

**Pre-circulated paper by David Gange, for round table discussion 'Sea Sites in Island History: Exploring the Lost Communities of Atlantic Britain and Ireland', SCNR Spring Seminar Series, 21 February 2018**

Thanks for the invitation to come and speak, and to submit some precirculated reading. This is a really useful time for me to be able to do this as I begin to write the final sections of my current book, *The Frayed Atlantic Edge* (Harper Collins). This document contains two very different kinds of reading: a piece from the beginning of the book and a very short article that I'm beginning to adapt into the final section of the book.

It's an eccentric pairing to send, so I hope people will feel comfortable reading none, either or both as their interests dictate.

The book follows a journey by kayak along the Atlantic coasts of Britain and Ireland from Shetland to Cornwall (a leg of the journey happened every month between July 2016 and August 2017). The first section of reading here is the draft introduction. It's intended for a general readership and is pitched as a personal journey rather than a research project: it's supposed to establish a few relevant ideas in the most approachable way possible. It's extremely personal and experiential – if that kind of thing turns you off, please skip to the second text!

After the 80,000 word narrative of the journey, the book then has five short essays (2,000-3,000 word) in a completely different, much more conceptual, register. They're either fragments towards a conclusion or appendices, depending on the attitude of the reader. They're intended to indicate the potential of 'the view from the sea' to provoke different thinking in relation to several categories (human/animal; movement as method; the scales of history; land/water; time/space) and in specific disciplinary contexts. In that way, they're supposed to be suggestive of possible ways in which the historical/geographical/literary/ecological material in the book could have purpose beyond the book itself. And, unlike that intro, they'll have full scholarly apparatus.

I began thinking through the ideas for these essays in articles on each theme, and now's the time I need to adapt the articles into their forms for the book. So the second bit of reading is one of these articles: 'Time, Space and Islands: Why Geographers Drive the Temporal Agenda'. This is about to go through the final stage of editing for *Past & Present*, published in one of their series of Viewpoints (generically more personal than their articles, so I'm afraid there are experiential elements to this too). I've chosen this article partly for your sake - it's by far the shortest - partly because the interdisciplinary nature of your seminar series seems the ideal place for it to be critiqued, and partly because it's going to be the most challenging thing to adapt into a new form.

While it'd be extremely useful for me to get feedback on these draft pieces, I wonder whether it might be most productive for discussions on the 21<sup>st</sup> if we treat them as loose suggestions for broader discussion about what can be done with these Atlantic coastlines – for the disruptions they can produce in familiar geographical/historical/literary narratives – rather than as the material for discussion in themselves.

So I'm intending to speak to the abstract previously circulated, and this document might best be interpreted as draft excerpts from an effort to put that into practice – providing some examples that can't possibly be in a 15 minute talk.

## **INTRODUCTION: A JOURNEY IN THE MAKING**

I remember clearly the moment I decided to embark on this journey. I'd shaken myself awake from a miserable night. The sun was yet to rise, but the view to the east was already full of promise. With overnight rain departed, a band of rich gold separated dark blue sky from the black silhouettes of mountains. The purring of curlews had begun to restore a sense of warm, active life to this cold, damp world and fulmars were wheeling over the water as the last of the rough night's swell died away.

The previous afternoon, I'd kayaked to one of my favourite places: Eilean a' Chleirich. This was my last night outdoors for some time, and although a short squall was forecast, I felt the need to venture somewhere memorable. Eilean a' Chleirich means 'Priest Island'. This single square mile of rock is uninhabited, and hemmed in by cliffs and boulders which prevent even small yachts from landing. Its upper slopes are home to storm petrels and other creatures that don't cohabit well with humans. The most remote of the Summer Isles off the north-west coast of Scotland, Chleirich is a final, bleak, landfall before the Outer Hebrides.

Setting off from a small bay on the Coigach peninsula, I'd made my way past the largest Summer Isles and along a chain of rocks that rise like wrecks from the sea. The wind had risen sharply as I battled waves on the final crossing and, with arms and thighs aching, it had been a great relief to reach water sheltered by the south-eastern cliffs of the isle. I clambered up the coast while pale November light gave way to storm clouds, and wandered above a patchwork of tiny lochans to the island's northern point, where spray from a gathering swell soon rose higher than the cliffs. Because of the approaching wall of rain, I couldn't see the distant islands to the west, so I settled into my waterproof sleeping bag, with pinkish sandstone boulders for shelter

and my back to the weather. Once dark fell, wind swirled until salt-tasting rain seemed to come from every compass point.

In the morning I blinked water from my eyelashes and stumbled to my feet. I was gazing downwards as I stood, carefully nudging the sleeping bag so the water on its shell didn't spill inside. Then I looked up, and the moment was heart-stopping. I must have turned around four or more times before I gained enough composure to choose a direction to look in. The storm had cleansed the skies so completely that every feature of the seascape was clear and perfect. A vast shattered coastline stretched on all sides: the tattered ocean-gouged fringe of northern Britain.

I was taken aback by the diversity of this view. To the west, the horizon was a long stuttering line of Outer Hebrides. The first rays of sun caught Harris' highest hill, An Clisham; its silhouette, which should have been featureless at this distance, was bright with golden-brown glens and ridges. In the foreground, the Shiant Isles, puffin-covered in summer, rose like great bronze whalebacks from the sea. And above the northernmost point of the chain of islands was a stretch of blank horizon that marked open sea till Iceland. To the north east, the coastline ran towards Cape Wrath, but as the mainland reached its terminus the land refused to give way: some of the weirdest peaks imaginable – Stac Pollaidh, Suilven, Quinag, Foinaven – erupt like deformed molars on a vast fossil jawbone. These strange corroded towers were once sandbanks in a huge riverbed when this region was on the opposite side of the globe from the rest of Britain's landmass. There are many miles between each peak – long winding drives along narrow one-track roads - but the view from this spot concertinaed them together. The mountains to the south east are less disorienting: where the northern peaks such as Suilven ('the pillar') and Quinag ('the milk churn') challenge every preconception of what a mountain is, the hills to the south, such as An Teallach ('the forge'), epitomise the pointed peaks and sweeping ridges a child might draw. These tips stand out from a skyline stretching via the magical Torridon range to the Isle of Skye in the south.

Although I've stood at 10,000 feet on peaks in the French, Swiss and Japanese Alps, the vistas from the rough knuckle at the centre of this tiny islet felt like the most expansive I've known. The British Isles are undoubtedly diminutive, yet this magical morning made me realise that how small they really are depends on how you measure them. From Land's End in the south to John O'Groats in the north is just 603 miles (shorter than some roads in a state such as Texas or Ontario). Yet the first hundred miles of longitude on the mainland's north-west coast hold thousands of miles of coastline, with mountains, bays, estuaries, cliffs and islets that would repay a lifetime's exploration. Looking from Chleirich at hills I'd climbed and stretches of coast I'd

kayaked showed me that all I knew from two decades of wandering was mere fragments of something huge. I wondered what it would take to change that, and it was in that moment that the need to undertake this year-long journey was born.



A few hours later I stopped in the port town of Ullapool. My mind had raced all morning as I tried to work out whether the plan I'd hatched could work. I headed for the town's two bookshops and filled three bags with reading that might help me think this through: tales of travel, natural histories, poetry, and accounts of Highland and Island life. Then I sat in a café, overlooking the pier from which ferries embark for the Western Isles, and began to consider the realities of what I was dreaming up. The trip couldn't be continuous: with a little planning, I could arrange my life to free up ten days of each month, but the rest would have to be spent fulfilling responsibilities back in the English Midlands. This discontinuity would have two distinct advantages. It could spread the journey across the seasons, revealing every facet of the turning year on these weather-ravaged coastlines. It would also allow me to equip myself to tackle each stretch in the ways that suit it best: where one month I'd sit low in the water and power my kayak through the waves, the next I could don crampons to cross snow-clad peaks, or fix ropes to rock and descend into networks of mines and caves.

Over brunch in Ullapool I used my phone to search for things that could help me. The journey would require a large expedition kayak (five feet longer than the one I'd used that morning) to handle rough seas and hold gear for several days. But the broken landscapes of the far north also made me look for a boat I could carry. I found a 2kg pack-raft: an inflatable vessel that could sit at the bottom of my rucksack until asked to carry me across a loch or along a stretch of river. Travelling like this I could spend my nights on islets and peaks with sightlines to the ocean and aim for 24/7 contact with the coastline.

Five hours later than intended I began the nine-hour drive south, but the sense of excitement was still building. Over the following months I renegotiated my life, striking deals and compromises to buy me time to travel. I rearranged my books so that the most accessible shelves in the house held only reading for this venture. I brushed up my learner's Welsh, and began to acquire a little Gaelic, so I'd have some access to more than just English writing on these coasts. I mounted a two-metre-tall map on the wall of the room I work in and started to

annotate its edge. I chose my starting place and date: Out Stack (a skerry north of Shetland) on 30 June 2016. And I began to contact people who might help me on my way.



Before long, I'd persuaded old friends to assist with transport and join me for a few short legs of the journey. But with surprising consistency these people remarked that there was a certain irrationality to this scheme: it was hard to justify, they said, in any practical sense. Although I could see where they were coming from, the plan corresponded so neatly to my sense of what matters that their caution felt empty: this seemed like the fulfilment of a course I've long been following and even a practical act of professional development. Their admonitions did at least force me to think through my motives for the venture.

I'm a historian by profession: I teach courses and write books about nineteenth-century Britain. Like the work of many historians, my writing has focused, so far, on a few urban centres: it has done no justice to geographical diversity. I knew from past journeys that it would be hard to imagine places with histories, cultures and current conditions more different than, say, Shetland and the Isle of Barra, yet to many people these ocean-bound extremities might as well be interchangeable (and neither is likely even to be mentioned in a history book with 'Britain' in its title). This journey would be a quest to comprehend and articulate the intense particularity of the places on this coastline; in undertaking such a project I felt I could become a more rounded and responsible historian of the British Isles.

This is an especially significant task because the predominance of southern and central England enshrined in so much writing on Britain is a relatively recent development. It's not all that strange a fact, for instance, that in 1700 the island of St Kilda, now habitually presented as fiendishly remote, was among the most thoroughly documented rural communities in Europe. Metropolitan culture tends to take today's geography for granted, despite the fact that the British Isles were turned inside out by roads and rail. Mainland arteries – the Irish M8, the English M1 and even the West Coast Mainline – now run through the centres of their landmass rather than along the external sea-roads that predominated till the railway boom of the 1830s. Since what would once have been miraculous – instantaneous communication across any earthly distance – has become ordinary, and what was once ordinary – travel by boat across a stretch of fierce sea – seems miraculous, attempts to empathise across centuries falter. Coasts and islands carry very different meanings than they once possessed: associations with remoteness and emptiness have replaced links with commerce and communication. This was part of the reason why travelling

these coastlines felt like a way of thinking myself into the world of people I write and teach about.

But there were other reasons why this felt right. The belief that wandering the landscape is a productive technique for historical research is not unusual, or at least it didn't used to be. The links between historians and the outdoors were once strong. In the 1920s, for instance, G.M. Trevelyan wrote his classic histories of Britain while wandering Hadrian's Wall. Trevelyan soon became patron and champion of the many outdoors organisations that were all the rage after 1930. The links between tramping the countryside and doing history were still so clear in 1966 that when the Oxford historian Keith Thomas noted the rise of new kinds of scientific historian, he described 'the computer' replacing 'the stout boots' worn by 'advanced historians' of preceding decades. Simon Schama wrote his best work in the 1980s, including a book called *Landscape and Memory*; at that time he frequently spoke of 'the archive of the feet'.

I discovered Trevelyan's writing, in my teens, in a small Welsh bookshop on a family holiday, and learning about him was one of the things that set me on the trajectory towards my current life. At that time, part of me wished to work in the nearby national park and part to write histories. Trevelyan made the two seem not just compatible but complementary. From that moment on, it was thinking of history as something that happened in negotiations between humans and hills, valleys, rain, wind and sea that drove me to be a historian. And I seem to have assumed from the beginning that reading and reflection are best done outdoors.

In those early years, while a pupil at the local comprehensive on the edge of the Dark Peak, I'd wander past pubs and churches, new factories and old mills and onto the moors, where I'd try to memorise the physics formulae I needed for exams (only occasionally would short-eared owls or golden plovers distract me so much they'd write off a day's revision). My life over the two decades since then has been a quest for better ways to escape into the wild to think. From the modest moorland of the Peak District, to Scotland's least peopled places and the hostile grandeur of Alpine ranges my travels have extended and my attitudes to nature, work and literature become increasingly entwined. Now, whenever there's something I need to learn in detail I pack a bag with books and choose an atmospheric place to wander: I spend days over an unhurried journey and sit reading amidst dramatic landscape. I've come to think that, with food and drink to spare, there are few luxuries more profound than getting well-and-truly lost for days among mountains. Staying still with a book for hours is also an excellent way to experience nature: a movement in the corner of the eye becomes a stoat between the boots; a sudden, startling noise is ptarmigan clattering onto nearby rocks; strange exhalations are a passing pod of porpoise. The associations this has created can be incongruous: Thomas Hardy and sea eagles, or

Rebecca Solnit and long-tailed skuas. But it is this practice of reading, thinking and writing outdoors that has begun to hone the habits that make a year of journeying feel like the ultimate source of reflection and growth.



Many of the places this journey would take me are now more free from human habitation than at any time since prehistory. The west has beautiful coastlines and wild ones, but even their remotest fragments are layered with diverse and difficult histories: they are sites of human default not design, shaped by past people but now reclaimed by nature. In the darkest spell of this story, the imperialism of nineteenth-century lowlanders drove highland and coastal communities inland, across the sea and to the grave. Part of the community of the island of St Kilda ended up in Melbourne, Australia; the people of Cork formed new Ontario communities; Welsh-speaking settlements were founded in the pampas and mountains of southern Argentina. The stories of these coastlines have stretched across the globe, revealing facets of Britain's imperial past and present very different from those seen from metropolitan London or Glasgow.

During my morning on Eilean a' Chleirich I sought evidence of the people who once eked out livings in this most uncompromising spot. At first, wading through thick, ungrazed foliage, the island felt largely untouched. But I gradually began to see hints of human history shrouded by the plants: chunks of cut stone and roots of an old wall. The earliest human traces here are vestiges of stone circles from a time before written records: millennia over which imagination has freedom to roam. From a later age are scant remnants of Chleirich's time as an early-Christian retreat; this was the period that gave the island its name yet it is unrecorded in any document from the time. Then there are foundations from structures built by a nineteenth-century outlaw whose banishment from the mainland was recorded in just one short sentence of Gaelic prose. But the island's stones only really intersect with literary record with traces of the occupation by 1930s naturalists whose brief stay was immortalised in Frank Fraser Darling's *Island Years* (1940).

Barely anything of any of these people's endeavours stands above ankle height, yet Chleirich is layered with past activity, where each successive wave of habitation has been so limited in scale that it hasn't erased previous histories. Wandering its hollows and hillocks is therefore a historian or archaeologist's fantasy. Indeed, what made Chleirich feel wild was not just wind, rain and the sounds of the sea, but the sense of being amidst remnants of human

action that had been conclusively defeated by weather. Humans toiled here centuries ago and my back when I slept had been laid against their labour: the rocks I nestled amongst had been worked by people, before wind, rain, ice and lichen reclaimed them for the wild. Although the British Isles have no untouched wilderness, their wildness is all the more remarkable for its entanglement with history: this journey would be an exercise in the art of interpreting the intertwining.



In that sense, my plan was an experiment. I hoped to see what could be learned by travelling slowly along these coastlines with an eye attuned to both the natural world and the remains of the past. The decades over which I've travelled here are long enough to begin to see changes and to ask what will become of these landscapes. The way in which some coastal regions were emptied of permanent populations now contrasts their growth as sites of leisure. Mountain paths grow wider and un-pathed regions fewer, coastal walking routes are extended and advertised in increasingly lavish brochures. I'd been spending nights on mountains for several years before I happened across someone doing the same, but now the experience isn't uncommon: in the winter before this journey I even slept on a Cairngorm summit from which the only visible artificial light was the pinprick of a headtorch on a distant mountain. Thanks to social media and political devolution, communities from Applecross to Anglesey pioneer new ways of living well while promoting and protecting the needs of nature. The languages of the small rural communities at the edges of the islands – particularly Welsh and Gaelic – grow in ways that once seemed impossible; lost languages like Norn and Cornish have vocal advocates. 'Small language' networks of cooperation and exchange now link Atlantic Britain with Breton and Galician cultures in ways that echo historic bonds along seaboard. Lynx might soon be restored to a few remote forests just as white tailed eagles have been returned to seas and skies. Yet even the eagles are still a source of contention: beloved by tourists and naturalists they are resented, even sometimes poisoned and shot, by those who see them threaten livelihoods in farming, fieldsports or fishing. This book is therefore not just the story of a journey, or an exploration of past and present on the fringes of the British Isles, but a reflection on how far, and in what directions, our current interactions with the coast are reshaping this north-east Atlantic archipelago.

In attempting to tell this aspect of the story I wanted to rely on more than my own experience, so in the months leading up to my journey I made use of every professional and

personal connection I had. I travelled to the University of the Highlands and Islands for events on coastal history, meeting, for the first time, the unofficial ‘historian laureate’ of Scottish coastal communities, Jim Hunter. I contacted artists and musicians, including the composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davies (an old friend of the family, who once taught me to play his Orkney-inspired music, but who passed away just weeks before my journey began). And I made use of my role as a teacher: I acquired dissertation students interested in the history and folklore of western Scotland, Wales and Ireland and wrote these places into my courses.

One class about these coasts was especially instructive. This was a seminar on ‘Film and History’ for the University of Birmingham’s MA in Modern British Studies which I taught with a historian of the twentieth century, Matt Houlbrook. We chose early films of St Kilda and the North Sea as the case studies for our students. They began by watching the first moving picture of Britain’s most famous small island: Oliver Pike’s *St Kilda, Its People and Birds* (1908). Then they watched four films from the 1930s, including John Ritchie’s footage of the evacuation, and Michael Powell’s *The Edge of the World* (1937) which was set on Kilda but filmed in Shetland. We then chose three documentaries of the eastern coastline – John Grierson’s *Drifters* (1929) and *Granton Trawler* (1934) as well as Henry Watt’s *North Sea* (1939) – each of which places trawlers and fishing at its heart.

The effect of putting these films side by side is striking. They show the process of these coasts being mythologised. By the early twentieth century, the North Sea had come to stand for shipping, industry and progress: its early appearances on film were commissioned by the General Post Office to advertise the vibrancy of fishing fleets and the productive potential of the ocean. Trawlers haul herring by the thousand from the waves: despite gales and storms, these icons of modern masculinity demonstrate human dominance over nature. Film-makers experiment with advanced techniques of sound and vision as they seek to portray the striving and struggling that make a modern factory of the sea. By contrast, the west in these films signals detachment and under-development. Its communities hold out against terrible odds with only vestigial industries to aid them. A lone woman sits at a spinning wheel the same as the one her grandmother’s grandmother used. A man is lowered from a cliff, draped in a sheet: he waits patiently, alone, to snag a guillemot which can then be salted for meagre winter sustenance. Children scatter, panicked by the strange sight of a camera and cameraman. Our students saw that when watching the east-coast trawlers the viewer feels like the audience at a performance; when watching films of west-coast crofters and fisherfolk they were left with a feeling more like voyeurism.

The contrasts that appear in these films are fictions. They don't portray these places as they exist today nor as they were when the films were made; still less do they depict a world that could have been recognised in earlier ages. Yet stereotypes like these are repeated endlessly. Twenty-first-century poets are forced to work as hard as Norman MacCaig did in 1960 to remind readers that Gaelic verse is often small and formal: grandiose romanticism and the wild red-haired Gael live in lowland imaginations not in west-coast glens and mountains. But I can't pretend that engrained romantic imagery doesn't still colour my own, lowlander's, obsession with these Atlantic fringes. Such notions are resilient to short spells on icy crags or a night in the ghostly remains of a cleared coastal township. But could they survive this journey's long immersion in these regions? I hoped to find my imagination changed by travel: the mists of Celtic twilight dispelled perhaps, with the delicate textures of mundane and everyday history appearing from the fog. This would not, I hoped be a tale of disenchantment, but of changed enchantment, in which the rich worlds of real human beings exceeded (as any historian will say they always do) the hazy types of myth. So I knew, when I set out, what I wanted from this journey. But if journeys always turned out how we planned, and provided answers only to the questions we knew to ask, there'd be little point in taking them at all.





## **Time, Space and Islands: Why Geographers Drive the Temporal Agenda**

One of *Past & Present*'s series of viewpoints on 'Time'.

Talk of disciplinary 'turns' is guaranteed, today, to draw groans and eye rolls. Despite the origins of this rhetoric in postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives, the 'turn' is often taken to imply a singular temporality with strong strands of directional development while, where temporalities are concerned, every discipline now demands contingency and heterogeneity. But the rhetoric surrounding spatial and temporal turns is worth attention, since it illuminates the status of temporal concepts in history and neighbouring disciplines. The spatial turn, from the 1960s to 1990s, was transformative: a critical shift that rejected geography's previously passive role as a stage for the action of history and inspired new interdisciplinary fusions across the human sciences without which today's intellectual landscape would be unrecognisable. In light of this, it is worth asking what a return to the temporal might mean.

Prophecies of a 'temporal turn' have arisen every decade for half a century, with particular intensity at the end of the 1980s and in the present. They have never quite come true. Today, with talk of temporality intensified, and often conceptualised as a 'historical turn' (e.g. in sociology or management studies), new kinds of opportunity and threat seem to be orbiting the historical discipline.<sup>1</sup> Historians from William Sewell Jr to Patrick Joyce have presented this as history's chance to seize initiative: to regain the central place among the human sciences that the discipline once, supposedly, held. The fact that such claims often appear as asides or

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<sup>1</sup> For example Roy Suddaby, 'Towards a Historical Consciousness: Following the Historical Turn in Management Thought', *M@n@gement*, xix (2016), 46–60.

even, in the case of Joyce, in footnotes suggests historians are unsure of how to grasp this chance.<sup>2</sup>

Underlying such claims are assumptions that while geographers are the go-to-scholars for the theorisation of space, historians can claim pre-eminence in conceptualising time. History, according to Sewell, adopts ‘contingent, complex, eventful and heterogeneous’ temporalities, which are the field’s professional common sense and with which other disciplines could usefully inform their less ‘eventful’, often teleological, ordering of the social.<sup>3</sup> Recent textbooks on historical practice convey similar messages: ‘it is widely acknowledged’ writes Prashant Kidambi ‘that the distinctive contribution of history to the human sciences lies in its reckoning with time’.<sup>4</sup>

If only this were true. Reading the scholarship of the ‘temporal turn’ is a sobering experience for a historian. Historical conceptions of time are often equated by geographers and literary scholars with a naïve historicism that is linear, developmental and homogeneous. History becomes the straw man against which others define their contingent temporalities. Deep mapping is seen as a rich device because it incorporates many temporalities without being tied into monocausal logics of historical narrative. Other examples appear in literary scholarship, such as David Lloyd’s *Irish Times: The Temporalities of Modernity*. History and the work of historians, for Lloyd, represents the hegemonic force, still sustained by ideas of progress, against which postcolonial scholarship must mobilise.<sup>5</sup> Lloyd, like the theorist of photography, Ariella Azoulay, demands a relationship between past and present in which the present is a toxic offshoot from a living past; ‘pastness’ is not an absolute property, and the otherness of the present, not the past, is what we should worry about.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, history in

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<sup>2</sup> Patrick Joyce, ‘What is the Social in Social History’, *Past and Present*, ccvi (2010), fn.23.

<sup>3</sup> William H. Sewell Jr, *Logics of History* (Chicago, 2005), 81–123.

<sup>4</sup> Prashant Kidambi, ‘Time, Temporality and History’, in Gunn and Faire (eds.), *Research Methods for History* (2012), 220–37.

<sup>5</sup> David Lloyd, *Irish Times: The Temporalities of Modernity* (Dublin, 2008), esp. 1–38.

<sup>6</sup> Ariella Azoulay, ‘Potential History: Thinking Through Violence’, *Critical Inquiry*, 39 (2013), 548–74.

Lloyd's model constitutes an ordering of time in which the past is gone, subsumed by irresistible social process into a careless present.

I had an unlikely opportunity to assess these contrasting visions of historical temporality in 2014, when a global confederation of Institutes of Advanced Studies began its first Intercontinental Academy.<sup>7</sup> This event lasted three years, with meetings, several weeks long, in Brazil (March/April 2015 and 2017) and Japan (April 2016). Fifteen fellows from across the arts and sciences gathered to collaborate around the concept of time. Takeda Kazuhisa (Waseda University, Tokyo) and I represented the discipline of history in a project that entailed exposure to a vast range of scholarship on temporalities.

One of the project's surprises was the realisation that the disciplinary portability of historical notions of temporality was limited in comparison with the ideas of literary scholars, geographers and philosophers. Henri Lefebvre and Paul Ricoeur carried more conviction than Reinhart Koselleck, Francois Hartog or Hayden White.<sup>8</sup> Rereading Koselleck in this context revealed the reasons: his concept of acceleration and his periodisation possess all the rigidity and linearity that sceptics expect of history. I found myself abandoning advocacy of historical theory and drawing instead on work that unravels multiple temporalities from specific histories.

This meant turning to recent studies of what might be termed 'temporal globality'. The closely interrelated work of scholars such as On Barak, Vanessa Ogle and Avner Wishnitzer provides an unusual revelation of the potential for research on temporalities to illuminate modern history.<sup>9</sup> They show how the co-existence of multiple temporal regimes in colonial and

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<sup>7</sup> <http://intercontinental-academia.ubias.net/> (accessed 6.6.17).

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting that almost all major interventions in historical thinking about time have entered the Anglophone academy in translation and after several years (usually at least a decade) of debate in French, German or Scandinavian scholarship; in almost all instances, Anglophone scholarship has paid little attention to these wider discussions, allowing work such as Koselleck's to stand as monolithic interventions and giving them very different afterlives from those they underwent in the context of their original languages.

<sup>9</sup> On Barak, *On Time: Technology and Temporality in Modern Egypt* (Berkeley, CA; 2013); Vanessa Ogle, *The Global Transformation of Time* (Cambridge, MA, 2015); Avner Wishnitzer, *Reading Clocks, Alla Turca: Time and Society in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley, CA, 2015); see also J. L. Gelvin and Nile Green (eds.), *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley, CA, 2013).

semi-colonial settings such as Egypt, Lebanon and the Indian subcontinent played out in unexpected ways. Barak, in particular, conjures with immense sophistication how modern technologies that transformed the experience of time – transport and telegraphy – were given unique meanings amid different temporal expectations of diverse communities.

Barak's ideas proved useful on the Intercontinental project because the methods of other disciplines – from social scientists to biologists – were reflected in this historical literature. Posthumanist, material and technopolitical implications fizz through Barak's text, creating a host of points from which debate could spiral out. It was less clear what history was giving back: how a particularly historical method might be identified. I also began to wonder whether history is currently running at dual speed as regards temporality: a few sites of contested global encounter, where imperial powers failed to comprehend the sophisticated temporalities of regions they disrupted, are subject to probing analysis. But reading recent historical work on temporalities in my own field (modern Britain), I found less to stir excitement.

This isn't because such settings offer less potential for temporal study; at least other disciplines don't seem to think they do. The issues driving temporal scholarship seem to swing easily from the local to the global in any geographical context. One familiar explanation for new interest in time suggests the idea is gaining relevance because conceptions of the future have changed dramatically. In African anthropology, time talk often involves discussion of a collapse of mid-term perspectives on the future; psychologists analyse time in relation to social anxiety and interaction between past and future in constructing reality; the environmental humanities and ecology sometimes embrace a new apocalypticism with theological echoes and implications.

Time looms large in all these fields, but especially the latter: the term often now occurs in names of centres or seminar series such as 'Encounters in Deep Time' (environmental humanities at the University of Edinburgh). There are even hints that ecological temporalities

might modify the spatial turn: Timothy Morton argues that ecological awakening entails ‘the revenge of place’ against postmodern ‘space’ (‘it is space that has turned out to be an anthropocentric concept’). He insists that ‘place’, as opposed to space, has ‘a strange loop form because place deeply involves time’.<sup>10</sup> These ecological contexts are where the idea of the temporal humanities begins to look necessary and urgent.

Perceptions of a new futurity are echoed in historical scholarship. Mark Levene’s ‘Climate Blues: or How Awareness of the Human End might re-instil Ethical Purpose to the Writing of History’ calls for a wholesale reinvention of the discipline, as does Daniel Smail’s effort to persuade historians to adopt expanded timeframes in *On Deep History and the Brain*. Armitage and Guldi’s *History Manifesto* seems to mark a juncture with a futurity not of short endlessly repeatable cycles – boom and bust – but radical contingency and unprecedented threat.<sup>11</sup> If so inclined, we might diagnose a conjuncture today like that Koselleck saw in the eighteenth century when shapes of past and future take on new significance, and historical thought gains new potential amid long processes of decreasing intellectual innocence.<sup>12</sup>

Is this, then, finally the time of the temporal humanities? The genealogy of temporal and spatial scholarship does not suggest we should expect that. Time, whenever its spread as an analytic concept has seemed inevitable, has quickly slid back into Augustinian intangibility. This genealogy, although well-known, is worth setting out because it provides crucial grounding for collaboration between historians and the other human sciences.<sup>13</sup>

Temporalities were clearly on the historical agenda before the explosion of interdisciplinary interest in time and space in the 1970s. Braudel’s analyses of the temporal

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<sup>10</sup> Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology* (New York, 2016), 9–11.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Levene, ‘Climate Blues: Or How Awareness of the Human End might Re-instil Ethical Purpose to the Writing of History’, *Environmental Humanities*, ii (2013), 147–67; Jo Guldi and David Armitage, *The History Manifesto* (Cambridge, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: on the Semantics of Historical Time* (trans. Keith Tribe, New York, 1985).

<sup>13</sup> Robert Hassan, ‘Globalization and the Temporal Turn’, *Korean Journal of Policy Studies* (2010), 83–102; Jon May and Nigel Thrift, *Timespace: Geographies of Temporality* (Abingdon, 2005); Simonetta Tabboni, ‘The Idea of Social Time in Norbert Elias’, *Time and Society* (2001), 5–27; Zygmunt Bauman, ‘Time and Space Reunited’, *Time and Society* (2000), 171–85.

characteristics of historical process inspired one strand of scholarship, contrasting with E.P. Thompson's study of the impact of capitalism on the time regimes of industrial workers.<sup>14</sup> Surprisingly, these two traditions remained separate. Where the projects of the *Annales* and the new social history intersected in many familiar ways, the richest *Annales* visions of what temporalities are (most highly developed, perhaps, in *Montaillou*) became everything Thompson's was not: multiple, flexible and differentiated according to gender and social status.

But the really dramatic turn towards analysis of space and time as frameworks for scholarship came later. Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* (1974) was key in establishing a field. The most influential instigator of what became known as the spatial turn, Lefebvre inspired scholars to take up culturally specific studies of spatial consciousness. His temporal work, engaging ideas of speed, gained less traction.<sup>15</sup> Koselleck's *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (1979) perhaps came closest to doing something similar for time. However, the term temporal humanities never emerged, where the spatial humanities became a movement.

Under the influence of Lefebvre and Koselleck an increasing number of scholars in various disciplines turned their attention to time and space as the dimensions of society. Historical texts such as Stephen Kern's *Cultures of Time and Space* (1983) used ideas that run back to both. But their really intense influence began at the end of the 1980s. Uncoincidentally, this was when English translations emerged (Koselleck in 1985, Lefebvre 1990).

Something odd occurred at this point: time and space became part of peculiar rhetorics of competition. The problem according to those who theorised space was that scholars were too focused on time. And the accusation also operated in reverse. Texts on space continued to

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<sup>14</sup> Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Reign of Phillip II* (trans. Sian Reynolds, Berkeley, CA, 1972); E. P. Thompson, 'Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism', *Past and Present*, xxxviii (1967), 56–97.

<sup>15</sup> Lefebvre's temporalities have been revived in the last decade: Peter Osborne, *The Politics of Time* (London, 2010); Hartmut Rosa, *Social Acceleration: A New Theory of Modernity* (London, 2013).

dominate. The influence of Lefebvre, combined with Foucault and Bourdieu, produced sophisticated analyses of the social and historical construction of space. In 1991 Frederic Jameson called for a 'new kind of spatial imagination'; Doreen Massey, in several works over a decade, demanded that political economy be spatialised to illuminate 'geometries of power'.<sup>16</sup> Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (1989) was a strident effort to make space the primary analytic category of scholarship. This was a sustained critique of historical thinking. Soja caricatures the possibilities of temporal concepts, reducing time to chronology in his effort to elaborate a 'socio-spatial dialectic' and deconstruct the tyranny of unexamined historical time.<sup>17</sup>

As Robert Hassan has shown, the concept of globalisation was both a driving force and a product of this analysis of spatial organisation. In *Globalisation* (1992), often credited with defining subsequent usage of the term, Roland Robertson explored the wholesale transformation of the qualities of space and time that modernity had generated. There was perhaps also a shift taking place among historians: where analysing scale might once have implied discussing decades, generations and centuries, conference panels or special issues devoted to scale have increasingly assumed the term to mean locality, region, nation, zone and globe.

Ecocriticism at that moment insisted that the fundamental problematic driving scholarship was changing and that this transformation required a spatial and temporal reorientation of the academy, turning from the holy trinity of social analysis to vast geographical processes. As Cheryll Glotfelty put it:

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<sup>16</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC, 1991), 365–6; in her emphasis on space-time and the dangers of maintaining the binary, formed in the nineteenth century, between temporal and spatial concepts Massey was one of the few scholars of that moment to evoke the complexities of these issues.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London, 1989), 1–2.

If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from...the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed you would never know that there was an earth at all.<sup>18</sup>

There was some work in the spatialising moment of 1989–92 that seemed to reharmonise space and time. David Harvey, for instance, didn't take Soja's antagonistic line. In essays such as 'The Time and Space of the Enlightenment Project' Harvey explored 'time-space compression' in the emergence of modernity.<sup>19</sup> In late capitalism, he insisted, the individual no longer had a role in constructing time or space: spatial and temporal imaginations were systemic and imposed. However, scholars have recently noted imbalances in Harvey's project: his 'best-known books', Noel Castree remarked, 'do not strongly thematize time, though they do say a lot about space'.<sup>20</sup>

Alongside hundreds of historical, sociological and geographical studies of space, interest in time was less prolific. But trawling library catalogues for books on temporality will still likely land a reader in the years 1989-1992. The late '80s saw an 'imperial turn' in the study of time alongside new collaboration between history and anthropology. Anthony Aveni published *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks and Cultures* (1989), then J.T. Fraser released *Of Time, Passion and Knowledge* (1990). These were warm-up acts for three major texts: *Chronotypes: the Construction of Time* (1991), a collection featuring names of the status of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak; Alfred Gell's *Anthropology of Time* (1992); and Norbert Elias's *Time: An Essay* (1992). Not coincidentally, 1992 saw the founding of *Time and Society*. The

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<sup>18</sup> Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader* (Athens, GA, 1996), xvi.

<sup>19</sup> David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> Noel Castree, 'The Spatio-Temporality of Capitalism', *Time and Society*, xviii (2008), 26–61.

journal's first year brought several important interventions that are still among its most cited outputs, including Helga Nowotny's 'Time and Social Theory' and Werner Bergmann's 'The Problem of Time in Sociology'. Also uncoincidentally, Bruno Latour's writings of the early '90s, culminating in *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), remain his most temporally-oriented work.

Over the following two decades, the literature on space grew dramatically. The work of the historian Phillip Ethington is exemplary of space's victory in the unnecessary competition between dimensions. Ethington denies the possibility of studying time at all: 'the past cannot exist in time, only in space'.<sup>21</sup> He set himself the task of historicising what, in 2007, he still referred to as the most recent turn in historical thought, the 'spatial turn'.<sup>22</sup>

This brings us back to the present, when the study of time proliferates in ways unseen since 1992. The richest examples come from disciplines that led the spatial turn. There are hints of this lineage in On Barak whose research is informed by spatial-turn scholarship and speaks as much to space (and place) as time. But most cases come from geography, sociology and the environmental humanities, which have seen a return to narrative and the invention of visual and textual mapping practices calculated to emphasise temporal diversity.

The research project I embarked on after the Intercontinental Academy was a journey by kayak through all the Atlantic-island communities of Britain and Ireland. Part of its purpose was to ask how a view from the sea could inform a spatial and temporal reorganisation of archipelagic history. Looking inland from the coast, for instance, the Enlightenment appears as the triumph of a few cities – Dublin, Edinburgh, London, Birmingham – at the expense of elsewhere; for coastal communities it was the beginning, and cause, of a dark age. In contrast, much of what were once referred to as Dark Ages had been eras of great coastal strength and

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<sup>21</sup> Philip Ethington, 'Placing the Past: Groundwork for a Spatial Theory of History', *Rethinking History*, xi (2007), 465-493.

<sup>22</sup> C.f. May and Thrift, *Timescapes*, which identified a 'spatial imperialism' in scholarship and prescribed, rather than more work on temporalities, rejection of time/space duality.

enlightenment. Reversals abound. The widely celebrated Education Acts of 1870 and 1872 were unmitigated disasters for Atlantic Britain, while the grim economic recession of the 1970s saw an island renaissance unprecedented for two centuries.<sup>23</sup> As David Lloyd showed in his work on Irish modernity, the multiple temporal trajectories of Britain and Ireland emerge most clearly at the edges.

What has been most striking in the research this journey entailed is that historians have contributed so little. Greg Dening, writing on the Pacific, and John Gillis, on the west Atlantic and elsewhere, are rare historians amidst the long roll-call of scholars who provide frameworks for analysing the temporalities of islandness.<sup>24</sup> Where the north-east Atlantic is concerned historical contributions are rarer still. Anthropologists and literary scholars such as Lloyd explore the temporalities of Atlantic littorals, asking what it means to live in island spaces more empty of human habitation than at any time since prehistory. But the scholar who inspires most imitation is the cartographer, Tim Robinson, whose extensive writings on the Aran Islands and Connemara evoke vast spatial contexts and diverse, multitudinous, temporalities: ‘the immensities each little place is wrapped in’. Sweetly, Robinson has great faith in historians; his maps, he once told an interviewer, are ‘organised by the sense of sight. I cannot see Time (as a good historian can) and the dates of buildings and events I have noted do not begin to compose a local history; they mark, though, some points of attachment of the historical web from which one can grope back along the strands into the darkness’.<sup>25</sup>

This is a project of countermapping that works against the military, Anglicising functions of Ireland’s official maps. The ‘strands’ of its ‘web’ entangle and demobilise the

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<sup>23</sup> Roger Hutchinson, *A Waxing Moon: The Modern Gaelic Revival* (Mainstream, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Greg Dening, *Islands and Beaches: Discourse on a Silent Land, Marquesas, 1774-1880* (Honolulu, 1980); John Gillis, *The Human Shore: Seacoasts in History* (Chicago, 2012); Dening’s work in the 1980s undermines any distinction between history and anthropology, his ideas formed in dialogue with other discipline-crossing scholars such as Marshall Sahlins, whose *Islands of History* (Chicago, 1985) would become the decade’s classic archipelagic study.

<sup>25</sup> Tim Robinson, interview with David Ward collected in the Folding Landscapes submission to the Ford European Conservation Award, Tim Robinson Archive, NUI Galway, P120/3/4/1.

linear temporality of imperial modernity that was embodied in the quantification of Irish landscape for integration into British political economy. Robinson conceptualises this quest to see beyond officially-sanctioned narratives of progress as ‘finding chinks in Time’.<sup>26</sup> In his wake have come countless deep mapping projects that aim to scratch below the topsoil to clutter and diversify a single spot’s temporal meanings. All are historical as much as geographical: the map’s space is container for temporal data. Events and stories are compressed into vehicles whose virtue is their lack of narrative structure. These projects are often community endeavours, advised by scholars in various forms of space and place studies such as Nessa Cronin (Irish Studies, NUI Galway) who are interested in ‘how communities both inherit and create their cartography of belonging’: ‘ground-truthing’ is no longer a matter of metric data but of meaning made through centuries.<sup>27</sup> Yet it is rare for historians to take major roles.

Community endeavours to reconceptualise the temporalities of place exist by the hundred in the Gaelic speaking regions of Ireland and Scotland, particularly among the islands. There are regions here that, for many years, refused to accept the imposition of daylight saving time. Many of the more substantive initiatives constitute profound, practical applications of historical thought unrivalled in most fields of British and Irish history: they achieve precisely that link between historical practice and social impact for which historians strive.

The earliest Scottish example occurred in Ness (Isle of Lewis). In the mid-1970s, Lewis was among the most economically depressed regions of Britain, facing enormous unemployment and an exodus of young people to the mainland. Ness identity in the era of depression was founded in temporal myths: that the island had no history, that history happened to cities and in the English language, and that the only way for ‘backward’ Ness to ‘catch up’ was to imitate English-speaking cities.

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Pine, ‘Cartography of the Soul’, *Irish Literary Supplement* (1987), 16.

<sup>27</sup> Nessa Cronin, ‘Deep Mapping Communities in the West of Ireland’ in Lynch *et al.* (eds.), *Thinking Continental* (Lincoln, NE, 2017), 46–62.

The striking part of the story is how that situation was overcome. When a few Ness residents, including Annie Macdonald (now MacSween), gained access to job-creation and education funds they used them in radical ways. Macdonald pioneered one of the most successful job-creation schemes in western Scotland, not by founding a fishing co-operative or transport company but by forming a Historical Society (Comunn Eachdraidh Niss) and recruiting a team of six to collect oral histories and placelore. At first this looked eccentric. In a 1979 interview, Macdonald noted the concerns of critics: ‘they thought it wasn’t the best way to spend public money. Maybe they thought the past was dead’.<sup>28</sup> Yet legitimisation brought by official funding facilitated a scheme conceptualised to stimulate ‘the people of the Western Isles to perceive their own community more clearly’.<sup>29</sup>

Nothing could be achieved economically, Macdonald realised, until the narrative in which Ness people placed their lives was reimagined. The six fieldworkers collected material to build Ness its own temporalities in tension with those of industrial modernity. By recovering the herring girl, crofter and Gaelic storyteller from posterity’s condescension they showed that mainland histories taught in schools were not the only shapes that time could take. The result was not the total rejection of temporal ideologies and modernising narratives that an approach informed by anthropological theory might have produced, but a targeted critique of those temporalities of modernity that pushed industrial, urban and bureaucratic integration to the fore: they argued that Ness was not traditional but differently modern.<sup>30</sup> Many early initiatives involved practical acts of mediation, much like those described by Barak, between technologies that transformed experience of time – such as telephones – and the specific temporal setting of Ness, where memory endured through Gaelic patronymics and an ordinary phonebook would

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<sup>28</sup> James Hunter, ‘Who Says History is Bunk? The Past Inspires Ness to a Better Future’, *Press and Journal*, 1 Dec 1979.

<sup>29</sup> *Sinn Fhein a rinn e: Proiseact Muinntir nan Eilean, 1977–92*, Comunn Na Gadhlaig pamphlet, Lews Castle Archive, Stornoway.

<sup>30</sup> For instance, Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York, 1983).

be incomprehensible. The society's impact was profound. The first exhibition featured photographs and coastal maps to spur the collection of Gaelic placenames; a 1979 newspaper article written by James Hunter (one of few historians ever involved with the phenomenon) remarked that this 'brought people together in a new way. It generated... the sort of enthusiasm for action which had previously been lacking'.<sup>31</sup>

Remarkably, the Historical Society is now the region's biggest employer, its archive bustling with locals and visitors. Maps that repopulate the historic landscape have become ever more crucial to the islands' historical renaissance. And Ness's historical fever proved infectious. By 1990 there were fifteen new 'Comuinn Eachdraidh' in the Outer Hebrides, their voice aggregated through a Federation of Historical Societies who could assist in the provision of resources to re-narrate history in schools. Today that number of historical societies has doubled, affiliated in Tasglann nan Eilean Siar and instrumental in resurgent Gaelic culture. The first historical society began a revolution in island life that is only now coming to fruition.

These community endeavours constitute one of the most inspirational historiographical phenomena in modern Britain, and their work has been celebrated by geographers, such as Robinson, and literary scholars, such as Robert Macfarlane, yet they are still uncelebrated among historians. They might be read as demonstrating Ethington's point (that time can only be comprehended spatially) except that they do the reverse, rendering space temporal. What they show is potential for historians to engage the conceptual world that informs Barak, Ogle and Wishnitzer in other historical fields. But, perhaps, it is only by taking the spatial turn and learning from the current practice of geographers that the potential for historians of thinking through temporalities can be realised.

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<sup>31</sup> Hunter, 'Who Says History is Bunk?'