

Archipelagos of Interstitial Ground: A Filmic  
Investigation of the Thames Gateway's Edgelands

How Can a Multimodal (Auto)ethnographic Methodology Be Deployed  
to Shape Geographic Imaginations of The Thames Gateway?

By

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to Tilly, my daughter. Without you I would have never managed to complete this. Whenever the research process was getting me down, you reminded me ‘mistakes help you learn’. And to Rebecca, for all the help, support and advice you have given. At times you believed in me, even when I had lost faith.





*No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,  
No waste so vacant, but may well employ  
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart.  
Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1797)*



## **Declaration**

This thesis has not been submitted in support of an application for another degree at this or any other university. It is the result of my own work and includes nothing that is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated.



## **Abstract**

This thesis explores and documents the development of an adapted ethnographic methodology that is defined through its orientation towards the representation and production of landscape. As a result of this methodology, I document the shift within my practice from a topographic photography tradition to a filmic, 'more-than-visual' (Jacobs, 2013: 714) mode of production, in response to ideas of creative ethnography as an immersive methodology. The resulting movement of films forms a 'landscape ethnography' (Ogden, 2011) that acts as both survey and auto-biogeography. Informed by the diversity of registers, and voices within landscape ethnography, and contemporary psychogeographic practice, the thesis and films shift tone to reflect this. To clarify, this work will inform a cross-disciplinary reading of place and landscape through an experiential methodology of both ethnographic and auto ethnographic methods.

This practice-led body of research investigates the multi-layered interstitial spaces that occur in the areas between infrastructure and planned development known as edgelands in the Thames Gateway. My multimodal creative practice will be informed by existing literature relating to marginal/liminal landscapes in and beyond geography and landscape writing.

The written thesis explores the contemporary landscape photography and new nature writing traditions, which I believe to be closely interconnected, through critique and production of new bodies of practice. Through a consideration of my own practice and others, I demonstrate a web of connections: between landscapes; between practitioners past and present; and, significantly, between theory and practice.

Through examining both landscape theory and my own experience of an embodied approach to landscape, this research examines not only the potential of lens based practices to act as a portal to read and experience the landscape as a whole, but also the practice and process of making work.

These sites will be seen and discussed as interconnected phenomena, stitching together 'archipelagos of interstitial ground'. This along with the idea of landscape ethnography can then be adopted as a methodology to develop an immersive form of virtual exploration that can utilise developing forms of media dissemination to explore the audiences' relationship to remote locations.

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# Introduction

*The A289 shoots out of the Medway tunnel, on either side of the busy dual carriageway are the remnants of the area's previous life, the site is caught in a state of flux between its old and new life. A heavyset, tall red brick wall sits obscured by the new archways of the brick walkway that gently step up the slight incline, carrying walkers to the new bridge that flows over the road. Cars rush past former drill halls, now bearing the logo of the University of Greenwich. Like so much of the Thames Gateway's industrial heritage it has now been superseded by new forms of business, mirroring the country's shift to an economy based on the burgeoning service industry.*

*Just past the bridge, two metal clad sheds mimic one another's architecture, one a part of the university's campus expansion, the other a fleeting reminder of the area's dock heritage. Not the historic ship works that sit slightly further round the river's bend, but instead the remnants of a more recent working dock that is now steadily being replaced with new development, 'as cities start to fall back in love with their once neglected riversides' (Grindrod, 2014: 424).*

*The road widens as it approaches a new intersection in front of the new regional police centre that replaced the previous smaller stations within the town centres that make up the conglomeration of locations that form the unofficial 'City of Medway'. Many years previously, my wife had photographed the boarded-up remains of Rochester's police station, which by this point had become somewhere for the town's homeless community to reside, making use of the building's modernist nooks and crannies to make their beds, rubbish piles and toilets. Allowing the large format camera's lens to render the misery of people's difficulties in painful detail left us feeling 'disgusted and guilty' (Galer, 2008: 98). The camera's limitations to record the multi-sensory reality of people's lives, would eventually involve a shift from the topographic mode of photography to a 'more than visual' (Jacobs, 2013: 714) methodology.*

*The road separates, peeling off to the newly christened Chatham Waters development, a mixture of high rise flats - wrapped in scaffold and mesh - and new retail opportunities mingling on the site of the former MOD base. The mesh cocooning the building work dances and shimmers in the wind. Hoardings surround a newly cleared section of site, waiting for groundworks to commence. The hoardings have replaced the blue palisade fence that used to surround the site, however they still bear the Peel logo, indicating the company responsible for*

*the redevelopment of so many of the UK's long dormant dock sites, such as the world heritage site in Liverpool. Alongside the logo sits the words Chatham Docks, however the context has clearly changed. The main attention of the new area is a large new Asda store; the car park sits hemmed in by the confines of the old MOD wall. Tucked next to the Asda petrol station forecourt is a tall green wire mesh fence, surrounding a series of deep ponds, obscured from prying eyes by a thick blanket of overgrown trees and vegetation. Large 'Keep Out' signs are bolted to the fence at ten metre intervals. As I peer through the undergrowth, it is possible to make out a scaffold structure that juts out, cantilevered over the dark water below. I have no idea what purpose this structure once served, but I am aware that the site was formerly a pond system for storing low-grade radioactive waste, from the next-door nuclear submarine refit base.*

*A steep, newly-seeded green bank rises to an elevated berm next to the roadway. A light brown streak trickles down the bank, the early formation of a desire path, a visual clue to people's need to explore the once off limits area. At the top of the bank a temporary security fence has been pushed over, behind it sits the rails to the train line that once served the docks, and would later be used to remove irradiated top soil from the man-made island that was formed by the digging of three large submarine basins, and would be regenerated into a new island community known as St Mary's.*

*The area is not far from where my wife used to work when we lived and studied in Medway, I once knew the area very well, but now it is increasingly unrecognisable. The speed of change has been drastic. The road acts as a separation between the old and new communities. Eight lanes of traffic form a divide between the established and the interloper. 'These invisible walls infamously have been used to mark off the territories separating the rich from the poor, or race from race...in 20<sup>th</sup> Century planning motion has served as the instrument for making boundaries rather than borders' (Sennett, website, 2008,).*

*It is shocking to me to see the once busy train line that was a vital piece of arterial infrastructure, brutally severed. It no longer comes to any kind of civilised halt, instead the track just ceases. The sleepers carry on for several metres, but then everything simply tumbles down the embankment. Climbing over the prostrate fence I cautiously proceed up the disused tracks. Foliage is sprouting between the sleepers, pushing aside the granite ballast. The tracks themselves are tarnished and rusty, trains no longer polish the top of the rails. People have told me this is the simplest way of gauging a line's use. A short way up the tracks is a bridge that crosses the busy road below. Police cars come and go from the neighbouring regional Police centre; I become slightly nervous trespassing this close to it. However, the bridge affords excellent views of the changing area, I am able to see over the hoardings into the waste ground beyond. The demolition of a pub has left a large vacant lot, no doubt waiting for developers to move in and transform it, to something more in keeping with the area's new gentrification.*

*As I proceed up the line towards the point that it once joined the mainline, I pass a community centre, and the local mosque. Holes sporadically appear in the fence, and small patches of fly tipping litter the embankments, general household rubbish, clothes, DIY materials. At this point I am still in view of the commuters coming back from Gillingham train station; every now and again, one of them catches my eye and looks on in slight confusion. Before long the track bends round to my left, and enters a steep-sided cutting, trees overhang the track and cut out the bright sunlight, a cold quiet stillness engulfs me. The distant sound of*

*the busy road, and the general murmurings of life from the local houses fade to a still hush. Up ahead a tall brick railway bridge looms into my view, just before I reach it I notice a collection of women's underwear discarded on the tracks. Two or three pairs of discarded thongs are spread over a small area, along with them I notice a series of discarded condoms chucked into the bushes. I am no longer shocked by what I come across in these areas, it is neither the first or last time that I would find evidence of sexual activity, just another example of the adventurous play (Edensor, 2005: 34) that I along with many others would come to recognise as one of the hallmarks for these interstitial folds (Deleuze, 1992: 267) in the urban fabric.*

*The space around the base and underneath the railway bridge is covered in a thick layer of rubbish, black bin bags have been thrown off the bridge 10 meters above. Some have split open on impact, others lay piled in accidental sculptures. Many of them have become stuck behind the low-tiered fences that stop the bank from slipping. The stench is obscene; rotting food litters the ground, attacked by carrion and foxes. I gentle tiptoe my way through the filth, I notice packets of used medicines, addresses and names still on the prescription labels. Used hypodermics contain the thick sticky brown residue that I recognise as the visible sign of the region's heroin problem. They are no different to the ones that the council had to collect from our back garden, thrown over the fence from the alleyway behind our rented accommodation.*

*Alongside the daily ephemera and habits, there are piles of torn magazine pages, faded and with the muted colour palette of another time. Staring back at me are images of women with big hair and unmanicured pubic regions. Some are simple soft-core 'tits and teeth' shots, while others contain the visceral depiction of penetration. A rough guess would suggest that the area contained something close to a hundred pieces of hastily torn imagery, ripped from its mother publication. This was clearly once someone's illicit stash, collected from multiple magazines and kept, or passed on for several decades. In a few disturbing instances the images of genitals had been crudely torn from the image, however there was no sign of them in the litter. They had either been kept or discarded at an earlier date.*

*Further up the line a tree has come down, blocking the rest of the track. The quiet atmosphere is broken by the sound of voices further up ahead. Three young teenage boys come down the side of the steep cutting, aided by a rope strung from the top of the bank. I watch for a short while as they play on the tracks, pretending to shoot each other. As I start to leave, they notice me and hurry to catch up. They make contact half way back to Asda, asking whether I have permission to be there and what I'm doing. I briefly explain about my research and film. I then ask them what they are doing; the response I get is not unexpected.*

*'You know, stuff'*

This experience mirrored multiple explorations into the landscape that surrounded my former home in Chatham, part of the Medway towns and the wider Thames Gateway region. These explorations were undertaken over the course of eight years of informal visits, followed by four years of intense embodied scrutiny. During this time the

landscape would become the driving force in this PhD body of practice and research. It would change and alter my artistic practice as I attempted to understand and capture the nature of the place.

This practice led PhD looks to question how forms of multimodal (auto)ethnographic research can be adapted to investigate landscape and place, and how it can be deployed to shape geographic imaginings of that area. It does so by using a case study of a geographic region to explore a form of landscape that has become prevalent in the peripheries of our urban conurbations. It goes by a range of names and is almost certainly a landscape that is familiar to the general public, if even on a fleeting level. While they may be unable to name it, they are certainly aware of aspects of its character, whether from first hand experience or simply through the absorption of its image in the media<sup>1</sup>.

In recent years, these areas have become known as edgelands (Shoard, 2003) and I, along with a range of artists and scholars, propose that they have an important, yet oft-overlooked, role which they play in our daily lives. Kenny Cupers describes them as ‘breathing spaces’ (Cupers, 2005: 3), calling them out as vital spaces of respite in our busy urban and suburban landscape.

Though often derided within the press, the region, situated on the eastern edge of Greater London, has been richly documented by a range of artists, academics, writers, and psychogeographers, due to its rich post-industrial heritage. With that in mind, what I seek to construct here is a landscape ethnography (Ogden, 2011)<sup>2</sup> of the Thames Gateway

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<sup>1</sup> The edgeland and interstitial landscape is often used as locations for police procedural dramas, and British social realism film and television (see Edensor, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> While Gillian Ogden proposed landscape ethnography in her book *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades* (2011), I am looking to redefine it in relation to defining a sense of place through elements of (post) Sinclairian psychogeography and new nature writing to form immersive filmic geographies of the landscape.



region, once the largest regeneration area in the UK, and now the site of multiple interstitial areas stitched together largely through informal practices and engagements.

Throughout all of my photographic work there has been a strong autobiographical strand that connected myself to my subject matter and each of these subjects to each other. An illustration of this would be my navigating the series of disused asylums that ring the M25 and play a difficult part in my family history, with my grandmother being held in one for a period of time (*The Darkness on the Edge of Town*, Robinson, 2005). Or exploring the post-industrial landscape that I had encountered as a young boy and remember in an almost dream like state of fugue (*The Smell of Bitumen*, Robinson, 2007); or, with my wife, attempting to make sense of the landscape that surrounded us while we lived in Medway (*18 Rochester Street*, Galer and Robinson, 2008). These experiences would form my earliest research into landscape, place, and psychogeography and would come to form the foundations of this thesis.

During the course of this research I became aware of the term autobiogeography (Gregory-Guider, 2005), from an essay about Iain Sinclair, and Rachel Lichtenstein's book *Rodinsky's Room* (2000). Gregory-Guider described autobiogeographical as a 'dynamic interpolation and interbraiding of person and place, alternatingly framing the former from the vantage point of the latter, and vice versa' (ibid., website, 2005). This statement sums up my experience of undertaking this research and the need to design a methodology that allowed me to frame the landscape and my own experiential reading of it in a curated manner.

This research has developed from spending prolonged periods of time in the landscape, as well as a previous personal history with the area. These periods of time took the form of a 'deep hanging out' (Geertz, 1998) with the landscape, and was the starting point for an adapted (auto)ethnographic methodology, and the development of a landscape ethnography, which looks to blend and formalize elements of Chicago School

ethnography, with elements of Sarah Pink's writings on creative and sensory ethnography, as well as psychogeography and creative non-fiction in the form of new nature writing. The development and adoption of the auto-ethnographic voice has come from allowing the landscape to inform the shape of the practice, and allows me to act as a narrative conduit to unpick the psychogeographic elements that mirror Doreen Massey's writings on place, history and story. This adapted (auto)ethnographic methodology works through written narration, and aurally through the resulting film work's soundtrack, comprised of multiple field recordings.

During the course of this research my practice has shifted from still to moving image. This is a reaction to frustrations with limitations within the still medium to capture the multiple sensory nuances that form the landscape. By shifting to moving image I am looking to embrace a 'more-than-visual' (Jacobs, 2013: 714) approach to my practice; film allows us to 'listen with our eyes' and 'listen to our eyes' (Jacobs, 2013: 715). This shift has also been within the visual framing of my images, moving from a topographic viewpoint to an embodied lens that acts as an extension of my bodily inhabitation of the landscape, grounded through the tripod to the soil.

The italicised passage that opens this introduction is taken from a series of (auto)ethnographic notes that I would make to support my walks within the Gateway region. They will be present in this format throughout the thesis and are designed to act as a lens through which the reader can experience the landscape, but also to add my voice to the moving image work, tapping into both new nature writing (Cowley, 2008) and (post)Sinclairian psychogeography<sup>3</sup> (Cross, online article, 2004, Richardson, website,

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<sup>3</sup> While ideas surrounding psychogeography play an important part in this research, there is not enough space to explore the wide history and development of the subject. For an extensive reader on psychogeography see Merlin Coverley (2010). While Coverley and others widely consider Iain Sinclair's work to be vital in redefining psychogeography in the Post-Situationist era, Sinclair

2014). While these (auto)ethnographic writings started as merely a note-making method, they developed, through my accompanying blog *Driving Thru Wasteland* (Robinson, 2013-15), into a vital part of my methodology. Combined with these (auto)ethnographic passages, the thesis switches registers, depending on the subject being discussed. These registers explore the personal ethnographic connection to place, a close critical reading of photographs, films and text, which in turn forms a reflexive strand that connects back to the development of my practice and a scholarly development of theoretical themes. These shifts in register echo the ideas that will define landscape ethnography, balancing a quasi-scientific distanced observer in my early photographic field trips, (especially in the work inspired by the new topographics, and explored in Chapter Three), and an immersed ethnographic approach that was adopted in my film works. This shift in register and practice is also greatly informed by the ideas and methods of new nature writing.

Chapter One explores ideas surrounding space, place, and landscape, and how these states are framed and formed. This acts as a theoretical framework to explore, in later chapters, the specifics of place within the Thames Gateway, and how the interstitial landscape is positioned within the wider debate surrounding place. The chapter includes ideas that are fundamental to the formation of a landscape ethnography methodology. It explores notion of place as put forward by Tim Cresswell and the shift or return to the idea of landscape within geography as explored by John Wylie. Both of these embodied readings of place and landscape will counter Marc Augé's notion of Non Place.

Chapter Two looks to outline the spatial characteristics that are found in our interstitial landscapes. By asking the question, 'what are edgelands?' I will outline the formation of the term and its relationship to earlier notions of the interstitial landscape, exploring how

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himself has called for 'a young group of urban walkers to pick up the mantel of psychogeography and do something new with it' (Sinclair quoted in Richardson, website, 2014). Richardson defines this idea as new or post-Sinclairian psychogeography.

these differ from Shoard's later term. It will build upon the work of other researchers who have explored this landscape, in particular the work of Farley & Symmons Roberts, who wrote the first exploration of the characteristics of edgelands and ultimately formed a typology of key defining factors. Further to this it looks at our relationship to these sites, as well as means of access and interaction. It explores both positive and negative associations with the term.

Chapter Three will explore ideas surrounding landscape representation in the work of artists, and this will take the form of an analytical overview of historic practices concerned with the depiction of ruins, linking to themes of the picturesque and sublime. It will look at the work of the New Topographic movement that came to define an idea of new landscape photography and a new wilderness. It will explore work that has allowed me to define a methodology that informed my visual understanding of edgeland spaces, and open up a visual chronology in advance of the term edgeland being coined.

Chapter Four will define landscape ethnography's adapted ethnographic methodology. It will do this by forming connections to; psychogeographic practice, autobiogeography, and new nature writing as a literary framing of a given landscape. These practices will be contextualised in relation to non-representational theory. Finally, connections will be formed between all of these methodologies to the metaphorical idea of 'deep' exploration and production of the landscape. Sarah Pink defines ethnography as "an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture" (Pink, 2007: 18). Therefore, by extension, a landscape ethnography is an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing landscape.

Chapter Five will explore my connection to the Thames Gateway, setting out the notion of my autobiogeography, and ultimately develop the idea of why it was chosen as a region for my fieldwork. It lays out a history of both the region and individual locations I have been working on a macro/micro scale, and explores the politics, the changes, and the

future for both individual sites and the wider Gateway region. It deals with elements of gentrification and the argument for preservation of the region.

Chapter Six further refines the research methodology by defining the framework upon which the fieldwork was undertaken and through which the practice developed and evolved. It explores ideas surrounding the use of walking as a means of research, linked to ideas of psychogeography defined in Chapter Four. This will be done by assimilating various ideas found within ethnographic study, including: Sarah Pink's work on visual and sensory ethnography. It will further explore the connection between film, ethnography and geography as written about by Jessica Jacobs and multiple others. It also defines the shift in practice from a visual photographic model, to a polysensual moving image model. Further to this, it explores how my films link to a tradition of landscape films that preceded them, including the psychogeographic cinema (Scovell, 2016) work of Patrick Kieller, John Rogers, Andrew Kotting, Adam Scovell and Chris Petit, and their connection to psychogeography.

Chapter Seven and Eight will map the development of my practice from the first fieldwork trips which utilised the idea of 'eye witness, ear witness, cartographer and interviewer' (Hanley and Dargavel, conference paper, 2012:1) as a basic methodological framework which was ultimately adapted into a more appropriate (auto)ethnographic framework. It explores the development of my practice, laying out my finalised methodology and the process that the wider research has played in informing its creation. It reflects on the process of exploration and the formation of a series of film works. This chapter will account for the visual language and conventions used within my films, including notions of framing, sound and music through an exploration of my work and the work of other artists working within similar landscape orientated fields.

Within the Conclusion, I summarise how each chapter has contributed to my argument, allowing me to question how landscape ethnography can be utilised to create work that

blends geography and art to form works that cannot be produced by traditional written publications and ethnographies. The Conclusion culminates by suggesting a direction landscape ethnography might take in the future, utilising emerging technologies to create more immersive ethnographic experiences.

# 1 What is Landscape?

This chapter explores ideas surrounding space, place, and landscape, and how these states are framed and formed. This acts as a theoretical framework to explore, in later chapters, the specifics of place within the Thames Gateway, and how the interstitial landscape is positioned within the wider debate surrounding place. The chapter includes ideas that are fundamental to the formation of a landscape ethnography methodology. It explores notion of place as put forward by Tim Cresswell and the shift or return to the idea of landscape within geography as explored by John Wylie. Both of these embodied readings of place and landscape will counter Marc Augé's notion of Non Place (1995).

## 1.1 Space, Place, and Landscape

Within everyday language, the terms landscape, place, and space are often used interchangeably. However, from a geographic perspective, all three have very separate meanings. The philosopher Jeff Malpas (2010) argued that 'place is perhaps the key term for interdisciplinary research in the arts, humanities and social sciences in the twenty-first century' (Malpas, 2010, quoted in Cresswell, 2015: 1). Cresswell argues that for a long time, 'place' was a word that spoke for itself; however, a recent rediscovery and resurgence in creative non-fiction writing has put place firmly at the heart of things. This writing on both 'wild' and urban places has become increasingly popular in psychogeographic texts and new nature writing (ibid: 2). By placing these two forms of

literature together, Cresswell is suggesting that they are both orientated towards the investigation and production of place, acting as place making devices.

The political geographer John Agnew, outlined three fundamental aspects of place as ‘meaningful location’ (Agnew, 1987): location, locale, and a sense of place. The majority of time we use the word place, we are referring to a fixed point of the Earth’s surface, a location that can be plotted through coordinates. By locale he is discussing the material setting for social relations, the places within which we conduct our lives. It is however the third notion, a ‘sense of place’ that interests me most and the crux of what I’m investigating within the Thames Gateway. By ‘sense of place’ Agnew is referring to the subjective and emotional attachment people have to places. Lucy Lippard, suggested that we have a sense of place about where we live, or have lived which she defined as *The Lure of the Local* (Lippard, 1997). As I have stated within the Introduction, I have a strong connection to the Gateway from having lived there, and through childhood visits. While the Gateway has an easily definable location and locale, it is the sense of place that is more elusive, and also fiercely individualised.

Henri Lefebvre’s 1947 *The Production of Space*, suggests that humans create the world around them, and, that in turn, are created by the world around them. Trevor Paglen states that ‘space is not a container for human activities to take place within, but is actively ‘produced through human activity’ (Paglen, 2009). However, further to this, Cresswell describes space as being a more abstract concept than place. Spaces have area and volume, and places have space inbetween them (Cresswell, 2015:15). Yi-Fu Tuan’s analogy possibly describes the relationship in the simplest way, likening space to movement, and place to the pauses and stops along the way (Tuan, 1977). As such he suggests the two are inseparable:

What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value... The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for



definition. From the security and stableness of places we are aware of the openness, freedom and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place (Tuan, 1977: 6).

By turning my lens on the Thames Gateway and presenting my findings to an audience, I am not only transforming what would be an abstract space to many, into a knowable place, but I am also imparting my unique sense of place. Not only this, but Paglen following Lefebvre suggests that if production is a fundamentally spatial practice, then cultural production is also a spatial practice. Speaking about geography, he states 'when I study geography, write about geography, teach geography, go to geography conferences...I'm helping to produce a space called "geography"' (Paglen, 2009).

Therefore, the same rings true of my practice within the Gateway region, I am helping to produce a space called the Thames Gateway that I then further refine into place. Paglen refers to this practice as experimental geography, and states that we can't only see the production of space as an ontological condition, but that active experimentation with the production of space should be seen as an integral part of one's own practice, and that this experimentation should be seen as production without guarantees. Space should not be seen as deterministic, and that the production of new spaces isn't easy (Paglen, 2009).

Cresswell sums up the space, place connection as the idea that space must be seen as a realm without meaning. When human beings invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way such as naming it, it becomes place (Cresswell, 2015: 16).

As a photographer and filmmaker, I am interested in the relationship between place and landscape. Cosgrove (1984) and Jackson (1997) define landscape as a portion of the earth's surface that can be viewed from one spot. While in one way this may be an accurate definition, from a cultural perspective it is limited. This simplistic viewpoint

combines what can be seen, with the way it is seen. Taking it from this viewpoint, landscape is an intensely visual concept, and, for many, a reading that is deeply entrenched with landscape art. Cresswell suggests that most definitions of landscape place the viewer outside of it, which he suggest is the main difference to place, which is intrinsically something that we see ourselves inside of, habiting.

Cresswell chooses to use Raymond Williams' novel *Border Country* (1960) to illustrate this point. The novel's protagonist returns to his childhood home in the Welsh borders after years away at university. When he returns he is surprised that he has forgotten the quality of life that helped define it as a 'place', instead his mind has now been replaced it as a 'landscape'. Over the course of the novel it shifts back towards a place as he becomes reacclimatised with village life. Cresswell ends the section by stating 'we do not live in a landscape – we look at them.' (Cresswell, 2015: 18). Williams stated that 'the very idea of landscape implies separation and observation' (1985: 126), placing landscape as a 'pre-given external reality which a detached subject observes and represents' (Wylie, 2007: 3).

Casey explores the connection between place and landscape from the position of exploring landscape art, but in particular painting. His view is that place is something experienced by the body. The 'spirit of a place' is captured through the 'essence of a scene'. If we merely 'capture scenery', it results in a degradation of that place. In order for the artist to 'capture that essence', they must penetrate into the depths of the place, and must identify with the landscape (Casey, 2002: 99). He further suggests that 'place is what is primarily transmitted in landscape painting' (ibid: 114). John Wylie builds on Casey's position on landscape by suggesting that 'Landscape is tension' (Wylie, 2007: 1). He further elaborates that the 'tension exists between proximity and distance, body and

mind, sensuous immersion and detached observation' (ibid:1). Casey suggests this tension exists in the horizontal-vertical schema that was developed by Claude Lorrain within landscape painting and would permeate ideas of the picturesque<sup>4</sup> that existed within the landscape tradition during and after the eighteenth century. Casey suggests that the positioning of the lived body of the work's author presents verticality and nearness, while the horizon serves distance and farness.

Wylie asks whether the word landscape describes a mutual embeddedness and interconnectivity of self, body, knowledge and land, just as the painter Cezanne wrote that 'the landscape thinks itself in me... and I am its consciousness'. Wylie questions whether this is artistic egoism and hyperbole, the artist claiming ownership of a landscape through his depiction and view of it. However, once again, it is a view of landscape that fits within Williams' viewpoint that landscape is something we look at from afar, until we experience it, and then it manifests itself as place. Wylie further suggests that Cezanne's painting was produced through the artist 'plunging his whole body and spirit into the landscape, creating a originary and inescapable involvement with it, that results in a folding and fusing of landscape and self' (Ponty, cited in, Wylie, 2007: 2-3).

Further expanding on Wylie's view, at this point landscape becomes a phenomenological experience, the relationship between observer and observed, the self and the landscape become intertwined. If we consider the original view that landscape is the measure of space that we can witness from a single point, then clearly landscape is an exercise in embodied reading of space. The difference between the observed and the observer becomes compressed; the horizontal and vertical schema is rendered two dimensionally, just as it is in painting and lens-based representations. At this moment, surely the real

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<sup>4</sup> The Picturesque is explored in detail in Chapter Four.

fusing is between landscape and place. The landscape viewpoint is unique to the observer and observer alone, whether it is the original or an artistic representation. Everyone's perspective, physically, emotionally, intellectually and culturally will differ. At this point the representation can be said to become place in its own right, while at the same time, as Paglen stated, becoming a new space. The space of the artwork, within which each participant will create their own node. Cezanne is not the detached spectator that fits within Williams' views, his gaze enters the landscape, probing, forming judgements, transforming its state, while at the same time the landscape enters him and allows this to happen, a symbiotic relationship. Williams would have us believe that we are detached viewers, Cezanne showed us that far from it, landscape is a live and embodied experience, and when we turn our eyes upon the painting we are able to see both, the painter's vision and the landscape that has informed it. Landscape becomes 'practiced' through place-making activities, which include but are not limited to 'looking'.

Since the 1970s, human geography and linked disciplines have moved away from the 'field science' model of landscape, and have looked to emphasise the 'qualities' of landscape. The idea being that landscape is a territory of cultural practices and values, as opposed to simply a series of observable material cultural facts (Wylie, 2007: 5).

Increasingly, UK based cultural geography has sought to position landscape's cultural practices as very much sitting within the notions of inhabitation, embodiment, and dwelling. Tilley (2004) suggests that the researcher must now not only theorise landscape through corporeal dwelling, but also must come to know it through participating in it with their whole body.

We can argue that both the Gateway region and the concept of edgelands exist within what Doreen Massey described as a 'global sense of place' (1991). The view of many observers was that globalisation was eroding places, reducing once distinctive places to uniform suburbs and 'clone towns' dominated by chain stores (Cresswell, 2008). This is an image that is certainly recognisable within the Gateway region. Massey even

comments on the conflict within the development of London Docklands at the time.

Docklands is place she described as being clearly defined by a conflict over its past and the idea of heritage, conflict over its present (1991) development and conflict over its

future (Massey, 1991: 6). Massey however argues that far from eroding place,

globalisation forces place to be constantly remade. The global connections can lead to endless series of specificities that contribute to the accumulated history of a place.

Massey suggests that from this perspective place is being reshaped by both local and distant connections, leading her to call for progressive notion of place to be developed.

The first and most important idea to her was the notion that place should not be seen as static. As place is formed through social interaction, then we should consider these

interactions to not be motionless things frozen in time, both place and our interactions with it should be seen as processes (ibid).

Massey is most keen to point out that a global sense of place does not erode or deny place and certainly doesn't erode the 'importance of the uniqueness of place' (ibid), and

suggests that global flows actually give places a greater number of social relations from which to form the unique character of a given place. This distinct mixture of relationships

combines local and wider factors, and leads to an accumulated history, with that history being comprised, as it always has been, with layers of linkages that connect to both the

local and the wider world. Indeed, if we consider Queen Elizabeth I's speech at Tilbury in 1588 to troops preparing to repel the Spanish Armada, as a single point in global space,

it connects to multiple other points, which in turn opens the place to a series of global connections and places. This sense of the global and local combining means that the

landscape becomes an even greater assemblage that comprises actors and agency on a global scale.

Finally Massey suggests that places do not have boundaries, in the sense of divisions, that frame simple enclosures. While she isn't removing the notion of inside and outside, she is instead stating that place is informed by the notion of what's outside, which then becomes

part of the place that it originally sat outside of. This helps to get away from the idea of penetrability and vulnerability, an association that traditionally made the notion of invasion by newcomers threatening (ibid).

Cresswell suggests that on smaller scales we are often hard pressed to think of the idea of where a place begins and ends (Cresswell, 2015: 104). However, the Thames Gateway master plan, including the idea of local economic zones, does exactly that and places need boundaries on to pre-existing ideas of place, whether on the regional scale, such as the creation of Ebbsfleet Garden City (Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, 2016), or through changes to the area on a local scale such as the development of St Mary's Island or Chatham Waters for which the developers The Peel Group, have created a 'new brand identity' (About the site, website, 2017), for a pre existing place. To Cresswell, this negates the multitude of flows that cross these boundaries constantly (Cresswell, 2015: 105). I therefore find it easier to consider the whole region to be fluid, a constant shifting mass of place and places that will look different to the observer based on the perspective viewpoint they choose, but one that operates on a local, region, national, and global scale, simultaneously and has cause and effect that flows in both directions. This concept is reflected in my idea that the Gateway's landscape is formed from small, island-like edgeland sites, that form an archipelago of interstitial land. When writing about the place where she resided, Kilburn, Massey describes it as a 'meeting place' where a 'constellation of social relations' come together to form place. While reflecting on Massey's work, Cresswell describes it as a place she has great affection for, but this affection is based on the fluidity and diversity, instead of a sense of unitary identity (Cresswell, 2015: 106).

Again, because place is formed through perspective and the personal, it cannot have a unitary identity. The Thames Gateway is a collision of factors at any given moment. However, Massey still suggests it is acceptable to seek identity in place, because the identity is never fixed and bounded (Cresswell, 2015: 109). In spending 12 years looking

for the identity of the Thames Gateway I have always failed because of this point, instead I can only produce an autobiogeography that is about my search and my relationship with place. In doing so, ultimately, I am producing a place and a landscape that someone else can connect to and build upon. This is also the reason that the Thames Gateway failed to take hold of people's imaginations as a new place; it is too large and made up of too many individual ideas of place on multiple scales. It is also the reason that the idea of edgelands ceases to exist when explored from the ground.

Shoard's model requires the idea of a border space between urban and rural, in reality this border is an imaginary divide, it shifts and flows in the same way as the Thames Gateway. To Massey, all place, whether it is a social/human landscape such as a city space, or the physical/natural landscape of somewhere like the Lake District (Massey, 1991, Cresswell, 2015) is an event, where things are 'thrown together', and this requires a different idea from the one that views places are separate and particular.

The notion of place has been explored in relation to the metaphor of weaving, this describes the gathering qualities of place, with a unique texture formed through the way differing threads are combined. Adams, Hoelscher, and Till, calls us to think about the 'texture' of place, suggesting that while 'we might think of texture as a superficial layer, only "skin deep", its distinctive qualities may be profound'. (Adams et al, 2001: xiii). Robert Sack suggests a 'weaving' together of different realms of warp and weft, realms comprising society (and the moral), nature (and the empirical), and culture (and the aesthetic), that are gathered and 'woven' (fixed) into place (Sack, 2003: 41). The analogy of weaving and textile is a useful one especially within the context of the Thames Gateway as, while these realms exist within all place, they can be woven into any unique garment imaginable. On top of this the fabric produced is able to breathe and move under the influence of external factors, and finally that fabric can be continually recombined and refreshed. This idea of place as weave, joins Casey's idea of a 'gathering' (1996: 19)

and DeLanda's notion of place as 'assemblage' (2016). Finally Cresswell (2004) draws these ideas together after Massey to define:

1. Place as process
2. Place as defined by the outside
3. Place as site of multiple identities and histories
4. A uniqueness of place defined by its interactions.

## **1.2 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored ideas surrounding space, place, and landscape. By presenting both a theoretical starting point for these three terms, and exploring how, at first, they appear as similar concept, they can be considered as evolution phases of knowing a site. I have shown that while space is a concept largely devoid of a fixed location, both place and landscape are formed through ever deepening bodily interaction and knowledge. Because of this there is a movement from outside to inside place that transforms it into landscape, this is further defined through the movement from global to local, and the drive to connect the landscape to this wide framework of nodes, that can both be collapsed to connect the global to the local, or expanded to make the local, global. This idea is at the heart of my proposed landscape ethnography, and demonstrates the importance of forming a 'deep' experiential reading.

Within the next chapter I will further explore the ideas of the interstitial landscape, and propose methods for accessing this landscape.



## 2 A Series of Metaphors - What are Edgelands?

This chapter builds upon the previous exploration of space, place, and landscape, and outlines the spatial characteristics that are found in our interstitial landscapes. By asking the question, 'what are edgelands?' I will outline the formation of the term and its relationship to earlier notions of the interstitial landscape, exploring how these differ from Shoard's later term. It will build upon the work of other researchers who have explored this landscape, in particular the work of Farley & Symmons Roberts, who wrote the first exploration of the characteristics of edgelands and ultimately formed a typology of key defining factors. Further to this it looks at our relationship to these sites, as well as means of access and interaction. It explores both positive and negative associations with the term. Finally, it will challenge the notion that this interstitial landscape can be considered a non-place.

In the minds of many people, the M25 motorway forms the unofficial boundary of London (Diamond Geezer, 2016), and in some places, this is a literal truth, with the edge of Greater London rubbing against the hard shoulder. The M25 marks the point where the urban conurbation gives way to the fields and farmland of the Home Counties. In several places, however, instead of seeing green fields from the car window, we pass over an unusual landscape of 'diaspora, oil tanks, wilderness gardens, gleaming blue tractors waiting for export'. (Sinclair, 2002: 31). Travel down the radial motorways that enter the

capital, the M23, M3, M4, M40, M1 and the M11, and you will pass through more of this landscape before it eventually shifts abruptly into the residential. Iain Sinclair refers to them as ‘off highway zones’ with ‘their own impenetrable micro-geographies’ (Sinclair, 2002: 11-12). These landscapes are most visible at the M25 motorway’s pinch point around the Dartford Crossing and Waltham Cross. However, you can see it on the edges of all our towns and cities in one shape or form, a landscape of distribution and storage, a new type of landscape, not truly urban and not truly rural, an edge-landscape, utilising cheaper land and with fewer planning constraints than the open country, exploiting areas formally used by industry. I was aware of their aesthetic before I knew they had a name, from weekend trips to get DIY supplies, or to collect a parcel from one of the giant storage sheds. Until I started this research I certainly had never hung out in them, and tried to understand their rhythms and connections to the landscape that they sprouted in.

*Attending university involved multiple trips through London and the Kent landscape by train. I was forced to re-engage with the landscape outside the window, instead of merely following the bumper of the vehicle in front. My daily train commute would take me through the devitalised south of London and north Kent marshes, past former industrial sites, now in a state of decay and collapse, patches of scrub land covered in buddleia. Past chalk pits, now either flooded, or replaced with the giant shopping mall at Bluewater.*

## **2.1 Discovering Edgelands**

I first came across the term edgelands from Farley and Symmonds Roberts’ book *Edgelands: Journeys into England’s True Wilderness* (2012). While I was unfamiliar with the term, Helen Saunter’s photograph on the book’s cover resonated. While it was digital composite of various landscape elements, it reminded me of real locations, such as the finale to *Get Carter* (film, 1971), with Michael Caine carrying out his bloody

retribution on a desolate Durham coal beach, the bucket line travelling slowly overhead, carrying the spoil to the sea.



Figure 2-1 Helen Saunders, *Constructed Landscape 3*,

This was a place, rather than a location, that I knew from exposure to various films, literature, and photography, all of which carried with them a familiar aesthetic; finally, it had a name: edgeland. As I became more immersed in the (edge of the) landscape, I realized that I had been exposed to these spaces since my earliest years, and that deeply-lodged memories of locations and experiences had informed my creative work in the following period, be it exploring the ring of deserted asylums around the M25 belt in *The Darkness at The Edge of Town* (Robinson, 2005), or the collision point between industry and housing in the British hinterland in *The Smell of Bitumen* (Robinson, 2007). This mixture of memory and experience formed a strong auto-ethnographic strand within my practice.

The house I grew up in was a 1980s redbrick estate, built on former farmland. When my parents and I moved there in 1984, we were the first people in our road, and my playground was the building site that surrounded us. Enclosing our road on two sides was

neglected farmland. For as long as I can remember, this farmland had no real right of way, but had been adopted by the local community as a place to walk the dogs, and play. It was where my earliest photographic experiments were, and paved the way for future work.

The idea of an edgeland landscape was first proposed by Marion Shoard, which she defined as an interfacial interzone dividing urban and rural (Shoard, 2002). 'This peculiar landscape is only the latest version of an interfacial rim that has always separated settlements from the countryside to a greater or lesser extent' (Shoard, 2002:1). Shoard paints an image of a place defined by a heterogeneity of disparate elements, thrown together through an unlikely amalgamation of social and economic issues, often situated on the periphery of our towns and cities: a collection of busy distribution centres, connected haulage firms, stables and struggling out of town English strip malls. She suggests that these are locations only visited for a fixed purpose; whether it be for work, DIY at the weekend, or the collection of a parcel from the main depot. All the elements within her edgeland model have the same thing in common, they are rarely sites we linger in for very long, and at the very least, disregard while we inhabit them.

Over the course of a four-year period I undertook multiple weeklong field visits, on top of living and studying in the region for a three-year period between 2005 and 2008. The more time I spent in the edgelands of the Thames Estuary, the more I came to feel my experiential reading of place differed from Shoard's wider view of what edgeland space constituted, arguably because the Thames Gateway is an assemblage of urban, rural, and collision points between the two. The longer I 'hung out' (Geertz, 1998) the more I considered that there had to be a different term to describe the landscape, one that captured elements of all three and took into consideration the slippage between them. 'Fieldwork is an integral part of geographical enquiry and provides significant opportunities...to investigate the practical aspects of any ideas...through first-hand experience. It also provides...the means to investigate issues in the real 'messy' world'

(Lambert, 2010:2).

Edgelands, as written about by Shoard, Farley & Symmons Roberts, describes a very specific form of spatial entity and only form one aspect of the landscape I am experiencing. The landscape forms what I am describing as an archipelago of interstitial place. This thesis is concerned with forming a new methodology that will allow landscape fieldwork, artistic practice and reflection to show that the landscape of the Thames Gateway is formed of a multitude of spatial characteristics, some of which will be identified in this chapter, and explored in further chapters.

Alan Berger discusses this in terms of the formation of the horizontal city and the issue with a top down regional planning viewpoint; viewed from this vertical platform, in the form of maps and aerial photographs, the city appears as 'extensive and plentiful - open space and vegetation - such as large agricultural tracts surrounded by new developments or forests with office parks nestled in their interior' (Berger, 2005: 26). While on the local level of walking or driving, 'the landscape... may appear diminished and wasteful. It appears poorly planned, designed and unmaintained and as irregular and indiscreet leftovers from other, more dominant forms of development' (Ibid., 2005:26). He further goes on to define this landscape disconnect and proposes it should be allowed to exist;

These 'large empty areas' are new metropolitan tissue... Internal and external frontiers should not all be salvaged by society. Landscapes attributed to these frontiers are indistinct: they are regarded as either too small and fragmented at the local scale or aggregated into isolation at the regional scale. It is difficult for society to identify and value them. (Berger, 2005:28)

Considering Augé's theory of non-place, (which will be explored later in this chapter), these places, I want to suggest, are only non-places if you allow them to be. This can be challenged by stepping outside of the usage model coded into them through socio-economic imperatives, through boundary-forming roads, parking restrictions and a lack of

council-built pathways. Through freeing yourself of this coding, through exploration and loitering, I want to make clear that these landscapes became far more complex than they appear on a map (Bordeleau et al, 2010: 45-58), from a car or train window (Keiller, 2015) or from the bow of a boat chugging down the Thames (Raban, 1986).

Poets, Michael Symmons Roberts and Paul Farley attempted to build on Shoard's ideas within their book *Edgelands* (2012). However, in reading their accounts, I still felt there was a disjunction between the prose, (which oversimplified the environments in the Romantic landscape tradition<sup>5</sup>), and my own experiences of these spaces, which are steeped in ethnographic and phenomenological experience.

During a conversation with Symmons Roberts about *Edgelands*, he alluded to the fact that their reading of edgelands is creative nonfiction with elements of embellishment, but argued that it is no less relevant because of it<sup>6</sup>. However, the refusal in *Edgelands*, to give any of their sites names or locations, instead describing the environment as a typology of Shoard's heterogeneous elements, suggests not only a simplification of the edgeland landscape, but also a simplification of the ideas within Shoard's original essay.

One book that offers a richer reading of the edgeland condition, in contrast, is Rob Cowen's *Common Ground* (2015). While often described within the press as an edgeland book, Cowen refutes this idea, suggesting the book is 'much, much more complicated' than being a simple typology, instead it is a complicated representation of a single edgeland site because 'edge-lands are complicated spaces' (Cowen quoted in Budden,

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<sup>5</sup> The Romantic landscape tradition is a movement within art during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This covers the gamut between the pastoral and the sublime and can be typified through ideas surrounding the picturesque. These ideas will be further explored in Chapter Two.

<sup>6</sup> The goal of creative nonfiction is to make it read like fiction so that readers become as enthralled by fact as they would by fiction, and to do this involves literary devices that would have once been considered out of place in traditional nonfictions.

website, 2016). By choosing to work within a very small and locatable site, he is able to understand the minutiae that govern and affect the space. The book revels in the rich detail and stories that inform the space, while at the same time the immense autoethnographic detail suggests that our mapping of these locations is informed by what we bring to them.

The more time I spent in the landscape, the more I came to recognise that terms such as 'Dumpscape, Junkspace, Stimdross' (Farley and Symmons Roberts, 2012: 3-4), which were used to describe dormant spaces<sup>7</sup> within the interstitial landscape, didn't reflect the landscape I was experiencing. These words had lost the specificity of their original meaning. Now they simply operated as de facto terms to describe a multitude of spaces and places within the confines of the modern built environment. More so they were often wrongly attributed to the wider edgeland landscape. These were spaces that have been generally overlooked by the public, yet all of them embody a marginal, liminal quality. Within the UK, the language used to describe the interstitial landscape is commonly pejorative. Shoard's model of edgeland space describes something very specific to our urban interstices and does not immediately carry with it the same negative connotations, (however it can be argued that this has changed since the essay's publication as the term has found wider adoption). Edgelands, in Shoard's formulation, can equally be spaces of play and opportunity. However, multiple terms helped form Shoard's idea of edgeland, or described aspects of the multitude of individual characteristics that define Shoard's edgeland model. None of these terms capture the complexity and fluidity of edgeland spaces, including, in my view, 'edgeland' itself.

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<sup>7</sup> A larger selection of these words is collected in the introduction to Farley and Symmons Roberts' *Edgelands* (2012).

## 2.2 The Shift from Rural-Urban, To the Urban Archipelago

The over-arching term that would define the Thames Gateway is peri-urban<sup>8</sup>, meaning the area immediately surrounding a city or town, however this in itself only broadly names the area, and does nothing to define the characteristics that are unique to that particular region or landscape.

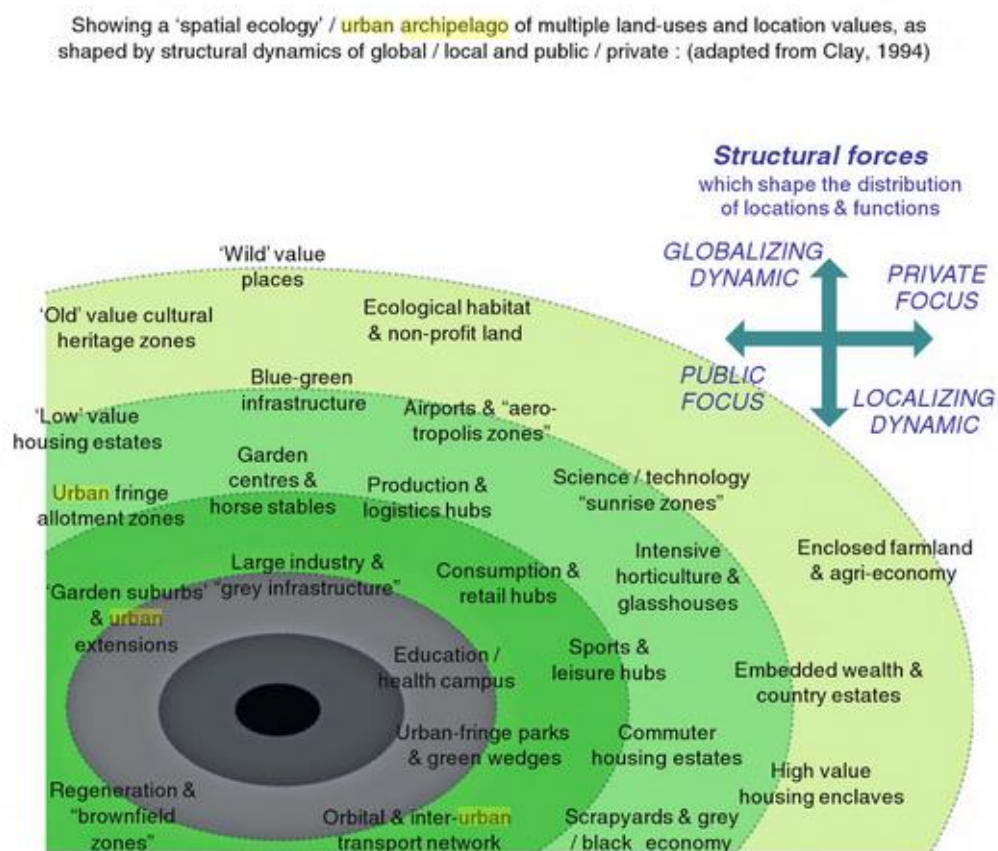


Figure 2-2 Clay, Showing a 'spatial ecology' / urban archipelago of multiple land-uses and location value, as shaped by structural dynamics of global/local, and public/private,

1994

<sup>8</sup> Peri-urban comes from the French word *périurbanisation*.



As can be seen from the diagram above that attempts to map the dynamics at play in the peri-urban, its usage model is complex and fractured, with elements failing to fall into neat zones or regions. Rueg (2004) places the complexity of the rural-urban dichotomy and its failure to act as a continuous planned belt within the confines of planning, and the number of local and regional administrative boundaries they cross. The Thames Gateway is comprised of three counties, sixteen government districts and countless local government politicians that comprise each district. Ultimately decisions are based on party politics (national), the constituency views of each ward (regional), and the (local) views of each district.

Throughout Europe, for planning purposes, new descriptions of evolving city regions have become necessary in an attempt to define them as entities separate from the rural/urban model: the '*stadregion*' in Austria, the '*verdichtungsraum*' in Germany, the '*agglomeration*' in France and Switzerland. Specifically, in relation to the urban fringe, Sieverts (1997) has coined the term '*zwischenstadt*' (in-between-towns) and Baccini and Oswald (1998) the term '*netzstadt*' (network or patchwork town). Priebis (2001) has accepted the North American concept of 'post suburbia', while the Swiss authors Eisinger and Schneider (2003) have introduced the term '*stadtland*' (urbanscape) and Borsdorf (2004) the 'urban archipelago'. In France, the terms '*ville emergent*' (emerging town) and '*campagne urbaine*' (urban countryside) are both applied.

This list highlights the differences and nuances of language, they all describe the outskirts, but each one offers a slightly differing emphasis, suggesting that the interstitial landscape is a product of the country and culture it inhabits. For me, the one that most applies to the Thames Gateway is Borsdorf's urban archipelago, it mirrors the pockets of edgelands that litter the landscape and the range of other characteristics that define it, as well as incorporating the range of rivers and streams that meet the Thames and appear to act as natural barriers that stop one location blending into the next. In the twelve years that I have been looking at the Thames Gateway I have seen its development contract and

expand, the economy mirroring the ebb and flow of the river, investment, disinvestment. From this I have come to think of the interstitial landscape as a series of metaphorical islands as described in Deleuze's writing in *Desert Islands*.

Geographers say there are two kinds of islands. This is valuable information for the imagination because it confirms what the imagination already knew. Nor is it the only case where science makes mythology more concrete, and mythology makes science more vivid. Continental islands are accidental, derived islands. They are separated from a continent, born of disarticulation, erosion, fracture; they survive the absorption of what once contained them. (Deleuze, 2004:9)

The eroding elements on the urban archipelago can be considered as the power structures that underpin it, social, economic, political and physical. No section of the Thames Gateway is safe from any or all of this erosion. Following Deleuze's model, in the end the erosion will fracture them into smaller and smaller islands. While an argument can be made that these sites can be agglomerated into wider urban sprawl, they would then cease to be part of the structure of the urban archipelago, and instead become something else. The photographic curator Paul Wombell, working on an updated *Mission Photographique de la DATAR*, a survey of France which originally ran from 1984-89, described similar locations as *liquid territories*<sup>9</sup> (Wombell, website, 2011), and posed the question 'where do you stand to take photographs on a territory that is not stable and is continually

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<sup>9</sup> Wombell takes the metaphor liquid from the writings of Zygmunt Bauman, in his books *Liquid Surveillance* (2013) and *Liquid Modernity* (2000). Bauman defines 'liquid modernity as a kind of chaotic continuation of modernity, where one can shift from one social position to another, in a fluid manner. Nomadism becomes a general trait of the liquid modern human, as he/she flows through their own life like a tourist, changing places, jobs, partners and values'. Wombell states that the 'new burden of responsibility fluid modernism placed on the individual, with traditional patterns being replaced by self-chosen ones. I have defined liquid territories more broadly with reference to the landscape and as well as the human'. (Wombell, website, 2014)

moving and how do you define the identity of territory when nations are not permanent?' (ibid., website, 2011)

It is important to explore the multitude of terms that have shaped and defined characteristics of the urban archipelago, Borsdorf meant it to explain affluent gated communities away from the risk of city centres, however within this thesis I am adapting the term into the archipelago of interstitial space. This separates it from both Borsdorf's urban model and Shoard's edgeland model, presenting a term that fits within any interstitial landscape and attempts to situate it within the idea of acting as a metaphor for the complexity of this landscape.

Whilst Shoard refers to the margins between town and rural, similar conditions exist from within the bounded city. These places in urban centres have been described as wastelands, dead zones, voids or derelict spaces that have no intrinsic value or attributes that would define them as places, and whose presence is seen to erode the pristine definition of the commodified city (Hanley and Dargavel, conference paper, 2012:3)

This appropriation of the term highlights how we use and adapt language, the terms we use are coded semiotic signifiers that are recognised and are able to be decoded and recoded, altering and creating new meaning. This reading of the language used to describe the urban, mirrors Kevin Lynch's ways of 'reading' the city. In *The Image of the City* (Lynch, 1960) he says, 'every citizen has had long associations with some part of the city, and his image is soaked in memories and meaning' (Lynch, 1960:1). Everybody's view of the language of the city is in part subjective and shifts from one person to another through personal experience and context. Through a series of questionnaire surveys Lynch defined five key characteristics that defined our reading and the legibility of the city. His definition of edges shows that it is a loaded term with a

variety of readings.

Edges are the linear elements not used or considered as paths by the observer. They are the boundaries between two phases, linear breaks in continuity: shores, railroad cuts, edges of development, walls. They are lateral references rather than coordinate axes. Such edges may be barriers, more or less penetrable, which close one region off from another; or they may be seams, lines along which two regions are related and joined together. These edge elements, although probably not as dominant as paths, are for many people important organizing features. (Lynch, 1960: 41)

Many of the terms we use to describe this landscape rely on metaphor: urban archipelago, '*liquide territoire*' and '*terrain vague*'. The danger of relying on metaphor to define what most people consider to be concrete, but is in fact fluid space, is in the openness to differing interpretations, especially in terms that have a base in a different language. Ignasi de Sola Morales explored the complexities of interpreting the term '*terrain vague*' which has multiple readings based on the complexity of translating a term that has routes in multiple languages. Suggesting that the French term *terrain* means an urban quality, while in English it is rooted in agricultural or geological meaning. Further to this the word *vague* in this sense means vacant or vacuum, which defines the *terrain vague*, as both 'empty and unoccupied' but also 'free, available, unengaged' (Sola Morales, 1995: 119-120).

## 2.3 Land Utilisation Surveys

Laurence Dudley Stamp undertook the First Land Utilisation Survey<sup>10</sup> during the 1930s.

Working out of the London School of Economics (LSE) used a team of 'citizen scientists', (mainly school children), to record the land use of the UK. This was published as a series of maps with a coloured layer printed over the top of the base Ordnance Survey (OS) map. Through the survey Stamp identified six main land use types, by comparison with later surveys this was relatively few categories and ultimately led to a limited reading of the land utilisation; however, this was due, in most parts, to the changing fluidity of land use, based on seasons, economy etc.

The base-map was overprinted with a wash of six basic colours to indicate broad land-use categories: including purple (gardens etc.) and red (agriculturally unproductive). This lack of sub-categorisation, especially in built-up areas, showed essentially only two categories of urban (red) and suburban (purple) land. The suburban and urban categories in combination with the base-map detail allowed the key to subdivide suburbs into 'houses with gardens sufficiently large to be productive of fruit, vegetables, flowers, etc.' and 'new housing areas, nurseries and allotments'. Urban areas were subdivided into 'land so closely covered with houses and other buildings as to be agriculturally unproductive' and 'yards, cemeteries, pits, quarries, tip heaps, new industrial works, etc.', all of which would be absorbed into Shoard's idea of edgeland space.

Due to this limited categorisation, an argument could be made that leads to an anthropocentric understanding of land use (when perhaps it should extend to notions of

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<sup>10</sup> The Land Utilisation Survey of Britain was a comprehensive survey of land use in Great Britain in the 1930s. The survey was the first such comprehensive survey in Britain since the Domesday Book survey in the 11th Century. A Second Land Use Survey was carried out in the 1960s and a third in 1996.

the non-human). This has the potential therefore to support the argument that these liminal spaces are non-places in accordance with Augé's human-orientated idea of place.

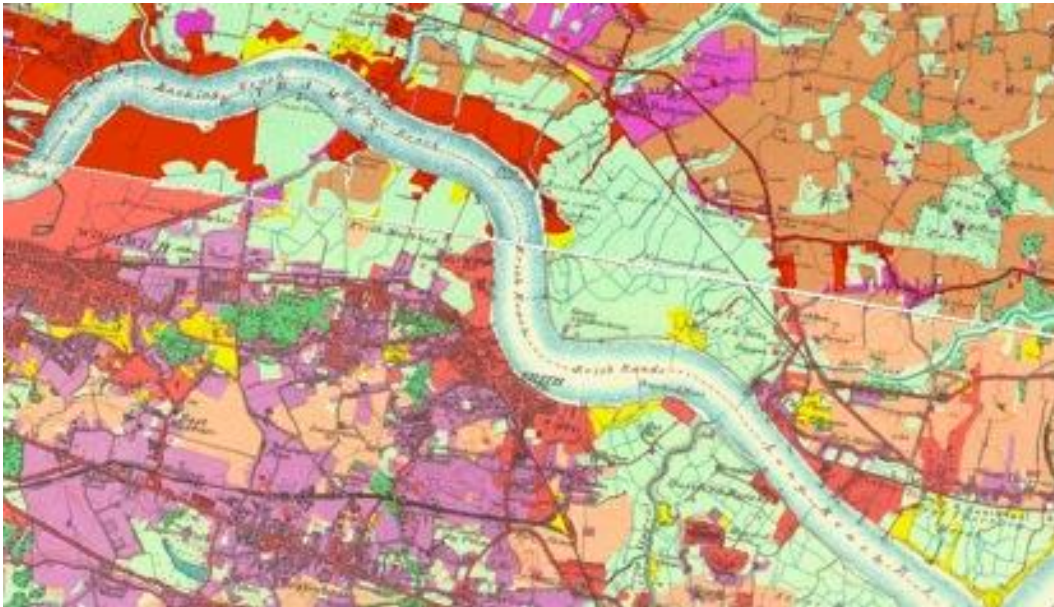


Figure 2-3 Alice Coleman, *Second Land Utilisation Survey, detail of sheet 225*

*Gravesend TQ 67/77, 1961*

The Second Land Use Survey started in 1960 with the aspiration to alleviate some of the issues associated with the first. Coleman built on Stamp's six original categories, keeping the base colour scheme, but extended it to seventy sub-categories, based around a series of main categories. However, even with the rise in categories and the use of more detailed 1:25000 OS base maps, Coleman's survey still has a distinct urban/rural divide, with the bias weighted towards the importance of rural economies. This can be argued as reflective of the direction of mainstream opinion at the time, since, as Tim Cresswell states, 'spatial structures structure representations of the world as they are held in a taken for granted way'. However, Cresswell also argues that through acts of physical and metaphorical transgression we can use the margins to 'tell us something about "normality"' (Cresswell, 1996: 9). During the 1970s, the Land Use and Town and Country Planning report (Coppock and Gebbett, 1978), identified that the Second Land Use Survey failed to document transitional spaces. The example they use is that

'particular difficulty must have been experienced in areas where one use graded into another e.g., where fields were being invaded by scrub or bracken, or where there had been substantial changes to the base maps, as when new housing estates had obliterated former field patterns' (Coppock and Gebbett, 1978: 56). This kind of issue contributes to a very polarised view of the land use and highlights the issue of mapping interstitial sites at such a scale.

Coleman suggested that the surveys represented an exposé on the nature of land disuse, misuse and abuse. However, the limited classification system is so narrow that it merely examines whether land is agriculturally useful or not. This binary classification of useful or not, oversimplifies the complex nature of place. Deleuze and Guattari consider the problem of 'dividing the real into a number of discrete domains' (Guattari, 1989: 41). They argue through the theory of (de)territorialisation that territory is not a fixed entity but a freely flowing series of states and that these territories contain a multiplicity of identities that constantly shift, forming fuzzy boundaries. Their concept of (de)territorialisation resonates with much of what has already been mentioned in this chapter about the interstitial landscape that has been discussed previously, especially the idea of liquid terrain. During the post survey analysis, Coleman saw a large amount of fringe land that did not fit neatly into her land-use pattern of either traditional farmscape or townscape. She appropriated the phrase the 'rurban fringe', maintaining that new development had sprawled into the countryside in a way that obscured the distinction between town and country. I would suggest that this fringe land failed to fit neatly into the binary categorisation of urban and rural, because of its fuzzy boundaries, and further to this, suggest that the ideas of deterritorialisation, and liquidity, position these places within evolving processes and movement, keeping them 'alive' as concepts, in a way that traditional 'scapes' do not. This fits with one of the key ideas surrounding landscape ethnography, and the formation of a multimodal ethnographic method that reconfigures the interstitial landscape in terms of constant process.

## 2.4 Green Belt and Planning

To many, planning control, and in particular the designation of London's Green Belt, was seen as the mechanism to control sprawl. P. Hamson, chairman of the *Radlett Green Belt Society*, suggested in 1969 that:

One has only to travel out of a town to realise what "sprawl" means. The octopus-like growth of a large town spreads its tentacles over the countryside, engulfing all before it... [it] has a tendency to grow and soon develops into a livid rash of modern buildings across the countryside...

The compelling need for a Green Belt around towns has arisen from the phenomenal growth, leading to an "overspill" of population and a desire for breathing space. (Hamson, 1969 republished in The Green Belt Saga, website, 2002)

Hanson's comments can be seen as indicative of the negative language surrounding these matters that I have already discussed. Words like overspill suggest an idea of loss within the reader, while rash conjures images of infection and inflammation, a symptom of a malady. Engulfing suggest a landscape and by extension its inhabitants being swallowed up, or drowning under an inescapable natural force. Views such as these give preference to the 'natural' over the 'cultural', with little thought to how the natural might also be cultural (Cresswell, 1996: 158-161), while Noel Castree urges us to question the representation that we are being given of nature (Castree, 2005: 247).

Hamson's views on the development of the green belt mirror Patrick Abercrombie's earlier Greater London Plan (1944). Abercrombie's plan proposed the development of a series of rings around Greater London, in order to control development and limit the capital's sprawl into specified regional areas, which could be defined by four zones; inner urban, suburban, green belt, and outer country (Abercrombie, 1944). Just as previously



mentioned, this defining of space, place, and the landscape attempts to impose rigid boundaries on fluid territories, failing to recognise their fuzzy, naturally evolving boundaries.

Subsequent building developments that crossed these zonal borders, meant that urban fringe farmland became fragmented, and in some cases, abandoned. Coleman considered this to be deeply undesirable, and recommended that the rural fringe should be reduced or eliminated. This could be achieved by turning it into proper townscape, with neatly rounded-off development or, better still, into productive farmland. In her 1967 analysis paper, *Is Planning Really Necessary?* Coleman took the area of the Thames Estuary as a case study, examining data gathered during the second survey and then resurveyed 10 years later (Coleman, 1967: 411-430).

**TABLE III**  
***Thames Estuary: land uses***

Category of use	1962 (km <sup>2</sup> )	1972 (km <sup>2</sup> )	Net change (km <sup>2</sup> )
<b>Residential</b>			
commercial	187.5	188.0	+ 0.5
Industry	27.0	30.0	+ 3.0
Extractive industry	21.5	16.5	- 5.0
Derelict land	2.5	7.0	+ 4.5
Transport	85.5	93.5	+ 8.0
Tended open space	72.5	80.0	+ 7.5
<b>Total settlement</b>	<b>396.5</b>	<b>415.0</b>	<b>+18.5</b>
<b>Orchards</b>	<b>20.0</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>- 7.0</b>
<b>Horticulture</b>	<b>65.0</b>	<b>66.0</b>	<b>+ 1.0</b>
<b>Arable</b>	<b>143.5</b>	<b>148.0</b>	<b>+ 4.5</b>
<b>Improved grass</b>	<b>138.5</b>	<b>98.0</b>	<b>-40.5</b>
<b>Total improved farmland</b>	<b>367.0</b>	<b>325.0</b>	<b>-42.0</b>
<b>Woodland</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>19.0</b>	<b>- 4.0</b>
<b>Scrub</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>- 0.5</b>
<b>Wasteland</b>	<b>33.0</b>	<b>63.5</b>	<b>+30.5</b>
<b>Heath</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>- 0.5</b>
<b>Marsh</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>9.0</b>	<b>- 1.5</b>
<b>Water</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>- 0.5</b>
<b>Total cover types</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>110.5</b>	<b>+23.5</b>
<b>Total area</b>	<b>850.5</b>	<b>850.5</b>	<b>—</b>

Figure 2-1, Alice Coleman, 'Thames Estuary Land Uses', *The Geographic Journal*, Vol. 142, No. 3 Nov, 1976.

Coleman states that the most interesting change in the landscape in the ten-year period since the second survey is the doubling of wasteland and the increase in land that has been left to degenerate into scrub woodland. She writes: 'Together these two useless categories accounted for one-twentieth of the total area' (Coleman, 1976:). While neither wasteland nor scrub is often quantifiably productive in economic terms, Coleman's analysis neglects to see the importance these places may have played in ecology, biodiversity and social and cultural reproduction. However, more importantly, by seeing it in rigid categorisation, it perhaps fails to consider that this could be seen as a new form of space, but also its position in relation to its neighbouring categories.

A 1979 Hansard report from a House of Lords' debate on Coleman's findings, records the negativity harboured towards what academics now consider 'interstitial space' (Lynch, 1965: 93). Below, the 7th Earl of Onslow, a Conservative hereditary peer, discusses the findings of Coleman in the context of the Thames Estuary.

Basildon New Town has been built on agricultural land to the east of Basildon. Yet idle waste scrub has been left idle, wasteful, and scrubby to the west. Why? Is this good planning?

The problem of wasteland and its creation, and the consumption of agricultural land, are further complicated by what Dr. Coleman calls "rurban fringe". This "rurban fringe" is defined as the surrounding, isolating penetration and consequent sterilisation of farmland by urban development...The "rurban fringe", she has shown, extends round [sic] most urban cities over more than twice the compact townscape area (Hansard, 21 March 1979, col 1426).

The use of vivid metaphors of penetration and sterilisation, echo the views in the previous Hanson quote. However, counter to these views of the importance of the green belt, architecture critic Ian Nairn, described it as 'a tourniquet which stops the bleeding but

doesn't heal the wound' (Nairn quoted in Kynaston, 2017). Grindrod further dispels the myth that the green belt is a landscape of 'timeless beauty', in the public mind, the green belt represents a 'complex web of hopes and ideals...things that green belt had never hoped to stand for, and could not possibly hope to protect or create' (Grindrod quoted in Kynaston, online article, 2017). It can be argued that the greenbelt that Grindrod explored and wrote about is nothing more than an edgeland that has been embraced by an Arcadian mythology.

## 2.5 Dormant Land, Or Wildspace

The 1974 survey showed that there were 106,000 acres of derelict and despoiled land in England (Hansard, 21 March 1979 col 1426). A Civic Trust report (Cantell, 1977) on urban waste makes the same point. The report followed work carried out largely by amenity societies, which were trying to identify wasteland, which they describe as dormant and therefore susceptible to regeneration. These societies suggested that as much as a quarter of a million acres of land in Britain may be dormant.

The Earl of Onslow's response to the notion of dormant land highlights the use of semantics to create a negative connotation with land: 'is it not possible to call dormant land something more pejorative? "Dormant land" gives the impression of nice, sleepy land. I think that land is too important a commodity to give it this euphemism, when it is basically unused' (Hansard, 8 February 1978 col 1426). Just as the way the interstitial landscape has been described by both Hanson, and The Earl of Onslow, the terminology used to define our interstitial landscape in the UK is highly pejorative: the terms *waste land*, *waste ground*, *brown field* all seed the negative connotations in the public view. Connotations such as this are then made worse through schemes like the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England's (CPRE) #WasteOfSpace initiative to document derelict sites through (mainly poor) Google Street View images (CPRE, website, 2014).



Figure 2-2 #WasteOfSpace Campaign, 'Abandoned Building in Folkestone', *CPRE*, October 2014.

The use of secondary imagery as evidence suggests that most people sending in photos haven't even taken the time to explore the sites themselves, let alone take the time to understand if and why those places may be important to local people. Schemes such as this reinforce and strengthen these ideas within the wider public. Of the 400 nominations the scheme received, the majority came from the South East and London (*CPRE*, website, 2015), areas with the greatest demand for housing, which suggests a bias within the nominees.

In 2003 CABI (the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) declared that there were up to 70,000 acres of derelict land across Britain. Much of this is brownfield and toxic ground, however some of it falls into another category. Shoard described some of these areas as wildscape, a concept that expands upon her notion of edgelands. This suggests an opening up of the theory to include wider more-than-human geographies (Latour, 1993, Whatmore, 2002). Sarah Whatmore suggested that 'humans are always in composition with nonhumanity, never outside a sticky web of connections

or an ecology of matter' (Whatmore, 2006: 603), this 'sticky web' ultimately renders (de)territorialisation's fuzzy boundaries even more discrete and complicated. Shoard separates wildscapes from what she defines as greenspace (Shoard, 2008). Greenspace, according to Shoard is socially and culturally acceptable and is the legacy of Victorian reformists, the municipal park, neat and manicured. Greenspace includes playing fields and parks, which, far from being wild, are a deliberate, constructed creation. Shoard makes a further distinction for purposely-wilded spaces - such as wildflower patches in parks and cemeteries, which due to their constructed nature fall into the realm of greenspace, and are an increasing element in landscape architecture (Ruddick, 2016) - and those areas that have become wild on their own accord, through spontaneity and by having the time to allow nature to grab a foothold (Monbiot, 2013). Like the patina on long-buried archaeological remains, these spaces have an aesthetic quality that cannot be manufactured. Gil Doron similarly defines 'landscapes of transgression' as derelict sites where 'nature has started to reconstruct the built or (now) "ruined" environment... space[s] that opened in the dichotomy of what we perceive as city and nature' (Doron, 2000: 255).

Shoard suggests that these sites are separated from the "true" countryside and thus from the human pressures being placed on the rural environment, 'making it more convincing as wilderness than "greenfield" land in the countryside' (Shoard, 2008: 82). Her paper clearly lays out the ecological importance of these sites, but also the importance these sites play to the local community, through their proximity to our daily lives. They are the sites we pass on our daily commute, but invariably ignore, except for perhaps a fleeting glance out of the train window.

The proximity of these sites to our daily lives, however, doesn't seem to imbue them with a place in our hearts. During the 1960s, Lowenthal and Prince (1964: 309-346) undertook a survey to discover the characteristics of the English landscape that were most desirable. They suggest the countryside loved by the majority is warm, comfortable, humanised, but

most of all, tame and inhabited. This is clearly in keeping with Shoard's greenspace, and in conflict with her view of the urban wildscapes. Tim Edensor further expands on our negativity,

The consignment of ruins to the common category of "wasteland" necessarily obliterates the wide divergences which exist between the characteristics of such space. According to such notions, wasteland is devoid of positive social, material, aesthetic qualities, or it is purely an abstracted and quantitative entity technically identified by the assumed absence of activity or function (Edensor 2005: 9).

## 2.6 Terra Nullius

This absence of function is further highlighted in topographic mapping; an Ordnance Survey map places a zero value on the majority of green/wildspace, unless it is of "more-than-local" social or economic importance. Doron says 'commonly represented on maps as a blank area, an impossible designation of space as *terra nullius* which suggests they are spaces of and for nothing' (2000: 260-1). Further to this he believes that wastelands 'are created by the suspension of new plans for an area' (ibid.) so their representation on the map remains blank. Doreen Massey points to the problems 'relating "the map as representation" to "the map as an agent" in spatial conception, she points to the propensity to disregard the impact that our presumably objective recordings of the world actually project onto the world' (Massey quoted in Bordeleau and Bresler, 2010: 45). When these sites are not assigned a use-value, they are inevitably perceived by many to be negative spaces ripe for 'regeneration', where value is added, (usually by corporations), whereas ruins rebut the notion that all space is the site of current or future production (Lefebvre, 1991). Instead they are sites of activities that do not fit within 'official' or 'appropriate' uses (Doron, 2000). These 'scars on the landscape' (Edensor, website, 2005) form sites for alternative forms of public life to exist, which Edensor splits into the following categories:



- Plundering: the asset stripping of anything that can be recycled for money,
- Home making: 'the persistence of numbers of homeless people means that ruins continue to be utilised as a resource for temporary shelter'.
- Adventurous play: urban exploration, graffiti, illicit sexual encounters, drug use, raves. (Edensor, 2005: 23-5)

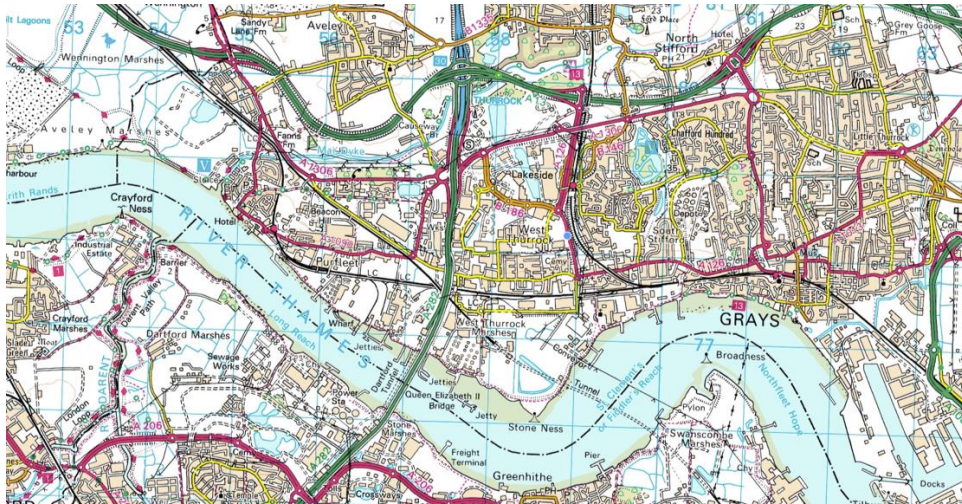


Figure 2-4 the extent of terra nullis in the West Thurrock area, adapted by the author from, Ordnance Survey (2015) *Greenwich and Gravesend*, sheet 162, 1:25,000.

Southampton: Ordnance Survey (Explorer Series)

In JG Ballard's novel *Concrete Island* (1974) the protagonist, Maitland, meets the human equivalents of this discarded landscape in the form of Proctor and Jane, two homeless dwellers who have made the island their own, both are on the run from oppressive systems of control. The island, reconfigured by Ballard as a container of social debris (both geographical and human), becomes a space where social relations can begin again, where the social order is decommissioned, recombined, reconstructed and reshaped in ways that subvert dominant systems of thought. Maitland comes to see the island much as Proctor and Jane do, as a psychic 'go-zone' (Sellars, website, 2009) where he can escape the pressures of his relationships with his wife and mistress and of his job, 'free to rove forever within the empty city of his mind.' (ibid., 2009). The formation of this 'go-zone' exists slightly outside the notion of legality, just as Sennett suggests the road forms a boundary between one state and another (Sennett, website, 2008), they exist within the thickness of the line, the patch of soft estate (Chell, 2014) caught between the road and the fence.

These activities undoubtedly take place – indeed when you're in these variously named spaces you are surrounded by the material remains of such engagements – but despite the amount of time I have spent in them for this research, I have rarely encountered other people. When I did encounter others, they appeared as everyday people who just happen to have interests different to societal norms (Harper, 2005). Despite these experiences, these exaggerated views of edgelands as 'dens of inequity' prevail, certainly within the eyes of the news media. And why is this? Because the material remains are unreconciled perhaps? Confronted with the materiality of space that is not maintained in a superficial state, the media is quick to find hopelessness there? Or are we eager for it, actually? Does some part of us know that there is something authentic there in the strange configurations of 'vibrant' assemblages, which we're drawn to? Edensor (2005: 35-42) argues that representations of these spaces are woven into popular culture, typically serving as sets for cinematic portrayals of dystopian near futures as highlighted by numerous films such



as *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999). While the film presents an edgeland or deindustrialised space, (the film's crumbling ruin of a Victorian mansion is sited on Paper Street), whose use certainly falls outside the societal normalities, it also paints a view of the interstitial zone as a place of escape from the pressures of society, in doing so the space once again becomes a psychic 'go-zone', and the narrator's<sup>11</sup> relationship to it mirrors Maitland's in *Concrete Island*.



Figure 2-5 Film Still, *Fight Club* (1991) Directed by David Fincher [Film]. USA: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox

## 2.7 Common Ground

Expanding on the notion of 'go-zones' we can think of these interstitial sites as common grounds (Cowen, 2015). We can think of the wider idea of an edgeland, as an organically-formed shared space and contribute to the possibility of attributing commonality between edgeland sites to form archipelagos, while at the same time

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<sup>11</sup> Edward Norton's character is never named in the film, and is simply credited as The Narrator.

alluding to their place within the contemporary landscape. Edgelands can be seen to act as unofficial urban commons, adopted by the public for a range of activities;

Unlike most other urban public spaces, they are not prescriptive: each individual seems free to do in them as they choose. Consequently these places fulfil a multiplicity of different roles for different people. They are places to take short cuts, walk the dog, wander about, gather blackberries, hang out, light a fire, dump rubbish, sleep rough, take drugs, ride a motorbike, build a den or chop down trees, to give but a few examples (Jorgensen et al, 2007: 455).

Very often the interstitial landscape is the spaces that aren't clearly privatised, especially valuable and unique in the city, where privatisation moves like a virus. In many rural UK spaces, the openness of the countryside is equally a myth – farmland is equally privatised (and subsidised). While the edgelands are equally privatised they are surrounded by SLOAP (Spaces Left Over After Planning) (Burdett, 2005), they are owned but generally not valuable enough development land to be policed, meaning they are utilised by a range of actors, for a range of diverse usage. However, they still generally form the entrance ways to wasteland sites waiting for investment and development, which places them under risk.

The edgeland is also formed following the implementation of urban growth. Building developments, the increase in urban grid scale and re-programming form boundaries based on obsolescence. Irregular shaped, small-scale sites, outmoded buildings and backstreets, are marginalised by dominant developments, forming pockets of cut off space. (Hanley and Dargavel, Conference Paper, 2012: 5)

They are space you can tramp around in with a sense of freedom, and be relatively confident that there will be no one else there. They form a meshing of human and nature, so they act as a perfect microcosm for the world at large.

The idea of urban commons has been written about by Bradley Garrett, writing about a patch of wood on the edge of Lancaster and its position within the community, as well as its contested nature with developers. 'Who owned the land has been, for as long as most locals could remember, ambiguous and irrelevant. The only policing of this territory was between visitors. In other words, they treated it as a common ' (Garrett, online article, 2016).

The idea of the common becomes the best way to describe these complex sites, they are not edgelands in the Shoard sense, but neither are they her true wildscapes. They retain an air of ad hoc communal ownership, until the point that they become targets for redevelopment, often these are brownfield sites by their nature, or pockets of space being held in stasis until the market conditions become right for investment and development.

Dougald Hind in *Build the City* (2015) suggests that commons exist 'as a fabric of relations that is built, rebuilt, and renegotiated over generations' (Hind quoted in Garrett, online article, 2016), and this is true of ordained commons, which legally must be used for recreation purposes over a twenty year period. However, although edgeland environments have 'direct links to global economic, political, and social networks' (Angus, 2015), most will have a far shorter lifespan than the twenty-year period deemed necessary to obtain official designation as commons spaces. Garrett, in response to Hind, writes that the reality of these sites is that. 'Commons cannot be made, they must emerge... commons can be *de facto* space used in practice but not necessarily ordained by law... unlike public space, a common may emerge in any kind of space' (Garrett, online article, 2016).

Geographer David Harvey explores the converse situation where the 'loss of urban commonalities reflect the seemingly profound impacts of the recent wave of privatisations, enclosures, spatial controls, policing, and surveillance upon the qualities of urban life in general' (2012: 68). The often-complex ownership of these sites, at times

owned by unlocatable foreign entities, means that often the only method of access is trespass. This can be as simple as stepping on to a grass verge, or as complex as crawling under a steel palisade fence on a Sunday morning, when you know that security is at its least effective.

## 2.8 Trespass

The idea contained within an archipelago of interstitial ground formed my earliest notion of wilderness, both physical and psychological, as spaces that I could claim as my own, albeit temporarily, and they were also the first sites that I trespassed into. The importance of trespass to our notion of land access cannot be underplayed, historically as a means of civil dissent it has been used to shape our access to the landscape, notably either through the Leveller movement, destroying enclosure of the common lands, or later on through the Kinder Scout mass trespass in 1932. It is worth noting that many of the lands now protected as commons, or even held by the National Trust, had their legal use period established through trespass. Within contemporary movements it is a key component to the urban exploration community and was highlighted at Oxford University's *Trespassing in Fieldwork* symposium (2014), where Garrett argued that trespass is a vital and longstanding method in our creation of place. As children, he argued, we develop our understanding of the world through curiosity and exploration, both forms of physical and psychological trespass. However, as we get older our desire to explore is diminished by outside agencies, which aim to regulate and normalize our use of the landscape (Garrett, online video, 2014).

Garrett was initially attracted to Freeman's Wood<sup>12</sup> through the work of artist Layla Curtis. Curtis' artwork, a digital story platform only available when one crossed a virtual geofence into private land, forcing the user to trespass, plays with our notion of public and private ownership, encouraging us to transcend the coding of outside agency and step through the palisade fence onto the contested soil of the other side. The app *Trespass* (2015) is a geo-fenced exploration of Freeman's Wood, told through the stories of its users. In parallel to the site Rob Cowen investigates in his eponymous book, Freeman's Wood becomes rendered through Curtis' work as common ground, in both senses of the word, separated by distance but connected. The nature of Curtis' app means both the audience and the community can only experience the site through an act of transgression, creating a connection and understanding between all parties, as well as the means for new interactions to happen within the field, outside the confines of the app.

Kenny Cupers' project *Where do you breathe* (2004) is an early precursor to Curtis' work. Part photographic work, part GIS platform, the work asked its audience to submit photos to a map of London that depicted places where they breathe on walks through the urban periphery. Cupers describes the images as an 'evocation of London as a fluid landscape of possibility and change' (Cupers, 2007). In doing so he is highlighting the tidal ebb and flow within the city that directly translates to the ebb and flow within the city's urban footprint and that conforms to the earlier idea of a landscape in constant process and movement.

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<sup>12</sup> Freeman's Wood is a plot of land on the edge of Lancaster that has been used by local people for decades, and which they regard as common land. Spiked metal fencing was installed around it between November 2011 and January 2012, together with "Warning - Keep Out" signs. Many of the site's various tree houses, and a complex system of bike jumps, which had been constructed by local people, were destroyed.



Figure 2-6 Kenny Cupers, *N 51:30:30 - E 0:04:00*, 11.06.2004, *walk alongside docklands and city airport - see planes take off at old pier site - sit down and feel the wind*, from *Walking As Do-it-Yourself Urbanism*, 2005

Both Cupers' and Curtis' work highlights the importance the community consciousness plays in the recognising and formation of new spaces, which seem 'schizophrenic and pregnant with "other spaces"' (Cupers, 2007: 8). These 'other spaces' manifest themselves through the art work as both physical and psychological, where 'each urban user/producer has the ability to construct their own reality in the urban landscape'. The spaces become a mirror for the individual, giving the user what they need:

The desire to escape from the multiplicities of the urban, away from the crowds into the continuous of the natural... The rational is more pragmatic: where does my body find a comfortable space to walk and rest? The ambivalence of the walk is defined by this continual search for a potential outside that will turn out to be situated on the inside (Cupers, 2007: 7).

The agent of much of edgeland space is not the human, but the constant interplay between the human and the landscape, between mind and space, between the inside and the outside. After all, these spaces are at a liminal frontier. Berger further states that 'the in-between landscapes of the horizontal city are liminal because they remain at the margins, awaiting societal desire to inscribe them with value and status' (Turner, 1969: 94, referenced in Berger, 2006: 29). Gareth Rees suggests that the edgeland is entirely psychological, 'the City of London becomes a psychological edgeland at certain times of day, at others it's bustling and full of people... I've seen taggers and the doggers and the prostitutes – they have a very different map... a very different temporal space' (Rees, website, 2014). This resulting conflicting reality and overlapping of uses creates 'a city that is the conglomerate of overlapping and sometimes opposing realities of its users' (Cupers, 2007: 4).

## 2.9 Non-Place

Within spatial orientated discourse, edgeland and the interstitial landscape has been described as non-places<sup>13</sup> (Brogden, 2006 2007, 2011; Kabo, 2015; Price, 2012, 2014).

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<sup>13</sup> Augé suggests that 'clearly the word 'non-place' designates two complementary but distinct realities: spaces formed in relation to certain ends (transport, transit, commerce, leisure), and the relations that individuals have with these spaces. Although the two sets of relations overlap to a large extent, and in any case officially (individuals travel, make purchases, relax), they are still not confused with one another; for non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. (Augé, 1995: 94)'

Anna Minton suggests that non-place, or at least a representation of non-place, is built into the fabric of the Thames Gateway.

As a reaction to centralised planning initiatives with the UK during the 1950s and 60s, a group of writers, architects and planners proposed the idea of the non-plan. Published in 1969 in *New Society* and written by Peter Hall, Cedric Price, Reyner Banham and Paul Barker, the article was called *Non-Plan: An Experiment in Freedom* (1969). By looking at cities throughout history the authors believed that planning rides roughshod over the people that live there, an idea that could be seen as an erosion of the sense of place within the original locale. They believed that by removing planning they would create a situation where 'one would find out what people want' or 'one might discover the hidden style of mid twentieth-century Britain' (New Society, 1969). One of the paper's authors would go on to be one of the originators for the Docklands Enterprise Zone, that would go on to become the first phase of the Thames Gateway. This initial enterprise zone's early development owes much to the non-planning philosophy.

The paper's authors argued that planning was largely based on a hierarchy that was aristocratic and oligarchic. They believed that the removal of the doctrinaire rigidity would free up British style and culture. Barker (1999) suggests that without the enterprise zone that resulted from non-plan, we wouldn't have the monuments to capitalism that are Gateshead Metro Centre, the first of Britain's super malls, or the pinnacle of the London Docklands development, the Cesar Pelli designed skyscraper One Canada Square, that to many has become known simply as Canary Wharf.

The non-plan cited the petrol station as a reference for the problems within the planning system. Taking this as their starting point they believed that the filling station could be a notable cause for change, incorporating a range of elements such as small post offices, shops and eateries, a concept that they believe was only held back by planning regulations. It is a viewpoint that we have come to recognise as the out of town



supermarket. Ultimately non-plan successfully predicted a move to out of town shopping centres and ribbon development, although they saw it as the model for a the future, comparing it to the freedom and excitement of development in the American West (Minton, 2012:185). However, as Minton (2012) reveals, that didn't happen, instead and especially in developments such as London Docklands and The Thames Gateway, a lack of local-government involvement in the planning process resulted in the homogenisation of the planned environment. Minton suggests 'that this is because "non plan" not only made the places developers wanted, but created the "non places" as identified by ... Marc Augé' (Minton, 2012: 185). The places are ubiquitous, however devoid of a sense of the local, instead trying hard to import their own culture and vitality, which simply results in creating fake themed environment where everything is controlled and far from unplanned and spontaneous.

This effect is visible in edgeland entertainment complexes such as the Medway Valley Leisure Park with its pedestrianised 'main street' of chain restaurants, replete with the 'Waters Edge' simulacrum of a public house, with beer garden overlooking and framing the Medway Crossing. The essay's major problem is failing to acknowledge that removing the planning controls, does not free up the people to make choices, instead the market is left unchecked to make choices that predominately fail to meet public demand, and instead work on behalf of the market and capital. Due to the 2015 decision to automatically grant planning permission to brownfield development (Clark, 2015), we may be returning the factors that resulted from the non-plan.

As I have said, while I agree on some level with the notion of edgelands constituting a form of non-place, I am less inclined to accept that the interstitial landscape can be considered in this sense. Andrew Price is a writer and a founding member of the American Strong Towns movement, a group dedicated to supporting models of development that allow America's cities, towns, and neighbourhoods to become financially strong and resilient (Strong Towns, 2013). Within his writing he categorises

the idea of place as destinations - parks, plazas, and building interiors - while non-places are the padding between destinations; highways, parking lots, and greenspace. He suggests that from a walkability perspective, non-places use up valuable land area without contributing anything, and while he concedes some non-places are necessary infrastructure, a good city planner should attempt to minimise the amount of land assigned to non-places as much as possible (Price, 2012, 2014). This is a planning argument that I have come across before that wrongly sees place, and non-place, as economic polar opposites, both in terms of financial value and the wider notion of social value. This view is, in part, connected to how we see these sites, acronyms like TOAD (temporary obsolete, abandoned or derelict) (Greenberg et al, 1992). While the Edgelands programme at Manchester School of Architecture (MSA) (Hanley and Dargavel, 2013) doesn't call for the complete erasure of inner city interstitial site, it is looking to regenerate areas it deems of 'low economic value' (ibid). Part of the reason for this prevailing attitude, I believe, has to do with the scale at which we look at these sites, by observing them from a metropolitan perspective. This level of viewing and failing to adopt a macro/micro perspective, leads them to appear detached, especially through the hard boundaries that they may appear to exhibit. This is no different from the notion of terra nullius explored earlier, which along with Coleman's land use survey, means the landscape when viewed at this scale, can only be rendered from a basic level of cartographic categorisation. Paglan (2009) suggests that contemporary geography has little more than a cursory relationship with cartography, and is critical of cartographies 'God's-eye' perspective, which as above, I would argue leads to a removal of bodily interaction with the subject, meaning that it is no longer a human scaled representation of place, but instead an abstracted one, which means it can only ever be considered a depiction of space. He states 'that as useful as maps can be, they only provide very rough guides to what constitutes a particular space' (Paglen, 2009). This idea supports the argument that to develop a sense of place within the Thames Gateway I need to develop

an embodied methodology that places value on fieldwork and experience in doing so this will allow me to conform to the ideas of the development of place and landscape.

The photographer and spatial theorist James Brogden (2011) in his thesis *Encountering the "Non-Place"* attempts to open up the way we relate to the interstitial landscape and the idea of non-place. In his introduction Brogden positions non-place as falling into the realms of liminal space. These constructions of late era capitalism, present as 'exiled' urban zones, a liminal no-man's land (Brogden, 2011: 325). While Brogden positions the interstitial (ibid) brownfield landscape within the confines of Augé's non-place, he is doing so as a reaction to a widely held public consensus. He believes that forming a dialogue between site and audience, through his photography and writing, that he is able to challenge and remove the idea of 'non', from non-place.

By questioning the idea of edgelands and non-place, we are questioning what constitutes place and whether, as an ethnographer, you can learn a place, but never know if any space is not a place? Because if the landscape has a subjectivity that can be the subject of your ethnography, it must follow that it is impossible to 'know' certain aspects of the landscape.

## 2.10 Conclusion

Within this chapter I have defined the concept of edgelands, and its position in the wider lexicon of interstitial land. By placing it within this wider sphere, I have demonstrated that while at first it might be considered a form of non-place, heavily reliant on its global connections, it is in fact heavily localised and unique. This counters the notion that it is merely a form of sprawl, or waste ground that is awaiting development. By considering these spaces as contemporary commons it is possible to view them as sites of both human and non-human importance, within both the local and wider space. In doing so these sites, which in turn form a wider urban archipelago, could be considered as heterotopia.

However, to open them up in this way requires us to reconfigure and break the boundaries formed by a complex web of outside agencies. Within the concept of landscape ethnography, if we consider the Thames Gateway as the location of my mapping, then we must consider the edgeland environment as the means to start this mapping. This shift in viewpoint, and the sea of connections that supports it, can only be achieved through acts of physical and metaphorical trespass in an environment that as Shoard suggested, we not supposed to linger in.

Within the next chapter I will explore how artists started to represent this landscape and how the new topographic movement reconfigured the idea of 'ruin' space breaking from the landscape art tradition of the picturesque and sublime, to form a new concept of wilderness.

## 3 Landscape as Ruin – Edgeland Representation

The most important thing is to multiply the readings of the city (Lefebvre, 1996: 159).

This chapter explores and contextualises some of the artistic bodies of representation that have arisen around the idea of edgeland spaces, and have also helped to visually define its characteristics. Since Shoard (2002) first coined the term edgelands, a huge body of artistic work has grown up to surround the term. A number of recent gallery shows have taken the term as their curatorial focus, including *Soft Estate* at the Bluecoat (2013-14), *Edgelands* at the Camden Art Centre (2015), and *Resident* at Metal Peterborough (2016). As such, the volume of work concerned with edgelands is too great to document in one chapter, instead I will look at work that has helped define my own creative practice and that has been informed by some of the wider ideas that accompany edgelands.

I will also demonstrate that the artistic representation of edgelands has been informed by work and ideas that predate the first use of the term. The idea of edgelands is closely linked to ideas of the sublime and picturesque, as well as notion of the bucolic and the effects of the industrial revolution on the English landscape. It is possible to see touches of edgelands within the works of J.M.W Turner, and L.S. Lowry. Turner's painting *Rain, Steam and Speed* (1844), is an allegory for the fast development of the industrial revolution. Some think this is a reference to the limits of technology (Hanning, 2010:

402), while others believe the animal is running in fear of the new machinery and Turner meant to hint at the danger of man's new technology destroying the inherent sublime elements of nature (Meslay, 2005: 133). However, either way, the depiction of the hare being chased down by the speeding train, places urban and rural in direct conflict with each other.



Figure 3-1 JMW Turner, *Rain, Steam and Speed*, 1844

### 3.1 ‘Terrain Vague’

To return to and expand on the idea of *terrain vague* covered briefly in Chapter One, Ignasi de Sola-Morales believed that photography formed our reading of the city,

‘The inhabited continuums of the first, second and third worlds have entered our memory and imagination by way of photography. Landscape photography, aerial photographs, and photographs of buildings... constitute a principle vehicle for information that makes us aware of the built and human reality that is the modern metropolis’ (Sola-Morales, 1995: 120).

De Sola-Morales also highlighted literature, painting, video and film as forming our imagination of place, shaping our gaze, since to develop it through first hand experience involves accumulation, and by extension prolonged time. We can remotely achieve a sense of place through immersion in representations of these places. These are places we cannot 'know' traditionally. Cresswell and Dixon explore this notion in their work *Engaging Film: Geographies of Mobility and Identity* (2002) which explores how moving image has been used inside the classroom as a critical pedagogical tool. In fact it was through photography that Sola-Morales formed his idea of *Terrain Vague*, through exploring the shift during the 1970s to photographers taking an interest in empty, abandoned spaces. An early example of this is Robert Smithson's *A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic* (1967) where he photographed the region's industrial relics, reimagining and transforming them into monuments.

In doing so, these relics become reminders of a recent history, metaphors for the passage of time (Foster-Rice, 2010: 51). Smithson believed that they were 'ruins in reverse', 'opposite of the "romantic ruin" because the buildings don't *fall* into ruin *after* they are built but rather *rise* into ruin before they are built' (Smithson, 1996: 72). Smithson's monuments are part of the interstitial landscape, and in photographing them and culturally elevating them Smithson is forming the interstitial landscape, not just metaphorically as may be suggested by Paglen's essay (online article, 2009) on experimental geography, but by being one of the first to artistically consider the role of entropy within the contemporary (de)industrial landscape he is forming our understanding of the interstitial landscape. 'Passaic seems full of holes compared to New York City, which seems tightly packed and solid, and those holes, in a sense, are the monumental vacancies that define, without trying, the memory-traces of an abandoned set of futures' (Smithson quoted in Culture Trio, website, 2016).



Figure 6-1 'Monuments of the Passiac' *Robert Smithson, 1967*



These spaces captured by the artist's lens convert, '[the] physical into the psychic, converting the vehicle of the photographic image into a medium through which we form value judgements about these seen or imagined places' (Sola-Morales, 1995: 119). He cites the work of John Davies, David Plowden, Thomas Struth, James Linders, Manolo Laguillo and Olivio Barbieri, as all photographing locations 'where the city is no longer' (ibid.: 120). His view is that this landscape is 'internal to the city, yet external to its everyday use', they are sites where the 'past seems to predominates (sic) over the present'. They exist outside 'the city's effective circuits and productive structures'.

Luc Lévesque responds to Sola-Morales with the view that *terrain vague* offers a counterpoint to the way order and consumption holds sway over the city. By allowing room for spontaneous, creative appropriation, and informal uses that would otherwise have trouble finding a place in public spaces. Through subjection, increasingly to the demands of commerce, 'the "terrain vague" is the ideal place for a certain resistance to emerge, a place potentially open to alternative ways of experiencing the city.' (Levesque, website, 2002)

Marion Shoard proposes, at the end of *Edgelands* (2002) and *A Call to Arms* (2008), a series of strategies to increase interest in our edgeland spaces of which she believes wildscape is a vital element (Shoard, 2008: 89) as a meeting point for 'not just wildlife but history as in the stratified layers of an archaeological site', a notion that mimics the practice of psychogeography, as briefly laid out in the introduction and further defined in greater depth in Chapter Three. Shoard argues that multiple readings of edgelands from a range of actors can challenge the notion 'that they provide a theatre for shocking and threatening behaviour' (ibid.: 90).

Shoard, along with Farley and Symmons Roberts, highlights the pre-existing bodies of artistic work that captured the 'interface' (Shoard, 2008 :20) before they formed the notion of edgeland. Shoard describes it as a history of 'scruffy landscapes occurring

elsewhere, such as shacks and broken-down fencing'. She then argues for the development of visual practices that capture 'the dynamism that the interface enshrines, rather than simply the decay and redundancy with which artists usually identify it'.

### **3.2 Ruination**

Yesterday I saw some ruins, beloved ruins of my youth which I knew already...  
and I thought again about them, and about the dead whom I had never known and  
on whom my feet trampled (Flaubert, 1847, quoted in Woodward, 2010: 72).

As discussed in Chapter One, Shoard's view of the artistic depiction of edgelands demonstrates the subject's propensity to be seen to be stuck in the realms of the picturesque, wrapped in notions of the romantic and sublime. Further to this, landscape imagery can be said to be dominated since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by the romantic aesthetic of the picturesque and sublime. Edensor believes that the negativity surrounding industrial ruins - and therefore somewhat by extension edgelands - stems from their failure to comply to the visual aesthetic that surrounds traditional notions of ruin space (Edensor, 2005: 10). He separates ruin space into a 'classical view of archaic ruins. These include crumbling medieval townships and castles, decrepit stately homes, and the 'fake' ruins erected on eighteenth century estates' (Ibid., 2005: 11). Separate to these is industrial ruination, which he argues that contemporary depictions, still linger in aesthetic of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, sustaining 'an iconography of dereliction which widely bypasses contemporary urban ruins' (Ibid., 2005: 11).

The colloquial use of the term picturesque, to define any view of the countryside that is attractive, or speaks to an Arcadian England, defies its original meaning. The use of ruination in the picturesque acts as a metaphor for not just the passing of time, but 'departed grandeur and the transience and fragility of that, which in appearance, was indestructible; tangible warnings to the living impermanence of stone and flesh' (Zucker,

1968: 198), indicative of the fall of empires. This is further exemplified by the visual tropes of the genre and its connection to the sublime. 'Lively light and dark interplay, rough textures' (Hawes, 1988: 6), combined with 'stormy clouds and looming edifices depicting the requisite atmosphere of awe' (Edensor, 2005: 11). Janowitz (1990:2) suggests that by connecting us to the past, ruins act as icons of British 'heritage', that can be reclaimed as 'the physical trace of an historical event'. Further to this Ann Bermingham (2002) describes the picturesque as a form of political metaphor. The picturesque 'linked art and nature with special closeness'. Through it, the English countryside was both aestheticised and transformed into the embodiment of nature itself. 'The highest praise for nature was to say that it looked like a painting' (Bermingham, 1986: 57) with the aesthetic observer tending to mimic the position of a privileged landowner who 'disdains active intervention in the lives of the poor' (Bermingham, 2002: 68-69), in this way the picturesque artwork through its framing and aesthetic choices can be said to be mimicking the act of enclosure, by presenting a landscape of, and for the privileged classes.<sup>14</sup>

I have often thought of the landscape as a sponge, absorbing every event and story that has played out on it and is waiting to leak out of the saturated soil with every footstep. Those of us who are receptive to the layers of history within the landscape, often find ourselves inexplicably drawn to certain ruin sites. Ruination is a concept that has been accelerated by the industrial revolution and technology. The 'capacity for ruination is no longer the work of an indiscriminate fate but an ineluctable part of the post-modern world order. The cycle of building and dereliction seems to have accelerated to the point where

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<sup>14</sup> Landscape ethnography's immersive methodology and presentation aim to produce works that allow the landscape to be opened up for the observer, instead of acting as a form of enclosure. In particular while my film works, at times utilise a traditional landscape aesthetic, by presenting my final film *Zone of Change* (2017) without a voiceover, I am attempting to form a more immersive landscape experience, than simply presenting my enclosed reading of it.

there is no distinction between the process of building and the process of ruination',  
(Jorgensen, 200; 451, after Roth, 1997: 20).

This shift from nature and time to culture and politics as our main method of ruination creates a compression of history. The urban wasteland demonstrates a deepening of the layers of historic strata; our urban environment is built on top of its ghosts. 'The contemporary city has many layers. It forms what we might call a palimpsest, a composite landscape made up of different built forms superimposed upon each other with the passing of time,' (Harvey, conference paper, 2000).

All of these ideas can be seen in the Thames Gateway, as well as the visible acceleration of the ruination process. This is particularly apparent at The Isle of Grain, on the Hoo Peninsular. The Grain power station is built on the site of the former BP oil refinery, which had a lifespan from 1948 to 1982. The refinery's footprint can still be seen in Google Earth aerial images. The power station was mothballed in 2012, and has since experienced a phased demolition. Not only did these sites exert a sense of sublimity during their lifetime, but in ruin, they continue to remind us of our own power to create and destroy. Both sites were closed, not because they were no longer necessary, but because they were no longer economically or politically relevant, with the power station, (along with others in the Thames Gateway), failing to meet future emissions targets (Gosden, online article, 2014). While some of our infrastructure may be hundreds of years old, some is less than fifty, but at the same time what we are seeing is an accelerated period of redevelopment. Many of the structures have been adapted over successive periods, and now are themselves a palimpsest.



Figure 3-2 Partially demolished Grain Power Station, May 2016, taken from *Zone of*

*Change*, 2017

*Living outside the Thames Gateway region means that I miss the gradual changes in the landscape, instead developments appear like time-lapse films, accelerated and fractured. Be it the sudden appearance of a series of distribution centres or the clearing of a wildflower meadow, to be replaced with tightly packed rows of red brick mid-century vernacular homages. The area is a stark contrast to the area I recorded six months ago when fatheaded poppies listed in the gentle breeze. Now that carpet of colour is replaced by the uniform orange of the freshly scraped soil, track marks from heavy machinery criss-cross the site, mimicking the well-worn paths that used to be here.*

*The corner of the site that sits next to the A2 has been neutered of its connection to the National Grid. Wires dangle uselessly from the remaining pylons, cut off from the substation that used to sit on the site. Soon any remnants of its past life will be gone. Its short period between its former life and its new one of buy to let mortgages, remembered by the few that jumped the fence, undeterred by the signs warning that trespassers would be prosecuted, instead looking to enjoy a small space of respite in the rapidly changing region.*

*Slightly further down the A2, caught between the old and new road network, is a former motel. Strange pockets of land exist between the new road and old Watling Street, which up until a few years ago was the original course of the A2.*

*Cafes, petrol stations and motels sit idle, many boarded up, unable to sustain themselves now that they are marooned from passing trade by the immaculate greenery of the Highways Agencie's new soft estate.*

*Like Robert Maitland in Ballard's Concrete Island they are marooned within sight of salvation, 'alone in this forgotten world whose furthest shores were defined only by the roar of automobile engines... an alien planet abandoned by its inhabitants, a race of motorway builders who had long since vanished but had bequeathed to him this concrete wilderness'. The reality is that very few will stop to explore these locations, barely seen, seldom acknowledged*

*as they are whisked down the road, 70mph, on to the destination, always the destination. The roadway, a metaphor for our understanding of the urbanised world, everything is now bypassed, unable to step off the path for fear of becoming lost, places dissolve from our internal maps.*

*The motel's two storey buildings step up the gentle hill. Adapted into an American style, a drive way meanders through the site, parking spaces in front of each room. It fits into the collection of old petrol stations and diners that exist along the former road's periphery. Victims to the new road, cut off from the modern junctions. The single carriageway with its convenient drop curbs, rendered obsolete by the eight lanes of rapidly moving traffic, now only able to stop at branded and authorised establishments, such as the new McDonalds that will soon inhabit the site. The motel's only resident is the security guard housed in a motorhome in the overgrown car park, protecting the site from vandals and the curious explorer.*

*Behind the hotel is a patch of scrub grazing land, sticking out of the thick hedge line is a green finger post pointing in the direction of the busy trunk road. Stranded, a heavy gate bars you in one direction and an endless stream of traffic in the other. The farmland that the footpath once crossed is long gone; the only route across the busy road is a wide bridge, decorated with a motif of metal rabbit outlines. A reminder of past lives and previous inhabitants. Ghosts and empties.*

## **Ruin Porn**

The contemporary photographic depiction of ruins has come to be known colloquially by the term 'ruin porn' (Griffioen quoted in Morton, 2009, Woodward, 2013, Doucet and Philp, 2016). James Griffioen, writer and photographer of *Sweet Juniper*, a Detroit-based blog, is credited with the creation of the term ruin porn. He was first quoted using it in a 2009 article in *Vice* magazine exploring the city after the 2008 financial crisis. Griffioen voiced his disgust with journalists and artists who would drop into the city to record and lament its decline without considering the events, stages, and forces that had led up to it.

'[They] gravitated to the most obvious (and over-photographed) "ruins," and then used them to illustrate stories about problems that had nothing to do with the city (which has looked like this for decades). I take pictures of ruins, too, but I put them in the context of living in the city'.

Some of the same principles, he noted that applied to pornography, 'exploitation, detachment, etcetera', applied to this situation. Ruin Porn faces the suggestion that the

photographic image acts as a tool that separates the viewer from the act of ruin, and therefore the lives of the people that still live with the situation. This is a view that is often levelled at bodies of work dealing with Detroit's deindustrialisation (Griffioen quoted in Morton, 2009). While the term was derived to deal with bodies of work exploring Detroit, such as Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre's *The Ruins of Detroit* (2010) or Andrew Moore's *Detroit Disassembled* (2011), it has also been used to describe the proliferation of photobooks that have grown up around the urbex community, the most well-known of which is the *Beauty in Decay: Urbex: The Art of Urban Exploration* series (RomanyWG, 2010, 2011). It can be argued that these works fetishise ruins, or we can consider them simply holding a mirror up to society and allowing the audience to question the wider social politics of the situation.



Figure 3-3 Yves Marchand and Romain Meffre, *Auditorium, Jane Cooper Elementary School, Spring 2009, The Ruins of Detroit*. 2010

As has been suggested by Zucker, Janowitz, and Bermingham, the ruin acts as a reminder and metaphor of the fragility of empires. The danger is that the metaphor oversimplifies the very complex issues, especially in Detroit, where these issues have led to the mass depopulation of the city and continue to blight tens of thousands of people who face foreclosure on their homes. At best, ruin porn acts as a form of metonymy to discuss risks within late era capitalist societies, at worst it is gawping at its effects.

More recently the term has been co-opted to also describe the coffee table books that explore the ruin aesthetic surrounding disasters zones, Pripyat and Chernobyl, Fukushima, Ground Zero, Hurricane Katrina. In particular, Robert Polidori's post Katrina work *After The Flood* (2006) has been levelled with criticism, with a photographer's choice to include, in his final edit, a photograph of a former resident lying dead in his own bed. To many this was one image that crossed a line, especially in relation to the fetishisation of ruins. However, I would argue that it is this image that stops the body merely being ruin porn and reconnects it to the uncomfortable reality of the event. The reason that we photograph ruins during this time is they are solid structures that stand the test of time; to see them rendered in this way challenges our sense of stability. The repeated cycle of images on 24 hours news, (which could also be labelled as porn), of people, after these events may have left us desensitised to the images. By depicting the pillars of capital through images of destroyed infrastructure the photographers are confronting us with monuments to our own folly, just as Smithson did during 1967. However it is difficult for us to confront through ideas of scale, both of ourselves, and the event. Meaning instead, we attempt to weaken its power through the adoption of terms like ruin porn, which is described as a 'phrase so immature and gawky it isn't sure how to take itself seriously' (Woodward, online article, 2013).



Dobraszczyk speaks of this kind of work being concerned with 'dead cities' (2017) and connects their representation to the 'apocalyptic imagination' (ibid, 2017: 5). Sontag's critique of disaster cinema (1965) can be utilised to question our relationship to the dead city and ruin porn. Sontag argues that it allowed viewers to gain a 'dispassionate, aesthetic view of destruction' realising the moral obligation to confront 'what is psychologically unbearable,' namely the reality of such mass destruction (Dobraszczyk, 2017: 5, after Sontag, 1965: 216).

### **3.3 New Topographics and New Landscape Photography**

While there has been strong tradition of the sublime and the picturesque in landscape photography, typified by the wilderness photography of Ansel Adams, alongside the conceptualism of artists like Morris (and Ed Ruscha), the dominant tradition has been the deadpan mode of New Topographics critical landscape, which accompanied the growth of environmental awareness in the 1960s and 1970s. In later work, like that discussed in Chapter Five, this has of course been recombined with elements of romantic landscape almost as a form of longing for something lost.

*New Topographics: Photographs of a Man-Altered Landscape* (1975) showed 168 photographs of newly built tract housing and mobile homes appearing in the American plains and deserts, warehouses in new industrial parks, the smooth concrete of infrastructure projects and endless car parks, both full and empty. In doing so the curator and photographers would find a new wilderness (Dunaway, 2010: 13-43), outside the confines of the traditional wilderness represented by the f/64 group. This new wilderness on first viewing appears banal, and that is the point. Robert Adams believed that where once images had taught viewers how to see the landscape, new landscape photography could contribute to environmentalism by enlarging the notion of natural beauty and infusing a sense of wonder in everyday spaces. In doing so the New Topographics can be

thought to have paralleled the earlier process where Ansel Adams and the Sierra Club had raised public consciousness of the need for the formation of the US National Park system to protect a disappearing landscape. Robert Adams was concerned that these same images had become so ‘widely accepted as the definition of natural... (that) the implication has been circulated that what is not wild is not natural’ (Adams, 1978: 29-31). He goes on to suggest the wilderness aesthetics’ ‘attention is only to perfection’ which ‘invites... for urban viewers... a crippling disgust; our world is, in most places, far from clean... this leaves photography with a new but not less important job: to reconcile us to half wilderness’ (ibid.).

Robert Adams suggested that there are three modes of landscape picture: geography, autobiography, and metaphor (Adams, 1996: 14). The geographic category is the most basic form of landscape picture, forming an authoritative visual record of place, mainly describing physical and topographic attributes. The work of Anthony Hamboussi and Michael Collins falls into this category, as does the work of traditional survey photography whose aims can perhaps be considered scientific and evidential rather than artistic, work that has a ‘distinctly *geographic* methodology’ (Alexander, 2015: 21). Adams describes the dangers of producing work in any one particular category: ‘geography is, if taken alone, sometimes boring, autobiography is frequently trivial, and metaphor can be dubious. But taken together... the three kinds of information strengthen each other and reinforce what we all work to keep intact – an affection for life’ (Adams, 1996: 14). The combination of these three modes mirror Cowley’s (2008: 7-12) description of the framework surrounding new nature writing as discussed in Chapter One, further confirming to me that this form of landscape photography and film can be considered literary works within the new nature genre. This is one of the key concepts at the heart of landscape ethnography. Adams hoped that ‘because geography by itself is difficult to value accurately – what we hope for from the artist is help in discovering the significance of a place’ (Adams, 1996: 16). The record and survey pictures previously

discussed attempt to present themselves as merely geographic, and fail to contain a sense of inhabitation and, as such, a space for reflection. 'If a view of geography does not imply something more enduring than a specific piece of terrain, then the picture will hold us only briefly' (ibid: 16).



Figure 3-4 Robert Adams, *Tract Housing, North Glenn and Thornton, Colorado*, 1973

It is easy to lose your visual position in the endless identical tract houses within Robert Adams' photographs. Quite often the only visual clue to the image's location is the plains and mountain ranges in the image's background. I would argue that it is here that both Robert and Ansel Adams' work shares similarities. Both are concerned with the loss of the natural landscape, however, within Robert Adams' work, you feel that both the new housing and the wider landscape depict differing forms of wilderness, one seemingly natural and one man made. Robert Adams' work *The New West: Landscape Along the Colorado Front Range* (1974) used the juxtaposition between this new wilderness and the familiar wilderness image to explore environmental degradation (Dunaway, 2010: 13).



Figure 3-5 Robert Adams, cover photograph from *The New West: Landscape Along the Colorado Front Range*, 1974

The contrast and tension between the urban and the natural wilderness is reminiscent of Shoard's edgeland model, and I would argue that *New Topographics* might be a visual precursor to edgelands, in terms of subject matter and framing it in relation to urbanism. The urban/rural dichotomy, the notion of sprawl, deindustrialisation and a changing economic model, are all themes that infect the edgeland landscape. Farley and Symmons Roberts describe edgelands as being our true wilderness. In *God's Own Junkyard: The Planned Deterioration of America's Landscapes* (1964), Peter Blake questions the landscape so beloved of Ansel Adams, arguing that nature parks only "elevate" us on Sundays and holidays, rather than enrich our lives all year round. They do little to protect

those areas in which most of us live or spend our free time, the areas nearest to our cities and suburbs. This idea is in keeping with later work undertaken by Cupers (2005) and discussed in Chapter One.

The ideas explored by new landscape photography and presented in *New Topographics* would continue to endure and inform work concerned with 'half wilderness' and the edgeland environment. Lewis Baltz would spend his career exploring the changing American landscape, and in particular, the science and technology parks that surround American cities, as well as the businesses that inhabit these non descript buildings and warehouses.

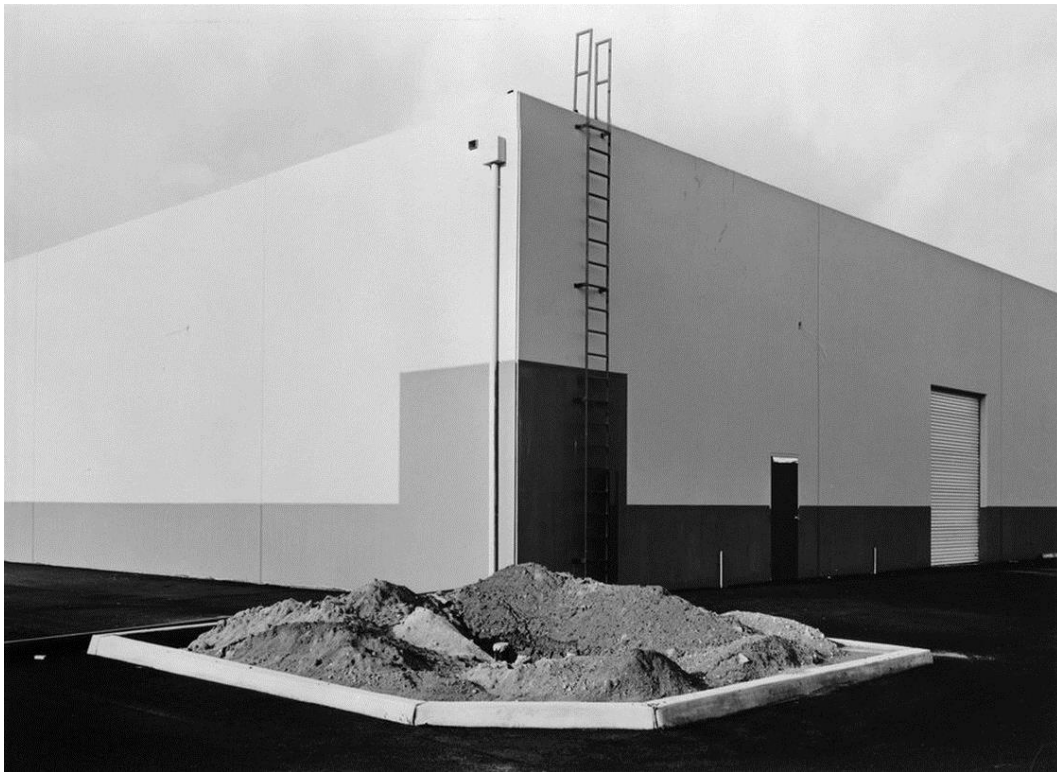


Figure 3-6 Lewis Baltz, *South Corner, Riccar America Company, 3184 Pullman, Costa Mesa*, 1974

One of the main criticisms of this new landscape aesthetic has been of its seeming detachment from its subject matter, and it is the same argument that has been levelled at

‘ruin porn’. Many read its matter-of-factness as a ‘dull reflection of the uniform and banal’ (O’Hagan, online article, 2010).

Bradley Garrett writes about the issues surrounding representation of ruin space, and the danger of the work becoming ‘entrenched in the gaze of the passive theoretical spectator’ (Garrett, 2010: 378-80) which creates a situation with ‘observers lacking bodies, dissecting ruins metaphorically from the safe distance of a film viewing, an archive, or at best, through a camera lens’ (ibid.).

However, the New Topographics show’s curator William Jenkins attempted to balance the historical aesthetics of both documentary and landscape photography, and it is in doing so that a new genre of photography was created, that would later become known as ‘deadpan’ and be embraced by Bernd and Hilla Becher’s<sup>15</sup> students at the Dusseldorf School. Jenkins said ‘the richness of this group derives in part from a tension between the aesthetic revelations made by the style of each, and what we already know about their referents’ (Ratcliff, 1976: 86-89). From the position of what has been discussed in relation to place and landscape, along with notions of how landscape is formed, I would argue that the belief that new landscape photography is documentary, in the historic sense of the genre, is incorrect. The suggested implication is that matter-of-factness within the New Topographic movement is removed from the emotive power of romanticism and the picturesque. However, I would argue that this seeming matter-of-factness, coupled with the high resolving power of the large format cameras adopted by proponents of the movement, allows the audience to be partially transported to the moment of the image’s conception, and, in doing so, they are free to reflect on the place and form their own judgements of the subject matter and in doing so are constructing and framing their own

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<sup>15</sup> Whose work was included within the New Topographics show.

landscapes based on their personal contextualisation of place. In galleries, you will regularly see people viewing the images from a macro/micro perspective, at first taking in the whole scene and then observing it close up and exploring the detail as they might explore the real place.

Garrett cites his own work along with Edensor, DeSilvey, High and Lewis (2007), and Dobraszczyk as 'working to write stories of ruins from the inside out, stories not about capital, empires... wars, and the production of history but about bodies in places and about places on the margins brought to the centre' (Garrett, 2010: 378-80), which he argues begins 'to erode our static notions of ruins as "wasted space"' (ibid.), which we do through 'embodied, personal and emotional engagement with ruins' (ibid.).



Figure 3-7 Frank Gohlke, *Landscape Los Angeles*, 1974

The New Topographics photographer Frank Gohlke links his work to J. B. Jackson's (1984) view of landscape formation, and defines landscape as 'a human creation, even

when the only interaction involved is the act of perception' (Gohlke, 2009: 140) and argues that we could reconnect with the lost notion of place within landscape art of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century through photography 'providing examples of careful listening' (ibid.: 179), and I would argue that links to Garrett's viewpoint.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored ideas of landscape representation in photography, as well as the development of works that focus on the edgeland and interstitial landscape. I have developed ideas of how landscape photography shifted from a tradition and aesthetic of the picturesque, romantic, and the sublime, leading to the development of a new landscape aesthetic, and through the work of the new topographic movement, defined a new form of wilderness. I have challenged this mode of representation, for its isolation from bodily and multi-sensory engagement. Within the next chapter I will explore how, through the use of a non-representational methodology, an adapted ethnography can be developed that allows for the production of a more-than-representational lens based exploration.



## 4 Not All Those Who Wander Are Lost – Designing an Adapted Ethnographic Methodology

*Solvitur Ambulando*, it is solved by walking.

This chapter explores the development of a fieldwork-based methodology through an embodied engagement with the edgeland landscape of the Thames Gateway. This methodological framework has been developed from a mixture of theoretical reading and the practical application of it.

The coming sections build upon the previous chapters to define the methodology for the production of a series of photographic and video works that fall under the collective title of *Zones of Change* (2013-17). It will further define and unpack notions of landscape, place, and space, as well as exploring my relationship to traditional ethnographic methods of research, and how these have been adapted to arrive at what I am terming 'landscape ethnography', which forms at the meeting point of ethnography, landscape, survey, and wider multi-media productions that utilise, lens based media, aural representations and literary devices to form multi-sensory readings that are both of and about their chosen landscape.

My research has developed primarily from the act of walking as a means of discovery and production, in, and of, the Thames Gateway, which has opened up important questions of both place and non-place. As the focus of this research has been the exploration of a particular form of the landscape, as well as being of a specific place, the notion of landscape, place, and space is an important starting point.

Sarah Pink defines ethnography as “an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture” (Pink, 2007: 18); therefore, by extension, a spatial ethnography is an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing place. At the heart of this thesis is the development of an adapted (auto)ethnographic methodology that is orientated towards the production and representation of landscape. Over the course of the twelve-year period that I have been exploring the landscape of the Thames Gateway I have been striving to develop an embodied method of exploration that speaks of the region’s varied interstitial sites and landscape. During the last four years, when my fieldwork has been at its most intense, I have been spending weeks at a time drifting through the region’s varied natural, and cultural topography, in the hope that I would grow to understand it.

Searching for a landscape epiphany, a moment when the region would open up to me and reveal its true image, which of course is impossible. The concept of truth in this sense is cultural and subjective; all I could do was attempt to interpret the landscape through my own connection with it, framing it in my own way. During my time in the region, my practice would grow, partially in response to landscape, an attempt to find a medium that allowed me to record the multisensory nature of place and landscape<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> This shift in practice will be documented and explored in relation to ideas of representation and place in Chapters Eight and Nine.

This chapter will explore the designing and development of my practice based research methodology, building on ideas explored in Chapter One, surrounding space, place and landscape, and how these states are framed and formed. I will lay out an overview of (auto)ethnographic methods, I will then concentrate on autobiogeography, as a literary framing of a given landscape. By exploring how these terms connect to each other and how they connect to notions of ethnographic study, this will then explore how these disciplines can be incorporated into an adapted ethnography, that has the potential to produce a more-than-representational, more-than-textual (Lorimer, 2005) multisensory ethnography. Through its connection to psychogeography, the practice of walking as a method of embodied exploration will be discussed, including its role in the creation of a sense of place and landscape, before finally discussing the concept of landscape ethnography as a method of incorporating these multiple disciplines into a more-than-representational adapted (auto)ethnography, of, and about the landscape that challenges the outsider/insider status of traditional ethnographic research.

## 4.1 Ethnography

The term ethnography was first introduced in 1922 by Bronislaw Malinowski in his work *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922), and is rooted in the descriptive science of social anthropology. Malinowski's book is about the people of the Trobriand Islands, and was based on his experiences of being detained there during the World War I, living with the islands' indigenous people. Malinowski advocated that instead of study other people from the comfort of university libraries, and that researchers should go out into the field and engage with the communities they were researching. Since this point, ethnography has come to describe the practice of documenting the lifeworld (Vannini, 2014) of other peoples.

As practiced by most geographers, ethnography consists of the analysis of records created during 'ethnographic encounters' (Garrett, 2012: 42), and are driven by qualitative

methods, such as data collection (Rowles and Watkins, 1993: 517), field visits (as originally advocated by Malinkowski), and large-scale surveys (McDowell, 1998: 2136). Garrett argues that while these forms of studies are valuable, the researcher will often maintain an ‘outsider’ status (Garrett, 2012: 43). Garrett further argues for ethnographic methodologies that ‘go deeper’ (ibid.), in particular citing the work of Crang and Cook, who separately undertook ethnographic research into historical re-enactors (Crang), and research into papaya farming (Cook), where they acted as both observer and participants, breaking down the divide between outsider/insider. Together they published their findings in *Doing Ethnographies* (2007). Within their opening introduction they state that ‘while there is an established literature dealing with the poetics and politics of *writing* such ethnographies (Atkinson, 1990, Crang, 1992, Gordon, 1988, Marcus & Clifford, 1986, Marcus & Cushman, 1982, Spencer, 1989) far less has emerged concerning the poetics and politics of *doing* them’ (Crang & Cook, 2007: 4). They go on to further suggest that few researchers have included detailed discussions of how their ‘methods worked in the field’ (ibid). This leaves new ethnographers, unprepared ‘for the losses of “control” and surprising twists and turns which their work can subsequently take’ (ibid), further suggesting that this can lead ethnographers to be drawn to the more ‘predictable’ and ‘controllable’ tried and tested quantitative methods (ibid).

During the course of my fieldwork, I would constantly have to reconfigure and evolve my methodology in light of the experiences of undertaking it. Within Garrett’s ethnographic study of London’s urban exploration community, he states that his goal was to ‘push geographic ethnography even further, to do what futurist Justin Pickard has referred to as “Gonzo ethnography” where the ethnographer ‘groks’ the subject; comprehending (relating intellectually), apprehending (relating emotionally and spiritually) the quiddity, essence, and being of a thing, event or being’ (Garrett after Pickard, 2012: 44). Garrett cites Peter Høeg, suggesting ‘there is only one-way to understand another culture. *Living it*’ (Høeg, 2005: 169). As the subject of this thesis is the orientation of ethnographic

methods towards the representation of the landscape, to adapt Høeg's view, there is only one way to understand another landscape, *Living* it. As already discussed in Chapter One, the landscape is framed and formed through the bodily interaction of the agent. Garrett calls for ethnography that 'goes beyond the participant/observer relationship to becoming an active producer and reproducer' (Garrett, 2012: 44). By utilising an autoethnographic or 'reflexive' (Cant and Sharma, 1998) lens, through which the landscape is viewed I am choosing to mimic the bodily experience of being 'in' the landscape. Sarah Pink defines ethnography as 'an approach to experiencing, interpreting, and representing culture' (Pink, 2007: 18), from which Garrett states that to an extent, every ethnography becomes an autoethnography.

From an ethnographic perspective, my research takes its lead from the methods of the Chicago School of Sociology, where, during the 1920s and 1930s, 'Robert E. Park encouraged his students to "get their hands dirty in real research"' (Anderson, 2009: 371). At times I have taken this idea physically, whether it is in photographing soil samples at West Thurrock in response to Shoard's (2008) writing on the locations post-industrial substrate, the filming of fly tipping sites, or the time spent searching for traces of sexual encounters at dogging sites. Garrett suggests that the Chicago School and the post-World War II, 2<sup>nd</sup> Chicago School, redefined 'deep ethnography' (Garrett, 2012: 45). Clifford Geertz suggests that deep ethnography is a practice of accumulating 'local knowledge' (1983), which is partially the purpose of my 'deep' exploration of the Thames gateway region, as it shifts the representation of the landscape from an outsider to an insider.

Crang and Cook (2007) suggest that while being a now recognised methodology in geography, sociology, and anthropology, the ways that ethnographic research is undertaken and published varies greatly. This thesis demonstrates how these methodologies can be adapted by incorporating cross-disciplinary methods that lead to non-textual outputs, opening ethnographic studies up to a different audience. Garrett, while positioning his urban exploration ethnography as a multi-media autoethnography

Garrett, 2012: 47) is still heavily reliant on textual methods to support this wider multi-media representation. Through combining both the textual and visual, through the use of the more-than-visual (Jacobs, 2013: 714) medium of film and video based production I aim to form a multisensory representation of the Thames Gateway's interstitial landscape that represents its complexity as place.

## **4.1 Psychogeography: A “Deep” Exploration**

I would suggest that J. B. Jackson's (1984, 1994, 2000) views on the formation of 'landscape' share similarities to the idea of the psychogeographer or spatial practitioner producing a deep topography (Papadimitrou, 2012) or deep mapping (Heat Moon, 1991) of the area. (see *PrairyErth: A Deep Map*). Denis Cosgrove describes Jackson's writing on landscape as being 'acutely sensitive to the complexities and ambiguities, as well as the expressive power, that actual landscapes embody' (Cosgrove, 2010: 17). He further suggests that his work contains an 'insider's apprehension of the land: of nature and the sense of place, together with a more critical, socially conscious, outsider's perspective... [towards] landscape “ways of Seeing”' (ibid.). This can be considered to mirror ideas within psychogeographic modes of production where the author may be both inside their subject through an embodied exploration, but outside it from the perspective of notions of viewpoint, which in turn relates to notions of how we frame and create landscape. I would suggest that the notion of 'deep' cartographies (topography, mapping) along with Geertz's deep hanging out, attempt to break the divide between inside and outside, or at least weakens it, through acting as a metaphor for immersed, embodied and engaged forms of exploration of a subject. Within Heat-Moon's book the idea of deep mapping is about excavating the hidden and buried elements below the thin top soil (Roberts after Heat-Moon, 2016: 2-3). In this sense, deep mapping is about archaeology as well as cartography, emphasising the verticality (Schiavani, 2004-5) of the process of exploration, 'plumbing of place's depths' (Gregory Guider, 2005: 5). Harris (2015:29-31)

suggests that horizontality is only for thin mappers, those that fail to peel back the thin deposit of topsoil, and in doing so forget to include the notion and effects of time within their configurations of space and place. Roberts suggests that our role as practitioners is to 'dive within' our subject (Roberts, 2016: 3, after Lynch, 2006) or to fit ourselves into the creases of the map (Wydevan, 1993: 134) which Roberts describes as an idea that 'neatly captures the materiality and performativity that goes into the act of wayfinding: of exploring and placing oneself in the multi-scalar locative dimensions that are opened up through the *act* of deep mapping' (Roberts, 2016: 3). While editing a special issue of *Humanities on Deep Mapping* Roberts, (2016), described deep mapping as:

The idea of "deep mapping", which, as a term, has its origins in the writings of William Least Heat-Moon (but as an idea, "deep mapping" has a much deeper provenance), is one that finds resonance across spatial humanities research more generally. While not necessarily couched in such terms, deep mapping speaks to a rich profusion of perspectives that are, in some shape or form, engaged with the *mapping* or *tapping* of a layered and multifaceted sense of place, narrative, history, and memory. From Historical GIS, to developments in literary or cinematic geography, or work on popular music heritage and the characterisation of place, to approaches that fall under a more generic banner of "psychogeography", deep mapping encompasses a loose set of orientations and practices that give fuller expression to what we have come to understand as "spatial humanities".

This can be either a literal mapping or a looser method of production and links to the idea of walking as a means of practice as explored by Gossage, and the original Situationists through the idea of psychogeography. The birth of psychogeography as an idea can be traced back to Guy Debord, and the Situationist International movement.

Psychogeography: The study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviours of individuals (Debord, 1955: 1)

Guy Debord developed Psychogeography, as leader of French Marxists group known as the Situationists. It is a means, (because methodology suggest something far more organised), to explore and investigate the city. They came up with several methods of doing this, but the most utilised, the *dérive*, [literally drifting (Debord, 2006 [1958]: 120)], which was ‘quite different from the classic notions of journey or stroll... [and involved] playful-constructive behaviour and awareness of psychogeographical effects’ (ibid.). The *dérive* is a technique of ‘rapid passage through varied ambiances... [the *dériviste(s)*] during a certain period drop their relations, their work and leisure activities, and all their usual motives for movement and action, and let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there’ (ibid.). While a stroll usually has a predetermined route and purpose, the *dérive* ‘guides’ the walker through experiences and feelings related to the surroundings. Whilst this lack of destination and purpose may be seen as a weakness, instead by allowing the drift to be led by atmosphere and feelings, leads to an intense experience of the landscape. This is because you are never truly in control of the situation, and merely reacting to, and acting as a conduit for what the landscape might become. In this way, each drift is a unique reading of the environment, and therefore the drifter is complicit in the formation of the landscape. The original idea of the *dérive* can be understood through Robert MacFarlane’s writing on it in *A Road of One’s Own* (2005).

Psychogeography: a beginner's guide. Unfold a street map... place a glass, rim down, anywhere on the map, and draw round its edge. Pick up the map, go out into the city, and walk the circle, keeping as close as you can to the curve. Record the experience as you go, in whatever medium you favour: film, photograph,



manuscript, tape. Catch the textual run-off of the streets: the graffiti, the branded litter, the snatches of conversation... Go out into the city, hungry for signs and portents, and see what happens. Open your mind, let the guiding metaphors of the walk find you.

Throughout the period of activity, the Situationists experienced a shifting relationship to Lefebvre that alternated between closeness and increasing distance. Kevin Hetherington draws on Lefebvre's Marxist perspective on the creation of space as a capitalist enterprise, that interstitial sites may not be physical sites in themselves, but locations of ideological and political resistance, spaces imperfectly formed within capitalism's spatial fabric. Franck & Stevens (2007) contest that these 'loose spaces' occur when the assigned use for a landscape ends, allowing for new uses to replace programmed ones. Gold and Revill (2003) explore how the model of power and vernacular landscapes uses fear to shape the urban landscape, through marginality, spectacle and surveillance.

Psychogeography is utilised as a tool/methodology to challenge an increasingly mundane world by altering ideas of how we explore it, through breaking with the 'normal' codes and conventions that exist within its planning. This compares with urbex's ideas and in particular Garrett's idea of place hacking<sup>17</sup> (2012), which are formed to challenge ideas of, commercialisation (Edensor, 1999) and securitisation (Adey, 2009), in the built environment. Today's psychogeographer, part urban explorer, part chronicler, believes 'the age of discovery is not dead: it lives on through urban explorers.' (Deyo and Leibowitz, 2003). Bradley Garrett who has written widely on the subject of urban exploration, places the urbex community in the tradition of hackers, looking to:

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<sup>17</sup> Garrett describes place hacking as the recoding of closed, secret, hidden and forgotten urban spaces to make them realms of opportunity.

Hack or exploit fractures in physical architecture and social expectations in an effort to find deeper meanings... An interest in the unexpected and underappreciated, and a desire to shatter illusions about control over urban environs through temporary spatial re-appropriation. Through this lens, the practice can be viewed as a tactic utilised to create smooth spaces of openness, transparency and interconnectivity and to appropriate cultural heritage and material memory on local, personal and affective terms (Garrett, 2012: 2-4).

Coverley (2010: 9-10) suggests that as a term psychogeography is strangely familiar, however its strangeness comes from the inability to pin it down as a single methodology, what it means or where it comes from. It is originally linked to the Situationists, while at the same time being connected to contemporary writers such as Iain Sinclair, Peter Ackroyd, and Will Self who could perhaps be considered landscape (auto)biographers, or proponents of what has been termed Sinclairian Psychogeography. It is also the domain of a newer generation of academics and artists, Tina Richardson's Post-Sinclairians.

Is it a literary movement and genre, or a means of political intervention? Is it part of the avant garde, or steeped in new age ideas? The reality is that psychogeography is all those things and more. It is a term that has gone through constant evolution and adaption, by a range of interdisciplinary practitioners that have shaped it to their own ends. While, at the same time, allowing it to absorb a range of themes and ideas from these wider disciplines, which are then passed on, and further reconfigured. It does this, while all the time resisting the urge to be defined. Even for those that practice it, while it might be hard to define, they recognise its signature when viewed in the work of others. People who may not be familiar with the term, but have subconsciously adopted its loose collection of themes and methods in their own spatial practice.

My earliest experience of the Thames Estuary was visiting one of the many Napoleonic-era forts that stand formidably upon its foreshores. My visit to Tilbury Fort as a child, like

so many of my early experiences, fuelled my research and practice in later life. Standing on the thick ramparts, staring out over the sea reach of the Thames I was struck, even then, by the solemnity of the location.

Conrad's narrator in *Heart of Darkness* (1899) can be thought of as a psychogeographer or at the very least, the work acts as a kind of deep mapping, through its concern with exploring the verticality of the landscape history. Conrad explores the resulting effect this landscape has on Marlow, who at times in his role of the narrator is acting as the conduit through which the wider ideas of capital and empire are being critiqued; ideas that are embedded within the creation of this landscape. This can be seen in the passage as he stares out across the Thames at the marshes that surround Tilbury Fort.

Imagine him here-- the very end of the world, a sea the colour of lead, a sky the colour of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina-- and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages, --precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink... Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness...disease, exile, and death... skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush... Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed round him, -- all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men... He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him.

I would further argue that Conrad's novella can be considered a piece of edgeland writing, it is concerned with ideas of ruin, both physical and mental. The Thames acts as interstitial zone between England and the Empire, between civilisation and savagery. Marlow's thoughts are drawn to an earlier history of the Thames, one that is not far removed from the view he stares out on to, and one that is so easily within our future.

Richard Jefferies explored the delicate symbiosis between urbanisation and wilderness in his book *After London; Or, Wild England* (1886) and described how London could be reduced within a couple of decades to ‘crumbling ruins’ inhabiting a landscape of marshes and woodland. Laura Spinney further explored these ideas in her essay for *New Scientist* “Return to Paradise- If the people flee what will happen to the seemingly indestructible” (1996). In it she explores London 5, 10, 60 and 560 years after a mass exodus, similar to Detroit’s flight of people. Without the Thames Barrier, the city’s flood plain would quickly return to marshland. Buddleia would be allowed to grow unchecked and its roots systems would make short work of walls and building foundations. Alder would start growing in open spaces, and in turn would improve the fertility of the soil allowing other species to take hold. Within 10 years, pathways would be torn up by tree roots, their paving slabs now suspended a metre above the ground, balanced on the new root systems ‘as if a giant earthquake had struck’ (Spinney, 1996: 30). After 20 years the city’s squares and courtyards would be tightly packed thickets of woodland. After 2000 years all that would be left was ‘marshland and a large wooded hill’ (Smith, 2012: 328). This isn’t science fiction, nature’s effects on the build environment are easy to see in Detroit, and Pripyat, whose mass evacuation was called after the Chernobyl accident, and whose demise has been captured by the cameras of John Darwell and Robert Polidori.

During my time within the edgelands I came across this reclamation by nature on smaller scales and it returns to Shoard’s notion of natural wildspaces versus created wildspaces.

*I unsurprisingly find myself under the expressway of the A57(M), the shortest section of motorway in the UK. Even in Manchester’s packed streets I am able to find respite from the busy world.*

*Tucked under the overhead road, the world around me melts away, the sound of the busy streets and cars becomes muffled, except for the noise of a game of football going on in one of the subterranean five a side pitches that have become a staple of our urban infrastructure.*

*All of the areas’ sunken walk ways and roundabouts remind me of Deleuze’s writing about islands, continental, born of erosion and dis-articulation. Urban archipelagos adrift in the shipping lanes of*

*Manchester's busy roads. The converging paths slip down the slope, ducking under the roundabout above, waiting to act as unofficial watercourses once the rain starts.*

*The asphalt paths remind me of the Croydon suburbs that my grandparents lived in. Strangely smooth and devoid of noticeable aggregates, and just like the tree-lined suburban avenues, the trees planted at the top of the banks have forced up the cobbles into undulating waves, the concrete curb stones hefted up by this shifting sea, only to later crash back down, breaking into jagged edges. Tucked underneath these stones is the usual collection of detritus, but a cleanly picked bone catches my eye, spotted and pock marked, the remnants of someone's late night dirty chicken stop.*

*The cobbles have been oddly covered in a thick bitumen, like the waterproofing on that hull of a ship, I am at a loss for the reason why. For a second an absurd idea pops into my head, maybe it's to stop them being nicked. My eye stops on a patch of missing cobbles further along the path, now a rock pool of moss and loose soil.*

*The stones directly under the overpass are stained in huge grey circles, one, two. Looking up I see the reason, stalactites hang from the underside of the concrete, slowly dripping on to the floor below, the limestone, leaching out of the damaged concrete.*

*This is an area I know from previous research, the site of the odd motorway exit to nowhere, built to a point and then stopped metres into the air. Like so much of our concrete cities, a reminder of a future, promised, that never came.*

Returning to the ideas of J.B. Jackson, and Massey explored in Chapter One and Two, places do not have single identities but multiple ones, which co-exist. Places are not frozen in time, they are processes. This idea of space and time being linked is at the heart of contemporary Sinclairian psychogeography.

Sinclair's peculiar form of historical and geographical research displays none of the rigour of psychogeographical theory and is overlaid by a mixture of autobiography and literary eclecticism... London's topography is reconstituted through a superimposition of local and literary history, autobiographical elements and poetic preoccupations, to create an idiosyncratic and highly personal vision of the city (Coverley, 2010: 121).

Shoard's model of edgeland spaces asks us to reconsider spaces that we take for granted, car parks, strip malls, business centres, etc. to look at them as environments with their own narratives. Farley and Symmons Roberts attempt to do this in their book, but ultimately end up producing a typology of the edgeland environment. By looking at it as a series of archetypes they relegate edgelands to space rather than place. Edward S. Casey (2002) described place as being the main unit of landscape, scenes of situatedness that are experienced by the entire body and having their own history. Melissa Harrison further stated that 'if place is about identity, then landscape is about memory' (2013).

Building on Massey's view that place is made up of stories and Casey's idea that place is an embodied feeling that can only be achieved through experience, I am borrowing from the tradition of ethnography to attempt to understand the Thames Gateway, therefore allowing me to produce an embedded representation of it.

The work has to be more than Clifford Geertz's idea of 'deep hanging out' (1998), which despite the idea of deepness can, to some, still be considered a too informal reading of the location or situation. Instead it has to build on the Chicago School's method of ethnography as a deep immersion within the subject, what Garrett refers to as 'penning stories from the inside out' (2010: 378-80). Deep immersion can be a dangerous idea and potentially means you can lose external perspective, however it can also allow for a level of understanding of your subject acquired through live embodiment.

## **4.2 New Nature Writing**

This autobiographic voice is now also a main stay of a genre of place literature known as New Nature Writing. Proposed in *Granta 102* (2008) it would be shorn of the pastoral and romantic tradition of 'old nature writing' and instead be voice-driven with the writer present in the story, as well as being driven by the particulars of our time, exploring wider issues such as the environment on a local scale. In his editor's letter from *Granta 102*

Jason Cowley defines new nature writing:

We also wanted the contributions to be voice driven, narratives told in the first person, for the writer to be present in the story, if sometimes only bashfully. The best new nature writing is also an experiment in forms: the field report, the essay, the memoir, the travelogue. If travel writing can often seem like a debased and exhausted genre, nature writing is its opposite: something urgent, vital and alert to the defining particulars of our times. (Cowley, 2008: 10)

While obviously photographic and film work in this thesis can not be considered as writing in the traditional sense, I would argue that the majority of these practices can be defined within these terms and therefore, could be considered as new nature writing or at least exhibiting methodologies similar to it. Whilst non-textual practices in most instances cannot be said to contain written language, (with the exception of examples of image and text work), it is comprised of a visual language, which shares many attributes with its literary cousin. Those languages are steeped in interconnected histories with both the written and visual being informed by movements throughout their shared histories. Visual works can be said to contain elements of narrative, metaphor, poetry, and through notions of an embodied lens, autobiography, indeed Robert Adams 1996: 14) states that landscape photography is comprised of three modes, geography, autobiography, and metaphor, whose presence strengthens each other. Both visual and written language is utilised in spatial practice to attempt to describe the ephemeral characteristic of place and landscape, and both are subjective representation of unknowable systems, and in particular the poststructuralist reading of photography means that it creates an open-ended representation of place where the audience is able to lead the interpretation, perhaps more so than the written element.

The process of producing work about a particular place through the use of a drift means that the initial 'recording' of an image is generally produced within the moment of the

drift. The *dérive* can be considered a ‘rereading of the city’ (Löffler, 2017: 48), an idea that resonates with de Certeau’s idea of ‘pedestrian speech acts’ (1984) where he suggested that the act of walking could be considered a form of semiotics that allowed us to read and rewrite the urban text. He argues it is the mass movement of people that write this urban text, with each individual writing their own story and giving his own interpretation; the city becomes a patched quilt of viewpoints and opinions, which can be connected back to Harvey’s idea of the city as palimpsest (2003) that was explored in Chapter Two, and becomes a poststructuralised text. These stories only exist while the walker remains there to define them, they are fleeting.

The photographic work therefore allows a representation of the space to exist outside of that moment and the viewer can use it to create their own reading, and make their own landscape, in doing so being said to be of new nature. In his book *Photography and Literature* (2009), François Brunet offers an argument for the emergence of photography as a kind of writing (Starner, website, 2009). The strongest argument, however, that we can consider the visual language to be part of the new nature writing lexicon is the inclusion of several photo essays within the original issue of *Granta* (2008), including Donovan Wylie’s images of the demolition of the Maze prison, which are greatly informed by the work of the New Topographics.

Cowley called for ‘studies in the local or the parochial: they are about the discovery of exoticism in the familiar, the extraordinary in the ordinary’ (ibid.:11). This resonates with the ideas defining new landscape photography, in that, just as some of these images are soaked in melancholy, Cowley considered that new nature writing could be ‘read as elegies’ (ibid.), lamenting loss but seemingly unable to do anything about it, except offer a reflection for a wider audience to consider. The break from the earlier history of Romantic landscape texts mirrors both movements, and the complaint that audiences ‘weren’t responding to the world anymore: they were responding to an ideal of photographic excellence that came purely from other photographers’ (Gohlke, video,



2007). Depictions of edgelands, and, I would argue, these depictions' connections to psychogeography, strikes at the heart of one of the defining notions regarding new nature writing, 'rather than being pastoral or descriptive or simply a natural history essay, [it] has got to be couched in stories... where we as humans are present. Not only as observers, but as intrinsic elements' (Peelle quoted in Cowely, 2008: 12).

### 4.3 (Auto)biogeography

As briefly discussed in the Introduction, (auto)biography and psychogeography are at the forefront of this thesis and practice. Peter Ackroyd's *London the Biography* (2000) was hailed as the moment when psychogeography entered the mainstream (Baker, 2003: 328), and while Ackroyd has been dismissive, even disdainful of the term, it is hard to argue that his work isn't rooted in a contemporary psychogeographic style (Coverley, 2010: 123-128), but is also reminiscent of an earlier form of writing that takes in such works as Daniel Defoe's *Tours thro' the whole of the isles of Great Britain* (1724-27) and Thomas de Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1821) (ibid). Coverly describes this connection as an 'attempt to resurrect and reconnect with earlier literary and historical currents' (2010: 32). The opening of Ackroyd's *London the Biography* considers the city as body, and as such he is then permitted to produce a biography of that body. He calls for the reader to 'wander and wonder' (Ackroyd, 2000: 2), and in doing so the body is transferred back on to the landscape. The narrative-led non-fiction that categorises new nature writing and contemporary psychogeography, often contains the voice of the author writing in an autobiographical style, or what Phillipe Lejeune refers to as the 'autobiographical pact,' (1989), an assurance on the part of the author that there is a very close correspondence between the narrator and themselves. Hatherley describes the Thames Gateway as being the 'locus for M25 flanerier or exurban poetics' (Hatherley, 2012: 3). Writers such as Iain Sinclair, John Rogers, and Carol Donaldson have all written books that blend elements of landscape, psychogeography and autobiography. All

three either live or have lived within the Thames Gateway region. Rogers' book *This Other London: Adventures in an Overlooked City* (2013), along with his series of YouTube videos<sup>18</sup>, explore East London until it is curtailed by the M25. Rogers is an inhabitant of Leytonstone, and as such is perfectly placed to capture the rapid changes that are happening with the region. His work successfully blends critical discourse, politics and place into a contemporary psychogeographic reading of regeneration.

Sinclair has lived and worked within the borough of Hackney for almost 50 years (O'Brien, 2005). Just as J.G. Ballard became known as the Bard of Shepperton (McGraph, 2009), his writing drawn to interrogating the region surrounding the Westway, so too can Sinclair be considered the Bard of Hackney (Dragicevich and Fallon, 2016). A large number of Sinclair's books have explored ideas surrounding the Thames Gateway, be it as the backdrop for fiction in *Downriver* (1991) and *Dining on Stones or the Middle Ground* (2004), or as the topic for one of his psychogeographic *dérives* in works such as *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* (2011). Within this book Sinclair devotes an entire section entitled *Privateland* to walking and interrogating the Thames Gateway, walking from the river's mouth to its source in Oxford. He describes it as a response to Peter Ackroyd's notion that the 'Thames is a river like the Ganges or Jordan, a place of pilgrimage' (Sinclair, 2011: 170). Sinclair discusses the changes to the region and the connection to psychogeography and place making that can be witnessed in the brochures for new developments. 'Every act of demolition requires a rebooting of history: as hospital or asylum vanishes, we thirst for stories of Queen Elizabeth I at Tilbury or Pocahontas coming ashore, in her dying fever, at Gravesend' (ibid.: 171). On walking the newly rebranded Olympic Park Greenway, once simply the Northern Sewage Outfall, he dedicates the walk to Ballard, with the walk forming an investigation into the 'emerging

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<sup>18</sup> An in-depth analysis of Rogers' film output can be found in Chapter Eight.

topography of sheds, retail parks and landscaped gardens made from decommissioned industrial sites' (ibid.: 173). It can be argued that by doing so, that Sinclair, through forming a connection to Ballard's Westway landscape, goes some way to forming an edgeland link between the two regions, tentatively correcting the West/East London bias that Hall identified in his Thames Gateway plans, but perhaps this new connection is not in a way Hall originally imagined as this new connection is one of homogenisation instead of economic renewal.

Ackroyd's view of the Thames and writing style differs from Sinclair's. Sinclair describes Ackroyd's writing as the empirical and poetic coexisting, giving us facts and figures, before allowing the river to act as a metaphor for human history. However, Ackroyd rarely allows the accidents and epiphanies of his private excursions to enter his narrative. The only vignette that enters the writing is finding a bloodied knife, white T-shirt and roll of Sellotape on the shore at Erith (Ibid.: 178). Sinclair seemingly allows every personal vignette to enter the frame; in doing so he acts as the lens for us to witness and interpret the landscape before him, leading him to be described by O'Brien as the 'bard of graffiti and broken bottles' (O'Brien, 2005).

This convergence of autobiography and geography has become known by the term autobiogeography, which was first coined by Matthew Wolf-Meyer and David Heckman in their 2002 special issue of *Reconstruction* entitled *Autobiogeography: Considering Space and Identity*. Christopher C. Gregory-Guider defines autobiogeography as works of life writing, 'in which the self and other are mediated and put into productive dialogue through the representation of place and its traversal' (2005: 2-3). I would argue that Gregory-Guider's view of the autobiogeographic converges with contemporary psychogeography, within both there is a strong sense of the writer or narrator as being

embodied within the landscape that they are exploring, unpacking hidden narratives and mythologies which are then strengthened through the author's connection to both the landscape and a wider 'psychic archaeology'<sup>19</sup>. Sinclair describes the process as being;

like you are walking through a series of memory control barriers, you pass under certain points ... The essence of a writer, the person you've read, is echoes. I mean someone like Peter Ackroyd touched on it, but then there is Moorcock whose own biography is always confused with places he has lived and experienced. You can't take a step, after a certain number of years, without every street being loud with these echoes (Sinclair, online article, 2008).

It is within this sense that work of writers such as WG Sebald and William Least Heat-Moon, could be seen as (auto)biographic, (auto)biogeographic, and ultimately psychogeographic. The works he looks at 'feature memory and memorialisation as inseparable from the perambulatory act. The traversal of place recalls the past, while simultaneously interweaving the categories of person and place' (Ibid.: 5).

## **4.4 Non-representational theory**

Hayden Lorimer states that 'non-representational theory has become as an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks better to cope with our self-evidently more-than human, more-than-textual, multisensory worlds' (Lorimer, 2005: 83). He suggests that cultural analyses have developed a 'tendency to cleave towards a conservative, categorical politics of identity and textual meaning' (ibid.). However, he suggests that this can be challenged by embracing the 'excessive and transient aspects of living' (ibid). Within geography's

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<sup>19</sup> By this I do not directly mean acts such as dowsing, but as a metaphor for the author acting as conduit to allow the landscape to speak through them.

cultural critique of landscape, representationalism has 'framed, fixed and rendered inert all that ought to be most lively' (Ibid; :84-5, citing Rose, 2002, Wylie, 2002).

Representing landscape, especially the interstitial one, in this manner fails to embrace the fluidity of place that makes them so exciting. While work has attempted to animate embodied acts of landscaping, however these acts have been situated in the 'manicured, husbanded, domestic setting' (Lorimer, 2005: 84). These include the small holding (Holloway, 2002), allotments (Crouch, 2003, DeSilvey, 2003), the back garden (Hitchings, 2003), community gardens (Paddison and Sharp, 2005), and the local park (Laurier et al., 2005). These are all very much spaces that fit within the model of Shoard's greenspaces (2008), and unlike wildspace, tend to have defined and ordered boundaries. Lorimer states that amounts to a 'rediscovery of old disciplinary field boundaries marking agricultural and leisure geographies' (Lorimer, 2005: 85), works that attempt to 'make sense out of the ecologies of place created by actions and processes, rather than the place portrayed by the end product' (ibid.). In doing so they remain focused on human intervention on the landscape, and traditional ethnographic studies and the landscape acts as a metaphor for the wider socio-political implications of these sites.

Phillip Vannini's paper "*Non-representational Ethnography: New Ways of Animating Lifeworlds*" (2014) sets out a series of characteristics of non-representational ethnography. Vannini characterises ethnography as 'people-focussed... research which makes use (varying) of data collection methods... which unfold by way of thick description and interpretive contextualisation' (Vannini, 2014: 318). I would argue this is true of all ethnographic study, which I would divide into data collection, interpretation, and representation. Traditional and realist (Adler and Adler, 2008, cited in Vannini, 2014: 318) ethnographies attempt to represent their research subject(s) 'as is', through faithful reproduction (Vannini, 2014: 318). By contrast, non-representational 'ethnographers consider their work to be impressionistic and inevitably creative' (ibid.). While these are inspired by their fieldwork recordings, they choose to present these findings in a manner

that avoids an ‘impersonal and neutral’ (ibid) style. Vannini argues that it ‘strives to animate rather than simply mimic, to rupture rather than merely account, to evoke rather than just report, and to reverberate instead of modestly resonating’ (ibid). I would suggest that non-representational theory embraces a multi-disciplinary method, and can utilise artistic practice as a means to both record and publish findings.

Throughout this research process a non-representational model has been the starting point for an adapted ethnographic study of the Thames Gateway, with many elements of it seemingly well-positioned to deal with the characteristics of the interstitial and edgelands landscape. Vannini cites hybridity as being a defining characteristic of non-representational study, suggesting that traditional representational theories are ‘built on binary opposition’, such as the ideas surrounding rural and urban; however, a non-representational stance recognises the ‘differences that cross over one another, that entail one another, that mutate into one another. Most notably human and non-human life fold into each other, erasing the clear cut distinction between animate and inanimate, metaphysical and material, the agentic and non-agentic. Therefore in this tradition “things” too, thus not only people act and “speak”’ (Vannini, website, 2012). Further to this Vannini suggests that fluidity is also a key characteristic, the idea that the research subject isn’t a fixed entity, but in a constant state of process. This is evident in the study of landscape where the subject is being constantly rearranged by inward and outward forces, and the act of bodily engagement involves constantly reframing. This is connected to the characteristic of relationality, which Vannini defines as the idea ‘that actors of all kinds – people, material objects, ideas, “nature”, etc. – are embedded in an ecology of connections’ (ibid). This ecology of actors, is ‘resting on an assemblage of others for its own existence and subsistence... however [these] exert different degrees of force and are therefore more or less powerful than others’ (ibid.). By understanding this series of connections and power dynamics, it is possible to explore the interconnectivity of the actors.

## 4.5 Landscape Ethnography

Landscape ethnography is a term coined by Laura Ogden for her book *Swamplife: People, Gators, and Mangroves Entangled in the Everglades* (2011) an ethnographic work on the area's 'gladesmen' and their connection to the land, flora and fauna of the Everglades. The book can be considered to be a non-representational study of 'the ways in which *our relations with non-humans produce what it means to be human*' (Ogden, 2011: 38). She describes the Bill Ashley Jungles (the area of her ethnographic research) as a 'remembered landscape' (ibid: 25), a name that is connected to the area's history, but is now only used within tight local knowledge. Ogden discusses that it has been over fifty years since the name has been part of the wider 'active landscape vernacular', and in that period the mangrove that it was once connected to has shifted and 'transformed itself many times over' (ibid). To Ogden, the act of remembering becomes a critical practice to understand the formation and connection to this shifting landscape. 'Exploration is not so much a covering of surface distance as a study in depth: a fleeting episode, a fragment of landscape or a remark overheard may provide the only means of understanding and interpreting areas that would otherwise remain barren of meaning' (Levi-Strauss, 1955, cited in Ogden, 2011: 25). With Ogden's book, her subjects' acts of remembering are nostalgic, what she describes as a 'nostalgia for a time when their claims to the landscape were not blocked' (Ogden, 2011: 25). Through this act of nostalgia they are searching for an image of the everglades that they are 'reimagining through the lens of loss' (ibid, 25-6). Through critically remembering she is attempting to counter the 'cheap romance' of previous representations, to create a blurred landscape, comprised of 'local mythologies, economic struggles, and asymmetrical relations' (ibid: 26). I would argue that shares many of the characteristics with contemporary Sinclairian psychogeographic methods and intentions. In doing so it becomes interested in challenging the perceived normalities of the area through critique of previous representations. However Ogden argues that this critical practice should not be confused with critique, declaring that 'instead of using

ideas to break down (reduction), I am interested in using ideas to build up (production)' (ibid). This process mimics how we explore and form landscape, which has been discussed earlier in the Chapter One. What Ogden produces in her written text is a 'map of a remembered landscape' (ibid), however these maps are not representational cartographies of what is or was really there, but instead non-representational maps, that mimic the landscapes 'fuzzy boundaries' and complicated assemblage of actor networks, they aide the reader in metaphorically getting lost in this landscape (ibid). Ogden surmises that these landscapes form a meeting point of 'local, or localised, embodied, experience of landscape, as well as a concern of how local landscape practices intersect with various constellations of power' (ibid: 27).

Ogden demonstrates, that to explore the multi-species concept of landscape that we do not need a 'post-human ethnography, but an ethnographic practice that is accountable to the *asymmetrical* relations of our collective lives. Landscapes – whether swamps or cities or rural farmland – are assemblages of collected species, the products of collected desires and the asymmetrical relations amongst humans and nonhumans' (ibid: 28). From this Ogden defends landscape ethnography as 'a practice of reintroducing and reinscribing the human back into the multispecies collective while at the same time being attuned to the politics of asymmetrical relations' (ibid: 29). In doing so it becomes an act of rewilding ethnographic methods, through which she is able to demonstrate how this assemblage is not stationary, but fluid and interactive, with multiple power relations, both human and nonhuman constantly having a dynamic connection to each other and the landscape.

Ogden positions her landscape ethnography within the realm of Deleuze and Guattari's model of the rhizome. She argues that 'Deleuze and Guattari's spatial philosophy offers a way of theorising landscapes as complex and changing assemblages of relations that dissolve and displace boundaries of nature and culture' (ibid: 29). Within Ogden's landscape there are reoccurring refrains and motifs, Ogden cites Deleuze and Guattari, to describe these refrains as 'repetitions (almost like tropes) within the assemblage that



designate the territory' (Ibid: 32). While working within The Thames Gateway, I found that certain elements such as building development signs and trains would keep reoccurring in my footage, while these potentially signalled regeneration and mobility, they could also be considered nodes within the wider socio-political power dynamic, with multiple actors and agency that defined the territory of the Gateway, and separate it from other interstitial or edgeland landscapes. These motifs form part of the region's signature. Ogden suggests that the human and nonhuman 'emerge as collaborative agents of territory within these refrains' (ibid). Just as Vannini discussed, these mark the notion of fluidity within the landscape, with the assemblage being formed of multiple elements that interact with each other through the assemblage to form and reform the territory. Past events become 'emplaced and define territory' (ibid), an idea that links to notions of contemporary Sinclairian psychogeography and its depiction of place and landscape as a connected web of past present and future agency. Ogden suggests that the rhizomatic model, disrupts the linear progression of time, or how we perceive time. Deleuze and Guattari state that 'the rhizome has neither beginning or end, but always a middle... from which it grows and which it overflows' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 23), 'unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature' (ibid). This idea fits with the view of complex and jumbled assemblages, that are constantly shifting and being redefined. The landscape isn't a linear progression with rigid boundaries, instead it is a complex web of connections that the more you pull on the end to free the tangle, the more the tangle shifts and knots, just as the new shooting growths of the 'rhizomes entangle the old, forming new knotty formations... this is how the past (partially remembered) and the present come together' (Ogden, 2011: 32).

With regards to the construction of the assemblage and power dynamics between actors and agency, Deleuze and Guattari focus on the 'megamachine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 490), which they describe as being the 'state...apparatus of capture' (ibid). The

state ‘megamachine’ acts as ‘an organising, centralising, hierarchising machine, (that transforms) activity into work (labour), territories into ‘the land’, and surplus [land] value into capital’ (Bonta and Proveti, 2004, quoted in Ogden, 2011: 33). While there is an obvious universality to this statement, it could be directly in relation to the Thames Gateway’s redevelopment and regeneration of interstitial and post industrial brownfield sites. It is this outside ‘megamachine’ assemblage that acts as agent on the interstitial assemblage, and ultimately forms the hard boundaries, both physical and psychological, through overcoding ‘pre-exisitng assemblages of humans and non humans’ (ibid), through the commodification of the landscape as capital. This is achieved through the ‘complex architecture of administrative agencies, quasi-governmental organisations, and a variety of nestled and overlapping private-public “partnerships”’ (Ogden, 2011: 33-4). Again, this is reminiscent of the complex assemblage that came to define the development of the Thames Gateway region, and which will be explored further in the next chapter. Within the Thames Gateway, the state should be considered as a heterogeneous assemblage of agencies and actors, from both inside and outside the landscape, that are loosely bound by the changing political vision of the Gateway region. These apparatuses of capture have profoundly altered the landscape, and constrain the human and nonhuman elements that define it.

Deleuze and Guattari categorise the rhizomic model through four characteristics, which they group together as connectivity and heterogeneity, and cartography and decalomania. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004: 13). With regards to connectivity and heterogeneity, as already stated ‘Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root, which plots a point, fixes an order’ (ibid, 7). It can be argued that the traditional principles of ‘connectivity and heterogeneity overturn any form of hierarchical command and control structure which ranks, orders, fixes, and names all points within the hierarchy and which determines which points are inside the hierarchy and which are outside’ (Harmon, online article, 2009). However, further to this

Harmon suggests that actually, 'the rhizome does not overturn hierarchy... rather, it simply renders hierarchy irrelevant and flows around it' (ibid). I would argue that this is what happens with the interstitial landscape, as much as the outside hierarchy attempts to control agency within the landscape, the actors that form and reform that landscape simply find ways to circumnavigate the intrusion, be this plant species reclaiming post-industrial sites, or bursting through asphalt, or urban explorers and 'adventurous play(ers)' (Edensor, 2005: 34) challenging hard borders.

Cartography and decalcomania within the Deleuze and Guattari's sense can be defined as a method of mapping for orientation from any point of entry within a 'whole', rather than by the method of tracing that re-presents an *a priori* path. While decalcomania is a method of continuous negotiation with its context, constantly adapting by experimentation, thus performing a non-symmetrical active resistance against rigid organisation and restriction. An idea that fits with notions of the *dérive* as a means of exploring the landscape and its construction. The rhizome emphasizes the importance of interaction and relationships between material, semiotic, human, and nonhuman worlds in the formation of a landscape, providing a compass for understanding the ways that humans encounter landscapes and that landscapes experience the human presence.

## 4.6 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter I have documented the development of an adapted non-representational ethnography, orientated towards the production and representation of landscape. I take Ogden's view of landscape ethnography as a starting point and continue to adapt it as a methodology that incorporates the multi-disciplinary ideas of psychogeography and new nature writing, as a means of connecting to the storied nature of landscape, and while new nature writing, in the way it seeks to give us purchase on place, landscape ethnography is distinct in its attempt to weave landscape stories through social and cultural traces, both material and immaterial. It becomes a methodology for

experiencing the landscape assemblage. Within my practice, landscape ethnography can be defined by its configuration towards deepness (topography, mapping, and hanging out). It acts as a starting point through which we can explore and consider the non-representational nature of the landscape. Through its use, our subject is transformed into a 'landscape of subversion, a reconfigured territorial assemblage' (Ogden, 2011: 35).

Landscape ethnography should be considered an assemblage of cross-disciplinary methods and modes of production, its borders are fuzzy, renegotiable, and in constant reconfiguration based on the experiences obtained through an embodied, bodily research process, that starts from the position of outsider, working inwards. In doing so, the constant fluidity and hybridity of the research mimics the production of landscape, and produces a non-representational and personal adapted (auto)ethnographic study.

In the next chapter I will explore works that could be argued to have utilised non-representational method, and have influenced the development of my own landscape ethnography.

## 5 A Sense of Place – Work in A Landscape Ethnographic Model

This chapter builds on the concepts in Chapter Three, surrounding new landscape photography and representations of the new wilderness, as defined by the work of the new topographic movement. It also builds upon the ideas presented in Chapter Four that have helped define the adapted ethnographic methodology of landscape ethnography. While obviously none of the work presented in this chapter was produced utilising this methodology, it does demonstrate some of the wider ideas and concepts of a 'deep' survey. In particular this work demonstrates notions of deep mapping and embodied investigation of place and the landscape, as well as ideas linked to psychogeography and autobiogeography. These ideas will help demonstrate that photographic work can be considered an ethnographic product, and not just a tool utilised in traditional ethnographic studies. The artist's works have been chosen for both this ethnographic, landscape orientated stance, and a connection to either edgelands or the interstitial environment. They are also bodies of work that have greatly informed my own practice. However, all of these works also demonstrate what I perceive to be the limitations of the medium when it comes to form a non-representational study. Photography is an inherently visual only medium, and this fact, in relation to landscape ethnography, has lead me to shift to a moving image practice that can embrace the wider gamut of non representational study.

## 5.1 John Gossage *The Pond*; In The Beginning



Figure 5-1 John Gossage, *Untitled, The Pond*. 1985

The work of John Gossage in his 1985 series *The Pond* is, at first viewing, seemingly deeply entrenched within the ideas of the New Topographics; however, like the work previously mentioned in Chapter Three, it writes its story of ruin from the inside out. The images depict an everyday piece of edgeland interstitial waste ground. Gossage describes the site as being a ‘unique, odd place...It just sat there unattended, disconnected, and untouched’ (Himes and Swanson, 2011: 186-93). The work has been seen as ‘a turning away from the broader landscape, a furtive escape into the pathways suitable for drug dealers and child molesters, precisely the opposite of an attempt to describe a larger space’ (Wittmer, website, 2010). The photographs often appear to depict nothing important, however their sequencing leads us on a journey and embeds us within the landscape. This is an idea that will be discussed in Chapter Seven, in relation to methods

of recreating psychogeographic drifts, and the ability to use the formal attributes of publication methods to create virtual dérives. We struggle to know the size of the site depicted, but instead we become familiar with its personality. Gossage describes it as his first attempt at creating a narrative landscape, he explains that 'in literature the landscape inevitably becomes the setting, the background to a story' (Gossage et al, 2010: n.p)<sup>20</sup>, going on to explain that 'landscape just isn't a literary mode. But it is a natural photographic mode- in photography, landscape can be the primary subject' (ibid.). *The Pond* was primarily designed as a bookwork, with a distinct sequence that was 'written' (ibid.), Gossage stated 'each stop was specific, and all the pictures interlocked. When you have a destination in mind, you don't double back' (ibid.). He said that 'there is no documentary function going on here- the photographs don't necessarily connect, except how I connect them in the book' (Hine and Swanson, 2011: 186-93).

Though Gossage's study of nature in America is believable because it includes evidence of man's darkness of spirit, it is memorable because of the intense fondness he shows for the remains of the natural world. He pictures everything – the loveliness of gravel, of sticks, of scum gleaning the water... He doesn't even hesitate to photograph what we admire already (which is riskier, it being harder to awaken us to what we think we know), abruptly pointing his camera straight up at circling birds, and, later, over to a songbird on a wire. Nothing is self-conscious about these photographs; we see in them just the subject – and thereby the glory of the common day. (Adams, online article, 2013)

I would argue that Gossage's work is important in the photographic depiction of edgelands and one that resonates with my personal perspective on the subject, and an

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<sup>20</sup> n.p means no page numbers. A number of the photographic monographs cited including *The Pond* (Gossage et al, 2010) do not include page numbers, either in the photographs or the accompanying essays.



influence on the development of my own practice; both the images and the means of Gossage discovering the site seem familiar. The work was produced during Gossage's daily commute between Washington DC and Maryland, however instead of simply continuing his journey and merely capturing glimpses of the landscape outside his car window, he chose to stop and 'disappear into the brush' (Gossage et al, 2010: n.p).



Figure 5-2 John Gossage, *Untitled, The Pond*. 1985

The decision to step outside the confines of the car could be seen as a reaction to Robert Adam's focus on automotive spaces, his images are littered with gas stations, car parks, and endless tarmacked or unmade dirt roads. One could surmise from *The New West* that this is a predominately vehicular space. While the human figure occasionally enters his frame, you still get a strong sense that these new spaces aren't designed for pedestrian interactions, while the paths in *The Pond* have a familiar human scale to them, and have clearly been created by the constant erosion of footfall. This form of bodily interaction



with nature appears completely lost from *The New West*, and in doing so loses the notion of spaces being written from the inside out.

Unlike the work of the New Topographics photographers whose images share a visual style, *The Pond*'s focus and framing shifts from deep focus to shallow depth of field, picking out single items. Instead of the macro/micro perspective that allows us to explore place within a single image, the book itself becomes a macro/micro exploration of place. The images build up and leave the viewing feeling that they know the terrain. Toby Jurovics suggests that this might be the work's purpose. "*The Pond* is not simply about place, but about how we discover it, and the larger act of how we engage with the world' (Gossage et al, 2010: n.p). He feels that the sudden appearance of a rock or branch in the path is designed to make sure we are concentrating, otherwise mimicking the journey we might stumble and fall. The camera suddenly lowers itself to the water's level and explores the leaves floating on the surface, while at another moment we focus on the foliage. The camera follows the same curious exploratory viewpoint that we might have if we had been there. In doing so *The Pond* 'doesn't show us what a photographer thinks, so much as it lets us see how a photographer thinks' (ibid.).

The book finishes with a page from Henry Thoreau's *Walden; or a Life in the Woods* (1854) with every word redacted with angry black ink scratchings, except for the two words, 'The Pond', which have been underlined in red. Thoreau's book explores his experiences of living in a self-built cabin over a period of two years and two days. In doing so he hoped to gain a greater insight into man's relationship with nature. In doing so Gerry Badger suggests that Gossage was perhaps 'declaring that the ideas espoused by Thoreau, of a man living in harmony with nature, is a pipe dream. Or, by obliterating everything except those key words, "The Pond," is he declaring that nature will eventually have its revenge for the interference of man and culture' (ibid.).

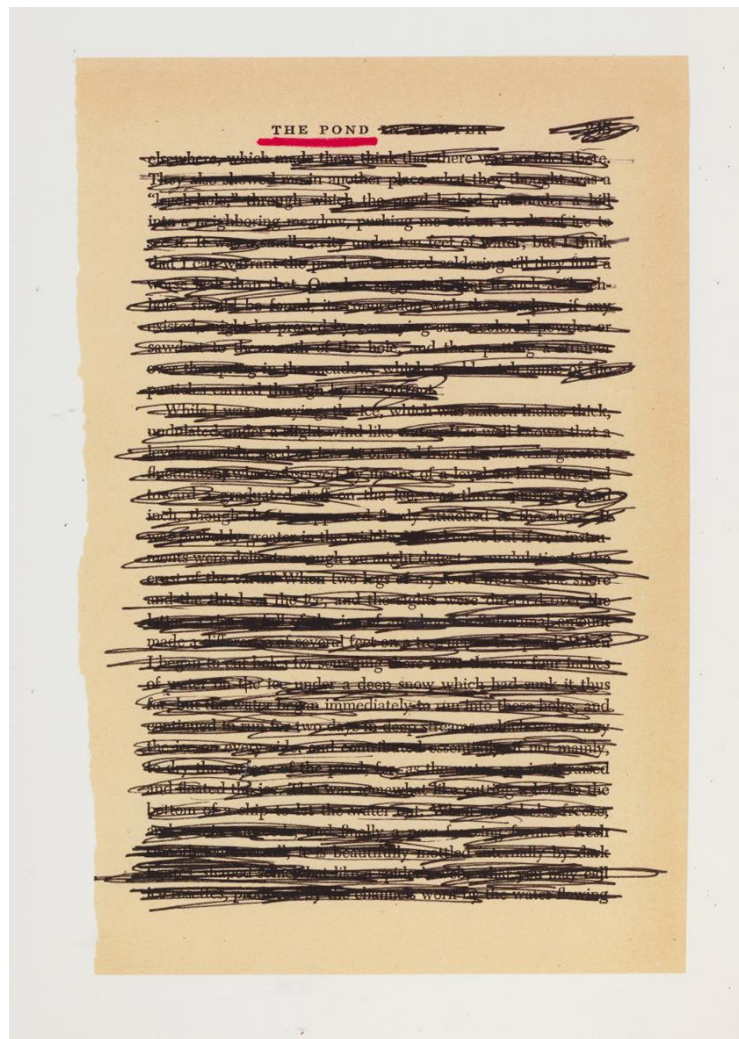


Figure 5-3 John Gossage, *Walden, The Pond*. 1985

## 5.2 (De)Industrialisation- John Darwell, and John Davies

One of the defining motifs of edgeland space and in particular through its photographic representation has been deindustrialisation, either through demolition leading to the creation of brownfield waste ground, or through the shift to other forms of economy such as service industries. Elizabeth Blackmar said ‘from the earliest days of documentary work, photographers have observed the making and unmaking of American landscapes and have found ruins’ (Blackmar, 2001: 324-39). Steven High and David W. Lewis in their book *Corporate Wasteland: The Landscape and Memory of Deindustrialization*

(2007) argue that unlike, with the current trend in ruin porn, the industrial landscape was once a symbol of progress and modernity. For example, photographer Charles Sheeler considered mills and factories as the ultimate 'American Landscape' (Noverr, 1987: 15-16). However, the aftermath of loss of heavy industry within the developed global west has signalled the birth of a new American landscape, a deindustrialised one (Hayden, 1995). High and Lewis argue that while a great amount of academic writing has been undertaken on deindustrialization, the majority has explored the economic cause and effect, while it also needs to be considered a cultural phenomenon. Jefferson Cowie and Joseph Heathcott in their 2003 book *Beyond the Ruins: The Meaning of Deindustrialization* explored shifting the focus from 'body counts' to rethinking 'the chronology, memory, spatial relations, culture and politics' (Cowie and Heathcott, 2003: 1-2). High and Lewis, however, urge us not to move 'beyond the ruins', as we might do in their representation through ruin porn, or the picturesque, but instead explore the wider cultural and political impact it has on the landscape and communities left behind. They call industrial ruins 'memory places', and cite historian Pierre Nora's observation 'that memory "fastens on sites" and is by nature multiple and subjective' (Nora quoted in High and Lewis, 2007: 9). Perhaps, then, the ideas they put forward regarding the 'deindustrial sublime', (as explored in Chapter Three), are best served by the deadpan aesthetic, allowing the viewer the space to form their own narrative: 'we are all spatial story-tellers, explorers, navigators and discoverers, exchanging narratives of, and in, the city' (Rendell, 2002: 116).

The work of British photographers John Davies and John Darwell document the changing face of British industry. Davies' work, in particular his retrospective book *The British Landscape* (2006), has been described as exploring the industrialisation of Britain. However, I would argue that in doing so it also records the deindustrialisation, shot predominantly during the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, it records the industrial landscape at a time of change.



Figure 5-4 John Davies, *Agecroft Power Station, Salford*, 1983

As you progress through the book, the red brick mills and ironwork of the industrial revolution are replaced with concrete constructions. Train tracks once serving the Welsh valleys have been ripped up and the land is now used for blackberry picking and walking. The old industries are now dwarfed by new constructions, high speed trains fly across viaducts passing over canals and wharves, echoing Turner's depiction of the coming of a new age in *Rain, Steam and Speed* that I previously mentioned in Chapter Three. The book shifts from the industrial revolution to the Brutalist city of the 60s and 70s before finally stopping in the new out of town shopping centres, built on brownfield land that once housed our industrial powerhouses. The final image is the most telling, the now clear site of Easington Colliery in County Durham, once the area made famous by the finale of *Get Carter*, now replaced with grassland meadow and part of the new heritage coastline. The accompanying text for each image reads as a history of British industry and its importance within the empire, and attempts to capture the once global importance

of these locations before they are lost to the tide of time. In doing so Davies depicts the (be)coming edgelands.



Figure 5-5 John Davies, *Site of Easington Colliery, County Durham*. 2004

The images are again produced and presented within the aesthetic of the deadpan. Within the gallery setting they are printed on a scale reminiscent of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic painters. In choosing to adopt this photographic language there is a danger that they will lose their documentary importance and just become picturesque representations of a (de)industrial sublime which the audience will view as either glorifying or memorialising our past industrial glory. There is little consideration of the impact this industry has had on the communities that surround it, and the wide viewpoint of the topographic camera fails to engage with the wider subject. John Schuster says ‘the sublime is breath-taking at a distance that stays distant and thus involves an uneasy relationship with forms of hands-on environmental activism’ (Schuster, 2013: 194).

While Davies' camera is interested in capturing the industrial landscape, John Darwell's is directly documenting the deindustrialisation of England's northwest region. His images of the demise of Manchester's (Salford) docks during the early to mid 1980s, along with his work on Liverpool docks and workers facing the realities of containerisation, blends the wide frame of the new landscape mode, while at the same time capturing the lives of their workers within the traditional documentary aesthetic. Both, at times, appear unaware of the toll that is to come; however all of the images carry an air of melancholy. This is not the grand industrial sublime, but instead feels like an embodied reading of complex, noisy, and dirty places. Simon Grennan suggests that one of the key ideas with Darwell's work is 'that in making a picture, a photographer is as much a participant in a photographic moment as a set-apart observer' (Darwell et al, 2007: n.p). He feels that while Darwell never appears in front of the camera he is as much in the frame as his subjects. Darwell's work is consumed by loss whether in the dock works or through his urban exploration series *Melancholy Objects*. These images of disused hospitals 'attracted Darwell because they prompt reflection and because we are places that we know, where abstraction, self-obsession and perilous lethargy accumulate' (ibid.).



Figure 5-6 John Darwell, *Agecroft, The Dark River, Salford*. 1986-87

In recent years, a number of his early bodies of work have been republished by Café Royal Books, the series of publications on the redevelopment of Sheffield, and the box set of books exploring the River Irwell in Manchester depicting landscapes trapped between old and new economies. The camera stalks the empty streets and explores the cleared lots that were once home to the Sheffield steel mills. In the distance, the steel girders are being erected for the new Meadowhall Shopping Centre, the great central dome of this basilica to commerce sits dominating the upper portion of the frame. In the foreground traces of the River Don can be felt. In one photo the Sheffield Ski Village is under construction with the aging mills hugging the river valley below and the Brutalist blocks of flats stepping up the hill in the background. The Ski Village has since been rendered into ruin by a fire in 2012, now a site of interest for urban explorers and downhill mountain bikers.



Figure 5-7 John Darwell, *Regeneration, Sheffield*. 1988-90

Darwell himself describes the process of producing the Sheffield work as feeling ‘like the end of an era (later to be labelled “post-industrialisation”’ (Darwell, 2013:1). He speaks about staring on with ‘fascination as the old city centre was replaced with shopping and



leisure facilities’ and how ‘the name Ponds Forge came from the former steel works that had occupied the site’ (ibid.).

Paul Herrmann, writing about Darwell’s *The Dark River* (2015) series, describes the images surrounding the River Irwell as ‘familiar to anyone who lives in an industrial city, visits its edges and gets to know the tears in its fabric’ (Herrman, 2015: n.p). He writes of a 150-year heritage of industry in the region being scrubbed out by Thatcherism, but before any consideration had apparently been given to its replacement. In doing so, Herrmann states that, while the work has been influenced by ‘the New Topographics, particularly Lewis Baltz and Robert Adams... his work here is less overtly iconographic than the Americans’, perhaps more intensely felt. They are pictures made with control, but the anger or sadness of them comes through...they feel raw and real’ (ibid.). Meanwhile the river itself has since been cleaned up and re-embraced by the city as part of its continuing redevelopment schemes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For an extensive study of the river’s restoration, see Restoring Europe’s Rivers *Case study: River Irwell Restoration Project* (2017), The Irwell River’s Trust’s *The Irwell GEP Project* (2015), *Urban River Regeneration in Manchester: Transforming the Dark River Irwell* (APEM Aquatic Scientists, 2004), and Salford City Council’s planning scheme *Irwell River Park* (2016).





Figure 5-8 Promotional image for a new curved bridge over the River Irwell, designed by Tonkin Liu and Arup, *Manchester Evening News*, 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2014

Darwell describes the changes that have taken place since he first photographed it. ‘The awesome monumentality has disappeared. It’s a pleasant walk, in a fairly bland kind of way, but any sense of history has gone;’ (ibid.), however, ‘like a landed eel the river keeps twitching – it’s not necessarily going to behave as we want it. Every year or two the river changes colour as an old mine tunnel collapses or something new and unpleasant gets discharged... in July 2015, the Irwell turned orange again, like a thick tomato soup’ (ibid.). Darwell’s images are drenched in the melancholic; his images are ‘weighted by deep reservoirs of dark water that are the actions of the past and the dreams, desires and losses that bind people together’ (ibid.).

### **5.3 Jem Southam *St James’ Halt*; Experiments with an iPad**

The English Photographer Jem Southam produces images that could be argued to be within a psychogeographic context; they form deep readings of very localised sites over prolonged periods of time. However, in the last few years Southam has been producing a

more immediate mapping with his iPad and Twitter. Over the Christmas 2013 period I corresponded with Southam, discussing and exploring the ideas behind his Twitter based bodies of work, *St James' Halt* (2013-15) and its offshoot, *Still Life* (2013-15) series.

Southam's previous bodies of work have all been marked by their rigorous aesthetic discipline. Using a 10"x8" field camera, Southam works with single locations over a period of time, exploring changes within the landscape, both natural and man-altered. These images when presented as incredibly rich contact prints<sup>22</sup>, which, due to the scale of the resulting print, force the viewer to engage with them on a very individual basis, and to see the rich detail contained within the image which the audience must view close up.

While his work has always had a strong sense of place within the final images, the immediacy of the iPad and the adoption of the wandering contemporary flâneur, has created a looseness within his interrogations. Speaking to Southam, he felt the iPad had freed him up to experiment, without the prohibitive costs of film, processing and printing. He also spoke how he felt it was a natural continuation of his 10"x8" ground glass screen. The screen presents you with a large representation of the world you are trying to capture. The device itself is somewhat difficult to hold and shoot with, forcing you to consider your frame, in the same way he would with a large format camera. He also spoke of the brilliant immediacy of the image, he could go for a walk, come home and upload the images to his Twitter account. His audience was able to experience his latest images almost as soon as he shot them, no editing, raw. Southam's new work, while being in a

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<sup>22</sup> A contact print is made by placing the negative directly on to the sensitized photographic printing paper and exposing it to light, produce a direct 1:1 reproduction of the original negative. In the case of Southam's work this produces a 10"x8" print.

different medium and self-curated digital gallery space still contains much of his personal interests and earlier visual language.

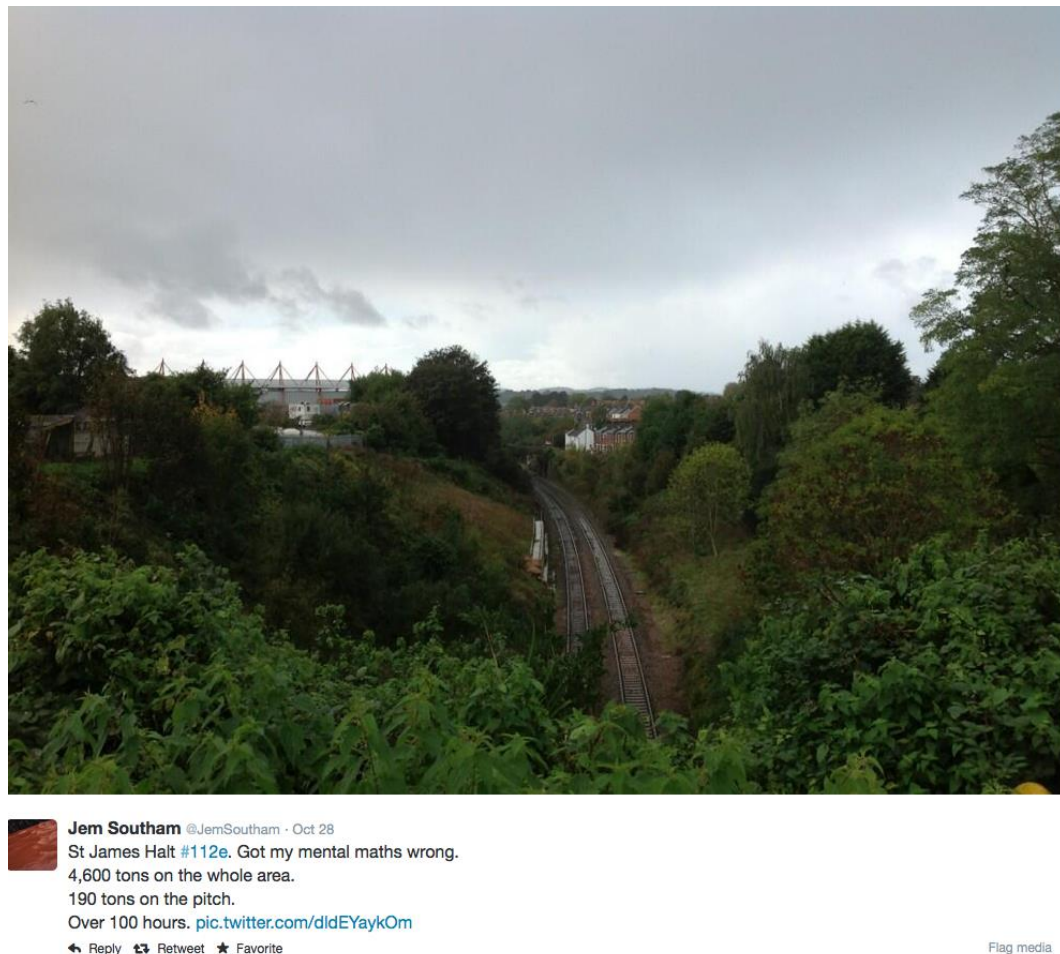


Figure 5-9 Jem Southam, on Twitter: "*St James Halt #112e*. October 8<sup>th</sup>. 2014

His chosen geographic area of interest is a loosely defined region around St James Park train station in Exeter, close to his own house. The body of work is named after the station's former name and starts a dialogue with the area's history. I believe that it is down to Southam's familiarity with the area that he is able to document the minute changes that happen in places like the allotments next to the station. Recurring motifs haunt the images and accompanying 140 character captions, the state of his local football team, whose ground falls within the bounds of region, a tally of birds spotted in the garden, the weather. All become documented within the autobiogeographical project, part

psychogeography, part beating of the bounds, part new nature writing. By the end of the project Southam had created 359 images and captions and the audience is left with a strong sense of place within Southam's landscape. While the photographs clearly demonstrate that the locale is inner urban, the constant motif of seemingly unmanaged banks and verges, with species of weed breaking ground in the urban environment suggests an interstitial, edgeland nature to the sites. This is combined with Southam's insider knowledge of the area, with an outsider's detached aesthetic, through a perspective of empty streets only strengthens this divide between states. The accompanying still lifes, with the foliage, combined with found objects, being brought into the kitchen where Southam is having building work done, creates a virtual meeting of the built environment and nature, and become edgeland sculptures.



Figure 5-10 Jem Southam. On Twitter: "*St James Halt #272. Still-life March 4<sup>th</sup>. 2014*"



## 5.4 George Shaw; An Obsession with The Places of Your Youth

George Shaw has spent his career painting the Coventry estate, Tile Hill, on which he grew up.

A postwar council estate on the edge of Coventry, with trees, grass and loads of woodland just beyond. The last built-up area before the countryside took over. I don't think it has ever left me, that sense of possibility and familiarity and possible danger lurking out there somewhere beyond. I haunted the place and now it haunts me... I'm a prowler with a camera. I have my territory that I revisit looking for clues to I'm not sure what. I might pass a certain place a hundred times and then, one day, something about it catches my eye. I take a few photographs, usually bad ones, then print them and toss them aside for a while until I find one particular image is nagging away at me. Something is definitely triggered by the photograph and it is that something that I am chasing after when I eventually make the painting. (Shaw quoted in O'Hagan, online article, 2011)



Figure 5-11 George Shaw, *Scenes from the Passion: Late*. 2002

I would argue that Shaw can be considered a psychogeographer in the Sinclair vein, his work is concerned with an edgeland he experienced as a teenager, and his viewpoint is autobiogeographical. Shaw's paintings are a sustained enquiry into the nature of time, place, and memory. To this point Shaw has come to think of his work as a single painting (Bracewell, 2011: 9).

'The central English provincial industrial-suburban world that he describes, the landscape of his childhood and youth to early adulthood, might be seen to exist simultaneously in several temporal registers: in linear "real" time, in the maze of memory and as rendering of imagined or reconstructed time, in which the distinctions between present witness and recollection merge with the cosmography of literature, pop culture and art history to create a form of super-romanticism.' (ibid.)

This blending reminds me of Sinclair's book *Hackney, That Rose Red Empire* and the drawings of Laura Oldfield Ford, who both blend elements of personal history, memory, collected stories with fictional elements to create a (auto)biography of Hackney. Both are familiar with the political intent of the original Situationist psychogeographer, and the looser contemporary version as a form of mapping place and connections. Shaw has seen the blending of 'tense within his work to a "diagrammatic" notion of time, connecting different points within the mapping of the past' (ibid.: 10). Like the macro/micro tensions within Southam's work, Shaw believes, 'the landscapes I have in mind are not part of an unseen world in a psychic sense, nor are they part of the unconscious. They belong to the world that lies, visibly, about us. They are unseen merely because they are not perceived; only in that way can they be regarded as "invisible"' (ibid.: 11). This is echoed in Jonathon Jones' review of *My Back To Nature* (2016). Within these paintings Shaw's attention has drifted from the architecture of the housing estate to the patches of woodland that sit within its centre and on its boundary. His brush captures the discarded

mattresses and collection of pornography, which litter the floor, along with discarded tarps, cans of lager and the ubiquitous graffiti phallus daubed on a tree trunk.



Figure 5-12 George Shaw, *Study for Hanging Around (Landscape without Figures)*, 2014

Just as Farley and Symmons Roberts suggest, these are images from our collective memories, experiences we had when we were growing up, or false memories implanted by culture. Jones informs us that ‘the beauty, surely, is there already. We just can’t see it. Schooled by landscape art and romantic poetry to look for unspoiled nature, we go for walks where we mentally edit out the cans and bottles and concentrate on the greenery. But we’re in denial’ (Jones, 2016).

## **5.5 Sally Mann: What Remains, Haunting the Landscape**

It would be many years until I was introduced to this idea photographically through the work of Sally Mann *Deep South* (2005). Mann’s images were impregnated with the history of the locations she explored. They spoke of both physical and psychological scars on the landscape and by extension the inhabitants of that world. She speaks of a ‘place extravagant in its beauty, reckless in its fecundity, terrible in its indifference, and dark with memories’ (Mann, 2015).

In her work on the American civil war landscape, *Deep South* (Mann, 2005), she depicts a landscape ravaged by history, the resulting images, painstakingly crafted on her wet plate collodion camera, display scars and pock marks of their own. Details are obscured by the heavy bloom of flare and fogging, or rendered as the shallowest impressionistic streaks by the 19<sup>th</sup> century lens. The “collodion community”, is very dismissive of the ostentatious errors in Mann’s work. “I happen to like the flaws,” Mann once said. “I’m so worried that I’m going to perfect this technique some day.” (Mann, 2005: n.p)

These flaws are down to the inherent instability of the process, but could also be argued to be visual representations of their landscape’s history. Occult marks or an unseen energy force stored within the loam, rendered visible by the camera, the landscape’s aura is captured within the silver halide. Mann herself describes that ‘the resulting image often



appears to be breathed on to the negative, a moist refulgence within the deepening shadows’.



Figure 5-13 Sally Mann, *Untitled 13* from *Deep South*. 2005

In an interview Mann spoke about the reason for choosing the process for *Deep South*.

‘Back in the early ’70s, when we came back from Europe, Larry and I were poking around up in the attic of this five-story building on the campus. And we found this collection of glass negatives that had been taken around Lexington, right after the Civil War, by a local photographer. In fact, he photographed at the cabin, right here on the farm. It was an amazing moment when I held up a glass plate—and damn, it was a picture of the same cliffs that I’ve looked at my whole life, exactly as they are now, even the little vines hanging down.’ (Art21, online article, 2001)

In producing *Deep South*, Mann spoke of choosing the ‘least travelled, most remote roads, exiguous pale blue lines on the map, certain in my bones of the memories residing there’ (Mann, 2015: 234). While driving these roads Mann would listen to Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, in doing so she would draw parallels between the landscape around her and Marlow’s paddle up the Congo surrounded by ‘groves of death’ (ibid.). Mann speaks movingly of the souls of millions of African Americans who built the American South, ‘I was moving among shades, aware, always, of their presence’ (ibid.). Mann herself is from Virginia and the South runs through her veins. She speaks of her wish for her aesthetic to be a ‘little cooler, like [Dusseldorf School photographers] Struth and Demand,’ but her ‘vision is always completely clouded by all that southern stuff’ (McThenia, online article, 2015). By southern stuff Mann is talking about Southern Gothic, or as McThenia describes it, ‘longing and doom, nostalgia and brutality, humidity and rot... but... they don’t cloud her vision. Over the years they have come to sharpen it’ (ibid.).

‘Flannery O’Connor once said the south is Christ-haunted, but I say it’s death-haunted, pain-haunted, cruelty-haunted- just haunted, period. I knew my pictures were haunted too, but in a different way from the ones I had made closer to home. I had come south looking not so much for the scars of the Civil War, but for something even more fundamental and, paradoxically, more elusive.

The pictures I wanted to take were about the rivers of blood, of tears, and sweat that Africans poured into the dark soil of their thankless new home. I was looking for images of the dead as they are revealed in the land and in its adamant, essential renewal (Mann, 2015: 235).

The landscape has played a vital role in the majority of Mann’s work, even from her first series *Immediate Family* (1993) the Rockbridge landscape surrounding her home ‘crept into the family pictures in the most insidious and insistent way’ (Mann quoted in

McThenia, online article, 2015). She took this as the 'siren song' (ibid.) that would lead to *Deep South* and 'how death and decay oozed, from battlefield landscapes' (McThenia, online article, 2015), describing 'the landscapes were just soliciting me' (Mann, 2015: 235).

I have tried to nail down what it is that makes it at once so alluring and so repellent, like fruit on the verge of decay. Ultimate beauty requires that edge of sweet decay, just as our casually possessed lives are made more precious by the whiff of the abyss. We southerners, like Proust, have come to believe that the only true perfection is a lost perfection, buying into our own myth of loss by creating a flimflam romance out of a resounding historical defeat. In that nexus between myth and reality we live uncomfortably, our cultural sorrows, our kind-heartedness, and our snoot-cocking, renegade defiance playing out against a backdrop of profligate beauty' (Mann, 2015: 239).

## **5.6 Multiple Voices: The Work Of Soth, Horn, And Hornstra & Bruggen**

Alec Soth's work maps the interplay between the outside and inside within the understanding of edgeland space. While his work isn't concerned with Shoard's edgelands it is a depiction of 'provincial' America, the middle, away from the seats of American power on the east and west coasts, and the neoliberal elite art scene. It concerns itself with the margins of the American psyche, as well by extension the marginalised of the American Dream. As David James (online article, 2015) writes,

Soth's work has taken him across the whole of the US, though it's what are derisively called 'the flyover states' that firmly hold his attention. This is his "big middle", as seen as a constantly shifting morass of economic stagnation, religious fervour and down-at-heel eccentricity.

While *Sleeping by the Mississippi* (2004) uses America's river to trace the two horse towns, it is at least within the mainstream conscious. *Broken Manual* (2011) on the other hand turns its attentions to real margins, both spatial and mental, exploring the world of hermits, survivalists and the dispossessed, those that have chosen to step off the grid.



Figure 5-14 Alec Soth, *Venice, Louisiana* from *Sleeping by the Mississippi*. 2003



Figure 5-15 Alec Soth, *Edel's hideaway (spring)* from *Broken Manual*. 2006

Due to the inherent visual nature of photography, allowing a subject's voice to become apparent in the image is difficult; however, as I have previously written, the capture of oral histories and testimony is a key research method for ethnographers in the formation of an understanding of place. The oral histories within the research of Rachel Lichenstein for her book on the Thames Estuary, *Estuary: out from London to the Sea* (2016) attempt to capture a slowly disappearing voice of a region. This key concept in new nature writing of the embodied voice has a strong literary tradition, but has been slower to migrate to the visual arts; when it has done so it has produced a stronger representation.

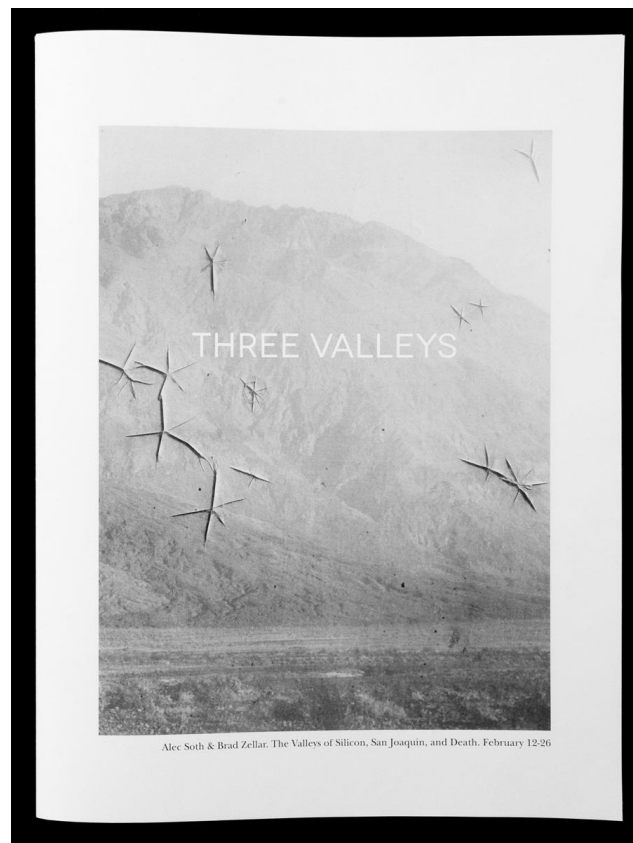


Figure 5-16 Alec Soth, Brad Zellar, *LBM Dispatch #4: Three Valleys*. 2013

Alec Soth's series of publications *LBM Dispatch* (2011-14) utilised the structure of a small town newspaper as a means of exploration. It started as 'a lark... to go on an adventure... to photograph a cat stuck up a tree that had eluded rescuers' (Zeller, online

article, 2013). Both Alec and his collaborator Brad Zeller had started their life at small town papers.

‘Usually, at about the midpoint of every trip, themes and sequences begin to take shape and we start fine-tuning and filling in holes. A bad day will be followed by a flurry of unexpected encounters, and the flagging energy in the van will be replaced by what often feels like a vibrational, purely synergistic rush... You ask questions, you poke around and you don’t stop: What’s in that room, what’s behind there, and eventually – boom – there it is’ (Zeller, online article 2013).

All of Soth’s work is poetic in nature, borrowing from and responding to literary ideas. As such the opportunities afforded to him through independent self-publication allow him to tailor the book to the project. Soth’s multiple series form an encyclopaedia of America’s edges, an alternative State of the Union style survey that bears many of the hallmarks of Roni Horn’s ‘To Place’ series and the idea of an encyclopaedia of identity. The series use of multiple, seemingly disconnected, books embraces a multidisciplinary method of representation that Horn describes as a ‘very slow process of accumulation’ (Spinelli, 1995).

Rob Hornstra and Arnold van Bruggen’s, *Sochi Project* (2007-13) forms an extensive visual ethnography of the South Russian Caucasus and was loosely based on the area’s selection for the 2014 winter Olympics. Through what they termed ‘slow journalism’ - which I would argue is a form of adapted ethnography - they returned repeatedly to this region as committed practitioners, establishing a solid foundation of research on and engagement with this small yet incredibly complicated place. The pair’s approach combined documentary storytelling with contemporary portraiture, found photographs and other visual elements collected during their travels.



## Archipelagos of Interstitial Ground: A Filmic Investigation of The Thames Gateway's Edgelands

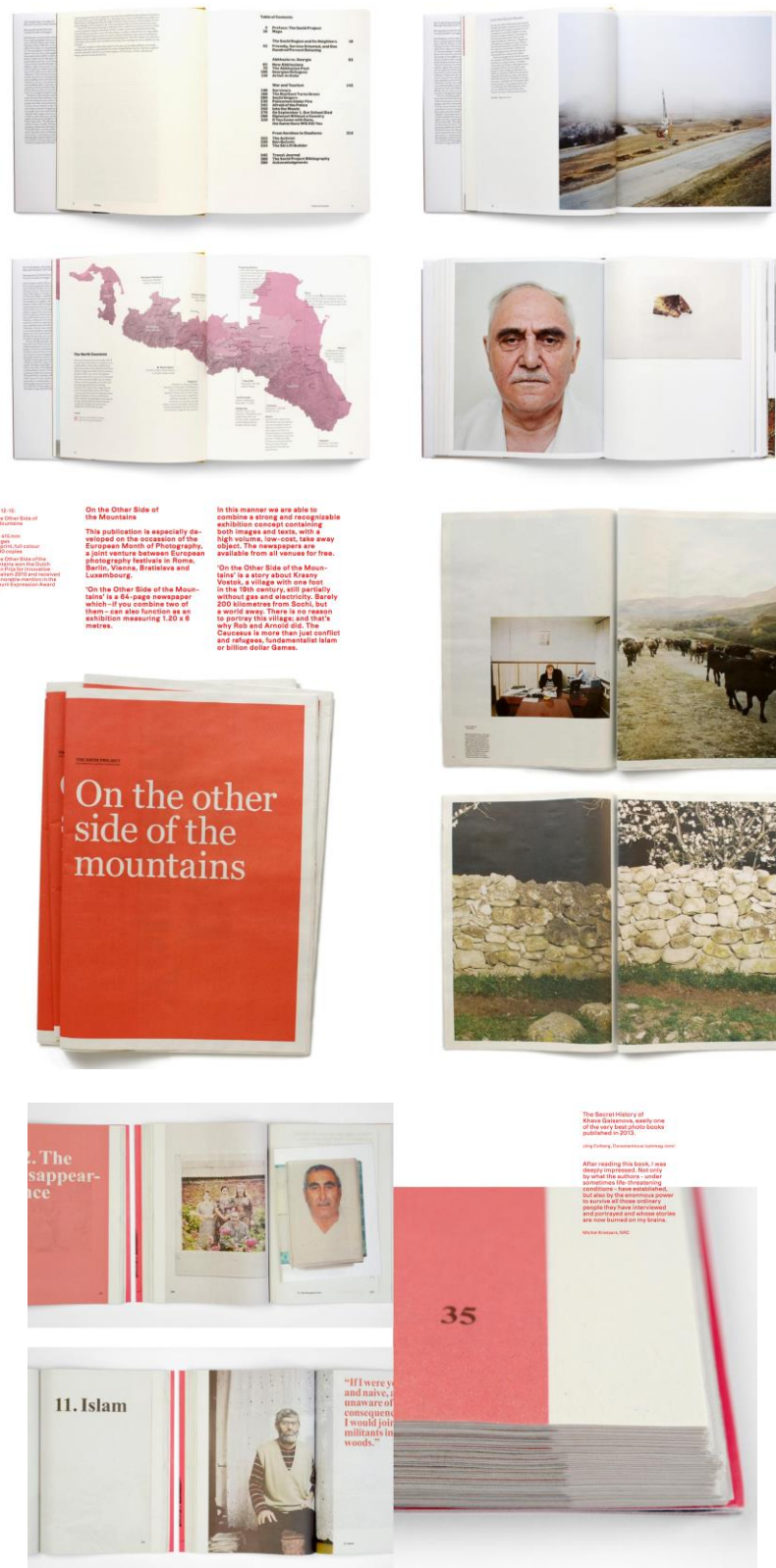


Figure 5-17 Rob Hornstra and Arnold van Bruggen, *selection of publications* from *The Sochi Project*. 2007-13

*The Sochi Project*, along with Roni Horn's *To Place* series, form intimate portraits of the areas that they investigated, utilising an ever changing methodology and methods of publication. Hornstra and Van Bruggen identify themselves within the slow journalism movement, whose aims are to break out of the rush to be first to publish and instead allow a story time to develop (Delayed Gratification, online article, 2017). Hornstra and Van Bruggen believe that a combination of time and research allow a deeper investigation (Hornstra, website, 2014). Susan Greenberg defines slow journalism as:

Essays, reportage and other nonfiction forms that offer an alternative to conventional reporting, perceived as leaving an important gap in our understanding of the world at a time when the need to make sense of it is greater than ever... More time is invested in both the production and consumption of the work, to discover things we would not otherwise know, or notice things that have been missed, and communicate that to the highest standards of storytelling craft. (Greenberg, 2012: 381–382)

The project as a whole forms a transmedia experience, which combines interactive documentary, print media, digital publication and exhibitions (Gambarato, 2015: 1). It has been described as 'a remarkable exercise in photojournalism... and has set new standards in modern journalism' (Ferri, 2014 quoted in Gambarato, 2015: 2). However, I am slightly uneasy about the (slow) journalism banner, and it is an issue that Hornstra is aware of, stating 'I think what we do is closer to art than journalism because we don't intend to be objective... These are our stories, our views and our visions' (Hornstra, website, 2014). Together with *To Place*, I situate it alongside photographic work by photographers such as Alec Soth and Sally Mann, works that combine Adams' three modes of landscape photography and sit within a poetic landscape tradition that blends narrative and metaphor (O'Hagan, 2015). As I argued in Chapter Four, these works echo elements of a macro/micro mapping that is at the heart of Sarah Ogden's landscape ethnography and transport it from a written product to a multisensory one that utilises



transmedia techniques of dissemination. I consider that Soth's work was at its richest when it was exhibited as a retrospective show (2015) that allowed his wide range of publication methods to be explored as a single 'state of the union'. While each of the publications by Hornstra and van Bruggen and Horn are impressive in their own right, it is when they are explored as a whole that they take on their full perspective.

It is possible to see that, upon reflection, all of the above bodies of work blend multiple aspects of the landscape aesthetic to create multiple and mixed readings of place. Visual ethnographies remain unusual within the confines of geography, however within creative arts we are able to see a rich heritage of work that explores complex situations through cross-disciplinary methods. The work of the *Sochi Project* and Roni Horn's *To Place* (1990- 2013) are exceptional examples of this and bodies of work that I hope to emulate in terms of their scope and understanding for the world they document.

## 5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored bodies of work that have informed my own practice, and which could be suggested to fit within a non-representational methodology. The wide range of methods within the work for exploring and representing the landscape, highlight the openness of landscape ethnography as a methodology. All of the works display a rigorous period of production, and a 'deep' immersion in their subject, and situate their chosen landscapes within the wider context of complex assemblages and wide ranging actors and agents. It also demonstrates the vast and differing methodologies that define contemporary landscape photography, and inform what we consider to be methods of fieldwork within landscape ethnography. In the next chapter I will explore the complicated history of the development of the Thames Gateway, and explore the actors, agents and power networks that comprise its assemblage.



## 6 A Personal Connection – Why The Thames Gateway?

The place was long forgotten. Whatever claims it had once had to commerce and industry were surrendering beneath a sheaf of vegetation. Here and there, the skeleton of a walkway appeared beneath the fleshy leaves of stonecrop or a crumbling kiln emerged from ferns, but the site was slowly being consumed by the undergrowth (Donaldson, 2017: 9).

Previous chapters have dealt with the overall concept of edgelands as originally proposed by Shoard and looked at its connections with landscape theories and models that pre-date its formation, as well as its visual representation. Within this chapter I will be mapping the ideas surrounding edgelands on to a geographic region that forms my case study area and the subject of my film works. This region has gone by several names and iterations, but is now commonly thought of as the Thames Gateway, so named due to it being seen as the gateway to London and London's gateway to the European continent (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, website, 2011).

Within this chapter I will briefly explore the history of the Thames Gateway as a redevelopment region, before moving on to explore my personal history with the region that has helped define the direction of my practice. I will look to make connections between the region and how I consider it to be an edgeland region. Finally I will explore some of the photographic work that directly documents the region, and how my

dissatisfaction with its representation has pushed me to find new methodologies to help with its documentation.

## **6.1 The Thames Gateway**

Anyone who has been stuck in traffic on the Queen Elizabeth 2 Bridge between Dartford and Thurrock, linking the south and north banks of the River Thames, knows the Thames Gateway. It loosely stretches as far as the eye can see, left and right of the bridge, hugging the twist and turns of the slowly narrowing river as it makes its way from the North Sea towards the capital. The gateway is hemmed in by the manmade girdle of the A2 and A13 roads. The Thames Gateway can be considered an edgeland in a geographic and metaphorical sense. As it is largely earmarked for redevelopment, it has diverse and mixed characteristics that will be explored through my resulting landscape ethnography films.

The redevelopment of the London Docklands region, comprising the former dock sites around the Isle of Dogs, The Royal Docks and Surrey Quays, formed the precursor to the Thames Gateway development. The decline of the docks had been rapid due to changing technology and the shift towards containerisation, with the old docks unable to cope with the new size of ships (London Royal Docks, 2015). Early attempts to regenerate the area, published in the London Docklands Strategic Plan (1976) had only limited success in Beckton, hampered by land problems and lack of funding.

To counter this the Conservative government set up an Urban Development Corporation (UDC) in the shape of the London Docklands Development Corporation, charged with finding new uses for the old docks, and regenerating the region. On the site of the former Royal Docks in Newham, London City Airport opened in 1988, using the former central wharf as its runway and the Excel exhibition centre was opened shortly after. On the other side of the River Thames at the Isle of Dogs, developers were offered building

incentives of no business rates for ten years, no development land tax, and the sites were not privy to the normal planning restrictions, as explored in ideas surrounding non-planning in Chapter Two (*The Battle for Docklands*, video, 1998). However the local communities, councils and a House of Commons Select Committee, accused the developers of 'bypassing' the local community (Imrie, Thomas, 1999: 23) while others argued that the site had been redeveloped but ultimately not regenerated (Brownhill, 1999).

The Thames Gateway was hailed as 'Western Europe's most ambitious regeneration programme' (National Audit Office, 2007: 4) and looked to reverse the development of London from west to east (Glancey, 2003), which in part had been fuelled by development around the M4 corridor from Heathrow Airport to Reading (Hatherley, 2012: 2, DoE, 1995). To many, the east of London answered a lot of the capital's planning issues. One of the Gateway's earliest proponents said it 'seemed to be a case of "win-win" in planning terms. It allows London to expand without stirring up the nimby sensitivities in the affluent west' (Hall quoted in Glancey, online article, 2003).

## 6.2 A Long Held Relationship

Just as the Thames Gateway was born out of a collision of ideas, so too was my interest in the region. The collision of a series of events, memories and bodies of creative work would combine to create an autobiographical connection to the landscape. My relationship to the Thames Estuary has its roots in urban exploration (urbex); my first serious body of work *The Darkness On The Edge Of Town* (Robinson, 2005) photographed the interiors of many of the ring of disused asylums that lay discarded around London's M25 perimeter, some of which Iain Sinclair had written about encountering in *London Orbital* (Sinclair, 2002: 344-5). I was concerned with forming a sense of the places, and I would now consider it an early example of a psychogeographic methodology, if such a thing can exist in such a loose term. I would argue that good

urban exploration and psychogeography are one and the same, while Garrett states that ‘Both psychogeographers and urban explorers seek to redefine and/or experience space and place on their own terms, regardless of pre-existing rules, social templates or cultural norms’ (website, 2009).

The autobiographical element of psychogeography (as explored in Chapter One), within the asylum images was provided by my personal relationship with the sites. My grandmother had been placed in one of these outlying hospitals during the early part of her life. By photographing the sites, I hoped to gain a deeper understanding of them, and by extension my grandmother.

### **6.3 Hoo Peninsula, Cliffe Fort, and The Isle of Grain**

During the time I was working on this body of images, I was also developing the idea for an investigation into the Thames Estuary’s industrial landscape that would become the basis for my PhD. The first images taken were on the Hoo Peninsula and Isle of Grain, a large patch of marshland that separates the Thames from the Medway. As an area it can be seen as a microcosm for aspects of a landscape that I would later come to view as edgelands.

My starting point for the work was Cliffe Fort, which along with its siblings Coal House Fort on the Essex foreshore and Shoremead, further down river, form the first line of defence at the river’s entrance. All three were built in the 19th century to replace the river’s 16th and 18th century defences that were now largely obsolete.

Cliffe Fort was constantly updated from its inception to deal with new threats during World War One and Two, before being sold off to the neighbouring aggregate works in the 1950s, who briefly used it as the home of Blue Circle sailing club, before shuttering it and allowing nature’s reclamation. The fort is listed by English Heritage as being at risk,

but no solution has been presented to save the structure (Historic England, 2017, Green, 2014).

The desire to explore the ruins, is not a new one; as previously discussed in Chapter Two and Three, people have long been drawn to the ruin. It forms a local edgeland, and is used for some of the things that these sites are linked to, 'dangerous play' as described by Edensor (2005), such as urban exploration (28DaysLater, website, 2014), graffiti (Derelict & Dangerous, website, 2015), as well as evidence of the area's use for dirt bikes, and as a site of alcohol consumption, evidenced by the discarded beer cans that litter the fort's interior.



Figure 6-1 detail of Cliffe Fort's numerous graffiti, *Derelict & Dangerous*, 17th  
*September 2015*

Local historian David Brown has amassed recollections about the fort within his website (CliffeFort.org.uk, website, 2010) devoted to the area. These recollections come from both forum comments and a direct appeal for emailed anecdotes. The comments depict the

changing attitude towards access to the site. Marizpan<sup>23</sup> grew up in the village of Cliffe during the 1970s and recalls camping out at the fort.

We used to be able to go into the fort, because Blue Circle wasn't that bothered about going to check during the day. I think many of us village kids were banned after a few minor accidents in the nights...

Because of the extent of some of the fort, we used to go camping round there... We used to have fun playing in the fort, and down the tunnels. This was '69 up to '73. The local school used to take us down, to frog spawn and pick bullrushes, and there was always a large supply of chalk for sculpting. We used to go swimming off 'the pipes', which are out in one of the waterways, although we knew that Blue Circle owned it, and our parents told us it was dangerous.

Maxeen Kimber describes accessing the fort during the 1980s with a photographer friend; her comments paint an image of adventure and freedom tinged with danger.

My memories are of some large doors to the fort which I don't think were in use; we generally used a way in via the beach, up onto the first storey roof and jumping in through a hatch into the building. Those dark interiors will always stay with me. The eerie offshoot passages, filled with water, dark and forbidding ... We roamed around the fort ... I remember the group of friends very well, and have photos somewhere of us reclining in the darkness within the fort - illicit kisses well away from parents!

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<sup>23</sup> Due to the act of trespass involved in accessing the site, some of these recollections use online forum handles instead of names.



Keith Beagley recalls playing in the edgeland as a four-year-old child, mirroring the idea of adventurous play that Edensor describes in *Industrial Ruins*,

We spent most of our time down the marshes, and we used to ride our bikes down what seemed at the time a long straight road down to the fort. We used to spend hours playing hide and seek and pretending that we were guarding the fort against the Germans! As we matured we would buy old mopeds and motorbikes and spend most of our childhood down at the fort and the marshes. (Brown, 2003-10)

I first visited Cliffe Fort during Easter 2005, at first drawn to the aggregate works that supported the North Kent cement industry. From aerial views of the surrounding mass of flooded pits and the yellowing sand extractions, it was easy to make out the diamond shape fort at the end of a long drive to the river's jetties.

*Parking outside the aggregate works we walked down the long driveway, past miles of conveyor belts. As we drew closer to the river, the fort grew larger in our vision, a heavy set two storey building, nestled in a small copse of trees on its northern edge. Perched on top of the solid block work was a modest brick guard tower, a later addition staring out towards the grey water of the Thames. Huge banks of sand had been piled up against the fort's exterior, partly for storage, but also to prevent access. The large double doors were blocked by the ad hoc barrier, leaving a small breathing hole at the top, just enough to be able to see into the structure behind. I scrambled up the sand bank, crumbling with every step, at the top I was amazed at what I saw behind the gate. The entire fort was flooded, with a couple of feet of brackish water, reeds and plant life had sprung up in this sheltered lagoon, and dragonflies flitted around in the warm sun. I yearned to be able to get my cumbersome large format camera inside the walls, to capture this oasis in the dry and arid desert of sand that surrounded it. We walked the fort's perimeter looking for a way in; it was surrounded by a large ditch with a tall steel palisade fence on the only accessible side. None of the steel uprights showed any sign of budging; thwarted I made do instead with photographing the outside of the fort.*

My interest in Cliffe Fort would be rekindled a decade later by a series of images taken by the photographer Quintin Lake as he attempts to walk the entire British coast. The images showed the interior of the fort, and were taken by someone seemingly without an extensive urbex background, so access had clearly become easier in some way.



Figure 6-2 Quintin Lake, Anti-aircraft battery, Cliffe Fort, Hoo Peninsula. 2015

*This time I approached by walking up Cliffe Creek past the small floodgates used to alleviate the pressure from the Thames tide. A sign warned that the path ahead was closed due to erosion, but I continued on, the path taking me between the creek's edge and a drainage ditch. Suddenly the path narrows, it clearly hasn't been walked in some time, I'm forced to push my way through tangles of brambles and hawthorns. As quickly as it narrows, it opens up again on a small patch of scrub, hemmed in between the thicket of stunted trees on its left and the now rising river wall on the right. Rabbits flee into the collection of burrows that cover the sandy soil. Huge ships pass by on the narrow shipping channel, the reminder that I am on the river is a little disorientating, easily forgotten on the tranquil walk to get to the location. Heavy and monumental concrete monoliths stand sentry within the hollows of the former concrete working, while the large pyramids of sand slowly shift in the breeze. The path comes to a halt by the conveyor belts, with a fenced path, hustling you under the heavy machinery. I wait for a break in the earthmovers shuttling sand from the piles to the river barge docked at the works wharf. The wharf gates themselves are heavily reinforced with barbed wire and signs*

*warning against rabies and UK border force. They are small compared to the border defences further up the river at West Thurrock, but this is only a private wharf.*

*Once I have dodged the earthmovers I come across the erosion that the sign earlier warned me about. A section of path has disappeared, washed away by relentless high tides. To get past the obstruction I have to lower myself gingerly down the new six-foot bank and scramble up the other side, briefly resting on the Thames' newest section of beach. It is easy to see that unless something is done to shore up the riverbank that the erosion will continue, the tide has already gouged out a new section of bank, undercutting the land above. The worrying thing is the closeness to the remaining torpedo chute; there is a real danger that this too will end up another part of the river's relentless motion.*

*Once up on the other side of the bank it is possible to see the route into the fort. The route is very similar to the one used by youths in the 1970s. Someone has piled a series of logs just in front of the steel fence; a foot wide section of the spikes has been removed with a petrol angle grinder. I quickly hop the fence and disappear up a small path in the undergrowth. At the top of the steep earthwork bank I finally come in contact with the fort, a rotting wooden ladder is propped up against the outer wall, loosely tethered by baler twine. The wall itself is only six foot high at this point, but attempting to climb the ladder with my large tripod and heavy camera bag proves difficult, I heft them onto the roof and finally get my first view inside the fort. I'm on top of the two-storey roof, a hatch in front of me descends into the darkness of the fort's interior, another wooden ladder pokes out of the hole in the roof. I think better of descending, concerned that I'm alone and without a mobile phone, as well as carrying heavy equipment. Below the roof's edge I can see the flooded courtyard, water breaches the open doors of the building. The fort itself is covered in graffiti, including the ever-present paintings of large phalluses. The view inside the courtyard is idyllic and at odds with the noise of the works outside the fort's walls. The earthmovers continue backwards and forwards, I watch them from my new vantage point; sirens intermittently break the quiet, each time forcing the birds inside the swamp to take flight. I spend an hour inside the walls before eventually retreating back to civilisation.*

Sitting on the fort's concrete roof it was possible to gain an insight into both the Thames Gateway and the edgeland environment. Upriver it is possible to view the landfill at Mucking Marshes, slowly being re-sculpted into a nature park, three squat cranes sit idly on the water's edge, waiting for London's barge fleet to bring fresh deposits to be interred into the rich soil. Further round the river's bend stand the far larger gantry cranes of the

new London Gateway deep water port, built to alleviate pressure on Tilbury's basins, while at the same time 'integrating it with what will be Europe's biggest logistics park... It allows companies to completely re-evaluate their supply chains' (Osborne, 2012). The giant warehouses and distribution centres are an increasingly familiar element of both the Thames Gateway and the wider edgeland environment.

Large container ships sit moored at the quay, while an increasingly automated process lifts off the tall stacks of uniform containers. These are a far cry from the hustle and bustle of London's former docks and wharfs, now transformed by the developers into high-rise gated communities, the dream of successive governments to turn the neglected post-industrial sites into a modern day Venice. As previously discussed, these transformations foreground the entire Thames Gateway master plan, and its grand scheme to balance the financial disparity between West and East London. This plan evolved and shifted over a prolonged period, constantly morphing based on the whims and motivations of successive governments, before being quietly killed off, only to return after another rebranding project after enough time had passed to remove the bitter taste left in communities by previous schemes (Eccleston, online article, 2007, Ames, online article, 2008, Nathan, online article, 2013, Lea, online article, 2017).

The new port sits on the footprint of the former Shell Haven oil refinery; just behind it are the remaining oil storage tanks, chimneys, distillers, flares and spires of the mothballed section of the site. It is all that is left of an industry that dominated the landscape of this section of the Thames. The density of refineries in the area was partly due to the Abadan oil crisis (1951-54) and the 'growing reluctance of oil companies to keep more eggs than they could help in the politically fragile Middle Eastern basket' and 'would lead to the British Isles having five times the refinery capacity of Iran.' (Cable, 1991: 96). All that now remains is ghostly shapes rendered in the grass, visible in Google Earth's aerial images of the region. Many attribute the decline of London's former docks as partly due to the 1973 oil crisis and their inability to compete in an increasingly global market (Hall,

2006). This decline, and the negative impact of globalisation on the area's traditional working-class industries, still has a large impact on the increasingly prevalent right-wing politics of the region (Burrows, online article, 2015).

Looking west, towards London, it is possible to make out the grey bulk of Tilbury power station, sitting trapped between the river and the marshes. Behind the fort you can just make out the chimneys of Grain and Kingsnorth power stations. All three of these power stations are in various stages of decommission or demolition, and, along with the oil-fired one at Dartford, are the last remaining power stations in a landscape that was once dominated by giant chimneys and hulking turbine halls. The chimney at Grain was a dominating feature on the estuary skyline, and drew a large crowd when it became the tallest concrete object to be demolished in the UK in September 2016 (Hawken, online article, 2016).

The area to the north of Cliffe Fort has a rich and varied history. Cliffe marshes are home to the former fort at Lower Hope Point, but also a large munitions factory, designed for the production of explosives. Maps and aerial photos clearly show the large workings and storage casements. The area is also the literary inspiration for the start of Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Magwitch escaping the hulks moored on the Thames Estuary, waiting to be transported to Australia. Dickens' words paint a vivid picture of the bleakness of the marshes.

The marshes were just a long black horizontal line then, as I stopped to look after him; and the river was just another horizontal line, not nearly so broad nor yet so black; and the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed. On the edge of the river I could faintly make out the only two black things in all the prospect that seemed to be standing upright; one of these was the beacon by which the sailors steered — like an unhooped cask upon a pole — an

ugly thing when you were near it; the other a gibbet, with some chains hanging to it which had once held a pirate (Dickens, 1861: 5).

The marshes were also used as the site of an imaginary war, rendered by Stanley Kubrick's exacting lens into Vietnamese paddy fields for *Full Metal Jacket*. Further upstream Kubrick turned the disused Beckton gas works into the Vietnamese city of Hue. In his book *This Other London*, John Rogers makes the pilgrimage to 'Bec Phu' hoping to find leftover palm trees. Alas, they are there no longer, although Rogers does discern where certain scenes were shot: 'The squad at the heart of the film gets lost somewhere near Tesco and comes under fire from a sniper that I'd place somewhere between WH Smith and Sports Direct' (Roger, 2013: 57-8).

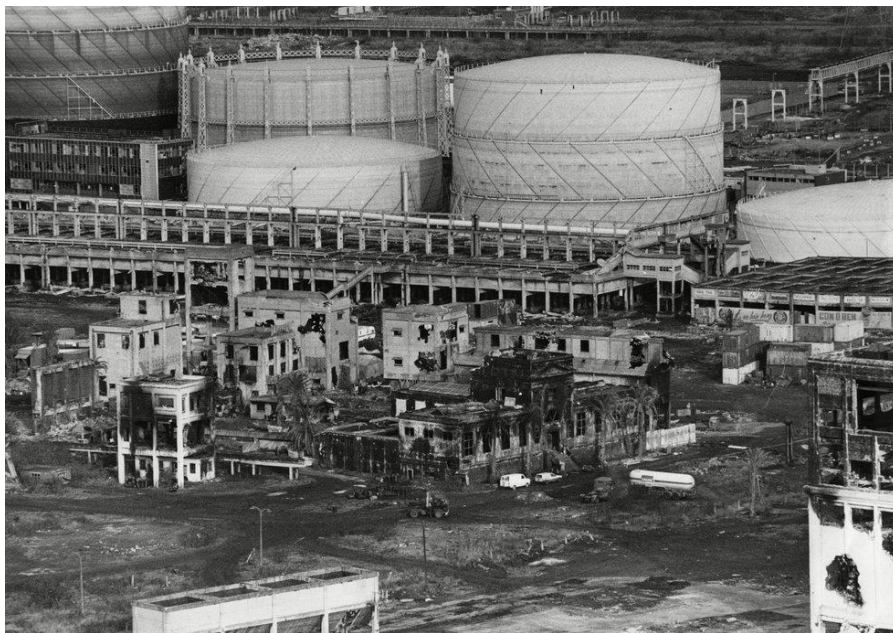


Figure 5-2 'Beckton Gas Works standing in for Vietnam in Kubrick's *Full Metal Jacket*',  
photographer unknown, 1987

## 6.4 Chatham & St Mary's Island

My relationship with the Thames Gateway would continue to grow and develop over the coming years. The body of work that I started at the end of my degree began to form a project about the (de)industrialisation of the English landscape, that eventually drifted

into my master's degree, undertaken at UCA Rochester, ensconced within the outer bounds of the Gateway region.

*For a period of time I lived on the barren moors of Dartmoor, and produced my earliest landscape photographs. Ever since then I have been drawn to the bleak marshes of the Thames Estuary as an escape from the run-down urban areas I was forced to live in due to cost. Increasingly I started to explore my urban surroundings and found the open wild spaces existed on my doorstep, albeit on a smaller scale.*

The Thames Gateway town of Chatham was the first heavily urbanised area my wife and I lived in. As a coping mechanism for the perceived hostility of the area, she and I started exploring these locations during the day and photographing them as a means of confrontation and then ownership. The resulting work *18 Rochester Street* (Galer, 2008) mixed black and white photos with autobiographical writing about her experiences of the area, and became a precursor to later work as well as forming our understanding of the place.

Our regular explorations into the wider world exposed us to the Thames Gateway and the interstitial landscape. One of the sites I became interested in was St Mary's Island on the Chatham peninsula, a new build development, and the photographs produced became the earliest site-specific development work on this PhD. The Medway islands are home to an interesting collision of histories, and the man-made island of St Mary's is no exception. The so-called 'island community' is no different from the swathe of new housing developments up and down the country. Its mixture of housing styles is a range of buildings in a series of faux fishing and Scandinavian vernaculars. Hatherley describes the area's developments as a 'fragment of the "aspirational" side of the Thames Gateway's property frenzy, the part that involves the perusal of *Wallpaper\** magazine and viewing of *Grand Designs*... it's unusual in North Kent, relatively exceptional for its high-end smoothness' (Hatherley, 2012: 6) The island's history is long and varied, and has been used as a major factor in the place-making surrounding the new community.





Figure 6-3 Simon Robinson, *Untitled 1-3*, from *St Mary's Island, Chatham*. 2006-7



The history of the island and its wider geography dates back to the Roman period of occupation. They found good use for the island, even though it was little more than a marshy swamp criss-crossed by tidal channels. A road was constructed to establish a ferry route from the island to the Hoo Pensinsular, which remained in constant use right up to the final years of the last century. St. Mary's Creek, which ran across the island and was utilised to create the Victorian basins that now mark the entrance to the island, played an important defensive role during the attempted Dutch invasion of 1667. Hurriedly, when the fleet was sighted, old ships were sunk across the creek and between St. Mary's Island and the far bank of Upnor. However, the Dutch fleet sailed round the sunken vessels, smashing through the chain stretched from one side of the river to the other, and caused much destruction to the sheltering English fleet. From the time of the Napoleonic wars to the end of the reign of Queen Victoria, the River Medway off St. Mary's Island was used to accommodate a fleet of hulked ships. These decommissioned naval vessels accommodated incarcerated hardened criminals and prisoners of war. Thousands of these convicts were used to dig out St. Mary's Creek and construct, in its place, Basins One, Two and Three. The spoil was used to create St. Mary's Island. Completed in the 1870s, the three Basins were used by Chatham Dockyard and warships of the Royal Navy for nearly one hundred years. It was closed in March 1984 by the Ministry of Defence with the loss of around 7,000 jobs and left a legacy of contamination that would require extensive remediation before house building could even start.

English Partnerships, who was the national regeneration agency for England at the time and who was initially responsible to the Secretary of State for the Environment, set about a programme to determine the nature and level of such wastes. A detailed research plan to test the ground across the whole of the island was put into effect, extensively testing and retesting soil and water samples.

Over a three-year period 1.2 million cubic metres of soil was taken away from the site and replaced. The extent of the clean-up operation and the attention to

detail with which it was carried out can best be illustrated by the fact that for virtually three years, every four hours, twenty-four hours a day, a train left the site carrying away soil and unwanted deposits in covered containers (Countryside Maritime, 2006).

The history as used by the developers in promotional material is limited, and the document ends with a short passage about yearly radiation testing, ‘radiological testing was carried out by the Ministry of Defence and English Partnerships and checked annually by an independent assessor’ (ibid.), however there is no further explanation as to why. In the wider unofficial history (at least in relationship to Countryside Maritime’s development) the three big basins at St Mary’s were used for the refitting of Britain’s nuclear submarine fleet up until the dock closed in 1984, including refuelling of the submarines’ reactor cores. Low-level radioactive waste was buried in the Dockyard near Gillingham Pier (DoE, 1980). Medium level radioactive waste (pumps etc.) was stored in the warehouse in the same location pending offsite disposal (Milcon Research and Consulting, 2012, Hansard, 26 Nov 2002: Column 172W).

The island’s interesting history has lead to a lot of discussion and conjecture about its use and potential accidents surrounding the submarines refitted on site on various local history forums, notably *The Kent History forum*. These forum posts (Radio-active waste Chatham Docks, online forum, 2011) describe the counter-history of the site, and challenge the status quo portrayed by the official histories presented by the developers.

When the navy had the yard, nuclear waste was stored in the old collier dock to the right of the south lock on the map... The spent fuel from the submarine reactors was taken out in crash-proof flasks on special trains in the dead of night, with armed marine guards aboard. (Bilgerat, 2011)

WildWeasel, further elaborates on the railway that serviced the site and was discussed earlier in this thesis.

The railway line from the dockyard runs in a cutting parallel to Rosebury Road / Richmond Road. It meets the main line just East of Gillingham station... I grew up in this area so we used to play on the line as kids...Big clue that it was used was the fact that the rails where always clean ...IE No rust.... A mate of mine (now sadly deceased ) Lived (sic) in Brooklyn Paddock next to the Bridge over the line at Burnt Oak Terrace ...He took photo's (sic) late one night of a train coming out of the Dockyard loaded with suspect containers... He had a visit from MOD Police and was told to " Be careful "..... (WildWeasel, 2011)

Because of the strategic importance of the Medway and Chatham's dockyard, the river is home to several defensive elements, including Hoo and Darnet forts, now cut off from the mainland as an archipelago of marshy islands. The fort at Darnet was purposely flooded to deter visitors from accessing its ground floor levels, although ingenious urban explorers have taken to using canoes to gain entry. There is a history of the Medway estuary's collection of islands being used by multiple groups of people as sites of moral rehabilitation, and later adapted into sanctuaries for those that need them. Carol Donaldson's book is rooted in this landscape. In *On the Marshes: a Journey into England's Waterlands* (2017), exploring the marshes of the Hoo Peninsula to the Isle of Sheppey, her quest is to understand why people are drawn to this landscape. She could easily be a character from one of Ballard or Sinclair's works. The prologue describes her time working for the RSPB on the Hoo Peninsula, living in a static caravan on the nature reserve. The starting point of her pilgrimage to understand the zone that she lives in is her eviction from the caravan and then resisting re-entry to 'normal' life. During this period she came across a series of people who had chosen to live unconventional lives in the estuary landscape. "The estuary, it seemed, had become a shelter for these people, and I began to wonder if the two were linked: the landscape in its unconventional beauty, and the people it attracted. Did this landscape, which continued to defy the modern world, attract people who also resisted the urge to be tamed?" (Donaldson, 2017:16).

Ken Worpole puts this down to the shoreline's liminality, 'a border territory, where the rules of classification as to what belongs to the land and what to the sea are ambiguously interwoven' (Orton and Worpole, 2013: 49). This liminality and separation from the mainland forms a place of psychological defence for those that need it. Photographer David Wise spent 45 days camping on Darnett Island (Bloom, online article, 2012), in the shadow of the flooded fort, following the breakdown of his relationship. He attempted to live off the land as much as possible, and his isolation echoes the inhabitants of the fort in the preceding centuries. He documented his time on the island in a book, and documentary film entitled *Otherness; Forty Five Days on the Isle of Beauty* (2012). The artist Stephen Turner spent a year living on the neighbouring Hoo Island in 1994, and has been described as "curator of the work of the river" (Collier, 1998: 1). His experiences would later form the basis of the work *Tide and Change* (1998)

I took a sight line from the centre, out through each (gun) bay to the shore and at each point recorded impressions of tidal erosion onto canvases fastened to the riverbed. These were then installed inside the fort and people were invited to visit... Visiting the fort was like an induction into a natural cycle and when people came I was the spirit of the fort somehow. (Turner et al, 2006: 84)

Turner, being a post-war child, says he is drawn to forts based on a childhood playing war games, an idea already discussed in the recollections of youths that used Cliffe Fort in the 1960s and 70s. His work includes *Seafort* (2006), where he lived on the derelict Maunsell Forts in the Thames Estuary for a month during the summer of 2005. The collection of forts at Shivering Sands formed part of the Thames' World War Two defences. They are eight nautical miles from the Kent coast and only accessible by boat. Turner had to bring all of his supplies with him to last the period and was lashed by gale force winds. Sue Jones describes Turner's works as defying categorisation, 'not land art, nor painting, or sculpture, nor performance. His works aren't issue based in a literal or reductive way, and yet one can be read subtle environmental references in individual

works' (Turner et al, 2006: 4), later going on to describe his work as being about the 'contradictions between transience and permanence' (ibid.).

'The sea forts would echo and shudder in the tide and high winds, the man-made structures at constant odds with the environment' (ibid.). Whereas Turner was completely removed from the wider world, Wise was able to have friends visit and bring supplies if necessary. Turner had chosen spiritual isolation, (ibid: 85) 'despite paradoxically being at the edge of one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world' (ibid:5). This isolation can be unpicked through his photos and writing, produced during his stay. 'Once there he became completely absorbed by the interior of the tower and began to look further inwards, shutting out more and more of the world outside' (ibid: 4). Being the first person to spend prolonged time in rooms that had remained untouched since the 1950s, led to a heightened sensitivity to his surroundings, 'I am in stimulating and thought provoking conversation with the fort itself. My eyes go on lingering journeys across misty mountain ridges formed by water stains on the walls NCO's barracks' (ibid: 24).



Figure 6-4 Stephen Turner, *Dust from Seaforts*. 2005

The condition has a name, 'fort madness' (ibid: 5) and was documented by World War 2 doctors. In Turner, it manifested itself as a surge or creative energy that might be impossible without the extreme isolation he was experiencing. For Turner, the fort replaced human interaction, in many ways he entered into a sensory and sensual relationship with the building. Turner describes his connection to the various forts and estuary locations as coming from a post-war childhood, playing 'forts' (ibid: 85) and exploring abandoned building and the possessions left behind (ibid: 81), this kind of play has been directly connected to edgelands through Farley and Symmons Roberts' writing on dens (2011: 37-47) and wasteground (ibid.: 136-149), and acts as a means to consider Turner's work being formed from the edgeland environment. Turner's time on the seafort is part urban exploration, part psychogeography. Turner speaks of using the time to pick up on 'resonances and memories of past lives and trying to translate them' (ibid). For me this mixture of Turner's photographs and first person diary accounts of his time on the fort, combined with the exploratory nature, and psychogeographic undertones (ibid: 82) mark it as a piece of landscape ethnography, at the very least Turner's representation of the work through the book, which documents not only Turner's thoughts, in the form of photographs and writing, but correspondence from others, and lists of equipment and supplies, becomes a method of Turner reconstructing his *dérive*.

## **6.5 The Thames Gateway as Shoardian Wildspace, Instead of Greenspace**

While it is important to consider the Thames gateway as an edgeland space, it is also important to consider large swathes of this interstitial landscape as Shoardian wildspace, as discussed in Chapter Two. One organisation that is exploring the region's biodiversity is Buglife. During the years 2005-07 they mapped every brownfield site in the Thames Gateway region and plotted the numbers of invertebrate species. They later revisited the sites in 2013 to compare the data. Of the 198 initial sites that they labelled of high and

medium importance they found that 51% had been lost, damaged, or were under immediate threat. The later 2013 maps formed the basis for my early fieldwork visits. By the end of my research process I had visited almost every site and was able to explore the locations on camera. Their report highlighted the disregard for the biodiversity that still exists in the planning system. 'The rate of development on brownfields is highly unsustainable, putting rare and endangered species at risk of local or national extinction' (Robins et al, 2013: 4). Two of the top five most biodiverse sites in the UK are on brownfield land, West Thurrock Marshes, the site of a former coal fired power station, and Canvey Wick, the home of a former oil refinery site (Shoard, 2008), both of which Shoard wrote about as key wildspaces (Shoard, 2012). Buglife argues that these sites thrive due to their former industrial usage. As a result the academic community is now starting to recognise that brownfields are as important as ancient woodland, and should now be considered as new lowland heaths, and rich flower meadows (Barker, 2000; Jones, 2003). Over the years I have been working in the West Thurrock marshes as a test site for my practice, I have witnessed the clearance and destruction of one of these locations, considered one of the UK's foremost sites of biodiversity (Shoard, 2008). In the past six months, bulldozers have cleared the rich scrub land and are slowly infilling the area with more distribution centres and warehouses.

Our urban wildscapes were allowed to flourish during the recent recession due to the lack of opportunity for developers to secure funds to develop 'hard-core brownfield sites' (Dixon, Otsuka, Abe, 2010). However, as the economy picks up and the effects of the housing crisis start to take hold, the government is placing these sites under serious risk. This was highlighted by the 2014 pre-budget speech that earmarked the redevelopment of the former Blue Circle cement works at Ebbsfleet:

There is the land available; there is fantastic infrastructure with a high-speed line. It's on the river. It's in the South East of England where a lot of the housing pressure has been and, crucially, you've got local communities and local MPs

who support the idea. We're going to create an urban development corporation, so we're going to create the instrument that allows this kind of thing to go ahead – in other words sort of cuts through a lot of the obstacles that often happen when you want to build these homes (Osborne on The Andrew Marr Show, TV programme, 2014)

George Osborne, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, described the development as being the first 'Garden City' in 100 years. The use of this term separates the development from the New Town movement of the mid twentieth century, which in proceeding years had developed negative connotations (Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State, 2002). Instead Osborne's attempts tap into the mythology of the rural idyll, and a mock historical vernacular, placing it within the confines of what Hall described as 'Garden Suburbs' (Hall, 1991: 4) when he was discussing the developments of Letchworth and Welwyn Garden City. Unlike Osborne, Hall, in adopting the term Garden Suburbs, is critical of their place within 21<sup>st</sup> century planning and housing. He questions how shifts in the way we live, especially the then recent development of the edgeland superstore can be reconciled with the arcadia the planners are trying to produce (ibid.: 9).

## **6.6 The View from The Train window**

John Grindrod, in his history of the Garden City, and New Town movements, *Concretopia* (2013) describes the Garden City movement as being 'The Britain of bucolic railway posters, those mythmaking images where the latest locomotives were seamlessly blended into the rolling landscape, as if they had always been there'. Recently there have been examples of developers co-opting the aesthetic of these posters to advertise major building and infrastructure projects.





Figure 6-5 *Northern delight: Scotland's Lochy viaduct, 1959*



Figure 6-6 *Norwich Northern Distribution Road, photo by author, 2016*

The development of the initial Thames Gateway scheme came from the collision of multiple ideas related to the region from various stakeholders, and, while these ideas happened at first in isolation from each other, it suggests that the region was experiencing the start of a critical period of (self)reflection regarding the future of the deindustrialised

docks and the wider East End of London. Hall himself has suggested that the genesis for the Thames Gateway comes from an article by Martin Simmons in *The Planner* (1987), that the Channel Tunnel Rail Link would ‘alter the transport geography of Europe fundamentally’ (The National Archive, 2011) and that it would create a development axis along the Thames Estuary that would help revitalise East London and Docklands. Hall said ‘by definition the corridor will provide the first and last image of London for visitors to Britain. Lynch wrote of the view from the road; we need to be thinking of the view from the train’ (Hall, 1992: 3). He comments on the association with train journeys to and from London being filled with miles and miles of ‘sordid and monotonous housebacks’ (ibid.: 3). He calls for something ‘more glorious’ to be done with this new transport link, and states that it will have to function for both long and short distance travel within the region. I would argue that both the view from the car and train windows, offer a very limited representation of the wider region. Instead the immersive methodology allows us to explore and contemplate, the wider and far more diverse landscape of the gateway region.

My internal map of the Thames Gateway was formed on countless railway journeys from London to Chatham, part of the Medway towns. From first-hand experience, I know that while the selling point of the region has often been the new high-speed rail link, the reality is somewhat different. Between the new international stations at Stratford and Ebbsfleet there are no intermediary stops on the high-speed line. Major new estates such as Barking Reach currently are cut off from transport hubs (Burrows, 2015), confined by the rush hour A13 and the lack of connection to the rail network. Hall spoke of Barking Reach, ‘oh, it’s a disaster, all right, so not what should happen, so very depressing.’ (Glancey, website, 2003), as well as pointing out that the future Crossrail Network failed to serve Barking (Knowles, 2002).

Hall described the region as a tabula rasa an idea that I would counter with the notion that these brownfield sites not only have an industrial history, but as has been discussed with

Shoard's work, a natural biodiversity. While large-scale deindustrialisation in the 1970s and 80s had left the region with large swathes of derelict brownfield land, John Marriot believes that there is a form of 'historical amnesia' surrounding this fact (Marriott quoted in Platt, online article, 2010), with the region having a rich history of large industrial concerns since the industrial revolution. These industries thrived as communities, providing 'a huge range of facilities as well- entertainment, recreation and housing' (ibid.). Failure to acknowledge these historical experiences will end up 'with the Docklands writ large, where the historical communities and the memories of those historical communities are obliterated' (ibid.).

As mentioned, Barking Reach and the wider Barking Riverside developments sit within the middle of small industrial units and derelict land that was once the site of Barking power station. The development on the whole is estimated to house 4,300 residents. It is cut off from the pre-existing towns of Barking and Dagenham by the 6 busy lanes of the A13. Within the development there is 'nowhere to sit and have coffee, no pub, no police station, no youth club, no football pitch' (Burrows, website, 2015). Residents have described the area as like 'living on an island' (ibid.). Before the opening of Morrisons Local, a trip to the shops for simple supplies could take an hour due to the clogged arterial A13.

Marriot believed that provision of transport links within the region could be part of the problem. 'In a sense the best thing that you can do is make them stay in the area... Otherwise, it will become a huge dormitory suburb for London, which will be a disaster. It will be dead. People will live and sleep there, but for their work and entertainment, they will go elsewhere' (Marriot quoted in Platt, online article, 2010). The architectural critic Jonathon Glancey, described the region as being a 'cockney Siberia' (Glancey, online article, 2003). Indeed much of the advertising material for the new developments sells the fact that with the high-speed link you are only 18 minutes from central London, you can work in the City and live in the country, which echoes the original advertising slogan for

London Docklands, ‘Canary Wharf, it will feel like Venice and work like New York’  
(This Brutal House, Twitter, 2015).



Figure 6-7 Canary Wharf: It will feel like Venice and work like New York, *This Brutal House*, 2015

## 6.7 Autopia

As previously mentioned, three major roads that border and intersect it, define the Thames Gateway and its ribbon like development. J.B. Priestley described ribbon development based around new infrastructures.

This is the England of arterial and bypass roads, of filling stations and factories that look like exhibition buildings, of giant cinemas and dance-halls and cafes, bungalows with tiny garages, cocktail bars, Woolworths, motor-coaches... greyhound racing and dirt tracks... and everything given away for cigarette coupons. If the fog had lifted I knew that I should have seen this England all

around me at the modern entrance to London, where the smooth wide road passes between miles of semi-detached bungalows, all with their little garages. (Priestly, 1977: 375).

The image he forms is very similar to Shoard's writing on edgelands (Shoard, 2002), and is certainly reminiscent of driving towards London Thames Gateway regions on the A13 and A2 roads. Priestly himself believed that these developments had originated in the USA, with the automobile being a defining part of modernism, just as edgelands can be considered part of this new 'autopian' (Woollen and Kerr, 2002) landscape. A landscape that they believe is 'simply there to be consumed, appropriated and enjoyed' (ibid. 2002: 235), with the car becoming our primary access to 'work, leisure and home' (ibid.).

Drive-to retail units would be inside towns if retailers could find there the floorspace, the parking area and the consequent relaxed planning regime they require. As these retail parks emerge outside towns the road network adjusts to provide access to them, and a chicken-and-egg situation arises whereby interface sites become more attractive to car users and therefore to retail developers. As shopping is coming to be seen more and more as a leisure activity than a chore, superstores are coming to be surrounded by other types of leisure development, such as restaurants and nightclubs. Business parks, distribution depots and housing estates also spring up in the interface, often around the bypasses and motorway interchanges that it provides. (Shoard, 2002: 4).

The effect of the new technological developments of trains, tubes and cars was the removal of geographic limitations placed on the expansion of our cities, 'prising open the suburbs of suburbia' (Hunt, online article, 2006). At the time this was seen as the potential start of Britain becoming an entirely urban region with no difference between town and country. 'We plant trees in the town and bungalows in the country, thus averaging England into a dull uneventfulness whereby one place becomes the same as

any other – all incentiviveness to exploration being thus removed at the same time as the great network of smoothed-out concrete roads is completed’ (Williams-Ellis, 1928 quoted in Hunt, online article, 2005). Hunt suggests that it is partly down to Williams-Ellis writing on ‘bland, boring suburbia’ (Hunt, online article, 2005) that we experienced a rural revival, with the rise of country pursuits, especially rambling, a longing for escape and a working class reclamation of land from the wealthy that would result in the 1932 mass trespass of Kinder Scout. In a way it is down to works like Shoard’s (2002) and Farley and Symmons Roberts (2011) that I, and others, are reconsidering access to the commodified edgeland and interstitial environment as an attempt to reclaim it from the complicated tangle of ownership. Both the act of walking, and by extension trespass have become key tools in my methodology, and the landscape ethnographies that I produce from this research become key in opening up and renegotiating access to the landscape. In all instances, these explorations have started in autopia (Woollen and Kerr, 2002), either in the edgelands or fresh suburban developments. From this I then proceed out into the wider landscape, renegotiating the fuzzy boundaries as I walk, turning space into place, before it finally settles as landscape, challenging the writings of Williams-Ellis, and Nairn, instead of passing through as so often seems present in their writings, I linger. My body, my feet, my eyes, and by extension my camera reimaging their words.

## **6.8 Photographic representation and the Thames Gateway**

### **Jason Orton & Ken Worpole**

Apart from my own photography and time spent within the Gateway, my interest has been informed by several bodies of work produced by others that take the Gateway as their starting point. Photographer Jason Orton and author Ken Worpole have been working on a series of projects based on the topography of Essex since 2005, when ExDRA, the Essex development agency, commissioned Orton to produce a series of

images depicting the Essex coastline. Orton contacted Worpole to contribute an essay on the history and topography of the region. These two linked essays, photographic and literary were published as *350 Miles: An Essex Journey* (2005). They discovered that the 'Essex shoreline is especially memorable for its obstinate refusal to conform to conventional notions of what is beautiful or picturesque' (Worpole, online article 2006). Like so many bodies of topographic photography, Orton chose to only concentrate on the landscape images and not include portraits, as a means of creating a sense of critical distance from their landscape orientated subject matter. However, Worpole is keen to separate this distance from the subject, from detachment to it. 'Distance of space, distance of time. The portraits brought us too close in: broke the spell disrupted the reverie we were each trying to create' (Worpole, website, 2005). However, as Pinder suggests, 'the movement of the body through the city itself invokes memories, a process associated with what Proust termed *memoire involuntaire*' (Pinder, 2001: 9-11). As previously discussed this concept of the body's movement through a space as a means of accessing the environment's memories is closely associated with contemporary psychogeography, and the idea of distance versus detachment is central to landscape ethnography. The removal of the portrait, due to the closeness to the subject, is akin to the relationship between ethnography and landscape ethnography, and allowing a sense of reverie to become formed through the landscape, which in turn can connect back to the idea of the drift within psychogeography. Worpole commented, 'the ghostly presence of human activity is to be found everywhere on this extraordinary coastline... The water's edge proved for both of us to be a memory theatre, a place of constant shape shifting and evocation of past lives.' (Worpole, website, 2005).

In the years since its publication Orton and Worpole have continued to work on projects around the Essex foreshore and the area now designated the Thames Gateway. Some of this has been in response to both this major planning project and the 2012 Olympic site at Stratford, which would eat heavily into the Lea Valley (Orton, website, 2012). Orton



produced a body of work photographed on the site of a former smallpox hospital on the edges of Dartford and the M25 crossing (Poynor, online article, 2011).



Figure 6-8 Jason Orton *Littlebrook Nature Park, Dartford, Kent*. 2006

Since Orton took the pictures, the 264-acre brownfield site, including the former hospital grounds, has been developed into a mixed-use “community” of offices, industry and homes called The Bridge. I found myself less interested in the site’s destruction, than its rebirth. I considered that a psychogeographic methodology would allow both the past and present to be discussed simultaneously. However, the limitations of a purely photographic medium make this very difficult. It was partly this limitation, especially due to my previous relationship to topographic photography in earlier bodies of work, that lead to me starting to explore more-than-visual (Jacobs, 2013: 714) methods and would ultimately lead to the adoption of a landscape ethnography methodology. This shift in my practice will be explored in greater depth in Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine.

In 2013, Orton and Worpole published another body of work concerned with the Thames Gateway landscape in which the combination of photography and essay allows the



landscape to be considered from a more than just visual perspective that I feel is closer to embracing a psychogeographic methodology (Worpole, website, 2013). *The New English Landscape* (2013) critically examines the changing geography of landscape aesthetics since the Second World War, noting the shift away from the arcadian interior to the contested eastern shoreline. It discusses how writers and artists gravitated towards East Anglia, and latterly towards Essex, regarding these territories as places of significant topographical disruption, often as a result of military and industrial occupation, and the dramatic incursion of the sea. The work, by adopting the idea of a new English landscape, acknowledges the role of photography as a place-making device, and the book should be considered as fitting within Paglen's notions of experimental geography as discussed in Chapter One. By even asking the question of this new English landscape, both Orton and Worpole are complicit in its creation, highlighting the notion that artist is not only framing the landscape in front of them but forming it.



Figure 6-9 Jason Orton, *Canvey Wick, Essex*. 2014

Worpole describes the areas photographed as ‘landscapes of profound ecological<sup>24</sup> and imaginative resonance, particularly along the Thames foreshore, and the islands and estuaries of its north-eastern coastal peninsula’ (Worpole, website, 2013). He states that the intention of the work and the book is to assess ‘the past, present and future of this new territorial aesthetic, now subject to much debate in the contested worlds of landscape design, topography and psycho-geography’ (ibid). While there is an element of hyperbole and advertising within this statement, these spaces certainly fit within Shoard’s wildspaces (Shoard, 2008) and some of them directly feature in both Shoard’s *Call to Arms* (2008) and Buglife’s *The State of Brownfields in the Thames Gateway* (Robins et al, 2013) as sites of ecological importance. While the subject of the images and essay aren’t necessarily considered edgeland sites (as laid out by Marion Shoard), they are interstitial regions, and this is something that Worpole explores in his accompanying essay. The essay places the landscape firmly in the confines of the topics already discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis. To Worpole the creation of this new English landscape is sited within the region of the Thames Gateway. Simon Schama argued that the upper reaches of the Thames valley acts as the ‘geographical locus of Englishness... constituted at the very heart of English topographical perfection’ (Worpole and Orton, 2013: 15), depicted in countless paintings, and literary work such as *Three Men in a Boat* (Jerome, 1898), and *The Wind in the Willows* (Grahame, 1908). Thus, the connection between the west/east disparity that the Gateway was supposed to alleviate, continues to dominate the landscape with the concept of the English landscape, and the new English landscape, arcadia versus industry, or simply traditional notions of the affluent classes in the west and the working classes in the east.

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<sup>24</sup> Canvey Wick is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and was one of the locations that Marion Shoard described in *A Call to Arms* (2012: 84).

Many Londoners discovered a spiritual home along the River Lea, and further out in the Essex reaches, and loyalty to this 'bastard' countryside is complex and enduring. The distinctive topography of the Lea Valley remains hallowed ground. Combining industry, agriculture, leisure and recreation, ecology and a tumultuous social history, it was a prototype of a new kind of landscape which emerged after the war, a model of how a working landscape could be seen to possess aesthetic and communitarian qualities. Such hybrid landscapes capture the ambivalent feelings we all have about our wavering loyalties between town and country, the life of the street and the solitude of the woodland walk or coastal path (Worpole and Orton, 2013: 10).

### **Stephen Gill: Experiments With Representation In Hackney Wick**

Stephen Gill has produced multiple bodies of work that explore the East End of London and in particular the area around Hackney. Gill has experimented with varying methodologies and interventions within both the methods of production and dissemination.

Stephen Gill has learnt this: to haunt the places that haunt him. His photo-accumulations demonstrate a tender vision factored out of experience; alert, watchful, not overeager, wary of that mendacious conceit, 'closure'. There is always flow, momentum, the sense of a man passing through a place that delights him... What I like about Stephen Gill is that he has learnt to give us only as much as we need, the bones of the bones of the bones. (Sinclair, 2007: 2)

Gill is a prolific photographer and his work, while not produced in a traditional documentary mode, explores the unseen essence of Hackney, it has the feeling of tapping into an unseen leyline that runs through the area. His images mix abstraction with elements of traditional straight documentary. He is particularly known for his interventions between photos and objects, by either placing collected ephemera inside the

camera or by placing found objects on his prints before re-photographing them. His series *Hackney Flowers* (2004-07) uses the latter and combines landscapes and street portraits with collected pressed seeds, flowers and berries, taken from the Hackney edgelands.

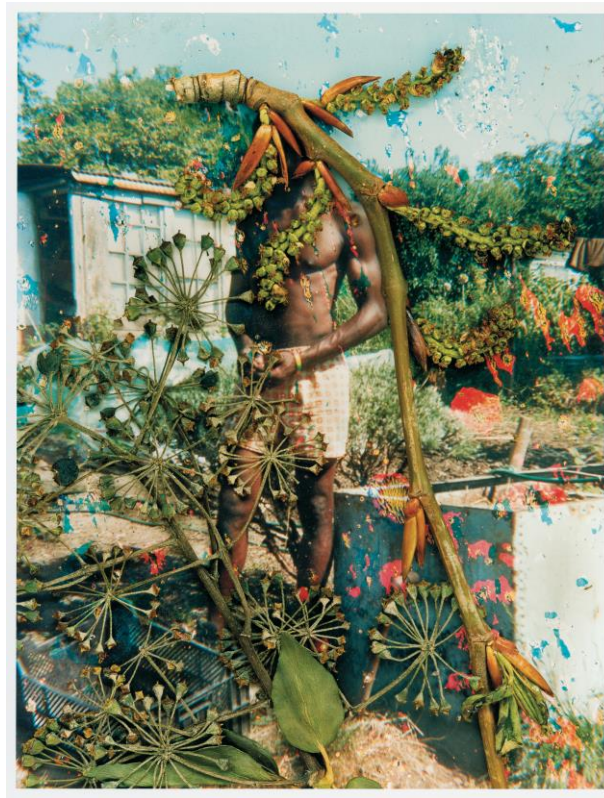


Figure 6-10 Stephen Gill, *Hackney Flowers*. 2007

He also chose to bury some of the photographs, as he did with his series *Buried* (2006) which use photos taken in Hackney Wick, then buried in the same place, allowing the ‘spirit of place’ (Gill, 2006) to leave its mark. Gill believes that this creates ‘multi layered images extracted from the area’ (ibid.). The images he produced are sculptural and playful; the sharp definition of the flowers and objects is in contrast to the faded photographs that have the aesthetic of snapshots. In this form the images appear to play with the notion of time and memory, some elements in sharp detail while others fade and recede, in a bloom of lens flare and light leaks.



Figure 6-11 Stephen Gill, *Buried*. 2006

The area of Hackney Wick sits caught between the Grand Union Canal, the River Lea and the Eastway A106 road. It is an area of wildspace that was once home to a thriving industrial history. It is now increasingly under threat from gentrification and redevelopment as it sits on the northern edge of the Queen Elizabeth II Olympic Park. Gill produced a 2004 series *Hackney Wick* that provided both the subject matter for the work and the means of production. Gill found an old plastic camera amongst the range of goods for sale in the market. It had a plastic lens and no means of focus or exposure control, and cost him 50p. Over a two-year period Gill would regularly return to the markets and photograph its people and objects as well as the surrounding areas. The images produced remind me of early Stephen Shore works that used point and shoot cameras to mimic the everyday tourist shots of America.



Gill returned to both Hackney Wick and *Hackney Wick* for his work *Archaeology in Reverse* (2007), using the same 50p camera he documented the moment before the area's destruction and rebirth for the 2012 Olympics. The images attempt to capture 'things that do not yet exist' (Gill, 2007), these reverse archaeological traces offer a quiet and poetic study 'of a place in a state of limbo' (ibid.). Like so many of the previous works mentioned in this chapter the images sit as testament to physical and psychological edgelands. The people pictured know what is about to happen to the area, but they are caught in the fold between states. "My aim was to evoke the feeling of the area the same time as describing its appearance as the subject was both in front of the camera and behind the camera at the same moment"(Gill quoted in ASX, online article, 2013).



Figure 6-12 Stephen Gill, *Archaeology in Reverse*. 2007

In the series *Best Before End* (2013) Gill tackles the notion of the 24-hour city and responds 'to the intensity of inner city life by focusing on the phenomenal rise of energy drinks' (Gill, 2014). Just like the works involving objects or direct manipulation by the

landscape, Gill chose to incorporate the properties of the energy drink into his production method, allowing the negatives to be imbibed by the same energy the drinks impart on the consumer. The part processed negatives were soaked in the drink, which caused image shifts, colour changes, disruptions and softened the negative. The softened negative would then be further manipulated by stretching, moving and tearing, while more finessed shifts were done by moving the emulsion with a brush. The drinks themselves were sourced in the areas the image was taken.

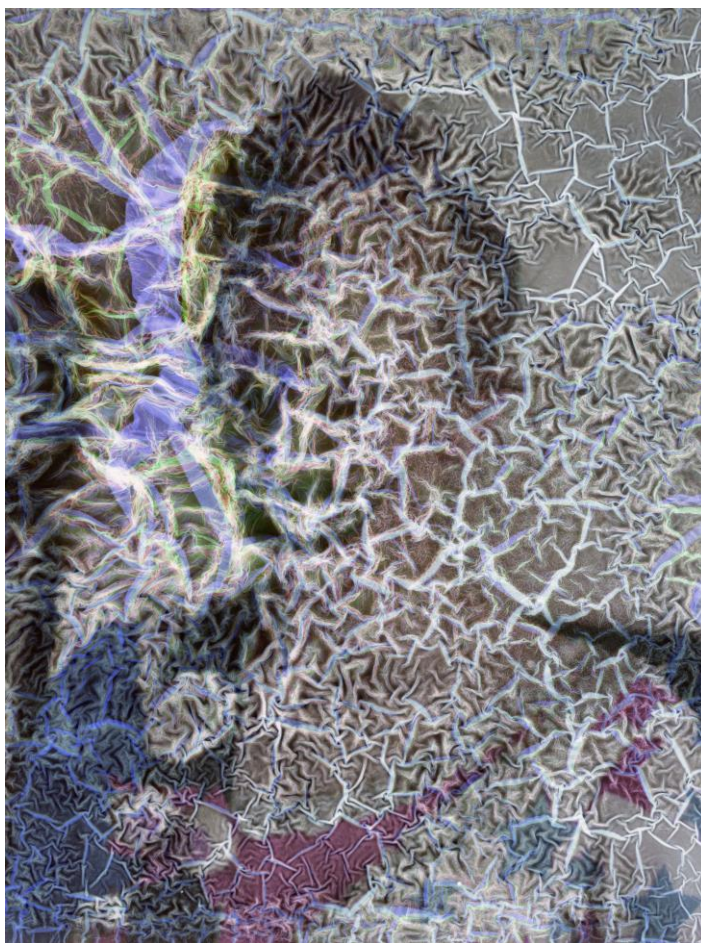


Figure 6-13 Stephen Gill, *Best Before*, 2014

The negative's blurriness is a "more accurate for portraying reality". Depending on what energy drink that is being used the colours and effects of the acidity varies. I can't take my eyes of this image made with Pussy – you can trace the contours of a woman, covered in dust, with a cracked surface, and ghostly

colours, In this case part of the image content itself plays a role in creating the images making a more direct physical presence in the image itself (ASX, online article, 2013).

These images are closest visually to the blooms and pock marks of Sally Mann's wet plate collodian technique, and allows all of his work to be physically, or mentally, infused with place.

This is an investigation, exploration, and discovery of various aspects of life and nature in East London. Starting with curiosity, an idea forms and a concept begins to take shape, an urge to explore that idea and define that concept is growing. Most of the projects are executed with discretion and accurate firing – others rebellious and multi-layered. “Mercifully lacking in malevolence, they are also wise and modern and beautifully laden with tiny, understated details about the way we live today. There is a wonderful, often inadvertent, eccentricity to them, too (Ronson 2004 quoted in ASX, 2013).

## **Michael Collins**

The longer I spent in the Thames Gateway landscape, the more I came to feel that through a purely topographic photographic method, or even a combination of image and text, I was struggling to impart the sense of place that I was forming through my embodied, multi-sensory reading of the landscape. I needed to be able to impart a more-than-visual message that embraced this multi sensory sense of place that I was experiencing and through which I would be able to respond to Massey's notions of place. This frustration with both the medium and the work representing the Thames Gateway came to the fore when I saw Michael Collin's photographic work on the region.

The images were in the style of civil engineering 'record pictures' that Michael Collins documented in his book *Record Pictures: Photographs from the Archive*. These



photographs followed the tradition of the Dutch topographical landscapes of the seventeenth century, combining the qualities of detail and clarity with the objectivity of technical drawings. As such, record pictures had a scientific rather than an artistic purpose. Collins suggests that these photographs are made with an emphasis on description rather than interpretation, aiming to produce an image that is 'faithful to the subject'.



Figure 6-14 Michael Collins, *West from Aggregate Works, Cliffe*, 2014

Collins says he admires the calm, unembellished aesthetic characteristic of record picture photography (Collins website, 2004) because he feels it allows him to make pictures without a didactic or subjective emphasis. This methodology is designed to not expose the artist's motivations or autobiographical engagement within it. While I understand that

even the ‘straight’ frontal photograph<sup>25</sup> is an interpretation with particular connotations, however the choice to consider this form of methodology and this treatment of a landscape that I had a deep autobiographical connection to and affinity for puzzled me. The more I looked at Collin’s images, as well as work such as that of Simon Fowler (website, 2016), who describes the Thames Estuary and especially Grain Power Station as his muse, or Frank Watson’s *Soundings from the Estuary* (2014), the more I realised that the still image in the new topographic style was unable to depict the resonances within the landscape that I was experiencing. To combine the photographic image with a psychogeographic and autobiogeographical methodology, I was going to have to develop a new visual methodology that placed me at the centre of my photographic frame and foreground my voice to interpret the landscape for my audience.

## 6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has researched the development of the Thames Gateway and explored the complicated range of actors and agencies that comprise its power network and assemblage. I have demonstrated how the region has been informed by the historic planning and development of London. I have also demonstrated my ‘deep’ connection and sporadic history with it, which demonstrates how the wider ideas of landscape ethnography are explored from the position of, outsider, and insider. I have questioned notions of how we navigate the regions, and its reliance on road and rail infrastructure that leads to us merely passing through space, instead of transforming it into place and landscape, and how this leads to a collapsing of distance between nodal points within the region, instead of expanding and opening up the space inbetween through exploration. Finally, I have explored the recent photographic representation of the Thames Gateway,

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<sup>25</sup> By this I mean the new topographic photograph, as discussed in previous chapters.

which in turn has demonstrated my frustration with the limiting factors of the deadpan aesthetic of photographers such as Michael Collins, that seemingly only present an outsider's perspective. In the next chapter I will situate myself within the Gateway and explore my wider connection with it.



## 7 Explorations Through a Lens - An Embodied Experience

My creative practice has been an exploration of my unease with the photographic medium and my move towards moving image during the search for a sensory, embodied mode of production, whether it be from an early embrace of the high resolving power of the large format camera used to render scenes in acute detail, to experimentations with image/text to describe place. In recent years I have sought to reject the seemingly detached lens of the Becher-Schule<sup>26</sup>, to reach for a methodology which relays a sense of place as much affective as representational. Building on Chapters Four and Five, this chapter further defines the idea of landscape ethnography, and in particular methods and frameworks of undertaking ethnographic fieldwork in this discipline. This framework is informed by ideas of walking as a means of research and production that are linked to contemporary psychogeographic study.

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<sup>26</sup> The Becher-Schule is the name for the photographic programme run by Berndt and Hilla Becher at the Düsseldorf School of Photography. It is generally used to refer to the 87 photographers who studied between 1976 and 1996 who would come to mark a conceptual shift in German photography through the adoption of the large format camera that marks an international rethinking of artistic photography.

The idea of *landscape ethnography* as discussed in Chapter Four, offers an immersive but critical take on place, through deep immersion, attention to the built form, and an informed, if conflicted, attempt to relay an admittedly mediated sense of place (Feld and Basso, 1996). The body of practice that accompanies this thesis has been informed by an evolving framework of visual experiments and fieldwork explorations that resulted from the wider concepts of psychogeographic drift. This chapter explores the move to a more-than-visual (Lorimer, 2005) mode of production and explores my reconciliation with a different form of visual language. In doing so it positions filmic geographies alongside a group of cultural geographers who are exploring more-than-textual methods of disseminating media (Taggart and Vannini, 2014, Bauch, 2016, Shaw, 2017). It will then explore the idea of psychogeographic, and landscape orientated films, through practitioners such as Patrick Keiller and John Rogers. Next, it will then focus in on work that is concerned with London's edgelands.

## **7.1 Walking As Method**

A key component of psychogeography, apart from the notion of the self as author, is that of walking as a methodology or means of artistic production. John Wylie suggests that 'landscape is defined... in terms of contact immersion and immediacy... [or] more broadly framing landscape in terms of process, sensation, performance and experience' (Wylie, 2009: 278). This means that not only is walking (which constitutes all of these ideas) a means of artistic production, but also landscape production, what Lorimer terms 'collective acts of landscaping' (2005). Through this we can consider how film can form a multimodal experience of being in the landscape that leads to the production of landscape ethnography. Sarah Pink observed video's connection to walking, 'video is not merely a method of audio-visually recording people and physical settings. Rather... walking with video provides a way of... sensing place, placing senses, sensorially making place and making sense of place' (Feld and Basso, 1996: 91, referenced in Pink, 2007:

243). As previously stated, this embodiment and connection between the camera, filmmaker and audience happens because of the medium's effectiveness in invoking material attachment, memories, dreams, and emotional entanglements. This can manifest itself through sympathetic connection with the filmmaker, as the audience places themselves behind the camera (Moretti and Smith, 2006). In this way the camera becomes not just a tool to capture the *dérive* or drift but the audience is transformed into the drifter and video can perhaps break the wall between the image and embodied experience (Garrett, 2010). Pink (2007) further suggests that walking with video can be seen as the act of the video-making process becoming a form of place making in itself. For her the importance is in the joining of the sensory nature of the film and video medium with developments within explicit ethnographic theoretical agendas relating to corporeality and embodiment in the late 20th century (Schilling, 1991) and sensory perception (Ingold, 2000, 2004, 2005) that have allowed for a more systematically reflective consideration of the embodied and sensorial nature of the research experience.

In addition, the act of walking itself can be seen as as a fundamental method of perceiving and intervening within our environment (Ingold, 2000, 2004; Gray, 2003; Lee and Ingold, 2006; Lund, 2006). Michel de Certeau theorised walking, as a 'practice of everyday life [that involves a] process of *appropriation*' (1987: 97) as well as being a 'spatial acting out of place' and is a 'space of enunciation' (1986: 98). This connects with the production of my film works that will be discussed in Chapter Eight whereby the act of walking forms the backbone of my psychogeographic explorations and production of the Thames Gateway interstitial landscape, that would otherwise perhaps remain simply as spaces that we are aware of, but have yet to become landscape through the framing that walking produces.

Within this landscape and my practice, the landscape ethnographic method, gives a voice and forms links to the wider nodes of interstitial sites, connecting areas that would otherwise remain disparate. In doing so I am renegotiating boundaries and the landscape

of the Gateway. Further to this it is possible to frame walking as a form of potential tactical resistance of the weak to the strategies of the powerful, (Lee and Infold, 2006: 76). Connecting these ideas to the Thames Gateway, these tactical resistances would be to architectural and urban planning.

The Gateway's edgeland landscape is predominately designed to be navigated by vehicle, just as Sennett (online article, 2008) suggests, this road network forms hard boundaries, which are further solidified by fences and securitisation. Upon attempting to traverse the Thames Path<sup>27</sup>, Garrett observed that in places 'the path bears more resemblance to a high-security prison corridor than a public right of way: gates, spikes and CCTV warning notices stand sentinel over fragmented patches of riverside that start and end abruptly, and whose access rights are shrouded in a veil of bureaucratic obscurity' (Garrett, online article, 2005). However, through walking and trespass it is possible to renegotiate and soften these boundaries. Just as in film and video, walking as a connection to place can be seen as a multisensory human activity that can be shared and empathetically comprehended (Pink, 2007: 244). Lee and Ingold propose that the 'locomotive aspect of walking allows for an understanding of places being created by routes' (2006: 68), in a way suggesting that the route of every act of walking both reaffirms a sense of place, and creates a new one in and through the walker. Ingold argues that 'it is surely through our feet, in contact with the ground (albeit mediated by footwear), that we are fundamentally and continually "in touch" with our surroundings' (Ingold, 2004: 330), later building on this to suggest that 'locomotion, not cognition, must be the starting point for the study of perceptual activity' (Ingold, 2004: 331; 2000: 166).

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<sup>27</sup> The Thames Path is a 213-mile pedestrian route that follows the river from its source to almost the North Sea. It was granted National Trail status in 1989, and has been described as being amongst the finest urban walks on earth (BBC News, 2013).



Further to this, Katrin Lund, writing an ethnographic study of Scottish hillwalking, said 'gaze cannot be separated from examining the body that moves and touches the ground' (2006: 40). Lee and Ingold suggested that the attunement with the environment (landscape) that you feel through walking is likened to a form of 'being there' that anthropologists need to achieve in order to perceive the multisensory environment to the fullest (Ingold 2000: 22). They also suggest that the idea that places are created as we walk routes through them demonstrates anthropology's need to understand the 'routes and motilities of others' (Lee and Ingold, 2006: 68). Both of these resonances highlight a connection 'between walking and a phenomenological approach to ethnographic fieldwork' (Pink, 2007: 246). They also further highlight the place making nature of Pink's (ibid.) 'walking with film', since the film making process captures, or produces depending on perspective, 'embodied experience, things, persons, relationships and so on' (Pink, 2007: 247) creating what Casey (1996) called a place event.

## 7.2 Walking Frameworks

Landscape architect Henrik Schultz describes the importance that walking applies to designing large-scale landscapes. He suggests that walking stimulates a complex and iterative process of engagement, flow, and reflection (Schultz, 2014). The use of car or bus, debars you from 'hearing, smelling, tasting, and experiencing the landscape' (ibid: 6), all vital sensorial methods of developing a sense of place. Schultz proposes three modes of interaction with the landscape through walking, that relate to Adams' three modes of production. He describes these as the 'discovery mode, the flow mode, and the reflective mode' (ibid: 7); these three modes interface with each other and depend on each other, while the 'rhythmic act of walking holds them all together'. The paper considers that these three modes can be thought of as perceiving, intuiting, and reflecting. Shultz derives many of his ideas from Hille von Seggern, who describes the dynamics of landscape as a constantly changing *geschehen* (to happen), part of a multidimensional

performative process (Seggern, 2008: 224), an idea that mirrors Massey's views on place as a space of stories.

Schultz proposes that to understand place you have to become part of the *geshenen*, and that walking is the best way to explore an area and to intervene in the *geshenen*. Walkers experience themselves as an active part of the ever-changing performance, by constantly orientating themselves to, and having the feeling of, being part of the landscape (Schultz, 2014: 8). 'When someone walks down a street she co-produces the spatiality of the street and is simultaneously co-produced by it' (Eliasson, 2009: 19). While in motion the walker is connecting views, perspectives, feelings, and places. In doing so the walker is constantly creating new perspectives, and playing a role in the formation of a new individualised landscape and this contributes and places the walker inside the space of the *geshenen*.

Because of this, walking allows the walkers to alter space, they are able to absorb and shape the landscape, suggesting a continuous interpenetration of perceiver and object (Berlant, 1992). 'This discovery mode allows you to perceive, analyse, and map spatial characteristics in order to acquire relevant knowledge and generate ideas. Therefore... open up and intensively engage with the landscape' (Schultz, 2014: 9). The flow stage takes this idea further, with flow being the state where mind and body are aligned (Csikszentmihalyi, 1985). By entering the flow state the walker allows their thoughts to stray, and they start to operate on intuition, walking and awareness merge, with the walker being transformed into part of the landscape (Schultz, 2014: 9). Rebecca Solnit suggests that 'walking fosters one kind of awareness in which the mind can stray away from and return to the immediate experience of traversing a particular place' (Solnit, 2002: 134). At this point the discovery and flow modes shift and alternate, allowing for the abstract leaps and connections that form through walking as part of the research and production process. However, I would argue that for these to be meaningful and of use to the process, the experience of walking needs to be in some way intensive, in particular in

relation to exposure to the landscape over time, separating the casual from Geertz's 'deep hanging out' (1998) and transforming it into a tool for landscape ethnography. This allows the complex interrelation of the landscape's components as a single ensemble. This is a key idea within landscape ethnography and what separates it from traditional ethnography; place isn't about a single ethnographic group or subject, but an ensemble of overlapping multiple ideas.

If the discovery and flow modes are acquired in place and within the moment or drift, then the reflective moment is the reconstruction and interpretation of these two modes, produced at a distance, a space for the walker to attempt to understand what they have experienced. Again, these three modes can be linked to Rascaroli's ideas on the post-Situationist *dérive* and its three phases of production (Rascaroli, 2015: 22), the walks, drifts or *dérives* become the framework for reflection in action (Schon, 1983: 76ff). Walking touches the emotions and enables an approach to abstract discussions on the landscape.

Walking artists such as Alice Foxley and Boris Sieverts engage with the landscape, to form creative knowledge. During this process, they pick out elements and combine them, to form stories that allow different spatial elements to become part of its plot, which is then used to produce a new landscape that can be experienced by a new audience, and in doing so further creates and refines this new landscape. The walker gains and connects knowledge that consists of images, feelings and emotions, which they further combine with pre-existing knowledge, adding new images to implicit memory, and creating new images (Bauer, 2004: 71).

# A Guide to Visiting Cities

By Boris Sieverts

1. Get topographic maps with a scale of 1:25,000 of your city. (Available at the local planning department)
2. Find out which neighborhoods are underrepresented or missing from the self-image of the city.
3. Visit those places. Find out what is special about them. Stay in these places for a while. Take photos of places, things and people that you think are typical and photographable at the same time. Talk to people who have been in these places for longer than you have.
4. Develop your photos and make prints. What do you see? What is not visible from the photos? Could it even be captured in a photograph?
5. Go back to those places. Be patient. Just sit back and let the boredom pass.
6. Go back several times with and without a camera. Start conversations, have coffee in the most unassuming cafes. Get drunk in the middle of the day. Sober up in an inappropriate place. Come back with a sleeping bag and a tent or stay in a pension, a bed and breakfast or a small hotel.
7. Go back to the planning department to get maps and aerial photographs covering a smaller area of your interest at a scale of 1:5000. Get two copies and mount one set to a contiguous image and hang it on the wall of your apartment or your office (In case you don't have enough wall space rent a space with sufficiently large wall-space for that time).
8. Let the image do its work. Compare the structure of the places you found underrepresented in step 2 with those places that seem to be stamped with the identity of the place. What do you see? Try to put it in words. Take notes.
9. Hang the maps and aerial photographs in scale 1:5000 next to your topographical maps in scale 1:25,000. Compare. Memorize everything as well as you can. Put the second set of maps and aerial photographs into a roll and make them part of your travel equipment.
10. Let the project rest. Spend some days or weeks at your day-job or travel to countries far away. As your desire to continue the investigation increases you will gain clarity about the character of your project.
11. Never read the local newspaper. The superficiality of their observation is in contrast to the weight that the printed paper gives it. That would lead you in false directions and set you back. Probably each of your own observations has more weight at this point.
12. Instead visit the archives of administrative offices, housing agencies, the local memorabilia shelves of antique shops, map archives, image archives, historical associations. Breathe the spirit of those places.
13. Persistently follow the questions that you encounter. Not in order to find the truth, but in order to hear a lot; that helps to dissolve the boundary between internal images and factuality.
14. Vary and elaborate on steps 1 to 13 until you feel competent enough for steps 15 to 19.
15. Imagine you would have to turn your most private, your innermost feelings outside and you could neither speak or write. But you know those places. Which places would you show to tell something about you? In what order would you display them as to increase their effect?
16. A person you talk to comes from a neighborhood that is prominent in the self image of the city. What feeling for this 'terra incognita' would you like to give that person?
17. What are the identity-creating elements that this 'terra-incognita' has itself? Don't fall into the trap of urban planners and local politicians but rather recognize these elements for what they are. Most of the time you will walk around them.
18. Are there sensations? If yes what are they? Do these sensations express something more clearly that permeates the whole area – like some smells that you can only sense very close to the ground? Use it at all cost! (Even if the volume of these sensations forces you to redesign the whole arc of your story). Other sensations are useless, but will rarely exist anyways.
19. Take friends and strangers to your personal places. Risk embarrassing moments. Put your preferences in words that express these preferences and give the grounds for them. Memorize the formulations that make the embarrassment disappear.
20. Fine-tune your approach over the years.

Boris Sieverts is artist and travel guide, living in Cologne, Germany

Figure 7-1 Boris Seiverts, *Guide to Visiting Cities*. No date

Sieverts, whose work can be considered as artistic walking tours of European cities, attempts to break away from traditional notions of the city and how we navigate and experience it. He combines paths, situations and views to create sequences of images for his participant to experience while walking, these take the form of newly written landscape stories that aid the general public in experiencing the creative potential of walking. His guide to visiting cities, (2007) presents a framework for the wider public to experience the landscape through walking that fits within the theoretical ideas surrounding landscape ethnography (see figure 7-1 ). His framework is a constant act of reflection and reorientation, with knowledge being acquired through time and repetition. Schultz adapts Seggern (Seggern, 2004: 19) and argues that these frameworks allow the creativity to unfold and act as a starting point by supplying a rough orientation (Schultz, 2014: 10). He proposes his own framework but readily points out that they are to be considered as a starting point to allow the walker to find their own methodological framework that they refine through experience, based on the needs of the landscape they are walking.

- Your walk should take at least one day. The journey is supposed to be strenuous.
- Once you have studied the map, try and avoid sticking to it. Use a compass to navigate the landscape. Choose a direction rather than 'the right path'.
- Experiment with following beaten tracks and with crossing the terrain by following a straight line.
- Walk alone most of the time, at least for half of your journey. Start a conversation with people you encounter on the way.
- Try to wander around and to become part of the landscape. Observe the place with all its scents, flavours, views, and textures. If you find something that triggers your attention, examine it and, if possible, take it with you for a while.

- Take as few photos as possible. Draw and write only the most important things that come to mind.
- Breathe calmly through your nose and try to find a rhythm that suits you.
- There is no pressure at all. Open up for the landscape. Play walking! (Schultz, 2014: 11)

## 7.3 A Polysensual Medium

‘The advantage of film or video is that they invite empathetic engagements with the sensorial and experiencing body of the film subjects in their viewer’ (Pink, 2007: 250-1)

As film and video becomes more prevalent within scholarly practice, more academics agree that it has remarkable potential to evoke ethnographic matters that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to convey through written means (Bates, 2015, Pink, 2007).

Memin writes that ‘film [should be conceptualized] as experience – and as such never completely controlled by filmmakers, subjects or viewers’ experiences of reading and creating meaning from their films’ (1997: 49). Cohen and Rapport further suggest that ethnographic interpretations of informants’ actions and behaviours are simply ‘an expression of our own consciousness’ (1995: 12). This is possibly due to the idea that video is inherently ‘not a primary visual medium. It is a medium that operates on two of the five senses at once, and it is an uninteresting question to discuss whether or which is dominant’ (Jarvie, 1987: 236).

While Jarvie’s observation is correct in simple terms, I, along with Garrett (2010), would argue that in addition to the basic image/audio component there is something within film and video that can operate on a multisensory level, or, as Garrett puts it, that is polysensual. This is especially true with high definition and higher capture where the divide between audience and subject starts to break down. Vannini suggests that the growing area of video research methods awakens our ‘sensual imagination’ (Vannini et

al, 2013). David MacDougall points out that 'the film is a conceptual space within a triangle formed by the subject, film-maker, and audience and represents an encounter of all three' (1978: 422).

For me this makes film and video the perfect medium for landscape ethnography, which, as I am practising it, becomes an (auto)ethnographic, autobiogeographic practice that meets Garrett's (2010) call for an increase in experimental reflexive cinema within the confines of geographic scholarship. In his critique of reflexive filmmaking as a geographic tool, Garrett lays out the idea that, when we produce video works, the document forms witness to events and production experiences. The invaluable nature of the medium is in not only what it contains, but also in the sometimes-invisible subtext, and its ability to recall what may otherwise have been forgotten. The idea of reflexive filmmaking blurs the line in MacDougall's conceptual triangle<sup>28</sup> (1978: 422), instead asking questions about 'who is behind the camera, who decided where to point it, who made the decisions about what to edit and why particular footage became foregrounded' (Garrett, 2010: 7). Garrett suggests that a reflexive process could simply involve taking careful field notes that covered personal thoughts, experiences, and activities, along with a record and acknowledgement of any biases. These elements could then be integrated into the later edited work. Or you could involve a more complicated methodology and through placing the filmmaker themselves within the frame you could subject them to the same scrutiny as the film's subject matter, which would form an (auto)ethnographic text. Self-reflection allows the researcher to become 'part of the phenomenon being studied' (Flyvbjerg, 2002: 132), and in turn this forces the filmmaker to experience the role of being both inside and outside the resultant work (Sandercock and Attili, 2010:26).

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<sup>28</sup> MacDougall's conceptual triangle is formed by the subject, the filmmaker, and the audience.

For me, this makes sense, as my interpretation of that landscape before me needs to be acknowledged to remove it from the confines of ‘truth and authenticity’. The camera is an extension of myself and that position and bias needs to be considered and, in doing so, the aim is that the audience is transported into the position of filmmaker.

While the landscape in itself cannot be considered the subject of ethnographic study in a traditional sense, by placing it through the lens of personal interaction it becomes (auto)ethnographic and, as Sarah Pink states, ‘video is ‘ethnographic’ when its viewer(s) judge that it represents information of ethnographic interest’ (2007: 79), further defining ethnography as ‘an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture’ (ibid.: 18). Crang and Cook (2007) acknowledge that the ways we undertake ethnography vary greatly between projects and disciplines, but Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) characterise it as including both overt and/or covert observations of people’s lives for an extended period of time as well as elements of participation. This is firmly the aim of my film works.

The multisensual properties of film and video make it perfectly suited to landscape-orientated work. Garrett explains the multisensual audience experience as being particularly useful to work, that seeks to give voice to people or ideas (Turner, 1992) or inspire action (Scheinke and Brown, 2003). However I’m most interested in its ability to depict the character of a place, with or without words (Hansen, 2008).

Ultimately, the aim I propose of landscape ethnography, is to balance all three of the elements in the previous paragraph. The experience of watching a video is a transportive experience, and multi media methodologies offer us possibilities as practitioners to transport our audience to far off locations, or experience the familiar from a different perspective.

The imagined and transportive qualities that exist in video allow you to feel the cold of an icy peak (Marshall, 1993, cited in Garrett 2010: 12) or smell the stench of a landfill that



people are picking through to find recyclables to sell (Fricke, 1992, cited in Garrett 2010: 12). Andrew Horton (2003:71) describes this as 'all landscapes in cinema are "reel"'. That is to say - landscapes that look like we could touch them, walk through them and smell them'.

With video our memories of places can become blurred, as we feel we must have been there, and then realise that the memory is virtual. This is especially true with edgeland sites that on the surface all seem strangely familiar. It forces us to consider the tension between the visual and the embodied experience. 'I will not argue... that video bridges the gap into becoming embodied experience (yet), it is the medium which most wholly conjures a multisensual facsimile of experience' (Garrett, 2010: 12). However, at the same time Laurier states that 'cinema engages so much more of our bodies than the eyes alone... a film can touch its viewer and elicits its viewers' experience of touch' (2009: 11). I would argue that the unique properties of film and video make it the perfect tool for psychogeographic exploration. Film has the ability to evoke the unseen and to record emotion and memory, acting as a tool for deep topographies, issues that strongly link to our forming of place (Davidson et al., 2005; DeSilvey, 2007; Edensor, 2005; Feld and Basso, 1996). Gold (2002: 209) believes that 'the documentary can convey a sense of visiting places and witnessing events in the company of an apparently knowledgeable observer'. While Young (1980: 3) shows that 'film therefore can provide data on at least two levels of consciousness – tangible and intangible... personally it is the latter that is most significant'. Many of the ideas surrounding place that cultural geography is dealing with fall into the confines of intangibility, conception of place, landscape, culture and mobilities, described especially in the work of Laurier (2006), Spinney (2008) and Cresswell (1993). Within anthropology, and to return to the idea of mapping that has been present throughout this thesis, video media can be utilised to form 'culture maps' that depict a 'social landscape' that can be used to create 'cognitive maps' (Crick, 1976, Hastrup, 1992, cited in Garrett, 2010: 19). Garrett further states that these ideas are useful

and when we are dealing with the predominately intangible ideas that surround concepts of place, landscape and culture (Garrett, 2010: 13).

Lukinbeal writes about landscape as metaphor within the bounds of the cinematic image, 'cinematic landscapes exceed the bounds of the image' (Lukinbeal, 2005: 13). By utilising metaphor, meaning and ideology are appropriated into the landscape, such as the attribution of social or human characteristics on to the landscape (Durgnant, 1965; Sherman, 1967; Rappaport, 1980; Higson, 1984, 1987; Aitken and Zonn, 1994). Further to this Aitken and Zonn write that, as viewers, 'we can "suspend our disbelief" and embrace the "dubious" meanings constructed within the landscape' (1993: 195).

Lukinbeal writes of the cinematic landscape being one of small and large metaphor. Small metaphors are rhetorical devices or literary tropes, such as the use of time-lapse photography to depict the sun setting, the use of a close up of an event, followed by a pullback reveal, or a river used as a symbol of changing times; they naturalise prevalent cultural stereotypes about the landscape (Johnston, Gregory, Pratt and Watts, 2000: 500). Geographers use stereotypes as a 'process of categorisation through which distinctive features of one place are used to give identity' (Burgess and Gold, 1985: 9).

These stereotypes link our assumptions about cultural and behavioural characteristics of places, this is particularly prevalent in discussion of edgelands, and in particular Farley and Symmons Roberts' book, which, by forming a typology of edgeland spaces, transforms it into a series of stereotypes that in, one sense, contribute to a sense of place, but also naturalise cultural politics about the places and people (Lukinbeal, 2005: 14). On the other hand, the suggestion has been that large metaphors 'structure research paradigms' (Johnston et al., 2000). Cultural geographer Don Mitchell argues that cinematic landscapes are sites where meaning is contested and negotiated. 'That which is perceived as natural, ordinary or normal in the cinematic landscape is explained as, "a site of contest in one case, and the landscape as site for the affirmation of the dominant narrative of identity, in the other"' (Mitchell, 2001: 277, referenced in Lukinbeal,

2005:14). When landscape functions as metaphor, spatial meaning is linked to the narrative text, and the viewer's cognitive map is influenced by the cultural politics embedded in the metaphors.

Two parallel movements have informed much of the film and video work that is undertaken by cultural geography. Cultural geographers are familiar with the term non-representational theory. Hayden Lorimer described it as 'an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks to better cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds' (2005: 83). Non-representational (Thrift, 2008) and more-than-representational (Lorimer, 2005) when used within video production allow the 'world to appear differently' (Simpson, 2015: 45) and the viewer to 'see [and hear] the world differently from our habitual ways of looking and feeling' (ibid.). Within an ethnographic context we must see the role of the camera as not being an instrument of reproduction, but as a poetic device, that is 'partly aligned and partly estranged' (Gallagher, 2015: 183) from its subject matter and, in doing so, contains an imperative to inject life into the 'dead geographies' of representation (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000, referenced in Bates, 2015: 4). Les Back, makes a similar connection with 'dead sociology', describes it as 'objectifying, comfortable, disengaged and parochial'. Live sociology should therefore attend 'to the fleeting, distributed, multiple and sensory aspects... through research techniques that are mobile, sensuous and operate from multiple vantage points' (Back, 2013: 18). Film acts as an audio-visual artefact that makes knowledge by evoking a social reality that can 'facilitate an appreciation of the practical, sensual and affective dimensions' (Brown and Banks, 2015: 98). Kullman suggests that video in fact attempts to amplify rather than reproduce embodied intensities of our daily lives, allowing for a 'potential to bring bodies, images and worlds into new relationships' (Kullman, 2015:54), that 'takes us beyond cognition and beyond the verbal into realms where bodily and multisensory grammar prevails' (Brown and Banks, 2015: 98).

This builds on Sarah Whatmore's belief that we have an 'urgent need to supplement the familiar repertoire of humanist methods that rely on generating talk and text, with experimental practices that amplify other sensory, bodily and affective registers and extend the company and modality of what constitutes a research subject' (Whatmore, 2006: 606-7). Cameras and microphones have the ability and potential to teach us to feel something intensely vivid about a place, in a different manner from the written word (Vannini, 2015). The work that Bates (2015) explores within the chapters of her book marks the huge variety and range of possibilities that video offers to the growth and development of geography's methodological repertoire. It is unsurprising that both geography and sociology have reached out to multimedia production and research methodologies in an attempt to keep pace with current thinking and extend the scope of our 'imaginations' (Mills, 1959, Back, 2010). Film and video allows these subjects to attune to a world that is 'tentative, charged, overwhelming and alive' (Stewart, 2007: 128).

## **7.1 Filmic Ethnography**

Within the confines of the social sciences, film has a strong tradition as a tool within both sociology and anthropology. The idea of visual sociology is promoted by organisations such as the International Visual Sociology Association, who aim to 'promote the study, production, and use of visual images, data and materials in teaching, research, and applied activities, and to foster use of stills, film, video, and electronically transmitted images in sociology and other social sciences and related disciplines and applications' (IVSA, no date). Connected to this is anthropology's long connection to film through the adoption of the ethnographic film. In 1889 Alfred C. Haddon referred to film as 'an indispensable piece of anthropological apparatus' (Haddon, quoted in MacDougall, 1997: 282), in relation to his expedition of the Torres Strait.

The connection between ethnographic film and documentary comes from American explorer Robert J Flaherty's films *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Moana* (1926). The earlier film is often referred to as the first ethnographic film (Ellis and McLane, 2005), while the second was the first to have the term documentary attributed to it in a *New York Sun* review by John Grierson (1926), who would later go on to define the genre of documentary film, by describing it as the 'creative treatment of actuality' (Grierson, quoted in Eitzen, 1995: 82). Grierson would end up having a hugely successful career as a documentary maker and is widely considered the father of the British documentary movement. The uneasy relationship between ethnography and documentary starts with these two films, both of which owe a great deal to fictional styles of representation (Rosenbaum, 1975), with many elements being staged for the films' production. Jacobs (2013) describes the connection between the two genres as 'being blurred' (ibid.: 716) and utilises Nichols' (2001) six overlapping types or modes of documentary: poetic, expository, observational, participatory, reflexive, and personal, to highlight the blurring, with observational, participatory and reflexive being said to originate from ethnographic methodologies. This unease can possibly be considered to be the reason why geography has been slow to embrace moving image as a methodology and production.

My own film works have more in common with the immersive landscape films of James Benning, due to their poetic nature which has been described as forming a 'temporalisation of space and a spatialisation of time' (Jeppesen, online article, 2016), than traditional video ethnographies and my practice has prompted me to consider whether geography's rather beleaguered relationship to film may also be a by-product of trying to emulate anthropological and sociological films about society and culture rather than concerning themselves with what geographers do best – offering meditations on *space* and *place*. Before I offer this however, it is worth giving additional consideration to the relationship between geography and film.

Jacobs argues that, unlike sociology and anthropology, geography does not have a sub-discipline that deals with the visual. The argument for this has widely been that geography approaches the visual as ‘constitutive of the discipline as a whole rather than a subset’ (ibid., 718). The idea of a geographic gaze has been investigated in its colonial (Gregory, 1994), touristic (Urry, 2001) and academic (Crang, 1997) contexts. While the filmic gaze has been explored in the context of landscape (Aitken and Zonn, 1994; Kennedy and Lukinbeal, 1997), Cresswell and Dixon (2002) have observed that this ‘new sub-field carried a binary logic equating landscape with text, confining cinematic landscape to a field of representation’ (Jacobs, 2013: 719). Crang (1997: 359) suggested that the geographic emphasis on writing and landscape has meant that geographers have paid more critical attention to the ‘representation of landscape than the practices that create these representations’. Rose (2001) notes that both anthropology and geography acknowledge their reliance upon the visual image as a means to construct knowledge, whereas geographers were less likely to consider the consequences of the dependency.

However, a growing number of geographers such as Jacobs (2011, 2013, 2014), Garrett (2012, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017), Gallagher and Prior (2014, 2015), and Vannini (2014, 2015, 2017) are exploring and considering what ‘geographical film could or should be’ (Jacobs, 2013: 720), and Charlotte Bates’ edited collection *Video methods* (2015) forms an excellent overview of this new field. This shift in opinion can be witnessed in initiatives like Royal Holloway’s Passenger Films society/collective (Cutler, 2012), which was formed by then PhD students that ‘aim to reveal hot topics from cultural geography to London’s film-going public’. While in the USA, Shaun Huston (2013) established Moving Image Geography, a Vimeo channel devoted to curating films created by geographers. It is dedicated to film and video that explores and examines the significance, meanings, and practices of space, place, and landscape, across cultural contexts and in both science and art. Videos featured on Moving Image Geography are intended as original works of art and scholarship.

In parallel to these developments, some university courses are now incorporating moving image training units into their syllabus. Northumbria University, Cardiff University, Loughborough University, The University of Southampton, The University of Geneva, and the University of Northern Arizona, all incorporate film making training and practice into their wider programmes of visual geographic methods. All of these courses encourage students to explore new forms of output other than text as a means to reach new audiences. Jacobs states that the sub-discipline of filmic geographies has the 'potential to challenge existing hierarchical and vertical research practices and co-produces a critical, more-than-human and more-than-written form of knowledge' (Jacobs, 2013:723), and that these filmic geographers have 'all chosen film not only to help us visualise our research to our intended audience but also to highlight the non-visual relational process that underlies "doing" research' (ibid.).

Garrett contends that while geography, as a discipline, is seeing 'the potential of film analysis and critique to enhance cultural understanding, and has produced some notable "landscape" films, the discipline is yet to realise the full potential of video as a research methodology' (Garrett, 2010:1). He reasons that video can offer different forms of representation, and produce something in terms of production and consumption that is inherently different from other forms of media such as text, photographs, performance, aural media etc. (Witmore, 2005). Video and film when it operates as a well-considered medium in terms of inception, production and post production, becomes a multifaceted web of thought, memory, materiality and movement; a place making process (Pink, 2008), 'situated in the interstices between the collage of the material articulations that encompass our everyday lives and ourselves' (Witmore, 2005: 58). One of the issues with geographic film in the past has been its failure to be 'well-considered', or, as Garrett has described, its 'amateurish' (Garrett, 2010, after Sui, 2008) nature. In his conclusion to Bates' book (2015), Phillip Vannini described his reservation with the medium, believing the 'people least qualified to actualise that potential... were academics' (2015:230). This

view was partially formed through shared experiences of poorly produced and amateurish classical anthropological films, ‘shaky, drawn out, rough-sounding, clumsily-edited productions that simultaneously failed to meet my Generation-X shaped expectations for entertainment and to inform my ethnographic sensitivity better than (often similarly drawn-out) written accounts’ (ibid.).

Vannini suggests that the lack of imagination and creative skills that had impacted scholarly writing had also impacted video making as a means of research beyond repair (ibid.). This may be partly due to prevailing attitudes within a branch of academia that deemed the visual as ‘inferior to the written word’ (ibid.: 230). Within ‘visual ethnography’ the name has come to mean written ethnographies that are accompanied by photographs or ethnographic films supported with study guides. He argues that for a long time the message was ‘images are seductively dangerous and must be treated gingerly. Images-(sic) as the criticism went on-(sic) may appear to show truth and evidence, but therein lay their shallowness, for all images deceive and hide’ (ibid: 232).

This is a notion that I argued against earlier when I discussed photographic representation in Chapter Two and Three, and it is one that both Bates and Vannini challenge within *Video Methods* (2015). Bates’ writing doesn’t seek to promote video as a visual method, as she states that this ‘would limit its qualities. With its sound and its movement, video exceeds the visual realm’ (Bates, 2015:2). Garrett writes about geography’s academic engagement with film and video by splitting it into five categories: writing about film (analysis), production for an audience (popular geography films), footage as record (data collection), reflexive filmmaking (experimental filmmaking), and participatory video (collaborative filmmaking) (Garrett 2010: 3). This largely follows the modes of documentary identified earlier in this chapter and bolsters my argument for an expanded sense of film as landscape ethnography. Garrett suggests that experimental filmmaking is the least used by researchers and academics within the field of geography.



Garrett cites the production of Matthew Gandy's film *Liquid City* (2007) which involved at least seven people, leading Gandy to surmise that a project of this kind 'requires a larger and more diverse team of people than is common for most academic projects' (Gandy, 2009: 407). This film was produced at around the same time that Crang and Cook (2007) were noting the cost and complexity of video making. This partially mirrors the evolution of ethnographic film, *Nanook of the North* utilised production methods due to the limitations of the production kit that are now highly questionable within documentary film practice. Even during the 1950s cameras were too bulky to be unobtrusive, leading to an expository approach, involving a narrator directly addressing the viewer from a single authoritative position of objectivity (Hight and Roscoe, 2001), and leading to very 'little sense of a collaboration... between the filmmaker and the subject of the documentary' (ibid: 19-19). The invention of relatively lightweight cameras with synchronous sound during the 1960s would lead to ethnographer Jean Rouch considering the camera as unobtrusive neutral observer and the birth of observational cinema and cinema vérité.

Film-makers now followed action, rather than initiating or directing it. In particular, interviews were eschewed in favour of a new sensitivity to context and to different, non-verbal ways by which social meaning was communicated. Recording technology was kept to a minimum, operated by film-makers as an extension of their bodies. There was also a commitment to authenticity, conceptualised as faithfulness to the filming experience. Editing was the process of distilling this experience. Hence it was to be carried out by those present during the shooting of the film... the film was to be shaped from a position within the encounter, rather than a place external to it through the use of a conventional editor. (Grimshaw, 2001 in Grimshaw and Ravetz, 2005: n.p)

Garrett suggests that counter to the notion that film is an expensive medium, reliant on external funding (organisations), there are bodies of high quality work produced on

shoestring budget by lone filmmakers (see Chaud, 2008 and Yorke, 2005). Further to this, there are freedoms to filming in this way that draws comparison to writing academic articles (Vannini, 2016). Recent developments in camera, sound and editing technology has made the single person production even more of a reality. Cameras are now small, relatively cheap and accessible to most, with some even being of high enough quality for broadcast by conventional means (Jacobs, 2016).

During a three-year participatory video project, Sandercock and Attili (2010: 24) found that the production was ‘immensely helped by recent advances in camera and editing software, and related reductions in film-making costs’. The majority of digital cameras now shoot manually controlled video, with advances in auto focus and in-camera stabilisation. When coupled with on-camera video microphones, we now all have the means to embrace cinema verité methodologies to produce high quality productions. The addition of high quality video on smart phones opens up even more possibilities, with one device acting as camera, video camera, notebook and voice recorder, a high quality all-in-one fieldwork device in your pocket at all times (Garrett, 2010).

Garrett (2010) along with Jacobs (2016) argued that one of the factors holding back geographic film was the matter of publication within journals. Work such as pieces by Hansen (2008) and Schienke and Brown (2003) are regularly pushed to the margins of geographic publications and require an accompanying text to describe the video, leading to the idea than ‘when visual ways of researching are used, data is still predominately presented as text’ (Brown et al, 2008: 14), or worse when they are written about with no mention of the film that provoked the article (Gandy, 2008). This is starting to change with multiple journals providing online counterparts for multimedia research, and the AAG conference in 2017 ran its first short film competition for geographic filmmakers. Vannini wrote that upon enquiring to the editors of *Mobilities* about a video submission, that the journal’s publishers were actively soliciting multimedia material, and would publish it on a dedicated website with an assigned DOI and stable URL which would

place it within a citable scholarly discourse. From this he suggests that it is time we stopped discussing whether scholarly journals might consider publishing multi-media material, but instead how such material should be utilised in relation to more traditionally conventional modes of academic discourse (Vannini, 2017: 8).

## **7.2 Psychogeography, Film & Video, And the Virtual *Dérive***

The ability for film and video to capture multiple elements that are open to a variety of readings demonstrates what Pink called the 'corporeal intersubjectivity between filmmaker and film subject' (ibid.: 248), but I would expand this to incorporate MacDougall's (1978: 422) triangle of filmmaker, subject, and audience. This allows us to connect Jason Throop's (2003) suggestion that we understand human experience in terms of a 'definitional range' that encompasses 'the indeterminate, the fluid, the incoherent, the internal, the disjunctive, the fragmentary, the coherent, the intersubjective, the determinate, the rigid, the external, the cohesive, the conjunctive and the unitary' (Throop, 2003: 227). I believe that landscape film and video works meet his demands for 'a phenomenological model of experience that works to integrate the "immediacy of temporal flux and the mediacy of reflective assessment"' (Throop, 2003: 233, referenced in Pink, 2007: 248).

'I consider myself to be both an image-producer and a "writing" anthropologist... I suggest an approach to ethnography that uses visual methods and media when they appear appropriate to generating knowledge about the question one is exploring. My approach is to use the camera when I think I will be able to learn more or learn differently about the particular questions that I am interested in' (Pink, 2007: 250).

I hope to show in the next section that film and video is suitable medium to undertake landscape orientated psychogeographic investigations, due to its ability to form complex representational assemblages that offer differing registers, which when combined, form a multi-sensual reading that couldn't be produced through the still image, or written word. Adam Scovell (2017) suggests that psychogeography has had a 'surprisingly strong but subtle output in British cinema', 'a re-engagement with place for the sake of place through a very literal traversing of its pathways, more commonly found as a form in literature than in cinema'. Laura Rascaroli (2015: 21-34) discusses psychogeographic cinema in terms of a form of expanded cinema and develops it to be a form of expanded post-Situationism. Her article opens with Jackie Hartfield's definition of expanded cinema.

Not without ambiguities, expanded cinema as a term generally describes synesthetic cinematic spectacle (spectacle meaning exhibition, rather than simply an issue of projection or scale), whereby the notions of conventional filmic language (for example dramaturgy, narrative, structure, technology) are either extended or interrogated outside the *single-screen* space' (Hatfield, 2005: 5).

Gene Youngblood defines this as not 'a movie at all: like life it's a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his subconscious outside of his mind, in front of his eyes' (Youngblood, 1970: 41), with Rascaroli suggesting it informs a 'new spectatorial perception of space and time' (Rascaroli, 2015: 21). The *dérive* when seen as a form of production that is both cultural, and critical, is capable of creating a participative spectatorial experience that is connected to a filmic consciousness 'outside the mind' (ibid.). Further to this, the emphasis that expanded cinema places on an adapted experience of space and time fits within the confines of the post-Situationist *dérive*. As previously mentioned, Guy Debord defined the *dérive* or drift as a 'technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances' that requires a 'playful-constructive behaviour' (Debord, 2006: 62). Rascaroli further suggests the post-Situationist *dérive* can be defined

in three separate phases of production: 'as an experience made by individuals or groups of Situationists devoted to the practice of quick passage through urban environments, guided by the attractions of the area itself and by occasional encounters;' 'as a theoretical and critical activity that focuses on capitalist society and on the space capitalism forges and controls;' and as a 'reflexive and cultural form of production' (Rascaroli, 2015: 22).

As such the *dérive* is not just a technique, but it is an action and experience, and is therefore actualised and consumed in the space and time dedicated to it. However, this suggests the *dérive* is merely of the moment, however, as previously discussed, film and video has both the ability to record the moment and extend that moment to the audience, allowing the initial *dérive* to transcend its moment of production. The critical-theoretical element manifests itself through a mediated form of reflection in the use of language and writing, therefore having its own time of production, circulation and reception that can be considered a method of documenting the *dérive*'s performance; this is evident in John Rogers' film *London Overground* (2016) that depicts the production phase of Sinclair's drifts that resulted in a book of the same name. Similarly connected to this is the *dérive*'s connection to cartographic activity that either happens before or after the fact, allowing it to either guide or represent the *dérive*. It is through the production of these representations that we are allowed to configure the act that is 'always and inevitably personal and ephemeral as an activity that communicated and shared beyond its specific, immediate temporality, and that extends (expands) into a form of reflection and into theory' (ibid.: 23). It is moving beyond these representations that allow it to move beyond 'personal' experience and produce the proposed social change that the Situationists sought. Rascaroli explores the output these representations take, such as diary writing, maps, data, photographs and videos, and concludes that they all contain specific traces of the *dérive*, and the experience made by the drifting person. However, it is video that promises a 'more faithful image and more direct, personal and synesthetic involvement in the experience of *dérive*' (ibid.: 26).

As Roland Barthes conceptualised, it is the linguistic message that anchors images and determines their meaning as document. However, I would argue it is the audio-visual coding that denotes the indexical trace of the image as an experience of *dérive* and that expands its experience to and for the audience. Therefore, we are able to both represent the *dérive* and reproduce it, emotionally and conceptually for an audience that could not participate in it. This is the simplest form of documenting the *dérive*, films that are directly influenced by a Situationist methodology and document a *dérive* that actually took place. The other more complicated form of psychogeographic *dériviste* film is one that are not documents of a drift that took place, but build and stage a virtual one. These films become, in themselves, a *dérive* and allow the audience through the filmic experience to experience the virtual *dérive* synesthetically.

### **John Rogers**

The video work of John Rogers falls into the category of documenting drifts that have taken place. Adam Scovell (2016) describes Rogers as one of the most prominent psychogeographical writers and filmmakers of the last decade. Fiercely independent and with a strong DIY sensibility towards his creative responses to London, his work is a vital component and documentation of a city still in a phase of hyper-development and gentrification. Through his YouTube channel, Rogers documents his politically charged drifts through east London, exploring concepts of regeneration, displacement and an alternative history of the region that is both post-Situationist and within the mould of contemporary Sinclairian psychogeography. These vlog entries utilise a handheld digital video camera as their mode of production. The handheld camera produces a sense of physical presence within the piece, and creates both a personal and emotional participation. In many ways these videos mimic the linguistic journeys that Rogers undertakes within his written blog and bookworks, and act as enhanced versions of the written text. Viewers are simultaneously being guided and lectured on the elements of the landscape that fall within and without the camera's frame.

Roger's longer form film work *The London Perambulator* (2009), acts as part reflexive drift into London's edgelands and part an exploration of psychogeographer and deep-topographer Nick Papadimitrou, a man whose life is dedicated to exploring and archiving areas beyond the permitted territories of the high street, the retail park, the suburban walkways. The film presented within the codes of the documentary genre utilises traditional talking-head interviews, as well as what Pink describes as 'walking with participant' (Pink, 2007) as a means of connecting the audience to the subject matter.



Figure 7-2 John Rogers, *Nick Papadimitrou* from *The London Perambulator*. 2009

His latter film *London Overground* (2016) documents the recreation of the walk that Iain Sinclair undertook for his psychogeographic book *London Overground: A Day's Walk around the Ginger Line* (2015). Sinclair uses the newly reopened overground line, which until its completion involved fragments of lines that failed to connect to each other and a section of disused track, to form a research area that allows him to explore a microcosm of gentrified London, taking in areas of up-and-coming South and East London. The film,

by being a recreation of the original walk, and a new temporal event, acts as both a reflection of the process of drifting and a new drift within itself.



Figure 7-3 John Rogers, *Iain Sinclair and Andrew Kotting from London Overground*.

2016

### **Patrick Keiller, *And The Other Robinson***

Falling into the realms of recording virtual *dérives* is Patrick Keiller's trilogy of *Robinson* films (1994, 1997, 2010). Unlike Rogers' films the camera is static and each shot is held for a reasonable duration within the edit. The loose narrative, if there is one, is told by a voice-over that consists of musing on the English landscape tradition in the style of the English travelogues of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The film follows the drift of a fictitious social scientist and his research assistant. The narration is largely disjointed from the film's visuals, and, when the two do meet, it is never within the moment of the filmic inception, but mimics the reflexive nature of writing about the drift. The film's time sequence is connected to moments of political shift and disenfranchisement, corresponding with the General Elections of 1992, 1997 and 2010. In doing so, they form a counter-reading of the prevailing political climate of the last English century, 'seen through traces left by



capitalism and imperialism, and by the policy of the Conservative Party on both urban and extra-urban space' (Rascaroli, 2015: 30).



Figure 7-4 Patrick Keiller, *film stills* from *Robinson in Space*. 1997

Sections of the films deal directly with the changes happening in East London and all contain traces of the edgelands within them. Rascaroli describes Keiller's trilogy as being ideologically close to the Situationists and their critique of bourgeois values, of capitalism and colonialism, but suggests that they are even more disenchanted, sceptical

and of postmodern tone. Mark Fisher (online article, 2010) described the collision of new and old London within Keiller's first two films. 'London was the capital of the first capitalist country, but Keiller was interested in the way the city was now at the heart of a new, "post-Fordist" capitalism, in which manufacturing industry had been superseded by the spectral weightlessness of the so-called service economy'. The static camera focuses on what Debord called the 'centres of attraction', but the lack of locomotion removes the movement causing 'currents and vortexes' (Debord, 2006: 63) from the visual depiction. Keiller's camera is said to look over, rather than at the rural landscape (Fisher, online article, 2010). However, that movement is still implied by the narration, and mentally reconstructed by the audience. Hence the *dérive* is entirely conceptual, transferred to the audiences' consciousness, allowing it to be compared to the psychogeographic maps produced by the Situationists that had to be read and interpreted. The voice-over allows the viewer to reconnect to Debord's idea of 'fixed points' (Debord, 2006: 63). The films that produce *dérives* within their images are experienced in the viewer's consciousness as being between screen and mind.

The final Robinson film, *Robinson in Ruins* (2010) explores the 'new ruins of a neo liberal culture' (Fisher, 2010), that has not yet accepted its own demise. Both the filming and Robinson's fictitious wanderings began on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2008, the day after the first of the major stock market crashes that would precede the international financial crisis. For a proportion of the film, Robinson is living in a large East London house that is awaiting regeneration. After Robinson's eventual disappearance, his nineteen cans of exposed film and a notebook are found in a derelict caravan. Robinson becomes an edgeland character.

The evolution of Keiller's film subjects is connected to his early working life in Walthamstow.

He explored out-of-the-way locales, searching for compositions suitable for a catalogue of surrealist architecture. The unfathomable mess of London, which might, if he had to evaluate it, drive him mad, was brought to book: a sewage cathedral alongside muddy Channelsea Creek in the Lower Lea Valley, a coal hopper in Nine Elms Lane, a concrete factory in Gravesend. Somewhere in the background of all these ghosted structures was a railway. (Sinclair, 2011: 315)

Keiller described these sites as being found architecture, at first spotted from the train window (Keiller, 2014) and then visited by bicycle expedition to be captured, and catalogued into a private archive of future locations and interests. Explored before the sprawling mess of the Thames Gateway development took hold and changed the areas forever, a shift that he again would capture on his Éclair camera many years later, while once again trying to come to terms with the unfathomable mess of London.

Doreen Massey writes about *Robinson's* relationship to landscape. 'Two things stand out to me about the form of the film: the long moments of stillness, and the fact the camera does not film while it is travelling, but stops and attends to a series of particular locations "in" the landscape' (Massey, 2011: 18). This is a production methodology that exists within my own work, due to it being an extension of my body and consciousness, both of which are necessary to transform space, to place, to landscape. Massey further questions the notion of stillness within Keiller's frame. Massey points out that the long takes are striking, but not to be confused with stasis, things happen within the frame, processes within the landscape, moments that Henri Bergson called duration and becoming. These processes challenge the notion that space is a static slice through time, devoid of temporality. Massey describes space as being imbued with the temporal. As the camera lingers in the landscape it becomes open to the 'myriad of on-going stories' (Massey 2011: 19). The concept of the lingering figure, or in this case camera, has been a defining feature of edgeland literature (Smith, 2014, 2017). Massey sees the representation of the

landscape within the film as being a ‘multiplicity of trajectories’ (Massey, 2011: 20), noting that these stories are not buried in the layered past, but bursting through to speak. These on-going, unfinished stories are of the here and now, and in doing so address our today. Every time Keiller’s camera stops and lingers in the landscape, it captures fragments of stories. The camera is, *flaneur*, *deriviste*, and ethnographer. While my films share many of the aesthetics of Keiller’s *Robinson* series, I would argue that by adopting the persona of Robinson, Keiller is presenting a detached, academic representation of space that is situated within notions of the picturesque and the pseudo-scientific. As an audience we feel we are looking on to a landscape, instead of being embedded within it. Further to this, the narration is often too far detached from the scene presented, suggesting the landscape is merely a metaphor on to which we can hang external ideas.

### **Paul Kelly, What have You Done Today Mervyn Day?**

A handful of psychogeographic films deal directly with the Thames Gateway region and the effects of successive attempts at regeneration and rebranding. Paul Kelly’s *What Have You Done Today Mervyn Day?* (2005), explores the Lower Lea Valley, that area that would eventually be replaced with the Olympic park, which would later be reconfigured and branded as the Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park. The film captures the area’s transformation from stagnant industrial waste ground into the iconic Olympic park. It follows paperboy Mervyn Day as he follows his paper route, delivering to the small industrial units and disappearing businesses. The film is set on Tuesday 7th July 2005, one day after the announcement of the capital’s successful Olympic bid and on the morning of the terrorist bombings that rocked the capital. In doing so the film presents an uneasy paradox between celebration and devastation, themes that are mirrored in the film’s locations, places that, now more than ever, have become transitional spaces of death and rebirth. The narrational voice-over has local residents fondly recalling the area’s industrial glory days and lamenting the loss of the communities that used to inhabit the area. Kelly would revisit the area and film in 2012 after the pomp and ceremony of

the Olympics has passed. *Seven Summers* juxtaposes footage shot in 2005 over the derelict Eton Manor sports complex, once simply known as 'The Wilderness', with images of the new flats, shopping centres and infrastructure that sprang up in the wake of the successful bid. The Carpenters Estate sits boarded up, while gleaming white flats, built to house the Olympic athletes, sit equally empty in the background. The whole area is now a ghost town. The unpopulated frame captures two seemingly deserted communities, old and new London, at the moment of transition, yet to be made place.



Figure 7-5 Paul Kelly, *The Wilderness*, from *What Have You Done Today Mervyn Day?*  
2005

The genesis for *What Have You Done Today Mervyn Day?* came from Redmond O'Neill, a keen cyclist who recommended the Hackney Wick end of Lea Valley that only locals and cyclists seemed to know existed. The site contained the track of the Lea Valley Cycling club known as the Eastway Cycle Circuit, which was bulldozed in 2006 to make way for the new Olympic velodrome and BMX track. Increasingly attempts to find details about the former track are met with webpages for the new cycle park, proving that place making has successfully rebranded the area, increasingly erasing the last the last vestiges of the old, as search algorithms inadvertently conduct an Orwellian rewriting and obliterating of history. An early recce of the area from Canning Town showed the difficulty in trying to navigate the area either on foot or by car. This was turned into the driving force behind the film's drama/documentary premise, with Mervyn Day becoming

increasingly lost the more he proceeds into the area's centre. The journey therefore shifts from paper route to drifting *dérive* as the topography seeks to exert control on the day's actions, or, as Tom Dyckhoff's essay suggests, borrowing from Lefebvre, 'spaces sometimes lie'. Dyckhoff describes the film as a grieving, 'an elegy, a lament... what has passed away is not a person, but a landscape and a way of life' (Dyckhoff, 2013: 13). The transition of the Olympic site and the river ways of the Lea, the Roding, the Medway, all emptying into the tidal Thames, form the backbones of the drifts within Andrew Kotting's *Swandown* (2012), Kieran Evans & Karl Hyde's *The Outer Edges* (2013), and Michael Smith's *East End Trilogy* (2011, 2012, 2013). All of them are seemingly forced into action by the shock of the new, hunting for a London that is so tantalisingly close in recent memory, Shoardian wildspaces replaced with new identities, placed in the witness protection scheme for crimes against capital. Cameras linger, staring into the freshly minted locales, hoping to capture a fleeting latent image caught on the celluloid, a ghostly connection to the near past/future that only psychogeography appears to be receptive to.

While I have discussed a range of psychogeographic and landscape films within this chapter, it is important to consider how they connect to the ideas explored within the opening section of the chapter and the ethnographic methodological ideas explored in Chapter Four. At the heart of each one is the idea of the landscape acting as both a physical and metaphorical entity, through which we can shine a light on both the wider contexts that surround the formation of the places depicted and our connections to them. Even though they are not present in the frame, the filmmaker feels constantly present in the narrative. The process of producing landscape orientated work is enacted in collaboration with the landscape itself, with the narrative often forming through the filmmaker's embodied experience of being in that landscape. This idea is at the heart of landscape ethnography and all of these films. The films are neither documentaries, nor fictions, instead they inhabit the area of creative non-fiction, and new nature writing, through which the author, or filmmaker is creating a reading of the landscape, and is

often having to utilise narrative devices, such as Keiller's Robinson, as a means of presenting their reading of the landscape to an audience, in a way that is engaging, and allows the psychogeographic underpinnings of the exploration to be apparent.

I would argue that the unacknowledged presence of the author or filmmaker allows the films to be considered as auto ethnographic landscape studies. At first it could be argued that the slow meditative nature of the films, largely comprised of static shots, filmed from a tripod, while being landscape ethnographies, fail to be auto ethnographic. To many the idea of filming from a tripod is too detached to be seen as auto ethnographic. However, I would argue that the slowly building narrative that develops through often long shot durations, such as those within Keiller's Robinson trilogy, mimics the experience of lingering within a landscape, allowing the filmmaker, through the agency of the camera, which is acting as a visual extension of the filmmaker to visually explore a new environment.

Instead of being a detached element, in this way the camera acts as an embodiment of the psychogeographic eye. The film allows us to be transferred into the landscape in the same way that the large format camera does, in the works explored in Chapter Five. This would not be possible with the hand-held camera style of other auto ethnographic films. All of these films explore ideas of drifting, which I consider to be a slow act of accumulation, and while our eyes are in constant motion, when we come to later the remember the experience, it is in slowly expanding memories, which certainly to me feel like a series of static shots, each of which adds to the previous.

## **7.3 Conclusion**

Within this chapter I have defined how some of the fieldwork is framed by works that have been informed by the wide cross-disciplinary ideas that surround landscape

ethnography, while doing so I have also strengthened its connection to visual methods of representation that place it within the confines of creative practice and separate it from traditional notions of ethnography. As I have shown in this chapter, an expanded sense of ‘visual geography’ is less visual and more of a multi-sensual landscape ethnography, which is highlighted through my shift from still to moving image that will be discussed in the next chapter. This is a response to the non-representational nature of landscape study and production, which in turn feeds into its representation.



## 8 Drifting Through the Landscape - The Shift from Visual...

This chapter is part of a pair that explores the practice and fieldwork that has led to the shift from a visual, to a more-than-visual moving image production and method. These remaining two chapters explore the development of the corresponding bodies of practice that have both accompanied and informed the research for this thesis. Neither could exist without the other and the preceding chapters have sought to both theorise and contextualise the research journey that is ultimately encapsulated within the series of films that fall under the banner of *Zones of Change* (Robinson, 2014-17).

As has been noted multiple times in previous chapters, my relationship with the Thames Gateway and edgelands environments has existed for most of my life and as such the development of my practice has taken place over an extensive period. The following sections aim to make sense of the wider bodies of work and experiments that have led to the film series. While the photographs and films produced during my work on edgelands and the Thames Gateway differ in framing and intention, they all share the common bond of being formed through a series of drifts and dérives that ultimately form a larger exploration into both the region and edgeland state, and as such can be seen as fractions of a twelve-year drift around both subjects. They also form a journey to find a more immersive form of presentation within my practice and mark the shift to the 'more-than-visual' (Jacobs, 2013: 714) methodology and production outlined in Chapter Five.

The works in the next section, while presented chronologically, did not have a linear impact on the wider body of work. Some experiments would have a greater impact than others that would not necessarily be immediately felt or appreciated by myself.

## **8.1 Pre-PhD**

I first started photographing the (post)industrial landscape of the Thames Gateway in the final year of my undergraduate degree. This work was produced around the Hoo Peninsula, particularly at Cliffe and Grain. The images were produced on a large format camera and exhibited the formal elements of landscape photography, but carried none of the autobiographical or critical considerations of the ‘man-altered’ landscape that would exist within later work. They did, however, lead to a fascination with the Gateway landscape that would continue to be the driving force in my work for the next twelve years.

Upon completion of my undergraduate degree I enrolled on a Masters Degree at the University of Creative Arts in Rochester, a town within the Gateway that forms part of the Medway towns along with Strood, Chatham and Gillingham. It was during this three-year period that a number of ideas and photographic works started to connect and form the backbone of my research.

### **St Mary’s Island**

At the time of living there, Chatham was experiencing a period of regeneration in an attempt to shake off its perceived negative image and redevelop its former docks. As mentioned previously the redevelopment of the MOD site at St Mary’s Island was

perhaps the most ambitious project within the town. St. Mary's Island is a 150-acre residential redevelopment by Countryside Maritime, a joint venture between SEEDA<sup>29</sup> and Countryside Properties that forms part of the 350 acre Chatham Maritime regeneration project. The regeneration of the island was always going to be more than just a building project. It was going to be a grand scheme to create a 'new way of life for people who valued the simple things: tranquility, harmony and community' (Countryside, 2016). St. Mary's Island had the unique distinction of being Britain's first and only strategically planned island community.



Figure 8-1 Simon Robinson, *Untitled 4* from *St Mary's Island, Chatham*. 2006

The architecture on the island changes according to phases of construction and where

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<sup>29</sup> South East England Development Agency – one of a number of regional development agencies in England. It was created as a non-departmental public body in 1999 and wound up in 2012.

they are geographically situated on the island. They range from New England style wooden clad buildings to brick semi-detached properties. By repeatedly walking the site, I became interested in this architectural mix and the points at which they collided with one another, creating juxtapositions of style. By utilising the landscaping and topography of the development, in particular a raised spine that traversed the centre of the island, I was able to photograph these collisions, as well as allowing the audience to see across rather than through the development. It was the first time that the elevated viewpoint appeared in my images. It allowed you to see the relationship between the buildings. The compression of the lens exaggerated the proximity of the buildings to one another.



Figure 8-2 Simon Robinson, *Untitled 5* from *St Mary's Island, Chatham*. 2006

At the same time as creating these images, I started to notice the fact that the island was surrounded by industry, be it the power station chimney sticking above the rooftops, or the working docks at Gillingham or London Thamesport on the Isle of Grain. The island itself is surrounded on the non-picturesque side by a large earth bank, attempting to obliterate the view of these industrial sites, however it did very little to muffle the

constant sounds and smells of the site, or the light pollution at night. Just as the banks allowed the camera to capture the connections between the different building styles and phases, it also allowed it to capture the connection between the industrial and residential. This is a motif that would regularly appear in the sites that I explored within the Gateway. At this stage I had yet to become aware of Shoard's ideas of edgeland (2002), and in many ways the St Mary's landscape didn't fit her edgeland model, with the River Medway forming a hard border on three of its sides, stopping the gradual drift from urban to rural that exists within Shoard's writing. However, due to this fact and its relatively small size, it does present a compression of Shoard's model, with the transitional spaces between residential, industry, and the rural, limited to small patches of landscaping. Instead it became a microcosm to explore all three categories and their relationship to each other, and to us.

I started to use Ordnance Survey maps and Google Earth to picture and remotely explore the spatial relationships between the sites. They allowed me to create a 3D map in my head of topographic relationships that would then allow me to navigate the sites once I was there. I would continue to utilise maps and aerial imaging throughout my research, along with the addition of Google Street View, which effectively allowed dérives to be previsualised, giving me a starting point that I could then adapt once confronted with the realities and practicalities of the locations.

The idea of the use of Google Earth and Street View technology as a means of remote survey has been utilised in several bodies of work. First and foremost is Doug Rickard's *New America Picture* (2011), an imagined road trip through America. Using the technology to create an alternative viewpoint of the great American State of the Union, crack houses, ghettos, crime, are all captured by the multiple cameras of Google's fleet of Street View survey vehicles. Rickard uses them to access areas that would be too dangerous and problematic to visit normally. Rickard's work blurs the notion of the physical and virtual dérive, as well as the line between dérive and survey. The work reads

as a drift through America's margins, one that has physically taken place through the systematically planned route of the Google survey vehicle, but one that is both presented in virtual form as data, that passes no judgement on the images it captures, and is then reconstructed as documentary by Rickard's curation.

Mishka Henner further explored the idea in his work *No Man's Land* (2012), in which he utilised the technology to document sex workers in the edgelands of Spain and Italy. Discussing locations where these women plied their trade, Henner hit on the idea of using Street View as a mapping tool, and, sure enough, some of the women were visible on the pictures. The story took a darker turn when his searches led to internet forums for men using Street View as a means of finding girls. By utilising and subverting the way the technology had been appropriated, Henner found a way of discussing both issues. Henner says, 'I loved it because it didn't pretend it was trying to understand the experience of the women. It's about us looking, being witnesses to a whole world with which we cannot empathise' (Henner quoted in Davies, online article, 2013).

The work can be compared with Txema Salvans' *The Waiting Game* (2014). The images are of a similar situation, but use a large format camera to allow us to immerse ourselves in the squalor of the scene. We are no longer detached witnesses; instead we are complicit in the experience. To produce the images, Salvans used the idea of the cartographer as his entry point; disguised behind a luminescent jacket, he was able to work close enough to his subject matter to produce the highly detailed images.

### **The Smell Of Bitumen**

The St Mary's work developed into my Masters' work *The Smell of Bitumen* (2007). This body of work explored the relationship between residential and industrial sectors within the British Isles. The photographs were taken from the elevated viewpoint of a cherry picker and depicted the meeting point of residential and industrial buildings, as well as the interstitial landscape that often existed around this zone. Several of the resulting

images were produced within the Thames Gateway, at Canvey Island and the Isle of Grain. For each image, I would spend a day at the site. The time spent at the top of the cherry picker allowed me to observe the Gateway landscape, further refining my internal topographic map of the region, building on the time spent with Ordnance Survey maps and aerial photographs. The simple act of being there and observing meant that this internal map became linked to my experience of the landscape.



Figure 8-3 Simon Robinson, *Grain, Kent* from *The Smell of Bitumen*. 2007



Figure 8-4 Simon Robinson, *Canvey Island, Essex* from *The Smell of Bitumen*. 2007



The decision to photograph from an above normal viewpoint is one that many photographers have taken. The photographer Bernd Becher said, ‘In order to achieve the desired result it must be possible to photograph from a particular viewpoint and to photograph them as an ensemble’ (Becher quoted in Lange, 2002). While the Bechers have become most known for their typologies of industrial buildings, their body of *Industrial landscapes* (2002) depicts a wider view than their typologies and places the industry into the context of the landscape that it sits in and affects. The relationship between industry and the wider community is represented through the relationship between the monumental structures of industry and the smaller housing structures that surround these sites. This is most starkly rendered in the image of the of the Terre Rouge plant in Luxembourg.



Figure 8-5 Berndt and Hilla Becher, *Terre Rouge, Luxembourg* from *Industrial Landscape*. 2002

A gigantic conveyor crosses right over a row of houses, the support legs sitting in the houses' gardens. The residents are quite literally living in the shadow of industry. The



scale of these industrial sites is even more shocking when they are connected back to ideas of deindustrialisation and industrial ruins explored in Chapter Two. While at first the images of industry and residency sitting cheek by jowl are disturbing, once you consider that both industry and residency have grown due to their relationship to each other, the Bechers' camera captures the symbiotic relationship between industry and the wider community. Once these industrial towns lose their purpose due to deindustrialisation, they are left with communities that no longer have an economic future. The images that the Bechers created over a forty-year period, especially the ones produced in the American Rust Belt and the Welsh Valleys, capture this shift.

The only way to obtain the shots I wanted for *The Smell of Bitumen* was from an elevated viewpoint. Without the cherry picker it would have been impossible to view the site as a unified whole, and obtain a connection between the buildings. The cherry picker enabled me to adopt a topographic view of the world; the resulting images allowed the viewer to see the relationship that these two sectors have with one another, creating a discourse, an area of disharmony where the two collide. I didn't want the crane to provide the all-embracing god-like perspective so beloved of the deadpan photographers like Andreas Gursky. I wanted the images to still have a human quality to them. I wanted the viewer to see the world as I did while up in the cherry picker, hence the choice to photograph the world with a standard 180mm lens that came close to mimicking the natural field of view of the human eye. I was aiming to use the camera's height to gain a level of clarity, to show the world from a slightly skewed angle. I wanted to show the viewer the sites from a different perspective, just as Gregory Crewdson had chosen to use a cherry picker in his series *Hover*, because he wanted to survey the town he was working in. While I was interested by the notion of the photograph as a method of survey, I came to feel that the topographic perspective of the elevated viewpoint and deadpan photography was too removed from its subject matter. Instead of the camera's lens producing a survey-like image of the landscape in front of it in a single image, a more immersive survey could be

produced from a ground-based perspective that utilised multiple images to explore the same wide perspective of the elevated platform, combining a macro viewpoint with the micro viewpoint, replacing the macro wide viewpoint, with macro notions of work produced over a long period of time.

## **18 Rochester Street**

The first complete body of work that put this idea into practice was produced a year after the completion of Masters degree. *18 Rochester Street* (Galer, 2008) was a photographic survey undertaken by my wife Rebecca Galer, and me during our time living in Chatham. She designed it as a means to interrogate and understand the area that we lived in, an area that she would regularly find herself alone in, held hostage inside the house due to the hostile nature of the neighbourhood. The work started in the garden of 18 Rochester Street and explored the interstitial nature of the rented property garden, which had been left to the elements by the landlord. Without any sense of ownership, it became the dividing line between her space and the seemingly lawless nature of the passageway dividing the two neighbouring streets of Victorian back-to-back terraces. While at first the garden acted as the divide, this was steadily eroded by break-ins on the street and the collection of used syringes that were regularly thrown over the fence. The broader idea of the alleyway has been described by Alexandrine Boudreault-Fournier and Nick Wees as ‘interstitial urban spaces where the public encounters the private, the hidden encounters the open’ (2017:211). In our experience the alleyway acts as a space for unlawful, or socially unacceptable acts to occur. The breaching of the interface between public and private in the alleyway and garden removed the psychological protection the fence offered and opened the interstitial nature of the whole site. The camera shifted from showing the fence’s fortifications from the inside, to probing the barrier from the outside, exploring its liminality.



Figure 8-6 Rebecca Galer, *18 Rochester Street*. 2008

Upon escaping the confines of the garden and back alley, we realised that our experiences were purely symptomatic of the wider deprivation within the region, a deprivation that we felt could be explored through the landscape, each photograph would merely be another part of a map that would build to a physical and psychological detailing of the region. Friends would tell us stories of their experiences, which would fuse with our own as well as with wider events within the area's newspapers. We felt like prospectors who had found a seam and were tracing it back to its source, or adrift on a river, at the whim of the shifting current. Our survey of the region was undertaken on foot and our walks spiralled out from the central point of 18 Rochester Street. Each rotation further informed our mapping, building on the layers that preceded it.



Figure 8-7 Rebecca Galer, *18 Rochester Street*. 2008

At the time the work was produced, we had no knowledge of edgelands, psychogeography, drifting, or writers and practitioners like Iain Sinclair. Instead the methodology evolved naturally in response to the environment. We chose to walk because it allowed us to linger in a way that driving or public transport does not. The further out our walks progressed, the more we experienced the edgeland environment, even if we had yet to hear the term. It allowed us to experience the shift from urban to rural, passing from houses to out of town shopping complexes, which in turn gave way to leisure pursuits and eventually the marshes, with the river's heavy industry in the distance. It also allowed us to understand the shift wasn't gradual or abrupt, and that zoning changes constantly shifted. So that when we finally did discover Shoard's writing it was possible to question her edgeland model, and to some extent the neatness it suggested.

The work also started to highlight the limitations of the photographic medium in regard to depicting the multi-sensory experience of being in the landscape. My wife started to write and record her experiences of living in the area and the resulting texts were used to open the potential of the images to describe the multi-sensory nature of the walks.

The limited time spent experiencing the Thames Gateway landscape failed to immerse me sufficiently in place, to form any sense of it, and ultimately at this stage they remained in a liminal state between space and place. However, it started to generate a sense that the area was densely, and multisensorially storied, (just as all areas are), but that these interstitial liminal sites were populated in fleeting, errant, and informal ways, which made it a challenge to undertake traditional ethnographic work. This would have also shifted the focus of the research from engaging with and creating landscape. The camera started to become my way of framing my landscape, and acted as a tool to focus my attention on the macro/micro elements that defined a sense of place, and would become the locus for the formation of a geographic imagining of the region, that would be formed through the idea of landscape ethnography. At this early stage the 'record' that the camera was

making was incidental to the experiences afforded by the methodology. The camera then shifted to being an extension of my bodily (mind, body, and soul) engagement with the landscape, and combine ideas of psychogeography and photographic survey. Undertaking the photography would become my method of ‘deep’ mapping (Heat-Moon, 1991) and hanging out (Geertz, 1998). The next stages of the practical development would involve the combining of these ideas, and thus the work I would produce would be as much about my relationship with the landscape, as it was about the landscape, as previously mentioned; it was of and about the landscape, and therefore could be considered a landscape ethnography.

## **8.2 Early Experiments**

The years following the production of *The Smell of Bitumen*, and *18 Rochester Street* were spent largely researching ideas surrounding psychogeography as a methodology as well as edgelands. It wasn’t until I formally started the process of writing my PhD proposal that I would return to the Thames Gateway or produce work concerned with it or with edgelands. Over this early period of research, I undertook multiple fieldwork trips to the region ranging from a few days, to two weeks, with time spent between used to edit and consolidate the practice. Alongside this I undertook a process of ongoing research and writing on different areas linked to the region, which are fed back into future fieldwork.

The initial fieldwork was around West Thurrock, an area I would come to know intimately over the period of my research and one that I would constantly return to as a test bed for further research. It is fair to say that it has had a profound effect on the development of the practice.

My PhD practice was formed during many long and boring motorway journeys, working on other bodies of work. It struck me how rarely we leave its safe confines and explore

the areas around these hubs and junctions. From personal experience, when villages are bypassed they cease to exist, falling off any internal map you may have. It is a site that for me has come to typify bypassed spaces, sitting next to the Queen Elizabeth II crossing, one of the busiest sections of road in the country, but rarely considered, at least by me at this stage. My regular journey from Norfolk to Sussex would always involve at least an hour queuing to cross the River Thames at this notorious pinch point, that for many acts as an unofficial boundary to London, and my attention in that time would be diverted to the area of marsh hemmed in by the spreading of the edgeland factories and distribution centres.

### **Jerusalem A Photographic Survey Of The Thames Crossing**

The initial choice to photograph the area around West Thurrock and the Lakeside Shopping Centre stems from the wider preliminary research I was doing into edgelands. The first development trip took place in 2013 while I was applying for PhD places; the trip resulted in a book dummy entitled *Jerusalem*, its name taken from Blake's poem, partly as elegy. The body was inspired by Roni Horn's *To Place* (1990-2006) series and the idea of an encyclopaedia of identity. The series use of multiple seemingly disconnected books embraces a multidisciplinary method of representation. Horn describes the publications as a 'very slow process of accumulation' (Spinelli, online article, 1995).

The initial idea for the practice based PhD outcomes would be developed through a series of site-specific shoots; each of these shoots would form an anthology of books that could be read individually or form the basis for a larger study, an ever-expanding survey of specific sites and the edgeland environment within the UK. Work in progress was going to be disseminated to the public as a series of zine-like publications, forming part of the editing process and allowing critical reflection and refinement of the work. The initial

proposal had three geographic regions, comprising of the Thames Gateway, The Manchester Shipping Canal, and the M1 Central Midlands Corridor<sup>30</sup>.

<i>Local-</i> small individual Publications	<i>Regional-</i> Collection of Publications	<i>National-</i> Full Archive
Thurrock Chatham Isle of Sheppey	Thames Gateway	
Leicester Sheffield Bradford	Central Midlands	Archipelagos of Interstitial Ground

The photographs were produced over a two-day period and my drifts were based from the Ibis Hotel that sits overlooking the M25 orbital motorway and the Queen Elizabeth II Bridge. The hotel was chosen due to its proximity to the road in the hope that it would inform the image-making process by allowing me to understand the connection the infrastructure had to the landscape it sits on and passes through. It had also been used by Iain Sinclair as one of the overnight resting places during his research for *London Orbital* (2003). Sinclair describes the hotel as being ‘within its acoustic footprint’ (2003: 510), a notion that can be mapped on to the whole area; at what point does the motorway cease to exert an effect on the landscape? The bridge itself becomes a constant talisman within the photographs, and visual reminder of the bypassing of this space.

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<sup>30</sup> This proposal was eventually reconsidered and narrowed down to focus purely on the Thames Gateway, as this multi-part survey was aiming to challenge Nairn’s idea of homogenization, which I felt was a closed question, as opposed to questioning the edgeland landscape itself.





Figure 8-8 Simon Robinson, *Jerusalem*. 2013

*Jerusalem*, as one of my early edgeland works, marked one of two very important developments in the work. One of the questions I was asked at an interview was ‘what would stop these just being more images of non-place?’ I found that I had fallen into this exact problem, the images were repetitive and without context. They had no voice to them and were isolated from the reality of the locations, as I had originally experienced them. While this was partly due to the very long edit and sequencing of the book, I was so concerned with trying to represent the area that I ended up including everything, creating a muddle of themes and ideas. However, at the same time it was due to my failure to spend enough time within the region and form a developed and critical response to it. My images felt limited in scope, clichéd and at best touristy, at worst colonial.

It was very reminiscent of the way I felt about Anthony Hamboussi's *Newtown Creek: A photographic survey of New York's Industrial Waterway* (2010). Hamboussi's five-year photographic survey comprises of 237 images displayed in chronological order, aiming to capture the resurgence of the creek through the area's gentrification and revitalisation. The detached deadpan images show us little of the area's rich history or the impact the changes have on the local communities. Instead the wide grey photos merely show us the location, however, we aren't given the information or tools to make our own decision on the validity of the redevelopment.



Figure 8-9 Anthony Hamboussi, *Queens Midtown Expressway (Interstate 495) over the Dutch Kills, Hunters Point, Queens, looking southwest*, From *Newtown Creek: A photographic survey of New York's Industrial Waterway*. 2010

At this stage I believed that *Jerusalem* failed because I had yet to absorb and learn from the methodologies that we had constructed during the research and production phase of

*18 Rochester Street*. The most important of which was the idea of exploration through a sustained period of walking, and the lens acting as an embodied eye, through which the landscape is framed and constructed. The act of walking became our means of interaction with the public, and by extension a vital tool in research development. Walking as a means of experiencing and forming landscape can be thought of as a process of translating sensory stimuli, both visual and more ephemeral. To carry on the metaphor these can be incredibly quiet and involve a straining to hear, in doing so we can be thought of as listening to the stimuli of space and place and allowing our cognition to form it into landscape that is felt, heard, and viewed. The bulky cameras became conspicuous, and therefore acted as an icebreaker that encouraged the public to approach through curiosity and later engagement. This informal form of engagement led to an openness that didn't happen when we approached subjects to request more formal interviews.

### **The Role Of Walking In Production**

For me the frameworks discussed in Chapter Seven, while problematic at times, act as good starting points to walking as a research process, and mark the difference between *18 Rochester Street* and *Jerusalem*. For both myself and my wife, who has been present for every production phase of this thirteen year research process and acted as my producer and, at times, co-director, the success of *18 Rochester Street* comes from living in that environment and taking our time over the early research phase without the burden of the camera. While *Jerusalem* was produced in a short amount of time without the experience of walking and absorbing the landscape to gain an insight into its rhythms, instead the camera, that was supposed to be a tool to open up the landscape to a wider audience, became a means of closing it down to us. This is not to say however that the process was a complete failure, while the images fail to connect with the landscape, it did start the process of us connecting with it. I started to reflect on the process, and produce (auto)ethnographic field notes to make sense of the experience, as well as starting

conversations with the public, that helped unpack and shape our landscape. Schultz warns against writing whilst in the walk and Michael Taussig questions the role of the field note diary:

The fieldwork diary is built upon a sense of failure—a foreboding sense that the writing is always inadequate to the experience it records. Nevertheless, on rereading by its author, the diary has the potential to bring forth a shadow text that can simulate the experience that gave birth to the diary entry, not only for what is said, but more likely for what is omitted yet exists in gestures between the words (Taussig, 2011: 100).

However, I would argue that, when used as a means of reflection, and combined with multisensory elements such as photos, moving images and sound recordings, the written text can at least become part of the way of conveying the multisensory nature of the place to audience. While ‘autobiogeography’<sup>31</sup> is always an act of translation in which something of the original is lost, forever eclipsed by the very words that are meant to convey the reality of this original’ (Gregory-Guider, online article, 2005), it can instead be considered an act of curation, rather than representation.

### **8.3 Edgelands in General and a Shift in Medium**

After the formal start of the PhD research process I started to refine my methodology, based on the work that had come before, my research question, and the wider research process into edgelands and representation, undertaking a series of trips into edgeland environments in Sheffield, the Thames Gateway, Norwich and Great Yarmouth. At this

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<sup>31</sup> As are the frameworks used by Adams, Schultz, and Seiverts, and autobiography more generally.



stage these trips were largely exploratory and allowed for a familiarisation with specific locations and the wider edgeland model.



Figure 8-10 Simon Robinson, *Southtown 1*, Norfolk. 2013

The most successful research trip during this period was a two-day exploration of the industrial edgeland of Great Yarmouth's Southtown area. The area was relatively small and was an edgeland mix of retail and industry, with patches of brownfield that were being utilised by locals for various semi-legal purposes. The site sits between the tidal mouth of the River Yare, and a large area of marshes. As the land is reclaimed it is criss-crossed by a series of drainage dykes and pumping stations, and many of the industrial units are linked to the North Sea oil beds. Both the scale of the site and the time spent exploring it allowed me to map the area in greater detail than I had during the *Jerusalem* shoot. The use of a medium format film camera allowed for a greater resolving power than I had experienced with my digital camera up until this point, while at the same time

being light enough that it didn't impede more fluid walking explorations. By only taking a camera, tripod and two lenses I was able to move with purpose and remain reasonably inconspicuous. This allowed me to step off the path and trespass into areas that would have otherwise remained off limits. The resulting images were able to break out of the usage model coded into the site and produce a deeper mapping.



Figure 8-11 Simon Robinson, *Southtown 12, Norfolk*. 2013

My time in Sheffield combined a research trip to meet Anna Jorgensen, lecturer in Landscape Architecture at the University of Sheffield, and key proponent of embracing the interstitial landscape, to discuss wildspace and the photographic drift. Staring out of the twelfth floor window of the University of Sheffield Arts Tower, the view takes in the full sight of the city below. Sheffield is a city of valleys and converging rivers. Below us we picked out the industrial corridor that hugs the banks of the River Don. It was suggested that, if I wanted to understand Sheffield and its industry and edgelands, it was a



good course to follow. In many of our towns and cities the riverfront has become synonymous with regeneration and 'urban professionals' (Grindrod, 2013: 424) and, while at the start of my journey this was readily apparent, as I drifted downstream the new flats and hotels abruptly gave way to the changing industrial belt, a mix of small units and the grand steel works, mills and finishing shops. A new river-walk path sat next to the waterway. Locals questioned the validity of this new development, believing that the clearing of the Don was due solely to the environment agency's concerns of alleviating another flood like the one that had befallen the city in 2007.



Figure 8-12 Simon Robinson, *Sheffield Test 4*. 2014

This official path presented a manicured view of the river, strategically framed to control its representation. The photos produced on this drift continued to be tourist snapshots, however the walk presented me with glimpses of brownfield land and graffiti that suggested an alternative narrative and usage. I also became aware of the mix of sounds that made up the area's acoustic signature, a blending of sounds of the river, the traffic in the distance, birds and insects, and the rhythmic bass of the drop hammer at Forgemasters steel works. It was a sound I was familiar with and had heard described as being formative within the area's music scene, with a series of rehearsal spaces and music studios at one point utilising the area's cheap rents during the 1990s. It was described by

many as being formative within the bass heavy rhythms of early Warp recordings, a sound that felt uniquely Sheffield (*The Beat is the Law – Fanfare for the Common People*, film, 2011).

I decided to finish my walk around the river's official narrative and return the next day with my medium format camera and hand-held sound recorder, with a shotgun microphone and a set of in-ear binaural microphones that could easily have been mistaken for cheap headphones. With the recorder locked and tucked into my jacket pocket I was able to freely move around the area, without anyone taking an interest in what I was doing. I decided to go out field recording in the early evening in the hope that the area would start to come alive with a wider mixture of sounds. Attercliffe is a former industrial suburb of Sheffield (Liversidge, 2003) and is now home to small industrial units, waste recycling plants and steel works. The main shopping street was once bustling and houses, some exceptional Victorian buildings (Pollard, 1961), however, it is now home to multiple take-aways, sex shops (Moore, online article, 2016), and, as I was informed by a local, 'clubs of an interesting nature' (*A Very British Brothel*, TV programme, 2015, 2017), Peace, online article, 2017). At first wandering around with a hand-held recorder and headphones was an isolating experience, however, after a little while I found it liberating. I could close my eyes and concentrate on the sounds of the city. I could pick out the constant hum of air conditioning units, the gentle trickle of the River Don, in the distance the sound of an air wrench in a garage, and the rhythmic pounding of sheet metal. I found myself lingering, waiting to hear how the sounds changed and altered over time. While my primary research interests were visual, this new medium opened up the unseen nature of locale, I was able to create an image of the area that differed from the written word or photograph, and elicited a different form of representation.

The next day I returned to the site of the graffiti that I had seen the day before. I had spotted the area on the other side of the wall, during my first walk down the river, but



from the opposite bank. From that spot I could see the elaborate graffiti under the railway bridge, and from this I knew that the site had to be accessible on some level. When I got back to my hotel I checked it on an OS map of the area. It showed the weir and a short tributary running towards the main stretch of the Don. You could clearly see the railway bridge and a small pocket of white space either side of the bridge and water, divided off from the main road by a boundary. A quick check on Google street view confirmed that there was access to at least one side of the bridge, but it wasn't until I jumped the wall that I could actually understand the space.

*Just through the gate a small disused path dog-legged to the left, through small trees and shrubs, on the right hand side is a pile of ballast, that has clearly been sitting undisturbed for some time, as the grass and moss has started to recolonise it. Empty bottle and beer cans litter the site. The path carries on for 10 metres before opening up as I get close to the bridge for the first time. The stream that I could see running into the Don is on my left hand side, covered with silver birch, that overhang it slightly. A large clump of bulrushes sit in the water, and as I catch sight of the dark pool under the bridge, as it appears through the trees and rushes, I am startled as a heron takes off, huge and pterodactyl like.*

*Underneath the bridge itself is a slimy pathway, about one metre wide, the ground is slick with moss and soft silty mud, the water has an oily metallic sheen in places, and is covered in a milky white scum. The graffiti that I could see from the opposite side of the river is on one of the bridge walls, while on the other is another piece, a black and white tribal figure, with a spear lodged through the tail end of a giant fish. The graffiti is one of many in Sheffield by the local born artist Phlegm.*

*The pool itself is formed by a metal flood gate damming the water supply, barrels and tree debris sit half-submerged in the shallow liquid, the muddy surface threatening to suck them in. Over the flood gate is a rusty metal walkway to allow access to open and close the gate. I decide to risk crossing it with my heavy bag and tripod. After placing a foot tentatively on the dark ochre chequer board, I am convinced that it will support my weight. It doesn't start to feel dubious till I'm half way across and I feel a slight increase in the bounce underfoot, nothing concerning but certainly noticeable.*

*The other side of the water opens up in the lee of the railway embankment. I come out into the small void of white space I could see on the map. It is covered in bracken and brambles, I venture closer to the river's edge, the stagnant pool to my back. As I walk over the covering of bracken I realise the ground is increasingly squishy underfoot, I am standing on a semi-solid void between the bank and a brick casing holding back the embankment from toppling into the river, which is a three metre drop below. While standing there, a group of people walk down the other side of the riverbank. They are from a local community group cleaning up the debris flushed down*

*the river from recent heavy rain. They look confused to see me, but wave anyway. Most people assume you are supposed to be there and don't bat an eyelid.*



Figure 8-13 Simon Robinson, *Attercliffe, Sheffield*. 2014

*Worrying that my time might be cut short I cross back over the floodgate, stopping halfway to photograph the pool. On the other side of the gate is an area where flood debris has collected, silting up the water to a point that is solid enough to stand on. The water starts again five metres beyond this point. I clamber down, intent on taking a photo. A makeshift fence of corrugated metal, topped with trident spiked galvanised security fencing and razor wire, separates the space from the breaker's yard next door. A blue metal post, supporting the corner of the improvised wall, holds up my side, a pile of tyres sits against the other side of the fence from me.*

*Just next to it is one of the many storm drain grates, large round metal doors holding back the escape of water from the sewage system, waiting to be opened if the weather turns biblical. The water that I have come to photograph is beautiful, and surrounded by green foliage, juxtaposed against the shipping container and fencing. A sign barely visible is attached to the back of the container, a legacy to its previous life on another edgeland site; I can make out 'Twines, Wiper, Load, Rope, 77321 for service'. I wonder who was the last person to read the sign, or call the number for service; no one is going to see it here.*

*I finish making my images just as the rain starts again, sheltering under the bridge I listen to the birds, the water dripping from the iron work above,*



*splashing with a plop into the now disturbed water below. A train thunders over head, deafening, and breaks the semi-peace of the location, the traffic continues beyond the tree line, a constant wall of static that until I pause to listen to, I haven't been aware of. I pack up my camera bag, happy with the roll of 120 that I've shot, and venture back out in the world beyond the trees.*



Figure 8-14 Simon Robinson, *Attercliffe 2, Sheffield*. 2014

When I combined the sound recordings with the photographs I realised that both could allude to things the other couldn't capture, this multi-sensory method could open up the ability to map place in ways I hadn't considered.

Further trips to the Thames Gateway allowed me to further refine my framework. I chose to return to utilising a large format camera as it allowed for a greater level of detail to be captured within the frame due to the size of the negative, as well as using the camera's ability to move the lens and film planes to control perspective and remove converging verticals. These trips to the Gateway were mainly traditionally landscape-based at this

point, and the size of the camera, while slowing me down, felt like an acceptable trade-off between image and portability.



Figure 8-15 Simon Robinson, *Thames Crossing, Essex*. 2014



Figure 8-16 Simon Robinson, *St Mary's Island, Kent*. 2014

However, I was largely limited to photographing sites that were readily accessible by car. It wasn't until I attempted to photograph a new edgelands estate in Norwich that I became frustrated by the limitation the camera placed upon me. The estate was a large new build estate that was still undergoing construction. It sat just off the City's semi-orbital bypass

and was accessed through an out-of-town shopping complex, with the single road in and out passing the large retail spaces.

As has been discussed in previous chapters regarding these new dormitory edgeland developments, the access and infrastructure was wholly inadequate for the needs of the residents. I found that, while attempting to use the large format camera in this environment, it presented a number of problems due to its size, and suddenly felt very conspicuous and intrusive. The moment I placed it on the tripod it started to attract unwanted attention and as such increasingly felt like an exercise in photographic vanity. The weight also meant that it was largely impossible to walk with and undertake any form of drift. As such, I found that I produced no images and decided that I needed to find a better camera package to suits my needs and the increasingly large number of images I would have to produce to form any kind of mapping. Ultimately I decided a DSLR camera would be the best fit for my developing methodology and framework.

The continued photographic experiments and developments within my methodology, combined with attending a workshop run by Hornstra and van Bruggen, made me realise that the only way to do this project properly and in any great depth was as a multidisciplinary project. I would have to act as photographer, filmmaker, sound artist and writer to be able to cover the four methodology roles outlined by the MSA (Manchester School of Architecture) and presented in Chapter Five, as at the time this was the position of my methodological framework, which would continue to evolve and refine based upon the work that I was producing. The workshop helped me realise the importance of documenting the work and publishing when appropriate. While I didn't have the budget to stretch to multiple complex printed outcomes, I could utilise a blog as a means to develop the direction and act as a sounding board for ideas. My blog *Driving Thru Wasteland* (2013-15) allowed me to gather a range of ideas, archival material, contextual work and my own developing images and present them to the public in an accessible manner. The most important thing it allowed me to do was develop my voice

as a writer. If I was going to produce an (auto)ethnographic mapping, I would have to become comfortable with writing an account of my interactions with the people and places I was documenting.

The blog would become my most important development and the hardest to produce. From a psychogeographic perspective it has allowed me to embrace a range of sources and created a deeper and richer reading of the area. This combined with the adoption of the *flâneur* has meant that my work has been informed by my time in the landscape. I would try to spend at least two days working in any particular area. I don't believe in predetermined shot lists, instead creating images as I experience them. Some days I might only cover a 1km area while others I can cover much more, depending on whether the experience is speaking to me.

Hornstra explained that at first they had no fixed idea of the Sochi Project's end point or publication. They tried to drift through the region and adopted the role of the *flâneur*, by using multiple travel methods to give them multiple perspectives on the regions.

This is something I have tried to adopt within my methodology, the use of trains, tubes and DLR is relatively easy in the inner London sections of the gateway, and are predominately above ground, however the eastern reaches have notoriously poor transport connections. Instead I utilise my car to aide exploration. Using OS maps and the region's green lanes I am able to access areas that are more remote. I try and leave time before and after a shoot for a driving exploration, to help me understand the connections from what I have just experienced with the wider landscape. I make notes and take snapshots to help plan future trips; the addition of GPS in modern phone technology allows me to pinpoint areas on OS maps and through Google Earth aerial photographs.

## **8.4 CONCLUSION**

This chapter has explored the varied fieldwork and visual practice that has lead to, and helped define the evolution of the concept of landscape ethnography. Within the next chapter I will explore the work that has been produced after the idea of landscape ethnography was adopted as a means of non-representational practice that is oriented towards the production of the Thames Gateway interstitial landscape.





## 9 Drifting Through the Landscape ... To the More-Than-Visual

This chapter forms the second part of the section that explores my creative practice within the Thames Gateway region. This second half is concerned with the shift from a photographic to a moving image practice, and explores the wider production and post production elements that form my films.

### 9.1 The Shift in Practice

During my first formal year of research progress on the photographic element had been slow, as I was nervous to move out of my comfort zone and start experimenting with a wider range of imagery. Conscious of this, I enrolled on the International Urban Photography Summer School (iUPSS). The programme was developed in collaboration with the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR). Over a two-week period, this immersive programme forced me to experiment widely, while providing me with feedback that I would use to further refine the methodology. It would lead to several missteps but ultimately to a major breakthrough within my own practice. I decided to continue to develop my practice within areas that I was increasingly familiar with, but attempt to explore them from a new perspective. The entire two-week period can be considered a series of interconnected drifts within the landscape.

Returning to the area around West Thurrock and in particular the marshes, I decided to borrow visual methodologies from bodies of work that I had researched. I took out a large white sheet and roll of paper to act as a day studio backdrop, allowing me to photograph objects in-situ and removing them from the surrounding context. The aim was to present them as contemporary archaeological finds.



Figure 9-1 Simon Robinson, *Everyday Archaeology*, Essex. 2014

I also used small specimen pots and a trowel to take and photograph soil samples. Due to the nature of these sites as post-industrial brownfields I felt it important to draw attention to the soil makeup. The area of the West Thurrock marshes was home to a former coal fired power station. Marion Shoard wrote 'the electricity pylons which stride across part of the site provide a reminder that these plants flourish not on naturally occurring soil but a substrate of the dark grey powder of pulverised fly ash (PFA), deposited from a local power station years ago' (Shoard, 2013: 84). While Buglife's report on the region stated:

The power station at West Thurrock (now closed and demolished) produced a waste product known as PFA; this material resembles grey sand. The PFA was settled out in ponds on land neighbouring the power station. As these ponds dried out the sandy substrate was colonised by a range of species, including many rare and endangered species that occurred on the unique, but disappearing, local natural habitats. (Robins et al, 2013: 19)



Figure 9-2 Simon Robinson, *West Thurrock PFA, Essex*. 2014

While these images presented interesting methodological challenges, it took the work down a very literal path, that had the potential to dangerously borrow from the scientific

method while have none of the rigorousness of quantifiable data, and ultimately I felt it failed to elicit the poetic response to place that could be better served through non-visual means, be it field recording, or narrative.

As I walked along the tidal wall towards the river crossing I started to notice the flotsam washed up by the river's current. I came across large blocks of ballast foam that had been weathered into a series of sculptural forms, their form created by the flow of the current and the ship's propellers, and photographed them against the stark concrete tidal wall.



Figure 9-3 Simon Robinson, *Tidal Sculpture*, Essex. 2014



Figure 9-4 Simon Robinson, *Positive/Negative Space*, Essex. 2014



Along with these found sculptures, the whole length of the wall was covered in ornate graffiti that was so thick with paint layers that it breaks off in places like plaster. For both these objects I became interested in removing it from its original context and allowing them to exist as objects. My first response was to collect them and present them in a gallery case along with a detailed photo of the hole they have created. Ultimately these images failed to excite me, I was attempting to borrow someone else's methodology instead of allowing my own to develop, informed by the act of walking and the wider research. I felt that instead of learning from Roni Horn's work I was merely copying elements of it. The real shift happened during a day photographing Becton Alps and The Jubilee Greenway between Becton and Stratford for a still life assignment. Not only was I producing images of rubbish, but also the object in front of the camera failed to relate to the landscape they were in.



Figure 9-5 Simon Robinson, *Crap, Beckton Alps*. 2014

The photographs failed to give a sense of the walk and exploration that had led to the depiction of the rubbish. I had failed to place myself within the image-making process. The adoption of an exterior studio space with white background, or a tight framing of a

single object on the floor, meant that the image could have been produced anywhere, the uniqueness of the moment was lost, I had removed the landscape. Locations which include The Greenway, the embankment designed to cover the Northern Outfall Sewer which travels between Newham's housing estates and was covered in litter and vomit from secretive drinking practices, doing little to hide the reek of sewage permeating from below the surface. Or Becton Alps which is a former toxic spoil heap from the Becton Gas Works that later was adapted into a dry ski slope and is now an East London landmark. These sites are the ones that I was aiming to, if not celebrate, then at least shine a light on and open them up to a wider audience. Instead I was visually closing them off.



Figure 9-6 Simon Robinson, *Ski Slope, Beckton Alps*. 2014

During this time, I also wanted to produce a series of portraits of people utilising these spaces. I wanted the portraits I produced to become part of the landscape, the voices and stories were the important part. By shying away from the staged portrait I wanted to show that the subject was part of the wider landscape, connected and informed by it. The people I photographed and talked to were a graffiti artist and a pair of homeless men living under the stairs by the Unilever factory at West Thurrock. The graffiti artist and I



chatted about his connection to the place. I found out that he had recently moved back to the area and was a painter and decorator by trade. He was only just starting to get back into painting and had chosen a space far away from the main slog that he was going to make his gallery. He confirmed my suspicions that, the closer to civilisation, the higher the chance the work would be painted over by some 'newb'.



Figure 9-7 Simon Robinson, *Painting the Tidal Wall, West Thurrock, Essex*. 2014



Figure 9-8 Simon Robinson, *Proctor and Gamble, West Thurrock, Essex*. 2014

The homeless pair opened up very quickly about the reasons for their current position, much of this is the usual racist vitriol I had come to expect. However, it did really unpack the politics of the area and give me an understanding of some of the views that I had increasingly heard voiced in the Thames Gateway region. The East End of London had always been an immigrant area, but I was truly shocked to hear the views less than a kilometre from the landing place of the Windrush. The photograph I took clearly shows the anger and frustration in the man's speech. However all of these experiments failed to elicit the sense of place I was striving to achieve. They continued to be superficial, I would have to further adapt and refine my methodology to form a mapping as opposed to a tracing, as discussed in Chapter Three, surrounding ideas of landscape ethnography. The use of the photographic portrait has becoming an increasing mainstay in these poetic landscape surveys, typified by photographers such as Alec Soth.

However, these portraits are formal in their pose and aesthetic, with the use of the large format camera informing a considered and structured approach. My documentary style images demonstrated none of this rigour or intensity of the camera's stare that could be found in texts I was exploring. The visual portrait image, removed from the context of the interaction and conversation, reduced them to tracings, hollow representations, which at their worst could be considered disingenuous. I found I was more interested in the stories and fragments of conversation that were produced through these interactions. They felt like particles of the wider landscape that, once attuned to, opened up discourse and operated as part of the flow period. It was as though I was responding to the fragmentary nature of place, that Massey's 'myriad of stories', highlighting the notion of landscape as ensemble and place of performance.

Because of the frustration of these visual experiments and the failure for any of them to feel embodied and present a sense of place within the landscape for an audience, the biggest decision was to produce a short film as a development outcome. Ever since my degree I had been interested in the possibilities that moving image had to extend my



practice and its ability to produce a deeper reading of a location due to its multidisciplinary production. I felt that by adopting moving image it would allow for a more-than-visual approach to the landscape as well as allowing me to document and produce a visual record of the drift that mimicked the actual mode of production.

## 9.2 Estuary England

After a two-day drift around the area to the north of the Thames Crossing, captured on a DSLR that was capable of manual video control, the resulting ten minute film *Estuary England* (2014) was a culmination of the preceding research and development of the psychogeographic elements of my blog, and recreated a series of shorter drifts that I had already undertaken and documented as a series of image and text blog posts.



Figure 9-9 Rebecca Robinson, *The author filming Estuary England on the West Thurrock Marshes*, 2014

By connecting up the shorter research trips and explorations it became a freely meandering piece that explored the area in the form of journey, working slowly away from the river. The images were informed by the structure of topographic photography, with deep focus and an often wide field of view. This deep focus runs counter to the filmic norm, where shallow focus is used to highlight the subject matter (Wilson, online article, 2012). Each shot is taken on a locked-off camera, devoid of movement, and held for ten seconds in the edit. I wanted the audience to question whether they were looking at a series of still images, however, instead with limited action slowly unfolding on the screen.

The short film is a moving photo essay and its edit was greatly influenced by my previous sequencing of book works. Each shot was printed as a small image and then laid out in sequential order as a paper edit, allowing me to quickly alter the sequence and explore the visual flow of the piece. At this point I still considered myself a stills photographer first and foremost, so the postproduction process was informed by the visual flow first, with the soundtrack then being created to flow round it, with some alterations to hit certain beats within the soundtrack.

The film's soundtrack was originally supposed to be a wild field recording<sup>32</sup>, but limitations with equipment forced me to rethink this approach. Instead I remixed two pieces of ambient music. The remixed pieces still have a wild sound quality to them and help to create the melancholic feeling of the film; this was my elegy to a quickly disappearing location. In the years that I have been working at West Thurrock I have seen

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<sup>32</sup> Traditionally a wild track is an audio track recorded separately from the image. This is sound that doesn't need to be synchronised with footage, but instead adds depth and realism to the environment on screen. Field Recording is the process of recording sounds outside of the sound studio, in the field. It started as a tool of ethnography, where 'colonial powers... [documented] their subjects to aid the western understanding of the world' (Smith, online article, 2016). However, in this sense I am also using the term 'wild' as a connection to Shoard's wildspaces, forcing us to question how the audio ecology of the edgelands differs from its visual signature.

the marshes sink and disappear under a tide of consumer barns. The time-stretched music seems to ebb and flow, mimicking the landscape, while wind rushes around the viewer.



Figure 9-10 Simon Robinson, *Clearing West Thurrock Marshes for Amazon, and Daily Mail distribution centres*, taken from *Estuary England*. 2014

A reading from the opening passages of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* complemented the soundtrack, keen to find a way to tie in the history of the locations. Conrad's novel is held by many to be a satire of British imperialism, the savages are equally English settlers as they are the tribal Congolese, and the reader is never certain what river is being spoken about in the title. I felt strongly that the passage was as prescient now as it was when Marlow left these shores. The contemporary empire of London still pulls people and money up the river.

The change in my production method has further created an embodied understanding. The use of a field monitor and audio recorder with directional microphone, monitored through headphones goes some way to isolating me from the wider world, forcing my attention on to the details of the area that I am in. I have noticed that in even the most industrial surroundings I can still pick out multiple birdsong, distant sirens, and snippets of conversations.



Figure 9-11 Rebecca Robinson, *Field Recording at Davey Down, West Thurrock*. 2014

At the time I shot the film I didn't have time to think about where the imagery had come from, but with hindsight I realise how much it had been informed by the film essays of Patrick Keiller, Andrew Kotting and William Raban, all of whom have worked in the Thames Gateway region, and all have produced slow meandering contemplations on the river.

A deeper reflection on, and understanding of, how these works function has come from exhibiting the work to a range of individuals and audiences whilst delivering papers at multiple academic conferences. This film has led to discussions about the landscape and people's experience of it. Many of the locations, being edgeland in nature, feel instantly recognisable, even if you aren't familiar with the region, suggesting universality in the edgeland environment. Therefore, in one sense it has achieved its goal of acting as a mirror for the public to consider their own relations to place. However, by feeling universal, it also lost some of its specificity. Ultimately the film derailed my practice for a period while I considered the aesthetic qualities of this new medium. With time to consider and reflect on the film, I consider that it is limited in scope and over-simplified. This is partly down to the short period of time that I had to produce it, but also the



returning to areas that I was familiar with. This meant that the drift itself often failed to operate in any of the three phases of the walking framework, and the images themselves, while being geographic and metaphorical, failed to utilise autobiography and a sense of inhabitation. The camera feels like a disembodied viewer, floating through the landscape, failing to achieve grounding to this specific landscape. Ultimately the film is merely depicting the drift, the images are presented chronologically, and it is thematically limited in scope, making it a reaction to the landscape that can be considered a tracing, rather than an embodied representation or mapping. Because I had lived with the locations for so long before production, the film arrived fully formed and became a vehicle for Conrad's passage which, while critical of the region, was disconnected to it. The film in being a tracing, is a scratching of the surface, a geographic survey, data without analyses, and as such it fails to meet the artistic possibilities of a deep immersion, that are inherent within both new nature writing and landscape ethnography.



Figure 9-12 Simon Robinson, *Estuary England*. 2014

At the time of production *Estuary England* was initially designed as a standalone film. However, during shooting, I started to consider it an introduction to a series of films that explored the wider thematic of the region. The more I reflected on it, the more I

considered it to form a coda to this wider body. The use of Conrad's text increasingly became a means to subvert the seemingly widely held belief that the region was nothing more than a series of dormitory developments held in London's sociopolitical current. The new films became titled *Zones of Change* (2014-17) and would combine moving image, field recording, aural histories, archival materials, and interviews with artists and academics on both the Thames Gateway and the wider themes present within my research. The films would act as a portal to read and experience the landscape.

### 9.3 Longer Film Works

There was an extensive gap between the production of *Estuary England* in August 2014 and my next film in July 2016. This was partly down to the success that *Estuary England* found on the festival and conference circuit, but also due to having to reconsider my practice and research. The pivot from still to moving image, while being difficult, finally allowed for a more-than-visual, multisensory methodology to be developed. The resulting films were a combining of extensive theoretical research into edgelands, The Thames Gateway, and psychogeography, which has been documented in previous chapters. This, combined with two years of extensive fieldwork, surveying and drifts, allowed for the development of landscape ethnography as a multidisciplinary artistic methodology, utilising a range of artistic disciplines to produce a developed version of the 'eye witness, ear witness, interviewer, cartographer' framework (Hanley and Dargavel, conference paper, 2012:1), that had guided some of my earlier work. The films were a result of extensive refinements of the experimental methodology that had evolved within each of the previously discussed bodies of practice, brought about through prolonged reflection and questioning. The more I came to show and discuss *Estuary England*, the more I questioned its focus, themes and purpose. I wanted my next film to be considered a critical discourse on the Gateway and the key themes being contested within the region.

## Pre-production

My objective in designing *Zones of Change* was to point a spotlight at the development of the Thames Gateway region, as within mainstream media it was now poorly represented, with articles dealing only with specific issues such as the lack of infrastructure within a particular estate development (Burrows, 2015). Since it had seemingly been removed from the political agenda, there were limited contemporary depictions that presented a connected discourse on the separate themes that were prevalent within the region.

During the two-year period, numerous long-term field trips were undertaken, often lasting up to two weeks. As I had already identified, while I was once deeply invested within the region, the move away from the South East meant that I could no longer rely on the strength of my connection to make meaningful work in short periods of time. The new prolonged length of the visits meant that I could slow down while I was there, allowing for both a more immersive drift in a smaller area, and time to respond to the shifts in my ideas while I was working. The discovery and flow phases were enacted and produced through the act of walking each day. The evenings allowed me to review footage and write field notes, which became a method for making sense of the day's work and reflection on what I had discovered or learnt. It also meant that I was able to undertake location specific research, combining historic and contemporary sources to help frame the existing footage and the next day's shooting.

Throughout this period the field notes became more autoethnographic, less observations and more collections of emotions and feelings elicited by the landscape. These field notes firmly placed me within the landscape as the lens through which 'my' Thames Gateway was formed, which acted as a foil for the detached nature of the landscape images I was producing. Suddenly, when combined, the words and images became an extension of myself, producing a strong mix of geography, autobiography, and metaphor, which by this point I had come to recognise as an autobiogeographic model of production. This finally marked a return to the embodied intensity of my asylum images *The Darkness on*

*the Edge of Town* (2005), and *18 Rochester Street*, both of them critical and intensely personal. The new explorations into the landscape could now be fully considered multimedia and multimodal *dérives* (Pink, 2008; Smith, 2010) and marked a turning point in my practical phase.

During the periods of reflection between field trips, I would constantly return to Sieverts' *Guide to Visiting Cities*, taking myself through the framework and asking myself a series of questions about the representation I was producing. The most important question became 'which neighbourhoods are underrepresented or missing from the self-image of the city?' (Sieverts, 2008)<sup>33</sup>.

I attempted to answer this question through repeated readings of government and development papers, as well as housing development brochures to discover the official narrative. Increasingly they would talk about London and the large new developments in the region, while failing to connect these back to pre-existing communities and developments forming a hierarchy of residents. The field trips therefore became increasingly interested in the juxtaposition between the region's phases of development, be it the historic elements such as the village of Greenhithe, the mid-20th century developments in Northfleet, or the recent developments at Ebbsfleet, all of which exist within a square mile of each other.

I also became interested in the shift within the area's industry and economy. When I first started working in the area there were active cement works on the south bank of the Thames. Now much of the area has been given over to commerce, such as Bluewater shopping centre, which now sits in one of the former cement quarries, or the large distribution centre that sits on the wharfs that would have once been used to move the raw

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<sup>33</sup> See fig. 7.1



products. It became important to consider ways of discussing these changes, many of which were not visible on the camera's image. In their multimedia exploration of Dundee, *Jute* (2011), Garrett, Rosa, and Prior described it as an exploration of a 'landscape of erasure' (Garrett et al, 2011: 1), a method to excavate the material and symbolic remains of the region's historic jute industry.

My films attempt to do the same within the Gateway region, but also question the idea of it as a landscape of renewal. Garrett suggests that while *Jute* was an attempt to know a city, without *knowing* the city, it was an attempt to translate 'a layered story of urban fragmentation into an audio-visual representation' (ibid.: 3). It could be considered an experiment in what it means to know and form a sense of place, as they attempted to produce a perspective on Dundee from the position of outsiders, exploring and tapping into a sense of this landscape and its history in a short space of time. As such the cycle of films that comprise *Zones of Change*, are films of edgelands, while not being *about* edgelands in a traditional sense of the documentary genre, the landscape's connection to the concept of edgelands becomes more ambiguous. As such, while I know the Thames Gateway and have a deeply connected personal history to it, through prolonged exploration, research and exposure, I am presenting it to an audience that may not, therefore the films become a method of knowing, without *knowing*, or to place it in the concept of landscape ethnography, experiencing the landscape through a mediated representation.

While *Estuary England* had been produced on the relatively modest kit of a Canon 60D DSLR, the camera's colour space and limited resolution of the 1080i processing had impacted on the film's scope. The wide landscapes and complexity of detail in the vegetation had been rendered as an over-sharpened mush, while the 'baked in' colour palette left limited room for artistic interpretation in the post-production phase, unlike the raw files I was used to dealing with as a stills photographer. The decision to shift to a 4K resolution mirrorless camera allowed for the images to be downscaled for presentation

but keep the level of fine detail resolving power that was closer to shooting a traditional still image. The Log colour spaces<sup>34</sup> of recent mirrorless cameras allow for a greater level of image control within post production and a wider dynamic range between shadows and highlights, coming closer to the natural eye.

For the early stages of the film's long production I utilised a Panasonic GH4 which was one of the first of a new wave of mirrorless system cameras that incorporated 4K resolution and Log colour spaces that until this point could only be found in high end moving image cameras and productions. I also utilized a Sony A7S for its exceptional low light handling and ability to film relatively noise free images at ISOs up to 54,000, figures that a few years before had been unthinkable. My lens package for both cameras consisted of a 16-35mm f4, a 24-70mm f2.8, a 70-200mm f2.8 and a 50mm f1.8. This range of lenses covered all eventualities, but predominately the 24-70mm became my primary lens, often filming between 50-70mm<sup>35</sup> which not only mimicked the field of view of the human eye, adding to the grounded nature of the footage, but also allowed for a balance between the detail of the vegetation in the foreground and the overall framing of the landscape behind.

These cameras had the advantage over a traditional ENG production camera due to their size and weight. There was a successful trade-off between image quality and the ease of moving and filming unnoticed and undisturbed in sensitive areas, such as when I was trespassing or on a housing estate near people's homes. When I needed to, I could build up a camera system that utilised a matte box to control the light hitting the lens and to cut down lens flare, as well as allowing for easy use of neutral density filters to control the

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<sup>34</sup> The Log colour space is a flat camera profile that allows a greater dynamic range to be captured.

<sup>35</sup> A standard lens is one that covers a 50 to 55 degree field of view, which roughly translates to the same angle of view as the human eye, which gives a natural looking perspective. As this focal length is approximately equal to the diagonal size of the negative (50mm for a 35mm negative) it will alter with the size of the film format.

strength of the light hitting the sensor and maintaining a 1/50s shutter speed, which came closest to mimicking the motion blur of a traditional 180-degree shutter angle.



Figure 9-13 the fully rigged camera set up

I was also able to mount a 7" field monitor to aid with focus, exposure and composition and an external ZOOM H6 sound recorder, which allowed for four channels to be recorded, either as a stereo pair of small omnidirectional microphones for general wild ambient tracks, or as individual shotgun, condenser, and contact microphones to capture more intimate sound details. I also had a hydrophone to capture sounds under the water of the Thames and smaller creeks and rivers that feed into it. The modular nature of my camera set up means that it could be customised to fit the needs of the shoot. Later on I also utilised a Sony RX10-ii that was able to shoot slow motion at full 1080 HD resolution at 240fps, as well as having built in ND filters and internal stabilisation for the moments that a tripod would have been difficult to use. Increasingly due to the small size

factor, this bridge camera became my main ‘A camera’<sup>36</sup>, as it increased the speed that I could work by removing the need to constantly change lenses, which meant removing the matte box in my other setup. The camera’s excellent autofocus meant that I could achieve and lock focus very quickly, which further increased the amount of locations I could shoot in each drift. I also utilised a GoPro Hero 5 camera on a car mountable gimbal that stabilised the shot and allowed a level horizon to be maintained, compensating for the bumpy nature of driving. Finally, I added a DJI Phantom 4 drone that had a stabilised 4K camera and would allow aerial filming to act as cutaways and introductory geographic survey shots for each section. However, after filming experiments with the drone, gimbals and slow-motion footage from the car window as it drove down the Gateway’s arterial roads, it became plain that this range of camera movements shifted the position of the lens from the embedded human viewpoint I was looking to use. These resulting smooth slowly floating shots lifted the viewer outside of the act of drifting and broke the flow stage of the process.



Figure 9-14 Phantom Drone Footage of Canvey Wick, 2015

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<sup>36</sup> An ‘A Camera’ is the primary motion picture camera used on a production.

## The Frame

Now that I had decided to firmly work in moving image, I also decided to reconsider the aspect ratio I was shooting in, switching from the standard 16:9 video frame of *Estuary England* to a wider 2.40:1 frame. Not only was this more filmic, which I hoped would elevate the production value of the new films, but also the wider frame allowed for a more expansive landscape, especially in the wide master shots that traditionally introduce a scene by placing it within a location. This switch was also informed by several photographic sources that were produced in a panoramic frame.



Figure 9-15 the 16:9 frame compared to the 2.40:1 frame



As a photographer I tended to work in a 5:4 ratio, either with a large format camera or with a 6x7cm medium format camera, however I am increasingly driven to work with a wider image. In photography, the main panoramic formats are 6x12cm or 6x17cm, along with the rarely used 6x24cm. Many of my influences are second unit shots from motion pictures. Second unit shots invariably don't contain any principle actors, whose time is expensive and therefore not to be wasted, they are usually 'pick-ups'. After the main unit has finished on a set or location, there may be shots that require some or all of this setting as background, but don't require the principal actors. These shots might include things such as close-ups, inserts, cutaways, and establishing shots. To me these have always been the most interesting images and are an eloquent way to progress a story without the need for exposition. These are also the style of image that you will regularly see appearing in photographic narrative works.

My biggest panoramic influence in photography came from the work of Josef Koudelka, in particular his *Black Triangle*, and *Limestone* books. Not only was I mesmerised by the beautiful black and white images but the striking wide format of his 6x17 camera.



Figure 9-16 Josef Koudelka, *The Black Triangle: The Foothills of the Ore Mountains*.

1990

When working on several commissions in France, including playing a prominent role in the DATAR project (as previously discussed in Chapter One), a multiple photographer survey of the French landscape during the 1980s, the Czech Magnum member, Josef

Koudelka, began to make photographs with a panoramic camera, a tool that was particularly associated with his distinguished compatriot, Josef Sudek. Koudelka took the lessons he learned in France with him when he returned to Czechoslovakia, and began to photograph the area known as The Black Triangle. Under the Communist government, where the extraction of coal and the production of electricity from coal fired power stations was an absolute state priority, this area became one of the most polluted in Europe.

In the foothills of the Ore Mountains, 75 million tonnes of coal from open cast mines were extracted annually... Koudelka's panoramas show a devastated countryside, a war zone of blasted trees and vegetation, a landscape as atrophied and as wrecked as anything Paul Nash painted of the Somme... One might argue that Koudelka is making beautiful images out of misery, and there is no denying that these are rich, dark-toned and sumptuous photographs. Koudelka is an unashamedly romantic artist, and has admitted that the region has a horrible beauty. (Badger, Parr, 2006)



Figure 9-17 Josef Koudelka, *The Wall*. 2013

Most recently Koudelka has produced *Wall* (2013). These images were taken along the security fence of the contested Israel/Palestine border. They comprise panoramic landscape photographs he made from 2008 to 2012 in East Jerusalem, Hebron, Ramallah,

Bethlehem, and in various Israeli settlements along the route of the barrier separating Israel and Palestine. Whereas Israel calls it the “security fence,” (Jewish Virtual Library, website, no date) Palestinians call it the “apartheid wall,” (Hawwash,online article, 2016) and groups like Human Rights Watch use the term “separation barrier,” (Human Rights Watch, online article, 2004). The wall in Koudelka’s project is metaphorical in nature, focused on it as a human fissure in the natural landscape. *Wall* conveys the fraught relationships between humankind and nature and between closely related cultures. The images are not flinching in their depiction of the wall, and act as a brutal reminder of the often forgotten realities of the ongoing conflict. Within all of Koudelka’s panoramic images, he uses the width of the frame to accentuate the manmade effects on the landscape. In particular in *Wall* he uses the width of the frame to highlight the structure and length of the wall, quite often it divides the frame into two distinct sectors.

In the end I chose the 2.40:1 ratio as a dramatic means to make a statement about the Gateway landscape. A large percentage of the footage was shot either on marshland or on reclaimed floodplains. The dramatic width of the frame allowed me to accentuate the bleakness and isolation of the location. The vastness of the vista could be further extended using a wide-angle lens, creating an additional horizontal perspective. Through framing it was possible utilise the negative space to accentuate the loneliness and physical alienation through the emptiness of the rest of the frame. Close-up details of objects could be placed into a context within the landscape, showing the physical connection between object and scene. The fact that the films did not contain any footage of people or talking head interviews also meant that there were none of the issues from a frame this wide when it came to isolating figures in the frame.



## **9.4 Ghosts & Empties: The Gateways Night Time Economy**

As I have already mentioned this period of production started with the idea for a feature length film or series of interconnected short films, which were concerned with various themes surrounding the Gateway. All the footage was shot during daylight hours, but the long nature of filming days, often 14-16hrs, meant that I would often be finishing at sunset in the summer and driving back after dark. Driving through the Gateway at those times allowed me to experience another phase of its cycle and usage. I became increasingly interested in the area's night-time economy, and the shift between day and night usage models. The addition of the Sony A7S camera had meant that I was now able to film in incredibly low light situations using only available light. During a week at the end of March 2016, during the full moon cycle to increase the available light, I undertook a week of night shoots and drifts. The Gateway was suddenly transformed into an entirely different space.

The scale of expansion of the 'night-time economy' (Hobbs et al, 2003) in 'British major cities, secondary towns and our sub-centres has been considerable' (Roberts, 2006). Like most spaces, edgelands and urban wildscapes can be divided into two distinct but simplistic spheres of usage, night and day (Sandhu, 2007, Yates, 2012, Beaumont, 2015). "In London's incarnation as a fluid and timeless global city... night is no longer the apex, but an extension of day' (Rippon, 2008: 1) The reality of contemporary edgelands is that they are far more closely linked to the urban night-time economy than a rural one, and as such have a very diverse night-time use, that can be categorised as both positive and negative, depending on your perspective. Within Sukhdev Sandu's ethnography of London's after dusk *Night Haunts: A Journey through the London Night* (2007), we get a sense of the author drifting through the nocturnal built environment 'flâneur-style (sic)' (Rippon, 2008: 1). While Sandhu has been dismissive of the term psychogeography -

describing his work as a distancing from ‘the self-obsessed maunderings of psychogeographic writing’ (Sandhu, 2007: 16) - it is nevertheless difficult to resist categorising the text as somewhere within psychogeographic tradition. Sandhu models his literary exploration on *The Nights of London* (Morton, 1926), and frames his gaze on perceptions of London’s, past, present, and future. The book’s characters seem to be from another time, which in a way they are, night time workers, often unseen and unconsidered. Male cleaners offer commentary on the teeming throng of young people that inhabit the city after hours, ‘having too much leisure, lucre, and libidinousness’ (Sandhu, 2007: 33). While mini-cab drivers lament change, with the shift to a globalised ‘always on’ London. A London where independent pubs and shops are replaced by Ikea-like buildings (ibid: 72). Sandhu’s locus for this night time exploration is filmic, concerned with what has happened to London’s night, ‘worried it has been ‘decommissioned’ by New Labour, its ‘fissile, threatening energies’ lost in a ‘live-forever, things-can-only-get-better fantasia’ of property moguls and Brit flick directors’ (Quinn, online article, 2007). Sandhu’s work is an exploration into London’s edges, the spaces between the flows of capital. His interviewees are the marginal figures that work behind the scenes to make sure the city keeps moving. To analogise it in terms of a theatre production, they are the figures working in the dark wings to facilitate the production, largely unseen, as the bright lights of the stage hold our attention.

Artists explore the threshold between the familiar and the unknown, the comfortable and the dangerous and show twilight to be a poignant hour when sensibilities change and potential-laden atmospheres emerge. Twilight is used to present or facilitate the subversion of normality, the darker side of fantasies and the fairy-tale gone awry. (Best and Barnes, 2006: 1)

Night envelops and obliterates our ability to see; instead we rely on our other senses, ‘marking a sheer sensory distinction between illuminated and unilluminated’ (Edensor, 2017: vii). At night the edgelands come alive, the drab grey exteriors of their warehouses

become bathed in light of all colours, sodium, fluorescent and LED, coating the periphery in a shifting hue of yellows, reds, ochres, greens and blues. Their arterial roads are given over to tankers and 'artics', ferrying goods and fuel from giant out-of-town distribution centres, pushing on with their early morning deliveries. Boy racers in souped up hatchbacks tear apart the still air, bass carrying for miles, engines screaming for respite, pushed to their breaking point, wheels screeching for purchase on the damp asphalt. Nightclub patrons are ejected on to the street, bleary eyed and wrestling with gravity, Cigarettes are lit, drinks regurgitated on to the pavement, vivid colours splash. Words are exchanged in hostility, blood is spilt, and sirens pierce the void.

But behind this, lurking in the shadows, something darker happens, illicit things. In the quiet car park of a country park, cars pull up and come to rest, engines switched off. A couple steps out, a man and a woman, she is dressed proactively, both disappear into the woods. More people exit their cars and follow, some are there to watch, others actively participate in the scene that unfolds in the undergrowth, and more bodily fluids are spilt.

New Road, A2. Late one night in town, I was walking home from being out. I saw a man, young, quite handsome, in a family estate car, dropping off a woman... at the side of the road. She was ridiculously thin, wearing a tiny vest top and a short denim skirt, her shoulder blades jutting out from her back. She tottered away looking pleased with herself.

He was facing me as he paused to light a cigarette, his face briefly illuminated. I felt disgusted looking at him, like he should know better. As I continued to walk towards him, I couldn't hide the look of disgust on my face. I stared at him, wanting him to know I knew, as he pulled away, which he did quickly.

As the car bumped down from the curb and revved away, something catches my eye, swinging from the back window. It's one of those diamond shaped window stickers, attached by a sucker to the glass. 'Baby on Board'. (Galer, 2008: n.p)

## **After Midnight: Watches Of The Clock**

As I have already argued, binary terms like urban and rural, day and night, oversimplifies the situation. Night has distinct phases just like daytime. In 1872 the Reverend T. DeWitt Talmage composed an essay entitled ‘After Midnight’ (Talmage, 1872), in which he put forward the notion that night-time in the city passes through four distinct ‘watches’. To anyone that has lead a nocturnal life, it seems obvious that night was not one entity that lasted from dusk until dawn. Talmage proposed night moves in three-hour periods starting at 6pm, the standard end of the working day for many. This merged into the second watch, when the city dedicated itself to leisure amusements, whether wholesome or otherwise. Those who pursued these late into the night would find themselves ‘after midnight’, a time when most, still awake were enjoying the city’s seedier offerings or using the cover of darkness to break the law. Finally, at around 3am as revelries died down, working homes began stirring ready for the day ahead.

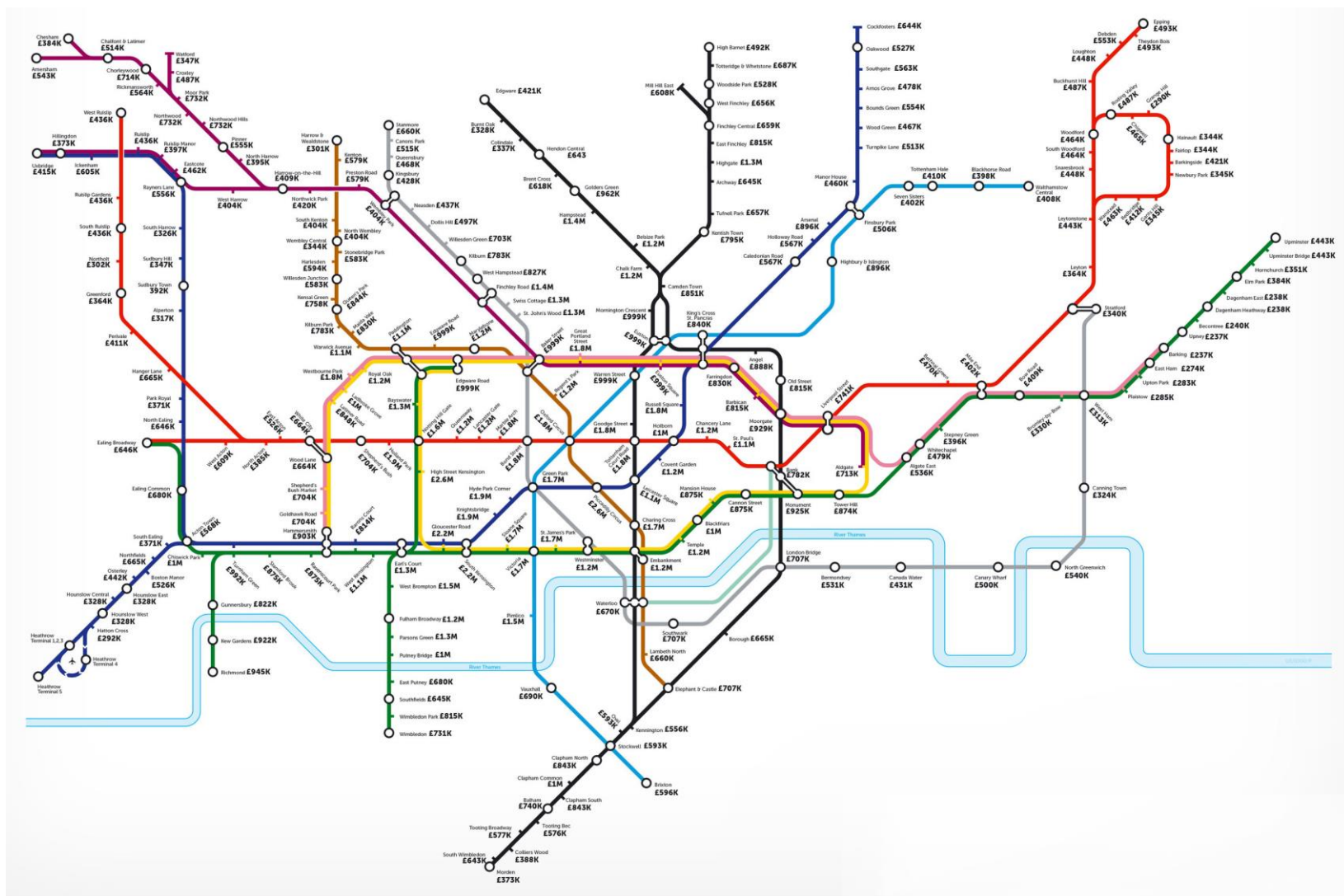
Each watch represents a new spatial function for the city’s spaces and each invoked a different set of connotations for the urban inhabitant with a corresponding level of morality and by extension class. Talmage’s watches still feel relevant today, and fit nicely into Shoard’s edgeland model, as they are spaces that reflect all four watches in a single microcosm, with the edgeland usage model shifting through these watches. Peter Baldwin shows that instead of making day of night, the addition of gas and electric lighting into our urban spaces created a ‘complicated new space with its own schedule, its own rules of access, and its own codes of behaviour’ (Baldwin, 2011: 13). This compares with the shift from town centre leisure pursuits, to out of town edgeland complexes, which in themselves follow the watches of the clock, and become complicated new spaces in their own right.

By depicting the ‘after midnight’ edgeland, I hope to explore their position as sites of ‘otherness’, activities that separate them from the heteronormal, or at the very least the 19<sup>th</sup> century views of gender and class that still permeate our night time economies.

The time of darkness remained a (young) man's world. In spite of modern technologies... pre-industrial rituals of the 'midnight hours' subordinated all unescorted women, subjecting them to insult and humiliation, if not sexual assault, in the more hidden places of the city (Platt, 2013: 107).

Work into prostitution by the Chicago School observed that it tended to occur in marginal or 'twilight' areas of the city, that they would term 'delinquency areas' (Thrasher and Short, 1963). Ernest Burgess's zonal model (1925) places this within the inner city 'zone of transition'. This zone would have traditionally been the American downtown and skid row area, with the affluent moving to the new sub-urban peripheries. Within London during the later 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century this model has been turned on its head (Taylor, online article, 2015), with the city centre now being the domain of the super-rich and the outskirts, particular the east end being home to the less affluent, and upwardly mobile migrants who have all built roots in the east during successive migration periods.

This shift in urban financial models was recently highlighted on a map (eMoov, online article, 2016) of the average house prices for London, based on tube station locations. The most impoverished areas of the city are the A13 corridor and around Heathrow, both classic edgelands in the Shoard sense.



## Production

The filming for *Ghosts and Empties* took place over 5 consecutive nights, running from Wednesday to Saturday to allow me to experience all aspects of the Thames Gateway night-time economy, from the pubs and clubs at the weekend, to the constant moving of produce to and from distribution centres, supported by an infrastructure of lay-bys, truck stops and petrol stations. The use of the low light capabilities of the A7S meant that I was able to film entirely with available light. The camera was so impressive that I would regularly point it at the landscape and be shocked when the field monitor showed buildings and livestock that I had no idea were in front of me. This use of only available light resulted in a colour palette informed by the mixture of light sources in the landscape, combining a mix of LED streetlights and more traditional sodium sources bathed everything in warm tones. The cloud cover and light pollution turned the sky a sickening ochre, echoing the look of the location captured by my eyes that a less sophisticated camera would normally underexpose to black.



Figure 9-18 Filming *Ghosts & Empties*, 2016

## Post Production: A Reflexive Process

While the production phase is vital for the creation of a film, it is in the post production, the edit and sound design phases that the film is formed, especially on films within the documentary

phase where the production phase has happened largely without a script, relying on a general story outline and framework and then adapting in relation to the events that unfurl in front of the camera. The process of editing is a reflective process that goes through a series of distinct phases of logging, checking the quality of the materials assembled, making notes, organising and analysing. Secondly is assembling, this is the stage where the story starts to develop, going from a rough assemblage cut which normally incorporates the useable footage, giving a range of options which are then whittled down towards an overall story arc. Finally is the period of finer editing and refining, a period of reflection where hard choices are made and footage ends up on the ‘cutting room floor’.

Philip Vannini (2017) draws the analogy between these three phases and the act of writing, while Garrett and Hawkins describe the process as a ‘creative-analytic process, combining the aesthetic and informational in a suite of digital-material processes that are as much about research and analysis as they are orientated towards the production of outputs’ (2014: 146). I would add to this that, within my own post production process on these films, the act of crafting the film in the edit is closer to the act of the walk and the drift as described by Schultz and Rascoroli. As the films are produced from fragments of each separate day’s drifting and filming, which may be further removed from their initial chronology as they are cut and reassembled on the NLE (non-linear editing) timeline, the editing phase becomes an extension of the drift and walking phase. I continue to discover, drift in and out of flow states and finally reflect on the process.

The physicality of the drift is further extended using my paper edit as a means of producing a first assemblage. While some people use the paper edit to transcribe any interviews undertaken, drawing quotes, themes and sub themes to create a working script (Vannini, 2017) around which they then assemble the traditional B Roll comprising cutaways and establishing shots. These films contain no formal or informal interview material; the landscape images form my A-Roll and my narrative themes and sub-themes. Instead I produce small printed photographs from film captures, and assemble them the same way a storyboard would be used to previsualise a film during pre-production, or a book maquette would be produced.



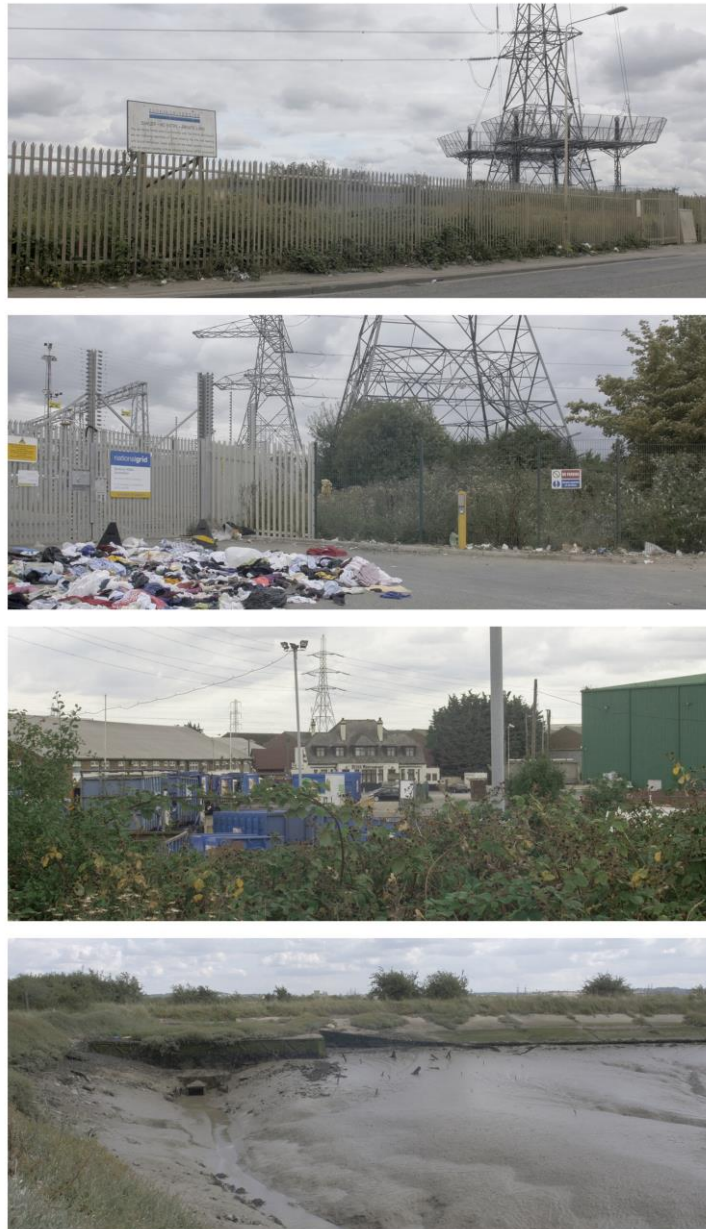


Figure 9-19 Story boarding the sequencing for *Zone of Change*

As the films get more complicated the shot number increases from 60 in *Estuary England* to 241 in *Ghosts & Empties*, before hitting over 1000 in *Zones of Change*. The space needed to lay out these paper edits gets greater, and the process becomes another act of drifting and exploration with the physical act of moving along the paper film and rearranging the film captures becoming a performance between myself, my supervisory team and my wife as my producer and most critical sounding board. It is at this stage that the overall nature of the film becomes apparent as we discussed themes and experiences that arose during the drift, and as such becomes the first

performance of the drift, that gets repeated and refined over a period of time before a single scene is cut in the NLE.

The actual edit was produced in Adobe Premiere Pro CC, a powerful NLE system that when combined with a high-speed Apple Macbook Pro and fast solid state hard drives could handle the intensive 4K footage in real-time, allowing me to scrub through footage at ½ resolution, returning to full when I needed to check fine details. By using 4K footage on a 1080 HD timeline I was able to recompose shots in the edit, even allowing for ‘mediums and close ups’ (shots) to be pulled from wider footage. This allowed a greater level of crafting the film through the edit, instead of it being at its most basic an act of assembling pre-composed footage in a linear fashion, I was therefore able to really consider the form the film took and alter raw footage, which in a way created a second shoot phase, informed by the reflection on the first. The film’s first cut was 45 minutes long which was finally refined to 30 minutes, a length that was the cutting off point for the majority of short film competitions.

The duration of each shot in *Estuary England* was a fixed 10 seconds, with the exception of the footage of the boat passing down the Thames, which needed to fit the duration of the section of Conrad’s passage of text. While in part this shot length was chosen for partly arbitrary reasons (mainly to do with overall film length and number of shots), it should also be seen as a legacy from transitioning from still image, book orientated works. Through having every shot being displayed for the same amount of time, I was looking to remove any sense of hierarchy within my shot choices; everything was presented in the same way. It also felt like a comfortable viewing duration, which allowed the audience time to take in and absorb the shots details, while avoiding the comfortableness of overlong shots. For *Ghost & Empties* the shot length was dictated by the flow of the film, with some shots held while others flowed by. These shorter shots were designed to have a cumulative effect and form discrete passages that would then sit with the longer shots to mimic the discovery and flow of the initial drifts. The colour correction of the footage was limited and comprised setting the contrast. While many might have gone for a more stylised colour grade, I was happy with the often-low contrast nature of the raw footage, which mimicked the bloom and

flare of the light through the damp dew covered foliage, marsh mists and the heavy light pollution that I experienced shooting in the cold March nights.

## Sound Design

The final phase of the postproduction process is sound design, which normally consists of dialogue, Foley, effects, atmosphere, and music. These would be mixed down to a music and effects track, before a final voice over track was added. Then all the audio elements are mixed down to a final mix. Neither *Ghosts & Empties*, or *Zones of Change* has a dialogue or Foley track, instead it comprises of a wild sound track, music and finally voice over. While sound design is not the primary area of my research, it plays the vital role in the production of the films, with the old adage that while we can forgive poor visuals, bad sound ruins a film. George Lucas once said that 'I feel sound is half the experience' (Lucas quoted in Blake, online article, 2004), a statement that was later adapted to 'sound is half the picture'. R. Murray Schafer points out that, unlike our eyes, our ears are always open, and regardless of the quality of our hearing we can still respond to the physical vibrations caused by sound (Schafer, 1994: 11). While the filmmaker Alberto Cavalcanti said 'pictures are clear and specific, noises are vague... that is why noise is so useful. It speaks directly to the emotions' (Cavalcanti, 1984: 109).

Films consist of diegetic and non-diegetic sound. Sound that exists within the frame or just outside the frame (diegetic) and sound that isn't natural to the shot, such as voice over (non-diegetic). *Estuary England* only contained a music track and voiceover so was entirely comprised of non-diegetic sound. However, the style of the music suggested it could be diegetic in nature, and as such helped to create a sense of the location. Before I undertook the sound design for *Ghost and Empties*, I returned to the opening minute of *Estuary England* and remixed it to contain an atmosphere track and several discrete sound effects. In doing so, it opened up the landscape and helped to guide the audience to certain details contained within the footage. Apart from a single shot that ends the dogging sequence that was used for effect, none of the wild track that accompanied the raw footage was used. This was mainly due to the very poor nature of the on-

camera microphone. Instead, this track acted as an *aide mémoire* that assisted in recalling specific details of the location that fell outside the visual frame or register, and was used to help design the atmosphere track that was recorded separately to make life easier as a single shooter.



Figure 9-20 Field Recording ambience with a stereo pair of omni-directional microphones, mounted in a windshield, 2017

The sound recordist Chris Watson (2015) breaks down the wild sound track as comprising of a number of features. The first is atmosphere, which has a small dynamic range, (the difference between the loudest and quietest elements). This atmosphere track is almost always non-synchronised sound (recorded separately to the visuals). On top of this are layered habitat recordings, which are the individual sounds of a habitat that are used to add depth to the atmosphere, ‘the sounds of the place itself’ (Watson 2015, personal communication, 12 December), and he suggests resisting the temptation to include elements such as vocalised narration and instead letting the sound speak for the specifics of the location itself. For me this would include the sound captured under the Queen Elizabeth II crossing, helping to highlight the unique acoustic ecology and fingerprint of the location, from the boom and clatter of the vehicles hitting the expansion joints above me on the bridge to the unusual reverb of the space itself. The final element would be individual featured sounds, such as a hydrophone recording of the boats travelling on the Thames. The balance for me was finding a compromise between the natural

sounds of the location and the creative use of non-traditional microphone techniques that were used to form a new image of the Gateway. Watson (Watson 2015, personal communication, 12 December) suggests that these three types of sound recording can be considered as being similar to the results of filming with different lenses. Atmosphere tracks equate to using a wide-angle lens, and give an overview of a location and habitat, telephotos can capture details from a distance, and macro lenses allow you to capture the minute details close up. This layering of sounds can be considered a form of mapping a location to form a sense of place, through the exploration of macro/micro elements of the area's sound ecology, and signature. As previously mentioned this mapping is a key feature of landscape ethnography, and through exploring a sense of place through sonic and visual methodologies we form a 'polysensual' (Garrett, 2010, 13) mapping that speaks to the more-than-representation nature of landscape ethnography, and places the landscape in what Lorimer describes as a 'self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual world' (Lorimer, 2005: 83, cited in Garrett, 2010: 13).

As I have mentioned, while sound design is not my field of expertise, I was informed by the work of several practitioners, and sound pieces, that guided me and opened ideas and possibilities. These people were primarily working within the field of field recording, but at times could also be placed within the wider field of sound arts. My understanding and appreciation of sound art has grown throughout this period of practice and reflection, which has been fed back into my work. All the sound artists have produced work that is directly in response to the edgeland environments, with many of them also producing work in or about the Thames Gateway. All the works fit within what R. Murray Schafer referred to as 'the soundscape' (1977), to describe the interaction of sounds in an acoustic environment, forming the most effective way to convey a sense of place through the use of sound (Biagioli, 2013: 2). As I have previously suggested, I consider the act of walking to be an exercise in listening and translation, and by extension, landscape ethnography is positioned between the observations of discrete, and connected elements that form the character or sense, of place, and the observation of ephemeral elements of story and narrative as suggested by Massey, that are collected through wider research and

(auto)ethnographic methods. Schafer's idea of the soundscape fits with ideas of landscape ethnography. Schafer positions soundscape studies between 'science, society and the arts' (Schafer, 1977: 4), a position that is also inhabited by the wider field of landscape ethnography, which could be considered to be a meeting point for landscape orientated quantitative, and qualitative research methodologies and data. Schafer opens his introduction to *The Soundscape: Our sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* (1977) with a section of the Walt Whitman poem, *Song Of Myself* (1855):

Now I will do nothing but listen...

I hear all sounds running together, combined,

fused or following,

Sounds of the city and sounds out of the city, sounds

of day and night...(Whitman, 1855, 1881, quoted in Schafer, 1977: 3)

Whitman's poem is a combination of biography, sermon, and poetic meditation, that combines metaphor, symbols and vignettes to discuss notions of the self, and the American landscape, which is highlighted in the poem's original title *Poem of Walt Whitman, an American* (Whitman, 1856). The Web of American Transcendentalism (Woodlief, website, 1999) run by the Virginia Commonwealth University, consider Whitman's poem to be a work of transcendentalism<sup>37</sup>. Just as Thoreau, in his work *Walden or Life in the Woods* (1854) (which would later become the locus for Gossage's *The Pond*) regains a 'feeling of spiritual self-awareness as he feels nature's sensorium all around him' (Balserait, 2014: 3). Schafer and Whitman are asking us to listen to sound of the world around us, to gain an understanding of our connection to the world. While

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<sup>37</sup> Transcendentalism is an American literary, political, and philosophical movement from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it centred around writers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau. They were critics of their societies' unthinking conformity, and urged people to find an original relation to the universe, which both Walden and Thoreau believed could be achieved through solitude in nature.

landscape ethnography should not be considered as being within the transcendental tradition, it is urging you to explore our connection to landscape's sensorium in order to understand a chosen landscape's position in the wider world.

The cross disciplinary work of Rob St James' *Surface Tension* (2015), at its most basic, is an attempt to document and represent the Lower Lea Valley, but, as with such a complex place, it is so much more than that. The River Lea is one of Britain's most polluted and man-altered stretches of river. At its confluence when it finally enters the Thames it has been cut and culverted backwards and forwards across the East End of London. These improvements attempted to make it workable and economically useful.

London is a city of hidden waterways and secret histories connected to them, The Fleet, The Effra, The Tyburn, The Walbrook, and Beverly Brook, all of them either feeding into the Thames or the Lea. In Ben Aronovitch's *Rivers of London* books (2011-15) they become personification of place, tapping into the psychogeographic occult of water nymphs and pagan gods. London waterways have become strong representations of their history, narrative devices on which writers can hang their psychogeographic hat, as in the work of Peter Ackroyd's *Thames* (2007) or Gareth E Rees' *Marshland: Dreams and Nightmares on the Edge of London* (2013). Due to the Lower Lea being a favoured haunt of psychogeographers and aural historians, Rob St James has decided to find another way to produce sound art about the location. In the opening text to the accompanying book, St John states that 'surfaces can be both revealing and concealing... layers of exchange that can form filters and catch imprints, traces and residues of what exists underneath and outside'. Surface tension catches these residues and the tensions inherent in the surface. As such this work can be considered psychogeographic in nature, and St John is attempting to record these assemblages, layers of history caught in the water, just as I attempt to encapsulate the palimpsest inherent in the land.

Utilising a range of recording techniques the resultant music evokes the 'spirit of the place,' (Amit-Cohen, 2009: 147) on a warm spring morning, uplifting and hopeful of change. It is the

result of a year of field recording, photography, note taking, research, and above all walking and noticing. St John's microphones - binaural, hydrophone, and contact - record otherwise inaudible fragments of the area, 'seeking to catch enlivened traces of the various surfaces- both sonic and visual'.

At the heart of the entire practice was the polluted nature of the waterway. By taking samples of the river water and immersing his medium format films, pin hole images produced with Lesney toy matchboxes that were manufactured in the region in a former life, as well as immersing his ¼ inch audio tape, he allowed the river to influence the sound and visuals, creating streaks and welts, reminiscent of the oil slicks seen on the water's surface.

The audiotape when played and re-recorded would slowly break down and disintegrate in organic ways. St John also used the river's pollution level data to map shifts in the river, creating sonifications and chord progressions that were fed back into the resulting works. St James calls these techniques 'sonic geography', the final method of which was to sample the reverb of various recording locations along the river and translate this on to the soundscape. He observed that 'it made sense to create new reverbs in the spaces where water had traditionally been mixed up and given new life: water having a hand in everything in the project, however subtly' (St John, 2015).

Co-founding member of electronic pioneers Cabaret Voltaire, Sheffield-born Chris Watson has nurtured an enduring fascination with sound and now produces aural ecologies for BBC radio and location recording for wildlife programmes.

In his 2013 exhibition, Watson produced and exhibited a sound survey (Rawes, website, 2017) of Sheffield, exploring its position starting on the moorland edges of the Peak District before following its waterways down the converging valleys, into the busy city centre. The work was recorded over an 18 month period throughout the city. Through immersion into the city's soundscape, that contained both recognisable elements of the city's acoustic ecology, combined with hidden and lesser-heard sounds and locations, Watson hoped that his audience would gain a



new perspective on Sheffield. The piece combined an immersive sound space with a series of projected images. The projections showed a slowly evolving series of black and white photographs, mainly depicting the industrial decline of the city, inhabited by ghosts of its glorious past. Photographs of the bell casting works, are accented by the harmonious peel of their creations, while in the background the foundry siren screams. This was made even more evocative having walked past a series of Sheffield bells on the way into the gallery.

I would suggest that the main themes of the piece, apart from the industry, are the rivers and the football. Pictures of Hillsborough and Bramall Lane are devoid of people, but the ghosts of matches live on in the chanting and singing of 'Hi Ho Sheffield Wednesday.'

The sounds have an ability to wash over you, and in fact I'm not sure if the photography took something away from the experience. When I lay back and shut my eyes I was transported to an image of the spaces.

The early beginnings of Sheffield's electronic scene in the 80s are clear, with the mixture of field recordings echoing Cabaret Voltaire's first recordings. The sounds of Sheffield have always been informed by its industrial legacy (*The Beat is the Law – Fanfare for the Common People*, film, 2011).

The idea of the sound map has been recently engaged with by the London Sound Survey's field recordings of edgelands spaces. The *London Sound Survey* (2009-present) is the work of Ian M. Rawes, a former sound archivist for the British Library. His online sound map documents the sounds of everyday life in London. It includes urban field recordings made by the author, archival materials, photographs, illustrations and a related blog. He aims to create an archive of the city's sounds that allow the listener to explore how the sound environment has changed over time, and in doing so creates what Schafer refers to as sound souvenirs, 'indelible memories for the aurally sensitive tourist, and always in need of protection' (Schafer, 1994 [1977]: 240). Rawes' microphone records the haunting sound of the siren at Coryton oil refinery, a place that has since

been mothballed, and a sound that was once ubiquitous is now a digital ghostly reminder of the area's previous existence. He has produced specific sound maps in *Waterways*, *Estuary*, and *Edgelands*. It is impossible to place specific dates on each map as they are themselves are a digitally evolving, and shifting location, mimicking the transitional nature of the sites.

In the case of the *Edgelands Sound Map*, sounds and photographs, mixed with current and historic mapping, shift and undulate under the gaze. While the *Estuary Map* presents a series of recordings covering the whole of the Thames estuary, the *Edgelands Sound Map* is broken down into four discrete areas of Beddington, Cray and Darent Valleys, Lea Valley, and Staines Moor. Each of the smaller individual sound maps, comprises a series of field recordings that create a portrait of the area. While there is an obvious similarity between the edgeland sites that suggests a degree of commonality between them, Rawes' microphones record the individual audio characteristics and present a unique portrait of each space. The sounds of the three maps have been further curated into a body of work entitled *The Tidal Thames* and presented, in this manner, the field recordings become a drift from Teddington Lock to the sea. The new form shifts from being an aural ecology to an aural documentary, similar perhaps to St. Johns' "sonic geography" referred to earlier, in that the field recordings are joined with location interviews and act to open up the field recordings in an accessible manner, placing them in context of the landscape and the wider themes affecting that landscape. Presented in this manner, the sound recordings encourage the audience to loiter within the location. The English scholar Jos Smith spoke of the importance of loitering during a talk at the *Edgeland* conference run by the University of Exeter in 2014:

This is loitering as preliminary exercise, preparatory research methodology. Edward Chell has described his epiphany about motorways after breaking down in a logjam of traffic on the M2, forced to loiter, but suddenly able to hear the insects and even the wind in the flowers. Again, this is loitering as a passage between experiences. As a hiatus it allows unlikely things to coalesce, modern natures and feral modernities, for example, and once they've coalesced new directions emerge. (Smith, 2014)

Speaking to sound artists has deepened my understanding of the role it plays within my practice. Conversations with Angus Carlyle and Jez Riley French have shown me different ways to consider the soundtrack rather than just wild field recording. The audio should be as much an embodied reading of the locations as is the visual, but at the same time can incorporate musical elements into the mix to develop an evocative picture of the sites.

Carlyle has produced work within the Thames Gateway, exploring the shifting Lower Lea Valley before it was redeveloped for the London 2012 Olympics. The work forms part of a series of sound art group shows put on between 2008 and 2012 entitled *Sound Proof*. These sound art pieces join the wide range of artistic practice devoted to the region during this time, including Iain Sinclair's book *Ghost Milk: Calling Time on the Grand Project* (2012) and Paul Kelly's film *What Have You Done Today Mervyn Day?* (2005) which was discussed in Chapter 7. Carlyle's sound works are increasingly concerned with exploring small pockets of land, and how sound can be both a specific part of the environment and a creative way of addressing how we perceive that environment. By blending traditional and non-traditional field recording techniques with archival materials, and photography, Carlyle produces rich site-specific ethnographic studies that I have come to typify as landscape ethnographies.

His work produced for *Sound Proof 1* (2008), entitled 51° 32 ' 6.954" N / 0° 00 ' 47.0808" W (Carlyle, 2008) is a 1 hour long sound composition recorded in a 100 metre square plot of land centring on Pudding Mill Lane DLR station and the old Greenway, which has since been reinvented as the Jubilee Greenway and been 'touted' as London's answer to New York's High Line (Broughton, 2016). According to Biagoli, within this sound work Carlyle sought to record the sense of place of this edgeland space, one that is now forever changed, and lost. The work is a 'sonic spatial mapping' (Biagoli, 2013: 2) and combines ambient sound, narration, heard conversations, and poetic pauses that reconfigure the place into a discrete poetic reflection, and in doing so celebrates and commemorates the liminal qualities of the space. The range of sonic strategies within the piece force the listener to engage with the precisely described sonic space.

Within the audio, Carlyle also describes in prose the found and discarded objects that he discovers on his drifts.

Since the turn of the year, I have made my way to a particular point of longitude and latitude. Strolling, standing still and sometimes sitting, in bright sunlight and grey drizzle, in mornings, afternoons and evenings, I've tried to listen. Magpies chuckling, bramble bushes caught in the breeze, seagulls calling in circles. Trains rattling across the points, jets banking in the sky above, traffic making its way up and down Stratford High Street. The people I have met - with dogs, on bikes, with cameras, on foot - have talked of one thing, The Olympics, and they've looked in one direction, to the north, to the vast mountains of chocolate-coloured earth, swarming with trucks, diggers and workers in Hi-Vis vests (Carlyle, 2008).

The work can be described as three-dimensional perspective on the landscape that 'arrests the senses and absorbs our attention' (ibid.: 3). In doing so the work fits into the wider remit of the group show, 'to retain a record of a moment in time highlighting the tangible cultural landscape and the intangible dimension of memory while the site was still in a state of becoming' (ibid.: 1). All of the art works highlighted sound's ability to work as experience, conveying active cultural memories of the people and places affected by the event, building a sense of time passing through the build-up of a memory track, and unfolding as layered historical records. (ibid.).

Within the designing of the film's ambient soundtrack I was keen to utilise elements of acoustic ecology. By the very nature of the Gateway and edgelands, it was important to find an ecological balance within the soundtrack to form a harmonic relationship between the manmade and the natural. By recording the landscape, instead of relying on commercially available atmosphere tracks, I sought to document and preserve the acoustic soundscape, just as the camera had sought to document and preserve the landscape. As mentioned, the sound and images were recorded separately and often in different sections of the Gateway. In recording and assembling

the soundtrack I sought to utilise Schafer's idea of keynote sounds. These are sounds that permeate the acoustic environment, and mark and define its tonal character. He described it as:

Even though keynote sounds may not always be heard consciously, the fact that they are ubiquitously there suggests the possibility of a deep and pervasive influence on our behaviour and moods. The keynote sounds of a given place are important because they help to outline the character of men living among them. (Schafer, 1994:9).

He further suggests that these sounds are the ones that are 'heard by a particular society continuously or frequently enough to form a background against which other sounds are perceived (1994: 273). In the case of the Thames Gateway these keynote sounds were the constant rumble of traffic, the sound of birdsong, which due to light pollution continued throughout the night, and the sound of the rivers. These became the backbone to the ambient soundtrack, around which all other sounds ebbed and flowed. Within the audio mix, these keynotes would rise and fall, shifting dominance, but always there. Just as certain visual motifs such as the bridges and the trains would keep returning, so too would certain sounds.

### **Voice Over**

The other major element of the film's soundtrack was the voice over. Both *Ghost & Empties*, and *Zones of Change* featured a departure from the narration of *Estuary England*. As the research process progressed I became more confident with the autoethnographic writing I was producing within my field notes as part of the reflective process. Instead of relying on a prewritten text that was then adapted to fit the needs of the film, I felt it was important to carry the embodied nature of the research and production process through to the final films. Using both my writing and my voice I wanted to continue the sense of perceiving and framing the landscape through my personal lens. The visual elements of the films work on a vertical narrative axis, this being the filmic elements that bring emotional depth, such as symbolism, motif and metaphorical significance, and personal meaning and resonance. I wanted to carry this axis over into the narration. The filmmaker and theorist Maya Deren believed that 'film art must marry the subjective and moral

intelligence of the artist to the relatively unexplored potential of the camera' (Deren, 2005: 10). At the heart of Deren's beliefs was the idea that narrative structure need not be the central focus of films (Deren, 2005:10).

All of my films blend elements of poetic cinema and the film essay. Poetic cinema is an elusive term that branches out into a vast territory that some have associated with art-house and avant-garde cinema, while others have suggested it can be categorised by its inherent vagueness (Bird, 2007: 14). For Deren the vertical axis was the poetic axis of mood and feeling. Within my works it is the film axis that allows the viewer a more in-depth perspective on the landscape. The filmmaker Richard Linklater described his 1991 debut film *Slacker* as being produced within the vertical axis. While the film is narrative-based, each scene forms a stand-alone element that does nothing to progress the horizontal axis. Instead, each scene only acts to deepen our understanding of the film's actual subject matter, Texas, The City of Austin. Linklater decided to describe the narrative of the film with a quote from Greil Marcus, 'the moment of true poetry that brings all the unsettled debts of history back into play... a near absolute loathing of one's time and place... the note held until disgust turns to glee' (Marcus, 1989, quoted in Linklater, 1992).

While this quote is referring to the punk music scene, when utilised by Linklater it embraces the Situationist *dérive*, inherent in the film. The drifting camera passes through Austin's 'Strip', its movement informed by the passing of a 5 dollar bill between characters. The film can be considered a Situationist experiment, and a deep rumination on both Austin and America, and as such becomes a shifting poetic metaphor. As an audience, we take the place of the camera; passing through the city and bumping into its residents, allowing glimpses into people's worlds, conversation taking strange tangents. To contextualise poetic cinema, it has been compared to Basho, the Edo period poet, and his summation of the haiku (Husseini, 2015), observing that:

Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine, or to the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo. And in doing so, you must leave your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the object and do not learn. Your poetry

issues of its own accord when you and the object have become one – when you have plunged deep enough into the object to see something like a hidden glimmering there. However well-phrased your poetry may be, if your feeling is not natural – if the object and yourself are separate – then your poetry is not true poetry but merely your subjective counterfeit. (Basho, reprinted in 1966: 33)

During screenings of *Estuary England* I was often informed that the film reminded people of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), and while I am in no doubt that this was mainly due to the similarities of the post-industrial landscape, and the slow drifting of the camera, I would agree that it shares Tarkovsky's poetic vision. Tarkovsky's works have been described as 'pure cinema' (Bird, 2007: 14), seemingly free of symbolism, but full of emotion and atmosphere. To Tarkovsky himself, cinema was an art form that existed to help us answer important philosophical questions (Bond, 2016). Tarkovsky himself suggested that there was never any intended symbolism in his work, only metaphors, because describing an "infinite world" in finite terms is an impossibility. Going further he said that 'A book read by a thousand different people is a thousand different books' (Tarkovsky, 1986: 177).

For my work this translates to the notion that I can only curate my own personal perspective on the Thames Gateway landscape, therefore I was keen to avoid the use of the voice-of-god narration that has become a mainstay of classical documentary film (Wolfe, 1997: 149-67). This disembodied voice represents a fundamentally unrepresentable human form, that connotes a position of absolute mastery and knowledge that exists outside the spatial and temporal boundaries of the world the film depicts. Unlike the classical documentary genre, I am not attempting to present an argument or convey a point of view. Instead I am trying to frame the landscape through images, sounds and thoughts that are emotionally connected to my relationship with place. Increasingly this third person narration is disappearing from the documentary genre (Taylor, 2015), largely replaced by the camera as observer instead of interpreter that was driven by the *cinema verité* movement.

The camera in *Ghost & Empties*, and *Zones of Change* straddles the line between these two ideas, however, there is a disconnect between the visual and the voice over. I am not trying to describe the events on screen, but instead build multiple perspectives on a single location. They are autoethnographic fragments, and stories collected within, and of the space depicted, recounting a recent history that cannot of been captured visually. This blending is informed by post-Situationist literatures and essays, in particular the writings of Iain Sinclair that may present multiple differing literary images of the same landscape. In presenting my reading of the landscape in this way I would argue that the films are able to bridge the space between poetic and essay. While the concept of pure cinema within documentary exists as a Godardian blending of image and sound, the essay film allows space for a literary discourse to enter the blend.

As I have previously alluded to, the fact that both my films and landscape ethnography are informed by (new) nature writing places them in the context of literature and the essay film. In Andre Bazin's review of Chris Marker's *Letter from Siberia* (1957), he described the film's primary material as verbal intelligence, rather than image. He called Marker's method horizontal montage, and suggested it was opposed to traditional montage that plays with the sense of duration through the relationship between shots. Instead, in this instance the image doesn't refer to the one that proceeds or the one that follows, but refers laterally to what has been said (Bazin, 1958). Geoff Andrew suggests that the essay film can 'move blithely between the realms of fiction and non-fiction, complicating the terms of both' (Andrew, online article, 2015). Andrew further defined the role of the essay film in the following terms:

What will distinguish the essay film - is not only its ability to make the image but also its ability to interrogate it, to dispel the illusion of its sovereignty and see it as part of a matrix of meaning that extends beyond the screen. (Andrew, online article, 2015).

In a large number of documentaries, the spoken narration serves as the driving force of the film, with the visual materials being utilised to illustrate what is being narrated. This extra-diegetic component is central within the majority of nonfiction cinema. While this narration in



documentary produces a sense of 'teller'; it often doesn't look like Kellogg and Scholes' idea of the 'storyteller' that exists within literary narrative ([1996] 2006). This differs from the role of the narrator in the essay film, where it appears to more directly link to the idea of character-driven narration. While in many senses, the prose essay appears to lack the notion of a story, it can nevertheless be considered to have a narrative progression within it. Timothy Corrigan states that 'the essay film is a practice that renegotiates assumptions about documentary, objectivity, narrative epistemology, and authorial expressivity within the determining context of the unstable heterogeneity of time and place (Corrigan, 2011: 6). James Catano suggests that the essay narrator exists within the text as a character. The making of the essay becomes the story of the narrative, within which the audiences watch and hear the narrator deliberating on the subject at hand. This idea, when adapted to my film works, extends the duration of the drift period outside of its natural spatial and temporal confines, and allows the story to shift in tone, location and temporalities. The German philosopher Theodor W. Adorno believed that within the essay, 'concepts do not build a continuum of operations, thought does not advance in a single direction, rather the aspects of the argument interweave as in a carpet. The fruitfulness of the thoughts depends on the density of this texture. Actually the thinker does not think, but rather transforms himself into the arena of intellectual experience, without simplifying it' (Adorno, [1958] 1984: 160-61, referenced in Catano, 2015). Catano stated that central to the essay's action is an 'associative framework filled with digressions, expansions, references and generally an intentional ("licensed rather than careless") lack of linear progression' (Catano, 2015).

Again, I would argue that this allows the narration to exist within the same discovery, flow, reflection framework as the initial drift, further highlighting the role of the film as an act of virtual drifting, mimicking the stages of research, production and post production. This implies transformation within the role of the essay from a static conveyance of thoughts, into the act of the narrator curating ideas and experiences that unfold as an experience, rather than being chased by the audience. As such the narrator is implied to be the active author of the production. While many essay films literally place the narrator/filmmaker within the frame, as a means of making

the narrator an element of the cinematic, with *Ghost & Empties* and *Zones of Change*, it is impossible to place the narrator/filmmaker in the frame, as the filmmaker is the framing device, the camera and microphone are merely extensions of the filmmaker's perspective.

The voice in the essay film is most often the voice of the lone author, however multiple other authors' voices inhabit the piece through paraphrase and citation. For example within *Ghost & Empties* I incorporate the voice of my wife through the adaption and use of her autoethnographic passage within her book *18 Rochester Street*. The decision to do so was the realisation that my experiences of the night-time economy differed greatly to hers, and due to my gender my relationship with the Gateway was only able to offer an engendered viewpoint. I also undertook and considered using a series of interviews with academics and artists working on the concept of edgelands. These were audio only and designed to offer an academic counter to the autoethnographic reflections. However, these interviews felt removed from my depiction of the landscape. As I became more confident with my own voice, I realised that I could offer this academic counter through the paraphrasing of other work, allowing me to frame other people's thinking in relation to the landscape I was filming and in a way, that remained accessible and in keeping with the other elements of the narrative. It was my aim to draw the audience into the film through the landscape aesthetic within the transit of the images, and then utilise elements of the narration to confound their viewpoint, creating a mix that I believe was both compelling and disturbing.

## **Music**

The final element of the soundtrack was the music, which was produced by two separate composers, Luke Sanger who has produced music for a range of television and computer games, and Neil Stringfellow who produces music under the moniker Audio Obscura. Stringfellow and I worked closely to design the film's music, and looked to work in elements of *musique concrète* into the soundtrack. This is a field of experimental music developed by French composer Pierre Schaeffer, utilising found sound that mixes sounds derived from instruments and the sounds

recorded from the environment. Within my initial correspondence I described the need for both the sound and music to be rooted to the film's environment and intrinsically linked. The desire was for all aspects of the sound to feel as though they had been captured on the wind, emanating from the landscape. We considered using found objects within the composing process, in the form of prepared piano interventions. Another idea was to re-record arrangements within the landscape, allowing the natural soundscape to bleed into the final music, affected by natural reflections and absorption, shaping the reverb of the piece. The development of the music was heavily influenced by Rob St John's work, but also by Jez Riley French, and Aino Tytti.

12 hours of field recordings were produced with a range of microphones, returning to many of the locations that I had filmed in. Over the course of the composing period, Stringfellow spent two weeks exploring the Gateway, attempting to find his own framing and perspective. We had already discussed the methodology and framework that I used to produce the moving images. I was keen for him to adapt this to find his own method of investigation and production. The resulting musical compositions are both produced from and informed by the landscape, resulting in arrangements that are both of the Gateway and about the Gateway.

All of the film's elements have been directly informed and produced through interaction with the landscape, resulting in an embodied drift and a highly personal framing of the Thames Gateway. Across the three films I have aimed to open up the landscape to a wider idea of landscape, showing it as both individual and unique, but also familiar and generic in relation to the wider edgeland landscape. The Thames Gateway is a complicated landscape, maybe due to its position and scale, arguably more complicated than other edgeland regions. I have aimed to produce a reading that, while informed by a romantic landscape tradition, attempts to avoid falling into the realms of melancholy and lament. This is not an elegy for a lost landscape myth, instead it aims to push beyond that point and find understanding and acceptance, but also the anger and discomfort that exists within the region.

If the essential feature of the edgelands is that they are untamed, and that they express our own age in being so, then to plan them is to some extent to trample on their essential character. If we conserve the land strewn with wild flowers around Llanelli and prop up the hulks of its once-active industrial works then are we not essentially destroying what makes such an area attractive to start with? If the interface is the only theatre in which the real desires of real people can be expressed, and if we wish to celebrate it and not inhibit it precisely because it provides that theatre, then trying to shape the built environment of the interface so that it becomes like an Italian city centre may appear to rob the interface of the freedom on which its character currently depends (Shoard, 2002: 15).

Shoard's characterisation of edgelands, along with their liminality, is that of a 'magic' space, and while there is a certain unreal framing of some of these wasted and 'empty' spaces, it would be foolish to imagine them as controllable or benign like a framed theatre space. The performances they throw up are not always ones that you can easily walk out of at the end.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter I have explored the shift in my practice, and the embracing of moving image techniques. The range of elements that are part of a film, including sound, narration, and music, have helped to produce an immersive representation of place. This has allowed the work to move from the visual into the polysensual, and embrace a non-representational method. The creation of these elements requires differing interactions with the landscape and forms a deeper reading of place, which in turn has been brought to bear on the further evolution of my landscape ethnography method. The three films show a level of experimentation and an evolution of the guiding ideas of an (auto)ethnographic landscape encounter. Further to this, with the final film I have decided to forego the narrative voice over, in an attempt to present a more immersive and open landscape experience. This allows the audience to partially form the landscape ethnography, through their own understanding, history, and connection to the edgeland environment. This has

partly been inspired by the immersive landscape films of James Benning, in particular, his *California Trilogy*, (1999, 2001, 2002), and *Ruhr* (2009).

# 10 Conclusion – Landscape Ethnography as a Reflexive Experience

As I have stated in the introduction to this thesis, my research questions how forms of multimodal (auto)ethnographic research can be adapted to investigate landscape and place, and how it can be deployed to shape geographic imaginings of that area. I have lived with the Thames Gateway for a prolonged period time, both physically in years spent there, and mentally, considering its representation. My desire to explore it came out of my urban exploration background and a belief that the narratives presented to us by official agencies only offered a limited representations of the landscape. Building on the work of people like Kenny Cupers (2007), and Bradley Garrett (2012) I have questioned our access, and desire to access, a landscape that is all around our built environment, but that is increasingly off limits, in part due to the complicated webs of ownership and that accompany our edgeland and interstitial landscape. However, my fieldwork within the Gateway region has shown that these sites are not the non-places that certain arguments would have us believe, but instead are accessed and utilised by a diverse range of people, for a wide range of reasons: be it to pick blackberries on the West Thurrock marshes, or to give graffiti artists a gallery space on the tidal wall, through to the collection of Polish HGV drivers having a barbecue next to the Thurrock motorway services, or the elderly group of gentlemen fishing at the end of the former Canvey Island oil refinery jetty (a task that involved trespassing over a high steel fence, using makeshift ladders tied to the structure with baling twine), or simply the ‘locals’ walking the dog on a landscape they have always considered to be their common land. These encounters, of which I experienced many more, reflect Tim Edensor’s writing on ‘adventurous

play' (2005:25). However, through my experience I would question this designation, and just how adventurous this play actually is, or are these simply examples of the public fighting back against the ordered world that the official Thames Gateway regeneration narrative has attempted to present. Garrett argued in the conclusion to his thesis (2012: 316) that his urbex groups' explorations of the built environment attempted to rework the binary of wilderness as 'noble', compared with urban as 'threatening' (Garrett after Cresswell, 1996), by showing that the 'urban environment could and should be explored' (Garrett, 2012: 316). A similar argument could be made for edgelands, based on contextualising Robert Adam's work and that of the new topographic movement's practice, as explored in Chapter Three, that defined the emerging interstitial landscape as a new wilderness. This idea was strengthened by Farley and Symmons Roberts' (2011) edgeland typology, *Edgelands: Journeys into England's True Wilderness*.

Within Chapter One I defined the concept of space, place, and landscape, as well as presenting an argument for how it is formed through bodily interaction. This was later explored further in Chapter Two in relation to the edgeland landscape. I would argue that edgelands retains a conceptual currency, but its application on to a complex landscape of actors and agency is problematic, not in the least because it has been argued that they form non-places (Auge, 1995), a viewpoint that I have attempted to counter through the placement of the edgeland landscape into the confines of the wider interstitial archipelago, which should be viewed as an assemblage of constantly moving processes. This idea was proposed to provide a useful development on the liminal nature of these places. By considering the edgelands in this way, it allows us to see them as connected sites, within a wider series of places, which weakens the claim that form non-places.

Within the landscape art tradition, there is a fascination and enduring preoccupation with ruins and ruin space. In Chapter Three I explored this in relation to landscape theory and representation. This fascination was found in Gilpin's ideas on the picturesque, and Burke's on the sublime. While it can be argued that these ruins can act as *memento mori*, the contemporary photographic trend of 'ruin porn' fails to question wider narratives that are in play in these spaces. In doing so, they return to notions of the picturesque, and present an aesthetic fetishisation of the landscape,

where we use them simply as sublime metaphors for power networks. Garrett argues that ‘the kind of knowledge and experiences urban explorers seek and find... [has] more to do with creating a new type of relationship with place, one not offered but taken... an effort to connect in a meaningful way to a world rendered increasingly mundane by commercial interests and an endless state of “heightened” security’ (Garrett, 2012: 316).

One area of edgeland analysis that has not previously been articulated is to re-read significant bodies of photographic practice within the frame of ‘edgelands’. Chapters Three, Five, and Seven presented a questioning of this photographic subject matter and suggest that photography has played an important role in the defining of a ‘sense of edgeland place’, that in many cases can be seen to predate the creation of the term by Marion Shoard (2002). This supports my argument that, while edgeland is a useful term for a specific form of space, it can be contextualised within a larger field of interstitial space that is exemplified by the concept of an edgeland archipelago, with both edgelands and the bodies of photographic work explored, forming a collection of islands as an assemblage of unique landscapes and places. T Paglen (2008) makes a similar argument that these cultural productions help form the space they are conceptualising, in this case the edgeland environment.

Within Chapters Four and Seven I recognised that there are problems with current methods of representing the complex assemblage that is landscape, and that while psychogeography offers a methodology to incorporate a wider range of references and ideas, it has its limits. However, from this I developed an expanded landscape ethnography that relies on art practice and walking as part of its methodology. This built on Ogden’s (2011) initial ideas of landscape ethnography, that, while embracing a diverse fieldwork methodology, still relies on a textual outcome, which I have argued is problematic when exploring the landscape from a non-representational perspective. Combined with the emerging fieldwork framework defined in Chapter Seven, that is the result of trial and error, is the importance of undertaking a deep temporal engagement with place.



In Chapter Six, by synthesising accounts of the Thames Gateway from a number of different sources and disciplinary perspectives, I have assembled a history of its development. This diverse history gives a sense of the dynamic process that has formed the area's interstitial landscape, and a psychogeographic understanding of the complex past, present, and future actors and agency that have formed, and continue to form and reform the spatial assemblage that is the region's interstitial archipelago. By utilising the edgeland lens we are able to connect the region to the wider network of local, regional, and global factors that define it. These are then explored through the camera's lens, as an act of temporal stabilisation that momentarily fixes the movement of processes within the assemblage, while still considering the idea of flux. As I have already suggested, I have a long personal connection to the Gateway because of the time I spent living and studying there, but also earlier memories of visits that have come to define my later responses to it. This set of connections is unique to me, and demonstrates a 'deep', long term, and personal engagement that is not always readily present in other bodies of work exploring the region, which fail to renegotiate the binary idea of 'in place/out of place' (Cresswell, 1996).

In addition to concentrating on a specific site (The Thames Gateway) I chose to adopt a particular photographic approach to that site. This approach involved undergoing a shift from the earlier more conventional photographic practices outlined in Chapter Seven, and, over the course of the PhD, took me on a journey into a new territory, in particular the embracing of a moving image practice. As defined in Chapters Eight and Nine, the key stage of this journey was the shift from a large format topographic approach that could be said to be influenced by deadpan photography (Cotton, 1996: 81), and the *Becher Schule*. After this I explored a more immersive approach to photography, attempting to place myself within the landscape, instead of looking on it. Finally I shifted to a more-than-visual (Jacobs, 2013) moving image production that allowed me to embrace the 'polysensual' (Garrett, 2010: 12) nature of the landscape. As a result, I would argue that this leads to a more immersive landscape experience that can be described as a form of landscape ethnography.

## 10.1 Contribution to Knowledge

I would argue that, during the course of this research, I have transformed the interstitial landscape of the Thames Gateway from an abstract spatial concept into a defined series of places with unique characteristics, that are formed through a constantly moving state of past, present and, future actors and agency. This has removed the proposition that they are non-places, and redefined the complex assemblage that defines them. By connecting these once disparate places through the idea of an archipelago, I have formed them into a landscape which challenges the perceived reading of the Thames Gateway, demonstrating that it is more than a series of regeneration and place making projects or exercises.

The multi-disciplinary nature of landscape ethnography, as I have presented it, opens the landscape and the underlying subject narrative to wider audiences, and asks them to consider wider ethnographic and (auto)ethnographic questions of the landscape. I would argue that, having expanded and defined a wider concept of landscape ethnography, the framework I have developed through extensive creative experimentation and fieldwork should be positioned as a starting point for further landscape ethnographies. Along this drift there were multiple possibilities I could have chosen to take, but I allowed my reading of the landscape to define my representation of it. Due to the (auto)ethnographic nature of the methodology, the landscape is framed through individual bodily interaction with its complex assemblage. Therefore the chosen fieldwork and practice framework must be defined by the author in relation to their landscape and the wider subject narrative. However, I have proposed some general features of the methodology that could provide a starting point, and model for other practitioners.

I have argued that landscape ethnography is about creating a non-representational reading of the landscape. This is because, as originally defined by Thrift, the non-representational project is concerned with describing 'practices, mundane everyday practices that shape the conduct of human beings towards others and themselves in particular sites' (1997: 142). Rather than obsess over representation and meaning, Thrift contends that non-representational work is concerned

with the performative 'presentations', 'showings' and 'manifestations' of everyday life (1997: 142). Further to this Latham (2003: 1903) suggests the role of non-representational work is, 'simply to present descriptions that are infused with a certain fidelity to what they describe'. Dewsbury (2003: 1923) calls this stance a kind of 'witnessing', a stance that is orientated towards being 'in tune to the vitality of the world as it unfolds'. This idea exemplifies the experience of being 'in' the landscape. However, within this the methodology is open to experimentation. What is important is to consider the hidden narratives in play within the landscape, and utilise a deep temporal engagement with place in order to form our reading and representation of it.

As landscape ethnography is an emerging practice, I see this thesis and the accompanying film work as the starting point for a landscape ethnography methodology. For future research, I propose to investigate the possibility of developing landscape ethnography as an interdisciplinary methodology through partnerships with researchers from some of the other disciplines that are drawn on and incorporated into landscape ethnography.

With regards to the creative practice, I would look to further develop my film making practice, as it is still a newly forming part of my practice. I will continue to explore the use of voiceover as a means of engaged representation, but I would also desire to embrace emerging technologies, such as VR film and spatial sound, to present an immersive landscape experience that provides a virtual mirror for the act of fieldwork production. This, combined with transmedia and interactive documentary practices (i-Doc), would allow the audience to produce their own landscape ethnographies through virtual embodied landscape exploration, which in turn would allow them to question the role of local/global in our understanding of landscape.

This thesis has profoundly changed my practice and the understanding of a landscape that I thought I knew well. I would urge you go out and start questioning the landscapes that you experience on a daily basis, and perhaps take for granted. Attempt to renegotiate narratives and boundaries, see what is waiting to be uncovered.





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