

Stori Mwd *A Story of Mud*

*A lecture-performance for the Sheppard Theatre, Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT), Machynlleth
written by Zoë Quick and devised by Zoë Quick and Kirsten McIver*

Stori Mwd was first performed on 17th May 2019.

The cast:

CHORUS	Students/staff from the 2019 cohort of the MSc and MArch courses at CAT.
WISE WOMAN (WW)	Kirsten McIver
STORYTELLER (ST)	Zoë Quick

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SLIDE 1: MATERIAL STORIES

The WISE WOMAN greets the CHORUS at the double-door threshold of the theatre. She wears Welsh peasant dress - layers of skirts and petticoats, and a crumpled hat - and is barefoot, her ragged clothes drenched with mud, and her face smeared entirely with mud. A shadowy, softly spoken figure, she blends with the rammed earth walls of the theatre. In a hushed voice she invites the students to take off their shoes before they enter...

WISE WOMAN *[whispering, with an air of mystery and anticipation]*

We're going to tell a story.... to ourselves, from ourselves... we're going to tell a story... etc.

In the familiar set-up for a CAT lecture, a powerpoint slide, 'material stories', is projected onto a large screen at the front of the theatre. Rather more ambiguously for a CAT lecture, three antique Welsh blankets are laid out on the floor in front of the CHORUS, each with a pile of mudstone at its centre. A wheelbarrow is parked by the lectern, and next to it stands a spade and a hat. Behind them, on the dais, is a basket of ferns/vegetable 'trash', a large metal 'bell' and a tin bath. At the other side of the dais is a very large wooden spoon about 2 feet long, a pair of Welsh clogs and a pile of books.

As the CHORUS enter the theatre, the STORYTELLER ushers them to sit in a circle at the front. She is a brisk, bustling woman in similar peasant dress to the WISEWOMAN, except hers is neat as a pin, starched and startlingly white.

STORYTELLER *[bustling, ushering, and repeating, with a sense of anticipation/excitement]*

We're going to tell a story... to ourselves, from ourselves... we're going to tell a story... etc.

[The STORYTELLER invites 6 students to sit cross legged by the blankets on the floor.]

[When the CHORUS is assembled and settled at the front of the theatre, the WISE WOMAN carefully closes the door and slowly walks to the front of the theatre to join the STORYTELLER.]

SLIDE 2. *STORI MWD* - A STORY OF MUD

STORYTELLER *[to the CHORUS]*

We're going to tell a story:

a material story, a story of matter, a story that matters.

We're going to tell this story:

to ourselves, from ourselves, of this place, in this place.

[STORYTELLER and WISE WOMAN lift a blanket, taking two corners each, and begin slowly lifting and lowering the ends of the blanket alternately, moving the stones to make a swooshing sound evocative of the sea.]

WISE WOMAN *[dreamily, wistfully, expansively]*

This is a story from time, of time, and in this time.

WISE WOMAN and STORYTELLER *[alternately - echoing and repeating each other rhythmically as they swoosh stones]*

...from time...

...of time...

...in this time...

etc.

[STORYTELLER and WISE WOMAN pause their blanket rhythm and pour stones into next blanket along the row]

STORYTELLER

We're going to tell a story of mud,
with mud.

[STORYTELLER and WISE WOMAN direct the 6 invited CHORUS members to follow their lead in swooshing stones with all three blankets]

STORYTELLER and WISE WOMAN *[in unison, emphatically, gesturing to all assembled]*

We are:

[ST and WW in call and response]

ST: infinite numbers of tiny particles;

WW: an admixture of mineral, vegetable, water and air;

ST: difficult to define, difficult to contain;

WW: merging and shifting from place to place;

ST: in a time of our own;

WW: we are an immense geological clock.

STORYTELLER and WISE WOMAN

We are many and we are one.

We are mud.

STORYTELLER and WISE WOMAN *[repeating and indicating to CHORUS to join in]*

We are many and we are one.

We are mud.

SLIDE 3. *DYFROEDD MWDLYD* - MUDDY WATERS

(Map: 'You are here' on a geological map showing the Welsh Basin in the Ordovician.)

[CHORUS and WISE WOMAN still sounding stones in blankets...]

STORYTELLER *[loudly, over blanket swooshing]*

In this place, we are over 510 million years old, the age of rock.

In this time before human time, a time of becoming-stone,
we are mud and silt.

By our slow, sloooow action of sludgy sedimentation,
silty, salty, heavy, and saturated -
our steady pressure squeezing out water -
we form rocks as deep and thick as mountains.

[gesturing Northwards in an arc]

We create a continent whose edge ran just North of here,
encircling an enormous basin.

We are underwater in an oceanic world of metre-long sea scorpions...

SLIDE 4. *RAB* - MUD STONE

(Image: Between Aberystwyth and Clarach. Bedding of Aberystwyth Grits in plan on shore.)

[CHORUS and WISE WOMAN still sounding stones in blankets...]

STORYTELLER *[still loudly, over blanket swooshing]*

430 million years ago:

rivers and floods carry our friends, rocks, gravel and silt...

WISE WOMAN *[softly echoing to a fade]*

rocks, gravel and silt...

rocks, gravel and silt...

etc.

STORYTELLER *[over WISE WOMAN's echo]*

...from the almost barren rocky land

to settle on the floor of this shallow sludgy basin.

Occasionally, every decade or so,
(because this is the slow, sloooow time of minerals)
these friends gush in vast quantities over the submarine cliff
into the deeper basin...

...and together, we fan out to form hundreds of layers of stone, sand and mud.

Our finest particles, silt and mud, travel the furthest,
and layer by layer, over millennia of time,
and the sustained and incremental pressure of our own weight,
we form layers of mudstone hundreds of metres thick.

[WISE WOMAN invites CHORUS to pour stones onto the floor and lay blankets down]

WISE WOMAN *[inviting the CHORUS, repeating as necessary]*

My friends, rocks, gravel and silt - choose a stone and lay it on another.

[WISE WOMAN leads mindful cairn building, ensuring that everyone has a chance to join in]

SLIDE 5.

(Quote on background of stratified mudstone: “Objects appear as such because their becoming proceeds at a speed or level below the threshold of human discernment” Jane Bennett - *Vibrant Matter*)

STORYTELLER *[...as CHORUS find their seats...]*

During the next few million years,
movements of the earth's crust compress, lift and fold our horizontal layers
leaving some of us vertical or even turned right over.

Through these movements we create mountains.

WISE WOMAN *[softly echoing as ST continues]*

we create mountains...

we create mountains...

etc.

SLIDE 6. PRIDD FFRWYTHLON - FERTILE SOIL
(Image: Remains of the submerged forest at Ynyslas, near Borth.)

STORYTELLER *[stiffly]*

2 million years ago:

It gets very cold.

Ice moves in glacial time, pushing us
incrementally, gritting, grazing with friction,
so that eventually we are deposited as mudstone 'roads'
that stretch out to the lost land of Maes Gwyddno,
20 miles west of the rocks now called coast.

In Gwyddno's lost land we are moist and rich, but fertile only for a time.

The loss of this land is storied:

They say an acre of Gwyddno's fertile land was worth four elsewhere.

But it relied on a dyke to protect it from the sea,
and a fairy priestess guarded its sluice gates.

One day she was distracted by a courtier...

a storm approached, and she failed to notice it,
the sea rushed in to flood the land, and 16 villages were drowned.

[loudly, moving briskly up the steps along the curved earth walls to the back wall of the theatre]

Gwyddno and his followers were forced to leave their fertile soil
and seek a living in the higher, rocky, almost barren uplands.

WISE WOMAN *[picking up the bucket of clay, and the bell, which she ‘tolls’, beckoning the CHORUS to join her in following the STORYTELLER]*

Come silently, my followers, seek higher ground!

[STORYTELLER stops to pause at the back of the theatre, with the CHORUS standing in a line along the earth walls behind her, and continues to speak while WISE WOMAN moves along the line silently handing a fistful of clay to each member of the CHORUS]

STORYTELLER

In Aberdyfi, they say that if you listen closely you can still hear the bells of Gwyddno’s villages ringing out.

[WISE WOMAN tolls the bell]

STORYTELLER

As they toll, they tell us of life and death, sea and soil,
remembering, and reminding us
how this tale of inundation might be resonant today.

[STORYTELLER pauses, then begins to move slowly forwards down the steps along the curved earth walls, back to the front of the theatre. CHORUS follow and settle in their seats]

SLIDE 7. PRIDD COCH - RED OCHRE, RED EARTH
(Image: A *stagnopodzol* in upland Wales, showing iron-rich horizon.)

STORYTELLER *[back at the front of the theatre]*

29,000 years ago, South of here, on the Gower Peninsula
we yield, shift, and crumble,
as early humans from a semi-nomadic tribe
dig into our skin, our soil, with sharp stones.
Deep down they find red earth, *pridd coch*:
our earth blood.

SLIDE 8. SWYN Y DDAEAR - EARTH MAGIC
(Quote: “To be rubbed with mud is the realisation that you are part of a fibred cosmos, that you are related to the sleek bellied otter [...] that we are receivers of a vast inheritance.” Martin Shaw - *Scatterlings*)
(Image: Cave paintings at El Castillo Cave, Northern Spain, dated back to at least 40,800 years.)

STORYTELLER *[after pausing to allow CHORUS to read the slide]*

With our ochre they make marks on the caves
where they take shelter from harsh cold winds.
Between finger and stone, we conjure events,
thoughts and dreams on the walls of the cave.
Our colour doesn’t fade,
so we define the sacred space of shelter with marks and symbols.
Across millennia and across generations we remember
the first acts of human dwelling.

WISE WOMAN *[softly echoing]*

we remember...

we remember...

etc.

STORYTELLER

We become medium of the human imagination,
carrying thought to reality, reality to spirit.

WISE WOMAN *[softly echoing and inviting CHORUS to join in a whispered chant]*

we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...

thought to reality, reality to spirit...

etc.

STORYTELLER *[continuing over the whispered chant as it fades]*

These nomads see that the colour of our earth-blood matches theirs, their life-blood.

So we, in their hands, skin-to-skin, smear our earth-magic onto their bodies too, to protect them from danger.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering an echo]*

we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...

STORYTELLER

Smudging and blurring between skin and mud-skin,
we become them, and they become us.

WISE WOMAN *[softly echoing]*

we become them, they become us...

we become them, they become us...

etc.

SLIDE 9. GWELY PRIDD - BED OF EARTH
(Image: Bones/skeleton of the Red Lady of Paviland.)

STORYTELLER

When one of the nomads' party, a 21 year old man, dies suddenly,
between warm hand and cold skin,
we smear our colour onto his body.
Our earthy pigment guides the young man's spirit
in its transition from this realm to the next.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...

thought to reality, reality to spirit...

etc.

STORYTELLER *[as WISE WOMAN lies on the floor, covering herself in a blanket.]*

...and the diminished party dig again,
this time to bury the young man in earth in a limestone cave.
We receive his body, his bones
and preserve them.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

*we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...
thought to reality, reality to spirit...
etc.*

SLIDE 10. ARCHIF YDDAEAR - EARTH ARCHIVE

(Image: Drawing of Goat's Hole cave in 1823 from William Buckland's book 'Reliquiae Diluvianae'.)

STORYTELLER *[uncovering the WISE WOMAN]*

Thousands of years later, in 1823,
a geologist digs into our layers of time and stone.
We reveal the young man's bones,
now deep red with our ochre.

WISE WOMAN *[echoing]*

*blood red bones...
blood red bones...
etc.*

STORYTELLER

Our ochre earth-magic speaks across time.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

*we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...
thought to reality, reality to spirit...
etc.*

STORYTELLER

In a twist of translation, the geologist calls the young man "Red Lady of Paviland".

[gesturing as WISE WOMAN starts moving]

She, lifted from our earth-archive,
is then buried in the archive of a museum,
because her bones are the oldest human remains
ever discovered in Wales.

SLIDE 11. CORFF CLAI - CLAY BODY

(Image: c. 2000 BC 'Pygmy Cup', Fan Barrow nr. Talsarn, Ceredigion.)

WISE WOMAN *[standing up, begins to slap her fistful of clay rhythmically between her hands, inviting the CHORUS to join her]*

*we shape them and mould them, knead them and roll them...
we shape them and mould them, knead them and roll them...
etc.*

STORYTELLER *[over the CHORUS, as it fades to wordless 'clay slapping']*

2500 years ago, a family of tribespeople begin to settle on a hill nearby in a place they call Talsarn.
They dig into our moist soil-skin, to grow oats.
Finding that under these oats, our fleshy soil sticks to their skin,
they dig not just for crops but for our clay.
They need containers for seeds, for harvested foods to be stored, and for transporting water
and so they shape us and mould us,
knead us and roll us...

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

we shape them and mould them, knead them and roll them...

STORYTELLER *[continuing over WISE WOMAN]*

...into pots and urns,
basins and bowls.

The tribespeople see their own bodies
in the curved vessels we make
as our fleshy clay becomes-body.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

we shape them and mould them, knead them and roll them...

STORYTELLER *[continuing over WISE WOMAN]*

As we become them, they become us.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

we become them, they become us...

SLIDE 12. WEDI TANIO PRIDD - FIRED EARTH
(Image: Pit Kiln.)

STORYTELLER

They put us as pots in pits,
and with fire we harden -
our earth meets ash -
and when elders of the tribe die,
they use our pot-bodies for their ashes
and our earth meets ash again.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...
thought to reality, reality to spirit...
etc.

SLIDE 13. *DDAEAR GOCH* - IRON OCHRE, IRON EARTH
(Image: Smelting iron in a pit furnace.)

STORYTELLER

As the tribes fire their pots,
they notice a red-hot substance oozing from our dug-out depths.
Over generations they learn how to shape this, our liquid of earth-fire,
as it cools into hardness, making sharper tools,
to dig into our earthy skin.

SLIDE 14. *ARADR* - PLOUGH
(Image: Plough, scythe, two adzes, a socketed axe and knife, from a Celtic settlement.)

STORYTELLER

These tools that came from
our
ores
increase
their
crop

...and *our* cultivation,
the cultivation of mud to earth,
marks the tribespeople's cultivation too:
their 'culture'.

This culture came from us, of us, with us, in this place:
Man makes culture with matter.

WISE WOMAN [*softly whispering*]
we become them, they become us...

SLIDE 15. *TYWEIRCH CARTREF*- HOME TURF
(Image: Celtic field patterns in Snowdonia.)

STORYTELLER

These tribes live on high defensible land,
for they claim us as theirs, their 'home turf'.

Each household's plot measures 30 paces by 60 paces -
as much land as can be easily ploughed in a single day.

They each inscribe this as their territory,
ploughing and digging,
making a giant patterned-tattoo across our surface.

We remember these acts of dwelling in our mounds and ridges.

WISE WOMAN *[softly echoing]*

we remember...

we remember...

etc.

SLIDE 16. CYFAR - JOINT PLOUGHING

(Image: Anglo Saxon plough.)

STORYTELLER

100BC:

As these slowly earth-cultured people slice furrows in our surface
they form a new relationship with us and with each other:

Our surface is hard - it does not yield without force

and so the resources for ploughing are not within the means of a single household.

So households combine and begin to plough together.

Cultivation becomes communal and turf wars start to diminish.

We make culture together.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

we become them, they become us...

SLIDE 17. GWAL GLOM - MUD WALL

(Image: Excavation of Ffynnonwen enclosure showing roundhouse drainage gullies and wall foundations.)

[STORYTELLER AND WISE WOMAN go to take two corners each of two blankets.]

STORYTELLER *[raising blanket alongside WISE WOMAN]*

Following the upward patting and smoothing of human hands,

we rise up to form walls for these households,

squeezing between wattle, mixing with straw,

and sticking and joining with the soil of cattle.

[STORYTELLER drops blanket. WISE WOMAN begins to make arcing movements with her blanket.]

STORYTELLER *[slowly pacing out an arc of 'wall' across stage, pausing to speak at intervals]*

We earthy walls

draw circular

seasonal patterns of dwelling

onto the earth

echoing the paths of the sun

and the stars.

These arcs of boundary around households bear religious and social meaning.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...

thought to reality, reality to spirit... etc.

SLIDE 18. *DWB* - DAUB

(Image: Section of wattle and daub, reconstruction of Castell Henllys iron age hillfort.)

STORYTELLER

So where human enemies, storms, wind and rain breach our brittle boundaries,
if our muddy defences are destroyed, they are rebuilt in a form of ceremony.

[WISE WOMAN puts her blanket as a shawl around STORYTELLER's shoulders: STORYTELLER becomes 'Nellie Evans'.]

SLIDE 19. *ANIALWCH* - WASTELAND

(Image: 'Encroachments' at Moel Smythno, Rrhosgadfan, Caernarfonshire.)

[WISE WOMAN goes to fetch hat and spade.]

STORYTELLER

400 years ago, after claims to this land, our soil,
by a succession of invaders,
this land of freemen is now called Wales.
But our fertile soils have been enclosed by the rich,
and divided up between generations and generations,
leaving some people landless and poor.

[WISE WOMAN puts on a hat and stands back to back with STORYTELLER]

One young couple of newly weds from near Machynlleth,
Nellie and Huw Evans, are looking to build a house for themselves.

They are left no choice but to 'illegally' squat on remote, desolate, barren land.

Nellie makes stockings from scavenged wool,
and Huw is a farm labourer.

They have no land and no money,
but by folk law they have rights
to claim a plot of common land
as far as they can throw an axe in four directions,

[WISE WOMAN throws hat]

if only they can build a house there under the cloak of one night,
and have smoke coming from the chimney by dawn.

WISE WOMAN *[whispering conspiratorially... as she and STORYTELLER pick up and 'pass over' the audience with a cloak/blanket.]*

We're going to build a house...

We're going to build a house...

etc.

SLIDE 20. TY TYWRCH - TURF HOUSE

(Image: Photo record of the building of a turf Ty Unnos by Dorian Bowen with family and friends - Trench a'r Betws, Carmarthenshire, 2006.)

STORYTELLER *[conspiratorially]*

Huw and Nellie have already helped some of their friends build a house in a night, a Ty Unnos.
They know to look for a site with clean water and materials for building:
turf, reeds, rush and earth.

WISE WOMAN *[echoing softly, while 'looking around for materials']*

*turf, reeds, rush and earth....
turf, reeds, rush and earth...
etc.*

STORYTELLER *[over the WISE WOMAN's whispers]*

They wait until the time is right: as early as possible in the summer.
They need to balance the weather with the need for the longest possible stretch of darkness.

WISE WOMAN *[beckoning the CHORUS to build a house together, with their handfuls of clay, in the centre of the circle]*

We're going to build a house.
Come, bring your clay, and help us build a house!

[WISE WOMAN leads the building of a 'house' at the centre of the circle in front of the stage, and acts as 'look out', peering over a blanket 'door'.]

STORYTELLER *[continuing as 'house' is built... and whispering 'secretly']*

As dusk falls on the night of the build,
a team of builders meet secretly on a hillock
and Huw and Nellie lead them to the site.

Some set to work quickly,
while others keep lookout.

Spirits are high because this is something of a social event.

Yet the materials available are limited:
timber and stone are scarce or distant,
and so we, the earth make walls and roof.

Bound by moorland grass, as turf,
we offer a medium that is readily available
and quick to build with,
one that will wear well in the severe weather of the uplands.

About a 1/4 of an acre yields enough of our turf for a house for Huw and Nellie.

SLIDE 21. TO TYWRCH - TURF ROOF

(Image: Turves laid grass-down on cowshed roof, Waenfawr, Caernarfonshire.)

STORYTELLER

As walls we stack,
and as roof, we rest heavy on a timber frame,
lying course by course,
starting at the eaves,
each partly covering the next,
with only our wiry hair of moorland grass visible.

As our turf-hair continues to grow,
we, a living roof, will shed the windy wetness of upland Wales.

Huw knew to cut us into roof
when the grass was dry enough to be ‘as tough as wire’.
His ‘measurement by metaphor’
is embodied knowledge,
calibrated by story, place and culture.
Passed orally, through generations,
it relies on a continued practice through which
humans and mud perform their physical and spiritual connection.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

*we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...
thought to reality, reality to spirit...
etc.*

STORYTELLER

When the turf house is roofed,
in the early hours of the morning,
Nellie brings food before the workers scatter.

[WISE WOMAN signals the CHORUS to ‘scatter’ back to their seats.]

She sets a peat fire on the new hearth,
and smoke unfurls from the chimney in the morning air:
Earth meets ash again.

Now that they have secured their turf,
in time, Huw and Nellie will build a second,
more permanent house on the same plot.

SLIDE 22. HOME TURF

(Table: Sourcing materials for a Cardiganshire mud-walled cottage - Eurwyn Wiliam.)

[STORYTELLER pauses to allow CHORUS to read slide... and picks up spoon.]

STORYTELLER

10 years later, again we rise to form the walls of Huw and Nellie's home,
but this time as earth rather than turf.

Abundant and local, we, the earth,
are the mainstay of local construction,
for stone is far away, difficult to transport,
requires more men to build,
and timber is scarce.

SLIDE 23. *HWRDD* - RAMMER

(Image: Reconstruction of building an earth wall, showing the stone footings, the first two courses, and a layer of straw to receive the second course.)

STORYTELLER *[stirring clay pot with big spoon as WISE WOMAN brings 'trash' to add in]*

Huw and Nellie begin building in April.
They have carefully watched their fellow builders,
the birds, for according to Welsh lore,
the best time for building
is when the swallow makes its nest,
when the days are long and the sun warm
to help dry and harden us, the earth.
It's also when the vegetable 'trash'
used to bind us into mud walls is still green.

[as WISE WOMAN starts stamping...]

Huw and Nellie's stamping feet above us echo generations of feet before them.

With each stamp, we mix and merge:
earth to grit to sand to clay...

We are built up with a three-man gang:
two to mix and pass us up,
one to pack us down on the wall with stamping feet.

Starting with about 20 inches of pure clay at the ground,
(to deter rats' claws)
we pile and rise, rise and pile,
squeezing, squashing, sticking,
and holding water.

Huw and Nellie follow the local method,
adapted for the damp weather round here,
laying us in courses without formwork.

This leaves us wet and only lightly compressed.
So it takes days, sometimes weeks, of resting under our own load
in the wind and the slow baking of the sun,
before we dry.

[STORYTELLER stops stirring and lays the spoon on the floor.]

SLIDE 24. TWLL - THICK, MIGHTY

(Image: Clom walled cottage with rounded quoins, Henfynyw Upper, Cardiganshire.)

STORYTELLER *[standing very still... then gesturing appropriately]*

Finally, we become-rock again -
massive walls, hard and very thick,
tapering towards the eaves
and rounded at the corners.

SLIDE 25. ARSANGAF - TREAD, PRESS DOWN

(Image: Treading a new clay floor with 'pattens', St Fagans, 1974.)

STORYTELLER

We provide a hard floor too.
Nellie knows that properly made and looked after,
a mud floor will last for years,
longer than a flag floor.

In fact, a mud floor will be improved by the persistent damp around these parts.

Nellie's 'recipe' is:
4 barrows full of earth,
a bucket and a half of lime,
and a barrowful of cow dung.

WISE WOMAN *[softly singing to herself as she busies about fetching and carrying 'ingredients' to the centre of the circle]*

*4 barrows full of earth,
a bucket and a half of lime,
and a barrowful of cow dung.
etc.*

STORYTELLER *[over WISE WOMAN's song]*

With a gang of friends Huw and Nellie slop us down and beat us.
We spread and shift, compress and flatten
until we're about a hand length thick and flat as a pancake,
literally floored.

[putting on clogs]

Then they walk and stamp over us with a special pair of clogs.
A neighbour recommends driving sheep through the house
to trample the floor, but Nellie isn't convinced...

As we harden gradually over 6-8 weeks
we're prone to cracks,
so Nellie wets and smooooths us often
her final touch is to wash us with ox blood from neighbouring farms
to make us shine. *[Smiling, pleased with her floor]*

SLIDE 26. *SWYN Y DDAEAR* - EARTH ENCHANTMENT

(Image: A simple cross pattern on hard, clay floor tiles at Mynythno, Caernarfonshire.)

STORYTELLER

Nellie takes pride in cleaning and decorating our flattened surface weekly with a rubbing stone, making patterns traditional to the area.

[STORYTELLER takes off her patterned blanket-shawl proudly, and lays it on the floor.]

SLIDE 27. MATERIAL ENCHANTMENT

(Quote: “Moments of sensuous enchantment with the everyday world - with nature but also with commodities and other cultural products - might augment the motivational energy needed to move ourselves from the endorsement of ethical principles to the actual practice of ethical behaviours.” Jane Bennett - *Vibrant Matter*)

STORYTELLER *[pausing to allow CHORUS to read the slide]*

We remember
the material enchantment of rubbed pattern and colour
in the cave,
in the floor...

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering]*

we carry thought to reality, reality to spirit...
thought to reality, reality to spirit...
etc.

SLIDE 28. *PRIDD COCH* - RED OCHRE, RED EARTH (Image: Red limewash on Kennixton farmhouse, South Wales.)

STORYTELLER

Even as Huw and Nellie’s neighbours begin to build houses with stone,
we provide not only mortar, but colour to protect walls,
a blood-red ochre that recalls caves and pots in these
houses that become-bodies -vessels for love, magic and dreams.

SLIDE 29. SOIL AS DIRT

(Image: Black and white image of Victorian peasant family outside farmhouse - “White liming on any part of the premises keeps the witches and their master away’ Rees. D 1936.)

STORYTELLER

Yet slowly our earthy-ochre gives way to white
as pride gives way to moralities of religion
and fear of our dirty magic.

SLIDE 30. SOIL AS DIRT

(Quotes drawn from Eurwyn Wiliam - *The Welsh Cottage*: “dirt was kneaded into Houses which were low in stature so that a man may ride upon the ridge and yet have his legs hang in the Dirt”
“clay built cottages proclaim the wretchedness of its inhabitants”
“Mud walled buildings are more excusable in the shale tracts of [west Wales], where the rocks consist of very perishable materials, and lime is far fetched and dear.”)

[STORYTELLER takes off her clogs while CHORUS read the slide]

SLIDE 31. COMMON AS MUCK

(Image: Modryb Gwen or Dame Venodotia: Map of North Wales as a peasant in footless stockings ca. 1840.)

STORYTELLER

We, grubby and threatening
have political agency.
The rich deride us, and
peasants seek to hide us,
covering us with white to
separate us from their touch.

SLIDE 32. SOIL AS DIRT

(Image: Melin Gwalchmai, Anglesey, Sir Kyffin Williams c.1980.)

STORYTELLER

This Wales-wide whitewash forms a new culture...

SLIDE 33. HOME TURF

(Map: The distribution of mud cottages in Wales: recorded examples.)

STORYTELLER

...that hides the culture of building that came from our soil, from this place,
a culture of earth defined by weather, climate and geology.

SLIDE 34. HOME TURF

(Map: Geological distributions overlaid onto the distribution of mud cottages in Wales.)

STORYTELLER

White hides our rocky beginnings, in the Silurian...

SLIDE 35. HOME TURF

(Map: Upland topography overlaid onto the distribution of mud cottages in Wales.)

STORYTELLER

White hides the way our culture of building is
contained by the rim of our ancient mountains...

SLIDE 36.

(Quote: “these buildings are the natural product of the country, the true growth as it were of the soil,
and show as clearly as any written history the development of the life of the people.” Hughes and
North - *The Old Cottages of Snowdonia*)

STORYTELLER

White hides the way mud moulded man’s culture,
and his homes once grew out of the soil.

Pride, morality and a lost connection,
mean that mud culture, our culture,
becomes slowly forgotten,
its metaphors and stories lost.

SLIDE 37. ANGHYWEIRDEB - DISREPAIR

(Image: Cementitious render over earth construction, 2018 - Llyn Peninsula.)

[WISE WOMAN begins to solemnly lay and fold blanket-graves and ‘headstones’]

STORYTELLER

So when 20 years ago
a local farmer, Dai, inherits the land Huw once claimed,
he covers us, the earthen walls of Huw and Nellie's cottage,
with cement render, in the hope
of shoring up an old shed against the elements.

Unwittingly, Dai starves us of air and we increasingly take on the damp.
The old knowledge about mud went to the grave with Dai’s grandparents.

SLIDE 38. BRIWIONAF - CRUMBLE

(Image: Decaying mud wall on stone footings, Rhydlos, Caernarfonshire..)

STORYTELLER

So now we earthen walls have crumbled into curious mixed forms.
Dai is gradually destroying the cottage,
because he’s found that our crumbs form the richest of manures.

[WISE WOMAN slowly moves towards the mud walls of the theatre.]

SLIDE 39. *ADENI* - REVIVAL
(Image: Ramming the walls of the Sheppard Lecture Theatre)

STORYTELLER

12 years ago Pat Borer and David Lea designed this earthen drum
and these walls remembered as they rose,
reviving relations of touch
between processes and practices
songs and stories
of generations of hands and machines
to build on our earth-knowledge.
With them, we have come back to ourselves,
back to the earth.

WISE WOMAN *[softly whispering, as she appears to merge with the earthen wall]*
come back to the earth...
come back to the earth...
etc.

STORYTELLER *[walking part of the way to join WISE WOMAN at the wall, then pausing and asking the CHORUS]*

How will our story of mud, our story with mud continue?
What does it mean?

SLIDE 40.

(Quotes: “the move toward performative alternatives [to representationalism] shifts the focus to matters of practice, doings and actions.” “matter is a substance in its intra-active becoming - not a thing but a doing a congealing of agency” Karen Barad - *Meeting the Universe Halfway*)

[STORYTELLER pauses to allow CHORUS to read the slide]

STORYTELLER

We’ve mixed and mingled,
buried and dug,
preserved and revealed,
moulded and daubed,
built and remembered,
shifted-shapes and shared recipes.

In performing our relationships with mud through process
we’ve enchanted with mud in this sacred space,
and in turn it has enchanted us into community.

[STORYTELLER lifts her clay-stained red palms in the air as she gestures to CHORUS to show theirs.]

SLIDE 41.

(Quote: “Why advocate the vitality of matter? Because my hunch is that the image of dead or thoroughly instrumentalised matter feeds human hubris and our earth-destroying fantasies of conquest and consumption...” Jane Bennett - *Vibrant Matter*)

[STORYTELLER pauses to allow CHORUS to read the slide]

STORYTELLER

We’ve *felt* how mud is vital,
how we make culture with mud, with matter...
and that matters.

SLIDE 42.

(Image: ‘How to Survive the Coming Bad Years’ - Ivan and Heather Morison.)

STORYTELLER

We need to remember.

WISE WOMAN *[softly echoing and fading out]*

we remember...

we remember...

etc.

STORYTELLER *[over WISE WOMAN’s echo]*

Remember the ways we can
talk not about, or even to materials,
but with them.

We need to remember ways to think, act, measure and build
with metaphors of materials, with their stories,
because their stories are much, much bigger than you, or me,
and our stories depend on theirs.

[STORYTELLER moves to join WISE WOMAN at the wall and both then turn slowly to face and blend with, the wall.]

End.