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Practice, Project, Power: Journal Keeping with an Emphasis on Empirical Observation

## Introduction

This essay began as a meditation on my own writing. I considered specifically *how* I wrote in my Scotland abroad journal. I have slowly discovered that this *how*, as a method or practice of writing, is rather intuitive; I am now concerned with offering also a *why*. In that sense, this essay has become both a *how* and a *why*, much like a cookbook which details both the method and the rewarding results. So, in this essay, I will demonstrate that I am empowered by writing. To do this, I will define first a writing practice where journal keeping and empirical observation are interwoven. I will then describe this practice's implementation as a project. Here, I will offer a few examples of my writing which I feel "contributes" to this project. Finally, I will demonstrate that, in contributing to this project, I am empowered. Following my main argument, I will set some goals for my own future writing.

## Practice

*I define a writing practice where journal keeping and empirical observation are interwoven.* To begin, let us consider empirical observation as the action of noting experience, generally with pen and paper. For example, wandering around and collecting flower blooms is not empirical observation, but noticing their leaf form, bloom structure, and petal size to jot down on a scrap of paper is indeed. I do insist that the action of empirical observation produces some record, perhaps a scribbled note or a half-constructed sentence. These records describe experiences in terms of physical observables and these observables' relative changes in space and time. Watching the fluctuations of sunlight through a window is an experience in time, grasping the contour of a porcelain coffee mug is an experience in space. These experiences become empirical observations once their qualities and characteristics are registered in language. It is useful to distinguish empirical observations, as easily communicated, from otherwise incomprehensible notanda, which are nevertheless records of some observable.

Let us consider journal keeping as the action of appending daily entries to a special document. For example, a child who writes every evening in a bright pink notebook at his tiny desk is keeping a journal, but a woman who frequently updates her desktop index-box of phone numbers is not. We may differentiate journal keeping from many other forms of writing by insisting that a journal is kept only if it is written in every day. This restriction follows naturally from the Latin

root of *journal*, which is *diurnālis*, meaning *of the day*.<sup>1</sup> The specific topic of a journal may vary from day to day. Perhaps one day's entry carries out a fantastic discussion with a long dead relative, whereas another's days entry is wholly concerned with the delicious ingredients required for a proper beef broth soup. Keeping a journal can be understood as writing daily (over any subject) and collecting these writings in a special place. It is good to commit about an hour of each day to writing if the journal is to be honestly "kept." In this way, journal keeping is inextricably performed in a day-night cycle. Thus a journal may be seen to harmonize with circadian rhythms, to integrate with eating practices, perhaps even to reflect one's dreams.

I have now loosely defined two actions: *empirical observation* and *journal keeping*. What remains to do is (i) explain how empirical observation is useful in journal keeping, (ii) explain how journal keeping is useful in empirical observation, and (iii) explain how the two can be deliberately combined.

(i) To elucidate the role of empirical observation in journal keeping. In overview: it gives detail to experience; empirical observations are easily remembered and conducive to locating a reader in time and space; they provide the ground and the context of setting: where was I when I wrote this?

Empirical observation helps to concretize thinking. Francis Bacon, in the late English Renaissance, put it that "For the wit and mind of man, if it work upon the creatures of God, worketh according to the stuff and is limited thereby."<sup>2</sup> Keeping one's mind to this "stuff" proves to be a creative limitation. When I write with an emphasis on empirical observations, my vocabulary has a firm connection to the *Umwelt* (the surrounding world). The written work is then, in a sense, made out of tougher fabric. On the other hand, thought without empirical observation is to be regarded with some caution: how does one think without natural referents anyways? By the end of the 16th century, natural philosophers were beginning to understand the deficiencies of many centuries of abstract scholastic jargon. Again, we heed Francis Bacon's critique "if [the mind and wit of man] work upon itself, as the spider worketh his web, then it is endless, and brings forth indeed cobwebs of learning, admirable for the fineness of thread and work, but of no substance or profit."<sup>3</sup> So thought without empirical observation is not dead, but it is weak and uprooted. In contrast, thought in conjunction with empirical observation produces a strong and deeply colorful vocabulary for both cognitive and written description.

Empirical observation also promotes attention. But what do I mean by attention? One of my favorite kōans describes:

A student asks a master to define Zen. The master writes 'Attention' on a board. The student asks the master to define this 'Attention.' The master writes 'Attention means Attention.' The student protests—the master replies aloud "There are three loaves of bread in the oven."

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1. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/journal#English>

2. Francis Bacon, "Advancement of Learning," ed. Mortimer J. Alder (William Benton, 1952), I. vi. 5.

3. Francis Bacon, "Advancement of Learning," ed. Mortimer J. Alder (William Benton, 1952), I. vi. 5.

Without having to define attention, we can safely say that empirical observation is attention registered. Unlike interpretations, empirical observations are made in terms of immediate experience. While any accumulation of empirical observations may naturally produce a sort of interpretative wisdom, we desire that this wisdom should not be prefabricated. Indeed, the scientific process is dependent on the non-interpretive attentiveness of empirical observation: “We can. . . only augur well for the sciences, when the ascent shall proceed by a true scale and successive steps, without interruption or breach, from particulars.”<sup>4</sup> In this sense, empirical observation is the fleshed out framework in which attention functions in the West. In turn, this attention is a desirable quality for keeping one’s journal. We see that empirical observation has a important role to play in the vocabulary and attentiveness of journal keeping.

(ii) Going in the opposite direction, I am also able to characterize the role of journal keeping in empirical observation. In overview: the journal is already a chronologically organized log book; it provides insights into personal biases. it provides a context for empirics: what what I thinking about when I noticed such and such phenomenon? what was the mood and tenor of my journal at the time I recognized such and such phenomenon?

It is important for the “empiricist” to be aware of coexistent desires when making empirical observations. For example, the landworker’s vision of her pasture is affected by what she believes is good for her sheep: poisonous flowers? easy to fence? accessible? There are many other examples of empirical observations set up alongside other motivations. The most common two other motivations (I believe) are the desires to be complete or to be consistent. Without a comfortable relationship with incompleteness or inconsistency in my life, my empirical work is like to suffer from distortions which attempt to present the world as both complete and consistent. This can be addressed in journal keeping. How can I can develop a comfortable relation with inconsistency? By confronting my own writing when it expresses a view of the world which is apparently foreign to me. This is one healthy encounter of inconsistency. How can I develop a comfortable relation with incompleteness? By grappling with a day’s worth of experience in only a few pages of my journal. I cannot hope to present the entire day as it was; rather I choose to write about representative selections. This is a healthy experience with incompleteness.

Another exemplary benefit of keeping a journal is that it can become a container of irrelevant, yet interrupting, notanda. For example, writing down a phone number saves me from holding a string of 10 digits in my memory. Similarly, writing down a goal saves me from worrying that I will forget it. Both are somewhat irrelevant to the present moment, but are likely to be useful in the future. By taking the time to write these short notes on paper I acknowledge the turning of my thought. Suppose, for example, that I am holding a rock and examining its texture while other obligations continue to slip into mind: at that moment I may write down how I expect to fulfill these obligations and resume my inspection of the rock. We must be wary of writing which attempts to control the future self. This writing can be very distracting and damage one’s attentiveness in the present. I should rather think goals and obligations as hypothesis: *what I believe I will do* (and so

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4. Francis Bacon, “Novum Organum,” ed. Mortimer J. Alder (William Benton, 1952), I. 104.

we shall see).

The journal is a place where floating thoughts are compiled alongside more substantial and digested statements. This is not to say that I need to record all irrelevant thoughts, but rather to suggest that persistent, reoccurring thoughts do want a home and will happily roam about on the little blank spaces in the pages of my journal. The acknowledgment of a floating thought in writing orients me towards attentiveness. I write it down and acknowledge: *that's OK*. In this sense, I can become attenuated to the outside world by allowing myself to express personal, perhaps highly interpretive, observations in the midst of empirical observations. We see that journal keeping is an important interpretive complement to empirical observation.

(iii) To interweave the actions of journal keeping and empirical observation. I apply a few general rules. First, I strive for authenticity in writing. In this way, I may freely roam between journal keeping and empirical observation. Both are honest representations of experience, despite the fact that journal keeping may be more figurative, grotesque, or hyperbolic than empirical observation. Second, in figurative statements, 'I' (or some part of my body) is the subject, direct object, or indirect object of the sentence: "I notice. . . the rain comes unto my arm." Third, it is useful to differentiate between verbs: to feel, to think, to encounter, to observe. When do certain verbs signify empirics and other verbs signify figurative experience. Fourth, to flag empirical observations, I attempt estimate measurements. Fifth, in both journal keeping and empirical observation, I focus on local conditions: what is my relation to my surroundings? what is unique about this place?

So I have some rules for conjoining empirical observations and journal keeping. Do I need a subject of study? That is, is it needed to delimit a certain set of physical observables for close reading and thick description? I think not. What I propose is that the two (empirical observation and journal keeping) are left in feedback loops. To start with empirical observation:

- I select a phenomenon,
- I incorporate into my written journal,
- by registering the phenomenon in language I utilize a unique vocabulary,
- this vocabulary affects my metaphorical thought-life,
- which in turn affects the phenomenon to which I am attracted or repelled.

On the other hand, to start with journal keeping:

- I become attentive to my own thought life,
- by tracing cognitive chains in written description,
- producing a unique image of my state of being.

That is, by registering inchoate thought-feelings into written language, I produce an aliased image of my thought life. This image can be treated itself as an empirical observation—a physical, emotional, and cognitive image of my self. If I compare this written image of self to my conscious image of self—looking for emphases and contradictions—I can become clued in to my own biases. These biases, in turn, affect my attention to the phenomenal world.

The writing practice I have just described is not unique. But for me, it is just the write balance of inner and outer observation. As for a name, legibility is best: I will call this practice *journal keeping with a emphasis on empirical observation*. This practice requires special definition so that I may explain to others how I write, as well as to encourage others to find their own special style of writing.

## Project

*I describe the aforementioned practice's implementation as a project.* The project is, for me, to keep a journal until I am a ripe old man.<sup>5</sup> The specifics of my project rather straightforward, so I need not strictly state them. The gist of it is: write in the mornings, write in the evenings, carry a journal and a pen, organize the journals when they are filled up, occasionally read old entries. The style of writing is for me journal keeping with an emphasis on empirical observations. This means that I may start out on any topic (with a mind to use thick, empirical descriptions) while alternating between noting my inwards state of being and noting my outward condition of being. What I have to look forward to, as I contribute to this project, is

- a mixture of poetic description and empirical observation,
- a blend of estimated measurements and figurative language,
- learning many new color words, sound words, sensory words,
- occasionally applying physics to Haiku poetry,
- open-endedness in writing with no specific direction, just a method.

This project is not oriented towards answering any questions about myself. If anything, this project is to encourage me to practice briefly and effectively communicate my observations and ideas. In a sense, this project is a metonymical reenactment of the scientific revolution, by which I clear out jargon to make room for concrete phenomenal language. Mimicking Francis Bacon, I will write with a mind to empirics, communicability, and legibility rather than “conceptual heftiness.”

*I offer a few examples of writing which contributes to this project.* I have two examples of my own writing. The first deals with an image of trees nearby the Scotland Youth Hostel in Braemar. This piece demonstrates the role of empirical observation in journal keeping.

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5. I must note that this project need not be merely for myself. I have laid this essay out in such a manner as to be a framework for others who are looking to define any genre of interdisciplinary practice and make a project out of it.

I am leaning back on a lichen covered tree stump. I am covering this journal with my polyester vest to prevent the light rain from wetting and metastasizing this ink. I am writing through the arm hole. There is a fence, of fresh pine lumber, crossing in front of me, preventing me from wandering up the hill. That hill extends, rough with dirty heather, shortly above the bountiful green canopies of loosely clustered deciduous trees. The rest of this journal entry will largely be dedicated to representing, without knowing its proper taxonomy, that particular species of tree.

A gross, crooked tree. Bark flaking into local patches of lichen like the pale bone green of Raku pottery. A tall specimen, perhaps forty feet, carries a carpet of lichen up its trunk and onto fourteen auxiliary branches; the first auxiliary branch splits off at the height of my head, marking the beginning of a succession of three foot branch intervals. The leaves are far from the trunks of these trees, such as with Aspens. In fact, these trees, in their local intertree clustering and trunk-canopy geometry, resemble a deformed, warted cousin of the Rocky Mountain Aspen. The diameter at their canopies ranges from an austere eight feet to a generous thirty. The canopy begins, on average, to blossom out from the trunk at six feet, just to high for me to take a bite of the lowest leaves. The diameter of the base of each trunk ranges from eight to twenty four inches, though the mean appears to be a gratuitous foot. A great two thirds of these trees begin to slightly torque out of vertical alignment every yard up from the base. Each of these knotty elbows appears to have no correlative incidence with the dangling auxiliary branches. The fickle complexity of the outer branch behaviour prevents a sincere counting (such tiny and numerous oscillations from the apex to the periphery, with every leaf the endpoint of a jagged and writhing path twenty feet into the sky). The trunks and peripheral branches seem to be ashy skeletons which carry water: liquid marrow. One way to describe the leaves would be to identify their resemblance to a fitful cloud of dust, each leaf a conglomerate of dusky skylight and high green chlorophyll. But this image is too severe—the leaves are neither fitful nor cloudlike. Another way to picture the leaves would be to construct them by iteration of fans. After, say five kinks in the auxiliary branch, little twig fans open out to a tight spread of some thirty fingernail sized leaves. But here, there are anomalies unaccounted for: vestiges of three or five or eight leaves delicately clasped to the main trunk at merely a yard off the ground. An impressionistic rendering would disregard the quantity of leaves all together, wrapping detail into tones of dark jade, light linens in shadow, encumbered by sporadic intrusions of convalescent blacks and blue greys.

*(June 11: After Dinner, outside, My Yellow Journal)*

I made this journal entry in the foothills of the Cairngorms with Paula. I wanted to be with her, so I asked her to go for a walk and work on journal writing. We plodded out the back of the hostel and towards the north east. Scott was just then making apple pies—we did want to eat them.

We set a goal of writing for thirty minutes, then quickly reading our work aloud, then running back for pie. Finding some shelter from the sleet rain, we set to work on our own journals. She wrote about swimming in the Quoich River. I focused on the trees. We mutually struggled to produce thick descriptions. I think this was because we both choose to push against the grain and avoid describing what we felt. Perhaps this struggle in writing was a means to erase a sense of direction and be attentive. I was reminded of Nan Shepard's remark that "often the mountain gives itself most completely when I have no destination, when I reach nowhere in particular, but have gone out merely to be with the mountain as one visits a friend with no intention but to be with him."<sup>6</sup> Why and how did writing empirically about impress upon my memory the experience of being with Paula?

This second example is about looking at the world as a passenger in a moving vehicle. This piece demonstrates the role of journal keeping in empirical observation.

Riding in the Mercedes wagon, I am with a crew of five other intrepid, aspiring geologists. We have been on an outlying road, which presses close to reservoir of water, several kilometers in length and filled by streams. The band *Bastille* is playing on the radio—a very capital-R Romantic band. They are singing "Icarus" and "The Weight of Living" (parts I and II). With a heavy four-four rhythm; long, syncopated vocals; and sweeping major chords; I gaze with affected eyes: cresting granite mountains cliffs exposed like turrets and archers' windows, streams falling in holy light from divine ferns, grasses and heathers.

(*June 1: During the Drive, My Yellow Journal*)

In truth, the mountains were not really Granites, but rather Schists. Listening to *Bastille*, however, induced me to project fantastic religious imagery. For some reason I believe that granite is holier than schist. (Why is that?) Drives are also dangerous places to make empirical observations. With the radio, the people, the rate of transit, I come down with a serious case of the road-trips.

## Power

*I demonstrate that, in contributing to this project, I am empowered.* Empirical observation trains the mind to think in colors; journal keeping creates a space for experiments with language; journal keeping with an emphasis on empirical observation promotes a balance of inner and outer observations.

For me, attentiveness means thinking in colors—a metaphor. To practice this style of thought is a strength. Empirical observation is the method which refines this strength. For example, empirical observation supplements a psychological view of self by considering: what muscles are clenched in my face? how does my breathing change? what textures do I notice most? am

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6. Nan Shepherd, "The Living Mountain," (Canongate, 2011), p. 15

I hungry? These questions can reveal something about my abstract state of mind in a way that jargony psychological reflection fails to do. If my concern with psychological well being is turned outwards—that is, once I recognize the workings of my thought life to be entirely metaphorical—I have less of a burden to “think” in language. Rather than thinking in terms of “good” or “praiseworthy”, I may think in no terms at all—just colors and postures, temperatures and noises, tastes and slant-eyed glances. To think in purely psychological terms would be like thinking with Orwellian Newspeak—‘doubleplusungood’. To think in purely metaphorical terms is thinking with, as the poet Gary Snyder describes, “grandparents, place, grammar, pets, friends, lovers, children, tools, the poems and songs we remember...” In this sense, empirical observation promotes an attentiveness to “what we think with.”<sup>7</sup>

Journal keeping is empowering too. The journal is a space for self-reflexive dialogue and experiments with language. Another noticeable characteristic of journal keeping: if I am writing daily, I am both more intimately connected to others. There are two reasons for this. Sometimes writing is an acute and self-conscious struggle with thought and language, thereby (in contrast) interactions with other people are all the more pleasant because the struggle in language is shared. Other times writing is a prolonged forethought to communication with others, adding depth to those relationships. A written journal is distinct from what is thought or what is spoken for the same reason that empirical observations are distinguished from immediate experiences. In both a written journal and an empirical observation there is a record of activity. Moreover, such a record is immediately cognizable and communicable, whether to other persons or oneself.

Why is the project of both empirical observation and journal keeping especially empowering? Well, when both are performed at once, writing becomes a powerful supplement to thought life. My journal, like a cookbook, provides the necessary instructions to recreate an experience. This is helpful for times when I plainly do not recognize what it is that I do think. In these situations, empirical observation becomes reflexive. My choice of phenomenon from the whole phenomenal world replaces my obligation to categorize or characterize my thought life. I am free to closely read another. For example:

I am in the open lawn of a park in Braemar; a rectangle, ridged on three sides by sandstone-hewn buildings: a pub, a hotel, a church—each of them appearing to have fallen into disuse. Yet, on second inspection, each structure seems to be well kept: white curtains hanging inside the clean windows of the hotel’s guest rooms, healthy potted plants surrounding the church, light turned on in one wing of the pub. Perhaps I am noticing the creeping dandelions and the sprigs of some seed resembling dill and a peculiar sapling tree—with fat pointed leaves. Next to me, centered in the park, rises a Neoclassical monument to some Elizabeth Louisa Oswald. The monument now is squatting—a gray concrete tower, buttressed by dirty maroon sandstone blocks, symmetric by quarter rotation (save the crouching panther on its summit). As

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7. Gary Snyder, “The Practice of the Wild”. (North Point Press, 1990), p. 60



if anticipating my mood, the nostalgic odour of burning firewood drifts from the forth side of the park; this direction is bordered by a slumped hedge, some low, thick bushes, and a basement of nettle. Perhaps the nettle is not there, but I am challenged to believe otherwise: the rich smell of a stove fire must float through a barrier of stinging nettles such that I shall not go to find its source. I am hungry, and this hunger rebounds against that odour of fire and camaraderie to produce an acutely dissatisfied contentment: melancholia.

sandstone lion's jaw gapes  
emblematic eyes roll slack  
chiseled with cold hands

*(June 12, prior to dinner, My Yellow Journal)*

This project also allows me to think of my written work as a second self. If I want to return to some open ended question in my thought life, I need only to read that which I have earlier written. If I have honestly and diligently worked to record my phenomenal vision, then my experience reading might closely resemble my experience writing. This vision becomes a second vision of myself. Then there are two lines connecting me to the past: the first my biological organism, the second the collection of my writings. This connection meets in the present moment of reading, where I may freely compare my memory of the experience to my written representation of the experience. Memory follows a neural network and written work follows a linguistic network, yet both are integral to my conscious experience of self.

It is arguably the case that encountering two images of self is a form of power. This double exposure is powerful because I am twice informed of my past state of being. I become fluid and refracted, breaking apart like a river and reconnecting. The joy of this power is in choosing which representation of self is most valid. Indeed, this also opens up space for self-conflict; my memory of an experience may differ from my written record of that same experience—how? what gives?

The past becomes a place which is not inaccessible, but intimately connected to the present: another room to access by opening up my journal. In journal writing, I participate in my own continuous history. Empirical observations interspersed in my journal guarantee that the symbolic meaning of certain words have not been overwritten in time. For example, my own understanding of the phrase “light footed” is likely to change over time; my understanding of the phrase “easily able to find traction on thirty five to forty degree Gabbro slopes” is not.<sup>8</sup> In moments of either hum-drum or superlative experience, by writing what I observe in the world and in my self, I keep two memories. One traces through my biological organism; the other traces through the symbolic script of my writing.

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8. This connection to the past also staves off dangerous nostalgia, described by Milan Kundera: “In the sunset of dissolution, everything is illuminated by the aura of nostalgia, even the guillotine.” A journal with empirical observations holds fast against this dissolution: the writer is somehow closer to the past than if otherwise. See “The Unbearable Lightness of Being”, trans. Michael Henry Heim, (HarperCollins, 2008), Part 1, Ch. 1, Para. 7

This project also empowers me to intuitively engage with scientific discourse. This is good—it is impossible to take science seriously all the time! By incorporating figurative descriptions, even “hard science” can be brought into stream of consciousness. If I am comfortable with imperfection, then I am open to work on “hard science” even when I am exhausted. For example, on June 2, I was falling asleep and listening to BBC:

Weary from the tour of Talisker Distillery (on the north west of Skye) and slouched—about to sleep—BBC Radio One announces a panel of three scientists: poised to discuss anthropological understandings of climate change. I believe the three gathered were (i) a nature journalist, Gaea Vince, (ii) a mathematician, and (iii) a professor of “social perceptions of science”<sup>9</sup> Various methods to “know” climates were presented, defended, and analyzed. Vince’s method described a world view in which humans were actively participant in their climate / geology. The mathematician detail the distinctions between the “known” and “unknown” in climate models. The professor listed and commented on the viability of the “enfranchising the public” in scientific discourse. The van jerked and rolled down A863, past Sligachan (north of the Cuillin Hills) and onto A87. Aspects of chaos theory were unveiled, complicated and represented: the Navier-Stokes equation models ocean and atmospheric fluid currents yet its solution is mathematically advanced and non-analytic in all be the most simple cases. Here’s complex geometry: plate tectonics; the bodies of melt water which rest upon the plates; the thick curtains of nitrogen and oxygen which ceaselessly rotate about the loosely spherical earth conglomerate—mountains, plains, ice sheets, deserts. I lean into the right window of the van: Loch Sligachan eases blue-by on my left. Jaime pulls the wheel and the van turns south—towards Loch Ainort. The program continue, radio crackling in the spatial interference of massive ferromagnetic lava flows, cooled in their formation 60 million years ago. Deciphering the curling segments of 94.7 MHz electromagnetic radiation, the receiver sputters out a young girl’s question to the panel: “how long will humans live in the future? how will their lifespans affect human impacts on the environment?” The professor, cheerily answers, “you, dear, may live to the year 2100. The only pessimistic question is in what physical condition you will be in at the age.” The audience chuckles. I palm the seat with two hands and straighten my posture, Loch Ainort breathes into the heavy clouded expanse—suddenly visible. Another question, deftly fielded by the BBC host, is passed to the mathematician: “Given that the rate of computational processes—even the rate of the rate—is increasing, how will humans utilize technology to ‘buffet out’ the limiting boundaries of the ‘known’ and explore the regions of the chaotic ‘unknown?’” The mathematician replies... something to do with the singularity... the point in time which artificial intelligence surpasses human intelligence... “and its affects on climate change?” Cutting

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9. Probably a historian, now that I think about it.

north then south again, staring at Mallach Carn on Scalpag, I rest my backpack on my stomach, cross my arms, and lay my chin upon my hands—"and we've seen Poincaré's conjecture and Fermat's last theorem proven"—into the south again, along the Kyle—"so the disciple promises much." I am nearly asleep, the van gently humming. With time for one more question, Gaea Vince yields a final response: "speaking to human's creative ingenuity, their local efforts to cool the planet—increasing the albedo—fruit grows in southern Spain reflecting the heat—panels on roofs... examples of humanity's ability to evolve culturally to their climate." Applause, the program ends, I sleep.  
(*June 2, evening, My Yellow Journal*)

Another strength of this project is mixing poetry and interpretive theory. For example: empty bubbles in the oozing pluton, catching silicate dust. Branching ladders of weblike atoms hook and jag as the form covalent bonds. Then, an infinite space in a nutshell, tetrahedrons arrange eternal.

(*June 3, Trotternish Ridge, My Yellow Journal*)

There is also the freedom to observe myself as a phenomenon:

Jonah and I find  
blushing granite, K-spar pink  
later, crack black rocks.

(*May 31, Ben Nevis, My Yellow Journal*)

Alternatively, there is freedom to personify the phenomenal world, as in "cortex slurry etches vortex hurry, strip Gortex surely: for a plunge" (*June 4, Fairy Pools, My Yellow Journal*), or to use animal metaphors, as in

like lambs' fleece thins to  
blinked open glassy eyes  
snow melts around cairns.

(*May 31, Ben Nevis, My Yellow Journal*)

Journal making with an emphasis on empirical observation is also a home-making technique. I believe that writing about a place gives me power within that place. As I write, I construct a mental map of a place. Then, when I am present in person I am also present with my text—Or perhaps this works the other way! Perhaps, when I write about a place, I become present with that place in my language. For example:

I am presently (to my great joy) sitting in the lobby proper of the Ceilidh Place and surrounded by green striped walls, wood for a fire, a fine sapphire, crimson and burnt orange rug, not to mention various portraits (all of them presumable Victorian and early Edwardian). Best of all, I have found a scarf which is hollow down the inside and therefore doubles as a long cap, slinking around my neck in solid black dyed wool and cuffed with floral golds, a silly teal, and sundry green and blue accents.

(*June 8th, Ullapool, My Yellow Journal*)

Then, I see upon the wall, above the fireplace, in cross-stitched letters:

From rising to sleeping,  
spinning and weaving,  
words in a garment,  
loose round my life,  
talking and singing,  
eating and meeting,  
such is the Ceilidh,  
the joy of my life.

Once I feel at home in a place, my attention can wander. For example, on the WWOOF farm I am currently at in Baden-Württemberg, I composed the double Haiku:

one application:  
upon worked garden soil  
to nap through an hour

stochastic rain  
monograms closed eyelids,  
skull cupped in dirt.

Home-making, too, is empowering.

## Conclusion

*I set some goals for my own future writing.*

- I would like to keep up more written correspondences.
- I would also like to write more poetry.
- Perhaps I can continue to work on place based writing—with an emphasis on plants and dwellings, climates and topography, as well as my relation to that place.
- I would like to be a more discipline essay writer as well. Journal writing is neat because I am almost never required to complete my thoughts. At the same time, in my journal I would like to push myself to finish my thought, or at least overview how I could continue if I choose to do so.
- That's all! Thanks for being with me on the trip!