

# The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

**Leon Hicks**, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture

**Published Online:** 24 February 2025

## Introduction

The purpose of this essay is pertained towards obtaining an understanding of the sky and its many facets, for which I have a long-standing fascination, through the themes of perception and time. This is a way of seeing the sky's perpetual motion, where light in all its facets is implicit or 'an experience of light itself' as Tim Ingold remarks.<sup>1</sup> Sky observations can also reveal the gradual and ongoing process of change through visual perception and time, by immersing and engaging oneself. The aim of this research was to consider whether perception and time influenced a person's experience of the sky and, if so, in which ways. My academic rationale and hope were that keeping the journal would create an in-depth grasp of the personal nature of sky observations and sky experiences in Aberystwyth town and the Cwmrheidol countryside. The work of Henry David Thoreau that described his sky and nature experiences at Walden Pond was explored, along with those of other authors with similar interests.<sup>2</sup>

## Methodology

This paper will use a phenomenological perspective as considered by Christopher Tilley and Belden Lane.<sup>3</sup> The sky was observed at two separate locations – Aberystwyth and Cwmrheidol – over a month, from February to

---

<sup>1</sup> Tim Ingold, 'The eye of the storm: visual perception and the weather', *Visual Studies* 20:2 (2005), pp. 97-104.

<sup>2</sup> David Henry Thoreau, *Walden* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); W. Barksdale Maynard, 'Thoreau's House at Walden', *The Art Bulletin* 81:2 (1999), pp. 303-325.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* Expanded edition (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 26.

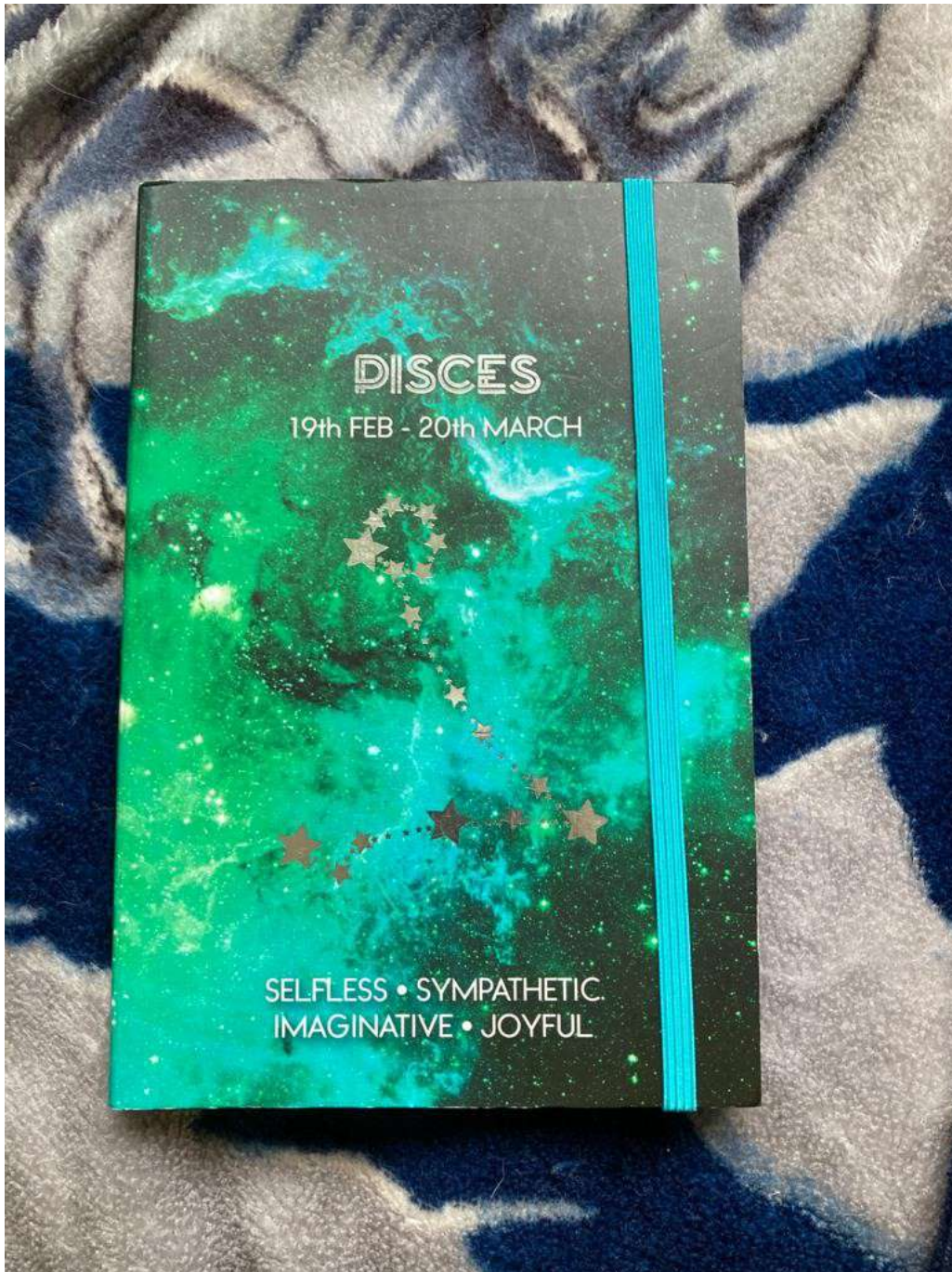
## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

March 2021, at varying times of day. I used my iPhone for image taking as I found it convenient, from which I chose relevant photographs for this essay. When constructing this paper, I noted in written form (fig. 1) my reflexive thoughts of the sky and my surroundings.<sup>4</sup> I am a thirty-six-year-old male of Welsh heritage, who has lived in Aberystwyth my entire life, spending many hours observing the sky in varying conditions and seasons. Thus, this experience is not out of the ordinary as I have always been drawn towards the sky and nature.

---

<sup>4</sup> Kathryn Haynes, 'Reflexivity in qualitative research' in *The Practice of Qualitative Organizational Research: Core methods and current challenges*, eds C. Cassell and G. Symon (SAGE, 2012), pp. 72-89.



**Fig. 1.** Sky journal. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

## Literature Review

A phenomenological perspective is important, as Christopher Tilley argued, when trying to grasp our relationship in terms of the world we inhabit.<sup>5</sup> Belden Lane also described phenomenology as a means of our interaction with the

---

<sup>5</sup> Tim Ingold, 'Comments on Christopher Tilley: *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Oxford: Berg, 2004', *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 38:2 (2005), pp. 122-129.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

world, where a person is ‘attending to the place itself’.<sup>6</sup> Tilley went on to say, ‘we perceive and experience the world because we are of this world and closely linked to it’.<sup>7</sup> In addition to Tilley and Lane, a phenomenological approach was used by Tim Ingold to examine the sky’s nature and how a person perceives it. Ingold noticed that, without the transparent qualities of air, our visual perception of sky could not be possible.<sup>8</sup> He also considered his difficulty in describing the sky, but said the ‘sky is the kingdom of light, air and sound’.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, it can be determined that our perception of the sky is defined by the light one observes, the air one feels, and the sound one hears.

Likewise, a naked-eye perspective of the sky and nature is important, as Thoreau realised during his time at Walden Pond. However, in contrast to Tilley, Lane and Ingold, Thoreau did not use the terminology of ‘phenomenology’.<sup>10</sup> Thoreau explained, ‘what is a course of philosophy ... or poetry, no matter how well chosen ... or most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen’.<sup>11</sup> Thoreau spent much of his time at Walden Pond journaling his experiences of the sky and nature. He wrote, ‘I require a deliberate existence ... deep living ... to suck the entire marrow out of life.’<sup>12</sup> Similarly, John Constable (1776–1837) noticed the importance of sky and nature. Like Ingold and Thoreau, Constable had a deep interest in the sky – specifically in painting clouds – and claimed ‘I am a man of clouds’. He also had a long-standing fascination with ‘geographical combinations’, for example weather like Ingold, and rivers like Thoreau.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, it was Constable who coined the term ‘skying’ as the way in which he

---

<sup>6</sup> Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, p. 44.

<sup>7</sup> Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Tim Ingold, ‘Reach for the stars! Light, vision, and the atmosphere’ in *The Imagined Sky: Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Darrelyn Gunzburg (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2016), p. 225.

<sup>9</sup> Ingold, ‘Reach for the Stars!’, p. 231.

<sup>10</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 20

<sup>13</sup> Claude Barbre, ‘Constable’s Skies’, *Journal of Religion and Health* 43:4 (2004), pp. 390-392.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

monitored a sky.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it can be seen that Tilley, Lane, Thoreau, Constable, and Ingold all have a connection with sky and nature.

### Discussion and Findings

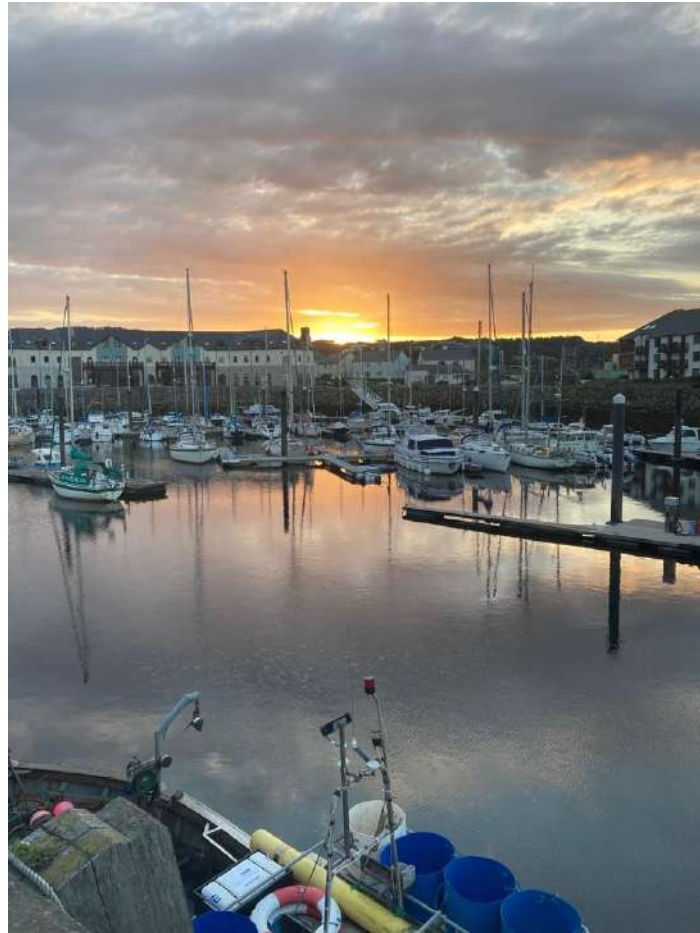
#### Perception and Time

Aberystwyth is located in the Cardigan Bay area on the west coast of Wales. The Ystwyth River skirts the town and the Rheidol River passes through the harbour and out to sea (fig. 2).<sup>15</sup> Both locations have beautiful skies and nature, where land and water meet. On clear sunny days, the water resembles a mirror with the sky reflecting off it. Given their unique settings, they seemed like perfect places to immerse myself and engage with the sky while experiencing nature, as Thoreau did at Walden Pond, and John Constable did when observing the sky.

---

<sup>14</sup> Louis Hawes, 'Constable's Sky Sketches', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32:1 (1969), pp. 344-365.

<sup>15</sup> Harold Carter, 'Aberystwyth: The Modern Development of a Medieval Castle Town in Wales', *Transactions and Papers* (Institute of British Geographers) 25(1958), pp. 239-253.



**Fig. 2.** Aberystwyth harbour, 15th February 2021, 5:30 a.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)



**Fig. 3.** Sky mirror, Cwmrheidol, 20th February 2021, 5:45 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

### Journal

I write in my journal and as my observations increased, so did my understanding of the sky in terms of perception and time – namely, water’s reflective qualities and what is happening above it (fig. 3). As Thoreau points out, ‘Walden is the ideal woodland mirror ... sky water’.<sup>16</sup> My scene mirrors his sky water.

When skies are clear I notice a blue-hued scene above me (fig 4). This represents happiness and peace for me. When the weather is stormy the sky becomes duller in its contrast, dramatic scenes of dark storm clouds representing situations in my life. However, there are times when the Moon makes an appearance, which brightens things up, including my mood (fig. 5a).

---

<sup>16</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 147.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

As my journal writing continued, I noticed frequently the time I spent with Fidget, my dog. We walk along the promenade or the riverbank, come rain or shine. It is late evening, I look out to sea – the Moon looks back at me, floating above the dark glistening water below. I notice the play of light on the ocean (fig. 5b). I liken this scene to one of Thoreau's or Constable's scenes.





## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

**Fig. 4.** Blue hues, Aberystwyth, 25th February 2021, 9:00 a.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)



**Fig. 5a.** The Moon's appearance, Aberystwyth, 30th February 2021, 8:30 p.m.  
(Photo: Leon Hicks)



**Fig. 5b.** Moon and sea, Aberystwyth, 17th March 2021, 8:30 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

### **Journal**

Evening at Cwmrheidol – twilight sky – amazing cloud colour (pink, yellow, purple haze) (figs 6a, 6b). Would have been a perfect scene for Thoreau or Constable to capture. I think of Thoreau at Walden Pond gazing up at the sky, ‘one needs both hands to defend their eyes against the reflection and more to the sun’. I too gaze in awe at the sky and the colour that manifests above me, but never covering my eyes. As I spend time at Aberystwyth seafront (figs 7a, 7b), I do cover my eyes as I notice the reflective qualities ‘takes light from above’,

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

as Thoreau puts it, again reminding me of Thoreau's sky mirror at Walden Pond.<sup>17</sup>



**Fig. 6a.** Twilight and cloud, Cwmrheidol, 5th March 2021, 6:00 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

---

<sup>17</sup>Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 145.



**Fig. 6b.** Twilight in nature, Cwmrheidol, 6th March 2021, 6:00 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)



## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

**Fig. 7a.** Light from above, Aberystwyth seafront, 10th March 2021, 4:00 p.m.  
(Photo: Leon Hicks)



**Fig. 7b.** Aberystwyth seafront, 18th March, 5:11 a.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

### Journal

Another twilight sky – Cwmrheidol – with my dog. So beautiful – so magical – could not imagine spending an evening another way (fig. 8). Thoreau's experience at Walden Pond was the same as he watched the play of light, of sky and pond. He described Walden Pond as 'looking white ... having crystals on its surface ... earth, light and lakes'.<sup>18</sup> I too watch the play of light – not the twinkling body of water, but at the play of colour above me ... giving me a sense of 'deep living' which makes me want to 'suck the marrow out of life', as Thoreau said. This acts upon me, changing my perception of time and view of the sky. I reach out to touch the sky – it reaches back. I try and pull the colour out the atmosphere – it remains. My perception of time increases my personal experience during the events unfolding before me. I have admiration for colours blazing across a sky, although I also notice the black silhouettes of trees, branches and their leaves amongst the colourful back drop. Ada Blair had a similar experience, saying 'viewing a tree is difficult to imagine, without also noticing the sky in the background'.<sup>19</sup> The entirety is a kaleidoscope of colour, seemingly adding to my visual experience. It clearly had an impact on me.

Silhouettes added tremendous depth and presence to the scene, as the leaves rustled in the chilly breeze. Time seems to stand still – its peaceful, I feel the wind on my skin, the air smells crisp. A perfect time – perfect place – perfect moment. I liken it to Thoreau's experiences at Walden Pond many years ago. Like me, Thoreau, Constable and Blair all have a deep interest in sky and nature. By immersing myself and engaging with the sky and elements, I get a sense of what Constable experienced of the natural world.<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 147

<sup>19</sup> Ada Blair, *Sark in the Dark: Wellbeing and Community on the Dark Sky Island of Sark* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Barbre, 'Constable's Skies', pp. 390-392.



**Fig. 8.** Silhouette and twilight, Cwmrheidol, 10th March 2021, 5:50 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

### Journal

Twilight morning. Me and my nan [grandmother] have ‘awe’ and ‘wonder’ for the sky (fig 9).<sup>21</sup> So, when I see the sky, I think of her too. Ingold observed, ‘in viewing the sky with our eyes and ears, both seemingly become one – to which, merging with our feelings, as one bares oneself to the elements’, which it is quite pertinent to the scene of my nan watching the sky from her chair.<sup>22</sup> It also perfectly describes the scenes and my experiences when observing the sky at Aberystwyth, Cwmrheidol, and with my nan.

---

<sup>21</sup> Nicholas Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology* (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>22</sup> Ingold, ‘Reach for the Stars!’, p. 231.



**Fig. 9.** View from my nan's house in Aberystwyth, 15th March 2021, 8:00 a.m.  
(Photo: Leon Hicks)

### Journal

I notice that I am dependent on the way the sky makes me feel in terms of perception and time. However, one thing is constant: the sky and everything that it encompasses gives me a sense of belonging and comfort, knowing I can look up or across and experience all the memories and joys that the sky or a natural environment can bring (fig. 10). By being immersed in the sky and engaging with it, I get an intense sense of wellbeing, of the 'weather world' around me, as Ingold remarks.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Ingold, 'Reach for the Stars', p. 231.





**Fig. 10.** Sky, wellbeing, immersed. Aberystwyth, 16th March 2021, 5:45 p.m.  
(Photo: Leon Hicks)

To summarise this part of the essay, all these scenes and moments are precious to me and evoke strong moods and memories. When I watch the sky I think of my nan, or being with my dog, or liken it to Thoreau, Constable, or Alexandra Harris, who remarked ‘the weather consists of parts made up of our moods and memories – full of other is the evening sky’.<sup>24</sup> I consider myself fortunate to have discovered my love of sky and nature. I get a sense of timelessness, happiness and joy, which surrounds me at these places. I relate it to Thoreau at Walden Pond, and the joy and happiness he experienced: ‘Walden Pond ... discovered years ago ... the same liquid happiness and joy.’<sup>25</sup> By immersing

---

<sup>24</sup>Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland: Writers and Artists under English Skies* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016), p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 150.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

myself in the sky's timelessness and engaging with nature, the moment is infinite.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was pertained towards obtaining an understanding of the sky and its many facets, for which I have a long-standing fascination, through the themes of perception and time. The aim of this research was to consider whether perception and time influenced a person's experience of the sky and, if so, in which ways. My academic rationale and hope were that keeping the journal would create an in-depth grasp of the personal nature of sky observations and sky experiences in Aberystwyth and Cwmrheidol. The work of Henry David Thoreau that described his sky and nature experiences at Walden Pond was explored, along with those of other authors with similar interests, and using a phenomenological approach. This was accompanied by handwritten reflexive field notes and relevant photographs. The first theme discussed was perception of the sky and how it relates in many ways based upon different scenes and settings, and how this affected my overall perspective. The second theme was time, referring to the time I spent at both locations and its relationship to my memory and mood. Memories and mood are a fundamental aspect of our experiences and being somewhere on a regular basis can be termed a 'biographical experience'.<sup>26</sup>

There are many scenes which are distinct to this sky journal, and many facets involving the sky and nature. However, I came to realise by immersing myself and engaging in, as Ingold and Tilley remark, the 'weather world', that the many qualities and elements in and of the sky, along with nature, are linked and indivisible.<sup>27</sup> Also, by observing the sky and the many aspects that accompany it, I simultaneously feel the impact of these natural phenomena on and within my physical body and mind, which is of great value to me. Thus, it would seem that perception and time are linked. However, to obtain a complete understanding of the sky and nature, a person must experience all conditions and seasons – good and bad, day and night, through all emotions, all

---

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Tim Ingold, 'Earth, sky, wind, and weather', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(s1), pp. S19-S38.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

perceptions, and through all modes of time. I set out to record the sky's ever-changing canvas but observed and enjoyed mostly twilight sky. The experience of sky observation is not out of the ordinary for me, yet what is new to me is the structural aspect it gives my life. This allowed me to immerse myself in the sky, with nature, and engage in the experiences with which I felt at one, realising that the sky is part of me and I am the sky. I have learnt a great deal about myself from sky observations. I have found my place and sense of being like Thoreau at Walden Pond, yet like Ingold, I still find it difficult to describe the sky.

### Introduction

The purpose of this essay is pertained towards obtaining an understanding of the sky and its many facets, for which I have a long-standing fascination, through the themes of perception and time. This is a way of seeing the sky's perpetual motion, where light in all its facets is implicit or 'an experience of light itself' as Tim Ingold remarks.<sup>28</sup> Sky observations can also reveal the gradual and ongoing process of change through visual perception and time, by immersing and engaging oneself. The aim of this research was to consider whether perception and time influenced a person's experience of the sky and, if so, in which ways. My academic rationale and hope were that keeping the journal would create an in-depth grasp of the personal nature of sky observations and sky experiences in Aberystwyth town and the Cwmrheidol countryside. The work of Henry David Thoreau that described his sky and nature experiences at Walden Pond was explored, along with those of other authors with similar interests.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> Tim Ingold, 'The eye of the storm: visual perception and the weather', *Visual Studies* 20:2 (2005), pp. 97-104.

<sup>29</sup> David Henry Thoreau, *Walden* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); W. Barksdale Maynard, 'Thoreau's House at Walden', *The Art Bulletin* 81:2 (1999), pp. 303-325.

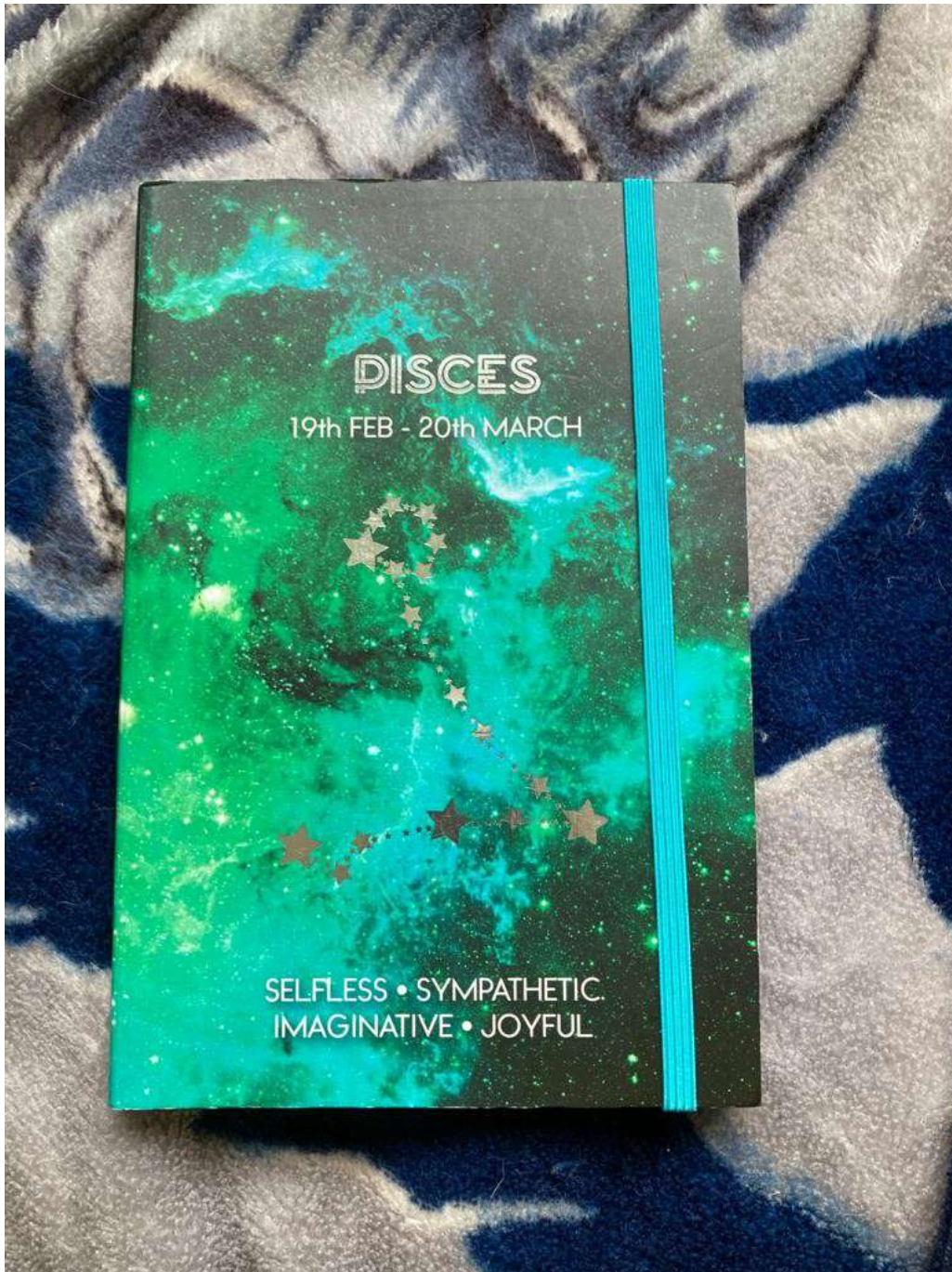
### Methodology

This paper will use a phenomenological perspective as considered by Christopher Tilley and Belden Lane.<sup>30</sup> The sky was observed at two separate locations – Aberystwyth and Cwmrheidol – over a month, from February to March 2021, at varying times of day. I used my iPhone for image taking as I found it convenient, from which I chose relevant photographs for this essay. When constructing this paper, I noted in written form (fig. 1) my reflexive thoughts of the sky and my surroundings.<sup>31</sup> I am a thirty-six-year-old male of Welsh heritage, who has lived in Aberystwyth my entire life, spending many hours observing the sky in varying conditions and seasons. Thus, this experience is not out of the ordinary as I have always been drawn towards the sky and nature.

---

<sup>30</sup> Christopher Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berg, 2004); Belden C. Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* Expanded edition (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), p. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Kathryn Haynes, 'Reflexivity in qualitative research' in *The Practice of Qualitative Organizational Research: Core methods and current challenges*, eds C. Cassell and G. Symon (SAGE, 2012), pp. 72-89.



**Fig. 1.** Sky journal. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

## Literature Review

A phenomenological perspective is important, as Christopher Tilley argued, when trying to grasp our relationship in terms of the world we inhabit.<sup>32</sup> Belden Lane also described phenomenology as a means of our interaction with the

---

<sup>32</sup> Tim Ingold, 'Comments on Christopher Tilley: *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Oxford: Berg, 2004', *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 38:2 (2005), pp. 122-129.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

world, where a person is ‘attending to the place itself’.<sup>33</sup> Tilley went on to say, ‘we perceive and experience the world because we are of this world and closely linked to it’.<sup>34</sup> In addition to Tilley and Lane, a phenomenological approach was used by Tim Ingold to examine the sky’s nature and how a person perceives it. Ingold noticed that, without the transparent qualities of air, our visual perception of sky could not be possible.<sup>35</sup> He also considered his difficulty in describing the sky, but said the ‘sky is the kingdom of light, air and sound’.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, it can be determined that our perception of the sky is defined by the light one observes, the air one feels, and the sound one hears.

Likewise, a naked-eye perspective of the sky and nature is important, as Thoreau realised during his time at Walden Pond. However, in contrast to Tilley, Lane and Ingold, Thoreau did not use the terminology of ‘phenomenology’.<sup>37</sup> Thoreau explained, ‘what is a course of philosophy ... or poetry, no matter how well chosen ... or most admirable routine of life, compared with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen’.<sup>38</sup> Thoreau spent much of his time at Walden Pond journaling his experiences of the sky and nature. He wrote, ‘I require a deliberate existence ... deep living ... to suck the entire marrow out of life.’<sup>39</sup> Similarly, John Constable (1776–1837) noticed the importance of sky and nature. Like Ingold and Thoreau, Constable had a deep interest in the sky – specifically in painting clouds – and claimed ‘I am a man of clouds’. He also had a long-standing fascination with ‘geographical combinations’, for example weather like Ingold, and rivers like Thoreau.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, it was Constable who coined the term ‘skying’ as the way in which he

---

<sup>33</sup> Lane, *Landscapes of the Sacred*, p. 44.

<sup>34</sup> Tilley, *The Materiality of Stone*, p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Tim Ingold, ‘Reach for the stars! Light, vision, and the atmosphere’ in *The Imagined Sky: Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Darrelyn Gunzburg (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2016), p. 225.

<sup>36</sup> Ingold, ‘Reach for the Stars!’, p. 231.

<sup>37</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 86.

<sup>38</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 20

<sup>40</sup> Claude Barbre, ‘Constable’s Skies’, *Journal of Religion and Health* 43:4 (2004), pp. 390-392.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

monitored a sky.<sup>41</sup> Thus, it can be seen that Tilley, Lane, Thoreau, Constable, and Ingold all have a connection with sky and nature.

### Discussion and Findings

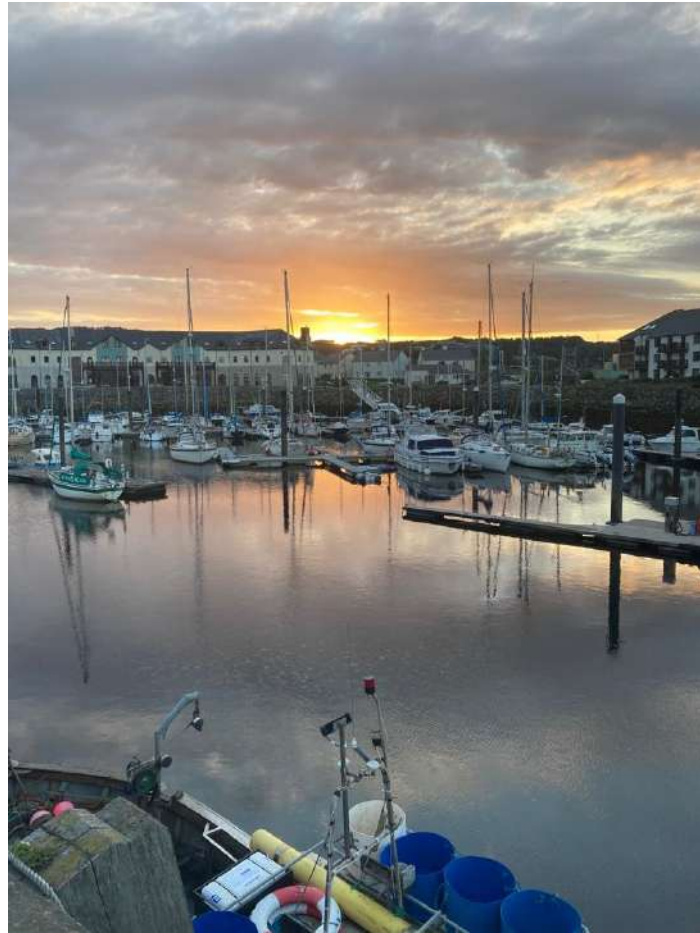
#### Perception and Time

Aberystwyth is located in the Cardigan Bay area on the west coast of Wales. The Ystwyth River skirts the town and the Rheidol River passes through the harbour and out to sea (fig. 2).<sup>42</sup> Both locations have beautiful skies and nature, where land and water meet. On clear sunny days, the water resembles a mirror with the sky reflecting off it. Given their unique settings, they seemed like perfect places to immerse myself and engage with the sky while experiencing nature, as Thoreau did at Walden Pond, and John Constable did when observing the sky.

---

<sup>41</sup> Louis Hawes, 'Constable's Sky Sketches', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32:1 (1969), pp. 344-365.

<sup>42</sup> Harold Carter, 'Aberystwyth: The Modern Development of a Medieval Castle Town in Wales', *Transactions and Papers* (Institute of British Geographers) 25(1958), pp. 239-253.



**Fig. 2.** Aberystwyth harbour, 15th February 2021, 5:30 a.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)





**Fig. 3.** Sky mirror, Cwmrheidol, 20th February 2021, 5:45 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

### Journal

I write in my journal and as my observations increased, so did my understanding of the sky in terms of perception and time – namely, water’s reflective qualities and what is happening above it (fig. 3). As Thoreau points out, ‘Walden is the ideal woodland mirror ... sky water’.<sup>43</sup> My scene mirrors his sky water.

When skies are clear I notice a blue-hued scene above me (fig 4). This represents happiness and peace for me. When the weather is stormy the sky becomes duller in its contrast, dramatic scenes of dark storm clouds representing situations in my life. However, there are times when the Moon makes an appearance, which brightens things up, including my mood (fig. 5a).

---

<sup>43</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 147.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

As my journal writing continued, I noticed frequently the time I spent with Fidget, my dog. We walk along the promenade or the riverbank, come rain or shine. It is late evening, I look out to sea – the Moon looks back at me, floating above the dark glistening water below. I notice the play of light on the ocean (fig. 5b). I liken this scene to one of Thoreau's or Constable's scenes.



## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

**Fig. 4.** Blue hues, Aberystwyth, 25th February 2021, 9:00 a.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)



**Fig. 5a.** The Moon's appearance, Aberystwyth, 30th February 2021, 8:30 p.m.  
(Photo: Leon Hicks)



**Fig. 5b.** Moon and sea, Aberystwyth, 17th March 2021, 8:30 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

### **Journal**

Evening at Cwmrheidol – twilight sky – amazing cloud colour (pink, yellow, purple haze) (figs 6a, 6b). Would have been a perfect scene for Thoreau or Constable to capture. I think of Thoreau at Walden Pond gazing up at the sky, ‘one needs both hands to defend their eyes against the reflection and more to the sun’. I too gaze in awe at the sky and the colour that manifests above me, but never covering my eyes. As I spend time at Aberystwyth seafront (figs 7a, 7b), I do cover my eyes as I notice the reflective qualities ‘takes light from above’,

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

as Thoreau puts it, again reminding me of Thoreau's sky mirror at Walden Pond.<sup>44</sup>



**Fig. 6a.** Twilight and cloud, Cwmrheidol, 5th March 2021, 6:00 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

---

<sup>44</sup>Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 145.



**Fig. 6b.** Twilight in nature, Cwmrheidol, 6th March 2021, 6:00 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)



## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

**Fig. 7a.** Light from above, Aberystwyth seafront, 10th March 2021, 4:00 p.m.  
(Photo: Leon Hicks)



**Fig. 7b.** Aberystwyth seafront, 18th March, 5:11 a.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

### Journal

Another twilight sky – Cwmrheidol – with my dog. So beautiful – so magical – could not imagine spending an evening another way (fig. 8). Thoreau’s experience at Walden Pond was the same as he watched the play of light, of sky and pond. He described Walden Pond as ‘looking white ... having crystals on its surface ... earth, light and lakes’.<sup>45</sup> I too watch the play of light – not the twinkling body of water, but at the play of colour above me ... giving me a sense of ‘deep living’ which makes me want to ‘suck the marrow out of life’, as Thoreau said. This acts upon me, changing my perception of time and view of the sky. I reach out to touch the sky – it reaches back. I try and pull the colour out the atmosphere – it remains. My perception of time increases my personal experience during the events unfolding before me. I have admiration for colours blazing across a sky, although I also notice the black silhouettes of trees, branches and their leaves amongst the colourful back drop. Ada Blair had a similar experience, saying ‘viewing a tree is difficult to imagine, without also noticing the sky in the background’.<sup>46</sup> The entirety is a kaleidoscope of colour, seemingly adding to my visual experience. It clearly had an impact on me.

Silhouettes added tremendous depth and presence to the scene, as the leaves rustled in the chilly breeze. Time seems to stand still – its peaceful, I feel the wind on my skin, the air smells crisp. A perfect time – perfect place – perfect moment. I liken it to Thoreau’s experiences at Walden Pond many years ago. Like me, Thoreau, Constable and Blair all have a deep interest in sky and nature. By immersing myself and engaging with the sky and elements, I get a sense of what Constable experienced of the natural world.<sup>47</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 147

<sup>46</sup> Ada Blair, *Sark in the Dark: Wellbeing and Community on the Dark Sky Island of Sark* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Barbre, ‘Constable’s Skies’, pp. 390-392.





**Fig. 8.** Silhouette and twilight, Cwmrheidol, 10th March 2021, 5:50 p.m. (Photo: Leon Hicks)

### Journal

Twilight morning. Me and my nan [grandmother] have ‘awe’ and ‘wonder’ for the sky (fig 9).<sup>48</sup> So, when I see the sky, I think of her too. Ingold observed, ‘in viewing the sky with our eyes and ears, both seemingly become one – to which, merging with our feelings, as one bares oneself to the elements’, which it is quite pertinent to the scene of my nan watching the sky from her chair.<sup>49</sup> It also perfectly describes the scenes and my experiences when observing the sky at Aberystwyth, Cwmrheidol, and with my nan.

---

<sup>48</sup> Nicholas Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology* (London: Continuum, 2008).

<sup>49</sup> Ingold, ‘Reach for the Stars!’, p. 231.



**Fig. 9.** View from my nan's house in Aberystwyth, 15th March 2021, 8:00 a.m.  
(Photo: Leon Hicks)

### Journal

I notice that I am dependent on the way the sky makes me feel in terms of perception and time. However, one thing is constant: the sky and everything that it encompasses gives me a sense of belonging and comfort, knowing I can look up or across and experience all the memories and joys that the sky or a natural environment can bring (fig. 10). By being immersed in the sky and engaging with it, I get an intense sense of wellbeing, of the 'weather world' around me, as Ingold remarks.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> Ingold, 'Reach for the Stars', p. 231.



**Fig. 10.** Sky, wellbeing, immersed. Aberystwyth, 16th March 2021, 5:45 p.m.  
(Photo: Leon Hicks)

To summarise this part of the essay, all these scenes and moments are precious to me and evoke strong moods and memories. When I watch the sky I think of my nan, or being with my dog, or liken it to Thoreau, Constable, or Alexandra Harris, who remarked ‘the weather consists of parts made up of our moods and memories – full of other is the evening sky’.<sup>51</sup> I consider myself fortunate to have discovered my love of sky and nature. I get a sense of timelessness, happiness and joy, which surrounds me at these places. I relate it to Thoreau at Walden Pond, and the joy and happiness he experienced: ‘Walden Pond ... discovered years ago ... the same liquid happiness and joy.’<sup>52</sup> By immersing

---

<sup>51</sup>Alexandra Harris, *Weatherland: Writers and Artists under English Skies* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016), p. 13.

<sup>52</sup> Thoreau, *Walden*, p. 150.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

myself in the sky's timelessness and engaging with nature, the moment is infinite.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this essay was pertained towards obtaining an understanding of the sky and its many facets, for which I have a long-standing fascination, through the themes of perception and time. The aim of this research was to consider whether perception and time influenced a person's experience of the sky and, if so, in which ways. My academic rationale and hope were that keeping the journal would create an in-depth grasp of the personal nature of sky observations and sky experiences in Aberystwyth and Cwmrheidol. The work of Henry David Thoreau that described his sky and nature experiences at Walden Pond was explored, along with those of other authors with similar interests, and using a phenomenological approach. This was accompanied by handwritten reflexive field notes and relevant photographs. The first theme discussed was perception of the sky and how it relates in many ways based upon different scenes and settings, and how this affected my overall perspective. The second theme was time, referring to the time I spent at both locations and its relationship to my memory and mood. Memories and mood are a fundamental aspect of our experiences and being somewhere on a regular basis can be termed a 'biographical experience'.<sup>53</sup>

There are many scenes which are distinct to this sky journal, and many facets involving the sky and nature. However, I came to realise by immersing myself and engaging in, as Ingold and Tilley remark, the 'weather world', that the many qualities and elements in and of the sky, along with nature, are linked and indivisible.<sup>54</sup> Also, by observing the sky and the many aspects that accompany it, I simultaneously feel the impact of these natural phenomena on and within my physical body and mind, which is of great value to me. Thus, it would seem that perception and time are linked. However, to obtain a complete understanding of the sky and nature, a person must experience all conditions and seasons – good and bad, day and night, through all emotions, all

---

<sup>53</sup> Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

<sup>54</sup> Tim Ingold, 'Earth, sky, wind, and weather', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(s1), pp. S19-S38.

## The experience of perception and time through observation of the sky

---

perceptions, and through all modes of time. I set out to record the sky's ever-changing canvas but observed and enjoyed mostly twilight sky. The experience of sky observation is not out of the ordinary for me, yet what is new to me is the structural aspect it gives my life. This allowed me to immerse myself in the sky, with nature, and engage in the experiences with which I felt at one, realising that the sky is part of me and I am the sky. I have learnt a great deal about myself from sky observations. I have found my place and sense of being like Thoreau at Walden Pond, yet like Ingold, I still find it difficult to describe the sky.

### Bibliography

- Barbre, Claude, 'Constable's Skies', *Journal of Religion and Health* 43:4 (2004), pp. 390-392.
- Blair, Ada, *Sark in the Dark: Wellbeing and Community on the Dark Sky Island of Sark* (Lampeter: Sophia Centre Press, 2016).
- Campion, Nicholas, *The Dawn of Astrology* (London: Continuum, 2008).
- Carter, Harold, 'Aberystwyth: The Modern Development of a Medieval Castle Town in Wales', *Transactions and Papers* (Institute of British Geographers) 25(1958), pp. 239-253.
- Harris, Alexandra, *Weatherland: Writers and Artists under English Skies* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2016).
- Hawes, Louis, 'Constable's Sky Sketches', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 32:1 (1969), pp. 344-365.
- Haynes, Kathryn, 'Reflexivity in qualitative research' in *The Practice of Qualitative Organizational Research: Core methods and current challenges*, eds C. Cassell and G. Symon (SAGE, 2012), pp. 72-89.
- Ingold, Tim, 'Comments on Christopher Tilley: *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology*. Oxford: Berg, 2004', *Norwegian Archaeological Review* 38:2 (2005), pp. 122-129.
- Ingold, Tim, 'Earth, sky, wind, and weather', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(s1), pp. S19-S38.
- Ingold, Tim, 'Reach for the stars! Light, vision, and the atmosphere' in *The Imagined Sky: Cultural Perspectives*, ed. Darrelyn Gunzburg (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2016), pp. 215-233.
- Ingold, Tim, 'The eye of the storm: visual perception and the weather', *Visual Studies* 20:2 (2005), pp. 97-104.
- Lane, Belden C, *Landscapes of the Sacred: Geography and Narrative in American Spirituality* Expanded edition (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).
- Maynard, W. Barksdale, 'Thoreau's House at Walden', *The Art Bulletin* 81:2 (1999), pp. 303-325.
- Thoreau, David Henry, *Walden* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006).
- Tilley, Christopher, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).
- Tilley, Christopher, *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).