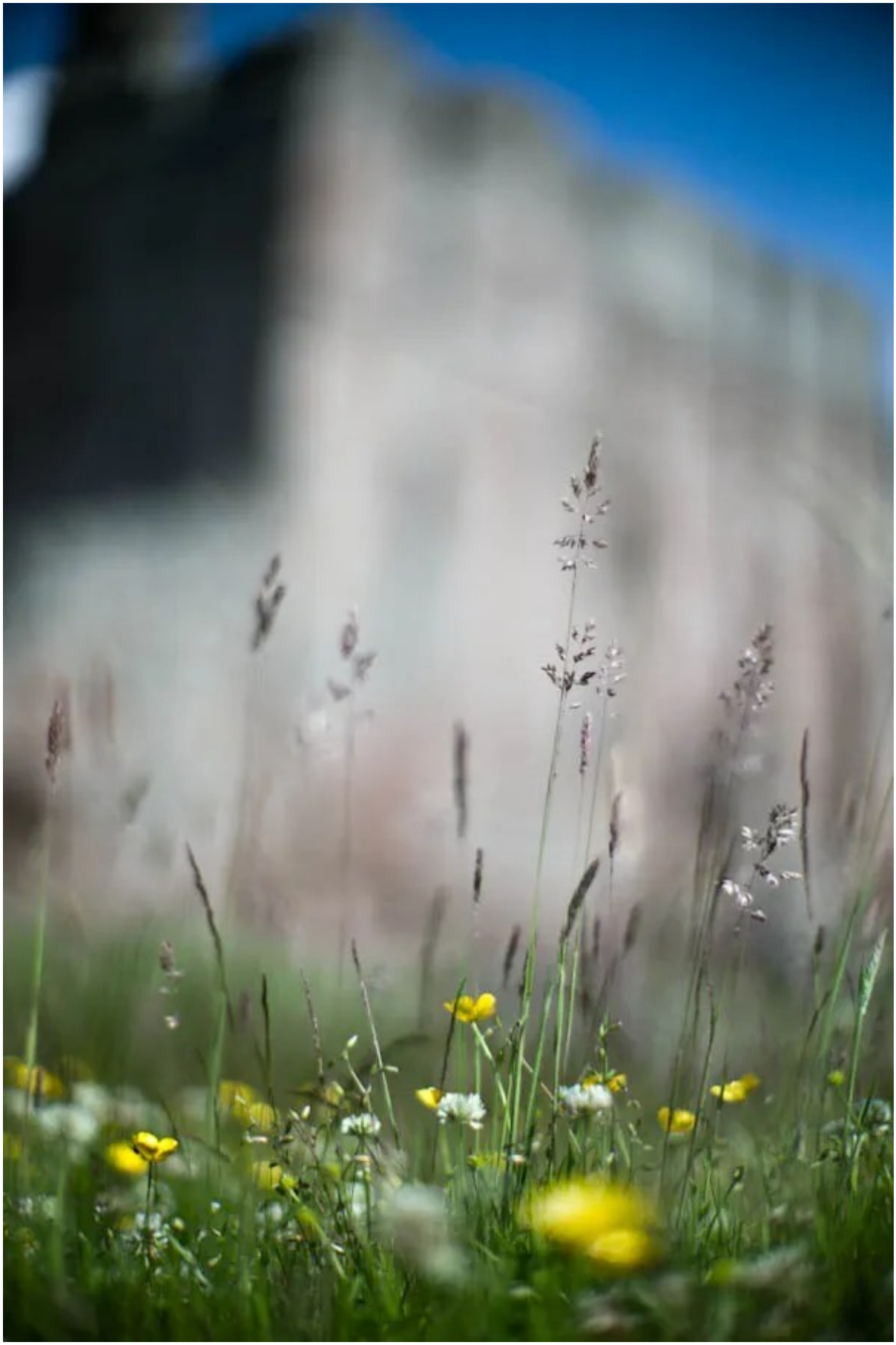
LANDSCAPE AESTHETICS – TACTICS (CONTINUED)



From a conversation in the Dun Cow, Durham (with Bianca Carpeneti and Chris Witmore).

Topic – archaeology, ruins and the picturesque landscape.

The allure, the ideology, the challenge to avoid cliché.

How do we deal with archaeological landscapes today?

Should I just give up photography? As a tainted medium?

This is too simple a response (not least, it doesn't make sense to say that media can be wholly compromised). Though for a long while I worked with the arts company Brith Gof [Link], and we explored relationships with place through site specific *performance* – see my book with Mike Pearson *Theatre/Archaeology* [Link] and his new book *Site-Specific Performance* [Link].

In our conversation in that archetypical English pub in Durham, Bianca, Chris and I decided to avoid the search for a definitive solution, and adopt instead an attitude taken from design thinking –

be mindful

and embrace the contradictions – for they are at the heart of how we connect with (archaeological) landscapes

– be mindful and work with the contradictions (iteratively – for there never is a definitive solution).

How?

- acknowledge and break the rules, reveal the constraints
  (eg break the framing in a time series, collage or some other manner)
- interrupt the work performed by the aesthetic with commentary or annotation
  (eg break the illusion, Brecht-like)
- recontextualize
  (eg use the images in an incongruous setting, or as a series that supplies a critical setting)
- intervene, use the images actively as engagement with a place and re-presentation

rather than treat them as simple descriptive document
(Mike Pearson and I adopted this tactic in many “performed lectures” we presented in the mid 1990s).

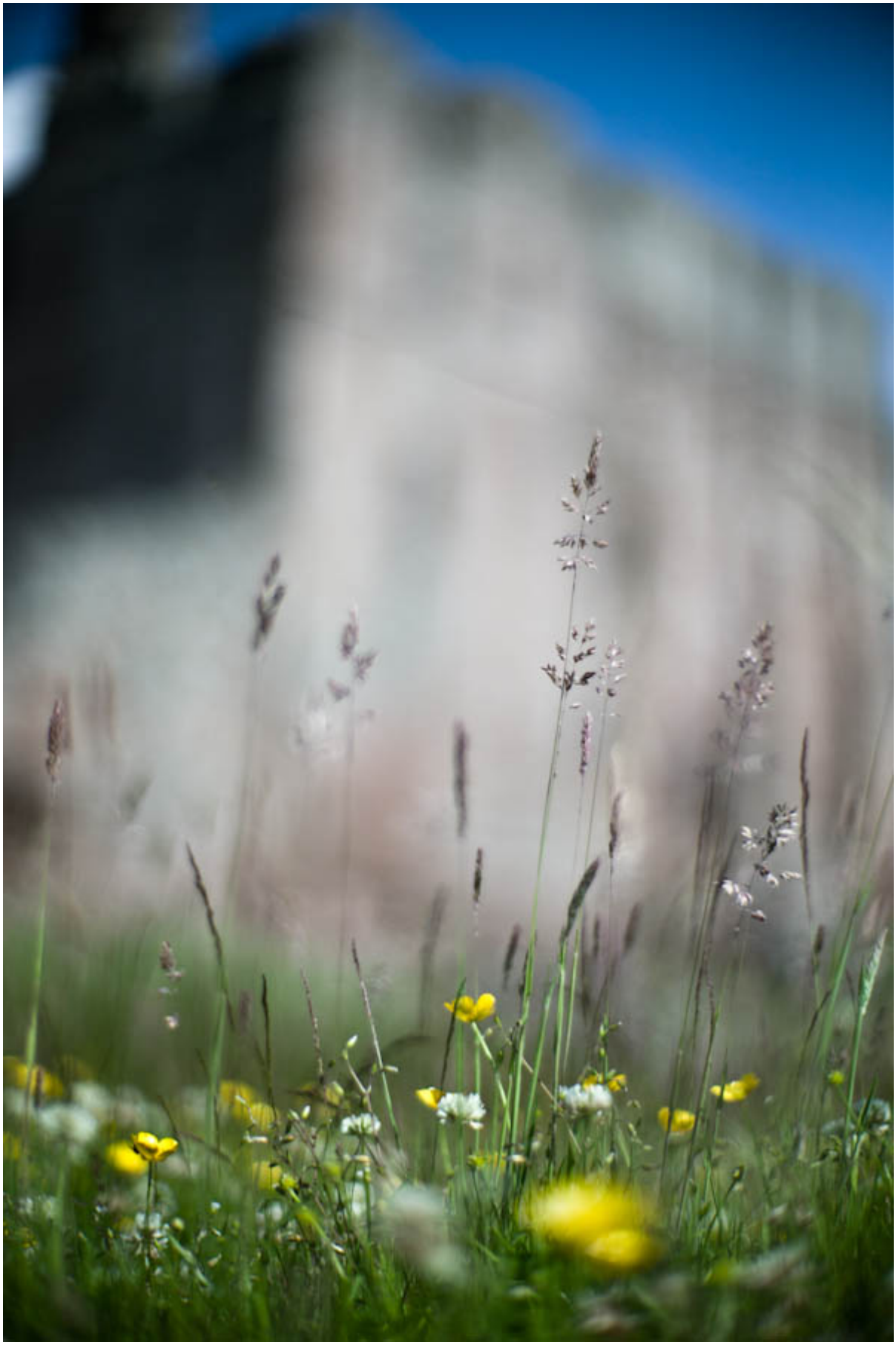
This all takes me back to a paper I published (very obscurely) a long while back – *Critical romanticism on a visit to the past* [Link].

I included a discussion of both Turner (see the previous entry [Link]) and another archetypical romantic, Wordsworth.

Wordsworth walked. His poem on Tintern Abbey deals not with the ruin so much as the synaesthetic and constitutive imagination – how place engenders certain responses in us, particularly through memory, but is dependent upon our creative apprehension that organizes the very substance of experience. As one walks and looks. Both Turner and Wordworth dealt with the topology of time – the folding of time, how pasts and presents meet in the composition of the “figure in the landscape”. And how this encounter is ultimately incomprehensible – sublime – prompting us to restlessly experiment with our responses, representations, reflections.

Here is how I summarised a critically romantic attitude:

- local self-assertion as opposed to universal systems (offering definitive solutions);
- an attention to the ordinary and the particular;
- an interest in the darker side of experience in the sense of that remainder which always escapes the claims of a rational system;
- defamiliarising what is taken as given, revealing the equivocality of things and experience;
- reality conceived, genealogically, as historical process;
- an attitude critical and suspicious of orthodoxy, because of the impossibility of any final account of things.



Norham Castle