

in the ink dark

*These are some words to wander with
as part of In the Ink Dark a new project
from Luke Pell and collaborators*

**ROBBIE SYNGE, A RAMBLE
MAY 2017**

PODCAST 2 TRANSCRIPT

“ Hello.

I am in Nethy Bridge, in the Cairngorms. Originally called Abernethy. Aber, Nethy – alluding to the confluence of the river Nethy and the river Spey. From where I live, I walk along the river, following its 10 metre wide tumbling course, a mile to where it meets the great Spey river. I do this walk, this physical action, because it's comforting. It supports me as I go on with my loss.

Over loose, rounded river stones and natural mini beaches, pausing to sit on an eroded sandy-earth grass riverside ledge. This is 10,000 years of material action, eroding, shifting, shaping, and it signals somewhere appealing for me to sit and to let my lower legs hang and swing.

This is the textbook contemplative scene Looking out over water. Contemplating. It's peaceful and the mind is occupied. I contemplate the past. A person remains, and also exists, in memories – our memories – vivid, questionable, shifting, malleable, consolidating, fading, precious. The past inside the present.

That water there, with gravity and in relation to other materials, follows a path of least resistance. It shapes those other materials, and is shaped by those materials. Never-ending physical sequences of cause and effect.

The physical law of the conservation of mass states that mass cannot be destroyed, only transformed. A piece of paper – burning; a dead animal - decomposing.

So, person's body cannot be destroyed, only transformed. That a person lost to us now is still present in material form in some state of solid, liquid and gas... that's a scientific and a poetic bolster of support, I find. They exist as material. Now. This is an undeniable truth and, a rational and uplifting inspiration for the imagination.

Anyway, back to my lower legs - dangling and swinging, the mossy surface under my thighs, the ground surface spreading my flesh, arranging the anatomy of my hips, asking me to crease forwards slightly at the hips, the organs in my abdomen shifted ever so slightly, the air from outside sucked in pushed out, swaying my entire upper body.

Our body – this vulnerable, fragile, sensitive vessel. Our vessel in contact with its surroundings, never ever disconnected. Always affected and always affecting. Never absent but always there.

This constant companionship with the physical environment? Can we harvest its positive presence? After all, it's accessible to each and all of us in distinct ways... through our own unique bodies, regardless of our form and abilities. Consistent and dependable. Available. Can we let it in?

It might be more than purely a positive physiological response to mild cardiovascular exercise. The peaceful water vista, or the comfy sofa – they are a good start but there is surely more to be had.

OK... so... this river. The energy exchanged and the material collisions and transformations of the river Nethy didn't *decide* to give me a place to sit. And I didn't *design* it. The materials of water, earth and my body followed a chain of events over their 10,000 years and my 10 minutes, to this result. Their unfolding physical interactions simply, if fortuitously for me, provide a resting place. Could we call this a collaboration of sorts?

I crave something beyond the comfort of the purely poetic. A philosophy or an approach – something to live by. It's accessible to all of us, this environment-body physical dialogue of physical sensation ... helping us feel... and we can navigate it.

Those interactions between surfaces, between people, with other matter. Those interactions can be acknowledged. But they might also be unbeknown to us. Can we see every one of our actions and words, and our very physical being, as participatory and influential?

With renewed vigour I jump up to stride onwards to the Spey. And fall flat on my face. That crease in my hip, leaning forwards, sat on top of the bishops weed, moss, wild thyme. Well... my leg's gone numb and I'm on my arse. Thanks for this collaboration! Love this philosophy. Ramble onwards!

There's a bird I saw here recently, with the help of a couple of visiting birdwatchers - twitchers or birders, I'm not quite sure! The bird was a rare sight in the Highlands and a species in decline. This one was lost. This is how the literature describes it:

- plump and pudding-like
- no distinguishing features
- tends to dangle its legs in flight
- Its song resembles nothing so much as the jangling of a bunch of keys
- The 'Fat bird of the barley', The 'Corn Blob', The 'little brown job', The 'docken sparrow'

It's the corn bunting. The drabest bird of all. In decline. Being lost.

Why oh why do I feel for the corn bunting? Why, when I read these listings and remember seeing these little birds do I well up. How can I be saddened by the emotional incorrectness of ornithological texts for goodness sake?! Come on!

I think of the effort of surviving. Each with complex challenges. Some explicit, many hidden. Getting on.

Other recent arrivals from Africa, the magnificent ospreys, have eggs on the nest at nearby Loch Garten RSPB reserve.

But... some sad news this morning that the male has disappeared, possibly scared away by the presence of a younger male nearby. The staff have made the decision not to intervene to provide fish for the newly hatched chicks. Their demise is almost inevitable. As a relatively high-profile nesting site, and with webcams on the nest-site, this is a narrative of loss that is unusually visible.

The dilemma of what we know about another being, the power to choose to support, or to leave be. It is public and open for all to see.

Following the narrow path, I am asked by branches of a few low trees to bend under their lower limbs, heavy with leaves and blooming white flowers. Something's on the path edge that catches my eye. It's an egg – fully intact, greeny-blue with pale brown speckles, on its own, out of place, cold. It had possibly fallen from a low nest in the tree above or been abandoned and I learn later it was probably a blackbird's egg. One of how many produced with the inevitability that some will not make it. This bird that wasn't, perhaps far less exotic a creature than an osprey. Yet not by choice or reason, but just because this matter came to be – here and now. It was a physical assembly, a physical fall, a transformation that has not ended but continues. For me, just a moment in time, a crossing of paths, a one-to-one encounter with one lost young.

As I reach the Spey and the waters converge I hear a loud quack. Only the female makes *this* quack sound. There's a pair of Mallards.

Matter, the word derived from the Latin word for mother.

This mother to be will spend time on the nest on that far riverbank when she lays... more camouflaged than her male partner... almost certainly to lose some young. *We won't* witness this but we *can* know it. She'll go on, instinctively and solidly. For she is a duck and does not feel loss, we say. Not like us.

Aware of me nearby, she takes flight and the drake follows. They fly away out of sight around the river's bend. They understand I'm a threat. I'm a threat to their loss.

I'm ready to turn back for home. End this ramble.

This transforming world of matter – it's inevitable but it's confusing.

Matter in all its live forms.

It transforms. Publically, privately... or completely unbeknown to us.

But it has its effects. We have our effects.

It is there for us all, physical, accessible, from the past, and with us now.

The past inside the present. ”