This is a repository copy of *Introduction: On Mountains*.

**Introduction: On Mountains**
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Mountains are 'sentinels of change' (Braun 2016: 1), according to a report by the Mountain Research Initiative (MRI).[{note}]1 They are 'tightly linked to their surrounding regions' (11) -- a canary in the mineshaft, or pigeon in the city (Glickman 1991).[{note}]2 Like the polar ice caps, mountains and their glaciers offer us a window onto how the world is transforming as it warms up, an indication of how delicately balanced our ecosystems are and a warning writ large on the horizon of what lies ahead if rising carbon levels are not addressed radically by 2030. (IPCC 2018). The pivotal role of science in assessing and addressing the current state of the planet's health is well known (notwithstanding the disproportionately loud voices of a few climate-change deniers). But the importance of the Arts or more specifically the Mountain Arts -- a deep cross section of which is represented in this issue On Mountains -- remains to be appreciated fully by policy makers and mountain research institutes internationally.

This is not because cultural practices are ignored in the interdisciplinary world of mountain research. The 2016 report cited above, Mountains for Europe's Future (Braun 2016), identifies mountains as a 'crucial' part of 'Europe's cultural heritage' (10) and part of the MRI's mission is to: 'recognize … the importance of different kinds of knowledge, beyond scientific research',[{note}]3 including that produced by arts practitioners. A recent call (2018) by the International Journal of Mountain Research and Development dedicated to culture acknowledges that: 'mountains worldwide are home to a rich cultural diversity, expressed in mountain populations' identities, languages, arts, agricultural practices, socioeconomic arrangements, governance, and music'.[{note}]4 As Director of the Centre for Mountain Studies in Perth, Martin Price has argued, mountains are generally recognized as areas of 'great cultural importance' (2015: 10) as well as of great environmental importance.

Why, then, for all the well-intentioned statements, does Mountain Arts research remain so under-represented in the wider field of Mountain Studies? A mere 4 per cent of over 2,500 researchers listed in the global MRI network identify 'Art/Folklore/Symbols and Language' as an interest or specialism, for instance, and

as such the vibrant and diverse communities of artists working on or in mountains remain largely invisible to Mountain Studies researchers and practitioners.[{note}]5 Why is the richness of mountain cultural activity readily acknowledged but the means by which such activity might be generated, documented, historicized and critiqued overlooked?

Addressing this disparity has been one of the driving imperatives behind an AHRC-funded fellowship project Performing Mountains,[{note}]6 led by myself with support from David Shearing as Post-Doctoral Research Fellow. The project culminated in a monograph of the same name and a new practice-led research piece, Black Rock (created by Shearing and documented in this issue). An international symposium was held at the University of Leeds in March 2018, providing a platform for arts practitioners, scholars and festival directors working in mountains to value the contribution live performance can uniquely make to mountain culture.

The event was framed with the following questions:

- How might the practice and research of Mountain Culture raise its status within the wider field of Mountain Studies?
- Where do the live arts fit into this picture, what do they uniquely offer and what might they contribute in the future?

As Mountain Studies is a manifestly interdisciplinary area the symposium attracted contributions from those in history, geography, sport science, literature, mountaineering, climbing, architecture and ritual studies, as well as from performance-based disciplines, and was arranged over three days of papers, panels, performances, exhibitions and workshops. Many of the presenters would not identify themselves as being part of the Mountain Studies community and not all of them are directly interested in climate change in relation to mountains. But the research shared in Leeds in 2018, which now forms the core of the articles in this issue, nevertheless constitutes one measure of why the MRI includes Art, Folklore, Symbols and Language within its disciplinary ambit, even if it does not yet have the personnel to populate the field. On Mountains is testament to how performance practice has made (and is making) sense of mountains and celebrates the range of

approaches being used to do this thinking: practice-research, phenomenological enquiry, historiography, gender studies, performance analysis, material enquiry and, in the case of a clutch of articles, wild speculation and thought experimentation. Such variety of approach necessarily leads to variety of voice and this issue, characteristically for <u>Performance Research</u>, celebrates the multiplicity of writing registers, sounds and images needed to do justice to a subject of such scope and diversity.

While the metaphor of a mountain as a sentinel conjures up the image of a large mass of rock standing guard over its neighbouring community, a sentinel also indicates 'the presence of disease' (<u>OED</u>). Beyond the long-term shrinking of the glaciers and melting ice caps there are much more immediate indications of our contaminated attitude to mountains -- such as the practice of Mountain Top Removal (MTR) for mining purposes or intensified footfall and environmental blight caused by insensitive or unsustainable tourism. In both cases one of the weapons at activists' disposal (what a recent <u>Guardian</u> article ambitiously suggested could be 'the way forward' (Smith 2018)) is to radically reassess how we view the status of a mountain and to grant it <u>personhood</u>. In the Appalachian mountains 'eco-sexual' artists and performers Beth Stephens and Annie Sprinkle (Sprinkle and Stephens 2013) achieved this in playfully performative terms by marrying Gauley Mountain, and 'champion[ing] new forms of relationality between humans and other earthly inhabitants' (Whitworth 2018: 73) in the process. In New Zealand's Mount Taranaki, the lack of respect shown for the mountain by tourists triggered legal action by local Māoris to grant the mountain the status of a legal personality or 'Juristic Personhood' (Studley, 2019), following successful actions in 2014 to protect the area of <u>Te Urewera</u> and, in 2017, the Whanganui River (or <u>Te Awa Tupua</u>). This action gave the mountain the same legal standing as a human being, with 'all the rights, powers, duties and liabilities of a legal person' (Studley and Bleisch 2018: 87).[{note}]7 While occupying radically different cultural and political contexts, both examples offer an indication of the power cultural intervention and local traditions can exercise. If such actions increase in frequency as we move towards the IPCC's 2030 deadline, they will surely force a reassessment of the subordinate place afforded 'Art, Folklore, Symbols and Language' in Mountain Studies.

This activity in the Gauley and Taranaki mountains chimes with recent questions about the efficacity of performance studies in relation to the environment. These are provocatively summed up by a question Carl Lavery asks in a recent edited collection, Performance and Ecology: What Can Theatre Do? (Lavery 2018). For Lavery, rather than the 'hubristic and misguided thinking that would purport to save the planet through performance', theatre's strength is in its weakness -- as a medium whose role is not to 'produce the real' but to 'make the world problematic, multiple and complex' (5). Much of the work discussed in these pages is closer to this order of activity than it is to the performative enactment of mountain personhood seen in the Appalachians and New Zealand/Aotearoa. It is, to use Lavery's description, more 'modest' in its aspirations, if potentially equally generative (5). It is instructive, however, to have in mind the direct and efficacious models of performance in the Appalachian and Taranaki mountains, not to claim as the Guardian article implies that personification might be 'the answer' to our diseased attitude to the planet's mountains but to help determine the fullest spectrum of mountain cultural activity, its motivations and modi operandi. In doing so, a much better case for a holistic research and development programme that marries Mountain Studies and Performance Studies can be made. Beginning to formulate such a case, no matter how contingent and emergent it might be at this stage, was one of the primary motivations of this issue's Call for Papers, in which we invited researchers to help us: 'assess the place of performance within mountain culture and to consider how mountain culture in all its diversity helps performance studies and practice rethink itself'.

Before detailing how colleagues have gone about responding to that call, it is worthwhile reflecting more generally on the value performance research offers for the mountain research community. This is evident throughout this issue, centred around performance makers' and scholars' capacity to reflect, intervene, engage communities, translate complex ideas and develop visceral and charged subjective responses in their audiences. While the focus on culture in the call for the Journal of Mountain Research and Development is to be welcomed, the parameters established for its assessment betray a positivist bias that I would argue is fundamentally at odds with the subject matter. 'Papers', it says 'should present systematically validated experiences and research insights into development

solutions that consider mountain communities' cultures and social practices'.[{note}]8 The articles in <u>On Mountains</u> make no claim to capturing 'systematic' or 'validated' experiences, words that might well stick in the craw of artist-practitioners intent on individualizing and diversifying the experiences of their spectators. This is not to say these mountain artists are any less engaged in evidence-based, experimental research than their colleagues in the hard and social sciences but that it is the very unpredictability and acknowledged complexity of practice research that characterize much of its power -- its 'weakness' as Lavery terms it above. Until the essential contingency of arts practice and research is fully recognized in the interdisciplinary context of Mountain Studies, we are in danger of talking at cross purposes.

A deep seam of unpredictability and speculation runs through this issue, represented in part by a series of articles under the theme of 'Mountains and Impossibility'. In 'Found Constraints and Followed Contours', Curt Cloninger offers a reading of the annual Barkley Marathons -- a more-than-extreme running event (100--30 miles long), held in the Appalachian Mountains and inspired by a break-out from the Brushy Mountain State Penitentiary by the killer of Martin Luther King in 1977. As this is a race that was 'never meant to be completable', the event's designers focus instead on what Cloninger calls the 'non-human components' familiar to those who spend time at altitude -- weather, terrain and topology. Cloninger sees these components as 'performance constraints' cunningly curated so that the race is 'set up for you to fail' -- in the words of the race-designer-cum-durational-performance-artist, Laz. In focusing on almost inevitable failure, Cloninger argues, the race is given a level of site-specificity uniquely contingent on the forbidding mountain landscape, one that sets it apart from the many ultramarathons around the world today. Simon Piasecki's piece 'A Mountain as Multiverse: Circumnavigating the Realities and Meta-realities of a Kailash Pilgrim' is equally interested in near impossible endurance feats in the mountains, though here the focus is on what he calls 'The ritual liminoid efficacy of a pilgrimage in a genuinely perilous environment'. Not having circumnavigated the sacred Kailas mountain himself, Piasecki uses a mode of reconstructive storytelling, fusing published testimony of the pilgrimage with his own 'imaginings', and rehearsing on the page a future attempt of the 32-mile, four-day long hike in order to map its physical characteristics and many challenges. Mountain-invoked failure features again -- but here it is framed as a necessary

process to 'forg[e] a new perspective' and to effect the 'collapse of ego'. Dave Ball's project, encapsulated in the subtitle 'A Performance of Tactical Absurdity', explores a different kind of impossibility: his consciously futile attempt to find 'the perfect, archetypal Welsh hill'. Gently critical of what he sees as the dominant mode of mountain writing, the kind that elevates quantitative data (numbers of hills bagged, elevations, grid references) and embeds 'soberly naturalistic renderings' of mountainscapes in its pages (as in Alfred Wainwright's guides to the Lakeland Fells), Ball injects an uncharacteristic wit and playfulness to mountain culture. He does this by focusing on the quotidian and banal rather than the heroic, documenting his own distractions away from the summit, his travails with technology and his deep-seated scepticism that a genuine, unmediated encounter with a mountain is in any way possible. In capturing the mundane, senseless and futile Ball ultimately arrives at a productive understanding of absurdity, one that brings into question the 'normative attitudes underpinning the practice of hill-walking' and that produces several counter-narratives of value.

Four practice-led researchers address in varying ways the challenges of 'Translating Mountains' to the stage: David Shearing, Deborah Norris and Jeremy Ward, and Simone Kenyon. Originally a key research term for the Performing Mountains project, 'translation' was much debated at the Leeds symposium. It is being used here for its evocation of movement (from one environment to another) as well as its suggestion of transformation, not to imply a linguistic word-bound process. Scenographer and theatre artist Shearing offers us what he calls 'Routes through scenographic translation, from mountain climbing to performance', analysing his performance piece, Black Rock, inspired by the era-defining climbs of Johnny Dawes in Snowdonia in the 1980s. For Shearing, the conceit of defining new routes -- a play on the purpose of rock climbing, of course -- 'offer[s] an insight into the tricky act of translation from one mode of experience to another'. Sections on subjectivity, gesture, language, atmosphere and breath combine to evoke the complexity of a performance that did not in any way attempt to reproduce Dawes' First Ascent but instead sought to evoke a series of experiences, in correspondence with the original climb. In two separate sets of artist's pages, Kenyon and Norris/Ward document projects that set themselves similar translational challenges. Kenyon, working with Nan Shepherd's iconic, The Living Mountain as a source text, asks: 'Can one's

experience of an environment translate and manifest within a live indoor theatre experience?' musing, as Piasecki has done earlier, on the power of mountain pilgrimages and their capacity to provoke self-reflection. Norris and Ward choose a threefold choreographic structure -- Ascent, Spiritual Encounter, Descent -- to help 'translate … an account of a family climbing trip in Snowdonia into movement', while connecting with the rich mythology associated with the region. Intriguingly, their work in translating such a story from mountain lake to black box studio has ultimately stimulated a need to 'reverse the process', in their words, and to take the dance back to its original context in Snowdonia.

Routes are central to the research done by site-specific practitioner and vertical dancer Kate Lawrence, as part of a section of articles addressing the 'Symbolizing of Mountains'. Lawrence's focus is on the practice of route naming, drawn from a meticulous survey of climbs performed close to her home in Wales, again in Snowdonia. Her analysis reveals the complexity, and artistry, of naming a climbing route, an honour bestowed on the individual completing a First Ascent (FA). 'Naming provides a frame of reference against which to map human experience' she asserts, drawing on her own familiarity both of climbing and of dance (so often linked in this issue, generally). A sample of 145 route names is used to categorize the approaches employed by climbers in deciding on their FA title and these are distilled down to fifteen types and further refined to three categories: Extrinsic (associated with the physical characteristics of the climb); Intrinsic (its feeling); and Discursive (names that play on words and/or make cultural references). While this is painstaking work, Lawrence's analysis is not without a strong sense of the embodied encounter she has with history, drawing as she does on her own practice of climbing: 'It was a perfect day', she tells us, 'my imaginative climbing and reclimbing of the route enmeshed with the actual experience, shared with all those who had already "summited" Cenotaph Corner'. Alec Finlay and Rob and Harriet Fraser's artist pages also explore the act of symbolizing mountains through naming. As an artist and poet, Finlay's starkly simple 'word mountains' abstract the mountain's topology and focus instead on the beauty of the Scottish Gaelic language: Geal-Chàrn (white peak), Càrn a' Gheòidh (the rocky hill of the goose). Used in other contexts, for instance in his photographic practice, Finlay's word mountains are used playfully as labels for peaks, the obvious scale of the mountain reduced to the size of the label through

framing and depth of field manipulation. They offer an ironic twist on the act of naming and ownership. In their pared-back presentation on graph paper here, word and form seem to tussle more evenly for attention. Writer Harriet Fraser and photographer Rob Fraser are similarly engaged with the clash of word and landscape in their illustrated article 'Poetics and Place'. In this, they document their Long View project: seven installations based around 'remarkably ordinary' trees in Cumbria, chosen over several years, and designed 'to draw attention … to what is broadly termed the "natural" environment, and to question the values we place on environments that inspire us'. Working in challenging environments -- on the Wastwater screes in the shadow of Ilgill Head, for instance, the artists have to cede control to the landscape and the conditions, a reality that the Frasers see as having 'beauty in the synchrony of influences'.

While the articles above are not empty of political content, four in this issue address explicitly the theme of 'Mountains as Sites of Protest and Political Expression'. Shi Ke celebrates the birth of performance art in China with her treatment of two landmark art pieces in the mountains and hills of China: Xu Zhen's 8848 Minus 1.86 and a collective of ten artists' To Add One Metre to an Anonymous Mountain. Wittily juxtaposing the use of addition and subtraction in these pieces as a means to critique the appropriation of mountains as symbols of power and national pride in China, Shi considers these pieces as if they have visited 'wounds' on the mountain landscape that may, paradoxically, serve a healing purpose. In the case of 8848 Minus 1.86, this wound is not hard to see -- the tip of Everest, removed from the mountain and displayed in a museum cabinet, which subsequently toured the world including the Tate in the UK.[{note}]9 For Anonymous Mountain, often attributed to artist Zhang Huan, the wound is a symbolic one: ten naked bodies piled up on a hill near Beijing, memorializing the thousands of soldiers who have been lost in Chinese battles. Where Xu's mountain top removal (complete with fake accompanying documentary) was obviously ironic, Maggie Greene analyses the actual history of Chinese mountaineering, seeing the expeditions to Mount Everest (Chinese, Zhumulangma) between 1958 and 1968 as 'Performing Socialism at Altitude'. In a detailed account drawing on varied sources, Greene exposes the mechanics of a performed socialism on the stage of Everest, one in tune with the rhetoric of Mao's Great Leap Forward, and which -- in its celebration of collective success -- pointedly overlooked the

disastrous impact of Mao's policy. Moving from performed politics, to the actual staging of a play titled Zhumulangma in Shanghai in 1962, Greene considers how the production of an expeditionary play can service greater aims. 'The actors performing the play', she suggests, 'were both acting out mountaineering for audiences, and -- just like the expedition itself -- performing a politically perfect, noble and modern vision of Chinese socialism'. Prateek's analysis of the Kumaoni opera, and Evelyn O'Malley's account of Ben Bulben's role in the Irish abortion referendum, bring us up to date on the relationship between political activity, protest and mountains, if in very different cultural contexts. For Prateek, the performance analysis of a recent production of the opera Rajula Malushahi in Delhi in 2018 'exemplifies the importance of a performance aesthetics that establishes a nexus between mountains, female bodies and modern environmental discourses'. Invoking Indian eco-critical writing, or as the article's title suggests 'Articulating Mountains Through Moffusil Aesthetics', Prateek sees hope and potential resistance in the production's celebration of the 'grandeur of the [Uttarakhand] mountains' -- a resistance that could help oppose their destructive industrialization in terms reminiscent of the Appalachian and Taranaki mountains mentioned earlier. Evelyn O'Malley examines how a mountain's visibility and cultural prominence might literally be used as a backdrop to charged political debate, recounting the pressure group Sligo for Life's erection of a 100-metre-tall 'NO' sign on the side of the peak Ben Bulben. As a gendered act of protest against the right of women to choose abortion, the 'NO' sign became the subject of various memes and social media posts, which enhanced its performative influence in ways the group of men who climbed the side of the peak to inscribe their negative message could not have imagined.

As one form of 'Mountain Representation', the use of social media is prevalent in recent discourses about mountains although it remains in productive tension with the 'Felt Experience' of walking, trekking, climbing and mountaineering. This dynamic -- between representation and feeling -- is addressed in three contributions by Helen Mort, William Bainbridge and Annette Arlander. Poet and fell runner, Mort, addresses this issue through the eyes of a dog -- or more accurately through the eyes of many dogs, whose owners responded to the question: 'Why do you think we like to document our dogs' mountain adventures through photos?' Collating several responses from owners and analysing them with reference to recent work in inter-

species studies, Mort outlines the conflicting attitudes expressed to this question, reflecting a tendency both to anthropomorphize dogs and to 'other' them. Her use of Charles Foster's provocation that both animals and humans are 'a rolling conversation with the land' is particularly helpful in addressing this binary -- and indeed in thinking differently about the tension between representation and feeling. A century before the advent of the internet, issues of aesthetics, performance and representation still loomed large and Bainbridge offers one way into this by discussing the lesser-known figure of geographer Martin Conway, contemporary of author and mountaineer Leslie Stephen and art critic John Ruskin. In 'Picturesque Lost: Martin Conway's Experimental Travels into Geography', Conway is represented as a challenger to the paradigm of a distanced and controlled picturesque, a practitioner of travelling whose perspective is 'filtered through a physical engagement with the landscape itself, elevating the body as the main instrument of both the geographer and the artist'. Performance here is understood as 'a state conditioned by experience', a state that prompts a reappraisal of the role of the art historian in the late nineteenth century. Annette Arlander's artist pages from her landscape practice in Finland and Sicily also grapple with the limitations of representation, as well of engagement: 'How to be here with Malla?' she asks of the Finnish mountain on the northern shore of Lake Kilpis, 'How do you greet a fell'? Like Conway, a 120 years earlier, Arlander rejects the picturesque view from distance -- 'I see only one side' -- and instead looks for multiple perspectives. Mountains are constantly moving -- in terms of their deep geology, their climate, their mythologies and how we perceive them, she argues. The challenge is to move with them: to combine 'sensation and imagination'.

The final category of articles is 'Mountains, Scenography and Materiality'. Although there are clearly other contributions that would fit into this category (the Frasers and Simone Kenyon's practice, for instance) here it is reserved for the articles by Louise Anne Wilson and Susannah Henry. Wilson advances 'A feminine "material" sublime approach', championing the approaches taken by Dorothy Wordsworth, Ann Radcliffe and Charlotte Smith in the early nineteenth century, which she argues -- in contrast to the masculine sublime -- are located in an everyday, experiential immersion in the landscape. These examples offer Wilson an archetype or model of her own scenographic-led walking practice in mountainous and rural landscapes,

designed as socially engaged, therapeutic experiences for specific communities. Seven principles that underlie this practice are outlined in her article (from Being Located to Wonderment and Defamiliarization) and we see these worked through in relation to some of her landmark works as a site-specific practitioner: The Gathering, Warnscale, Mulliontide and Women's Walks to Remember: 'With memory I was there'. The result is a historically located and deeply informative window onto a scenographer's creative relationship with walking and mountains. Walking is essential to Susannah Henry's scenographic perspective, too, and in her photo essay, 'Figure with Landscape: A Scenographer Walks', she takes us with her on an unfeasibly large excursion, 'zigzagging our way around a 25-square-kilometre area of the Lake District'. Again, there is an embodied connection with the landscape being explored here, and again the ephemerality of the environment is noted. Scale is played with on Henry' walk, as well -- both through the placement of her own 2-inch facsimile, and more generally in her sensitized relationship to the surroundings and to others walking on the fells. Ultimately, while there is no attempt to draw specific conclusions in this gentle ambulatory article, the scenographic marriage with landscape is a generative one: 'There is a sense of the landscape intervening on the walker in these experiences', Henry observes, 'rich additions to the palette of a scenographer whose playground is space'.

Through the themes of impossibility, translation, symbolizing, protest, representation-and-feeling, and materiality, these articles collectively offer a measure of the contributions performance scholars and practitioners are making to mountain culture. Mountains in this issue are revealed as sites of resistance as well as of precarity, a stage for political actions of starkly different hues; their varying landscapes incite the creativity of performance practitioners and makers, and creative practice in turn helps us interpret mountains in ways that go significantly beyond the validated and systematic. Indeed validation -- in many of the contributions here -- finds its source in the experiential, in the embodied and in directly engaged acts of making. This may be of no surprise to many of the readers of this journal but to the researchers who make up the vast majority of the Mountains Studies community, there is an implied call to action here, an appeal to put into practice the declared commitment to 'the importance of different kinds of knowledge',[{note}]10 and an agenda to be set for a deeper collaboration.

**Notes**

1 A global network of Mountain Studies experts based in Berne and founded in 2001.

2 Both are so-called 'sentinel species': 'Animals [that] can serve to monitor any type of environment, including homes, work places, farms, and natural aquatic or terrestrial ecosystems' (Glickman 1991: 2).

3 www.mountainresearchinitiative.org/en/the-mri/about-mri

4 www.mrd-journal.org/pdf/MRD_Call_3904_Culture.pdf

5 The figures as of 6 September 2018 were 105/2,550 researchers identifying this category as a specialism.

6 This project ran from October 2016 to November 2018. For details of the symposium see: https://performing-mountains.leeds.ac.uk/symposium/

7 I am grateful to Dr Nic Salazar-Sutil for bringing this to my attention.

8 www.mrd-journal.org/pdf/MRD_Call_3904_Culture.pdf

9 www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/real-thing-contemporary-art-china/real-thing-exhibition-guide-16

10 www.mountainresearchinitiative.org/en/the-mri/about-mri

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