

Hand-Written Road Maps to Multi-Dimensional Space

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ABSTRACT:

In their article “Hand-Written Road Maps to Multi-Dimensional Space” István Berszán and Philip Gross investigate the heightened alertness of literary reading and writing in an interview with Gross, the prize-winning British poet and professor of creative writing. After the presentation of the interviewee Berszán asks him questions concerning the kinetic spaces of his literary practices. The itinerary follows issues like place, temporality of occurrences, attention, system and ecology, metaphor, time projection, gesture-resonance and collaboration. Gross seems to be as good a creative playmate during the discussion as he was for children, students, artists or readers who met him in a „collaborative space between”: his answers turn the questions both into hunter and quarry.

Keywords: creative writing, place, temporality, attention, ecocriticism.

The prize-winning poems of Philip Gross strike their readers by a heightened alertness and accurate thinking. *The Water Table* won the British T.S. Eliot Prize 2009 and received a Cholmondeley Award in 2017. His later books include *A Bright Acoustic* (2017), *Love Songs of Carbon* (2015), winner of the Roland Mathias Poetry Award and *Deep Field* (2011), which deals with his father's loss of language from aphasia, and with voice and language itself. In this interview the author is invited to talk about the gestures of attention in order to map, on the one hand, their places, times and ecology, and their resonance or collaboration, on the other. It is a great benefit for the topic that Philip Gross is not only a poet, but novelist, an author for adults and children, Professor of Creative Writing and a frequent collaborator with a variety of artists: musicians, visual artists or dancers. He has published ten novels for young people, including *The Lastling* (2003), has written scripts and wrote the libretto for *The King in the Car Park*, a cantata about the re-discovery of Richard III, performed by three hundred school children in Leicester

Cathedral in 2015. His poetry for children includes *The All-Nite Café* (winner of the Signal Award 1994) and *Off Road To Everywhere* (winner of the CLPE Award 2011). His collaborations include *A Fold in the River* (Seren, 2015) with artist Valerie Coffin Price, and *I Spy Pinhole Eye* (Cinnamon Press, 2009) with photographer Simon Denison, which won the Wales Book of the Year Award 2010.

Philip Gross grew up and went to school in Plymouth, within sight of the dockyards, the sea and the bare uplands of Dartmoor. He started writing poems in his mid teens, and discovered music playing in a band called Wasteland, after the poem by T.S. Eliot. In 1970s he studied English at Sussex University, then he worked for a correspondence college and in libraries, later on as a freelance writer visiting schools all over England and leading writing workshops. In 1990s he joined Bath Spa University College to teach on their Creative Studies programme, and in 2004 became Professor of Creative Writing at Glamorgan University. He lives in Penarth, on the shores of the Severn Sea/Môr Hafren/Bristol Channel, which the poems in *The Water Table* contemplate.

The hope of the interviewer that Philip Gross would be as a good creative playmate during a discussion as he was for children, students, artists or readers who met him in a „collaborative space between”, was surprisingly fulfilled: the answers of the interviewee turned the questions both into hunter and quarry.

Berszán: Let's start with the concept of place. Referring to the Severn Estuary you say: “the waterscape altering with every change of weather, wind or light, it defied my concepts of ‘river’ or ‘sea’, and indeed of ‘place’” (Gross, “Halfway-to-whole” 30). Does it make a considerable difference whether an altering waterscape or, as in my case, an altering mountain-scape defies one's concept of place? On a whole-day-long trip (usually from 4:30 a.m. to 4:30 a.m.) I'm hiking on different planets: early in the morning, daylight, at sunset or in the night, the mountain and forest make me cross parallel worlds. And I have not mentioned yet seasons and altitudes: the forest and/or mountain covered by green, by snow or by nothing.

Gross: I make no special claims for water, except that it's the principle that proved fruitful for me. Even saying “principle” seems to be making an assumption, as if I'm going with Thales of Miletus on that ancient Greek quest for “first” principles that underlie everything. I'm much more poetically pragmatic than that, and instinctively pluralist, too, more at home with poet Louis MacNeice: “World is suddener than we fancy it. // World is crazier and more of it than we think, / Incurably plural” (MacNeice, “Snow” 24).

What convinces me is the sheer delight of that perception. Arguably water is the substance that visibly comes closest to that multiplicity and flux. So let's settle for calling it a metaphor – a way of disclosing new perceptions about the world, viewed from that particular angle, rather than accounting for it totally. I might say the same about the mind-teasing propositions of contemporary physics, such as string theory. Prag-

matically, I inhabit the world of everyday Newtonian science, within reach of our senses, albeit pushed to their edges by fluid dynamics, “chaos” and complexity. There *is* physically a particular way that matter behaves when in its fluid state and, philosophy aside, I just observe that my poetry leads back to versions of that, again and again. When I see that happening – and not as repetition but as continuing small surprises – I trust it. For poetry in particular, water seems to suggest an interplay of great subtlety and great simplicity, which strikes me as a fine aesthetic.

And mountains...? Though growing up in the far south-west of England means being aware of the sea all round you, that sense was almost too pervasive for me to be conscious of it. In my teens, the place I walked and climbed and made my own – made a new sense of my adolescent self in it – was Dartmoor. In European terms you could not call that terrain of heathland, bog and granite outcrops ‘mountains’. But the sense of walking up, out of the everyday world, into an other-ness, with a new pace and a new perspective, was clear. Like sea, the moors could seem monotonous, at least to people with a taste for peaks and precipices, but a long walk in that landscapes tunes your senses to much subtler changes and, you start to realize, a huge variety. I have been reading *The Living Mountain*, Nan Shepherd’s small exquisite book about the Cairngorm range of Scotland – written during the Second World War, unpublished for more than thirty years. An inspiring text for modern eco-critics long before that term existed, it describes a way of being with a mountain that is both intensely physical and existential: “Something moves between me and it. Place and a mind may interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered.” (Shepherd, *The Living* 8) That too seems to be describing the ability of place to dissolve boundaries, including those between the self and its surroundings – very much what water offered me.

It may be a coincidence that my encounter with the Severn estuary, crossing it most days between an old established life in Bristol and a new engagement with a place and work in South Wales, came as I was witnessing my elderly father’s experience of losing the ability first to hear, then to speak or write in any of his several languages. The shifting banks and shoals and currents of the estuary offered a medium for considering a fluid sense (rather than simply a loss) of his or anybody’s self. If I had been crossing mountains, who knows, they might have offered a means of expression for that work to be done. Questions inside us tend to reflect themselves in our perceptions of the surrounding world.

When I first visited Australia, a few years back, I was struck by the landscape – I ought to say “Country”, with the capital letter denoting the multi-layered sense that English word has been given by Aboriginal people... the way that their visually breathtaking art and the place indeed “interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered”. Myself, I could barely begin to “read” that landscape – rather, it reminded me that I do not have such a grounding in any native landscape of my own. Yes, I have absorbed a good deal of Dartmoor, and of Cornwall, further west, where I was born, but it is the places between places, images of migra-

tion, crossing, changing – all of which have echoes of my father’s status as a wartime refugee – that feel more like “home”.

Berszán: (How) can we help each other to discover differences and similarities between these two learning processes concerning places?

Gross: The learning processes in any of these places might be similar – close and constant, even obsessive, attention across time and place. In your mountains, nothing is more natural than to traverse them by walking. Lacking the miraculous ability to walk on water (and I’m not a sailor), my vantage points on water were fewer... except that the estuary did most of the moving and changing for me, with its enormous tidal range, the second highest in the world, and the constant play of light and weather. The attention I am thinking of is nothing like being a tourist. Far from seeking out the “sights”, it courts an experience a tourist sensibility could call boredom – the faithful slog of walking up a long slow incline as much as the moment of view from the top. Or, if you like, in the style of a long good marriage with the place, rather than a brief heady affair.

Which landscape might be the best ground for that learning, for each individual, might be partly the chance of where they live. There will be some culture at stake as well. I suspect most people growing up on the continent of Europe will have a richer resource of associations with mountains than the English folk-mind offers. Here in the British archipelago, on the other hand, there is a lot of sea. Whether rich cultural references are an advantage in the process of attention... that’s another matter. Such associations can alert us to the detail but also blind us to it, by offering a ready-made story that feels like an experience of place. On one occasion working with school children I was secretly glad when the school bus coming to take us to the local beauty spot broke down; instead, we went out in the bare concrete yard at the back of the school, where there was (one child said in dismay) “nothing to see”. “So... look,” I said, and gave every child the task of speaking up for one tiny thing that nobody might ever have noticed before. The perceptions they came back with were immediate, vivid, quirky, sometimes funny, unexpected – in other words, they were poetry.

Berszán: Now about time and occurrences. Is ‘time in the dingle’ (the title of a sequence in your recent collection) a different temporality from time in the wetland, elsewhere in the same book? Are there alternative temporalities even in a dingle? By its intensive multiple rhythms, practical research promotes an ethics conceived of as practical orientation in time(s) focusing on questions such as how can we get in touch with something that happens, how can we get into the rhythm of an event or into the space of a practice, how can we find a passage between the kinetic spaces of different occurrences? These questions are essential in completing empirical research on attention. (See Berszán, “Empirical Research”) By rhythm I mean alternative temporalities. Time is rhythm(s).

Gross: What would it mean to suppose that each ecosystem had a temporality of its own? (Here, I’m volunteering to collaborate with your radical concepts of rhythm, to see what this gives rise to.) Let’s accept

the ecological sense that there are such systems – discrete cells of tight interconnections between living things, albeit within a looser web of wider forces with a more diffuse effect. It is easy to accept that each individual organism has its own time-world: the wren in my poem “Wren Time” in the Dingle sequence lives at a more rapid rate, as measured by its heartbeat, wingbeat, pitch of vocal cries and speed of flight, than the human observer, or the annual growth and fall of leaves or the seasonal swelling and dwindling of the small stream nearby.

That last item reminds me, too, of human activity around the dingle, which has covered much of that stream’s natural watershed and so dimmed its rhythm to the point that you have to look closely to see it at all. My observations of the place were often fleeting, on my way to or from the train I caught to work. Those human temporalities are often a wry point of reflection in the poems. The whole sequence was triggered by a sense of the disjunction between the “rhythms” of the dingle and my own.

What that simple trope might “know” implicitly (in the sense that a well-found metaphor contains implicit or possible ideas the writer has not consciously yet thought) is that the multiple life forms and inorganic features of the place might necessarily have coordinated their rhythms, just because the most efficient way for each creature to live within the other rhythms is to be, in some way, “in sync”. So the rapid life of a fly fits within the somewhat slower rhythm of the wren, as a 16-beat music measure might ‘fit within’ one with four beats in the bar. A life-form failing to ‘fall into step’ with the rhythms around it would be dysfunctional, looking for food when there is none, or hatching its young at the harshest time of year. It would not last. And a much stronger force, like currently the human, might destroy the coherence of the system by trying to force it to conform to rhythms of our own.

Alternatively, with enough alertness and humility, we might try to conserve or restore. I have recently been in a wetland – one created consciously by humans. This was a reed bed on the margin of a lake that fills a quarry on a formerly toxic industrial site. After only twenty years, this reed bed is undoubtedly an ecosystem rich with interconnected lives, many of which are as rapid as any in the dingle. This contrasts with my general sense of wetland as slow and absorbent – I think of Iron Age bog sacrifices and the ability of peat bog to preserve organic tissue across millennia, in a way we are tempted colloquially to call ‘timeless’ even as it gives us a new and vivid sense of deep time.

Even so, the principle discussed above applies. A settled cell of ecological connections will have established a consonance between their rhythms. Human intervention has the choice to fall into step with those rhythms or disrupt them so they no longer work organically.

Berszán: To be the home of voices as an untenanted attic (“*Time in the Dingle/ Should I try*”) – should I try this? Is attention a special psychic function linked to the senses alone or does it mean intensive and

refined practices of listening, watching, walking, playing an instrument, reading, writing...?

Gross: The hint of the supernatural here is another metaphor. To me the idea of ghosts is less mysterious and wonderful than the thought that the spaces around us and between us (and, yes, inside us) are alive with activity our sense are not tuned to or our minds geared to receiving. The appeal of birdsong may be that it is a hint of busy complex lives lived just on the edges of our perception. Bats, famously, live just on or over that edge. We cannot train ourselves to perceive infra-red or ultra-violet light, let alone the whole seamless spectrum of electromagnetic frequencies beyond. (We can build equipment to do this, which at least can startle us into awareness of how limited our sensorium is.) But there is almost no end to the extent to which we can increase our acuity within the field of our senses, way beyond what we need to notice for everyday use.

I am old enough to remember the late 1960s with their counter-cultural claims for the “mind-opening” power of psychedelic drugs. In hindsight, most psychedelia lost itself in absorption with the dazzle of proprioception playing on the optic nerves, but I am still interested by the image Aldous Huxley picked up from William Blake: “If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, Infinite.” (Huxley, *The Doors* 15) From a contemporary understanding of cognition this is a half-truth – even the simple act of seeing involves an array of constructive activities in different parts of the brain. Even so, we know that generally the brain also acts as a filter, for the good pragmatic reason of gathering as much information it need to guide our actions... not so much as to get distracted and not act at all. Creativity, meditation, and any state of heightened alertness, let more data past the filter. This can be practiced, as a discipline, and learned.

Berszán: How should we aim at a sound or movement in order to attend the rhythm of its happening? What about a safari as scouting for sounds (like many times in *A Bright Acoustic*) or attentive gestures of writing? I was taught by my father how to be a hunter without any weapon: the point is to get as close to living wild animals as possible and as long as possible. Sometimes I follow a group of deer or a lonely bear for hours in the forest. For me this is a master’s degree in reading: in the forest of a poem I also try to be as cautious as I can not to miss, not to fail to attend to, the living gestures of writing.

Gross: The image of the hunter is compromised for British readers by its cultural meaning – historically, “hunting and shooting” were pastimes of the aristocracy. Still, as a metaphor it offers us some use. The hunter’s perception (and that of the prey, I could add) is not unfiltered or passive, but alertly combing the surroundings for the slightest movement or whisper of sound, for a scent, a movement of the air, or that sense of something present in a space that we scarcely have words to explain.

I am comparing this metaphor favourably to an exercise embraced by Georges Perec in his short book *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place*

in Paris. This is a theory-derived idea, to observe every detail in a given time at a given place, but, for me, though there is an interesting melancholy in its repetitions it seems surprisingly unambitious in its execution. The class of school children I mentioned earlier, observing unnoticed things in the school yard, had greater acuity and, I have to say, surprise.

Berszán: There is a tension between system and ecology because both of them include exceptions to the other. Why is time an exception in your poem “On Poetic Form: a short essay”? (Gross, *A Bright* 47)

Gross: It is a playful exception, in a poem which turns out to be a fabric of exceptions and negations of itself. It isn’t an absolute statement as much as the pursuit of a thought process, one that gradually unpicks itself term by term and leaves us, I hope, standing on the edge of a newly honed state of attention. It is also in part the gift of the sonnet structure: the *volta*, the stanza-break before the words “except time” are as much the issue as the words themselves, the point at which the poem breaks out of its spiral of self-negations – “as if there was a he / to speak to, or an I to speak, or words to say /or any other place to come in from // except time” – and into conceiving how two apparently incompatible things need to be true, both the constant changing and not-changing. I take heart from Heisenberg’s complementarity principle which tells us that we have to conceive of light as both particle and wave; it isn’t either/or.

Berszán: Is light (a recurrent playful movement in *A Bright Acoustic*) the subtlest representation of what is happening? Is there a system for everything (that happens) or do we have to orientate ourselves in and between parallel spaces? What is the case with light?

Gross: Not every term is a part of an integrated system, even in a poem. In fact, part of the poetry process is a kind of complementarity (as in Heisenberg, above): more than one frame of reference may be in play at the same time, and as in the rippling patterns our eyes perceive in moiré silk, it might be the “interference” between the two that produces the effect. I am not talking about the cultivation of the jarring shifts of register between different lexicons and registers of language which is the stock-in-trade of much Late Modernist or Language poetry in English. There, the aim is the foregrounding of language itself, often with the implication that there is no experience beyond or not created by language, so the thing to study are the ideologies at work in words. All of which is a part of the truth, useful in alerting us to the cross-currents of power and history that work on language, but for the sensory, felt experience that gives body to my poems still I am with the 18th century Dr Johnson who responded to Bishop Berkeley’s idealist philosophy by kicking a stone. It might not logically disprove the theory, but if it leaves you with a sore toe, or your neighbour with a broken window, then the possible existence of the stone needs to be treated with respect. At least you need to be alert for it, and poetically that is the point for me.

The light that features in my three-part poem Written “On Light” is both the scientifically measurable kind, of finite speed, and the cultural and religious connotations, in particular the sense traditionally used by the Quakers, which can be almost a synonym for ‘God’, or equally a state of open-ended and revealing clarity, not unlike Buddhist ‘enlightenment’. I don’t want ‘light’ to become a blandly all-embracing positive. Developing *The Negatives*, a recent sequence of prose-poem-propositions responding to a friend’s photography, ends with the line “My eyes hurt. Turn the page. I want to see what’s written on the other side of light.”

Berszán: In order to collaborate with somebody, I need to get practiced in his way of paying attention. How does your concept of „resonance/resonant space” resonate with my concept of gesture-resonance? Instead of a definition I will give you an example to describe gesture-resonance. Somebody from the town bought an old house in countryside and he had to repair the hayloft by sealing it with mud. His neighbors told him how to prepare the mud (a mixture of clay, husks and manure), but nobody now knew how to do it. Listen to his experiment: “As soon as I made the first moves, and began to spread the fine, but strange-smelling mud with my hand, under the sliding of my palm I could feel that unknown hand which had mudded this hayloft properly and professionally years, decades ago. Like some ancient fossil. My palm was sliding along the negative of his palm. The pad of my hand fit into the place of his palm. I got goosebumps sensing this pad of a once-existing hand. I followed it. Before, I had gone to my neighbors with my questions on how to do it, but then I learned it from him, who had done it before me. Life had never presented me with such a profound experience of learning. It made me happy and cautious. I was straining to do my job as he would do it. I followed with the palm of my hand the guidance given by his palm, and that came to be my knowledge on the procedure, and thus on his life.” (Nádas, Évkönyv [Yearbook] 95-96)

If we want to get in touch with the rhythm of this occurrence in a practical way, we have to learn to follow the attentive gestures of Péter Nádas’s writing in the time of reading – just as the palm follows the guidance given by another palm – otherwise we fail to read the gestures of narration.

Gross: The Nádas story is moving and curiously convincing. Would I have used the word ‘resonance’ to describe what is happening? I might have said it is a lovely illustration of the relationship between things – even when one of those things is a human agent... or rather, a human accustomed to thinking of himself as agent of actions on an inert thing. Instead, it turns out that much of the knowledge that the earlier craftsman had possessed, and that had been lost from memory, came from a felt understanding of the properties of the material to hand. (In this case, literally in his hand.) I watch a skilled plasterer at work on a wall, and realize there is a certain speed she or he has to move, or the material resists and won’t cooperate.

What insights do we gain by calling this “resonance”? In learning to move in the ways an earlier labourer would have done, the modern writer is reminded that every aspect of his life moves at a different speed, a different texture. The discipline is to lay aside the habits of an intricately connected, multi-tasking world. In this different pace and rhythm, new perceptions might come through.

Berszán: Let us compare metaphor, time projection and gesture-resonance. „A metaphor is invariably an angle – a resemblance that holds for a moment, from one point of view. Its job might be to play against another metaphor, as some of the tropes here do against a Romantic figuring of birdsong as joyful utterance or indeed as “song” at all [“The myth”, Bright Acoustic]. (Gross, “Halfway-to-whole” 41) Now about projections: If we project Plato’s cave experiment onto the dimensions of rhetoric interpretation, it appears to be an allegory that reflects in an accidental or contingent way Plato’s formula conception, which one could hardly take seriously today, of ideas seen as autonomous beings. However, turning this image into an experiment by realizing its relevance regarding the problems of projections and dimensions, it is not only practical that is, executable, but it also leads to conclusions compatible with contemporary string theory. Attending to an occurrence in a space with different rhythmic dimensions I call time projection. Alain Badiou, for instance, follows Saint Paul’s apostolic work and writing in the space of a leftist revolutionary struggle.

Are metaphors different angles/directions only in space, or in time as well? Can we regard possible directions in time as complementary rhythmic dimensions (multiple time dimensions)? If we do so, is this attempt a metaphor in contrast to the metaphor of time as measurable quantity or it can enlarge our kinetic space in many temporal directions? I consider rhythm as time direction. We can change the direction in time by changing the rhythm of our practice. Is metaphor necessarily a time projection alone or it is, in the same time a gesture resonance with special rhythms? Can we make a distinction between the ways and degrees in which we tune our gestures of attention to the rhythm of a happening?

Gross: The study of history insists that an event need to be understood in terms of its own time. If it seems to be repeated in the present, the discussion is usually of to what extent it is a recapitulation or an imitation. I think of the classic Marxist put-down “the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.” (Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire* 1. line) For Badiou to find clarifying sense in St Paul’s movement building is not very surprising for anyone who notices the similarities between small proselytising groups with radical ambitions, whether religious or political. Current events give us warnings about the ways that earlier stories may be politically enlisted. In the British Isles, the tales of King Arthur have been reclaimed again and again. This gesture of fitting one’s current story to an earlier model is often a source of inspiration, but often to partisan ends. I would be wary of giving that correspondence the validation of a scientific principle. What we know of the Arthur story

is that every retelling of it through time has said more about the time that revived it than about a probable Iron Age war band leader of whose life there is almost no trace. A movement that adopts and reinterprets an old story might seem to be changing the past, but it isn't. All that changes is the story of the past told in the present.

Whatever I make of theories of time, or of string theory, I find the phrase "gestures of attention" hugely valuable. It locates attention not just in the head or gaze but the whole body, whether it is by the meditator's sitting or the walker's tread. Meditation is a challenge to our habits in suggestion that attention need not mean attention to one thing, but can be an open alertness. Traces of the past can be an aid in this. We can only speculate about the rituals enacted in and round Palaeolithic rock art, but of their whole-bodied physicality there is no doubt. And there is certainly hunting. If we want to practice gesture, that's the place to start.

Berszán: Is the "collaborative space between" a fellowship by mutual impulsions where participants (persons, places, animals or poems) „invite connections”? Should we conceive it as a kinetic space where we tune our gestures to an intensive common rhythm? Or rather as orientation between different rhythms? Is there any difference between the two, or does changing the rhythm mean necessarily tuning your gestures to another rhythm? Can we say that both orientation in a rhythm and orientation between different rhythms are possible by means of gesture-resonance?

Gross: "Orientation between different rhythms." I would find the word 'relationship' easier here – but you might want that added sense of a 'direction'.

Berszán: Relations need an all-encompassing space (the same); orientation can be a passage between different spaces of motion. In my practice research I make a distinction between 'creating relations' and 'contact making'. I consider the first a case of the later. In this sense contact making is more spacious.

Gross: "Kinetic space"... "a common rhythm". In one case this has been clearly true for me – that of performing poetry with music, as I did in the 1990s with a band of musicians from Bath. These came from different traditions, from classical music to folk to free jazz; together they would improvise, so this synchronising of their rhythms was literally true. I did not improvise the words themselves, but the pacing, intonation and attitude, I certainly did, differently each time we performed.

I still hope one day to work with a visual artist whose craft and slant of mind works in the same rhythm as my own composition – a one-stroke Zen sketch, say, to correspond to my own brief gestures in words. I have loved the work I have done with artists but in all cases their working method has been necessarily slow because of the materials they work with. One was an engraver, another a photographer who worked with pinhole cameras, and more recently my collaborator was a walking artist who needed to pace the ground physically, in a way very much in tune with your land ranger style of attention, before beginning work in her own time and

space. In each case, though, the difference in our pace became part of the collaboration, a source of its energy, even if that difference sometimes felt like friction... and part of our subject matter too. Perhaps collaboration needs the energy potential of a difference. I have never done one that rests on pure likemindedness. Why would you need to, after all?

In each of my written collaborations, from a shared “discovery” of the magic-realist land of Mistila with Sylvia Kantaris thirty years ago to very recent interplays with an Australian artist-poet Jenny Pollak, with a Welsh language poet Cyril Jones and with a fine British poet Lesley Saunders who is also a classicist, a kind of synchronisation has happened. The to-and-fro of our alternate contributions has tended to speed up, in pace with each other, as the work goes on. In the end the sheer momentum of the work itself dictates it, whatever either of our usual working habits. That felt like rhythm, in a physical sense.

Sometimes, too, the slowness is the point. One beautiful thing about doing a *renga* – a collaborative linking of haiku – with three or four other people is that we agree to slow down to a common pace, exerting no pressure on each other. At its best this is both slow and very deft and light-touch. It requires more trust than the sharing of speed, which generates its adrenaline-drive. Shared, synchronised slowness is a more delicate thing, which invites us into calm alert attention, being as alive to each other’s silences as we are to the words. That is a kind of hunting awareness, with no violent capture at the end. At its best, the quarry is one no one had been looking for, which comes to perch unasked-for on the back of someone’s hand.

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