

Postgraduate/Distance Learning

Assignment coversheet & feedback form

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Student Name: Leon Hicks Student <u>University</u> Email: 2022572@student.uwtsd.ac.uk						
Module code: HPCA 7015 Module title: Foundations in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology		Student ID number: 2022572		Educational support needs: Yes/No		
Assignment title: Essay on a Sky Journal Assignment due date: 1/12/2021						
This assignment is for the module of the degree 1 st 2 nd 3 rd 4 th 5 th 6 th						
I confirm that this is my original work and that I have adhered to the University policy on plagiarism. Signed						

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Essay based on a Sky Journal

Introduction

This paper intended to obtain an understanding of the sky and its numerous features, of which I have had a time-less captivation – through the following themes: *clouds in a day sky, weather* and *nature*. This is a way of observing the clouds ever-changing canvas or as Tim Ingold said, ‘to observe the clouds is not to view the furniture of the sky but to catch a fleeting glimpse of a sky-in-formation, never the same from one moment to the next.’¹ Clouds can reveal their gradual but continuous process of change by engaging and immersing oneself. This essay aims to examine if clouds affected a person’s sky experiences and, if so, in what ways. The academic rationale and hope, was in writing this essay produced a comprehensive understanding of the intimate nature of cloud experiences and cloud watching. Alexander Harris’ quote was explored, ‘to think is to walk among clouds,’ together with other experts in this area.²

Methodology

This research was approached from phenomenological perspective, as suggested by Dermot Moran.³ In which the *clouds in a day sky, weather* and *nature* were observed in Wales, over 7 days, November 2021, at different times throughout the day. I used images which illustrated the link to this subject – an iPhone was used to take photographs as I found it suitable, and a sketch book and pencil for drawing. In this regard, I selected applicable images for this paper. When considering this essay, I

¹ Tim, Ingold. ‘*Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather*.’ The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, vol. 13, [Wiley, Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland], 2007, p. 28.

² Alexandra, Harris. (2016). *Weatherland: writers and artists under English skies*. Thames & Hudson. P. 202.

³ Dermot, Moran. (2000). *Introduction to phenomenology*. Routledge. P. 2.

recorded by written text my reflexive thinking of clouds and my surrounding (fig. 1).⁴ I am a Caucasian male in my mid-thirties, of Welsh culture, that has been living in Wales from birth, spending innumerable occasions viewing clouds. Thus, this pastime is not new to me, as I have always been drawn towards all aspects of the sky and nature.



Fig 1. Sky Journal. Wales. *Photo*: Leon Hicks.

⁴ Charlotte, Aull, Davies. (1999). *Reflexive ethnography: a guide to researching selves and others*. Routledge. P. 4.

Literature review

A phenomenological approach is important when trying to understand our world, and can be 'characterised initially in a broad sense as the unprejudiced, descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, precisely in the manner in which it so appears,' as Moran suggested.⁵ It would appear that Alexandra Harris also recognised the sky's phenomenology, which is clear in her statement 'to think is to walk among clouds,' in her book 'Weatherland.'⁶ The phenomenology of clouds and weather was also observed by English landscape painter John Constable (1776-1837), who coined the term 'skying,'⁷ according to John E. Thorne, for observing the sky, to which he was also known for saying 'I am the man of clouds.'⁸ The 19th century German painter Casper David Friedrich (1774-1840), who, like Harris and Constable also observed phenomenology of the sky, the morning mist and nature, and once remarked 'I have to stay alone...in order to fully contemplate and feel nature,' according to Christian J. Jensen.⁹ Thus, it would appear that observing the sky and the environment, could be considered a phenomenological experience, which has inspired many great people. The following chapter are excerpts from my Sky Journal.

⁵ Dermot, Moran. 'The Phenomenology Reader.' United Kingdom: Routledge, 2002. P. 1.

⁶ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

⁷ John, E. Thorne, John, Constable. *John Constable's Skies: A Fusion of Art and Science*. Kiribati: University of Birmingham, University Press, 1999. P. 80.

⁸ John, Constable. *John Constable's Correspondence*. United Kingdom: Suffolk Records Society, 1968. P. 75.

⁹ Christian, Jens, Jensen. *Casper David Friedrich: Life and Work*. United Kingdom: Barron's, 1981. P. 136.

Discussion/Findings

1st November 2021 8-12 a.m.

I take many pictures on my walks with Fidget, in hope of seeing a bigger sky, more clouds, changing weather and nature's beauty. Wales is estimated to cover some 8,000, hilly, damp, and sometimes cloudy western square miles of Great Britain,¹⁰ and being of Welsh heritage myself, feel deeply connected to it. As I observe the clouds in this image (fig. 3,4), I also imagine my thoughts consisting of clouds, as did The Anglo-Saxons, as they too 'imagined thoughts being made of clouds,' pointed out by Harris.¹¹ For me, being amongst nature 's chilly weather and listening to my dog's paws crunching on the autumn auburn leaves (fig 5,6) gave me an undulating experience or like Friedrich, cited in Harris, I too feel this is an 'accurate figuration of all mental life.'¹² Thus, by immersing myself in this wholesome experience, I truly felt part of nature and grateful for this moment.

¹⁰ Jane, Zaring. 'The Romantic Face of Wales.' *Annals of the Association of the American Geographers*, 67, no. 3 (1977): p. 387.

¹¹ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

¹² Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.



Fig 3. Cwmrheidol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.



Fig 4. Nant Y Arian. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.



Fig 5. Auburn leaves. Cwmrheidol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.



Fig 6. Autumn leaves. Cwmrhiedol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.

2nd November 2021 8-12 a.m.

Wales' nature could be considered quite unique, with its large mountainous landscapes, many lakes and rivers and sometimes dreary foggy weather. I enjoy gazing at the foggy sea of cloud cover (fig 7) or 'gazing over the sea of fog, as Friedrich said, cited in Harris.¹³ This makes me think I am walking among clouds or as Harris put it, 'to think is to walk among clouds.'¹⁴ . Thus, by immersing myself in this experience, feel it's transparent qualities in and of myself.

¹³ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

¹⁴ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

However, contrastingly to me, Friedrich, cited in Harris, said he 'had no time for the dreariness of total cloud-cover,'¹⁵ of which Friedrich 'painted clear air and sunlight above the fog,'¹⁶ or in my case, capturing an image of sunlight and blue peeking through the dark, swollen rain clouds (fig. 8). Like Friedrich, cited in Harris, I too think the sky 'was the true image of infinity, and when our view of it is narrowed our minds are proportionately constrained and oppressed.'¹⁷ Thus, by immersing and engaging myself, was able to fully embrace the sky, nature's tapestry and the clouds unique, transient and sometimes unclassifiable formations.

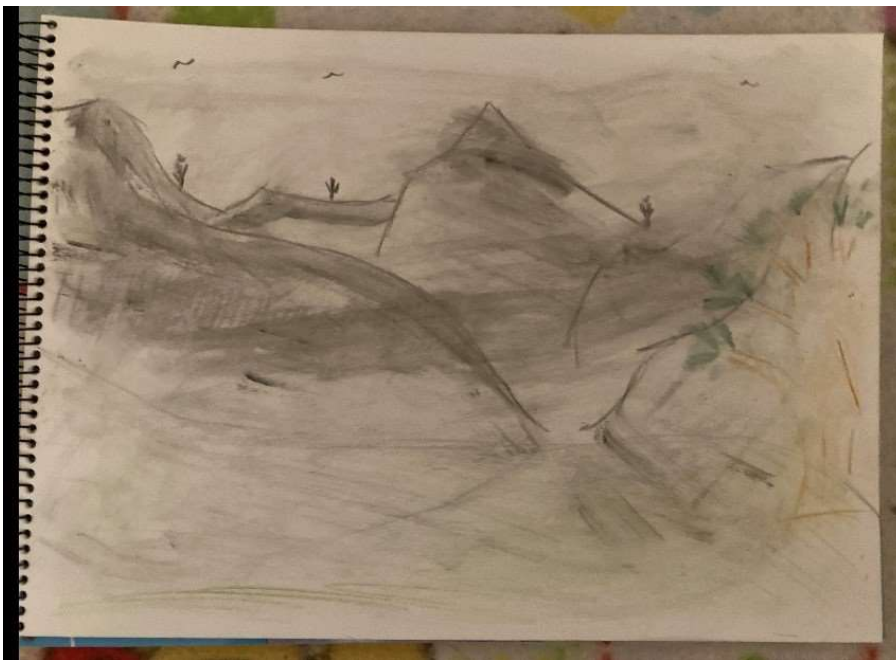


Fig 7. Fog. Cwmrheidol. *Sketch*: Leon Hicks.

¹⁵ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

¹⁶ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p.202.

¹⁷ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.



Fig 8. Blue peeking through. Cwmrheidol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.

3rd November 2021 7-8 a.m.

It's a cold early misty morning here in Wales, and I hardly recognise the lake I frequently visit, as it's covered in a blanket of mist, teetering above the ground (fig. 9,10). As I moved closer it was seemingly transparent. I thought I was walking among clouds as I passed through it, or as Harris points out, 'to think is to walk among clouds.'¹⁸ I also felt the mist was emanating from me, like Friedrich's mist that 'emanated from him,' cited in Harris.¹⁹ Thus, by immersing myself within the mist, was able to see its 3-dimensional volume.

¹⁸ Harris, '*Weatherland*,' p. 202.

¹⁹ Harris, '*Weatherland*,' p. 202.



Fig 9. Mist. Cwmrheidol. *Sketch*: Leon Hicks.



Fig 10. Lake mist. Cwmrhiedol. *Photo*: Leon Hicks.

4th November 2021 11-12 a.m.

I like relaxing with Fidget near nature, in that it allows me to be in a pendulum state of mind and to reflect on spiritual matters, or in my case today, to contemplate the clouds, and to be fully alone with nature or as Friedrich said, cited in Jensen 'to be alone to fully contemplate nature.'²⁰ In many ways this experience is a good substitute for indoor essays writing. Given the lack of clouds in this scene (fig. 11,12,13), I certainly did not think I was going to be walking among clouds this day, or as Harris remarked, 'to think is to walk among clouds.'²¹ Thus, as I immersed myself in this breath-taking scene, was able to fully contemplate the sky and nature and to some degree, imagine that I may be, or 'I am the man of clouds,' as Constable put it.²²



Fig 11. Contemplation. Penrhyncoch. Photo: Leon Hicks.

²⁰ Jensen, 'Caspar David Friedrich: Life and Work,' p. 136.

²¹ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

²² Constable, 'John Constable's Correspondence,' p. 75.



Fig 12. Cwmrheidol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.



Fig 13. Cwmrheidol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks

5th November 2021 8-9 a.m.

The sky's overcast window view has me feeling somewhat frustrated – offering me little encouragement, then I see Fidget observing clouds (fig. 14), maybe thinking, he could walk among clouds or 'to think is to walk among clouds,' as Harris said.²³ I too, as Harris did, have my head in the clouds, but I do not have my judgment clouded, as every overcast cloud has a silver lining. For all I knew Fidget could have been observing the sky's phenomenology, as this world we inhabit stretches to different forms of consciousness, as 'the unprejudiced, descriptive study of whatever appears to consciousness, is precisely in the manner in which it so appears,' as Moran suggested,²⁴ or maybe Fidget was 'skying' as Constable put it, cited in Thorne.²⁵ Thus, like life and consciousness, so do the movements and structure of clouds seamlessly – timelessly, ebb and flow.

²³ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

²⁴ Moran. 'Introduction to Phenomenology,' p.2.

²⁵ Constable, 'John Constable's Correspondences,' p.75.



Fig 14. Fidget sky watching. Machynlleth. Photo: Leon Hicks.

6th November 2021 19:24 p.m.

I regularly observe animals in nature that resemble clouds. I observed two swans, their plump downy bodies flouting on the lake (fig. 15), wondering their relationship to clouds. It was as if they appeared at that moment as stepping stones in the water. This bringing a new meaning and experience of 'to think is to walk among clouds.'²⁶ I was being cloud-minded, the swans reminding me of glorious clouds, although walking across them would be nightmarish, for the swans. This reminded me of what Friedrich said, 'the cloud-mind could be glorious, and it could also be a nightmare,'²⁷ cited in Harris.

²⁶ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

²⁷ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.



Fig 15. Swans. Cwnrheidol. *Sketch*: Leon Hicks

Some-time later, I notice both the cows and Fidget had cloud-like markings – which reminded me of stormy/black rain clouds (fig. 16,17,18). What next? The woollen blanket of clouds against increasingly bigger patchy blue sky - stormy sunlight (fig. 19). Sun appearing? I am blue sky and cloud thinking or 'thinking I could walk among clouds,' as Harris said.²⁸ Did Constable have the same musings, as he was a faithful proponent of the sky's many facets and remarked that clouds are 'the chief organ of sentiment.'²⁹ Furthermore, like me, did Harris, Constable or Friedrich think animals could predict the weather? Thus, by immersing myself in the atmosphere's crispness, was able to fully engage with the environment.

²⁸ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

²⁹ Thorne, 'John Constable's Skies,' p. 57.



Fig 16. Fidget and cows. Cwmrheidol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.



Fig 17. Cows. Pendam. *Photos:* Leon Hicks.



Fig 18. Dairy cow. Cwmriedol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.



Fig 19. Stormy sunlight. Cwmrheidol. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.

7th November 2021 1-4 p.m.

I venture to the road, where I observed the dramatic weather unfolding. The heavens open, rain pours. I have captured one of nature's true phenomena – a rainbow, as it floats motionless, like Friedrich's mist or fog (fig. 20).³⁰ Did the rainbow come to wish me farewell on my last day of observations? I see reflecting clouds and the rainbow in the puddles, the sky always resides on earth. Maybe this is what Harris truly meant when she said 'to think is to walk among clouds,' as she herself was not just observing clouds but all aspects of weather and nature.³¹ Thus, this seemed like a perfect way to end my observing exploration.

³⁰ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

³¹ Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.



Fig 21. Rainbow. North Wales. *Photo:* Leon Hicks.

Conclusion

This essay set out to obtain an understanding of *clouds in a day sky, weather* and *nature* by describing a Sky Journal, in which I observed the clouds over 7 days, November 2021, in Wales, at varying points of day. From this, my hope was to attach some meaning to what I saw, and to explore my reflexive thoughts and their influence on me. I endeavoured to put my observations in relation to this specific sky monolog as a cultural means, as I am of Welsh heritage, in view of Alexandra Harris' quote, 'to think is to walk among clouds,'³² which has been instrumental in considering what it may be like to mentally dance with unidentified shapes above me, as I deliberately pictured myself cartographically.

³² Harris, 'Weatherland,' p. 202.

By embracing a phenomenological perspective and reflexive point of view for this essay, my personal introspection allowed me to resonate with and appreciate observing the sky's canvas, the clouds perpetual motions and what the weather and nature brought to my attention – which I can only describe as having a profound impact on me, to which I also felt inherent to the tapestry of information I gathered. In turn, I came to the understanding that by immersing myself and engaging in, 'the furniture of the sky,' as Ingold said,³³ and its many transient and transparent qualities, I too, felt part of the sky's furniture, to the point of opening up a new world into the language that everything surrounding may in fact be alive. As a result, I simultaneously felt the impact of their natural phenomena in and of myself, which led me to consider how grateful I am for having been part of this experience. Even more so, by doing this, I was able to truly and completely immerse myself in what Ingold termed 'the weather world,'³⁴ or the 'skying' experience as Constable put it, cited in Thrones,³⁵ and whilst being alone, was able to 'fully contemplate and feel nature, 'as Friedrich said, cited in Jensen,³⁶ or that 'I am the man of clouds' as Constable pointed out.³⁷ Thus, as this essay draws to a close, I have a sense of contentment, as I know I will be creating many more Sky Journals.

³³ Ingold, *'Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather,'* p. 28.

³⁴ Ingold, *'Earth, Sky, Wind, and Weather,'* pp. 28-29.

³⁵ Constable, *'John Constable's Skies,'* p. 80.

³⁶ Jensen, *'Caspar David Friedrich: Life and Work,'* p. 136.

³⁷ Constable, *'John Constable's Correspondence,'* p. 75.

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