

What Can We Learn About Love From Lichen?



*conversations, notes, instruction scores, drawings,
and ruminations with and by Dirk Bell, Lucy Cooke,
Richy Carey, Nick Hodgetts, and Isabel Lewis*

INTRODUCTION

What can we learn about love from lichen?
by Isabel Lewis

Guided Walks, Accompanying Publication,
and Hosted Occasion.

An Art Night and ATLAS Arts Co-Commission. With contributions from Isabel Lewis, Dirk Bell, and local agents Lucy Cooke, Richy Carey and Nick Hodgetts.

In *What can we learn about love from lichen?* Isabel Lewis builds on research and conversations with collaborators based in Skye, Scotland, to choreograph a series of guided walks at Achnacloich, Scorrybreac, and Coille Ìosal, Braes. Led by the local agents — a wild forager, a composer, and a lichen expert, the walks weave a circuitous narrative about interspecies bonds and the potential for ecological attunement, brought together in a hosted occasion at Braes Community Hall, in the Isle of Skye.

With sound, song, touch and taste *What can we learn about love from lichen?* tunes into more sensuous forms of knowing the landscape and the society between species — through taste, smell, song, sound — and thinking with lichen.

This specially created publication brings together scores, drawings, ruminations, and interviews with contributions from Isabel Lewis, Dirk Bell, Richy Carey, Lucy Cooke and Nick Hodgetts. Shared as a tool at each of the walks and at the final Occasion on 19 June 2021, it also stands on its own as a document of specific encounters and as a way to voice and share various techniques of bodily attunement to ecology, for future readers.

So too is the publication a kind of guiding presence or host in lieu of Isabel's physical presence. Due to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic Isabel has been unable to return to Skye for the final Occasion. The role of the host, vital to her choreographies, the rhythm and intention of her works and their ensuing legacies, is in this case distributed among the local agents, recorded music and vocal address composed by Isabel for the Occasion, and the publication. This publication, which can be read and interacted with, holds space for personal note-taking as well as scores that, while set in specific landscapes in Skye, can be activated anywhere, at any time.





Text by Isabel Lewis, drawings by
Dirk Bell and scores by Richy Carey

Lucy & Isabel

Isabel **Lucy, I am curious to know if you prepare your body in any particular way for a day of foraging**

Lucy Physically foraging is not simply a walk in the park. It can be quite taxing contorting yourself into strange spaces for long periods. It's a wonderful experience but the time it takes (including the washing, preparing, preserving and eating!) is probably what has led most people to pop to the shop instead. Foraging is a fully immersive experience. Sometimes it means going swimming in a freezing bloody sea loch or scaling the side of a tree. I think that's part of its charm though. You connect with each environment physically and emotionally.

Isabel **What brought about the urge for you to learn about and start foraging?**

Lucy I have always been interested in nature. Apparently a lot of people that wind up learning about fungi were interested in birds previously. This is true for me. When you realise the diversity out there you want to know everything. I've always enjoyed food and cooking so it was a natural evolution I think.

Isabel **Has your sense of taste changed, or been adapted in any way as a result of this practice? Are there new flavour profiles that you have grown to observe and like (or dislike)?**

Lucy Somewhere along the line our ancestors started making eating easier. By this I mean cultivating plants, fruits etc. that are perhaps more palatable, soft, smooth or take less time to chew. Everything today is literally easier to swallow. I have found that part of foraging is retraining your taste buds to explore a range of foods that create a more diverse experience. Eating nettles is very different to eating spinach. Nutritionally nettle shines above spinach being high in protein and calcium and vitamin C. It's free and abundant and yet we have been trained to eat a cultivated plant in a plastic bag instead. In my day job I work with disadvantaged families (who are quite often the least likely to forage) and I am very interested in introducing them to Scotland's wild larder.

Tell me something about you? Why lichen?!

Isabel **I think I have always been interested in these variously coloured and textured spots and marks that I observed on surfaces of rocks, stones, old buildings, and trees and never understood what they were. I found them strangely beautiful and mysterious and maybe a little bit scary too. I would wonder if they were parasitic, signs of disease, mould (none of these things are the case with lichen!). A couple of years ago I was preparing a performance that would**

unfold in the courtyard of an old art school in Venice, Accademia di Belle Arti di Venezia Dorsoduro as part of an art programme called *s l o w*. While creating the work and reflecting on this theme and spending time in Venice I was very much thinking about the time of other eras, the way time feels different in different places, the strange way multiple kinds of time can co-exist. The basic elements of the show were what I could generate in the space using electronic music, dancing and speaking while interacting with the fantastic architecture of the old courtyard and the public. Dance for me is the primary technology through which I mediate my relationship with the world. While I was dancing upon the courtyard and coming into contact with the weathered surfaces of the stone building blocks I noticed patches of lichen everywhere. What I learned is that I was relating with this very particularly interesting kind of living creature that is neither plant nor fungus but a collaboration between species. I learned that lichen rely on some of the living processes of fungi like reproduction with spores and some of the living processes of plants like photosynthesis and that these creatures were some of the oldest and slowest growing creatures on earth! I became fascinated with this example of the many interspecies mutually beneficial relationships that are in fact so common throughout the living world. As someone who was educated in school to believe that competition was the motor of evolution, it was a profound lesson to learn that collaboration plays such an important role in the flourishing of life on this planet.

Lucy I like what you said about lichen being collaborative. Fungi especially works like this with trees, plants, and dead things. The more research people do the deeper the connection seems to go! It makes you realise there is a lot going on and that habitats are a space in which many connections and relationships are taking place, weaving in, and dancing.

Isabel I am interested in what you said about introducing folks in Scotland who are unlikely to forage to what can be found and eaten in their immediate surroundings. Do you find there is social stigma attached to the idea of searching for food in the so-called “wild”?

Lucy Yes, definitely and this does seem to shift and change. Nowadays of course, anything with “WILD” in the title is popular but would not have been at another time. There is still stigma around anything free and I think the post-war era encouraged this idea of wealth and prosperity through processed foods, throw away culture and excess – for some at least. Foraging could be seen as lowly like you couldn’t afford to buy things. The term weeds is useful here. What is a weed? This is all lifted from the Oxford dictionary:

weed

[weed] *noun*

1. Mass noun A wild plant growing where it is not wanted and in competition with cultivated plants.
2. British informal, derogatory A contemptibly feeble person.
3. informal a leggy, loosely built horse.

If the term weed can be used negatively to describe a person, what are we to think of the plants? There is also something around the idea that they are growing where they “shouldn’t” that is interesting. I know from the gardening I do that invasive plants can be difficult but our choice of words comes with heavy meaning.

Isabel **What are the ways you are thinking about communicating in regard to foraging? How might we facilitate thinking differently about what seems “easy” but is rather destructive and how could we make something that seems time-consuming and therefore has a negative connotation seem worthwhile and desirable?**

Lucy The way we work — most people work over 40 hours a week — that leaves little time to forage or garden or visit multiple food outlets to shop around or buy/swap with friends and neighbours. Foraging however can be less time consuming than you would think. It’s not often that I would go out for an entire day of foraging although that would be marvellous!!! I try to forage on my way to other things and do small amounts regularly, like picking salad whilst walking the dogs. Every time I’m outside is an opportunity to find something.

We are all so busy that normal things have become exotic. We’ve had to come up with terms like green health, eco therapy and forest bathing to make spending time in nature for health and wellness seem legit, scientific or a thing even. How mad is that?!

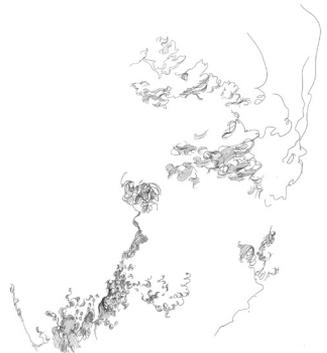
Isabel **In our current contemporary culture everything is about ease of access and convenience even at the expense of one’s own rights to privacy, at the expense of one’s health, and the expense of the overall health of our planet and we all know about those costs but I see little overreaching change.**

Lucy Yes, this is difficult and I think something which should be happening across the world and across many subjects. Exposure is good. Showing the destruction, the costs and the impact. Those Netflix shows about meat and fish — they seem to have had real impact in the homes of many. However I don’t think they give the whole picture. I think if

we all start simplifying our lives and diets a bit, buy less but better and locally we can all still eat meat and fish if we want to. But our food systems need to change and so does our education. In school (as far as I am aware) there is little time spent on flora and fauna identification and if you cannot learn at home then this knowledge remains lost. I had hoped a reflective year with Covid might have shifted the balance and that we might start demanding a simpler life that allows these integral connections to be made. I've seen a little bit of change here and there... I don't know. I'd like to think ecological consciousness is gaining popularity and more people seem to be striving for a softer, ethical and harmonious footprint on the land they exist with.

Isabel **From whose perspective do we forage from? This question is perhaps a bit odd out of context but it is inspired by a question composer and collaborator on this project, Richy Carey asked me about what is being heard when I am creating a performance: "Whose perspective are we listening from?" I thought maybe "Whose perspective do we forage from?" is an interesting question to ask in regard to this very old human technique of survival and what it means to do it as a contemporary human.**

Lucy This is a big question! I think it's a very personal experience and one I now feel as important as getting fresh air. In foraging circles they speak of restoring a vital connection by teaching foraging. Returning to a shared experience vital to our ancestors' experience. Foraging allows me to understand my home, the seasons, migration, habitat decline, climate crisis. It's integral. I'm not sure if that answers the question but it's a start!! I don't know if this is relevant but I'll say it anyway! Sometimes people are surprised that I eat meat. Now I don't eat much and I try to get it locally from a sustainable place. For me there is little difference between eating deer meat and eating a vegetable. Plants just move a lot slower than animals but they should still be respected and consciously considered.



Some notable species along the foraging walk:

EDIBLE:

Cow Parsley
(*Anthriscus sylvestris*)

Elder
(*Sambuca nigra*)

Fireweed or Rosebay
Willowherb
(*Epilobium angustifolium*)

Herb bennet or Cloverroot
or Wood avens
(*Geum urbanum*)

Gorse
(*Ulex sp.*)

Vetch
(*Vicia sp.*)

Common Sorrel
(*Rumex acetosa*)

Raspberries
(*Rubus idaeus*)

Nettle
(*Urtica dioica*)

Dog Rose
(*Rosa canina*)

Orache
(*Atriplex spp*)

Cleavers or Sticky
Willy or Goosegrass
(*Galium aparine*)

Sea weeds

INEDIBLE:

Hemlock Water DropWort
(*Oenanthe crocata*)

notes

Handwritten signature or mark.



Nick & Isabel

Isabel **A lot of people, including myself confuse lichen with moss. Can you tell me what makes lichen and moss similar and what makes them different?**

Nick They are really very different, and the only things they have in common are their small size and ecology. They both tend to grow on rocks and trees, often together in intimate mosaics, as well as on the ground. Bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) are small green plants with a distinct alternation of generations, which is opposite that seen in other plants (or animals for that matter!). Excuse me getting technical for a moment!

Isabel **That's great! Please do!**

Nick The dominant generation of most organisms is the diploid (or sporophyte) generation (i.e. with two sets of paired chromosomes), with the haploid (or gametophyte) generation (with a single set of unpaired chromosomes) reduced to a small structure, often consisting of just a few cells. In mosses and liverwort, the opposite is the case, with the gametophyte generation dominant. Lichens, on the other hand, are composite organisms composed of fungi, which provide the structure of the organism, and algae, which photosynthesize and provide most of the nutrients. Lichenologists tend to refer to them as 'lichenized fungi', because there is a huge variety of fungi, and the Latin name of the lichen is the name of the fungus, but only a restricted variety of algae, which are 'appropriated' by the fungus to form the lichen. Lichens produce spores, which are entirely fungal, and which (if they are to form a new lichen) latch onto an alga, and the two continue to grow together into the lichen, in a kind of symbiosis. Lichens also produce asexual propagules, which are little bundles of fungal and algal cells, which go on to form new lichen plants.

Isabel **So, lichen are a form of interspecies collaboration?**

Nick Yes, but lichen is not unique in this respect. Something really interesting is that, while this symbiosis has been recognised for 200-300 years, we are now beginning to understand that most organisms are to some extent composite. A few examples: mosses and liverworts often have microscopic fungi growing in their cells which appear to be crucial in their development and survival. Orchids only thrive in symbiosis with a fungus. Woodlands are in effect massive composite organisms, with the trees all connected underground by a network of fungi (mycorrhizae), and the plants and mosses on the woodland floor also connected to the trees and each other via the fungi; this has sometimes been referred to as the 'wood-wide web'!

Isabel **It appears then that this type of mutually beneficial relationship is really common among different species.**

Nick Yes. More generally, it is illustrative of how all of us on the planet — habitats, species and individuals — are interdependent on each other. For example human beings are reliant on their gut bacteria, and also we all have tiny mites and nematodes living on various parts of our body, no matter how clean we think we are! One could of course extend this metaphorically to personal human relationships, in the sense that we are all ‘in symbiosis’ with our loved ones.

Isabel **Nick, how do you prepare your body for a day of field research?**

Nick Hmm. Not consciously at all really. If I have a period of field research I tend to start slowly and work into it, so the first day or two are physically quite easy, working up to more demanding days. Generally, outside of paid fieldwork, I try to keep healthy and active through walking, gardening and recreational fieldwork, but I’m afraid I have an aversion to gyms and can’t be bothered with exercise for its own sake, which I find soon gets boring. Maybe I’ve lost something! I used to quite enjoy cross-country running at school, but have never enjoyed sport much, and dancing (sorry!!) is something completely outside my comfort zone!!!

Isabel **Haha! No need at all for an apology! I can completely relate to your aversion to gyms and to relating to the body like as though it is this hyper-efficient machinic thing. Ultimately this is one of the main reasons I went away from Classical Ballet. It continues to fascinate me though mostly for the way it embodies the will toward the Machine Age long before the 20th century! The technique itself treats the body very much like a decorative mechanical object much like Baroque clockwork. Gyms and repetitive exercise also treat the body like a machine. I am not against it, as I love to see the ways we humans always manifest our relation to the world in our various bodily practices. Dancing is something I’ve always done. It was introduced to me through the Dominican culture of my mother so dancing was just what people did together socially. When I started to study it my relationship to it changed.**

Isabel **Is that the case for you too in regard to botany? How did you come to begin studying what you do?**

Nick I have always been interested in nature, perhaps through the influence of my father, who was a keen birdwatcher, and being fortunate enough to grow up in a leafy village on the outskirts of Cambridge, where (like most children those days!) I was allowed to roam more or less at will, so long as I appeared at mealtimes. I was aware of nature conservation issues very early. There were 1970s campaigns such as ‘Save the Whale’; there were TV visionaries like Jacques Cousteau and, of course, David Attenborough; there was collecting ‘threatened species’ bubble-gum cards; and I was aware of some much-loved places being obliterated by housing and other developments. I started

a degree in Zoology and Chemistry at London University (Goldsmiths' College actually, in the days when they had a Biology Department!). After a year of that, I discovered that I was finding the subsidiary course in Botany much more interesting, so they let me switch to a full Botany degree.

My first real awareness of mosses and lichens came during this Botany course. I found their intricacy, beauty and strangeness fascinating. Also their smallness, I suppose, 'doing their thing' unnoticed, passing under everyone's radar, yet phenomenally successful and wild, existing and thriving in the unnoticed crevices of human life (maybe English author of sci-fi, J.G. Ballard's idea of the 'interzone?'), seemingly carrying on completely independent of human activity. Especially appealing was their ancientness, a direct link back to the flowerless forests of the dinosaurs, awaking a kind of deep atavistic connection with life millions of years ago.

Isabel I am so glad you mentioned J.G. Ballard! Yes, lichen is so sci-fi! I think this "in betweenness" is what draws me to lichen too. All kinds of "interzones" intrigue me and I tend to savour the marginal and liminal spaces between the edges of one experience and another or between recognizable formats, even the transitions between the songs of a DJ set are often my favorite moments of a club night. And I am a sci-fi fan, more familiar with the North American writers, Octavia Butler, William Gibson, and Niel Stephenson. In "Amnesty," one of the stories in Butler's collection of stories called Bloodchild and Other Stories (which I very much recommend if you don't already know it!), there is an alien species called the Communities that draw in (by force) humans and enfold their bodies in their branchy appendages by way of communication. In my imagination they are these massive amalgams of moss and lichen-like material. Yes, the strange, even monstrous beauty of these creatures just "doing their thing" as you say, often overlooked, and being some of the oldest and most resilient species of life on this earth is very inspiring to me.

Nick I don't know Octavia Butler: I'll give that book a go, thanks. I used to read a lot of SF when I was younger but I'm not familiar with much newer material.

Isabel So after the Botany degree, what happened next?

Nick I got a subsequent Master's in Plant Taxonomy, and eventually began to work in nature conservation and three things happened: first, while I was doing plant surveys from Wildlife Trusts, I began to notice the mosses and lichens more and more, and devote more time to them and less to the flowers; second, I inherited a microscope from my grandfather. I had always known he was a botanist (although he died when I was a baby), but only now did my dad produce this

old brass instrument from the attic and wondered if it was any use to me. It was. Third, I had a period of unemployment (it was the early 80s!), which I spent cycling round the south Cambridgeshire countryside and acquiring more and more competence with my moss identification skills.

It just snowballed from there really, leading me to the small, but highly expert and friendly, bryophyte and lichen community, and a working life largely devoted to mosses, liverworts and lichens. Mainly it has been in a context of conservation, but also ecology and taxonomy, and it has been a great way to see parts of the world one would otherwise never have visited! I've done quite a lot of work in various parts of Africa, for example.

I now look at these plants very much from a scientific viewpoint, but sometimes get that old frisson of excitement that I had when I first encountered them, especially if I find a new species or something like that. More importantly, (for me anyway!) the way I look at these plants has gradually dovetailed with the way I look at the whole of nature, and indeed the whole of life, including human life (which needs nature) and spiritual aspects too.

Sorry, you asked the question, and I have rabbitied on...

Isabel **What a great expression, where does that come from? Never heard it before!**

Nick According to my dictionary, 'rabbit' as a verb is cockney rhyming slang — 'rabbit and pork' = 'talk'. Check out the truly awful Chas & Dave song of many years ago!!

Isabel **I am intrigued that you mention "spiritual aspects" at this point in the conversation. I imagine this must emerge from a certain intensity of emotion you were experiencing while reflecting on the whole of nature and our role within it. I won't prod into your spiritual life because at least for me in regard to my spiritual life I feel its best to let it unfold and do its thing rather unspectacularly (while totally spectacular!) much like our lichen friends. I do want to ask you about emotion though which is certainly a part of our spiritual life I suppose. I have this perhaps misguided idea that scientists have to be cold and rational to be able to do their work. What emotions do you think aid your work and which ones hinder it?**

Nick Emotions in science are interesting. Some would say that botany is the least 'scientific' of the sciences, but I don't think that means very much. Scientists are supposed to be dispassionate, in that we look at evidence objectively, make hypotheses and draw conclusions, no matter where they take us, but that is not the same as being emotionless. All scientists are human and subject to the same

emotions as anyone else. Negative emotions might include jealousy and jealous anger with other scientists; but then again, is righteous anger really negative? It can often be experienced when government policies proceed against or ignoring scientific evidence, and might spur scientists to further efforts. Some scientists (a bit like some chefs!) have been tyrants in their own labs. Usually, the best scientists are collaborative, yet the most important contributions are often made by lone workers thinking outside the box.

Isabel **What about the tension between science and religion?**

Nick Science is often seen to be in opposition to religion, yet there are many distinguished scientists who have some sort of faith. Science and religion address what Stephen J. Gould called 'non-overlapping magisteria' — they address different questions.

Isabel **It does feel more generative to think of science and religion as differing domains of knowledge and inquiry, and certainly not the only two, rather than as modes of knowledge in opposition to one another. Why would we diverse humans need one form of teaching to be able resolve all questions anyways? It seems to me that the different domains of inquiry phrase and express questions and resolutions very differently and that it's rather important to note the capacities and limits of each mode. I sense an exciting potential in initiating conversations that sit between different epistemologies but I see no need to collapse them into one another and relativize the meaningful resolutions acquired in a specific domain.**

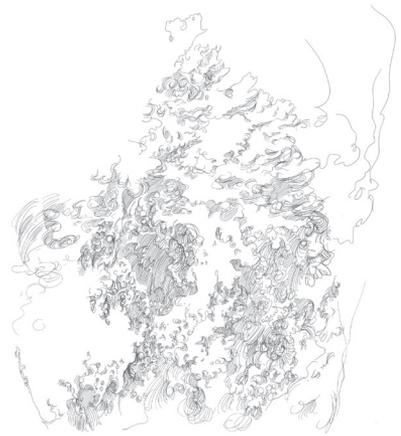
Nick Some, such as the likes of British ethologist, Richard Dawkins on the one hand and various sorts of fundamentalist extremists on the other, do not understand that. It is also often seen to be 'opposite' to art, but that is false, and largely a result of the inadequacies of school curricula over the decades. Scientists — the best ones anyway! — are rarely cold and rational in the sense that is sometimes understood by society.

Isabel **I guess curiosity and creative problem solving are just as important in art as they are in science.**

Nick It's interesting that scientists are often very accomplished writers/ artists/musicians, or involved in some area of the creative arts, but the reverse is rarely the case. Creativity is actually a key attribute in science. A scientist who cannot be creative will never be a great scientist. Sometimes, scientists get blinding 'revelations', very intense experiences of what C.S. Lewis called 'joy', which can move their science forward. What today is scientific orthodoxy, was often thought to be ridiculous in years gone by, if thought about at all. In ecology, the idea of the 'wood-wide web' would have appeared mad to a

19th century biologist. Going back a bit, Darwin's ideas would have seemed mad 100 years before him. Going back again, people like Galileo and Copernicus were mavericks, going against the current received wisdom. Who knows what will change in scientific thinking in a hundred years' time?

Isabel **Indeed, who knows! I do hope that in a hundred years' time that as a species we have come more broadly into an ecological awareness that far out shines our current moment and that indigenous knowledge systems around stewardship of the world become mainstream.**



Some notable species along the lichen walk:

Tree Lungwort
(*Lobaria pulmonaria*)

Great Scented Liverwort
(*Conocephalum conicum*)

Bottlebrush Moss
(*Breutelia chrysocoma*)



notes

Richy & Isabel

Richy Isabel, I've been thinking recently of the kinds of questions I often find myself asking people when we start out creating a sound work together, and I thought they could also be a place for us to start from in imagining the work you are making here in Skye. The first one helps me listen for the shape of what it might be.

From whose perspectives are we listening in the experiences you are arranging in Skye?

Isabel I think listening can be an act of communion between and among human and non-human life worlds. I feel there is a power and an intimacy in the conscious act of using our senses together. What we will each perceive in our listening and how it resonates with each of us individually will be profoundly personal but sharing and supporting one another's quiet concentration has a bonding effect. I am reminded of attending church as a child and the feeling in the room during a moment of prayer or observing a moment of silence, such a quiet but palpable intensity! I find that charged space of focus and intention very inspiring.

Richy Definitely! What you're saying reminds me that we listen in sound and well as to sound — it envelops us, we are a part of it, it has volume and we are part of that volume. And yes, like you say, we can almost amplify its mass by consciously attending to it, especially when we do so collectively. I often do deep listening exercises on my own and there's times it can feel almost too sensorial, like a kind of vertigo feeling as the meeting point between my attention and what I'm listening to becomes so weighty — it's rare that happens, but I do find it interesting that we can vacillate between being completely unaware of sounds to being utterly overwhelmed by them. I don't know if some of that comes from a focus on one mode of attention over another, listening over looking over touching for example.

In your occasions, do you imagine the audience going through kind of sequential/individual provocations to their senses, attending to these spaces by focusing intently with different modes, or is it more that there are numerous sensorial events occurring at the same time and they choose where their attention might go?

Isabel I spend a lot of time thinking about this. When I first started creating the works I refer to as the "occasions" they were composed in a way that had multiple simultaneous sensory inputs such as smell, surround sound, food, and the visual/haptic effects of furniture elements, large-scale plant life, and heavy vibratory bass. While the space is sensorially maximal all the time there is also a dramaturgical unfold of the smells that coincide with the storytelling that is happening in my speaking and that is supported

by the electronic music I produce that permeates the entire show. The work inhabits a single space that has transformations in light, smell, and general atmosphere over time.

In the more recent works I've been introducing parcours through multiple spaces that the public move through that has the sensory stimulation distributed in space and time. I have been working with the Berlin-based musical entity known as LABOUR. They are particularly adept at choreographing sound, making meaning out of the way sound gets distributed in space in relation to the public's shifting positions. In different spaces, the work invites the visitors to focus on particular combinations of the senses. In truth, everything is a fully multi-sensorial experience but our awareness of this is not always there. I've been working with choreography, installation, and smells created by Norwegian smell researcher Sissel Tolaas to intensify the experience of being in our human bodies.

Richy Where is our attention?

Isabel I am thinking of absorption, when one's focus is directed inward in concentration. This quality of attention is fascinating to observe outwardly in others. It has a strong and felt effect, like a force of gravity. This makes me want to compose the conditions of a situation in a way that might be hospitable to this kind of "diving in"— thinking about darkness, closing eyes, or facing away from others in order to facilitate connecting to oneself. Also in shaping the dramaturgy and the order of experience giving enough time for warming up, for sinking in, allowing time for the commitment to being present for a proposal for participation seems important.

Richy I like the thought of absorption, it seems to speak to a slowness and a kind of enrichment or imbibing. The time to prepare the body to open up to these attentions is so important like you say. In the work I make with collectives and groups, having a thing to collectively focus our attention around can take away a lot of the self-consciousness that can come from feeling like you're performing for others, towards the feeling of making with others. There's a trust that needs to be earned and offered — devised in the work and process for that feeling of heightened presence to become — like you say. How do you usually facilitate this kind of offering or holding time?

Isabel Every element of the situation I am composing addresses the body of the visitor as an invitation to engage and I try to make sure the work leaves space for different modes of engagement and doesn't prescribe or require a single way to do so. Composition can be a public expression of care. I use common sense, intuition and let myself be guided by the rules of sociability to get at what



feels “right” in a situation I am arranging. I may shift the frame of reference multiple times within a single work so I work toward establishing an initial frame which seems clear, and cared for, and has a strong sensory impact as a starting point. This for me is about establishing trust between myself/the work as host and the public. This initial stability, however temporary, is a form of welcome and a signal of care and respect for the public. It provides a codex or map for reading and navigating what is to follow... it can be subtle. It doesn't have to be instructional, in fact, more compelling and generous in my experience is when the situation is imminent, enacting itself, rather than referring to itself. This is where the role of the performer as facilitator is important and sensitive work. It takes understanding how to be welcoming and supportive without being aggressive or didactic. A lot of this is a vibe thing. Quiet confidence and assuredness draws us in, fear, insecurity, arrogance is distancing. The role of the host is to instill that sense that everything and everyone in the situation feels attended to and addressed. This does not mean the work always has to be “nice”, there can be a range of aesthetic and energetic manifestations here.

Richy I was talking with another artist recently about the need to show your own vulnerability in working collaboratively — just as an honest recognition that we all might feel so — like part of a soil from which trust can grow, and I totally agree that with that is also the need for an assuredness and confidence in that soil too. I really like what you're saying about a codex/map for reading what is about to come — carefully constructed but welcoming interpretation, an open work. This seems to welcome indeterminacy, or way of reframing an authorship — how a tale is told in a way. When you said you think about shifting the frame within a single work — could you go into that more?

Isabel Sometimes that's about shifting the point of focus among who or what is doing the storytelling. In my work the storytelling may begin with smell, then shift to sound, then performance. It may begin unfolding in one space and then move to another and get passed around from live musicians to recorded sound, from the bodies of the performers, to the installation of the space. Do you relate to this? How is it for you when working between sound and image?

Richy I do. When I'm thinking of “sounding an image”, or picturing a sound, I try to think creatively with their difference as a place of relation and not opposition, what Trinh T. Minh-ha calls the interval — like thinking of what is between seeing and hearing as a complex chord. I think I try to present a meaningful cluster of notes (sounds and images), but invite the listener to create their own inversions in these chords with

what resonates for them — like composing together, finding ways of tuning, being flexible. There is a sonic meditation by Pauline Oliveros which often helps me try and attune to an environment before doing field recording, to think about flexing my attention, to listen for things that are slower in becoming apparent.

Isabel **Yes to sonic meditation!! Attunement is everything! This is often the thing I want to shape more than a predetermined outcome. I consider my works pathways for attunement that are themselves highly aestheticised, meaning they are clearly/visibly shaped by a responsible and accountable person or persons who are the hosts of the situation. This makes the shaping of an experience for another ethically possible. This affect and stylisation of the composition of a situation makes clear and felt that there is something to consent to or not consent to.**

Richy Absolutely! I completely agree that there is an ethic to attunement — that what you do and how you do it matters, it materialises meaning. Consent, con-sensus, together-sensing has to embrace indeterminacy and support choice in the collective. How might we work towards that? It makes me think of how multimodal your work is, speaking around a complex subject through different lenses, how seeing might allow different knowledges to become apparent than listening, touching, moving, reading, etc. might. How do you think about the multiplicity of modes you're drawing on to illuminate what the audience might perceive?

Isabel **I try to consider how to most effectively stimulate the senses toward what the work wants or needs to say. That brings me toward collaborating with architects, smell and flavour chemists, chefs, and sound designers and clothing designers for example among other kinds of practitioners who relate to the body. I also work the other way around by tasting, feeling, touching, listening as a way of getting to know what the site of the work has to say and let that guide the storytelling. I feel there is a political urgency to rehabilitating our innate human capacities. We are not going to be able to theorise our way out of the social and ecological crises we humans have created, we will need to “cultivate our capacity to respond” as Donna Haraway says, we will need to feel our way through and deeply and emotionally connect to the issues at hand to be able to affect positive change. I'd like to think that in practicing our humanity we are on our way towards the renovations we need to make in all of our biosocial relations within our ecosystem. I have to think of Brazilian theatre maker Augusto Boal who said “theatre itself is not revolutionary: it is a rehearsal for the revolution.”**



What can we learn about love from lichen?

A rumination in text and music by Isabel Lewis



[slow beats in repetition]

A holobiont is a multi-organismic assemblage shuddering and trembling with life like lichen, reef-building coral, ordinary primates like us, humans. The term refers to a host and the many other species living in and around it, symbioses in complex multi-partner consortia.

Take a moment to bring attention to your abdomen and its contents. And now the surface of your skin. Glide your tongue along the slippery inner surface of your mouth. Slowly close and open your eyes, wetting the whites of them, the sclera, with the slick inner lining of the eyelids. All of these are sites of busy ecological interaction between microorganisms like bacteria, fungi, even micro-animals, and more. The mammary glands, the seminal fluid, the lungs and saliva are just some of the soft tissues and biofluids inhabited by these others that constitute us. With some of them we co-exist being neither harmed nor gaining benefit, with others it's a win-win situation benefiting the entire association, and yet in other cases we are utterly vulnerable to harm, but overall the role of most of these microorganisms we live and die with is not yet well understood. What seems clear is that the human body is much less of a discrete entity and much more a dynamic flow of inter- and intracellular communication.

[crackling sounds both organic and electronic]

Evolutionary biologist Dr. Lynn Margulis chose to focus on the cooperative relationships between species rather than on competition between species and in doing so formed the perspective that symbiosis is the driving force of evolution. Darwin a century earlier focused on the "struggle for life" and produced different theoretical results. In the history of science we have always looked to other species to try to make sense of ourselves and in the process projected our own very human desires and concerns onto them.



I am looking at lichens and thinking about love. In their peculiar beauty I learn something about difference in close proximity. I think that maybe this is something important to a living and flourishing form of love- distinct difference and cooperation -and that does not mean dissolving into one another, eliminating each one's particularity. I learn that inside of this more expansive idea of love, that not only respects but requires difference, I can love beyond my species, I can even love beyond the living. I learn that love is perhaps a never-ending participatory epistemological quest to discover the other who we will never fully know because of our human limitations. We can perhaps never supersede our human biases, yet if we claim our specific point of view, acknowledge our vision as partial rather than totalising reality, maybe it's ok? Maybe this is our human fate and human fortune.

[vocal humming and singing digitally processed]

(Beautiful Beasts written and performed by Isabel Lewis)

There is of course no resolution, You know that well,

Only life-giving tension,

that attraction between specs of matter moving in opposing directions,

That inevitable rotation and all its lush variation.

You are the animal, you are the magic, you are the maternal, the luminous, the loving, the brutal

the life force!

You are all of this

You are all of this

You are all of this,

Beautiful.



We are all of this, each one of us multiple selves flailing
and the power that binds us.

Wildly kinetic patchworks, it makes us so excruciatingly
human.

And beautiful. And perfect, For what we lack in feathers or fur
or scales or foliage or, slime or iridescence,
we make up for in the finest movements of our lips and hands.

We too,

The disenchanting,

Just might one day stand glorious among the pantheon of
beasts of beauty!

If we would claim

that which we are,

forgive ourselves for our perpetual confusion.

Know that this might be

our quality,

We are nature-

Why do we believe in our delusions of rupture?

We are the animal, we are the magic, we are the maternal,
the luminous, the loving, the brutal, the life force!

We are all of this

We are all of this

We are all of this,

Beautiful.

[song fades away]

There are elders among us that actively keep these connections alive. They do so by paying close full-bodied attention. They are receptive and respond to their more-than-human relatives. We too might listen knowing that we may not hear anything at all to begin with, in the darkened forest we may mistake the density of sound for silence. But then, perhaps suddenly, we might hear noise so great and be crushed by its overwhelming immanence. If we survive this, resilient as all the earth's creatures are, we might begin to hear it, slowly start to process it, find its patterns, repetitions, and subtle variations like babies learning language.

What might it feel like to be fully reconnected with the force of natural phenomena within us? Might we be driven to reconnect to the primal instinct of predation? What may be forgotten should we dare to hunt again is that when one engages in a pursuit one must be prepared to be pursued in return. As with Acteon, the boundary between the hunter and the hunted when subject to the laws of the forest can and do shift. In the forest the subject who calls forth the dogs is in the next moment the object of prey hounded by them. And while we humans suffer the torque of such a karmic twist of fate, there is really nothing special about it. If we hunt we might relish in the badness of it. We might indulge in the depravity of bloodthirst, the passion of the kill. Nature is indifferent.

[bell sounds overtaken by a deep and heavy drone]

Following the trail of lichen into the forest we go, entering the web of never-ending, polyvocal, overlapping conversations that is life, responses to responses in an ongoing cycle of adaptations and counter-adaptations too dense to be decipherable. The utter magnitude of what cannot be comprehended comes to us as darkness and the density of noise as silence. It is grace.

[silence]

walking | listening | singing

Coille Ìosal, Braes Hall
with Richy Carey

We do not just hear sounds; we hear in sounds. Sound is like a smirring rain, a hazy, swirling continuous song that we are a part of, and apart from. There are lots of different ways of listening to sounds, each of which open up different ways of hearing the world, because listening is listening and responding.

Listening, like lichen, is symbiotic

As part of Isabel Lewis' project *What Can We Learn About Love from Lichen?* composer Richy Carey will lead a series of listening and singing walks.

Over the course of an hour or so, participants will take part in performing a series of instruction scores – short, semi-improvised compositions about listening, which anyone can perform, using our voices to sound out the world around us, and to listen for what we hear echoed back.

With Richy participants will wander up Coille Ìosal, a short, undulating forest walk beginning at Braes Hall and ending at the top of the hill, looking out across Ben Tianavaig and the Sound of Raasay.

The arc of the singing and listening exercises will echo the landscapes walked though, stopping along the way to perform works by composers who use instruction scores to bring people together to pay attention to each other, and to the world around them, through sound.

Coille Ìosal is marked as a grade 1 of 5 on the Walk Highlands website.

Walking boots and weather appropriate outerwear is recommended.

There are occasional steep gradients along the walk, and we will make some detours off the path to sites from which we will perform the scores.

Participants will need a copy of the scores and a pencil for making notes.

walking | listening | singing

Instruction Scores

The Hall

Teach Yourself to Fly

Pauline Oliveros

From *Sonic Meditations* (1971)

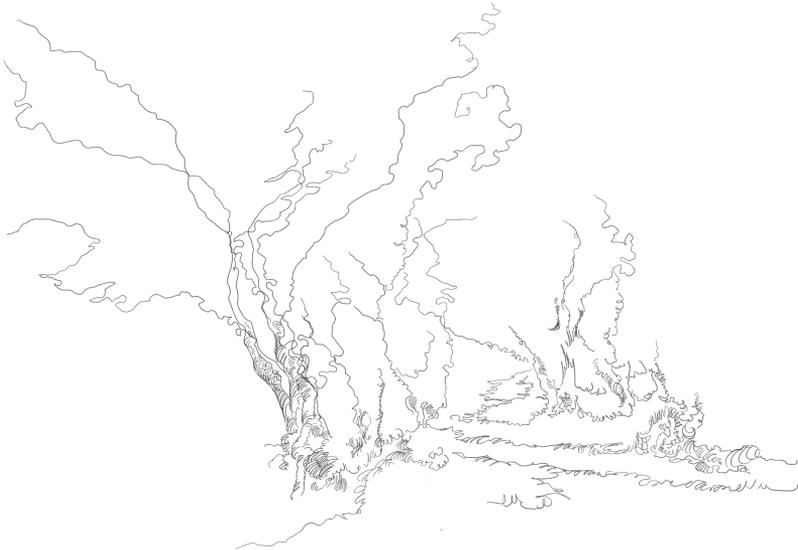


— | —

Any number of persons sit in a circle facing the center. Illuminate the space with dim blue light. Begin by simply observing your own breathing. Always be an observer. Gradually allow your breathing to become audible. Then gradually introduce your voice. Allow your vocal cords to vibrate in any mode which occurs naturally. Allow the intensity to increase very slowly. Continue as long as possible naturally, and until all others are quiet, always observing your own breath cycle.

The Birch Forest

Environmental Dialogue Pauline Oliveros From *Sonic Meditations* (1971)



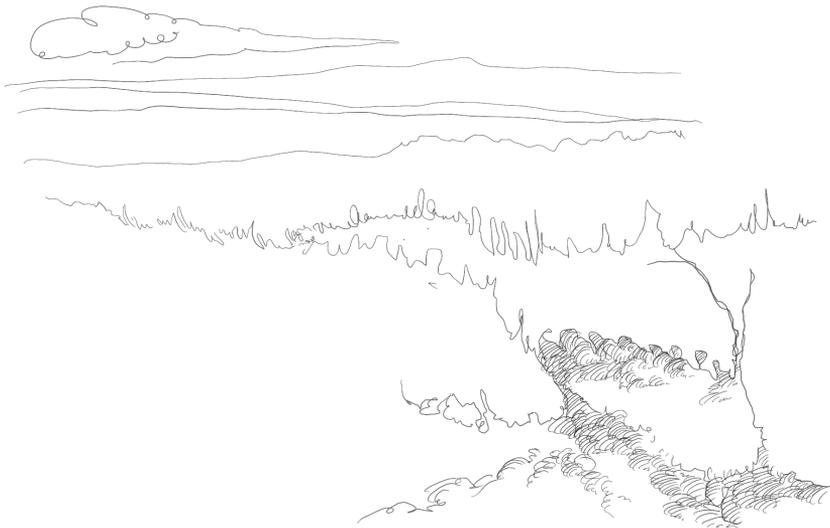
—VIII—

Environmental Dialogue

Each person finds a place to be, either near to or distant from the others, either indoors — or out-of-doors. Begin the meditation by observing your own breathing. As you become aware of sounds from the environment, gradually begin to reinforce the pitch of the sound source. Reinforce either vocally, mentally or with an instrument. If you lose touch with the source, wait quietly for another. Reinforce means to strengthen or sustain. If the pitch of the sound source is out of your range, then reinforce it mentally.

This score builds on the listening attention we built in the previous score, the focus in listening intently to each other, to expand this out into listening similarly with the environment around us — with the invitation to use one's voice to sing with the world, to reinforce the sounds they are hearing.

From the River Archive
Annea Lockwood



* * * *

Find a place at which a river is passing through rocks or over logs, gently (i.e. not white water).

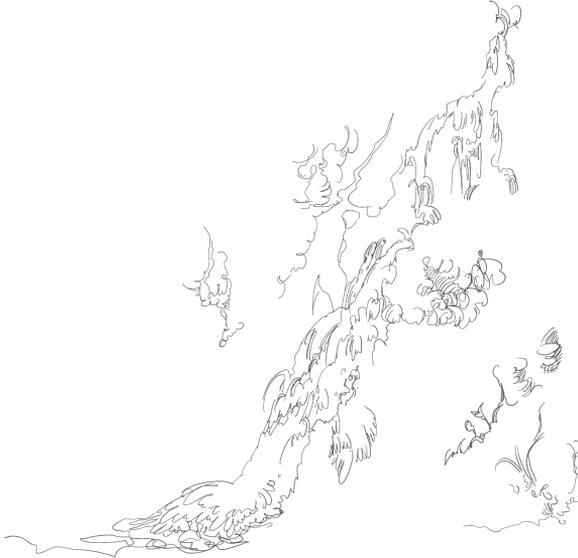
Search out every layer of the sounds the water is making until you can hear the whole intricate texture, until the river is flowing through your body.

Turn the listener's head very gently from side to side, tilted towards one shoulder, then towards the other as he or she is listening. Suggest that the listener closes his or her eyes to listen. Tell each other personal experiences with rivers/brooks/etc; dreams involving them; memories.

* This is a cross between two different Annea Lockwood instruction scores, which echo some of her other works around rivers and memory. In this exercise we will think about the relationships between memory, the flow of water and the flow of sound as we listen to it.

The Gully

Accents – IV
Richy Carey

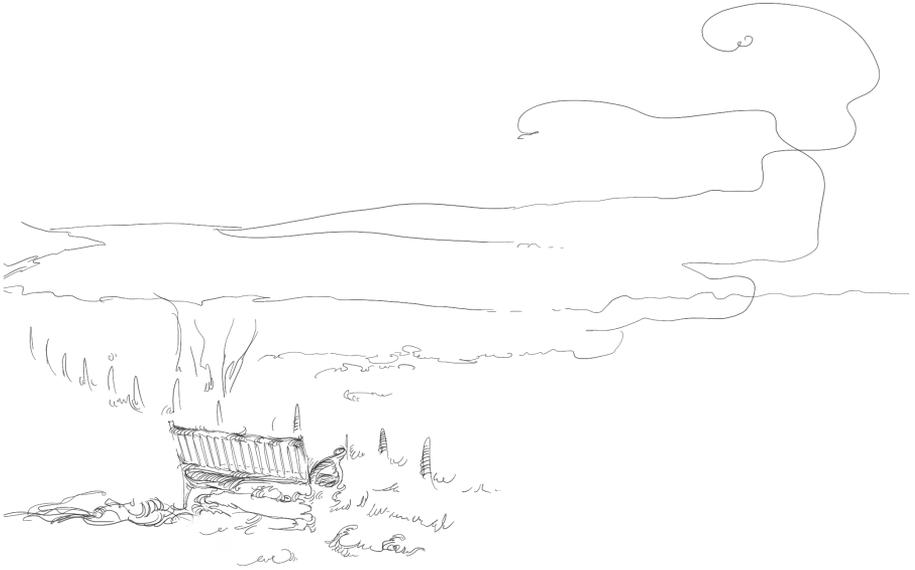


Think of a word that speaks to a place you want to hear.
A word that holds your hopes.
Think of the shape of the sound of that word,
as it flows past your lips and out into the world.
Begin by repeating that word out loud, as slowly as you possibly can.
So slowly, it dissolves on your tongue, melting into sound.
still repeating your word, savouring all of its sound
listen for that place you want to hear
listen for the timbre, the texture in the air
very gradually, let your word begin to speed up
small (r)evolutions
as the repetition gets faster, let the word sing out as a tone
let your tone find a harmony, an interval in common
without straining, let the sound become louder and faster, louder and faster
until it ends

inhaling/exhaling

The Hill

Pauline Oliveros
From *Sonic Meditations* (1971)



—XVI—

Begin simultaneously with the others. Sing any pitch. The maximum length of the pitch is determined by the breath. Listen to the group. Locate the center of the group sound spectrum. Sing your pitch again and make a tiny adjustment upward or downward, but tuning toward the center of the sound spectrum. Continue to tune slowly, in tiny increments toward the center of the spectrum. Each time sing a long tone with a complete breath until the whole group is singing the same pitch. Continue to drone on that central pitch for about the same length of time it took to reach the unison. Then begin adjusting or tuning away from the center pitch as the original beginning pitch was.

Variation:

Follow the same instructions but return to the original beginning pitch.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT LOVE FROM LICHEN?

Instruction Scores

Notes

Richy Carey
2021

Find a time to be together-apart, in a meaningful place. Have a pen or pencil and paper to hand. If you can, close your eyes. Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, in long slow breaths. Open your ears to the space you are in.

When you are ready, begin to listen for notes in the air around you.

Make notes on what you notice. Write down what you hear.

If you don't know the source of the sound, describe its texture or tone.

Follow one sound as it moves into the next.

If it moves away from you, let it go and listen for a new sound.

Listen for the sounds inside other sounds.

Listen for the sounds around other sounds.

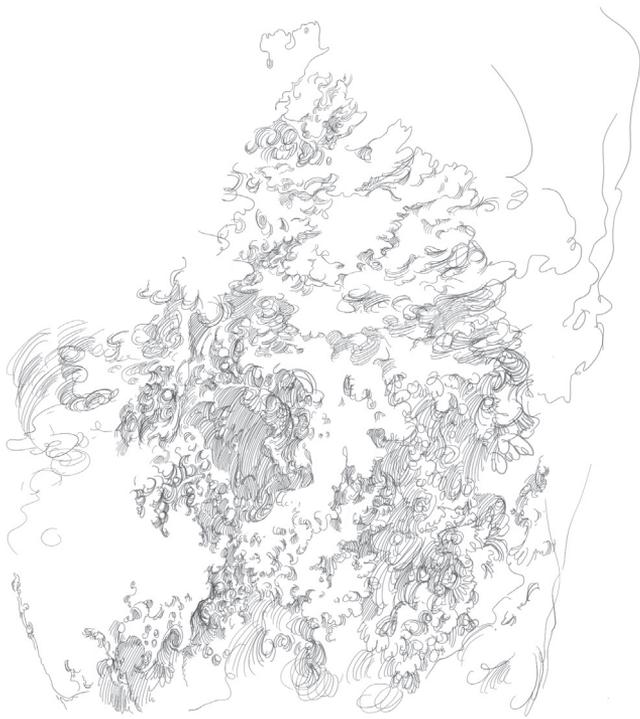
Listen to where they meet.

Try to describe what you are hearing, not what you are seeing.

Notice the differences between the two.

When you feel like you have heard something of the space,
read back through what you have written.

You might choose to read it aloud,
you might choose to record yourself.



Soundwalking

Hildegard Westerkamp
2007

Start by listening to the sounds of your body while moving. They are closest to you and establish the first dialogue between you and the environment. If you can hear even the quietest of these sounds you are moving through an environment which is scaled on human proportions. In other words, with your voice or your footsteps for instance, you are “talking” to your environment which then in turn responds by giving your sounds a specific acoustic quality.

Try to move
Without making any sound.
Is it possible?

Which is
the quietest sound of your body?

(If, however, you cannot hear the sounds you yourself produce, you experience a soundscape out of balance. Human proportions have no meaning here. Not only are your voice and footsteps inaudible but also your ear is dealing with an overload of sound).

Lead your ears away from your own sounds and listen to the sounds nearby.

What do you hear? (Make a list)

What else do you hear?
Other people
Nature sounds
Mechanical sounds

How many
Continuoussoundscontinuous Continuoussoundscontinuous

Can you detect

Interesting rhythms
Regular beats
The highest
The lowest pitch.
Do you hear any
Intermittent or discrete sounds
Rustles
Bangs
Swishes
Thuds

What are the sources of the different sounds?

What else do you hear?

Lead your ears away from these sounds and listen
beyond-----into the distance.

What is the quietest sound?

What else do you hear?

What else?

What else?

What else?

What else?

So far you have isolated sounds from each other in your listening and gotten to know them as individual entities. But each one of them is part of a bigger environmental composition. Therefore reassemble them all and listen to them as if to a piece of music played by many different instruments. Do you like what you hear? Pick out the sounds you like the most and create the ideal soundscape in the context of your present surroundings. What would be its main characteristics? Is it just an idealistic dream or could it be made a reality?



Handwritten signature or scribble.

Biographies

DIRK BELL

Dirk Bell is an artist who lives and works in Berlin and in the countryside north of Berlin. He is the initiator of several project spaces and collaborative projects that have been active at various times in the last 20 years such as Montparnasse, Very, and 13 Boxes to name a few. His drawings, paintings, sculptures and installations have been presented in solo exhibitions at BQ, Berlin (2013) in the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (2011) as well as at The Modern Institute, Glasgow and Sadie Coles HQ, London (2010) and in the Staatlichen Kunsthalle Baden Baden (2009) and the Kunsthalle Bremerhaven (2006) among others.

LUCY COOKE

Lucy Cooke is a self-taught forager interested in how wildfoods can revive connections to nature, place and rhythm. She lives on the Ardnamurchan Peninsula but regularly works on the Isle of Skye and enjoys exploring its wonderful natural larder. With a history of working in the community, food and environmental sectors she loves to combine her experiences and enthuse others by sharing her foraging journey.

RICHY CAREY

Richy Carey is a composer who lives in the Isle of Skye. He works collaboratively with artists and communities to create soundtracks and soundscapes - making communal sounds that explore ecologies of authorship, agency and empathy through listening and sounding together. He was Glasgow's UNESCO City of Music artist in residence 2018, has a BAFTA New Talent award and is finishing a PhD about film sound at Glasgow University.

NICK HODGETTS

Nick Hodgetts is a local botanist specialising in mosses, liverworts and occasionally lichens. After gaining degrees at London and Reading universities, he worked in local wildlife trusts and governmental conservation agencies before becoming a self-employed consultant in 2001 and later moving to Skye, where the mosses, liverworts and lichens are amazing. Since then, he has contributed numerous surveys to conservation projects and developments such as small-scale hydro schemes. Nick has broader interests in music, literature, wild places and the relationship between science and religion.

ISABEL LEWIS

Isabel Lewis is an artist who lives and works in Berlin. Her work often centres around music, choreography, food, and the building of focused gatherings, occasions and spaces where the knowledge held in our bodies can become more apparent to us. Across all of her work is an interest in interrogating Modern ways of knowing, categorising and being social. Her projects invite us to re-approach the sensuous knowledge of the world's inhabitants in contemporary ways, to recalibrate how we relate and assign difference. Isabel Lewis' live art works have been presented in contexts of contemporary art, music, dance, and theater by Kunsthalle Zürich (2020), Sharjah Biennial (2019), Roskilde Festival (2019), Berliner Festspiele-Gropius Bau (2018), Tate Modern (2017), Steirischer Herbst (2017), Ming Contemporary Art Museum Shanghai (2016), and Tanz Im August (2015) among others.

This project was commissioned by Art Night in partnership with ATLAS Arts as part of the 2021 Art Night festival. Curated by Helen Nisbet, the festival stages internationally significant contemporary art projects outside of traditional gallery spaces, taking work into communities and municipal settings such as social clubs, libraries, train stations and village halls. ATLAS Arts is an art organisation working across Skye, Raasay and Lochalsh, hosting a year-round programme of long-term projects, screenings, residencies, meals and workshops rooted in their locale. They pay attention to the social, political and global significance of these conversations and the building of communities in between.

Isabel Lewis was invited to make a new work in Skye, building on her own practice and responding to the landscape and communities of the island. The resulting project, ***What can we learn about love from lichen?***, comes from two years of research, site visits, fostering relationships and, during the pandemic, dreaming of Skye. Her wider commission includes a sound installation at Compton Verney, a manor house in Warwickshire, England which will be in situ from 18 June – 18 July 2021.

**ART
NIGHT**





ISABEL LEWIS

What can we learn about love from lichen?