specific narrative in the words of a song itself. For example, what we might read semiotically from the recording of an X Factor contestant would carry hugely different cultural resonance from a Moldy Peaches recording. These differences are clear and audible whether we know the context of these performers or not, and it has as much to do with sonic 'quality' as with musical style or indeed fashion. The signification of fidelity and production instantly allows a work to be culturally located, through recognisable tropes and timbres, giving any artist (deliberately or otherwise) an ideological position. This is a tangible articulation within

popular music, which can potentially be as much a part of identity and fashion and image as any other aspect of practice. Although, as Glenn Gould notes:

> But in limiting our investigation to the effect of recordings upon music, we isolate an art inhibited by the hierarchical specialization of its immediate past, an art which has no clear recollection of its origins, and therefore an art much in need of both the preservative and translative aspects of recording. (Gould 1966: 332)

Gould then asserts that in his opinion, the concert as a means for experiencing music will be 'dormant' in the 21st century. Economic factors may have undone his prophetic purpose to some extent, but that the recording has come to represent a large aspect of the 'reality' of music is undeniable. Paul Théberge goes some way towards simplifying this interdependence by writing:

> Such a premise demands that one develops an understanding of music technology as more than a random collection of instruments, recording and playback devices. Technology is also an environment in which we experience and think about music; it is a set of practices in which we engage in making and listening to musical sounds; and it is an element in the discourses that we use in sharing an evaluating our experiences, defining in the process what music is and can be. (Théberge 2001: 3)

However, if we disregard the accepted notion of transparency in 'good' recording (certainly as Gould would have us experience the western classical repertoire) and support the version I propose here that accepts, encourages and uses the audible presence of technology and media, then we start to see how the studio as compositional tool (Brian Eno in Ed. Cox & Warner 2004: 127) (regardless of its type or location) might offer us an entire and pliable resource for the construction and/or representation of sound, voice, space, place, performance, ultimately writing/ composition and subsequently meaning. Eno asserts that the studio-based composer can 'think in terms of supplying material that would actually be too subtle for a first listening.' (Ibid) in fact, composing in this way allows for a great number

of things whether subtle or not, for example the drone in 'Veesik for the Broch' is constructed from both instruments and field recordings of water at Clickimin Loch and the machinery of the boat builders at Hays Dock in Lerwick. This last field recording actually dictates the key of the song. This last is something not achievable in un-mediated composition, and only in performance after the fact. To this end, Kim Cascone reminds us that:

> After advances in sound technology gave birth to the recording studio, the record shifted from document to that of a highly crafted object of "ideal, not real, events." The final product was created by an invisible assembly line of composers, musicians, producers and engineers, who created an aura that operated at a meta-level to the star performer. The recording studio became a laboratory in which cultural artefacts were concocted; audio technology could now enhance, repair, or even create a musical performance through the fusion of science and art. (Cascone: online)

I started to consider recording as being a sort of taxidermy of performance. Production following the same sort of shape as the idealisation or anthropomorphic changes we see in the preservation of animals. I thought of Rachel Polinquin's questioning of 'Animal or object? Animal and object?' (Polinquin 2012: 5) and what she called 'irresolvable tension' and this seemed to have common ground with both Cascone and Eisenberg, the ideal set against the implication of performance and the desire for reification; music as a thing both conceptually and literally. A stuffed bird is at once a real bird and not a real bird, as produced music is at once a real performance and not (at least in the way that I record). Playing live and producing recordings become related but very different disciplines. I don't mean by this to say that recorded music is 'dead', but rather that it can be controlled and manipulated in the process of its reification to behave (or seem to behave) in ways in which a live performance cannot. I imagine for this purpose a stuffed fox in a tweed hat, smoking a pipe. The animal in life occupies its surroundings as they happen to it, but the taxidermied animal/object is dressed and arranged to suggest narrative and context in perpetuity.

On thinking of taxidermy, one must build an artefact that has at least the appearance of something living. Performance becomes a thing that exists within the artefact (and has indeed been performed), but it is at the same time a performance manufactured and constructed. There are other musicians here, and there is me. Where I play many of the parts, I cannot play them all at once, and there are things I cannot render at all. The diatonic button accordion eludes my logic for now, as do the subtleties and complexities of the bow. The underlying theme of non-place and itinerancy remain strong and interwoven through this recording method. These musicians are never in the same place as each other, and often in different places to me. There is something pleasing in remote recording, building the artefact from materials that at one time, were one kind of performance, captured, under direction, but the full composition and arrangement never heard by the performer. That is for me. I send guide guitars and versions of a part to the musicians. They fret about their performances. Scott and Al worry about their accents, and try to adjust their voices to 'fit' with mine. I ask them not to bother. I want the geographic implication of Elgin and Aberdeen to mark the route to Shetland in the songs for there, and the fluidity of place to be vocally rendered in 'The Streets I Staggered Down'. (There is something further to these two in particular as they themselves are both relocated; one to Glasgow, the other to Foshan). These people are chosen not just for their skills, but also for their locations, practices, and histories. Not one of these musicians is where they are from. Somehow, this begins to matter.

These performances can link the songs too. They are a part of the narrative. There are two recordings of Seamus: one in Belfast (the town this Tyrone man now calls home) and one from Helen's house (this last not on the song of that name, but on the 'Ballad of Cootehill'). In Belfast we find ourselves in the live room of David Holmes's home studio. I ignore the elaborate equipment within and give Seamus his guide part on headphones connected to my laptop. I leave him as he re-renders my amateur pulls and pushes on the bellows. I think now of his presence in the lyric to 'Helen's House' as much as

his performance as a part of his contribution. There is material in these dictatorial collaborations that presses forward both literal and elusive musical meaning. Those that I interview play a part here too. We talk about their practices, about folk music, about place. They are then sent their guide vocals and musical parts. In London, in Brighton, in Harbertonford they sing and play. On one occasion I allow myself the pleasure of Laurence Collyer's studio and we sing together in his shed, cluttered and obstructed by the dusty broken boxes that shape his musical expression. He, the deliberate outsider.

I imagine I can see these likely images of performances, in places familiar to me, but without my presence. Jen sings at One Cat in Brixton, Darren at his home with his dog nearby, Mary sitting in Victorian Terrace, straight-backed and narrow shouldered amongst dolls, cobwebs and white piano. Chris, all loose T-shirt and expensive coffee on viaduct road, in the house apparently previously inhabited by Christy Brown. And then there are those fiddle players, each selected for a different purpose. Stacey for Cornwall, a slowly drawn and fragile bow to sound that synesthetic nostalgia around the scent of Newlyn, and Gris, more certain, sounding the animate echo of the Cavan Fleadh, the pain of leaving the Shetlands for that second time, and the monotonous trajectory of the Maritime Line. These two I watch as they record; one in Berry Pomeroy, one in Penryn. I am glad of my choices here, and, in this instance, glad of my presence. Things must be sounded right, and timbre is the key here, as with so much of music. Again, as with those in Scotland, I intervene. I think of this as I abandon Chris T-T's vocals for 'The Ballad of Cootehill', offering myself as substitute. in the end favouring his voice for 'The Wolf on the Shelf'. It's funny how our social journey mirrors that sense of propriety (for both songs), our relationship being ironically born from my departure to the South West, when I left the town in which he remains. All these parts in the end become mine to tease out, through timbre, and through suggestions of space, volume, and arrangement, the relevant weave from which meaning might grow. My own performances furling around these remote contributions, in a way now, not unusual for the self-producing solo artist. There is no implication that this is a 'band' per se, but

they remain arrangements un-performable for the soloist. The implication of performance then, is only ever a taxidermy; object rather than animal. But they become a band, remotely, for this fixed time, reified amongst a host of me, in a blur of ontological fluidity.

And so, the 'discourse of realism' reveals itself to be a discourse of mythology. Production centres within the 'ideal', which does not necessarily mean 'best', 'cleanest' or 'most accurate' (although these terms are in this context are infinitely slippery), but rather that the choices of recording, production, fidelity etc., are ideological, political, and aesthetic all at once. The visibility or invisibility of our recording methods are powerful and potent signifiers, and as in Nebraska, we can use these technologies to convey the politics and poetics, the metaphors and meanings of music, with a potentially equal footing to the melodies and sounds themselves. In short, I would like to assert that one need not make a decision between hi or lo fidelity, (which exist to be played with), but accepting the notion that what may constitute a 'good' recording, is simply (in my case) the recording that best does its job, to embody, represent and convey the polysemic variables of meaning. So the recordings presented here fall between format and all around fidelity. Mobile phone recordings sit alongside cassette recordings. Wooden acoustic instruments play alongside 8 bit electronic devices and applications and software envelopes reel to reel. There is constant negotiation between what I have, and what I want, I do not use a 'professional' studio for the most part, favouring my own gradually assembled equipment, but I try to make the songs sound as good as I can, recognising the subjectivity of that word. I can acknowledge that 'New York Girls' By Bellowhead (Bellowhead 2010) is a 'good' recording, but were any of the songs for this research recorded and produced in that fashion, I would consider them to be outright failures. Recording a song in a clean, 'live' fashion is of little value to me here. Every production decision matters as much as every word, or note of instrumental decision. These things form a whole.

Chapter 5. Past Place

In the twist of umbilical treachery a calf muscle both taut and shaking gave way to carry me. But what she had said undid her purpose, so I went and heard the men singing with women on the commercial quay. The sound muffled brown like, and so to porter. But there were few shanties here, just the formal suggestion when performing other more popular vernacular songs. No shanties here, no Veesiks there (any more). When I think of past place, or that past place in connection with that other less graspable landscape (both literal and metaphoric here) I find that my songs are imbued with both. Whatever longing or betrayal or loss or misinformation, indeed, I should simplify; with a lack of information, a holding back, that I perceive, seems implicit within each place. I separate descriptively, and focus upon each in turn, but there are remnants of each within each. I asked a question of heritage, and the reply was simply 'probably, don't ask her.' So I turned back North with my attention and gathered the scant memory of childhood. I had chosen a route, mirroring my first action upon the boat's landing in my initial visit since we had left, where I tried to locate Harry's toyshop without referring to anything but some kind of instinct or body-memory (neither word will stand scrutiny here, but for a lack of more convincing language I'll stay with them). I went straight to it without recognising the streets. But this time I am away, I must picture my wandering, and apply my experience of that later 'then', which is now of course what it has become. Fitting, that the form of the song is one that, so far, I have only read but not seen performed. Something that I can construct, but not fully rely upon my interpretation of its workings. To see the walk that I took at different times at different ages and apply the details of both, but allowing for the gaps and changes of both time and architecture. This within the kind of song I can hear, but have not heard. I cannot copy, appropriate or directly lie in either instance, my method being so dissolved. I have heard the common phrase of 'setting words to music', but this is not what I do. I am not even sure if I

set music to words, though I like this better. It seems more often than not that words will take their prosodic shape from melody, the songwriting being something that 'happens' as it goes. These songs, of course, go more than others, in those ways, in my way that I have gone.

I have found a kind of narcissism within my work. Not something that lends itself comfortably to academic pursuits, but one that begins to lay bare the unravelling, inaccurate myth of perceived authenticity, so frequently desired within the naming or performing of folksong. When discussing this aspect of my research with a friend via email, specifically the part of this research that attempts to describe a song's relationship with a past place, I found that when questioned on the inclusion of specific memories, I had typed: 'the "fact" of them is incidental, the meaning of them is colossal.' I make reference to this sentence, as it seems to accidentally capture a small part of what can tie a song to a place, without excluding a listener from elsewhere. As such, I would like – before addressing specifically the past place that is concerned with my own research (the Shetland Islands) – to look closely at what has become a 'traditional' song that takes this nostalgic view of a place once occupied and now left far behind. 'Spancil Hill'[18] an Irish song (I will later be writing about Ireland, but this song seems most appropriate here) that sees the narrator recounting a dream of his old home, not as it was 'then', but as it is 'now'. He takes in a number of aspects of his old haunts before being awakened and finding himself 'in California, many miles from Spancil Hill'.

The song engages first hand with the experience of missing one's home but at once acknowledges and anticipates the inevitable changes that occur in

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[18] The song was written as a poem by Michael Considine in the 19th century, and is autobiographical but has become a standard for many folk singers within and without the Irish repertoire. Versions differ, and subsequently it is difficult to quote exactly from the 'lyric'. I have in this case deferred to the version that I occasionally include in my sets. (A collision of versions by Christy Moore and Shane MacGowan). A brief history can be found here, http://www.geocities.com/lorettapage/irish/span2.html (accessed on 17/02/2012)
A version by Christy Moore (1972) of this song can be found here,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWL7dKl8_eU (Accessed on 17/02/2012)

absence. Perhaps necessarily, the song is built at first around repeated traditions, the attending of mass, 'Their duty to fulfil at the little church in Clooney, a mile from Spancil Hill' and the annual fair in June, 'The day before the fair, when Ireland's sons and daughters and all assembled there.' It is only after the initial 'delight' of this that the differences begin to occur. Upon visiting old neighbours the dreamer states, 'The old ones they were dead and gone, the young ones turning grey', accepting even in his sleep the passage of time where he has been present elsewhere. It seems significant in this song that the landscape or appearance of the town is barely described; instead the focus is upon people, ageing and at last a lover left behind. Musically the song is fairly simple, containing a sequence of just three chords in an A-B-A ternary[19] kind of form: A being an A minor to G major chord progression, and B being A minor to C major to G major progression. Inevitably this is subject to all manner of embellishments, but I have yet to hear a version that radically altered this basic structure, or indeed the melody, which takes a recognisable approach to the Irish Ballad so familiar to those who engage with this type of song.

My reasons for discussing this song in particular are because it looks at the idea of a past place in a very specific way, as I briefly mention above. The use of the dream allows the narrator to explore the potential change within a place, without having to go back. The articulation of place here is deeply personal, perhaps even at odds with some approaches to defining the nature of folksong (I recall here folk singer Seth Lakeman telling me in conversation that a folk lyric could not be 'subjective'). But the aspect of change here is essential. For the itinerant (or migrant) returning to a former home must always tackle the changes that have occurred in absence, and my songs here (and elsewhere) that concern Shetland are largely concerned with this fact. The difference between the protagonist (or indeed author), of 'Spancil Hill' and myself, is that I have been back, although, only in the interests of this research, and never before. The impact of the

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[19] A quick definition of Ternary form can be found here: http://general.music-dictionary.org/Music-Glossary/Ternary_form (accessed 17/02/2012)

Shetland Islands upon my life is vast, but the relevance is not strictly to do with growing up there or being a part of the culture, but rather something I have concocted since, in reaction to newer places.

I did go back, and from what I have written since in song, or in this thicker form here, I glean some disappointment, not unexpected I suppose. I was not welcomed or recognised (and why would I have been? I made no attempt to contact anyone). But this place, these islands are where I was forged. Not biologically, but as character. Even now when asked where I am from, with a host of possible answers I always reply with the place of my birth followed with 'but I initially grew up in the Shetlands.' I have no solid or brief defence for this. We did not stay long, but they have stayed with me. My likes and dislikes, my sense of self tattooed with the islands. But strangely so, not in street names or specific views, rarely in people or event, rather it is a misted or dirty mirror. It is trawlers, quays and rock. It is coastal birds, seals and wind. It is snorkel coats and plaid and music. But more than that, most of all it is just that we left. All that I have sought out since, and all that I must acknowledge on my return that I am visiting, although much of it surrounds me now I travel there, and only to observe. I remembered being so perplexed in an English school, the size and numbers, the shocking volume of children's voices. I hated it because I could not find myself. There were no rocks, no sea, just endless buildings and trees. A glance up a solid trunk would give me vertigo, and still my legs go weak on bridges or on the higher floors of buildings. At Calgary Bay I threw myself from the dunes at a sprint, chest deep in the salt water before I had realised that I was still clothed. I saw otter prints in the beach and I almost saw myself smiling back from the sand.

Marc Augé states that, 'the fact remains that all ethnology presupposes the existence of a direct witness to a present actuality.' (Augé 1995: 8) When we suppose that the ethnology here is one of the 'self' as characterised or formed by a place, acknowledging the influence of place upon the self, then

this 'direct witness' is apparent from the outset. The 'present actuality' is more fluxed of course pertaining in this case to a remembering as well as a revisiting, and indeed a remembering of the revisiting, sited wherever that may be and not necessarily the site under discussion. I have written earlier of the isolationist nature of both the practice and writing of contemporary alt-folksong and I raise this point again in the context of Augé's discussion of the nature of the individual as it relates to culture, place, history, and ethnology. Despite the isolationist trend that I have highlighted within my practice and the practice of my peers, Augé forces an acknowledgement of the shaping and collective factors within the individual:

> [….] absolute individuality is unthinkable: heredity, heritage, lineage, resemblance, influence, are all categories through which we may discern an otherness that contributes to, and complements, all individuality. (Augé 1995: 16)

This list outlines the shaping forces of the individual. Those forces are potentially unique in some ways, and in that we approach this 'otherness', which separates, but at once is forged in the surrounding culture, collectively. He continues:

> Cultures 'work' like green timber, and (for extrinsic and intrinsic reasons) never constitute finished totalities; while individuals, however simple we imagine them to be, are never quite simple enough to become detached from the order that assigns them a position: they express its totality only from a certain angle. (Ibid: 18)

The 'totality' they express, is arguably a singular reflection of the previous list, giving said individual their particular 'angle' from which to express their culture and so their inclusion within it. And so, their inclusion disallows the culture itself a totality of its own. This being said, for Augé the individual's view of themselves and of their culture takes a more solipsistic form, in spite of these ethnographic traits. He suggests that the individual (as I have of the current folksong writer) demands or assumes a separation from other aspects of their cultural surroundings, writing that, 'In Western societies, at

least, the individual wants to be a world in himself; he intends to interpret the information delivered to him by himself and for himself.' (Augé 1995: 30) For the itinerant, this notion resonates with Yi-Fu Tuan's writing on the anthropocentric nature of 'homeland' where the importance of a place is made through people rather than geology:

> With the destruction of one "center of the world," another can be built next to it, or in another location altogether, and it in turn becomes the "center of the world." – A spatial frame determined by the stars is anthropocentric rather than place-centric, and it can be moved as human beings themselves move. (Tuan 1977: 150)

But as this 'center of the world' moves, so too the itinerant carries the formative aspects imprinted by previous places, never fully leaving one place and never quite arriving at another, making Augé's 'otherness' all the more pronounced. This state of being 'between places' is perhaps the root of nostalgic songs such as 'Spancil Hill'. It seems almost incidental to the narrator that he wakes in California, and at the same time, so consuming that he has missed the ageing of his former peers, but it is acknowledged in the first line of the song that his involvement with his old home is only a dream. The real centre of his world (himself) carries on, without that place, elsewhere. The 'individual' is formed in this case of the merging of locations, and so the missing, wanting, hating, and solipsistic history of place combine to form the emotionally geographic and cultural whole.

(The lyric of the song as I perform it is this):

Last night as I lay dreaming
Of pleasant days gone by
Me mind bein' bent on rambling
To Ireland I did fly
I stepped on-board a vision
And I followed with a will
'Til next I came to anchor
At the cross near Spancil Hill

Being on the 23rd of June
The day before the fair
When Ireland's sons and daughters

And all assembled there
The young, the old, the brave and the bold
Their duty to fulfil
At the little church in Clooney
A mile from Spancil Hill

I went to see my neighbours
To hear what they might say
The old ones were all dead and gone
The young ones turning grey
I met the tailor Quigley
He's as bold as ever still
Sure he used to make my britches
When I lived in Spancil Hill

I paid a flying visit
To my first and only love
She's fair as any lily
And gentle as a dove
She threw her arms around me
Saying Johnny I love you still
She was the ranger's daughter
And the pride of Spancil Hill

I dreamt I hugged and kissed her
As in the day of yore
She said Johnny you're only joking
As many's the time before
The cock crew in the morn'
He crew both loud and shrill
And I awoke in California
Many miles from Spancil Hill

Establishing the probable status of the itinerant involves the application of the method signalled earlier that makes selective use of Lacanian ideas. In the case of past place it is the Imaginary that will preoccupy this text as it continues. Bear in mind the 'poetic' aspect of my engagement with this psychoanalytic terminology. The relationship between this form of analysis and the research itself is one that tallies symbolically (with a small s) via the autobiographical shape of its subject or topic, by which I mean that it is a device aimed at illuminating the development of the subject.

Did I say that I wore parkas until I was thirty? I am shamed out of it now

perhaps, but maybe not. I was wearing the place; I wore Uyeasound on

my back, as though anyone would have known. It was a uniform to me

and I wore it proudly, though I never said why that I can recall. My father

made reference to it once, accurately, and I loved him for it. But it is for

these things that I choose to write this song, and those that follow. There

was the initial response, and then the considered construction of

particular form or type. I hurriedly sketched down the scant details of the

Veesik at the museum and archive, and now I attempt to build my own. I

listened and re-listened to the 'Unst Boat Song'[20] and tried to give that

flow to my own song. I looked over translations of the morose Norn

language as it collided with the Shetland dialect from stanza to stanza and

I saw different times merge to form the narrative. I allowed my walk to do

the same, planting memory upon memory. This must only be a dream,

something vague and shapeless. Recognisable in its location and its

theme, but prepared for its brevity.

Lacan's notion of the Imaginary begins at the Mirror stage; grounded in infancy where, according to Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis's definition, 'The Imaginary order is characterised by the prevalence of the relation to the image of the counterpart' (Laplanche, Pontalis 1973: 210). Rosalind Minsky opens this idea:

> [….] we first begin to take up a position, a sense of having a distinct self with definable boundaries in what he calls the realm of the *Imaginary.* But this identity is always based on an image of yourself which is reflected back from someone else, like the reflection from a mirror. (Minsky 1998: 64)

It is this aspect of Lacan's work, considering Augé's ideas around history, heritage and lineage as they relate to the individual, the notion of identity being formed through a mirrored relation to someone else which is vital to this line of thinking. If we begin, then, at Lacan's defining of the Mirror stage,

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[20] A recording of this song, with translation of the Norn lyric can be found here: http://www.shetlanddialect.org.uk/Unst-Boat-Song

he states that, 'The child, at an age when he is for a time, however short, outdone by the chimpanzee in instrumental intelligence, can nevertheless already recognise as such his own image in a mirror.' (Lacan 1977: 1), highlighting a biological necessity for the development of identity:

> This act, far from exhausting itself, as in the case of the monkey, once the image has been mastered and found empty, immediately rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates – the child's own body, and the persons and things around him. (Ibid)

This recognition of the connection between the image in the mirror and the infant's perception of its own movements signifies the beginnings of an association of the self with the image. We must be sure to understand that this stage is not reliant upon the presence of an actual mirror. The model of the mirror serves to play the part of whatever identification the infant makes in order to begin forming a sense of self. Lacan is quick to remind us of this:

> We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification,* in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago.* (Lacan 1977: 2)

Supposing that the subject 'assumes an image' that relates heavily to his surroundings (some amalgam of parents, siblings or family friends), then the assumed image – i.e. the identity of the subject – must be sited within those behaviours that relate to where they are. If one comes to associate these formative infant experiences with a place, then identity becomes, at least in a descriptive sense, fused with the place in question. However, it is important to note here that this aspect of the formation of identity carries with it a significant coda. The founding of identity within the assuming of an image 'i.e. another who is me' (Laplanche, Pontalis 1973: 210) is to base identity upon something that is not 'me', but in fact literally 'another'. This

brings into question any notion of authenticity when considering identity or the individual. Minsky also acknowledges this issue:

> Lacan rejects the idea that our identity can ever be relatively coherent or authentic. He argues that all our identifications lead only to a *sense* of identity, not an actual identity and this sense of having an identity is always unjustified and based on misrecognition. (Minsky 1998: 63)

This idea of misrecognition ties once again with Augé's questioning of the individual. Where identity relies so heavily on the (mis)recognition of outside sources, any hope for the individual's status as an independent is crushed against the tide of influence and the incorrect identification of other as self. That identity is only ever a 'sense' of itself suggests that one might carry and perform a potentially (at least to the outsider) quite flawed and self-deceiving aspect of identity, without necessarily being any less authentic than someone who ethnographically might have a much firmer claim to authenticity. Indeed, the case for both may well, in these terms, appear to be fruitless. Something that Phillipe Van Haute seems to anticipate:

> [….] one might consider the case of the analysand who spends his time in analysis giving long descriptions of what his character is really, [….] An analysand who speaks this way sets up an image of himself with which he identifies, and which he hopes his analyst will want to confirm. But both the scientist and the analysand [….] will very quickly be confronted with the hopeless character of their project. (Van Haute 2002: 84)

This seems to be a duplication of the image. The subject having assumed an image as an infant, then setting up a new image 'with which he identifies' in order to support or perform that original identification, only to find under scrutiny the implicit misrecognition. The identity is false, but no more false perhaps than any other.

The songs I write for the Shetlands are an attempt to recognise these things. From the recognition of that other to the performance of that constructed

identity. But I attempt also to acknowledge the loss, the misrecognition and the eventual acceptance of the gap between the islands and myself.

'Veesik for the Broch' is the song that most makes this chapter possible, but the other two songs about Shetland, in turn, make this song, embedding it within a trench of confession, partial memory and wanting. I will write of those other two around the Veesik. The enquiry, the research that the songs are, forces this connection with the Imaginary. In its title, 'Home Faring' at once seeks to acknowledge the gap I mention above, corrupting the Shetland expression 'Hamefarin'[21] (an occasional event where members of the Shetland diaspora return to the islands, which in my first field trip I had missed by one day). I sought, through my not having entitlement to that dialogue, to write a song as simply as possible that sings of the isolation of return; to articulate the feeling of exclusion I felt when I was once again at that place and inside that culture as a visitor. I had spent my days walking, writing and recording in Shetland, and my evenings seeking out 'trad' sessions and talking with local people in the pubs and bars my father had frequented with his friends some thirty years previous. It was on the overnight ferry back to Aberdeen that this song began to take shape. Intending initially to write explicitly about the place itself, a song that marked the returning to and second leaving seemed to force itself on me (which began the on-going preoccupation with legitimacy in terms of subject matter for songs). The song should not sound like Shetland, but it should sound as though it wants to. Returning to St Keverne, with lyrics noted roughly down from the ferry, I pushed three instruments together; two fan organs and an old 'Caravan' electric organ, and taping down certain keys on each, began working through simple chords, sifting the words through an editorial process of what was fact, and what could be discarded as embellishment. The song tries to play out through two things, what had happened and what subsequently did not.

(Take me home

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[21] Information about 2010 Hamefarin can be found here: http://www.shetlandhamefarin.com/ (accessed 20/02/2012)

Take me home
Take me home
There's no one there
Is there no one left?)
The years passed by since I had left
My heart grew hard as we went west
And I lost the view of my sweet Ness
And I never went home again
No, I never went home again

And I chased the work and I followed girls
All lover's hands and playful curls
Before shitty jobs where I was hurled
And I never went home again
No, I never went home again

And when I saw this land again
The voice I'd had was not the same
So I turned back the way I came
And I never went home again
No, I never went home again

The place I thought was still my own
Had changed so much as though I'd known
So the best advice for those that roam
Is never go home again
No, never go home again

(I was lost on the boat
I was lost on the road
I was lost in the town
I was lost in my home)

But, there are three narrating voices in this song, all internal, all contradictory. 'Take me home' scrapes against 'Never go home again' the third declaring 'I was lost in my home' and all three muse around these themes, never seeming to reconcile. The subject shaken by the fragility of the image making a flawed fiction of his character, the song is made of regret, with each voice singing a different aspect to it. I was considering something of 'Broad Majestic Shannon' here. A song reflective but contemporary in narrative 'The last time I saw you was down at the Greeks, There was whiskey on Sunday and tears on our cheeks' (MacGowan 1988) begins MacGowan's lament for Tipperary, in simple major keyed progression. His song looks back, as does mine.

Having established within myself an identity relating to that 'counterpart' (Laplanche, Pontalis 1973: 210) my absence from the islands distances me from them and so through the songs the place becomes an image, like the double exposure of a photograph. I imagine a photograph of myself and my brother and sister taken in 1981 imposed upon another where the playground apparatus upon which we sit has become surrounded by houses. This is in some sense the shape of the Veesik. Using this form of song, lost[22] but known to have had clapped accompaniment and sung in groups takes the form of the first exposure. The drone constructed of field recordings from the boat shed at Hays Dock and around Clickimin Loch where the Broch of the title sits, forms the second. The narrative follows this, being an account of a walk taken in the early 80s and in 2010 told at once, always with the recognition of being present only temporarily.

If I remember
I'm past Andrewstown
A field of rams
Where there is a broch
I am fed
I am ferried here

Brickwork gone
I'm past anyone
See the brook
Where there is a skull
I am fed
I am ferried here

If I remember
I'm past over land
A line of men
Where there is the boat
I am fled
I am ferried away

The words to this song are at the same time an attempt at remembering the past and describing the present. There is futility at the root of this. Futility of performing an identity of place that one is so removed from underscored by

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[22] No genuine Veesiks survive, but scant details can be found in the Shetland Museum and Archive: http://www.shetland-museum.org.uk

the futility of trying to revive a form of song that no one living has ever heard.

This futility is what charges the last song to be discussed here (indeed there is a certain futility in all of these songs). In writing this chapter, and the first two songs about this place, the weakness of my ties with the Shetland Islands becomes increasingly apparent, so the final job becomes to tackle this as subject matter, remembering that, as Linda Anderson reiterates, 'Lacan argued that the mirror constructs the self, that what is 'known' as the self is the cohesiveness of a reflection which the subject fantasizes as real.' (Anderson 2001: 65) What I have 'fantasized as real' is a relatively intangible thing, but the shadow cast by the Shetlands is significant, and the admission I am forced to make only in light of this research is troubling and uncomfortable.

Despite having come to recognise myself in this place and despite my having held on to that fact as a significant part of my identity, I must allow in the truth of elsewhere. 'The Truth of the Matter' seeks to address this, beginning somehow appropriately with my father's spurious claim that on Fetlar there is a piece of land so narrow, you can throw a stone from the Atlantic, across the land into the North Sea. Everything about this song seeks to confess inauthenticity in relation to the Islands, and furthermore it allows a much more literal inclusion of other musical influence, inviting a questioning of the status of any of these as folk songs. Keeping recognisable tropes and instrumentation, the song fairly reeks of Shoegaze[23], Britpop, and Lo-fi, demanding that I (or indeed the listener) pay attention to the other relevant music in my learning to play and write songs. The music that is present in all my other work is deliberately underscored here. One might question whether or not this kind of articulation is a move of apology, or defiance. Perhaps it is both, but it feels as though in order to make sense of the songs I have written for this geography my truthful place within/without it should be clear.

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[23] A concise glossary of this term can be found, with several audio examples at:
http://rateyourmusic.com/genre/Shoegaze/

I threw a stone from Atlantic to North Sea
To prove I'm who I said
I know the shape of the islands that haunt me
I'm sleepless in my bed

I wore a coat like it meant I was still there
But I was lost to time
I grew my face and I harboured my brown hair
The rock was never mine

Oh, but I won't go on
To the place that I came here from
I give myself to the tide
You know I never meant to lie

But the truth is that I can't remember
Where or how I lay
And I don't claim that the island still waits there
It's just something to say

Oh, but I won't go on
To the place that I came here from
I give myself to the tide
You know I never meant to lie

If the Imaginary might be considered to be 'a kind of pre-verbal register whose logic is essentially visual,' (Jameson 1977: 353) then this song's relationship to it as a means of describing, or at least attempting to describe an obsessive but not quite legitimate identification with a place is one of clothing, hair and landscape. Barely remembered images that seem to have been enough to serve as the foundation for an identity. A formative place, that with relocation took on a perhaps greater value than it should have. But the song is a recognition of that, a questioning of the songwriter's entitlement to claim narrative territory. This idea of entitlement continues to run through the research, as the places that follow also fall into the hole of legitimacy that faces the itinerant songwriter. There is a further question of methodological authenticity here: if the Imaginary becomes 'the internalised image of this ideal, whole, self' (Loos 2003: online source), then it differs from what is subsequently symbolised. I am aware that in writing this state I am to some extent trying to drag these songs of the Imaginary into the

Symbolic by producing the narrative in language. Particularly as the Symbolic is associated explicitly 'with language, with words, with writing and can be aligned with Peirce's "symbol" and Saussure's "signifier."' (Ibid)

Chapter 6. Place of Heritage

The Place of Heritage in this research is Ireland, which expands the notion of place into that more abstracted idea of heritage that encompasses nation. This chapter will therefore address this place from the perspective of the second-generation migrant, which introduces further complications into ideas or feelings of belonging. The songs that run parallel to this writing explicitly attempt to engage with this experience and sing of Ireland from this particular direction. As part of the method for tackling this place, I continue the Lacanian model of Imaginary, Symbolic and Real, and it is the Symbolic's relationship to language that is significant here. As Shetland provides the mirror, placing it as the Imaginary, then Ireland provides the structure in language of the formation of this subject. In the first instance, with the acquisition of language to be told, 'this is what you are' in an ethnic sense, the signification of, and subsequent performance of, Irishness is learnt not through experience, but through a linguistic telling of what remains, essentially, an abstract. To clarify this, Lacan's use of the term is well explained in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* as:

> First he uses it to designate a *structure* whose discrete elements operate as signifiers (linguistic modal) or, more generally, the order to which such structures belong (the symbolic order). (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973: 440)

These 'discrete elements' conspire with those aspects of identity informed by the Imaginary to add an ordered sense of subjectivity:

> [….] we also establish another kind of identity – what he calls subjectivity - when we begin to acquire language in what he calls the realm of the *Symbolic.* Here, the apparently fixed meanings offered us in language give us an alternative, ostensibly much more stable *sense* of identity, a psychological place where we can discover what appears to be the 'real' meaning of who we are. (Minsky 1998: 64)

From this perspective, Irishness takes on its role as part of structuring the identity of this subject through both language, and that which behaves like

language, or seems to possess semiotic value or coherence. Through inheritance of others' sense of ethnic or national pride, this itinerant, second generation mongrel orders identity through understanding and performing these signs. This, of course, takes on the aspect of fiction that any identity construction must, and differs greatly from an Irish identity formed during a life spent within Ireland.

Irishness is the confused stepchild of my identity, and in writing this down I must acknowledge that identity surely contains the conscious and unconscious performance of a host of character traits. How I wish to be perceived by myself, as much as by others, wages constant battle with geographic and cultural fact and fiction. I had tried to write about Ireland in a detached and honest way, finding myself amongst lists of sensory detail. Is this what I meant by an articulation of place? Whatever it is, it is not the sincere account it claims itself to be. To be sincere in writing this place and the places within it is to immerse the research and the songwriting in the lies and delusions, the identifications and symbols of being 'plastic'. I recall the dislocation and itinerancy of my childhood, so many houses and towns and schools; how I hated each one. My mother would forcefully say, seemingly at every possible opportunity, 'Remember that you are Irish.' (Half Irish would have been true) and my father would respond exasperated, that there was 'nothing wrong' with being English. My mother's scornful reaction to this affected me greatly and I, like so many, dissatisfied with my current surroundings, sought to identify with this other. Locating myself with an identity that was fictitious and not my own. No, that's wrong, it was my own, but it was not Ireland's. It was an identity easily performed in an English school (though I remember being fiercely jealous of the boy with a 'real' Scottish accent, any trace of Shetland in me having faded as though it were never there), but impossible for me to tell or perform in Ireland. To this day it seems to demand such courage on my part even to allow my voice to be heard there (do I rely somehow on what my mother calls without evidence of any kind, 'Irish bone structure'?). The mumble of

utterance that I form just to order drinks without the illumination that is reserved for us imposters to shine glaring and accusing upon me. Such delight in my heart to have a stranger approach me and say 'You're a Cavan boy aren't you?' before the deflation of explaining the connection. Oh! Bitter truths that I learn to swallow. In a Kilburn pub, the beer mats bore the legend: 'The Only Non-Plastic Bar in the County of Kilburn.' So the London-Irish make a claim over the borough. To a child, the legitimacy of blood seems enough to also make a claim.

For Lacan, it is language that fixes the subject as something functional:

> [….] the *I* is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject. (Lacan 1977: 64)

This particular building of subjectivity (and its related performance of identity) has a complex structure, which is best explained through this examination of the Symbolic. If we consider that:

> By welding together Freud's theory of the unconscious and Saussure's linguistic theory of semiotics, Lacan makes human identity into nothing but the self which the world of language eventually enables us to speak. In fact Lacan regards all forms of identity which lie outside language and signification as false, and reserves the idea of 'subjectivity' only for our identification in language, the best we can achieve. (Minsky 1998: 213)

Irishness, then, might be considered semiotically. Thinking of Irishness as a signifier must be done, in this case, from the perspective of the second-generation migrant, where the term is linguistic, rather than 'lived' in any tangible geographic sense, although, through language and displacement, lived nonetheless. To clarify, for Saussure:

> A language is a system of signs expressing ideas, and hence comparable to writing, the deaf and dumb alphabet, symbolic rites, forms of politeness, military signals, and so on. It is simply the most important of such systems. (Saussure 1983: 15)

This 'system of signs' for the subject is a specific set of signifiers that fall within the group of signifiers that form a code of 'Irishness', and their resonance as such is what, in a Lacanian sense, forms this subjectivity. These signs, though, are more various than simply words, and Saussure usefully elaborates, 'By considering rites, customs, etc., as signs, it will be possible, we believe, to see them in a new perspective.' (Ibid: 17) All three songs and much of the preceding and following text of this chapter deal with the response to an assumed signification of Irishness, and its subsequent failure (but detailed set of rules), when set against an actual life. If we concur with the notion that 'The language system is value producing and, hence, meaning making' (Thibault 1997: 53) then much of what is signified in the code of Irishness (and its subsequent subset of signs) might be considered to be what makes up a detailed set of narratives upon which subjectivity in this case is formed. As such, the songs and their related written research are explicitly involved with these signifiers and attempt to extract some aspect of truth in their articulation of Ireland in terms of this experience. All of them are written, performed and produced in the shadow of an assumed inauthenticity (much like the songs for Shetland, though of a differing nature), but also in the shadow of a learnt or imposed linguistic frame that comes with the consistent implication of ethnicity.

There is a definite chronology to these three songs, just as there is in the songs for the other two fixed places: the initial song and its findings, through to the more laboured articulations brought about by the model that has become most beneficial to the completion of this work. 'Helen's House' is a fairly straightforward description of a trip to Ireland, tied with a visit to a friend there. I had gone to immerse myself in Irish sessions at the Cavan Fleadh, and met with box player Seamus Harahan (who features on these recordings). The starting point of writing songs in the early stages of the research as being simply to respond to my surroundings exposes a glaring fact relating to my relationship with this country. While I am well versed in its ballads, drinking and rebel songs, and have been since childhood, I do not

feel, when within it, a part of its culture. Or, at best, a fraud, masquerading as one of its own. Subsequently the lyric of this song is the narrative of a man who is following a series of events in his surroundings, but without a context of knowing them. The words of the song form a flow of details noted down during the trip. Landmarks and events pass through the tongue of the singer as he is taken on a trip through the fleadh and back to his friend's house, until the realisation, 'I'm not gone. I'm not from.'

Help my feet
Make me sleep
Belfast, goodbye

Hold my arms
Make me calm
Take me to this island, found

I was looking over but the bus to Enniskillen was gone
I ditched the car in Cavan and I followed the box playing man

Echoed bark
Yews in dark
Grey castle sky

Trees gone by
Drink is why
Wake for my hands in the lake

I was looking over but the bus to Enniskillen was gone
I ditched the car in Cavan and I followed the box playing man

I'm not gone
I'm not from
I'm not gone
I'm not from

Soothe my eyes
Now goodbye
I'm gone south now for a time

Coming back from the tour that forms the subject of 'The Snow in Kiel', this song details the failure of the language, and so - the status of - Irishness when encountering its actual geography. Initially wanting to respond to Ireland from a diasporic perspective, I was left with only detail that had little to do with Irishness at all, but rather a description of my physical state

coupled with literal experience. So, the song folds in on itself, losing a sense of narrative coherence during the verses offering isolated phrases, with a minimum of adjectives. The narrative of the chorus is one of aimless resignation. Both verse and chorus echo musical tropes of Irish traditional music, although deferring to harmony rather than the unison playing normally associated with the kind of music. The middle eight takes the form of further narrative and structural introspection, seeming to give up on any attempt at sounding aspects of Irishness lyrically or musically, extending the resignation to one of at once recognition of dislocation from the place, but also, of remaining.

Musically, the song is formed around a finger picked guitar in the DADGAD scordatura tuning common within (not just) Irish folk tunes and until that moment of change described above is a jaunty telling of good times. The key is D major, useful for both the Irish accordion and uilleann pipes, both of which supply the drone in echo of the music encountered at the Fleadh itself. The musical presence of my sustained practice remains, in electric guitar and the more generically pop sound of the middle eight. The 'tradition' is knowingly buried in the rendition of traditional tune 'Na Conneries' which sits all but inaudible in the mix, disguised as arrangement, skewed and edited to fit the phrasing of the song. There is a recognition here of one type of perceived inauthenticity and the lack of actual immersion in both land and music that I have always found so significant plays out in this song and forces both acknowledgement and methodological shift.

> When attempting to locate oneself in a state of frequent relocation, the search for something solid, for an idea of 'home' became greatly significant. That home is not necessarily a house, village or town, or even a country, but an 'idea' of something, perhaps nationhood, perhaps it is books, or a sense of belonging in some sub-culture of musical trend. Most likely it is an uneasy combination of things (certainly in my own case). I must write here, with the assumption of lived or learned knowledge. But still, there is a knowing self-scorn in this, there is great sarcasm within

my family when we refer to the 'Motherland' and a certain inward mockery in the adoption of words like 'grand' and 'gee bag', that very quietly locate us as partially, 'elsewhere', or more accurately, 'there', or more accurately still, 'not here'. Families have rules. There are certain unspoken expectations amongst mine that relate specifically to the performance of Irishness, some of them playful and thoughtless, some of them sophisticated and strict, intangible to any outsider. But Ireland is a presence and a signifier, though it does not make us Irish. It makes us something else altogether. The spectre of heritage notwithstanding, the cultures and contexts bleed heavily and the individual takes position somewhere within both 'real' geography and symbolic meaning.

A key issue here is belonging. Belonging as it relates to culture, community and geography. The exclusion of the second-generation migrant from the belonging entirely to anywhere is the thread that binds these songs. Jane Fernandez writes of belonging:

> In this sense, "belonging" implies an acceptance of what is and what is not. When we speak of belonging, we speak of a certain kind of denial: of a shortfall or lack, of exclusion, of a gap between wholeness and meaning. In this sense, "belonging" is managed within a complex space that is pregnant with desire, frustration, pain, hope and arguably, disconnectedness. (Fernandez 2009: 29)

This notion of 'acceptance' is amongst the most intangible here. There are aspects of both choice and of force within this issue. To throw in one's lot with one sense of belonging is to deny another, but by the same token, to be told you are part of a heritage you have never seen is to magnify this 'gap' and 'disconnectedness' and, at the end, find oneself ultimately a part of neither place. It is at root, in the absence of geography or community, language that is of significance here, indeed if belonging is 'a series of contesting stories someone else writes for us till we choose to write our own', (Ibid: 30) then for the second generation Irish person, ethnicity lies almost

entirely within telling. The subsequent performance of identity or heritage becomes then, structured like language itself, with recognisable semiotic meaning. Actions, words and ideologies all contain a strict and loaded aspect of meaningful value, from perhaps an adoption of the greeting 'howiya' over 'hello' to a political sympathy to Irish republicanism to the wearing of 'Celtic' tattoos (most noticeable amongst the younger generation of 'Boston Irish', but also apparent in myself), all seem to develop a sense of meaning (in a loosely linguistic sense) 'Irish'. This is not to suggest that other identities are wildly different, but rather that the relationship to place in this instance is disfigured by absence, and geography replaced by language, and that which behaves as such. Indeed, when interviewed on the subject Pogues rhythm guitarist Phil Chevron is quite clear in his assertion that the Pogues 'could never have happened in Ireland',(Share 2006: 25.34) and that:

> The Pogues needed to happen from the diaspora [….] It's like there's two Irelands, there's the people who live on the island, and there's the people who went away, or who are second generation and very often that gives a different point of view on the culture, on what it means to be Irish. (Ibid: 25.52)

The looking back at heritage told only in language but taking the shape of place, is a particular diasporic symptom affecting the development of the subject and giving birth to a particular type (in this instance) of Irishness. A floating disembodied identity that is as flawed as the mythology of authentic Irishness itself.

'The Ballad of Cootehill' is, again, an account in some respects of fieldwork undertaken during this research, but this time with specific allegorical purpose. The partially fictionalised account of my trip to Cootehill (the town of my Mother's origin) stems initially from an encounter at the Flatlake Festival in County Monaghan (at which I performed in August 2011) where a friend of a friend described me as a 'Cavan boy'. The subsequent conversation and then field trip to Cootehill, County Cavan have grown into this song.

I met a girl
While I was on the way
She said 'Well, you're a Cavan boy
At least, that's what they say.'
I had to tell her
That I hadn't been there still
She said 'Oh then we'll go there
We'll go to Cootehill.'

We went to the town
Where my Mother's house had been
But they had knocked it down
And there's nothing left to see
I was feeling empty
And as nothing took its fill
She said 'This was your Mother's home
And your blood is in Cootehill.'

The girl and I
Went idle through the town
I said 'You know there's little here
That tells me where I'm bound.'
But she just laughed and left me
Alone and with my will
So then I started taking in
All the bars of Cootehill.

Waking in the road
A pavement for my head
'Remember who you are.'
My Mother always said
But I didn't grow here
And I am a stranger still
And I am not the man to say
That we are from Cootehill

Musically, the song apes the forms and melodies of recognisable popular Irish songs such as Peggy Gordon, Spancil Hill, Black is the Colour or indeed, The Parting Glass (which closes the song, sung by the Cavan Male Voice Choir at the Flatlake Festival). There is a deliberate irony in this, but also an acknowledgement of my musical connection to Ireland as the secondary foundation to my understanding of Irishness. The lyric of the song also uses the direct style of past tense 'telling' particular to this type of song. As such, this song, (indeed, all of these songs for Ireland contain an

aspect of this) is the most conscious pastiche of recognisable folksong forms. There is a sense of the song itself playing a part in the set of signifiers relating to this place, but it must make clear the relationship between this inherited ethnic notion and the fact of being in the place, further abstracting the familiar trope of this kind of song about being separated from homeland to one of never having seen the homeland at all before; a new experience rather than a return. The girl plays a dual role as both a real person that I met who also signifies that ghost of Irishness, which deserts me upon arrival at this significant place. This character has (appropriately enough) aspects of aisling, the woman embodying Ireland in the dream or vision poem. D. G. Wilgus identifies three types of aisling: the 'fairy-aisling', the 'prophecy-aisling' and the 'allegorical aisling', the last of these being most useful here described as, 'the fusion of the other two types in that a beautiful female visitant, an allegorical figure representing Ireland provides a message of hope.' (Wilgus 1985: 256) The difference here is that the woman represents not the land itself, but rather, the forlorn promise of ethnic status. As such, her departure is significant. This song's form and sound seeks to articulate both location and my own experience of Irish song, but absolutely does not aim towards inclusion within that canon. Its not doing so is very much the point.

My musical relationship to Ireland begins, ironically, in the car, places shifting and passing as my supposed heritage came with us, packed alongside whatever luggage there might be. It was not the jig and reel of Ireland's instrumental tradition, but songs that were played. Always songs. Those hearty ballads voiced into significance by Luke Kelly, Ronnie Drew, Christy Moore and Shane MacGowan. How I might tell of my love for these voices, as though I never had. Frequently they were songs of leaving, or missing, or being away: 'When I first came to London – I landed on that Liverpool shore – Left the girls of Tuam – I wish I was back home in Derry' and it is these songs that fill me still with a sense of belonging, an empathy that seems to comfort in both directions. Now I imagine myself on the pilgrimage back to the 'ancestral home' or

whatever, before realising that I have done this many times, each time

getting closer to the frightening epicentre of historical beginnings,

Cootehill, County Cavan. My songs for Ireland really begin here, and the

account may be truthful and not truthful at once. They will voice these

older songs melodically and thematically, and somehow they will tell this

relationship, somehow knowing that this is always about language,

telling and name, occupation having no foothold here. And so I sing

truthfully and lie with integrity.

I wish to introduce here the writing of James Joyce as a model by which to view Irishness as a means of describing place. Joyce's writing of Ireland and more specifically Dublin as it related to his alter ego Stephen Dedalus is certainly of some use here as a model to which to compare my own articulations. There are two significant essays I would like to draw attention to, both to be found in *Joyce, Ireland, Britain* (2006) edited by Andrew Gibson and Len Platt. The first of these 'The Greater Ireland Beyond the Sea: James Joyce, Exile and Irish Emigration', by Wim Van Mierlo, tackles Joyce's exile and its wider meaning within Irish culture and diaspora. Recognising that Joyce had cited his exile 'as a condition for his art' (Van Mierlo 2006: 178), itinerancy and its cultural and personal consequences are significant for Mierlo and indeed for me as a songwriter. As I read this essay it was easy to see some common ground between the picture of Joyce and Irish Migrants painted here, and my own (however self-mythologised) attitudes towards Ireland and other places left behind. Mierlo writes:

> Joyce's backward look toward the country of his birth – his ongoing interest in Dublin, its people and their affairs, and his nostalgic re-creation of his native city in his work – compares to the migrants' lamentations on the lost homeland; these expressions of homesickness offered "so pervasive and unifying a sentiment" that it became quite commonplace for the Irish emigrant to identify his situation with that of the exile. (Ibid: 178).

This begins to touch on themes common to itinerants and migrants that relate back to aspects of Tuan's *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977). Mierlo continues:

> The migrant never loses one place completely, nor embraces the other absolutely. There is always a middle passage, not a radical break between two places but a transition or movement from one place to another, similar to the two points on the map of Stephen's exile: "Newhaven-Dieppe, steerage passenger. Paris and back". (Ibid: 180)

This 'middle passage' is of interest to me; in the songs I write about, place will frequently and necessarily be from a perspective of looking back or from the view of visiting and travelling. Being in between and not quite belonging are of increasing significance within the songs of this research. The next essay I wish to mention here, 'Nation without borders: Joyce, Cosmopolitanism, and the Inauthentic Irishman' by Vincent J. Cheng picks up on this theme as it relates to the perceived 'authenticity' of a national identity. Cheng interestingly does not site the 'inauthentic Irishman' necessarily outside of Ireland as one might expect in the realm of the 'plastic paddy'[24], but rather, this figure is placed simply within the city:

> This binary of the rural/local versus the cosmopolitan/global plays itself out in a number of parallel variants, each side of which can be conveniently glorified or vilified: country versus city; peasant versus urban dweller; folk culture versus modernity and metropolitan culture; rude primitives versus suave and urbane city dwellers. After all, the term *cosmopolitan* contains, as part of its etymological identity, the *polis*, the city – and thus also the various qualities of metropolitanism associated with "cityness". (Cheng 2006: 212)

What I refer to as 'itinerancy' is similar to what Cheng calls 'cosmopolitanism' although he highlights the political manipulation of 'wandering' or 'homelessness'. He also points out the sense of

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[24] This is a slang term. The Urban Dictionary defines it as, 'A person who retains a strong sense of Irish cultural identity despite not having been born in Ireland or being of only partial (if any) Irish descent; generally used in reference to Irish-English or Irish-Americans.' http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Plastic%20Paddy (30/01/11).

'inauthenticity' that goes with the cosmopolite, describing this distrust as an 'anxiety of national identity' (Ibid: 219). (This issue of authenticity mirrors that same issue when considering folksong and this same 'anxiety' carries through to the practice of folk music, despite the paradoxical scholarly nature of its current practice). Anxiety is extended and increased through migrancy and separation, and as Aiden Arrowsmith writes:

> If migrancy destabilises identity, problematising spatial and temporal coordinates, then such ambiguities of migrant identity are in many ways compounded for the post-diasporic second generation. (Arrowsmith 2000: 35)

Arrowsmith takes on the cultural position that I might be said to occupy, describing the shape of an identity that is at once familiar to me, that shameful sense of being outside of two distinct cultures. In doing so he quotes Liam Greenlade:

> They belong completely to neither one culture nor the other and are caught between their parents' heritage and their present context, rendered invisible and inaudible from the point of view of recognition. (Ibid: 35)

I would suggest that this sense continues to be magnified if the 'present context' is frequently shifting. I introduce the aspect of shame here, because in not belonging comes difference, but in the attempt to belong comes the implication of fraudulence. As the migrant is dislocated, their children become 'hybrids' and as such are 'doubly inauthentic'. (Ibid: 35) An issue that is further magnified, when a child is of mixed parentage (as I am). If these children become victims of parental nostalgia and grow to consider themselves always in the 'wrong' place, then this inauthenticity becomes problematic to those who occupy the 'right' place:

> These 'plastic Paddies' are implicitly seen to be unfit to belong within this 'we Irish'; unfit to claim the conveniently undefined 'authentic Irishness' upon which such arguments unwittingly rest. (Ibid: 36)

The last song to discuss here is 'Mother This Land Won't Hold Me'. Again, there is a sense of pastiche, the song initially takes the form of the unaccompanied sean nós ballads as it narrates one of the field trips I made to Ireland. Aside from these pastoral, geographic details though, the song is bound up in what has been claimed, and the song's words weave around the assertion of 'I was told'. The articulation then is of the mismatching between linguistic supposition, and geographic experience. The numbing, disappointing sense of being where one has been told one should be, but with the estranged motherland remaining a stranger. The anthropomorphised land shouting its indifference, where the Bann is just a river, the land just land, but the body within it, still wholly institutionalised into the subjectivity of its inheritance, inescapably so.

As I was driving
Along the river Bann
The banks were low and green

Through trees and hedges
The roads and farms
The mile on mile that I've been

I called it hers
And I was told
Where she grew
And where she was happy

But I was outside
Always playing my part
I said 'Mother, this land won't hold me.'

So I went walking
By the side of the lough
My thoughts were wrong and black

Through reeds and water
All behind the dogs
I lost the way that went back

She called me hers
And I was told
But I stayed
A West Country baby

Oh! How I hated

Both sides of the fence
I said 'Mother, this land won't hold me.'

The song is in three distinct sections, the first a cappella with the just the sound of the road backing the voice, a mimicry of heritage. The second introduces the Pogues-like instrumentation of what MacGowan calls 'Paddy Beat' (Clarke & MacGowan 2001: 193) where a rock band form merges with Irish instrumentation like banjo, accordion, bouzouki and bodhran, in a generational skip, a nod to migration. The third section remains lyrically mute, beset by the intrusion of big distorted heavily reverberated guitars, in a further generational leap. The form of this ballad muddied and obscured by the imposition of the sites of migration, giving purpose to the double meaning of its refrain, the subject neither embraced nor constrained by Ireland.

Chapter 7. Present Place

Cornwall takes the third position in this research. It is the place where I live, the current epicentre of my life. This makes it the most difficult place to discuss and the most difficult to 'occupy'. It is a place that I have come to live in relatively recently, though my parents have been in East Cornwall for over a decade now, and my brother in the most westerly part (also quite recently). For the vast majority of this time, I have been elsewhere. I never ventured as far west as I now live, save for one childhood holiday, when most of the family was living in the Black Country. The place seems to have happened to me gradually, like an incoming tide, and it is in here, in Cornwall, that I am now, and I have brought myself, my identity, to it. Cornwall is encountered only when this is pushed aside, by weather, by touch, by event. Beyond this, the geography has the filter of past over it, a past that I put here. The songs for this place must reflect my status of living here *now*, but not *before*. In seeking a precedent in other relevant songs that articulates present place, particularly from the perspective of a subject that has arrived, rather than being from there, I seem inevitably to arrive at 'Transmetropolitan' by The Pogues from their first album *Red Roses for Me* (The Pogues 1984). This song is most certainly about London. It is a fast paced and aggressive tour of key parts of the city, all name-checked through the stanzas. The song is urban, and it is sited in sound as in language. The opening section of the song manifests as a romantic accordion line played over a fast approaching reversed reverb of MacGowan's first line, which charges toward the listener in onomatopoeic fashion. The arrival of which signifies the start, proper, of the subject's trip through the city 'From the dear old streets of King's Cross to the doors of the ICA.' (Ibid) As the song continues, what is increasingly clear is that the place is, for the subject, at once home, and not home. The status of being not native is clear, despite having 'been here for a long time, and we'll be here till we die', (Ibid) the song's subject is underscored as Irish, and defiantly so. A sentiment cemented within the song's lyric by the Joycean reference 'with a KMRIA' (Kiss My Royal Irish Arse) (Ibid).

What is significant here is that despite London being the present place for this narrator, and the city, its landmarks and the activity therein comprising the material for the song, it is the past, in terms of heritage and previous place that provides meaning. London, for this outsider is made from just that experience, being an outsider. The music itself, while suitably brutal and urban, promoting a continued sense of momentum as the narrative crashes through geographic reference, is built from a musical sense of Irishness. The instrumentation including tin whistle, banjo, and beer tray (beaten about the head) confirms this as much as the melody, arrangement and lyric. The subject's identity as a migrant, or as an itinerant is superimposed upon the place, and it is through identification with this identity that the city becomes meaningful. The song is made from the acknowledgement of difference. As a person not native to Cornwall, the songs I write here must also make a case for themselves in this recognition.

I went to record one of those last, waning, working harbours that I have always been drawn to. The gruff hum of the inboard engine, the keening of the gulls, the avalanche of the ice machines, and the rushing hiss of the brush. But it seems it was a geological and visual aspect that lent itself to my writing. The song is preoccupied by the rock that gives the town its shape, the skeletons and keels of the fishing boats, the plant life and the colour. And so the words and music sit against this ambient recording as though to 'ghost in' or replace what is missing from the language of the song, the instrumental choices seeking too to perform this function, aping both the amateur fiddle groups and the brass bands that I come across here. (I had just been listening to a Salvation Army group outside the old bank in Penzance before walking across to Newlyn). It seems from the words I have given this song though, that I do not quite believe myself.

Newlyn is the kind of place I had thought that I had lost. Entirely familiar, but never before seen, giving a sense of déjà vu. It is a new site of olfactory

memory. The bracken damp and heavy in the air, as though I should be

somewhere else entirely, somewhere I know.

'When I smell bracken, I am lost'.

But do I 'know' any of these places? To drag out my memories is to find
the narrative of my life altered. To question what I had thought to be fact
is to be corrected. To visit the geographies of my past is to be surprised.
To inhabit the geography of my current life is to be elsewhere.

As my presence here in Cornwall is coloured always, by where I have been, this is a prominent component of these songs' make up. 'A Song for Newlyn' deals explicitly with preoccupation with the 'image'. The constant negotiation between lived experience of the present with the overlap of the Imaginary. The narrative of the song describes being at Newlyn harbour and finding only the ghost of Shetland and the Western Isles there. This Proustian effect is brought about (as described above) by the scent of bracken, which I have long found disorientating. Much like the first trigger for memory in Proust's text, catalysed by madeleine cake dipped in tea:

> No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. [...] And suddenly the memory revealed itself. (Proust 1966-72: 58)

We can also see this technique employed explicitly in the Danny Kendall song 'My Lover's Arching Back' (Danny Kendall 2012) where songwriter Ben Murray describes a persistent dislocation from romantic attachment instigated by being 'Under Proustian attack from my lover's arching back' (Ibid). As in my own song, this 'attack' removes the narrator in someway from the Real, the least graspable of Lacan's orders. The woman in Murray's bed, like the Newlyn in my own experience becomes only the current frame for the image. There is a strange security in this, the Real being for Lacan, 'traumatic' (Minsky 1998: 62). Indeed, the Real, given the

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nature of the other two orders becomes almost impossible to think or to live consciously. Stephen Ross offers:

> The difficulties that arise from trying to define the real point directly to its nature and to the nature of the other two orders against which it is set. Insofar as it is "impossible to imagine" and "impossible to integrate into the symbolic order," the real is utterly unavailable to the very categories of thought and articulation by which humans organise their worlds (both mental and physical). (Ross 2002: online source)

The 'impossibility' of being within the Real is key here, and is why Cornwall can serve as the metaphor here. Cornwall is the location, but the subject (me) is entangled wholly within the Symbolic and Imaginary, a host of elsewheres. Ross continues:

> The salient point here is that the real, though never directly encountered (except perhaps in death), is everywhere felt in the radical contingency of daily life, that it forms the lie-giving truth that underwrites both of the remaining orders, the imaginary and the symbolic. In their basis upon and opposition to the real, then, these two latter orders have it built into their very fabric (if only by the vehemence of its exclusion), and we are compelled to read any disruption in either order as potentially an irruption of the real (even if it is masked in some way). (Ibid)

And so the continued presence of the Real is felt in the song, the intrusion of the brass band into the musical arrangement is a nod to this, as is the field recording of the harbour itself; that which I cannot usefully score. If the Real can be briefly described as 'the dream that is interrupted by a knock on the door.' (Ibid), the knock being the Real, then musical or sonic 'intrusions' into songs are a useful way to attempt to articulate this, the field recordings and arrangement in this instant comprising a further metaphoric value, beyond Hayman's idea of 'dressing the set' (Darren Hayman interview 2011: 26.00). Although, the narrator is left inarticulate at the end, with nothing tangible to say of the experience that is not corrupted in some way by the image and by language, all that is left is 'It was green.' This says nothing accurate of Newlyn at all, hence the song's (and the following song's) descriptions of

materiality, whether musically or lyrically, all three of these songs take materiality and the imposition of previous places and meanings as thematic cores. Rosalind Minsky clarifies this notion of the Real, thus:

> In Lacan's view, where meaning and signification come to a standstill there is nothing except the intractable, unsymbolizable quality of 'the all' or totality, the materiality of the world, trauma, psychosis and death. This is what Lacan allocates to the realm of what he calls the Real. (Minsky 1998: 62)

And so we find, inevitably that the other parts of this research intertwine to obscure and interrupt the work on Cornwall. Newlyn simply plays physical host to myriad layers of self-imposed narrative:

> Identity becomes nothing more than the endless accounts of the world and ourselves that we can create as personal narratives within the structures of language. (Ibid: 62)

These 'endless accounts' are a useful way of considering the relationship of all of these songs to place, but in this instance, 'A Song For Newlyn' seems to articulate only this. As I went there to write about that place, I found that I could only say of it, that I can say almost nothing, save how it relates to other experiences of place. This, itself, becomes the narrative of the song.

Love, was I dreaming
Of the rocks that the town's in?
When I smell bracken, I am lost

And then, was I watching
The wood that you ride in?
When I smell diesel, you are lost

When they ask me what I seen
When they ask me I'll say
It was green
It was green

This song seems then, to echo Minsky's notion that:

> The real is what we come up against, the obstacle we stumble over – and miss. In an ultimate delineation, the Real beyond image and symbol is finitude. (Ibid: 47)

And 'A song for Newlyn' does indeed stumble here, Image and symbol taking precedence, not allowing any tangible engagement with the Real, but rather layering themselves over the present landscape.

For this reason 'The Maritime Line' attempts to exclude memory and other places from its narrative, however improbable an outcome this may be. But the song must acknowledge the difference between 'real' and 'Real':

> Lacan's Real is not the basic reality of science to the "real" world as distinguished from the scholarly or theoretical world. For Lacan, in the enigmatic formulation already cited, the Real is what we miss: it is the encounter with chance, the ineluctable luck of the world-child's game played with itself; it is uncountenanceable, the inconceivable wonder that things are as they are and not some other way. (Babich 1996: 47)

The song then, takes on this 'inconceivable wonder' as material. It is a trip through undiscovered territory. To some extent a sensory exploration of the present that hopes to capture, aware of inevitable failure, this aspect of what we 'miss'. We find then, within this song, attempts to engage with physical property, cultural activity, weather, wildlife, sound, and geographic construction, all of which serve only to further sever the subject's grasp upon the place itself. The result is one of occupation but a dislocated one. The song, necessarily, was written on the first night of arriving in a new town, with little pre-existing knowledge of the place. The key of the song (based on a hydrophone recording of the hum from Falmouth Docks, which on that particular night was an F), the guitar parts and the words are all attempts to describe, simply, the events and feelings of that evening. But again, when venturing out to begin the song, it is elsewhere that initially occupies my attention.

'At the early age of thirty-eight, me mother sent me west. Get up, says she,

and get a job. Says I, I'll do me best.' (Moore 1987)

So this is my new town. I don't know why, but as I stood there, staring at the becalmed natural harbour, and listening to the hum of the ferry, this is the song that came into my head. Songs do this sometimes. They creep up on you unexpected, from years ago and for unfathomable reasons. Some hidden catalyst sparking a recognition or connection, bringing a previously seldom thought of melody to some cortex or lobe, its language returning as though it were your own name to step, incautious, from the tongue, familiar, and so, forever to have a new association. For me today it was this song, this folksong made for the airport at Knock, that will now always remind me of this most recent move to a room for me and my work in Falmouth. Such a long way from those fields in Ireland, where I stood just once, in a dream, and I swear, the Holy Virgin never appeared to me. No matter how I willed it. But I did see the airport. I wonder if the real one actually looks like that?

Where the songs of others contain for me, just one listener, so many of my own inscriptions, assumptions and narratives, is there any value in my attempting to declare a specificity in my own, for the listener to find? I have never felt, or been dictatorial in the stories I try to tell. I have remained, at least in part, ambiguous, allowing inevitable further pictures to be etched over mine. I can clarify the vagaries, but I cannot 'tell' in my telling. I read about 'exchange' between performer and audience, the 'rules' for which must be 'established' and I think that this might be my role. Bring a sense of something, of place, and then leave it there, as 'the knock song' was left for me, and for whoever else that might find it. Music's 'polysemy' freed up for the inscription of others. Future histories. And so I go home and try to score the rain in the harbour with a guitar, in the key of the quay.

If I make the claim though, that this song is an attempt to describe reality that is not to say that it is within the Real, and too, that the Real is ever-present is not to say I can write it:

What matters is the structural disruption to the order of the phenomenal world brought about by this experience of sheer contingency. Our understanding of this relationship between contingency and order is facilitated by the opposition of the real to reality. Simply put, the real is that which is utterly unsymbolisable, while what we call reality is that particular order of the phenomenal world imposed by the use of symbolic structures (i.e. language). (Ross 2002: online)

'The Maritime Line', then, is a resignation to this idea. Even in the exclusion of other places from the song's narrative, Cornwall itself, as this model demands, eludes me in any sense other than the material 'now', but even that is full of the previous.

And when I said I was here
Always I'm thinking of there
And did I wish it was different?
And did I wish it was different?

But now I live
But now I live on the Maritime Line

And when I go through the door
Forty one steps from the harbor
Oh! Did the rain keep on coming?
Oh! Did the rain keep on coming?

But now I live
But now I live on the Maritime Line

I heard the streets come alive
The moment that I went inside
Seabirds and songbirds alike
All end up flying down the Maritime Line

And when I said I was home
I meant that I'd roam through the weather
Oh! Did I wish I knew someone
Oh! Did I wish I knew someone

But now I live
But now I live on the maritime line

While the song is also an articulation of the sadness, loneliness and anticipation of being somewhere new, a familiar feeling for the often

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relocated, that story serves as allegory to the previous reading. It tries to sing the futility of experiencing somewhere without the imposition of memory, image, language and structure that we bring to any new home. Or as Minsky writes:

> Our view of the world can never be uncontaminated because of the deluge of pre-existing meanings through which we are compelled to perceive the world which stands before us. (Minsky 1998: 62)

The third song, 'The Wolf on the Shelf' continues Minsky's theme but becomes focused upon the current home. It doesn't venture outside, but rather plays host to the collection of objects that I placed within Cornwall. Again the outside, the extended notion of place, Cornwall is present as a constant interruption of the song. In this instance it is the rain and wind as it pushes against the static van that I lived in. Beneath this and the more standard musical arrangement, reverb and oscillating analogue delay mimic the weather, and a heavily reverberated piano a quarter of a tone sharp, creating a backdrop that disturbs the flow of the song, but which is intangible and difficult to place. The words of the song are essentially a list of belongings that serve to make a dwelling a 'home', the aspects of identity and subjectivity that are performed as material or object. These objects, when given a kind of voice confirm the location's virtual irrelevance leaving the objects themselves to define the place. The narrative denies fixed location as being important, declaring 'I am never home, I just have 'things''. So, while the metaphor of the Real beats against the walls of the caravan, the subject becomes concerned with its interior and having made the realisation that it is the 'meaningful' objects that make the home by providing the images, signifiers and symbols to order it, ironically the plea is to stay, to stop moving. While the materiality of the location is present throughout, there is enough to keep it at bay, outside. In this, past place and the place of heritage become enough for these songs to play out their articulations, mindful of the Real, but aware of its ungraspable nature. In short, if Cornwall plays the part of the Real, then meaning, as ever, is supplied by the

Imaginary and Symbolic, played totemistically by the contents of the caravan.

The weather beats violent against my shack, bringing the night flecked
with hopeful lights, flickering through rain as the wind announces. I sit
and consider the nature of my home. A shell, situated as it is, here. But
it is not the here that makes it mine, but the totems, and objects, that fill
it. The significant gifts and pictures, the things worth keeping for
whatever sense of belonging they provide. I set up a microphone
amidst the storm and start to list the things, as they observe in passive
reproach. Then I sing the list to life and somehow I keep returning my
gaze to the wolf on the shelf. A plastic ornament with a miniature banjo
tied with string to its back given to me as a portrait. It serves, likes
everything else here, to remind me that it is everything I brought with
me that spells the narrative of home, intruding on, and corrupting my
experience and expression of this barren county.

The deer's head on the wire
Below the face benign
The wolf on the shelf
And I am home
Whatever I find there

So what? The words say
On the wall
It's quiet here
Because I am home
Wherever that is now

(I'm just trying to ask you)
Let me stay
(Oh won't you let me stay?)
Let me stay
(Oh won't you let me stay?)
This time

The hare's eye tells me
I b(r)ought everywhere with me
I don't see now
And I am never home
I just have things

(I've been trying to ask you)
Let me stay
(Oh won't you let me stay?)
Let me stay
(Oh won't you let me stay?)
This time

This song then, is the inevitable conclusion of the other two (perhaps even the preceding eleven songs). From the failed attempt to engage, with its surprising invasion of the olfactory image, and the resigned nostalgia of journeys and homes past, despite the banishment of their names and details, I come at last to the somewhat desperate listing of, and discourse with, the symbols that can alone afford me any sense of place or belonging, no matter the geographic coordinates.

Chapter 8. Places Between Between Places

The experience of place when touring is the most skewed I know, and so when considering the in-between, my attention naturally turns to that most transient of practices. The travel is the only constant here, landscape, audience and set change as the musician passes, blinking and removed, over the map. I remember the familiarity of the hotel rooms complicit with the chains and franchises as they dot around the major routes in and out of towns and cities. Waking up I would feel as at home as I ever do, before realising that this is not the same room as yesterday. It is never the same room. This also applies to the service stations, but oh! The efforts I have made to visit the one with the lake, as though the presence of swans were the antidote to the crushing experience of another roadside sandwich. It seems as though touring is like a geographic binge, putting the distance behind, always behind, without ever stopping to look. So the experience becomes station upon station, garage upon garage, bridge upon bridge, blurred suburb upon blurred suburb, sound-check upon sound-check. Even as I write this, my words seem to mimic the galloping aspect of the passing landscapes, a list of not-quite-landmarks that are never remembered outside of their generic descriptions, passing the eye too fast to focus on the detail. I am sorry to say that even the gigs begin to turn into each other, I could not tell you what venue I met a person in, in Berlin, in fact, perhaps it was not Berlin at all, but Hamburg, or Kiel. There are, of course, stand-out shows that stay present like lost lovers. How fondly I recall the night in Nottingham with a whole audience in Halloween fancy dress, while the panic of weeks of nightly gigs crawled up my body as I fought to get through one last night of someone else's songs. I needn't have worried, my hands had long overtaken my brain to find their own way through each musical phrase leaving me to my neurosis and my wild eyed, exhausted gaze out to the back of the room. The scene delighted me, even as the blackness came around my eyes like a faint.

In addition to the three specific places of focus in this work, there is also the in-between. So much, for the itinerant and for the practising (touring) songwriter, lies between places. The journeys are significant and their status set large against arrival and leaving, as it is the relationship between the various destinations that shapes the relationship to place. Methodologically speaking, it is the in-between that joins (as it does in actuality) the places that I am attempting to write about. This slippage of place is one where the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real come together, and reveal themselves present in each of these geographies (but in a skewed and altered structure). Indeed it seems possible at this stage that none of these places, despite their being occupied (or not) fully escape a liminal state, no geography entirely itself, and none of them able to exist here, within these narratives, without the presence of the others. They become just one cartography of this subject, a singular and unique map of this one story. I note how much of the material generated during my research - despite a specific focus on one or other of the three selected places - seems to deal at least in part, with absence, with leaving or returning. Indeed, with the imposition of one place over or into another through memory or experience. Next to that then, must be the journey. It is as though my songwriting has become an auto-ethnographic act explicitly catering to its subject.

Let us consider the practice of touring as a microcosmic version of the transient nature of my life. And in this model we find a condensed rendering of the emotional state of the itinerant, but taken through the aspects of contemporary culture that finds us immersed within Marc Augé's ideas around non-places. Touring encompasses a routine of motorway, airport, train, road, service station and venue without ever really engaging within the journey's destination. Even this research has been carried out with large chunks of time spent between the sites of investigation. The aeroplanes, ferries and roads that link the focal points of my studies become as significant within the overall narratives as the places themselves. They seem to provide ample metaphor for displacement and the tours undertaken during this process mimic in miniature a life of frequent transit. There are songs included within this submission that seek to address this in-between,

the issue of moving, the dislocating experience of touring. This is as much a document of the performative process of the research as an acknowledgment of the untold places absent from this writing. Indeed, as Augé states, 'Place and non-place are rather like opposed polarities: the first is never completely erased, and the second never totally completed.' (Augé 1995: 64) These places that lie in between are incomplete, sketches of partial experience, unfinished maps without compass reference but as significant a cultural total as any explored space.

I can think of no experience of mine that is so placeless but placed; we talk of tours by the names of towns and route them carefully. So many locations visited without learning or even seeing anything of them save for the ways in and out and the venue itself (and how long do we sit in the shut rooms poking at the rider while the engineer un-loops cable after cable? We wait only for the daily thud of the testing kick drum, for then, we have begun). Home becomes the splitter van or train or car, moving onwards each day to the next group of strangers who listen and applaud in the pre-arranged fashion. We become like so many performing hermit crabs. Empty rooms or full rooms, in the end it makes no difference save for the potential earnings from the sale of albums. I do not mean that to seem callous or uncaring, but rather that touring is fast and the details get lost in the motion. Think of the view from the locomotive window, the landscape unfocussed by the speed of travel and the rivulets of rain on their diagonal trip across and down the glass. I might see a group of deer grazing in the middle distance, but they are gone even as I register their presence. And still, the tour does not seem like work as I had always imagined it to be, there are no set hours, no (or few) days off, the tour does not pause for fatigue or illness, one lives suspended without fixed point, save for the forty or so minutes it takes to be onstage and the bizarre twilight of meeting and greeting through bloodshot eyes that follows, longing for a bed. But just as it begins, it stops and suddenly I am

relocated, home. And everything I recognise seems to belong to somebody else for a time, before I re-join my own life.

Augé observes that:

> Non-places are the real measure of our time; one that could be quantified – by totalling all the air, rail and motorway routes, the mobile cabins called 'means of transport' (aircraft, trains, and road vehicles), the airports and railway stations, hotel chains, leisure parks, large retail outlets, and finally the complex skein of cable and wireless networks that mobilize extra-terrestrial space for the purposes of a communication so peculiar that it often puts the individual in contact only with another image of himself. (Ibid: 64)

It is just this measure of time, this accumulation of points of non-arrival and the abstracts between them that make up the touring experience and also the itinerant experience, albeit in slow motion, that the songs concerned with the in-between try to articulate. The two of these songs that have lyrics begin at notions of momentum, of movement. Despite the very different sound of each, these songs are built from travel and motion. But they deal with two almost paradoxical feelings of this, which are, of course experienced at once. 'The Snow in Kiel' with the numb, almost static sense of the landscape passing by in rail travel and 'The Streets I Staggered Down' with the frantic confused lurching of physical self, the collision of experience that is encountered on tour.

Strange then, perhaps, that this is my favourite activity. I dare say that if I could, I would do it indefinitely. The relentless movement, and the nothing of it all seem to suit me. How inviting is the made bed in the beige of the same old brand of hotel with the shared artworks and the continental breakfast (did you know they use the same pictures)? Speed me from the Tunnels in Aberdeen through Fibbers in York, the Leeds Cockpit, where ever. Bring me to my old friend the Albert on Trafalgar Street then on, somewhere un-trod and unsung. Touring is perhaps a microcosm of my relationship to the other, larger geographies that make

up the rest of this work, and indeed the others that I have excluded in favour of those more significant to what I imagine my narrative to be. Each day a snapshot in miniature of the whole, and so songs fall out behind me like a trail or sheep path, follow the placeless back to the place while I sing the journey. Stepping from the plane or van or train, the experience is a particular brand of Otherness, similar one supposes to the business class constant flyer who goes from arrivals to office and back so soon to departure lounge, but different too in context and culture, these kinds of pilgrim (us and them) remain apart and alone, prostrated by the going on, for now. One day I will be home, and I will have written it down. Then, when I start to move again, it will be these stories that I sing. It will be the bars and cafés that I never knew that name of, the tracks between cities, friendly people that question me, the other singers. These will be the stories of the songs, to show that I never once quite arrived.

'The Snow in Kiel' tells the truthful narrative of a 2010 German tour, where I was ill, but had to play regardless, the snowfall had been heavy and in Kiel and Leipzig was particularly deep. I had been mindful of this aspect of the research while travelling by rail across the German countryside, an unknown landscape I would never visit properly, passing away outside the train window, my physical position or posture remaining constant, but the geography always different, and yet, the same. It put me in mind of the Papa M song 'Many Splendored Thing', Where Pajo sings 'I live my life on the road. The view is never changing, Just the viewer's mode.' (Pajo: 2001). This is a most succinct way to describe this experience of 'the road'. My own song in response to this tour is an attempt to describe this kind of travel, the arrangement a translation of the gathering momentum of the train, without speeding up. Rather, the music thickens and the percussion, when it arrives, doubles the onomatopoeic mimicry of the rails in the banjo and guitar parts. The legato chord organ ghosting in the passing landscape, as that is the song's preoccupation, the passing of that which is only glimpsed. The song's lyric then tells the reflection upon the tour itself, or rather, the partial experience of places quickly left behind; a fleeting look at venue, after party

and musicians sharing the stage, mirrored by the view flying past. These songs encounter Augé's notion that:

> Space, as frequentation of places rather than a place, stems in effect from a double movement: the traveller's movement, of course, but also a parallel movement of the landscapes which he catches only in partial glimpses, a series of 'snapshots' piled hurriedly into his memory and literally, recomposed in the account he gives of them, the sequencing of slides in the commentary he imposes on his entourage when he returns. (Augé 1995: 69)

So, what's a long way
If I am tired
And distance lies to me?

And when I was streetward
On my own
In the snow
That was knee deep in Kiel

How my chest aches
I was sorry
For my voice
That breaks over tracks

How the land flies
Wheels on ice
And where am I?

It passes by
It passes by
It passes by

And while I'm out singing
The cities stop
Where I'm not any more

And then Saint Paul is calling
Where she does songs
And I am gone
To bars underground

How my feet hurt
I can't speak
And I'm not anywhere

I wish, oh! That I would sleep

While the land flies
Past my face
Place on place

They pass me by
They pass me by
They pass me by

'The Streets I Staggered Down', while remaining in this area of discourse, takes a different position in describing this experience. It also broadens the territory to take in places that are not simply a part of touring, but occupy a transitory status in my life. For example, 'Shin Bone Alley' is in Wotton Under Edge in Gloucestershire, where my father spent a brief time as curate. There is also 'The Talbot' (a reference to Ye Olde Talbot Inn) in Worcester, one of the few buildings I remember from my time there. This song focuses on momentum and travel, but from the point of view of the emotional and physical blurring of distance covered, an articulation of geographic confusion rather than the landscape itself. The music is fast and relentless, and everything is there to suggest a forward momentum, from the quick rolled drum fills to the marching bass, to the ascending accordion motifs, the parts interweave to give no respite to this movement, save for one quick draw of breath after the 'middle eight'. Lyrically, I attempt to retain the same sense of movement and confusion by colliding a series of context-free memories of this kind of travel, without resolving the narrative of any of them. Events take place in four different countries, over several years of touring, with as few details as possible. The chronology of these events is out of order with the exception of the return home, 'I fell down from the car, just past Crows An Wra'. It is a song of speed, travel, and confusion, one that seeks to tell the experience of being a working practitioner of this music. Indeed Augé's analogy of possession seems most appropriate here to describe the loss of, or dislocation from identity asserting that the traveller (or touring musician in this case) 'tastes for a while – like anyone who is possessed – the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing.' (Ibid: 83)

I took a left off Moore Street
To who knows where, and
Remembered shin bone alley
Where she got scared

How many steps did I climb?
To find some small rest
From all the times I lay down
Before I left?

Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
On the streets I staggered down

Lost friends in Barcelona
Behind the main drag
Made new on Karl Marx Allee
So few I had

Then headlong down the High Street
We left the Talbot
From fights outside Rock City
Back to the Fal

Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
On the streets I staggered down

It's night all on the home straight
What is the last day?
I fell down from the car just
Past Crows An Wra

Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
On the streets I staggered down

To take touring as a model with which to deal with the in between or non-places, is appropriate not just because I am a touring musician making practice-based research, but also because touring is in direct engagement with Augé's ideas. Grant Boswell writes that:

> Augé argues that by making remote distances and places accessible to us by travel or by electronic media, supermodernity compresses space, changing the scale of things such that the world can fit into one's vacation or living room. (Boswell 1997: online source)

This compression of space allows the musician a huge geographical outreach in terms of practice, but within the strange expanse of Augé's non-place, and as such, the experience becomes one 'in which the unfamiliarity and expanse of space is compressed into the familiarity and knowability of place.' (Ibid) However, it is the travel that concerns us here. The in-between that occupies these two songs is the very essence of non-place. Boswell continues:

> Because the traveller passes through places to a destiny without taking notice of the placedness, or locality, of the place. That is, a traveller in an airport, on an airplane, or on the freeway passes through or passes by places - places that are in fact places to the residents - without experiencing them as places. The traveller's experience is reduced to a textually mediated substitute, a sign or billboard indicating that somewhere is a place with historical or cultural significance if one were to stop and actually traverse its socially encoded space. Instead supermodernity bypasses places en route to elsewhere. (Ibid)

There is another kind of in-between here: that of the musical in-between that is inevitable when considering work within this field of alt-folk. It is not traditional music, though it draws heavily from it, nor is it entirely something else. Geographically, these songs all display various aspects of music from various places. In this sense, on account of the acknowledged inauthenticity at play, the itinerant nature of the narratives, and the musical genre that the work inhabits, everything here belongs to the in-between. 'How We Make a Mongrel of the Archipelago' is a track that seeks to embody this kind of

'betweenness'. It is the work on the album that seems in the first instance to 'sound' like folk music. Its rhythms, instrumentation and melody all appear to mimic tropes of traditional tunes. It is a piece of music that attempts to force the listener's hand into describing what they are hearing as folk music. Indeed, in this regard it would be difficult to call this piece anything else. However, upon closer inspection, everything about this music is, in a formal and strict sense, 'wrong'. The key is G major, largely uncommon within this kind of tune on account of the key of tuned instruments often used to perform them (concertinas, button accordions, uillian pipes for example); indeed, even the guitar and banjo must be capo'd on the fifth fret in order to perform this work (and tuned to an open D scordatura tuning). The melody does not conform to jig, reel or hornpipe structure, although it does contain some of their characteristics. The emphasis on the first and third beat resonates with the hornpipe, but it lacks the dotted and subsequently swung nature of this kind of tune, '- it's notated as a dotted quaver followed by a semi-quaver it's really played as a quaver followed by a semi-quaver.' (Hume: online) Despite its dancelike structure, rhythmically, the tune is not a true kind of those recognisably structured dances we find in the traditional music of the archipelago in question, and although we find formal experimentation within recent folk songs, for example the jiglike form of 'Little Beggar Girl' on Richard and Linda Thompson's 'I Want to See the Bright Lights Tonight' (Thompson: 1973), which in its middle part becomes an actual jig, before returning to its song form, the intention here is to make a tune that demands to be referred to as folk, but which has no real ties to either traditional form or a specific geographic trope in music. There is also the invasive introduction (as with all of these songs) of reverb-heavy, distorted electric instruments, allowing newer forms or musical signifiers to weave amongst the seemingly traditional. This kind of approach to the in-between functions both as a reflection upon territory and also on the definitively hybrid and postmodern nature of this kind of practice, it is explicit here, but plays a part throughout the arrangement of these songs.

As I draw towards the conclusions of the written part of this thesis, the in-between seems to take some kind of role throughout all of its chapters, from

definition, through place, production, writing and musical style. There is a pervasive liminality throughout this work that the research (lived, read, written and sung) demands in order to articulate a sincere response to any of these places and themes. And it is this that I must now explicate in order to bring this work to a close.

Conclusion

Having made this work, it falls to me now to make what conclusions I can, if indeed there are any to be pulled from this strangely, but unavoidably, introspective text and collection of songs. Turning my head to the left I see the drawn-out vista as Penryn stretches towards the estuary of the Fal, which itself then follows onwards into the sea. The sea that links all of the territories I have tried to write about, as the writing links them too, playing in its way the role of the water. I consider that the making of this thesis has been as itinerant an exercise as the life that weaves through its methods, taking in Dartington, Totnes, St Keverne, Falmouth, Sennen, Penryn, four European tours, several UK gigs, festivals in Ireland, field trips to explore and document relevant geography and landscape, as well as those places where others have made remote contribution including Glasgow, Inisherk, Foshan, and London. That, and the frailty of my belonging to place, coupled with all of those other sites that remain excluded by name here, find me always, wherever I am, or what ever part of this text I revisit, in fact, at that last, *in-between*. Never anywhere. Throughout, I have pondered and re-evaluated folk's (even in this 'alt' form, its most twisted offspring) complex relationship with authenticity. The term I might never fully manage to absorb or explain. The words that come back to me now from these pages: integrity, lie, inauthentic, dislocated, truth. They remain so large, so monolithic. As mysterious now perhaps, as when this enquiry began, but changed for me too. There are insights now into this mystery, where before there was only opinion and puzzlement. Realising as this work took its course, through all three particular modes of writing, that the issue so often becomes one of legitimacy and entitlement, and that those early intentions of writing a place become unworkable, and that rigid methods of composition render, in this instance, practice as research, fruitless. A gamble is made in allowing myself to write songs that allow for all potential contradictions, and allow too for whim and that thing we call intuition. I have constructed a field through the appropriation of ideas from other fields, and the songs,

as concerned with the self as they are, have directed this study, and then
in turn each other, pushing towards articulation that can be shared, and
empathised with. The sky outside the window darkens as I sit at this latest
desk, and consider the word that forms a reckoning: contribution.

In researching the potential defining characteristics and status of
contemporary alt-folksong and its roles in the articulation of place, I have
developed and adapted an on-going set of methods within songwriting and
written research using three various modes of writing in tandem as a form of
practice-based research to inform written research and vice-versa. As stated
earlier in this thesis, these things happening concurrently have been an
important methodological strategy; my thesis is not comprised of practice
accompanied by a subsequent report, nor is it a body of writing from which
practice is then undertaken. I am aware of the potential problems of practice-
based research, particularly when the practice is that of popular song
concerned with autobiography. I am aware too, that in choosing to write
somewhat freely within this topic, it is possible that the engagement with
place becomes questionable from a certain perspective. To write
autobiographically about a place puts the outcome in danger of solipsism, or
places the thesis too far into a fathomless and unanswerable place of
subjectivity. Indeed, at the outset of this project I had envisaged a particular
and constrained approach to composition relating to the particular tradition
and/or landscape of each location. However, it quickly became clear that this
particular method profited very little in learning how alt-folk might play a role
in the articulation of place. Rather, it would have remained simply how a set
of rigid compositional methods can be used to respond to a location. This
distinction is most important. It is quite plausible to employ a set of methods
whereby the place in question is used to dictate structurally, or materially the
nature of the music. It is plausible too, to appropriate particular musical trope
from each place so as to engage within the produced work with the particular
tradition and heritage of the different places as they have developed. While
ghosts of these methods do remain within this thesis (the sean nós
introduction of Mother This Land Won't Hold Me, or the instrumentation of

The Ballad of Cootehill for example) these methods do not profit, in and of themselves, a rigorous enough outcome to stand up as research into the alt-folksong's engagement with place. Nor do these methods profit a sincere collection of Thirty Pounds of Bone songs dedicated to finding an answer to my research questions. So the chosen methodology becomes the most appropriate, notwithstanding the potential hazards of autobiography. The theoretical context here provides a model by which these outcomes of song, reading and writing find a place within knowledge. I have had to become comfortable with my songs' status as research, and allow for them to begin answering questions about alt-folk and articulations of place, because they are both of these things.

The initial, now abandoned, songs led me to a different approach, one where it is my relationship with place that falls under scrutiny, where autobiography becomes a method, over which the song's narratives can invite identification from the listener. The music's relationship to the tradition, necessarily, remains tenuous throughout. There is no attempt to write 'in' the tradition. Indeed, that is not the purpose, and the presence of the prefix 'alt', which at one stage, I hoped to discard, becomes a potent signal of the nature and limits of the field. The part of the thesis which is dedicated to the attempt to make a working definition of the kind of practice that I am involved in (evidenced by instrumentation, production, and those chapters devoted to definition, recording and the making of meaning), forces the thinking and the songwriting to consider particular themes relating to a kind of authenticity, to eligibility, and to a legitimacy of narrative. The claim that my work, and that of some of my contemporaries is not folksong but some other, newer, related practice further strengthens the need for this kind of focus. It is perhaps here that a contribution to knowledge might be most easily located. The thesis contributes to the growing body of alt-folk through the album, but the album's writing and the surrounding research bring into question several assumed characteristics of folksong which relate to the oral, the aural and their transmission, also in question is the noun 'folk' itself and its contemporary (mis)use. Questioning these things allows for an interrogation of ideas of

both preservation and appropriation of tradition and how context, place and the performance of identity might inform a practice such as mine.

Given this focus, what came to the foreground in attempting to autobiographically map place and life in this way, whilst tracing the efficacy of this thing we call alt-folk, the emphasis becomes more about the subject's relationship with place than the place itself. In aligning oneself with the notion (beginning at Heidegger) that 'authenticity amounts to establishing and maintaining a genuine selfhood' (Mulhall 1996: 123), then we must concede that 'the fluctuations of individual desires and dispositions cannot form an adequate basis for it.' (Ibid) Although, within these songs, it is the use of these 'desires and dispositions' as key components of the narratives, that lays the foundation for a kind of authenticity. So, the real issues are those mentioned above (authenticity, entitlement, and legitimacy, as they relate to narrative), leading to the conclusive belief that in order to make (in this instance) authentic articulations of place, the frailty of identity and a definite inauthenticity in claiming a place, actually must become the material matter of the songs themselves, revealing a particular, but not surprising irony in the consideration of making new folksongs. The problematic aspects of the definition of folksong as outlined by Boyes (1993), Gammon (2008) and Harker (1985) suggest that a recognition of alt-folk as an atavistic and postmodern practice is inevitable. And the practice addressed here, whether it is my own, or other contemporary work included in discussion, seems consciously or not to concur, with an often wilful transhistoricism, anachronism and a hybridity of form suggestive of this characteristic aspect of the practice.

There are further things to pick up on here relating to the practical work presented in this thesis. The iterative methodology demands a reflexive compositional approach, and the fact that this is the research of one individual demands a particular relationship to collaboration and to recording and production. The songwriting has had to respond to written and read materials, and as such, the freedoms usually in place for the writing of an album have been restricted somewhat. Furthermore, I might well have

employed a much looser approach to the contributions of other musicians outside of this research, allowing them a great deal more freedom as to what they played or sung, or indeed how they played or sung. The album's status as research within my particular set of methods means that it was important to maintain a dictatorial hold over the performances and parts of other players. Musicians were sent only guide tracks to play or sing along to, and the majority of these were carried out remotely. None of the contributors heard the complete arrangements until the album was finished. There is strength here in terms of the amount of control one can exercise over the outcome of the recordings. What is used, where, how, at what place in the stereo field, and at what volume are all left entirely to the composer's discretion. Although, this being said, there will always be a question of what might have occurred had I assembled a band, and recorded as an ensemble. Not that there is regret. I am a solo artist, and my practice has long been built on a multi-track set of methods, with the majority of the work being played by me. Furthermore, the conceptual strength in the remote and displaced set of musicians is useful in enforcing a musical itinerancy that marries with the narrative travel. In trying to answer the questions raised by this thesis, I have adopted a model of three significant places, and it is these that must retain priority over the pleasure of playing with others.

Within this comes the addressing of the subject's relationship to these places, as a tenuous and easily breakable thing. I can make no claim to belonging to any of these territories, nor to any other, but the relationship in an autobiographic sense is fixed. It is fixed though, from the position of outside. I have this relationship to them, and as such, they are not mine, and I am not theirs. This is why I used sources concerned with Lacan's Imaginary, Symbolic and Real as a way of framing my relationship to the chosen places. It is through our negotiations, both as infants and in later cultural activity, with these three orders that our identity becomes knowable to us, though as Minsky writes:

> Through our identification with, that is, investment in the certainty and coherence that these meanings seem to represent, we can

> gain a sense of having an integrated identity. We feel defined and buoyed up by these meanings which we experience as 'real'. (Ibid: 64)

However, it is important to note that this 'investment' is, for Lacan, based on misrecognitions:

> Lacan argues, therefore, that our conscious identity, expressed through the rational categories of language with which we parcel up the world, is always bogus and false. Ultimately, he suggests, the identity we achieve in language in the Symbolic - consciousness and culture – is only another reflected identity without substance, like that with our mother and all subsequent identifications. (Ibid: 65)

The frailty and 'bogus' nature of my cultural identity can be traced through the routes of my geographic heritage, and the brevity of my engagement with these places make the misrecognitions inherent in my performed identity easy to find. All places become then, for the itinerant subject here, between. Between each other and elsewhere, in an ongoing tapestry of dislocation. For the songs to maintain any efficacy it is this that they must articulate. So in the end, these do become songs of *where*, which inhibit the possibility of songs of *here*. Always there is the intrusion of memory, of image, of experience. The songwriter fills the songs with these things; fragments of detail, losses, relocations, and wishes, running parallel with those direct descriptions of surroundings. This list suggests itself as a list of inseparable attributes so these attempts at articulation, the narratives as hybridised as the music. The atavism of the subject and the atavism of the musical form, work together as a writerly strategy becoming method: production and form all become metaphor to the purpose of the project. The thesis is at once an identity performed and an identity built. Integrity becomes favoured over literal truth in the face of autobiography's inevitable fiction, understanding that a truthful account is not the same here as the truth itself, which given the nature of subjectivity must remain an idea, rather than an attainable state.

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Appendix 2 Lyrics

Veesik for the Broch

If I remember
I'm past Andrewstown
A field of rams
Where there is a broch
I am fed
I am ferried here

Brickwork gone
I'm past anyone
See the brook
Where there is a skull
I am fed
I am ferried here

If I remember
I'm past over land
A line of men
Where there is the boat
I am fled
I am ferried away

The Truth of the Matter

I threw a stone from Atlantic to North Sea
To prove I'm who I said
I know the shape of the islands that haunt me
I'm sleepless in my bed

I wore a coat like it meant I was still there
But I was lost to time
I grew my face and I harboured my brown hair
The rock was never mine

Oh, but I won't go on
To the place that I came here from
I give myself to the tide
You know I never meant to lie

But the truth is that I can't remember
Where or how I lay
And I don't claim that the island still waits there
It's just something to say

Oh, but I won't go on
To the place that I came here from
I give myself to the tide
You know I never meant to lie

Home Faring

(Take me home
Take me home
Take me home
There's no one there
Is there no one left?)
The years passed by since I had left
My heart grew hard as we went west
And I lost the view of my sweet Ness
And I never went home again
No, I never went home again

And I chased the work and I followed girls
All lover's hands and playful curls
Before shitty jobs where I was hurled
And I never went home again
No, I never went home again

And when I saw this land again
The voice I'd had was not the same
So I turned back the way I came
And I never went home again
No, I never went home again

The place I thought was still my own
Had changed so much as though I'd known
So the best advice for those that roam
Is never go home again
No, never go home again

(I was lost on the boat
I was lost on the road
I was lost in the town
I was lost in my home)

The Streets I Staggered Down

I took a left off Moore Street
To who knows where, and
Remembered shin bone alley
Where she got scared

How many steps did I climb?
To find some small rest
From all the times I lay down
Before I left?

Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
On the streets I staggered down

Lost friends in Barcelona
Behind the main drag
Made new on Karl Marx Allee
So few I had

Then headlong down the High Street
We left the Talbot
From fights outside Rock City
Back to the Fal

Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
On the streets I staggered down

It's night all on the home straight
What is the last day?
I fell down from the car just
Past Crows An Wra

Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
Keep my eyes on
(The streets I staggered down)
On the streets I staggered down

Helen's House

Help my feet
Make me sleep
Belfast, goodbye

Hold my arms
Make me calm
Take me to this island, found

I was looking over but the bus to Enniskillen was gone
I ditched the car in Cavan and I followed the box playing man

Echoed bark
Yews in dark
Grey castle sky

Trees gone by
Drink is why
Wake for my hands in the lake

I was looking over but the bus to Enniskillen was gone
I ditched the car in Cavan and I followed the box playing man

I'm not gone
I'm not from
I'm not gone
I'm not from

Soothe my eyes
Now goodbye
I'm gone south now for a time

The Ballad of Cootehill

I met a girl
While I was on the way
She said 'Well, you're a Cavan boy
At least, that's what they say.'
I had to tell her
That I hadn't been there still
She said 'Oh then we'll go there
We'll go to Cootehill.'

We went to the town
Where my Mother's house had been
But they had knocked it down
And there's nothing left to see
I was feeling empty
And as nothing took its fill
She said 'This was your Mother's home
And your blood is in Cootehill.'

The girl and I
Went idle through the town
I said 'You know there's little here
That tells me where I'm bound.'
But she just laughed and left me
Alone and with my will
So then I started taking in
All the bars of Cootehill.

Waking in the road
A pavement for my head
'Remember who you are.'
My Mother always said
But I didn't grow here
And I am a stranger still
And I am not the man to say
That we are from Cootehill

Mother, This Land Won't Hold Me

As I was driving
Along the river Bann
The banks were low and green

Through trees and hedges
The roads and farms
The mile on mile that I've been

I called it hers
And I was told
Where she grew
And where she was happy

But I was outside
Always playing my part
I said 'Mother, this land won't hold me.'

So I went walking
By the side of the lough
My thoughts were wrong and black

Through reeds and water
All behind the dogs
I lost the way that went back

She called me hers
And I was told
But I stayed
A West Country baby

Oh! How I hated
Both sides of the fence
I said 'Mother, this land won't hold me.'

The Snow in Kiel

So, what's a long way
If I am tired
And distance lies to me?

And when I was streetward
On my own
In the snow
That was knee deep in Kiel

How my chest aches
I was sorry
For my voice
That breaks over tracks

How the land flies
Wheels on ice
And where am I?

It passes by
It passes by
It passes by

And while I'm out singing
The cities stop
Where I'm not any more

And then Saint Paul is calling
Where she does songs
And I am gone
To bars underground

How my feet hurt
I can't speak
And I'm not anywhere

I wish, oh! That I would sleep
While the land flies
Past my face
Place on place

They pass me by
They pass me by
They pass me by

The Maritime Line

And when I said I was here
Always I'm thinking of there
And did I wish it was different?
And did I wish it was different?

But now I live
But now I live on the Maritime Line

And when I go through the door
Forty one steps from the harbor
Oh! Did the rain keep on coming?
Oh! Did the rain keep on coming?

But now I live
But now I live on the Maritime Line

I heard the streets come alive
The moment that I went inside
Seabirds and songbirds alike
All end up flying down the Maritime Line

And when I said I was home
I meant that I'd roam through the weather
Oh! Did I wish I knew someone
Oh! Did I wish I knew someone

But now I live
But now I live on the maritime line

A Song for Newlyn

Love, was I dreaming
Of the rocks that the town's in?
When I smell bracken, I am lost

And then, was I watching
The wood that you ride in?
When I smell diesel, you are lost

When they ask me what I seen
When they ask me I'll say
It was green
It was green

The Wolf on the Shelf

The deer's head on the wire
Below the face benign
The wolf on the shelf
And I am home
Whatever I find there

So what? The words say
On the wall
It's quiet here
Because I am home
Wherever that is now

(I'm just trying to ask you)
Let me stay
(Oh won't you let me stay?)
Let me stay
(Oh won't you let me stay?)
This time

The hare's eye tells me
I b(r)ought everywhere with me
I don't see now
And I am never home
I just have things

(I've been trying to ask you)
Let me stay
(Oh won't you let me stay?)
Let me stay
(Oh won't you let me stay?)
This time

Appendix 3

Email Interview with Chris T-T. 11th January 2011.

I'll begin by saying that for me there are at least two different strands to your songwriting, and I'd like to focus on just one for now, that being the kind of writing on '9 Red Songs'. It is this, I believe coupled with your solo touring that has given you status as a 'folk' singer. The implication being actually quite different to that of a songwriter like me, your inclusion in under the classification of folk, to me, seems to come from the aspect of 'telling' in your songs. They are politically engaged and firmly located within the present and within something that for these purposes I'll call 'fact'. To what extent would you agree with this, and would you describe yourself as a folk singer? If you would, what do you think the criteria are for this?

Any definition like that applies to the songs (or at least, I'd like it to apply to the songs) but not necessarily to me. I have a problem with self-definition, since it's never truthful but always a spin based on context. For example there are occasions when I'd call myself a folk singer but only if I felt it made me sound cool and 'other' – for example to non-folk people such as rock or indie people. I'd never claim to be a folk singer around folkies. So my self-description is fundamentally dishonest / redundant.

Anyway mostly I define myself by composition, not performance: call myself a 'writer' or 'songwriter' instead of any kind of singer or musician. But again, that is spin too.

Secondly, due to the complexity and extreme debasement of the word 'folk' in recent years, I'm scared of using it without coupling it to the word 'protest' to add a level of distance and a different pile of meanings. 9 Red Songs is (I believe) a folk-protest record but not a folk record. If, when I released 9 Red Songs, the folk establishment had embraced it (and me) and let me in their world, as I hoped, then I would proudly call it a folk LP and myself a folk artist. But they didn't (and still don't); whether it's the old-school trad crowd,

or the eleven middle-aged media people who run the folk mainstream establishment, or even your various underground cool psych-folk or DIY scenes, with a few honourable exceptions they keep me at arm's length. It doesn't matter – but does mean I cannot fairly grab a portion of that word.

My dream for the 9 Red Songs material would be for people to define (and perform) the songs as "folk songs" in the long-term. Occasionally they do now but rarely within the folk world, for the reasons I just explained. However I'm very patient, it could be in 100 years and I'd be overjoyed.

But what songwriter wouldn't say that about any of their songs?

Several of the songwriters I have interviewed so far have talked about a DIY approach to music making and distribution as being important to being a folk artist. I suppose this has some relation to folk art as 'craft', and some allusion to the contemporary folksinger's supposed status as being 'outside' the industry. Do you think that this is at all a necessary feature of classification for new folksong?

Absolutely not, I think it is a red herring. They're trying to bend the definition to include their own work in the 'folk' classification (when what they really make is DIY acoustic pop/psych/indie) but exclude more establishment artists.

For me (biting the bullet and offering a definition largely coloured by what I described earlier about being left out of the club) a 'folk singer' is someone who performs primarily traditional repertoire – and only later/sometimes augments that with more modern material and perhaps self-written songs.

I accept this is quite a conservative definition but I'm more comfortable locking everyone out (Laura Marling, Teddy Thompson, you, me) than letting us all in the club, because if we let us in, we can't stop anyone else just because we don't like their songs. I'm saying it's the only fair place to draw the line.

By which I mean this: more people around the world will perform covers of James Blunt's 'You're Beautiful' than any Mary Hampton song over the next few years. So it's ridiculous to say she's 'folk' when he isn't, just because she's 'good' and he's 'shit'. So for me, 'folk singer' is best applied only to those with the trad repertoire at their core: June Tabor, Martin Carthy, Benji Kirkpatrick, Spiers & Boden, Eliza Carthy. The rest of us are something else.

Ultimately a song becomes a 'folk song' later on, if it passes into some kind of tradition (whatever tradition exists at the time) where it is sung again and again by other people in their own 'folk' context. But 1) this has to stretch in time beyond the immediacies of the global media agenda that skews 'quality' and 2) surely this has nothing to do with the working methodologies of the artist who originally wrote it.

I totally acknowledge how damagingly skeptical this position is, by the way.

Given that you have now made three albums specifically about London, what are your methodological approaches as a songwriter to writing about place?

I think it's 100% about being there and soaking it up, rather than any cerebral thought-about composition process. More than the narrative content for me, the sense of place is the background noise, smell and language that then, if you're lucky, imbues the writing and recording. So when there's a location mentioned in one of those songs, however vague or hinted at, I know exactly where it is and what it's like.

To an extent though, the trilogy fails because the final LP Capital is not the pay-off I imagined when I released the first two parts, it had too many jobs to do as a commercial release. Arguably I should've split Capital into two records, one of which was a third London LP and one of which was something else. There are abandoned songs that absolutely should've been

on there to properly complete all the London ideas (and vice versa). I recently learned (maybe remembered) a lot about creative compromise from watching the Springsteen film about making Darkness On The Edge Of Town. My biggest creative weakness on 9 Red Songs and Capital was to compromise content for form. Just after I realised that (watching the film) then over Christmas I heard Sondheim say (on a radio documentary) "Content dictates form, always," as one of his three rules of songwriting. Sold.

Stephen Burch (The Great Park) Email interview 21/1/11

You often describe your music as folk (sometimes with an explanatory word with it like 'problem folk'), what is it that you mean when you say 'folk' as it relates to your songwriting practice?

I think that when describing music in order to promote it one often has to be economical - I like the bluntness of the word and the suggestions it throws up. I think that often my stuff is story based, it uses elements of other people's work in terms of names and references, it's adaptable and can be rewritten - these things to begin with could be called 'folk' qualities to me. When I make albums the songs to me aren't set down in stone, but rather recorded in a particular state at a particular time. Sometimes I've recorded songs a number of times as I feel they've changed and have reached a different form or tone that's interesting. I think of 'folk music' as something that could be malleable - it can take this kind of treatment.

Musically I suppose there's this thing of the root note that I'm grounded to a lot more than most other people I know. This and the general lack of middle eight passages in my songs suggest to me songs that have a chapter / episodic narrative like structure. They tend to go verse refrain, verse refrain, verse refrain until they get the job done - there isn't much in the way of popular song devices there to me.

How important to you as a songwriter is an engagement with traditional song?

It's difficult to measure it but I don't think I'm a scholar of traditional song or anything approaching someone who is knowledgable of historical songs. Generally speaking I don't know these things - I enjoy listening to older recordings because I like the immediacy of the sound, the recording of the performance in the room and so on. I feel that at the moment I have very little contact with performances of traditional songs - perhaps this is entirely

a consequence of living in a country where one doesn't hear traditional songs being played in the same way as I did in England or Ireland. That 'folk scene' or that standing up in the bar singing a ballad thing hasn't made itself known to me here in Germany.

So I don't know how important it is to me. I don't tend to make reference to traditional songs too often in my stuff, but maybe some of the melodies are derived from traditional songs - I'm sure this soaks in. I'm not sure I've ever consciously sat down and written something in response to a traditional song, but I do play a folk ballad set to the music of one of my own songs - although this is probably a result of my laziness more than anything else.

Are there specific musical techniques that mark you out as a performer/ writer of folksong?

I would only say this structure thing - this verse / refrain / verse / refrain / verse / refrain. This simple thing opens everything up for me - the length is dictated by the message, not the form.

There is a general sense within your work that events take place in a fictional landscape called 'The Great Park', what role does this 'place' play within your narratives?

Well 'The Great Park' is a real place but it exists as a fictional landscape too, absolutely. The place is just something to fence the action in, otherwise it could go anywhere and I wouldn't be able to manage it. It exists as a limiter.

Despite this, you are, like myself, a habitual user of place names within your songs, how do these function within the narratives and what is the relationship of real places (like the royal canal) to 'The Great Park'?

Well firstly it's fun to have things happen in places that one knows about - this mix of fact and fiction, like a reverse blue screen effect. I like these games and this putting places in songs and somehow making heroes of

them at the same time.

To me it's like having specific points of reference that are like definite marks. Without them it's something of a smudge - these towns, this house, this road, this one and that girl - all vague. I like positive marks - this goes here and there it is and I stand by it. The real places are like the pins in the map. They provide points of definition to me.

So, even if one isn't personally familiar with The Royal Canal (I've never actually stood next to it) - the fact that in the song it's not just 'the river' but has a name and a character - this to me makes the experience richer.

But it is double edged in a way - when one says 'the river' they could mean every river - this universal thing, almost non-specific language - and plenty of people think this is a better direction to take. This not wanting to exclude anyone. But the thing is I try not to be vague and I'm not interested in including everyone in my songs - I'm English and I write and sing in English and putting in a specific place (especially the Royal Canal) says something that is definite and sure of itself and arrogant and problematic and all that good stuff. It's like bones in the soup. Initial questions for Stephen Burch (The Great Park).

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Appendix 5

List of contributors.

Al Nero – Vocals

Scott Maple – Vocals

Chris T-T – Vocals

Seamus Harahan – Button accordion

Laurence Collyer – Harmonica, vocals

Stacey Sewell – Violin

Gris Sanderson – Violin

Mary Hampton – Tenor Guitar

Darren Hayman – Vocals

Jen Macro – Vocals

Helen Sharp – Spoken voice

David Prior – Field recording