

Foundations Module

Methodology for collecting data, writing up, and using images, art, and photographs in Sky Journal

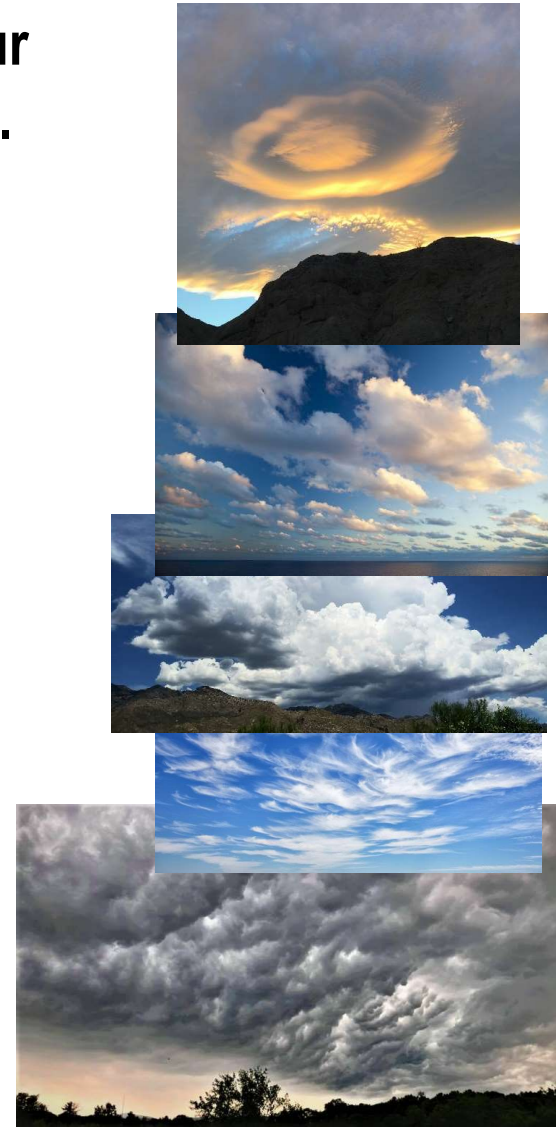


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Canolfan Sophia
The Sophia Centre

Gathering your observations.



**Sorting your
observations into
'buckets' of similar
ideas.**



Once you have your **themes**, then your introduction will consist of the following:

Your **AIM**

('The aim of this essay was to observe the sky for a month and focusing on the sky. I chose to observe [what] in the sky for [how long] from [dates].')

Your **METHODOLOGY**

(I live [where] and I observed the sky phenomenon from [where].)

And your **RESULTS**

(From this observation, two/three themes emerged as follows: [ONE], [TWO] [THREE]. **These will be situated within the academic framework of [Alexandra Harris quote/ van Gogh quote].**) Note: Essentially these ask you whether your experience was one of rationality (Alexandra Harris) or wonder (van Gogh).

Bridging sentence into the first theme.

Make sure you

- * **introduce, discuss and conclude each separate theme**
- * **bridge** from one theme to the next
- * **conclude** by summarising each theme and then finish with a concluding sentence.

The phenomenology of
land and skylscapes.



The power of colour.



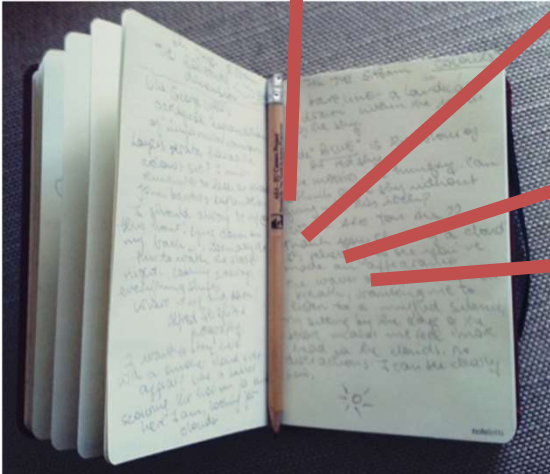
Assigning meaning to light.



Sacredness and meaning.



EXAMPLE 1: Grace Cassar



My location is the Mediterranean Maltese Islands and the time of year was July. Yet despite my willingness and my sharp-eyed surveillance, the harsh reality of the Maltese summer brought its own agenda. Armed with pencil, notebook and mobile phone for taking photographs, on 1 July, I wrote in my sky journal:

**Theme 1: The
phenomenology
of land and
skyscapes.**

Summer and July. Summer *is* July! The sky seems to welcome its arrival with wide open arms. A cloudless sky (Fig.1). Actually, I was not prepared for this, but I am glad to notice the different layers of blue. They all dovetail into each other, gradually, smoothly. Devoid of clouds, the sky pure and timeless, grounding me to a peaceful now. It is special to be here. The moment is infinite.



Figure 1. The cloudless sky. Wednesday 1 July, 18:27 – on a rocky beach. Photo: Grace Cassar.



On 9 July, 6:38 pm, I wrote in my sky journal:

I am lying on my back on smooth clay rocks, sky-bathing; I would say cloud-watching if there were any! Watching the sky from this horizontal position alters my manner of observation. I realize I cannot see the horizon as I am only looking upward, seemingly deeper. Thoughts of distance and journeying cross my mind. The clouds seem to have evaporated. Is it the heat? There is a thick haze, it must be the humidity. I wait and take some photos, and soak up the beauty (Fig.2).



Figure 2. A road in the Mdina, the Silent City. Saturday 18 July. *Photo*: Grace Cassar.

Over the course of the month the clouds continued to elude me. On 29 July, 8:03pm, I wrote in my sky journal:

Another crystal-clear evening. I decide to observe the sky from the pontoon of a yacht marina. I look up and scour the sky; I see nothing that resembles feathers or tufts of curls. I seem to be focusing on what is missing rather than what is. I take a deep breath and take in the sight of the boats and the reflection of squiggle-curved masts floating on the blue of sky and sea (Fig.3).

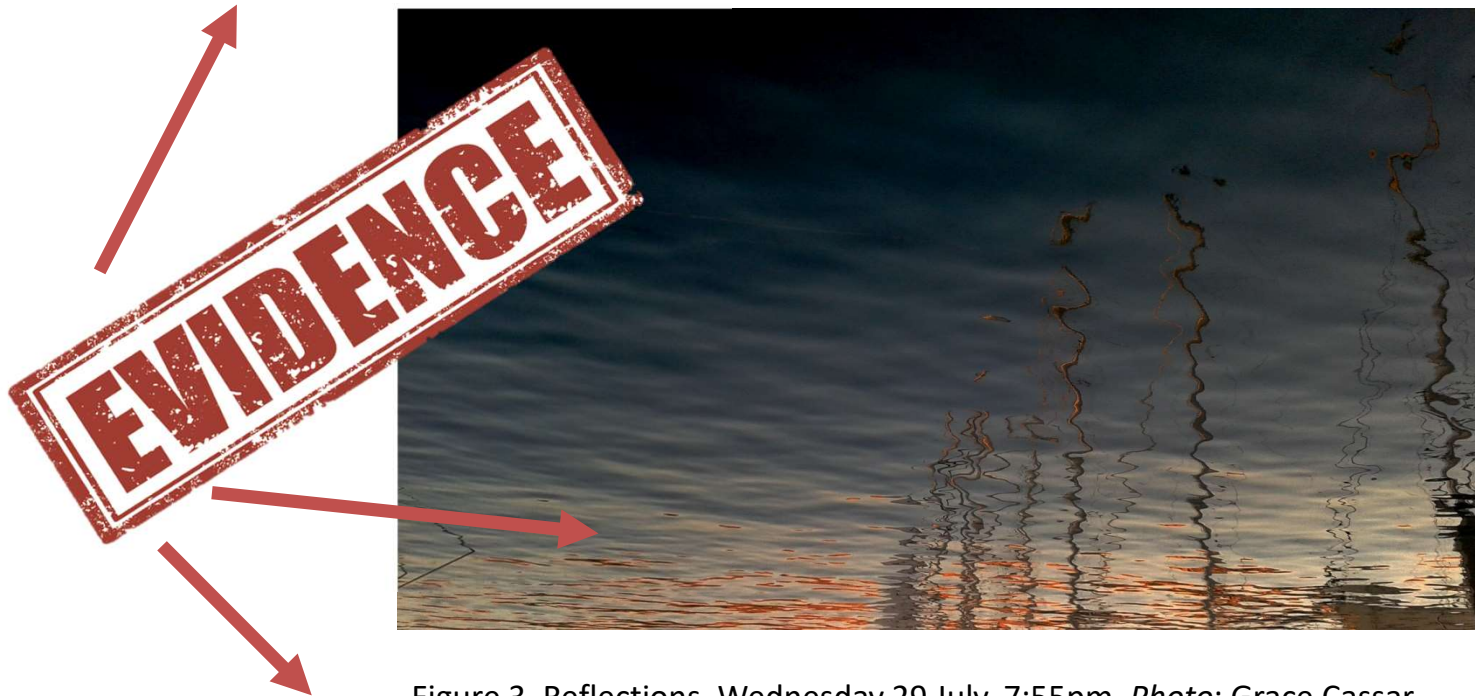


Figure 3. Reflections. Wednesday 29 July, 7:55pm. *Photo: Grace Cassar.*

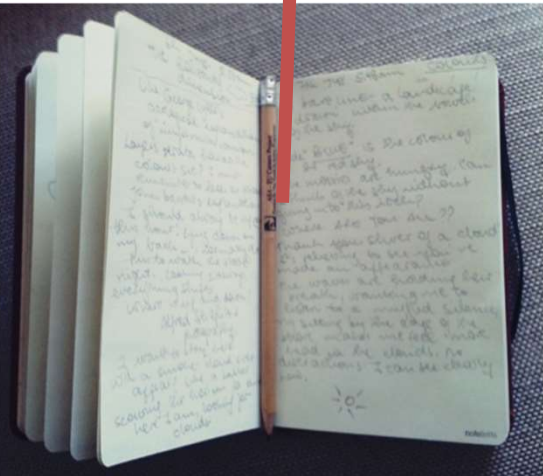
The phenomenology of land and skiescapes.



This lack of clouds lead Grace into a different discovery. Situating her thoughts and reflections of blue in the sky into the literature, Grace concluded this section of her paper with the following insight:

To summarize this part of the essay which deals with the phenomenology of the land- and skiescapes, in my sky journal I noted the following realizations: first, that a cloudless sky is full of different layers of blue; and second that the sky feels pure and timeless, and infinite; and third, that this timelessness grounded me to a peaceful now. [In seeking secondary support for these realisations in the works of Lane, Renfrew and Bahn, Eliade, Lawrence, Benke, and the artworks of O'Keeffe](#), I become aware, that while anticipating clouds, I was actually 'attending' to what Lane described as a 'phenomenological reality' of the here and now.¹

1. Britta Benke, *Georgia O'Keeffe: 1887-1986: Flowers in the Desert* (Köln; Los Angeles: Taschen, 2011), p.55; Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the sacred: geography and narrative in American spirituality* (Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p.ix.



EXAMPLE 2: Teresa Alfonso

In keeping my sky journal, my first realization was my dislike of blue skies. On 6 May 2015 I wrote: 'Blue skies in Johannesburg (Fig. 6)... like almost every day in late autumn and winter. It reminds me of Irving Berlin's *Blue Skies*: 'Blue skies smiling at me, nothing but blue skies do I see.' I never liked that song. And neither do I like blue skies.



Figure 6. Blue skies above my garden in Johannesburg, 6th May 2015, 8.07 a.m. *Photo*: Teresa Alfonso.

After similar observations a few days later, I gained an understanding that this dislike came from my younger self, one who was six years old and living on the family farm in the Karoo:

I have a clear picture in my mind of my father squinting his eyes against the sun in search of clouds. At night I would lie in my bed listening for the first whisper of wind in the drooping branches of the peppercorn trees near the house (Fig.7). Because the wind meant clouds. And the clouds the hope of rain. But mostly the last sounds I heard were my parents' distressed discussions about their poor prospects and the dry barking of baboons in the deep ravines to the west. In the end the clouds never came and we had to abandon the farm and move to the city where my father carried engine blocks in a car manufacturing plant and we lived in a small flat where my room had no windows... This is why I hate blue skies.



Figure 7. A digitally adapted drawing from my Sky Journal of our farmhouse in the Karoo at night. A peppercorn tree is to the right of the house and the water tank I mention in my journal entries is to the left. My bedroom window was the first one to the front of the house. *Image*: Teresa Alfonso.

Added to this harsh childhood environment, **I came to recognise that my culture as an Afrikaner also played a significant role in my estrangement from the sky, that Afrikaner culture contained little if no sky lore**, since heaven was God's domain and not to be intruded upon with sky stories or folktales.² The Afrikaner's Calvinistic variety of Christianity compounded an inherent Platonic dualism, whilst also discouraging projection onto the heavens (Fig.8). With these insights, **I sought, through my sky journal, to understand how I could become an inhabitant of what Tim Ingold called the Weather-World where, rather than feeling separate from the earth and sky, I could feel woven into it by sun, moon, stars, rain, thunder, and wind**.³ The phenomenological approach my journal facilitated, allowed for greater self-awareness and new perspectives with which I could, as Levine stated, 're-insert [myself] into the sensible world'.⁴ I realized the courage needed and the difficulty of developing a new cosmological approach to an interconnected life.

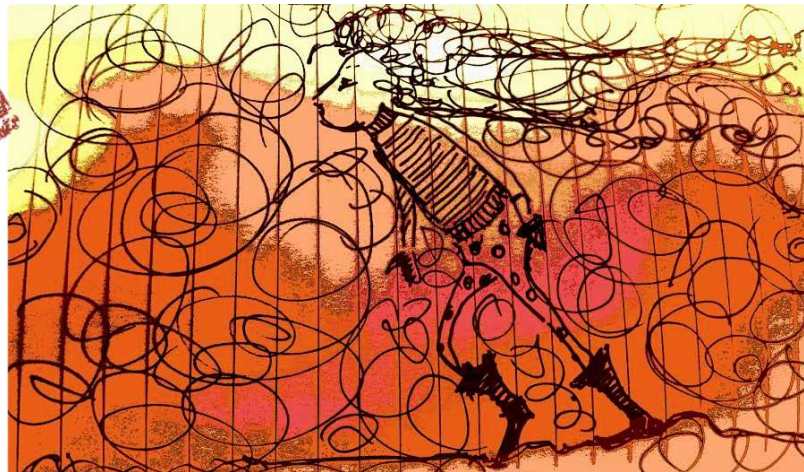
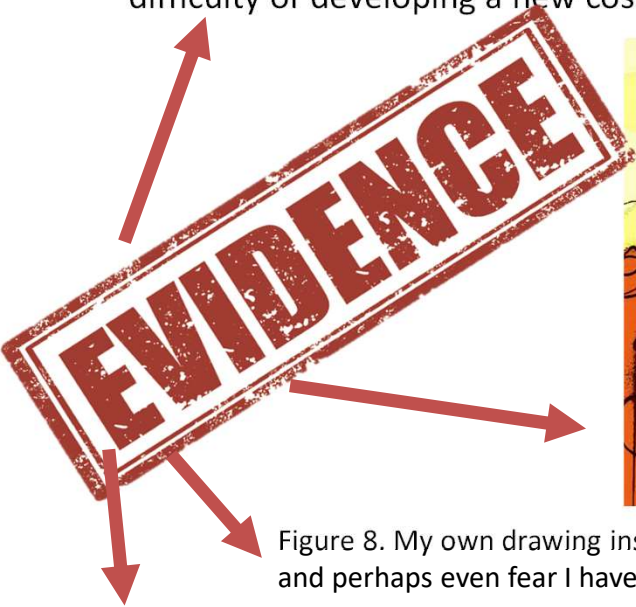


Figure 8. My own drawing inspired by Selina Wagner's *Walking into the Wind* to illustrate the personal difficulty and mental struggle and perhaps even fear I have in my departure from dualistic thinking to immerse myself in the weather-world. Image: Teresa Alfonso.

2. Pieter W. Grobbelaar, (ed.), *Die Afrikaner en sy Kultuur* (Cape Town: Tafelberg-Uitgewers, 1974).

3. Tim Ingold, 'Earth, sky, wind, and weather', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(2007), S19-S38, p.S20.

4. Paolo J. Knill, Ellen G. Levine, and Stephen K. Levine, *Principles And Practice Of Expressive Arts Therapy: Toward A Therapeutic Aesthetics* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2005), pp.22-23.

EXAMPLE 3: Octavia Sheepshanks

Sky Journal: The Sky in the City

Introduction

This essay is a discussion of the experience of keeping a sky journal in London for four weeks from the last week of July through August 2018. **The aim of the research** was to consider whether buildings, if present, influence an individual's experience of the sky and, if so, in what ways. **The rationale** - and hope - was that keeping this journal would provide **an in-depth study of the subjective nature of sky viewing and sky experiences in the city of London**. It is a fact that buildings can obscure areas of sky, so **I was curious to examine whether the presence of buildings could also obscure the sky experience or whether, perhaps paradoxically, they could enrich it**. I also wondered whether buildings might serve as frames for the sky. **My methodology was** both qualitative and reflexive. I was constantly reflecting on the process of the sky journal and how that was affecting my experience of viewing the sky. I used my iPhone camera to document skies I had observed, as well as recording my experiences through text, and used these photos and words to create a physical journal (Figure 1).



Figure 1. My Sky Journal side-on (left) and from above (right). Photos: Octavia Sheepshanks.

Sky Frames



Though I had planned to consider whether buildings could ‘frame’ skies, I never expected to experience this so literally, and so immediately. Walking home through Westfield Shopping Centre on the 26th July 2018, I looked east and saw through a large open window-like structure, ‘the moon! perfectly framed’. [26.07.18] (Fig. 3).



Figure 3. Moon through open balcony space in Westfield Shopping Centre, 26th July 2018. *Photo:* Octavia Sheepshanks.

Sky Frames



The experience was so powerful that as I eventually walked on to the station, I found myself thinking of the possibility of having dedicated places in cities set up as ‘windows to the sky’. People were walking past this view blindly, and I later wrote, ‘perhaps in cities people need more guidance...’ [26.07.18]. **Jefferies had suggested that everyone must find their own locality, but I wondered whether, in the city, they were failing to look.** I thought about the concept of signposting localities, and whether it would work.⁶ If I had not, suddenly remembering my status as a sky journalist, cast my eyes upwards while standing near Victoria station on the 9th August, I would not have caught sight of the unusual way in which the windowed surface of this building created individual frames for the clouded sky (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. Cloud-windows, near Victoria station, 9th August 2018, 7.57pm. *Photo*: Octavia Sheepshanks.

6. Richard Jefferies, *Nature Near London* (London: Collins, 2012 [1893])

Sky Frames



The sky and mood



Frustrating skies



Positive skiescapes



Positive skylscapes



Figure 8. View to the south-east with near-full moon visible, Olympic Park, London, 26th July 2018.
Photo: Octavia Sheepshanks.

Reading the Royal Observatory blog on Astro Art: Skylscapes, I was struck by the similarities between Henry Pether's painting of the moon illuminating the Thames and Greenwich hospital (Fig.12) and my photographs of the moon at Stratford (Fig.8). In Pether's painting the buildings do not detract from the skyscape: they are the skyscape, and yet the moon dominates. This is the same feeling I had when looking out past the London Aquatics Centre.



Figure 12. Henry Pether, *The Thames and Greenwich Hospital by Moonlight*, c. 1854-65, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.



To conclude...

- Your Sky Journal is simply that. It forms the primary source from which you can then find common themes.
- Your images, art, and photographs in your Sky Journal are as much your primary source evidence as your Sky Journal and thus must be used with care to provide support for your claims, captioned appropriately, and cross-referenced in your text.
- Your final essay follows the same structure as every essay you will write in the MA.

Night Sky JOURNAL

