

Lori Diggle: *deep mapping thin places*

Much of my creative practice involves negotiating the periphery of thin places. In this context I mean *thin* in the Celtic sense of a thin veil between one mode of being-in-place and another. Passing through this veil can feel like slipping a gear or missing the final step when descending a staircase in the dark. Sometimes I experience this privately. My interior 'thin place' is encountered in my practice when a way of working slips into an iteration of an idea previously expressed and then forgotten – a personal haunting. Or an overheard conversation on a bus, or the discovery of a book in a secondhand bookshop, become serendipitous findings, speaking directly to an idea that had been half-formed, incubating or dormant until that moment.

But thin places can, I think, also occur in shared gatherings, more publically and outwardly. Collectively, the *language, landscape and the sublime* conference for example, gave rise to similar ideas that surfaced in the work of people previously unconnected to become its *zeitgeist*. Here the distances between individuals were diminished and seemed to become more porous through inhabiting a shared, resonant space.

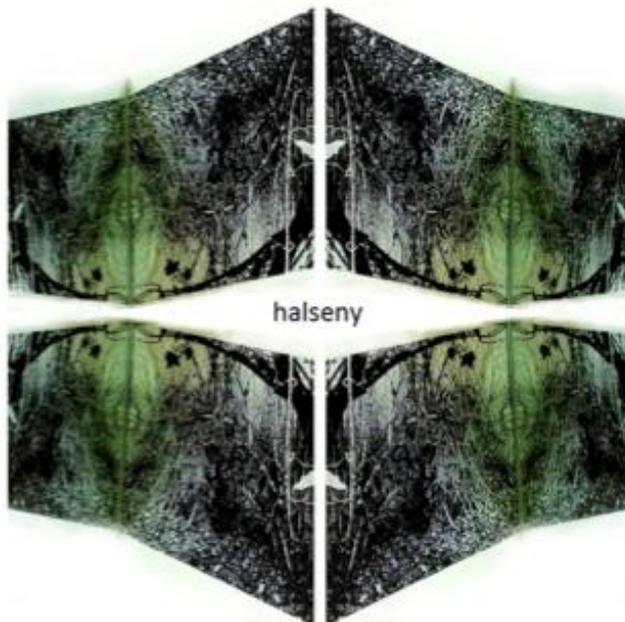


As an artist-scholar I am positioned as *wrecker* in my research community. Ideas come to me by digression and drift as much as through seamless argument, partly through the architecture of virtual knowledge, organised through links. But visceral, embodied dialect words inform my texts and underscore a search for a research vernacular that expresses labile, feminine

discourses and ways of knowing. I am interested in this pairing, this *doubleness*, where distant totalized mythic ideas are

expressed, through interdisciplinary practices alongside the detailed, close –up grain of experience.

My current doctoral research is attempting to harness this doubleness, to establish a Chora – a delirious museum to describe a particular thin place in Penryn, Cornwall, through series of micro-narratives or *anecdota*. These narratives coalesce to become my deep map, my poetics of uncertainty, exploring the slippery relationship between histories and fictions, the tales and the telling of them. But previously I had spent some months, between the Winter Solstice and the Spring Equinox, mapping another resonant site – Orley Common near Ipplepen - the oldest untouched piece of land in Devon. It was, I imagined, the play-world of a Victorian explorer, William Wills, who as a young man in his twenties, was surveyor and navigator on the doomed transcontinental crossing of Australia from Melbourne in the south to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north. But when Wills was seven his family had lived in a house near the church in Ipplepen and the boy would spend hours walking thereabouts in the company of his cat. Conjecturally then, I imagined that Orley Common was his thin place, his first wilderness.



halseny
he has made a shield,
a shelter, a small
hide of shadows
striped vertically
the willow stalks
once lively as a poppy
in his arms
now frame his view
the child has been a
stallion for an hour
his back stiffens - he
counts his breathing
out and in
a beetle crawls across
the skin above his
kneel
he forgets his own
small death
it's like remembering a
potential
to re-root and to
flower

One week, for example, I imagined that the boy Wills had built himself a shelter from coppiced hazel branches and, sitting inside, had a premonition of his death, in the outback, lying in a shelter of branches that his comrades had built to shield him from the sun. I wrote a poem called *halseny* which is an old Devon dialect

word meaning to divine the future, using a hazel wand.
The following week I wandered into an area of the Common that I had not previously explored and found this makeshift shelter, like the lacey hull of an upturned boat.



Later I was able to travel to Melbourne to complete the Australian half of the project and to find myself standing before this painting in the National State Library of Victoria

Eugene Montagu Scott, *Natives discovering the body of William John Wills, the explorer, at Coopers Creek, June 1861*, oil on canvas, 1862, [State Library of Victoria](#)

Orley Common, the original site that I had documented in words and images was, for me, a particularly resonant *thin place*.