Place apart
Burnett, Kathryn

Published in:
Relate North

Published: 18/05/2017

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Link to publication on the UWS Academic Portal

Citation for published version (APA):

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UWS Academic Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact pure@uws.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.
PLACE APART:
Scotland’s north
as a cultural industry of margins

Kathryn A. Burnett
University of the West of Scotland, UK
This discussion explores artistic imagining of Scotland’s highlands and islands as a place both ‘north’ and ‘on the margin’. Cultural representation of Scotland’s highlands and islands and processes of communicating these representations are subject to ongoing interrogation and debate. What and how remote communities, cultures and places are represented through art is undoubtedly informed by debates on survival, sustainability and responses to marginal status. The account presented here examines some of these themes from a Scottish perspective, including how art informs cultural production and creative economies in and of Scotland’s remote communities.

Arguably it is the lack of community that has been celebrated historically in Scotland’s visual art. Tropes of exile, absence, or emptiness abound in ‘North British’ and Scottish ‘highland and island’ “place apart” imagining. Indeed the conscious situating of art in the ‘empty’ or ‘beyond’ spaces of remote rural Scotland informs the narratives of artists living and working ‘in the north’ (Harling Stalker & Burnett, 2016; Burnett & Harling Stalker, 2016). The representation of Scotland as a ‘north’ place, and most especially the Gàidhealtachd,¹ of marginal communities and cultures, at the periphery of the British Isles is well documented (Anderson, 1997; Maclean & Carrell, 1986; Maclean & Dorgan, 2002; Morrison, 2003; Mulholland, 2003; Macdonald, 2000, 2010; Blaikie, 2010; Richardson, 2011; MacLeod, 2012). Art depicting Scotland’s highland and islands is dominated still by tropes of remote, empty wilderness and romantic ‘highlandism’ imagery albeit moderated by contemporary critique and response not least the “cryptic cultural landscapes” that emerge from such legacies (Macdonald & Macdonald, 2009). Empty landscape and ‘places apart’ depictions are political in Scotland, however, informed as they are not least by the inequity of land ownership and continued concerns over cultural elitism (and imperialism) informing the narratives (artistic, tourist, visual and enterprise) of Scotland’s remote rural spaces.

Critical endeavours examine the legacies and sustainable futures of art, culture and creative practice within Scotland’s northern communities, as well what and how aspects of Scotland’s ‘north’ inform national and international accounts of Scotland more generally.
Art and the embodied narratives of individual artistic practice inform and refract ideas of Scotland’s north as ‘other’ and as margin. In this regard a number of excellent inter-disciplinary endeavours have sought to bring greater focus to the relationship between culture, community and the nature of communicative practice in Scotland. These include *An Leabhar Mòr*, The Great Book of Gaelic (Maclean & Dorgan, 2002), and the WINDOW to the West – Towards a redefinition of the visual within Gaelic Scotland (2005–2010) project, a collaboration between the Visual Research Centre of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art (University of Dundee) and Sabhal Mòr Ostaig (University of the Highlands and Islands Millennium Institute). The Northern Communities project at Heriot Watt University, and Gray’s School of Art’s *On the Edge: developing the role of the artist in society* research are two more examples.

Configuring a relationship between artists and artistic practice within Scotland’s northern margins invites reflection on what is culturally shaped and formed in, of, and outwith these communities, spaces and places. *Relate North* 2016

---

**Figure 1.** Isle of Canna, Inner Hebrides. Once Canna had a population of just over 430, the island now is home to less than 30 people. Sustainability and survival is a central concern for small remote island communities such as this in Scotland. Photo: Kathryn A. Burnett.
extends these commentaries further within Scotland where the communicative acts of artistic practice and its education engage and bring into relief or indeed negate the bounded and shifting aspects of what contains and what confirms ‘us’ as ourselves and the ‘us’ of our neighbours beyond (Jokela, 2008; Macdonald, 2010).

Scotland’s sense of its boundary as a community is subject to a long history of complex interrogation, challenge and assertion by social and political scientists (Cohen, 1982; 1987; McCrone, 2002; McCrone & Bechofer, 2015). Artists and cultural intellectuals offer their own interrogation (White, 2006; Moffat & Riach, 2008; 2014). How we present our art as a nation is an important aspect of how we educate and collectively seek to examine our sense of culture and arts via channels of communication and media (Blain & Burnett, 2008; Blaikie, 2010) This includes the synergies between art, cultural expression and the economy of remote margins. Scotland’s evolving yet inevitably complex relationship to the land is both tangibly and intangibly crucial to note in this regard.

Less than 500 people own more than half of Scotland’s land. Such stark inequity despite important moves to empower local communities more widely across Scotland remains at the heart of how Scotland’s places are accessed, represented, and developed. Art, culture and design are central to this empowerment. Furthermore, issues of asset ownership and governance underpin creative representation and cultural sustainability more widely and education must continue to play a key role in questioning this (Anderson, 1997). Currently debates on how we sustain empower and engage Scotland informs much civic and governance agenda. The role of the arts and culture in articulating, embodying and remaking communities is widely and vigorously debated and performed, not least through Scotland’s tertiary education sector community partnerships.

Margins provide Scotland with rich resources for innovation, learning and shared practice to explore, enhance and interrogate the industries of art, culture and arts education (MacDonald, 2012a; 2012b; Coutts, 2014). Scotland is an acutely historical nation: that is, our arts and culture continue
to position and challenge against backdrops of iconic narratives and images of pasts and what new and alternative futures are possible. What past and what futures are key questions for art education and practice in Scotland not least in terms of responding to challenges of sustainability, engagement, and inclusion. Who represents us to ourselves and to others remains a key debate for Scotland as we contend with our complex peripheral situation to the “rest of the UK”. Furthermore, art, design and cultural expression within the margins must negotiate tensions, complexities and complicities of difference locally, including the role of cultural elites or shifting policy demands, for example. Margins and the identities and communities of peripheral places nevertheless must work hard to counter their reification as places ‘static’, ‘past’ and singular. Educating to bring forth expression from within communities for all remains a key aspiration. A focus for local communities to perhaps (re)claim and participate more fully in art echoes Stöckell (2015, p. 57) who states: “If we want art to speak to us and others, people and communities, it has to have such elements for narratives that people feel they can use in their own narratives.”

Figure 2. University of the West of Scotland Masters of Arts students present their Creative Media Practice project work on the island of South Uist, Outer Hebrides. Photo: Kathryn A. Burnett.
Questioning what is community and who or what might speak for ‘us’ is an important focus for all who inform and participate in arts and cultural development, creative economies and identity expression.

As with the salmon swimming upstream to their source, Scottish artists, it is often contrived, connect back to a sense of origin. Often Scottish narratives are therefore of ‘us’ and of ‘belonging.’ This may well be something good, to be celebrated, yet it is also suggestive of ethnic, primordial and potentially problematic essentialist ties. Baillie and Mulholland (2011) critique Richardson (2011) in this very regard. Here Neil Mulholland describes the inherent tensions of defining ‘Scottish art’ as an act of ethnicity:

NM: [on Richardson] He’s chosen works and artists that he considers exemplars of ‘Scottish art’. That’s problematic on so many levels. [...] Exemplars of what we might ask? Of their time and place? How can anyone be certain of this, that we have chosen the correct canon? We can’t convincingly argue that some artists (those included) are any more exemplars of ‘Scottish’ art than others (those excluded). To do that we would need to have an ethnic, possibly essentialist, understanding of the ‘Scottishness’ of art, as if there were somehow degrees of ‘Scottishness’ by which we might evaluate matters. This act of territorialisation is Arnoldian, Leavisite even. It implies that the ethnic constructions of ‘Scottishness’ that we find in and around art, imaginaries that need to be deconstructed, are the method by which we should judge this art. (Baillie & Mulholland, 2011, p. 4.)

And indeed as David McCrone (2002) and others suggest we must interrogate identity more fully as something ‘made, not born’: there can be no ‘essentialist’ ethnicity of Scottishness. As with Doreen Massey’s observation of place being a ‘constellation of processes’ (1994, p. 156; 2005, p. 141) our cultural expressions of community identity should not be predicated on essentialising tendencies of ‘Scottishness’. In turn, those who make and educate through ‘Scottish art’ need not necessarily find themselves defined by, or required to answer to an iden-
tity as *Scottish*. Communicating this through various artistic media and narrative forms is encouraged and is largely embraced but ideas of who speaks for margins (and how) is not without its challenges. Furthermore, the very nature of policy focus has generated a counter effect whereby particular places, communities and experience are at risk of becoming the new hegemonic iconography of art making within Scotland’s margins to the exclusion of less fashionable (or perhaps less critically ‘valid’) art practice, experience and expression.

In *Culture and Society* Raymond Williams (1958) wrote that communication is “not only transmission: it is reception and response”; furthermore, he fostered an embracing of the global reference of our shared lived experience in terms of culture and communication (Couldry, 2000). Williams offered his observations on culture, on community and indeed communication from a consciously negotiated position from and of the margins. A working-class Welshman, Williams become a towering figure of Western political and educational intellect, declaring himself ‘Welsh European’ and proffering the necessity of hybrid identity that Scotland not only recognises but increasingly (if not always successfully) embraces as the default position (McCrone, 2002; Blain & Burnett, 2008). What it means to be in, and of Scotland following 2014’s independence referendum, or to be or not to be “European” following the ‘Brexit’ vote in 2016, are important questions. It becomes incumbent upon all of us in Scotland to reappraise the various boundaries of community that frame us, as well as the nature of communication and culture that appear to give shape and form to such expressions. How we situate ourselves to a sense of place, and of expressions of identities, cultures and practices in places remains ideologically charged (Massey, 1994; 2005) and is not without controversy (Gunn, 2016).

Artistic expression and creative endeavour is inherent to this articulation process. As Williams noted, communication is key. The visualising and transmission, the reception and response, frames through the interplay of *otherness* (Blain & Burnett, 2008). Communicating Scotland as a ‘north’ place (or not) is an ideological act as: it is by nature an act of situated debate and negotiation. As Massey suggests we must embrace more fully the contested nature of the qualities of ‘place’:
What is special about place is not some romance of a pre-given collective identity or the eternity of the hills. Rather, what is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now (itself drawing on a history and geography of then and theres); and a negotiation which must take place within and between both human and nonhuman. (Massey, 2005, p. 140.)

Consequently one of the singular achievements of art education is embracing community and culture as complexity, and to offer accessible tools for all to negotiate ideas of the ‘pre-given’ and the throwntogetherness of history and geography.

Scotland as a territory of ‘the north’ is a complex character dominated throughout modernity by its charged relationships and socio-political axis with the ‘south’. The nation as place, physical elements and expressive experience dances between a differential realm of otherness – the remote, the

Figure 3. East coast of the island of Benbecula, Outer Hebrides. The remote rural remains a working environment for many different sectors. Photo: Kathryn A. Burnett.
margin, the lost – and an increasingly confident claim to certainties and the necessary connectivity of modern communities via culture expression and its communication. Within this Scottish expression of north, remote rural spaces and perhaps most especially islands and coastal margins, figure greatly in both literal and littoral form. Ideas of Scotland’s north as Gàidhealtachd, but also complexly as Scots, as Norse, and Celtic are established tropes with powerful imagery and narrative forms evolved through history yet interpreted freely and variously through media, locally and globally. Contesting what is our ‘north’ is an important unfolding identity project for Scotland as too is our sense of the ‘margin’ and edge. Kenneth White offers a geopoetic commentary of “the Atlantic edge” and most especially the margins of coast:

Geopoetics breaks familiarity, and recognizes a strangeness. Beginning with the lie of the land, remaining close to the elements, it opens up space and it works out a new mindscape. Its basis is a new sense of land in an enlarged mind. (White, 2006, p. 52.)

A sense of communities and culture both bounded and enriched by margins of land (mountains and glens) and water (lochs, coasts and oceans) is core to Scotland’s visual imagining and its oral cultural traditions. The interplay across arts in Scotland is valuable not least within education where policy actively beds in practice to continually inquire, empower and ‘open up’ both mindscapes and landscapes (Coutts, 2014; Jokela & Coutts, 2014; 2015). The Caithness writer Neil Gunn spoke of an eternal landscape of his beloved north Scotland but so too of the landscape of self and the potential of consciousness: of the need to ‘see lovingly’ one’s world as it is in the moment of itself (Hart & Pick, 1981; Pick, 1991). The poet Sorley MacLean, Somhairle Macgill-Eain, writing in his native Gaelic, offers a politically potent frame of reference for the deep visuality and tonality of our Scottish north, most especially but not exclusively of the Gàidhealtachd. MacLean’s poetry continues to offer artistic inspiration of place and people, a historical internationalist frame of cultures and communities both sustained and denied. Crucially MacLean through his
poetry and prose centred the ‘north’ experience of both the Gàidhealtachd, and Scotland itself within Europe and beyond, as a culture and community deeply connected through time in oral tradition, landscape but also across the international experience of community and cultural struggle and survival elsewhere.

Figure 4. Pictured is Will MacLean and Arthur Watson’s bronze sculpture, Crannghal. Located at the campus of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Scotland’s National Gaelic College on the Isle of Skye, the sculpture overlooks the Sound of Sleat. The college is a University of Highlands and Islands campus. The original Gaelic college opened in the early 1970s and spearheaded a critical turn in the renaissance of Gaelic language and culture. Photo: © Agnes Mitchell Photography, www.agnesmitchellphotography.com.
No contemporary account of what informs a sense of Scotland's imagery not least that of the north could ignore the impact of the poetry of Sorley MacLean. Undoubtedly an artist of words and the imagery of words, MacLean's capacity to reflect the doubts and passions of his own time provides a restorative conduit to the re(generations) that follow: “A large part of Somhairle Macgill-Eain’s greatness as a poet lies in his restorative work: this can be properly celebrated as a triumph of regeneration” (MacInnes, 1986, p. 138). Community and cultural rooting in place was deeply important to MacLean’s work, as the 2011 centenary celebration – *Ainmeil Thar Cheudan* so richly explored (Bissell, 2011). Recently Moffat and Riach (2014) revisited the legacy of poets and artists such as Maclean in their treatise on the relationship between art and independence but also on knowledge and education. Following Beer (2014) on the Canadian landscape imaginary, we recognise how we too in Scotland continually look to our ‘conflicted assemblage’ of both traditional and contemporary art forms; questioning and destabilising through praxis the processes of informing and elucidating whether it be through cultural exchange events, residencies⁴ or indeed critical articulation and debate. It is helpful to therefore observe that in Scotland the creative and cultural industries are championed as solutions to challenging economic and social legacies and art is increasingly recognised as the praxis of much sustainability and solution.

**Artists at Scotland’s margins: ‘territories of difference’**

Artists and arts practice in communities generate economic effects. High profile accounts of the artist in the margins assist in this. These Scottish edges of north Atlantic Europe have fascinated many, including German filmmaker Werner Kissling (Russell, 1997), the celebrated American photographer Paul Strand (both to the Hebrides), Joseph Bueys (Rainbird, 2005; Gibson, 2010; Macdonald, 2010) and American artist Jon Schueler to Mallaig, and many others to the ‘Highlands’. In each case the artists offer a mapping effect of what is considered of value and an asset to the place, people and locale to which artists are drawn or indeed return: this adds value to each marginal space. As with Schueler
(Salvesen and Cousineau, 1999; MacKenzie, 2006; Coburn, 2016), Strand was drawn to the ‘northness’ of Scotland’s islands and west coast (Stange, 1990; Macdonald, 2010; Lyden, 2015). Strand’s *Tìr a’ Mhurain* collection remains one of the singular iconographic statements of a visualising language of the Hebrides, of Scotland’s remote rural modernity and a creative response to its tensions:

“... in the 1950s the crofters of South Uist were witnessing change to their own remote community, most notably with the siting of a missile rocket range on the island. While Strand opposed this facility and indeed his portraits may be seen as a protest against the Cold War, the works should not be read as propaganda. They are part of a life-long quest of his to capture something of humanity’s essential character focusing on communities whose precarious existence was under threat from the modernising world. His photographic journeys took him all over the world—America, Mexico, France, Italy, Egypt, Romania, Hungary, Spain—but in considering the *Tìr a’ Mhurain* work, literally and figuratively, all roads led to Scotland.” (Lyden, 2015, np.)

Engagement with the artistic responses of the past remains imperative if re-visions of Scotland’s remote and rural places of the north are to recognise current contexts as historically contingent. Art and cultural praxis offer voice, innovation, and interrogation of the ideas of place. Art as knowledge are accounts (narratives) – exhibition, study and archive – offering insight to artists in and of places, speaking of and for communities (Burnett & Grace, 2009; Stöckell, 2015).

In Scotland’s northern places – the highlands and islands region – there is a confidence of debate and expression within art and education networks and evidence of sustained art-making within all remote and rural communities. Policy is often mapped to regional structures in this regard, not least the multi-campus University of Highlands and Islands (UHI) but also Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) the agency for economic, cultural and social development. White (2006, p. 59) is dismissive of the term ‘region’ for the highlands and
islands of north Scotland, preferring in ‘place of region, to speak of territory’. Territory is distinguished from region, according to White (2009) by its ‘aura’ and its ‘relationship to totality, to the cosmos if you like’. White quite rightly alludes to the overly imperialistic histories of regionalising places into administrative spaces and the highlands and islands of Scotland undoubtedly have experienced considerable economic, social and cultural policy brutality in this regard (Burnett, 2011; Hunter, 1976/2000). White has argued that regionalism (as the necessary outcome an ‘administrative region’) fosters an ideology of identity that replaces creative energy, and will ‘drag along with it a harping on history, and a cultural localism attached to local figures simply because they are local, interpreting their limitations as the very characteristics of the region’ (White, 2006, p. 59).

But places and their people are in their everyday ordinariness (to return to Raymond Williams) unavoidably defined by administrative function. Art and cultural expression are entwined with White’s aura of territory. Territory too is nonetheless complex and complicit. For artists who live and work in Scotland’s highlands and islands the creative energies of place are undoubtedly central to the communion with place. The regional entities that underpin the structural realities of functioning communities for all in Scotland’s north are nonetheless critical to the current requirements of ongoing sustainability agenda. It is in the very ‘globalised localism’ of place and people that perhaps the more resilient, creative, empowered and confident artistic responses from within and with communities have emerged.

**Scottish art: community, culture and communication**

Scotland as community and as place is sustained through art (Zeiske, 2013). The contextual reference of community in and of art is recognised as variously important and controversial in Scotland. It is nonetheless useful to suggest that it is with a view from and within the margin – the periphery – that awareness of the inequities of representation and of expression but also access and audience are brought into relief (Burnett & Grace, 2009; Permar, 2013).
Finding a connect with the arc of communities and cultures past and present was an important driver for the WINDOW to the West – Towards a redefinition of the visual within Gaelic Scotland (2005–2010) project, as was a smaller undertaking in Uist with the Island Cultural Archives project (Burnett, 2007). Speaking at the Sorley Maclean centenary event on Skye, Professor of Scottish Art, Murdo Macdonald repositioned the depth of articulation of Scotland’s northern and north western communities as cultures both marginal yet powerfully connected to Europe and beyond. Macdonald has commented more widely on the need to recognise the *complicities* within which art and its education are place in Scotland:

“I think one of these unconscious agendas is an unwillingness to fully accept the degree to which Gaelic culture has been suppressed by colonial techniques ranging from military intervention to the appropriation of land to education policies. No one likes to accept complicity in acts of cultural destruction, but most of us are indeed complicit. So particularly with respect to indigenous cultures – and this applies throughout the world, not just to the Gaidhealtacht – it is easier to stereotype and deny than it is to work out one’s relationship with what has been suppressed”. (Murdo Macdonald interviewed; Coburn, 2007.)

*Figures 5 and 6. Creative work is expressive of the energies of a place and cultural practice engages within and beyond the communities of remote and rural north Scotland.*

*Photos: Kathryn A. Burnett.*
Political events such as voting in referenda can ‘charge’ a scene and in Scotland there is little doubt that artists and creative endeavour actively mobilised around 2014’s Independence Referendum as to what was and could be Scotland’s culture, ideas of community and the nature of the communication. Art finds itself closely entwined with policy: Cape Farewell’s Sea Change (Tionndadh na Mara) was one such example of engaging the sustainability agenda (Haley, 2011). A programme of research and art making across Scotland’s western and northern isles sought to promote the professional development, capabilities, connectivity and ambitions of Scotland’s creative practitioners and organisations by looking at “how artistic and other communities could potentially find common ground to interrogate climate change and broader sustainability concerns”6. A reconfiguring of the communities of craft and the ecologies of past has led to a celebration of various arts knowledges phenomena (Heim, 2015). This offers a welcome interface of both our communities of time and space (that is ‘places’) and of artistic and educational practice (that is ‘cultures’) where materials and knowledges are reconvened as part of a new cultural landscape of art, policy and enterprise (Jokela & Coutts, 2014; 2015).

**Industries of sustainability: community, culture and communication**

Creative arts and cultural heritage economies are important to Scotland (Danson & Burnett, 2014; MacDonald, 2012a) such as industries of ‘creativity’ in and of the marginal spaces of Scotland’s north.7 Stuart MacDonald (2012b, p. 125) makes the following observation:

“In a chapter on Illich looking at the wider economic context, Schroyer (2009) depicts the vernacular space as the sensibility and rootedness that emerges from shaping one’s own space within the idea of the commons and local-regional reciprocity, and is central to those places and spaces where people are struggling to achieve regeneration and social restorations against the forces of economic globalization.”
Figure 7. Uist machair. Paul Strand’s collection of Hebridean photographs takes its name from the name given to Uist, Tir a’Mhurain – the land of bent grass. Photo: Kathryn A. Burnett.
Our global localism is acknowledged here as we reflect on what communities and aspects of culture are ‘lost’ as others are brought into being through new expressions of form and different boundaries of meaning not least in our highly digital, increasingly marketised art economies of the margins. Communicating such engagement is powerfully reliant on a media world to bring and build audience. Today, broadcast communication and media is negated from the everyday activity of artistic practice yet the very considerable shift to the digitally mapped landscape of artistic and cultural workers more generally across Scotland offers impressive global reach, despite material limitations of remoteness (Burnett & Harling Stalker, 2016; Harling Stalker & Burnett, 2016). Nevertheless, questions should be asked of the nature of the digitally and consumerist mapped landscape of artistic presence and to what end? It is incumbent therefore to critique past and current tendencies for “place apart” creative narratives across all channels of communication including our educational praxis.

Policy is central to Scotland’s sustainable artistic heartbeat. Within the communities and spaces of Scotland we contend with inequities of wealth, of access and of representational voice:

“Creativity has become a cornerstone of national policy in Scotland not only as an opportunity to build confidence, develop knowledges and foster expression and inquiry but also as a strategic commitment to undertake transformation through harnessing Scotland’ creative resource across all communities: Just as crucial is the impact on people’s lives and those of their communities. Untapped potential is unforgivable human wastage on a grand scale. That potential, released and harnessed, is nothing less than transformative.” (Wishart, Creative Scotland, 2013.)

Policy is also core to nuancing of arts educational practice. Artists and the communicative acts of art in all forms remain at the heart of how we relate to these ideas. A sense of ‘north’ and the interplay of ‘margin’ can inform Scot-
land’s sense of this consciousness and it may offer artists and art educators a comparison for the future here in Scotland as well as to inform accounts of small nations creative ‘margins’ elsewhere (Danson & Burnett, 2000; Danson & Burnett, 2014; Burnett & Danson, 2016). Scotland has embraced connectivity with Europe not least with northern European partners in terms of culture as transformative (Coutts & Jokela, 2008) and arts more generally informing sustainable remote rural development. Ideas of what are marginal peripheral communities and places of Scottish – European connectivity has made an informed difference not least in terms of funding and shared good practice but also in terms of offering interpretative dialogues with place and people. Exploring aspects of ‘north’ throughout the region have both explicitly and implicitly exposed our cultural sites as an opportunity for increasingly communicative sharing (not least through digital media and literacies) but also instances of refraction of what remains different or disconnected here in Scotland from our northern neighbours elsewhere.

**Conclusion**

Understanding histories of Scotland’s arts and crafts in terms of articulation of community will inevitably require an incomplete charting through what is positioned as dominant accounts and narratives of certain practices, places, individuals and indeed portrayals. The co-production of knowledge in this process has become one of the more attractive and welcomes shifts within research communities and academia more generally. Projects are encouraged to work in collaboration with non-academic gatekeepers of knowledges and practice and in doing so restore a greater sense of a shared mapping of Scotland’s arts and craft histories and indeed current activities. Examining arts and crafts of the past today via education and research projects communicates an appreciation of place and people. Furthermore, dialogues open up over what has been arguably ‘lost’ within our national narratives revealing how certain dualisms have loomed large not least ideas of ‘North’ and ‘South’ and of ‘urban’ and ‘rural’. Through a questioning of certain romanticisation, ‘indi-
individual’ artists and artisans are better understood as networked communities of identity and practice. It might also be argued that examining further the histories of artistic and craft practice in economic, social and cultural context, will reveal too the vagaries of gender, ethnicity and most certainly the material conditions and dispositions of people variously making, accessing and experiencing art in Scotland’s margins.

Our physical north as lived and worked community spaces are continually resisting and responding to both natural and human forces of change. These spaces are reimagined through art and industry not least by the very forms and materiality of communication and cultural technologies variously available. The transmission and representational practice – our communication – of ‘seeing lovingly’ the contemporary spaces and communities across Scotland’s north are made available and brought into being through art and cultural media and ongoing tensions and delights are noted. Creative and cultural economies inform and are the art world; they do not sit beyond it. Artists and educators in and of ‘the north’ stimulate connectivity across all Scotland’s margins engaging communities locally and globally with an ever increasing informed assembling and sharing of old and new aspects of cultural form.

Endnotes

1 Gàidhealtachd is the Scottish Gaelic term that refers to the communities and culture of the Scottish highlands and islands that are recognised as historically Gaelic-speaking and the heartland of Gaelic tangible and intangible culture.

2 See work taking place in Heriot Watt University’s Intercultural Research Centre, for example. Available online at: http://irc.hw.ac.uk/research/groups/groups-heritage/northern-communities.html

3 On the Edge (2001–present) is a research programme at Gray’s School of Art, Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. Available online at: https://ontheedgeresearch.org/

4 For a global comparison see ‘From Surviving to Thriving: Sustaining Artist Residencies’, Alliance of Artists Communities (2012). Available online at: http://www.artistcommunities.org/sustainability
Paul Strand’s photographs have become iconic of a ‘northern Scottish’ way of life, and most especially of the Hebridean north west but they also speak to institutional tensions over the choices made within Scotland and as to what ‘is’ art of Scotland as well as how might artists’ motives be examined.

Various examples of the Cape Farewell Sea Change creative project can be viewed online at: http://www.capefarewell.com/latest/projects/sea-change.html

See for example the research work undertaken within the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI), Centre for Rural Creativity initiative. Available online at: https://www.uhi.ac.uk/en/research-enterprise/centres/centre-for-rural-creativity

References


MacDonald, S. (2012a). Joined up creativity: creative industries and Scotland’s urban and rural creative economy. Retrieved from OpenAIR@RGU. [online]: http://openair.rgu.ac.uk


