



Rede of Reeds: Land and Labour in Rural Norfolk

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Abstract – Rede of Reeds: Land and Labour in Rural Norfolk

The central aim of this thesis is to provide a detailed ethnographic account of the human ecology of the Broads – a protected wetland region in the East of England - focussing upon how working lives shape and are shaped by this reedy landscape. In conversations about the management of the Broads, the concept of “common sense” is a frequent trope; encompassing a wide range of associated meanings. But what are these meanings of “common sense” in English culture, and how do they influence the peoples of England, and landscapes in which they work? This thesis addresses these questions ethnographically; using academic and lay deployments of common sense as a route into the political economy of rural Norfolk.

Based on 12 months of fieldwork in the Broads National Park, this thesis draws together interviews and participant observation with land managers of various kinds – including conservationists, farmers, gamekeepers, volunteers, gardeners, and administrators. Chapter 1 dissects the differences between academic and popular understandings of “common sense” as a phrase, and produces an ethnographically-derived, working definition. Chapter 2 examines the attitudes of farmers, establishing “the common” as a root metaphor for social and practical rectitude, actualised through labouring in a shared landscape. Chapter 3 explores how the common is sensed, reflecting upon the diverse sensoria afforded by different degrees of enclosure on a single nature reserve. Chapter 4 explores how the concept of common sense intersects with a prevailing culture of possessive individualism, creating a fragmented society in the Park, wracked by controversies over management. Chapter 5 examines bureaucracy in Broadland – frequently cast as the very antithesis of common sense. In the conclusion, we return to the title, and ask – what do the reeds have to say about land, labour, and human nature?

Preface

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

This thesis does not exceed the prescribed word limit by the Degree Committee of the Division of Social Anthropology. Total word count: 79544

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DSM

In fulfilment of my vow

Contents

Introduction: Getting There	9
Figure 1 – A map of the Broads	12
Fieldsite: The Broads	13
Figure 2 – A map of the UK’s National Parks, including the Broads	15
Methodology: Work, Walk, and Talk	17
Existing Literature: Into <i>Crow Country</i>	18
Figure 3 – From the Yacht Deck	22
Argument: Common Sense, The Common, Sensibleness, Silos, and Bureaucracy	25
Chapter 1 - A very English pragmatism: Towards a social life of common sense	28
<i>Koinē aisthēsis</i> and other opinions: Key philosophical debates on common sense	29
“Sons of the Soil”: Etymologies of common sense	31
Common sense as a social scientific object	36
Common sense as a political object	41
Common sense as a vernacular object	47
Figure 4 – A Broad Taskscape	51
Figure 5 – Working Together	56
Conclusion: Common sense in vernacular use	57
Chapter 2: Kett’s Shadow - The Broads as common ground?	59
Figure 6 – Coppicing in progress	62
Learned voices: Common land in environmental histories of Broadland	66
Working Voices: “Bad Farming”, Tidyness and the Balance of Contemporary Rural Life in Norfolk	77
Figure 7 – A depiction of weeds being allowed to grow on a harvested wheat field	79
Concerned voices: Current trends in Britain’s rural economy	81
Analysis: Work, Common Land and the Process of Enclosure in Broadland	88
Figure 8 – The Common as a Root Metaphor	102
Conclusion: The Institution of Common Ground	103
Chapter 3 – Be sensible: How to acquire common sense	106
Overview: Strumpshaw Fen as a Place of Desire	106
Figure 9 – Reed cutting	107
Underview: Thicket Description of <i>Working Your Way Through</i> the Landscape	110
Figure 10 – Overgrowth	114
Counterinterview: <i>Quiet Enjoyment</i> and Visitor Experience	115
Figure 11 – A table showing the individual members of full-time staff (bold), part time staff, and groups of volunteers (italics) based at Strumpshaw Fen	116
Figure 12 – Photographers crowding around Swallowtails	121
Interview: Farmers, Children, and the Acquisition of Common Sense	122
Figure 13 - Encouraging and discouraging factors in affective environmental values	128
Television: “Broadland Consciousness” versus “Barrier Consciousness”	129
Chapter 4 – Against the Grain: Silos and the absence of common sense in Broadland	135
Hickling Broad: A lack of common ground	136
Figure 14 - Ostrom’s analysis of the salient factors pertaining to the management of a complex water catchment, including a number of tributaries and landholders	140
Figure 15 - Hickling Parish, showing the extent of enclosure of common land	143
Figure 16 – Continuing enclosure	145
Bird Farmers: Catfield Fen and Landscape-Scale Conservation	145
Figure 17 – Instances of Enclosure	158
Trials and Errors: The trouble with common sense	159
Figure 18 – Bourdieu’s schematic of the relationship between doxa and opinion	159

Conclusion: Chedgrave Common and the Apogee of Commoning	163
Chapter 5: Paperchains – Total bureaucratisation and bridging the metabolic rift	168
Enclosed by a Wall of Folders: Total Bureaucracy in Broadland	168
A Utopia of Paper: From Paperchains to Living Documents	176
Downstream of the Metabolic Rift: The Broads as a Landscape of Abstraction	186
Figure 19 – A Landscape of Abstraction.	190
Figure 20 –The Broadland Economic Circuits.....	192
Conclusion: Bureaucracy, abstraction and the absence of common sense	195
Conclusions – The Thinking Reed	198
Common sense and becoming.....	198
Figure 21 – Thinking Reeds.	200
Gillian Tett, Robert Kett, and the Division of Labour.....	201
Figure 22 – Oak trees killed by rising water levels in Cantley Marsh.....	203
Bibliography.....	206

Introduction: Getting There

Ever since I was little, I have experienced some confusion regarding the social norms of other English people. As a dyspraxic, I don't intuitively understand subtle cues given through body language. English society, which relies on this non-verbal communication, was for me a challenging context in which to grow up. I needed to consciously learn how to behave in any given situation, following instruction provided by my relatives.

If you want to talk to someone, Jonathan, you can't just walk over and speak at them. If they're already talking to someone else, don't just interrupt! You need to wait until they pause, and make eye-contact with you first.

Remember to bring a bottle of wine when visiting someone's house for dinner.

Ask people about themselves; don't just talk yourself.

While the other children picked up how to be English as they went along, I had to actively learn it as a system of rules. My learning difficulty ensured that, from an early age, I was subjecting my behaviour, and that of those around me to conscious appraisal. As such, I believe it is fair to say that my developmental experience has ensured that "home" has always been, to an extent, an ethnographic other. And so, though this research project is based upon a fixed period of fieldwork, conducted from August 2014 to September 2015 in the Broads National Park in the British counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, my observations and analysis bear the marks of my experience of growing up as a kind of naïve ethnographer in England.

*

Mindful of my own longstanding interest in the anthropology of the environment in Britain, I began by choosing the following research questions:

1. How is the landscape of Broadland managed? How do local people engage with the Broadland landscape? What are the impacts of working directly in landscape management on this kind of engagement?
2. Why do certain people¹ actively choose to spend their working lives in the Broads? Do the practical techniques and embodied aspect of being in certain kinds of places have a part to play in the kinds of work they choose to do?
3. What is the role of tradition and innovation in landscape management in Broadland? How do these qualities relate to local and institutional landscape management techniques?
4. When do notions of environmental change, sustainability, and resilience become significant for the people of the Broads? What sort of discussions and activities precipitate these instances?

The first clause of my chosen title - *Rede of Reeds* – summarises my approach. *Rede* is an archaic English term for counsel or a story; I wanted to tell the story of how the reedy environment of The Broads influenced English culture there, and how Broadland is cultured by its English residents in turn. The common focus of the questions I had chosen – on work, and on the landscape – arose from a very personal motivation: I longed to find a rural community where I might learn practical skills, that would help me to live sustainably, away from the vagaries of global capitalism. To this end, I contacted a carpenter who made yurts for the tourist industry, and ran a bed and breakfast in Panxworth on the edge of the National Park. I organised to volunteer at his business in exchange for a place to stay, and make this the central theme of my thesis.

In the event, this was impossible. Soon after I arrived, the carpenter told me that he'd decided to stop making yurts, and so my hopes of learning carpentry were dashed. Further contrary to my hopes, rural Norfolk hosted no idyllic “organic” community that had disentangled itself from the flows of capital – although, I did find many people who shared that aspiration. Instead, I witnessed many of the things I had sought to escape, continuing everywhere I went - the power of capitalist markets, the dependency upon the fossil-economy,

¹ In Broadland today, this includes conservationists, farmers, landowners, volunteers, wardens, graziers, and small-business owners.

the universality of bureaucracy, the tendency toward social fragmentation. Rather than being an exception to these various trends, I was confronted with the realisation that rural life is as much composed of them as any other part of English society. During my fieldwork, I grasped that the very things that motivated my choice of fieldsite and topic – namely, a desire to acquire practical skills through a sense of the nobility of labour, and a yearning for rustic community – were tropes that I shared with my informants; tropes that had a complex and constitutive relationship with the realities of economic life and land management in Broadland².

In 1927, Henry Vollam Morton, a pioneering travel writer, remarked that “Norfolk is the most suspicious county in England”(2000, p. 231). 90 years later, and it appears little has changed. People would often remark to me that, in comparison to other parts of Britain to the North and West, Norfolk was a very private, individualistic sort of place – where there was little desire to reach out to one’s neighbors. One friend of mine struck a stark contrast between his experience growing up on Orkney, where Orcadians would invite passers-by into their homes for tea, and “you’d have a plate of neeps and tatties in front of you before you knew what was happening!”. Such a social context would, naturally, have been an easier place to do long-term participant observation. In Norfolk, by contrast, although people were very happy to help me with my research, the relationship they sought to develop was – in many cases – confined to a brief interview at their place of work³. There was little question of inviting a stranger into one’s house for a full meal, much less so adopting them into your family or social group. As such, although I collected a large number of semi-structured interviews, I was at first unable to conduct much in the way of participant observation. As we shall see, this problem was compounded by the fact that most local people don’t actually live in the Broads proper. Ironically, what resolved this issue of not being able to break into people’s personal lives with the Broads as my object was securing full-time employment. Once I started working as a volunteer 5 days a week on smallholdings or at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen, that I got to know

² Similar yearnings are expressed in English nature writing – such as Richard Mabey’s *Nature Cure* (2008) - a genre satirised brilliantly in Steve Coogan’s *Alan Partridge – Nomad* (Partridge, 2016).

³ People who worked “at home” – such as artisan food producers or large landowners - would invite me into their kitchens and sitting rooms for coffee or tea; but it was clear from the tone and framing of such meetings that this did not constitute an invitation to build a more long-term friendship.

people as friends. Being a colleague was a culturally salient reason to accept me personally, where the status of an anthropologist was not.

A key rhetorical function of ethnography is to convey the “wholeness” of a given society to the reader (Thornton, 2013). And yet the reality of life in Broadland is anything but holistic, as my difficulties during fieldwork amply illustrate. This thesis, therefore, is a testament to the fractured nature of social life in Broadland; rather than providing a holistic ethnographic portrait of the region, it is rather a series of conversational interviews, stitched together by the work experience I gained in and around the Park.

Figure 1 – A map of the Broads, the towns and rivers within the Executive Area. *The majority of my fieldwork was conducted in the watershed of the Yare (between Norwich and Reedham), the Waveney (around Beccles), and the Bure (The Broads Authority, 2017).*



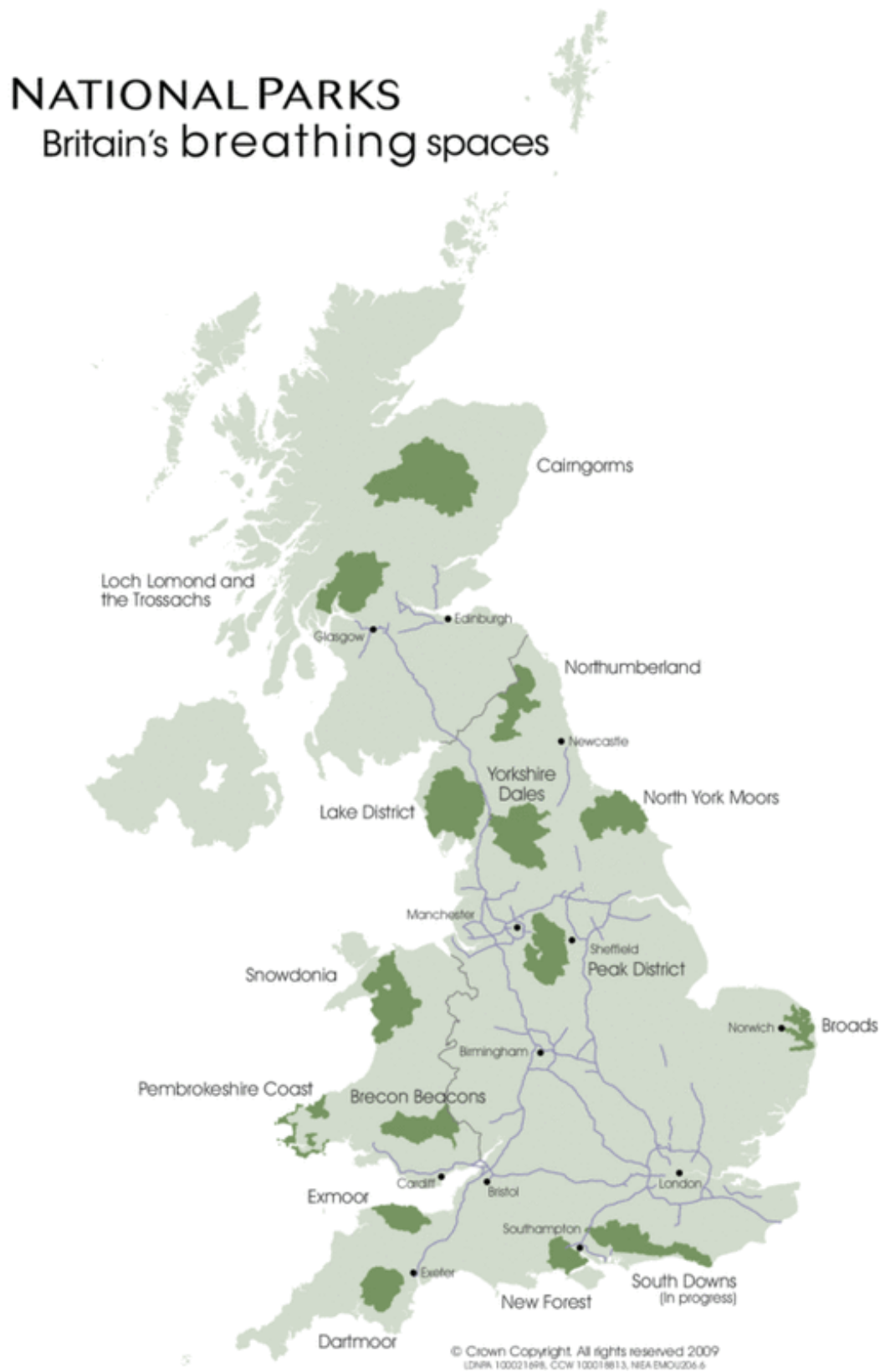
Fieldsite: The Broads

The Broads is Britain's largest protected wetland – a lush carpet of rivers, shallow lakes, marshes and fen, spreading across much of Eastern Norfolk and extending into the neighboring county of Suffolk (see Figure 1). The region gains its name from more than 60⁴ shallow lakes – the eponymous broads – that dot the landscape; creating a habitat for thousands of different kinds of waterbirds, plants, microorganisms, amphibians, mammals and fish – many of which are nationally or internationally scarce. These broads are also a popular site for recreational pursuits; from sailing to fishing, from motorboating to painting. The watershed that feeds the floodplains and broads themselves extends far inland, and includes some of Britain's richest farmland. The Broads National Park, formally referred to as The Broads Executive Area, is a jurisdiction of some 303 square kilometers, including the lower flood plains of seven interconnected rivers; the Yare, the Bure, the Waveney, the Thurne, the Ant, the Chet, and the Wensum. The topography is gentle, ensuring that the 200 kilometers of inland waterways here have no locks or weirs, allowing for ease of travel. Both navigation and conservation are the responsibility of the Broads Authority; a statutory government agency set up by a UK parliamentary act in 1988; its dual responsibility for conservation and navigation setting it apart from other authorities in the National Parks family (see Figure 2). In addition to maintaining the rivers for navigation, and safeguarding the unique habitats found there, the Broads Authority encourages tourism, oversees planning, liaises with landowners to ensure water quality, and helps coordinate the activities of NGOs, community groups, and private businesses that operate in the Broads. Most of the local population live on higher ground that lies outside of The Broads Executive Area, beyond the direct oversight of The Broads Authority. This densely populated and intensively-farmed “upland” nonetheless falls within the catchment of Broadland's rivers, and forms a crucial part of the overall landscape of the region.

⁴ This curiously vague figure reflects the fact that these shallow lakes are prone to being colonized by marginal vegetation, and landowners will on occasion cut and dredge entirely new areas of open water; the number of broads, therefore, is constantly changing. Furthermore, there is no agreement of what distinguishes a broad from a pond, other than convention, and many broads form part of the course of rivers or are separated from one another by only narrow strips of land. As such, most authorities decline to pin down the precise figure.

Although it is often imagined in popular accounts as a wilderness, the Broads is – and has always been – a peopled landscape. Although the same can be said for many supposed “wilderness” areas (Cronon, 1997a, 1997b), the Broads perhaps exemplifies this, as its defining features are the products of human artifice. Botanist and ecologist Joyce Lambert used stratigraphic sampling of sediments across the region to conclusively prove – from their unnaturally steep sides – that the lakes were artificial in nature: the product of extensive medieval peat-diggings, that had flooded in subsequent centuries (George, 1992; Lambert and et. al, 1960). Many of the region’s best-loved features – from windpumps to the grazing marshes – betray its industrial character. Rather than having been created through a ruthless and total expropriation of the local population, as in colonial contexts (Mason, 2014; Rudin, 2013), the history of Broadland and its eventual transition into a protected area could be read as story of a gradually increasing human presence on the landscape, with an increasing numbers of tourists and intensifying agriculture necessitating the creation of a statutory body capable of protecting the region’s unique biota (see Ewans, 1992). The Broads Executive Area itself is inhabited by over 6,000 people, and a great many large towns and villages – such as Acle, Brundall, North Walsham, and Beccles – as well as the conurbations of Norwich, Great Yarmouth, and Lowestoft, lie just outside.

Figure 2 – A map of the UK’s National Parks, including the Broads, alongside major cities and motorways (Crown Copyright, 2009).



All this makes the Broads an ideal location to study the involvement of land and labour ethnographically – patterns in the political economy of England will be materially evident here, rendered manifest in the peat and plants, wood and water, silt and sky of this anthropogenic region. Perhaps the most dominant of these patterns – pivotal to my experience of the private, atomistic quality to Norfolk sociality – is individualism, particularly *possessive individualism* (Macpherson, 1962; Rose, 1994; Strang and Busse, 2011); according to which the ownership of land and labour in Norfolk is organized. Possessive individualism is realized through a process of *enclosure*; by which economic resources that are owned or managed collectively are physically and legally parceled up into private assets separately owned by specific individuals. Although most strongly associated with the Parliamentary Acts of Enclosure in the 18th century, the process of enclosure has a long and complex history (Frake, 1996, p. 99; Pryor, 2011, pp. 465–475). Some parts of the British countryside were never organized into open fields, and enclosure has taken place piecemeal ever since Medieval times (Rackham, 1997). Below, I shall argue that this complex story of enclosure can be extended further, as a dynamic process that continues to affect economic life to this day. The social impacts of this process are profound; progressive enclosures deprive English people of the means required to build a shared understanding of how the land should be managed – leaving people trapped in “silos” represented by particular professions, trades, and interest groups. *Siloing* leads to mutual mistrust, even hostility, that has profound ecological implications. Under conditions of progressive enclosure, another institutional framework – that of *bureaucracy* – is constructed and deployed. Though the “living documents” of Broadland bureaucracy are put to work in pursuit of greater “engagement” and transparency, by drawing labour away from the direct management of the land towards sustaining abstract paperwork, bureaucracy also constitutes the rift that separates many Broadland people from the land in which they live, and one another. These concepts often stand in contrast to an alternative framework; that of the *common*. As opposed to an enclosed, bureaucratically-managed landscape of siloed, possessive individuals, the common is a shared, open landscape, in which reasonable individuals use *common sense* to discover and maintain common ground. Each of these key concepts will be developed and explored in the chapters below.

Methodology: Work, Walk, and Talk

I utilized three primary methods in conducting my fieldwork; the first involved participant observation while volunteering on farms, estates, private gardens, nature reserves, and commons. I volunteered with a number of community groups, including The Conservation Volunteers Environmental Action Group and Norwich Farmshare in Norwich; the Bure Valley Conservation Group in Acle; the Greengrow Workers Cooperative in the Waveney Valley, and the Saturday Working Party at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen. I spent the final four months of my fieldwork – from late May, to the end of September - working full-time as a residential volunteer at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen, where I developed a close familiarity with the Yare Valley, and received intensive training in wetland conservation; turning my hand to livestock management, coppicing, surveying birds during the breeding season, and reedbed management – even gaining certification in the use of a brushcutter. I was provided with accommodation on the reserve, so I lived within the Broads Executive Area itself – something that would have not been possible otherwise due to the scarcity of affordable rental accommodation.

When not working the land, I spent much of my time walking across it – exploring the uplands and wetlands of East Norfolk, with informants or by myself, on foot, taking photographs that I shared online, providing a montage of my activities and experiences (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 11). This approach helped me better appreciate the sensuous sights of Broadland, allowing me to “thicken” my ethnographic description (Banks and Morphy, 1999, pp. 4–7) and showing me the distinctive ways of sensing that combine within what Jackson calls the “mind-body-habitus” (Jackson, 1983, p. 334) of particular Broadland sensoria (Howes, 2003, p. XXII). As Jo Vergunst has argued, slow movement of this kind affords a unique perspective (Vergunst and Vermehren, 2012), and can be a valuable research method in its own right (Ingold, 2010; Vergunst, 2017; Vergunst and Arnarson, 2012). In this way, walking became my second method for gathering material. My third method was semi-structured interviewing. In addition to informal conversations with coworkers and neighbours, I conducted 60 semi-structured interviews in total, with naturalists, conservationists, regulators, businesspeople, historians, tour operators, landowners, farmers, residents, and council officials. By working, walking, and talking about the land, I was able to compile a rich and detailed ethnographic account, including both visual and verbal elements.

The use of walking through the landscape, photography, and working full-time in the environment sector, alongside more traditional ethnographic techniques, reflects the broader,

cross-disciplinary approach taken by myself, and my colleagues at CIRE⁵. CIRE draws together a wide range of academic and practitioner voices, in order to take a broad and comparative approach to the study of the environment. I was inspired to approach my fieldwork in a similar way, choosing to trace the pathways established by different working communities as they sought to explain and understand their local environment, with methods that closely mirrored their own forms of mediation and practice; walking and working.

Although I spent seven months of my fieldwork living in Broadland proper – the villages of Panxworth, Barsham, Ilketshall, and Strumpshaw - for six months during the winter, I rented a room in Norwich. Norwich is Norfolk's county town, the traditional capital of East Anglia, and a regional base for environmental organisations, including the Broads Authority, Broadland District Council, the RSPB, and Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Some local people in Broadland felt that the urban base of these organisations created conceptual, political, and social distance from Broadland's rural communities - the play *In a Vulnerable Place*, performed whilst I was in the field, drew inspiration from this sentiment when it compared the Broads Authority's Head of Strategy to a colonial official (Waters, 2014). But Norwich has always had an intimate relationship with its marshy hinterland. Trade flowed up Broadland's rivers into Norwich, and the boats that carried it – wherries – are an iconic part of the region's heritage; gracing art and weather vanes, even lending their name to region's main railway line. Medieval Norwich was England's second city, and without its vast demand for brushwood peat as fuel, the broads would never have been dug in the first place. Norwich has, therefore, been the institutional locus for the environmental management of Broadland for almost a thousand years, and the present day situation – with all its tensions between rural and urban - is reflected in this long history. Living in the city for a time enabled me to meet representatives of these various organisations easily, trace their influence upon Broadland, as well as giving me the opportunity to regularly venture out into the National Park using Norwich's public transport links.

Existing Literature: Into Crow Country

The central concern of this thesis – the intersection between land and labour – is a common theme in English culture; with many nature writers such as Thomas Bewick (1862), John Stewart Collis (2009), and Clare Leighton (Leighton, 1935, 1992) writing eloquently at this

⁵ *Cambridge Interdisciplinary Research on the Environment* is a cross-disciplinary research group, set up with an AHRC Networking grant, bringing together social anthropologists, educationalists, engineers, and geographers.

intersection (Macfarlane, 2015, p. 95). The Broads in particular has been the subject of an affectionate popular literary discourse - alas “much of it is repetitive, adulatory, rose-coloured and unsatisfying for anyone wishing a real understanding.” (Moss, 2001, p. 24). *In the Nature of Landscape* (2014) by the cultural geographer David Matless surveys this canon, alongside the many other varied narrations about Broadland produced by tourists, the press, academics, and local people. Matless’ study of Broadland culture is exhaustive, and highly ethnographic in detail, comparable to Frake’s brief, but rich portrait of the Broads (Frake, 1996, pp. 96–97). Matless’ thorough survey of the expert and touristic literature, I feel, leaves little to be added from that perspective. Matless is himself a Broads enthusiast, and it is this perspective that dominates *In the Nature of Landscape* - simply because enthusiasts produce the most writing about the Broads. The analysis of Broadland narratives is a worthy enterprise, but it leaves open questions regarding political economy and socio-ecology; how does the distinctive culture and environment of Broadland relate to flows and accretions of labour, material, and power?

The Broads have not previously been subject to formal anthropological study with such a question in mind. M. L. Braddy’s 2002 PhD dissertation on rural Methodism involves an ethnographic component (Braddy, 2002; Stringer, 2011, pp. 56–59), but Braddy was working under the auspices of theology, rather than anthropology. Charles Frake paints a vivid portrait of the constitution of local identity through perceptions of place in his essay *A Church Too Far Near a Bridge Oddly Placed: The Cultural Construction of the Norfolk Countryside*, (Frake, 1996). The Broadland region has received sustained attention from a range of scholars in other fields, primarily naturalists, ecologists, landscape historians, and geographers. Given the fact that the Broads is an anthropogenic landscape, many naturalists – particularly those working in the late 19th and early 20th century – documented the human elements to the landscape too. At times, these accounts enter a distinctly ethnographic mode, reminiscent of the early work of Franz Boas (Boas, 1964). This genre of Broadland near-ethnography is perhaps exemplified by *The Norfolk Broads* (1903) by William A. Dutt (1870-1939), a journalist based in Lowestoft and London, who wrote extensively on the countryside of East Anglia. *The Norfolk Broads* provides a vivid description of the Broadland landscape, complete with beautiful illustrations of rural scenes and wildlife. Dutt’s knowledge was founded upon time spent talking to local people – the frontpiece acknowledges that Dutt was “assisted by numerous contributors”. As Dutt himself says:

*“The visitors who content themselves with what they can see of Broadland from a yacht’s deck can never become really acquainted with the Broads and Broadland life. To gain a real knowledge of these, they must, to some extent, “rough it” as the early adventurers did: trudge the river walls; associate with the eel-catchers, marshmen, reed-cutters, and Breydon gunners; explore the dykes unnavigable by yachts, and the swampy rush marshes where the lapwings and redshanks nest; spend days with the Broadsman in his punt, and nights with the eel-catcher in his house-boat; crouch among the reeds to watch the acrobatic antics of the bearded titmice, and fraternise with the wherry-men at the staithe and ferry inns. **If the stranger in Broadland is unwilling to do these things, he must rest content with the outward aspect of the district and second-hand knowledge of its inner life.**” (Dutt, 1903, p. 28, emphasis mine.)*

Dutt, together with figures like P. H. Emerson (Emerson, 1885, 1893), Walter Rye (Rye, 1885), and Arthur Patterson (Tooley, 1985), built a reputation as “authorities” on the region, supported by long-term participant observation with the rural workforce. In many respects, I modelled my methodology on the example set by these scholars – who spent most of their time with those who hunted, farmed, herded, and managed the Broads; rather than enthusiasts who visited the place. Of the most recent generation of writing about the Broads, I take most inspiration from Mark Cocker’s *Crow Country* (2008), a deeply affectionate account of the Mid-Yare Valley – the region in which I did the majority of my own fieldwork. Cocker, who I was lucky enough to meet during my time in Norfolk, is a naturalist who devotes most of his attention to the rooks who nest at Buckenham Carr, but their foraging flights do lead him to delve into the lives of those human beings who live and work nearby (Cocker, 2008, pp. 88–97). Whereas Matless and Frake provide a rigorous portrait of the Broads “from the yacht deck” as Dutt put it, I wished to “rough it” (See Figure 3).

This focus – practical engagement with the environment – has long been a popular topic of anthropological enquiry (e.g. Evans-Pritchard, 1969; Malinowski, 1935). But the most relevant scholarly oeuvre for thinking through the issues raised above – time, landscape, practical engagement, and phenomenal experience – is that of Tim Ingold. In his seminal text *Perceptions of the Environment* (2000), Ingold develops a thoroughgoing critique of what he deems to be characteristically “Western” styles of thought and action – focussed upon the “mastery” of the natural world (2000, p. 321) that is predicated on a fundamental Cartesian divide between the mind and the body, the human and the natural (2000, p. 260, 2017a, p. 4).

In its place, Ingold draws on the philosophical traditions of hunter-gatherer societies (such as the Mbuti, the Cree, and others) and the Gibsonian notion of “affordances” (Gibson, 1977; 2000, p. 3,5) to suggest that “we” Westerners should reject the nature culture divide, and that we should “follow the lead of hunter-gatherers in taking the human condition to be that of a being immersed from the start, like other creatures, in an active, practical and perceptual engagement with constituents of a dwelt-in world.” (Ingold, 2000, p. 42). Ingold's phenomenological approach to practical activities and materiality has informed a broad swathe of subsequent scholarship in both anthropology and archaeology (e.g. Berkes, 2012; Henare et al., 2006; Tilley, 2004; Vergunst, 2012; Vergunst and Vermehren, 2012). Ingold develops the *taskscape* as the precise correlate to the word *landscape* - “Just as the landscape is an array of related features, so - by analogy - the taskscape is an array of related activities.” (Ingold, 2000, p. 195). The taskscape is the complete array of tasks – acts that are constitutive of dwelling – that go into a landscape. The taskscape is to labour, therefore, what landscape is to land. This connection of landscape, to taskscape and labour, therefore entails a consideration of time – leading Ingold to conclude that each momentary apprehension of the taskscape in the present reveals vistas onto the past and future. The taskscape is, in Ingold's terminology, a “plenum” - it has no holes or gaps (2000, p. 191).

Figure 3 – From the Yacht Deck. *A typical Broadland vista in the Yare Valley. Although it may look “wild” and free of human interference to visitors, this landscape bears all the hallmarks of intensive management – including removal of riverside trees to allow the wind to fill the sails of yachts, the regular management of the reed beds (right), and even the straightening and dredging of the Yare itself.*



Ingold’s work in *Perceptions* provides points of departure for this thesis. Firstly, his characterisation of a dwelling perspective of hunter-gatherer societies as a counter to the prevailing perceptual schemes in the “Western” world raises the question – What kind of perception do we find amongst land managers in the “Western” context of rural Norfolk? How do these modes of perception relate to the sensibilities that Ingold critiques? Secondly, his characterisation of the taskscape – the sum of actions that are constitutive of dwelling in a place – invites us to reflect upon the totality of practices that contribute to the socio-ecology of Broadland. But further, his affirmation that the taskscape is a plenum invites a further question: what is the role of conflict, tension, power, and change within the taskscape of the Broads? How do labour, work and experience of the environment relate to processes of economic and political change? In raising this question, I draw further inspiration from the work of Anna Tsing, to attend to sites of friction between different forms of knowledge and ways of living – as she remarks “It would be easier for everyone if rational deliberations always converged in

common understandings. But even those of us who believe that some knowledge claims are better than others have difficulty in denying that even the best ones retain a certain incommensurability. This is because knowledge claims emerge in relation to concrete problems and possibilities for dialogue - productive features of friction.” (Tsing, 2005, p. 10). As we shall see, academic accounts of the Broads depict it as a site of “ruination” – a peasant landscape disrupted and transformed by capitalist modes of production and urbanism, much like the matsutake-growing forests of Japan (Tsing, 2015, pp. 180–187, 189–190). My aim here is to think about the taskscape not so much as a plenum, but rather as a sort of “landscape of unintentional design” (2015, p. 286), where the lack of central orchestration and the presence of disruptive political forces indicate the potential for gaps and holes within which useful products emerge. As we shall see, despite land managers’ sensing the marshy surface of Broadland in a highly kinaesthetic, “haptic” way (Ingold, 2017b), movement through field and fen is not free of friction.

There is a second literature that sets the scene for my argument: the small but growing Anthropology of Britain (Rappport, 2000). There is a history of productive ethnographic enquiry in the United Kingdom, including the Mass Observation initiative spearheaded by the anthropologist Tom Harrisson (Harrisson, 2009), the essays of Mary Douglas on the significance of food and drink (Douglas, 1972, 2003, pp. 3–16), the historical anthropology of Alan Macfarlane (Macfarlane, 1978, 1992, 1999), and the ethnographic works of Marilyn Strathern on institutions, kinship, and moral life (Strathern, 1981, 1992, 2000, 2016), and a collection of monographs, published in *Sociological Review* earlier this year (see Degnen and Tyler, 2017; esp. Irvine, 2017). Perhaps of greatest relevance for the purposes of framing my own work is Nigel Rappport’s classic study of an English village in the Lake District (1993), Strathern’s study of the kinship relations in Elmton in Essex (1981), Frake’s work in North Norfolk (1996), and the work of Veronica Strang on the cultural significance of water in Britain (Strang, 2004, 2015). Rappport’s rigorous discussion of the imagined idyll of the rural community (Rappport, 1993, pp. 32–40), and Frake’s exploration of how the discursive features of the Norfolk countryside are constructed practically from the material landscape (1996, p. 89) both speak directly to themes that emerged in my own fieldwork. I would, however, mark out two points of difference between how I situate my own work, and the framing of these two scholars. Instead of defining my ethnography as a study of a *British* culture as Rappport does, I regard it instead as an ethnography of an *English* one. This is for two reasons. Firstly, at the present moment, it appears that a growing spirit of regionalism within the United Kingdom –

to the point that Scotland has already had one independence referendum, and may yet have another. There are clearly still shared institutions, historical processes, and trends across the entire country, but beyond this I believe that deploying the notion of a shared “British” culture analytically in this thesis would lend support to a construct that is, at root, a nationalist one – a political value set I have no interest in supporting. Although “Englishness” is also highly politicised, it has the situational advantage for this thesis in that it also refers directly to a specific *language*. For reasons that will become apparent in the next section, the comparative possibilities that this sets up – between my informants and other English speakers, rather than between my informants and other inhabitants of the United Kingdom and/or the island of Britain – are preferable.

Frake states that “While fully prepared to point out the sometimes deceptive political-economic facades of culturally constructed edifices, this essay is not intended to contribute to the depressing climate of condescending deconstruction that pervades much of current human science, deconstruction which reduces real people to gullible dupes of a hidden malevolence that makes itself visible only to the discerning investigator” (Frake, 1996, pp. 90–92). Such sentiments are echoed by Rapport, who reminisces that “I told my doctoral supervisor that I knew what I wanted to write about: the complexity, the inconsistency of things. Social life was not about neat, mechanical models, about overarching systems, whatever may be the conventional wisdom about structure and function, synthesis and consensus. Social life was farcical, chaotic, multiple, contradictory; it was a muddling-through, which turned on the paradoxical distinction between appearance and actuality.” (Rapport, 1993, p. ix). My response to critical interventions like this is to ask, if the human sciences are incapable of making critical interventions to cultural life, what exactly are they for? Although oversimplification is to be discouraged, complexity remains, I suggest, the *explanandum*, rather than the *explanans*.

And there are extremely pressing reasons for not ending our analysis with an simple acknowledgement of complexity. We are currently living through a time of ecological and economic crisis; an crisis engendered, as Strang points out, by powerful cultural narratives regarding the “gardening” of the world, that have escalated into an ideology of limitless growth and development, that frequently sublimates the problems humanity faces into mere technocratic issues for specialist, top-down bureaucracies to manage (Strang, 2009, pp. 2, 279–281). England’s water resources are experienced and imagined in a way that reflects deep cultural themes, that have direct impacts upon how water is managed and governed (Strang, 2004, p. 159). Land – like water - is a pivotal resource for human existence, and so watery

landscapes like the Stour Valley and the Broads are vital case studies for thinking about truly sustainable ways of living.

Argument: Common Sense, The Common, Sensibleness, Silos, and Bureaucracy

These two strands – the interest in cultural imaginaries of landscape and “community” from the anthropology of Britain, and the concern for practical activities in landscape – prompted me to identify one emic concept in particular that serves as the structure upon which my argument shall be built: *common sense*. In my fieldsite, common sense was frequently mentioned by the land managers with whom I worked; to describe their work, to praise or normalise certain kinds of knowledge, and to decry or denounce the behaviour of those with whom they disagreed. Common sense also has a life in the world of scholarship, which the vernacular use of the term inflects and contrasts. In Chapter 1, I explore this complex of meanings, arguing that “common sense” denotes a polysemic concept in English thinking, which normally posits a shared attitude that engenders both morally and practically correct (*pragmatic*) actions. This attitude is instilled through experiencing a common working environment, that serves as common ground in every sense.

In Chapter 2, I unpick this dense semantic field, reflecting upon one of the components of common sense – the common. I suggest that the common acts as a “root metaphor” in the English imagination, that is “a symbol which operates to sort out experience, to place it in cultural categories, and to help us think about how it all hangs together” (Ortner, 1973, p. 1341). The common knits together wide-ranging ideas about community, moral behaviour, effective actions, and the shared landscape, the narrations of the environmental history of Broadland, and the aesthetic preferences and outlook of the region’s farmers. I suggest that the notion of the parish community and its common land acts as a repository for “peasant-like” attitudes, and that the continuing process of enclosure that characterizes the spread of possessive individualism into England’s rural landscape engenders a possessive habitus that conflicts with that of the common.

Chapter 3 reflects upon how the habitus of the common is acquired. I provide a thick description of my own experiences volunteering at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen, and contrast this with that of visitors to the landscape. Whereas those who work on the land are able to develop a shared aesthetic of proximity, akin to that of farmers, those tourists engaged in quiet

enjoyment view the Broads at a remove. Against O’Riordan’s positive characterisation of “Broadland Consciousness” amongst tourists, I follow Cocker’s suggestion that the Broads themselves act as a psychological divide, or a mere temporary destination, for most people. Despite the continued role of the common as a theme in English cultural imaginaries, the dominance of enclosure and its distinctive opposing habitus to that of the common, turns the common from a root metaphor, into a dead one.

Having explored the positive affirmations of common sense in the previous chapters, Chapter 4 deals with a curious fact – that English people often joke that common sense isn’t very common. In the context of such a contested cultural space as the Broads, common sense gains varied shades of meaning it shows in vernacular conversation – from a basic principle that unites all right-thinking people, to a virtue that few possess. Such claims serve to demonstrate a central tension that emerges in modern Broadland – where a highly individuated landscape and social milieu conflict with the expectation that society should be organically unified with place. The space between expectation and reality leads to mistrust, which in turn engenders something that Gillian Tett helpfully characterises as “the silo effect”, in her recent discussion of corporate cultures and institutional failure (Tett, 2016).

Being the final substantive part of the thesis, Chapter 5 explores the impact of common sense’s most frequent foil – namely, bureaucracy – on the ecology of Broadland. Taking my lead from recent anthropological work that has examined the materiality of paperwork, I explore the material effects of bureaucratic management on the Broads itself. Paperwork, I suggest, both bridges and reaffirms a rift between the Broads and the general population – fostering public engagement, while drawing labour and resources away from direct land management. In conclusion, I suggest that common sense represents an exercise in substantive rationality, as bureaucracy is an exercise in formal rationality.

In my conclusion, I reflect upon how the Durkheimian promise of the modern division of labour yielding a state of organic solidarity does not reflect the fragmented reality of life in the contemporary English countryside. A greater professionalization of knowledge, specialisation of work, and privatization of land creates an atmosphere of anomie and mistrust that prevents solidarity networks from forming and frustrates the pragmatic aspirations inherent in the concept of the common.

This argument is placed within a framework of classical scholarship – in particular, the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Karl Marx, and Max Weber. To explore the social life of common sense – how it is practiced and its impact upon the strategic choices made by the people with whom I lived – I utilize the Bourdieuan tools of habitus, field, and doxa. But to unpick the particular ecological and institutional challenges to the commons, I turn to the political economies of Marx and Weber. Weber’s analysis of bureaucratic rationality remains highly pertinent for thinking about how English culture contrasts with the machinations of British governmental and commercial life; while Marx’s understanding of the ecological effects of capitalist exploitation – developed by Marxist geographers into the concept of the “Metabolic Rift” represents an excellent model for understanding how administrative strategies and materials have direct ecological consequences.

Chapter 1 - A very English pragmatism: Towards a social life of common sense

“The English approach to ideas is not to kill them, but to let them die of neglect. The characteristic English approach to a problem is not to reach for an ideology, but to snuffle around it, like a truffle hound, and when they have isolated the core, then to seek a solution. It is an approach which is empirical and reconciling and the only ideology it believes in is Common Sense. The English mind prefers utilitarian things to ideas.” (Paxman, 2001, pp. 193–192)

The above quotation – culled from journalist and author Jeremy Paxman’s *The English: A portrait of a people* – is where Paxman attempts to explain the antipathy he perceives, within English society, toward intellectuals, ideology, and idealism in general. Although Paxman goes on to say he does not feel that commitment to this “ideology [of] Common Sense” is the primary cause of this antipathy, this utilitarian “ideology” – one that privileges the senses and solutions, over detached reflection - is referred to as a contrasting pole to academic understanding. This leaves us with two enduring impressions; that the English scorn ideas in favour of practice, and that common sense, insofar as it is an intellectual phenomenon at all, is utterly bound up with that practice. The work of British intellectuals like John Locke and David Hume, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill who developed the theories of empiricism and utilitarianism that lie at the foundations of English quotidian culture and liberal ideology today (Fox, 2005; Ryan, 2012; Sober, 2008) is thus submerged into a natural matter of perceiving the world in a sensible fashion, and responding to these perceptions in a practical, matter-of-fact way.

Although Paxman highlights both the *empirical*⁶ and *utilitarian* aspects to English knowledge culture, they could be captured together as *pragmatism*⁷. Indeed, mere empiricism on its own would be viewed as suspiciously abstract, as conveyed these excerpts from a book on naval slang: “Common sense, a quality sometimes lacking in university graduates of otherwise high intellect.” (Jolly, 2000, p. 112)... “Your average university graduate these days is the sort of bloke who can tell you the square root of a pickle jar... lid to three decimal places – but can’t get the bloody thing off...” (Ibid 327)⁸. The meaning here is clear; empiricism needs to be part of a *pragmatic* attitude for it to be common sense. Furthermore, intellectuals – like university graduates – are deemed to lack this attitude, despite their empirical abilities. I would, therefore, argue that rather than conceive of common sense as an English species of empiricism, it is rather an English *pragmatism*.

Koinē aisthēsis and other opinions: Key philosophical debates on common sense

While common sense in English culture may be the pragmatic antithesis of intellectualism, this has not stopped generations of philosophers from using the phrase, and in turn influencing popular conceptions of it. And despite the quintessential “Englishness” of common sense itself, such academic engagements draw heavily on an intellectual lineage that has roots far from the linguistic and cultural contexts where common sense – as an English pragmatism, counterposed

⁶ Paxman is not the only popular author writing about English culture to identify empiricism as a key feature of English attitudes toward knowledge; Kate Fox explicitly contrasts the English “stolid, stubborn preference for the factual, concrete and common-sense” with “obscurantist, airy-fairy “Continental” theorizing and rhetoric” (Fox, 2005, p. 405). In this, they both reflect a broad scholarly tradition – across anthropology and cultural studies - that identifies empiricism as a distinctive feature English thought (e.g. Easthorpe, 2004, p. viii, 59-114; Parkin, 2009, p. 159; Porter, 1992, p. 182).

⁷ Pragmatism also has its own philosophical school, founded through the work of American philosopher Charles Pierce (Pierce, 1905).

⁸ For example, philosophical empiricism does not claim that the findings of scientific experimentation or experience reveal what is *real*: it merely states that they are “empirically sufficient” (Sober, 2008, pp. 129–130). Common sense in English society would not only reject this sort of anti-realism, it would not even recognise the worth in considering it as a possibility. Pragmatism, however, concerned with what “works”, would respect the English concern for “utilitarian things”.

to academic learning – finds its expression. As such, “common sense” as referred to in academic philosophy denotes a distinct set of meanings to those conveyed by its lay usage today, despite frequently being translated or referred to in academic texts as “common sense”. Descartes’ *bon sens*, Kant’s *gesunder Menschenverstand*, Reid’s *common sense* etc., are all different from one another, and from lay usage, in terms of their meanings and broader cultural significance. The dialogue – between distinct intellectual and popular understandings of common sense, between more or less pragmatic, and more or less abstract attitudes – reflects, I suggest, a dialectical relationship at the heart of English attitudes toward knowledge. Common sense is a polysemic concept that both emerges from, and sits at the heart of this dialogue. Before we return to examining common sense as a lay phenomenon in the following sections, we will reflect upon the philosophical tradition against which this very English pragmatism may be contrasted.

Academic discussion of common sense reaches back to Ancient Greece, and the writings of Aristotle. In *On the Soul*, Aristotle reasons for the existence of a basic sensory capacity – common to all animals – that is able to integrate perception from the other senses, into a single sensorium, a capacity he called *koinē aísthēsis*, literally “the common sense/perception” (Aristotle, 1957). In the writing of prominent Roman politicians – including Cicero – *communis sensus* was used to refer to a set of concepts and reasoned ideas that are shared in common by a group of people – specifically, the Roman citizenry (Bugter, 1987, p. 89). Despite the fact that both are translated in English as “common sense”, the distance between these concepts is striking; both owe a significant legacy to quite different intellectual projects and cultural contexts. Aristotle, for example, was seeking to provide an explanation for the agency shown by non-human animals without attributing them souls and reason, as his mentor Plato did – a position Aristotle rejected. Both Plato and Aristotle were drawing upon ancient medical theories about human physiology – with competing schools claiming that either the brain or the heart were the seat of perception (Gregoric, 2007, p. 7). Cicero, meanwhile, was sympathetic towards Stoic philosophy, and so his use of a civic common sense reflects the Stoic agenda of mapping of nature, reason, and ethics onto one another, in order to create a robust basis for personal behaviour and societal norms (Johnson, 2013).

Aristotle and Cicero’s models of common sense are part of a legacy bequeathed to many subsequent philosophies, from Renee Descartes’s discourse on sensation and reasoning (Descartes, 1709, p. 1; Wilson, 2012, pp. 32–45), to the aesthetics of Kant (Kant, 1914, pp. 92–

94). Broadly speaking, though, it appears the Greek and Latin literatures have given rise to two, distinct traditions. Thinkers drawing most upon Aristotle link common sense to the senses and basic cognitive faculties pertaining to them, as propounded by the Scottish Common Sense Realist school of the Enlightenment (see Johnston et al., 1915). Those drawing on Cicero and the Stoics treat common sense as simply the shared knowledge base of any given society, a view exemplified by Giambattista Vico (Bayer, 2008; Vico, 1948). Both traditions, however, stress the universality of the feature to which they refer – either a universal human capacity for sensibleness (Reid, 2005), or universal human capacity to develop shared assumptions and ideas (Bourdieu, 1977)⁹. This universalism is repeated by present-day philosophers when common sense is treated matter-of-factly as something that should – at least in principle – be shared by everyone (Chisholm, 1982; Elio, 2002; Lemos, 2009; Pollock, 2002). This universalism has even been transplanted into other disciplines, including psychology (e.g. Bogdan, 1991), and anthropology (see below)¹⁰. The goal of this chapter is not to intervene in any of these debates per se – my aim is not to explore the twin universals of reason or the co-creation of culture – but rather to add to this broad discussion an aspect of common sense that has not, so far, seen much sustained attention; that is, the vernacular usages of common sense in England today. My question is simple – *what does common sense mean in ordinary, non-academic parlance in England?* Using the idea of an English pragmatism as a point of departure, my answer will develop through three stages. Firstly, I will discuss the etymology and linguistic significance of common sense as a vernacular phrase; secondly, I will comment upon its political significance, with reference to the writings of Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine; finally, I will explore these twin dimensions of the phrase through occasions where it was mentioned during my own fieldwork.

“Sons of the Soil”: Etymologies of common sense

Through much of the Middle Ages, common sense was known as “common wit” (Simpson and Weiner, 2009). But from the 1500s, we begin to see discussions in English of “the common

⁹ I only touch upon Bourdieu’s work here, but I will focus upon the significance of his oeuvre – specifically his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977) and *The Batchelor’s Ball* (2008) – for common sense in rural England in Chapters 2 and 4 below.

¹⁰ In summary, most anthropological writing on common sense has treated the concept theoretically, rather than ethnographically.

sense” – “sense” and “wit” conveying identical meaning in Early Modern English. By and large, the understanding of “the common sense” shown at the time was squarely of the Aristotelean sort. But we see the beginnings of something different in the debate between George Joye and William Tyndale over the nature of the resurrection in 1543. Joye remarks that Tyndale cannot be so far from his “common senses” as to believe that the dead can hear the voice of Christ¹¹. Here, we see a connection being drawn between sensory perception and reason. The truth, here, is evident in universal sensory experience – seeing is believing. The rhetorical force Joye attributes to the senses has, in the English cultural imagination, been commanded by them ever after. This marriage between thought and sensation gathered momentum after the Reformation, so that in 1744 James Harris remarked that “Common sense... a sense common to all, except lunatics and idiots.”. At the same time, we see common sense acquiring a distinctive, normative flavor too. In 1726, the poet and political writer Nicholas Amherst produced a speech in which he claimed that “There is not (said a shrewd wag) a more uncommon thing in the world than common sense... By common sense we usually and justly understand the faculty to discern one thing from another, and the ordinary ability to keep our selves from being imposed upon by gross contradictions, palpable inconsistencies, and unmask’d imposture. By a man of common sense, we mean one who knows, as we say, white from black, and chalk from cheese; that two and two makes four; and that a mountain is bigger than a mole-hill: in short, when we say a man has common sense, we only say, he is not a fool which (as uncourtly as it may sound) is a very great character; a character, which most men indeed pretend to, but what very few deserve. For though common sense, as before defined, is what the most vulgar and unlearned think themselves possess’d of; yet is it in the most learned often wanting: we are all born without it, and most of us educated in defiance of it; such obstacles and prejudices lie in its way, that it is attained (if at all) with great struggle, pain, and anxiety; and when attained (a melancholy consideration!) it comes accompanied with infamy and contempt.”(Amherst, 2004). Amherst’s wry commentary is revealing in two ways.

Firstly, it hinges on the ironic claim that common sense is, in fact, quite uncommon – a remark I encountered in the field on numerous occasions. Common sense is often invoked at times of disagreement, or when someone has made some obvious mistake (“She just has no

¹¹ “I am suer Tyndale is not so farre besydis his comon sencis as to saye the dead bodye hereth cristis voyce.”

(Juhász, 2014).

common sense whatsoever!"; "I mean, it's common sense to wear a coat when it's raining, but he just didn't bother"). On such occasions, it is used to point to the obvious folly of an "other", such as an officious bureaucrat or an unreasonable neighbor, in contrast to the reasonableness of the speaker and the listener. The fact that common sense is often most conspicuous in its absence points to its normative, and even political significance – being used to exclude some people from communities of shared understanding, while including others. As we have already seen, common sense is still deemed in the popular imagination to be something that intellectuals in general do not possess. Scholars are depicted as more concerned with abstract knowledge about a situation, than practical mastery of it. As Amherst explains, common sense instead finds full expression amongst ordinary English people, and so our attention is drawn to the intimate connection between common sense, and social class. Common sense acts as way of creating an authoritative field of vernacular knowledge, and policing its membership; serving to exclude intellectual elites. An articulation of this tension I encountered frequently in the field – in the form of tensions between common sense and more abstract, bureaucratic or scientific rationality – is explored in Chapter 5 below. But it is from this confluence – of direct experience, and social norms – that common sense gains its pragmatic character.

Common sense is thus pragmatic in an inherently political way - the continuing significance of which is perhaps reflected in the fact that the primary legislature of the British state is referred to as *The House of Commons*¹² – not least through its power to demarcate communities of shared experience. This exclusive form of "common sense" flies in the face of much of the academic literature described above, which treats "common" as synonym for "universal". The collision between these distinct meanings is described by the Anthony Cooper, Earl of Shaftsbury in 1709. Regarding a discussion between himself and his friends, Cooper mentions that:

"Among different opinions presented and maintained with great life and ingenuity by various participants, every now and then someone would appeal

¹² Although it is widely believed by the British public that this nomenclature indicates that the House of Commons is a deliberative chamber for common people (as opposed to the House of Lords, which is reserved for the nobility), in reality "Commons" descends from the word "communes" which in the 13th and 14th centuries was merely the word for an association or confederacy (Pollard, 1920, pp. 107–108).

to ‘common sense’. **Everyone allowed the appeal, and was willing to have his views put to that test, because everyone was sure that common sense would justify him.** But when the hearing was conducted—the issue examined in the court of common sense—no judgment could be given. This, however, didn’t inhibit the debaters from renewing the appeal to common sense on the next occasion when it seemed relevant to do so. No-one ventured to call the authority of the court into question, until a gentleman whose good understanding had never been brought in doubt very gravely asked the company to tell him what common sense was. He said: **‘If by the word “sense” we understand opinion and judgment, and by the word “common” we mean what is true of all mankind or of any considerable part of it, it will be hard to discover what the subject of common sense could be! For anything that accords with the “sense” of one part of mankind clashes with the “sense” of another. And if the content of common sense were settled by majority vote, it would change as often as men change, and something that squares with common sense today will clash with it tomorrow or soon thereafter.’**”

(Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, 1709, pp. 6–7, my emphasis.)

On one level, what can be seen here is a collision between the Aristotlean and Ciceronian traditions – between common sense as universal reasonableness, and common sense as the universal human tendency to generate a received wisdom – there is also something else going on at the beginning; specifically, a tendency to use common sense rhetorically to identify what is both normative and reasonable together, colliding with an ambition to situate that synthesis within all mankind. This ambition, as the gentleman of good understanding intimates, could never be reached, because every people in the world has their own idea of common sense.

Secondly, many of the examples Amherst uses to illustrate what common sense is – knowing one’s chalk from one’s cheese, knowing that mountains are bigger than molehills – are themselves vernacular turns of phrase¹³, that all relate back to the landscape of England.

¹³ *Chalk and cheese* refers to a fundamental and inimical difference. *To make a mountain out of a molehill* is an overreaction to a slight issue.

“Chalk and cheese” refers to the different landforms of the South and East of England, including Norfolk - the high calcareous downs where only sheep are grazed (the “chalk”), and the rich lowland pastures where cattle are traditionally found (the “cheese”). Moles are common across England, and it is quite apparent to anyone familiar with her rural landscape that, although annoying, their excavations are not mountainous in scale. In Amherst’s remarks we see a fully developed form of the construction that appears in Joye – a confluence of sensible observations, and sound thinking; in which the environment plays a key role. It’s perhaps especially fitting that the name of Amherst’s position at Oxford University –the *Terrae-filius* – translates into English as “Son of the Soil”¹⁴. The connection between common sense and the landscape, I suggest, has a strong cultural resonance – highlighted by the fact that to speak of “a/the common” in vernacular British English specifically denotes common *land*, rather than other shared spaces or resources.

The earliest recorded incidence of “common[s]” being used to refer to common land in this way, according the OED, dates from the Bury Wills in 1491, that states that “The northe hede abbutyth vppon the comown of Euston”¹⁵ – referring to the position of a grave (*hede*) adjacent to a piece of common land. The third earliest mention, dating from 1550, refers to the enclosure of Euston common. But the notion of a common as involving certain collective rights to land dates back all the way to 1386, and is found in Chaucer T. 69 “Alle othere manere yiftes hardily, As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune...”¹⁶. One of the oldest references to the word “common” recorded in the OED – in the Cursor Mundi d. 1300 – refers to common rights to land “To pastur commun þai laght þe land/ þe quilk þam neiest lay to hand”¹⁷ – a retelling of

¹⁴ The *Terrae-filius* was an officially-appointed satirist at the University of Oxford, appointed by the proctors, that existed from 1591 until 1763. (Dougill, 1998, p. 273).

¹⁵ “The northern grave extended to the common of Euston.” (Trans. Liam Lewis, personal communication).

¹⁶ “...Certainly, all other sorts of gifts, such as land, tenements, pastures, or commons, or personal property...”

An extract from one of Chaucer’s tales, the full passage reading: “A wife is truly God’s gift. Certainly, all other sorts of gifts, such as land, tenements, pastures, or commons, or personal property - all are gifts of Fortune, that fleet by as a shadow on a wall.” (Trans. Lewis opp. cit.).

¹⁷ “They put the land to common pasture [sharing it between them], that which lay nearest to hand...” (Trans. Lewis opp. cit.).

the actions of Abraham and Lot in Genesis 13 (Simpson and Weiner, 2009). Such textual evidence is indicative of both the antiquity and prominence of land as a species of common resource in England, and shows that “common” and “common land” have been all but synonymous since the Medieval Period. Although other forms of common exist in the English lexicon, the role of land in “the common” is central, and has been so for centuries. It is through this connection that the pragmatism of common sense becomes rooted in the landscape itself. The contemporary contours of this relationship shall be explored in the next chapter.

Common sense as a social scientific object

With this etymological context in mind, we turn now to the work of linguist Alex Wierzbicka, who has written on the use of “common sense” in contemporary spoken and written English. Wierzbicka examines the febrile confluence of culturally-specific meanings and associations that lie behind a variety of terms regularly used in English-language scholarship that, she argues, has important effects upon the shape of philosophy more generally (Wierzbicka, 2009). Rather than treat common sense as the English term for a universal human capacity, Wierzbicka argues that “anglophone scholars who write about common sense are often oblivious to the fact that the English phrase *common sense* carries a unique, culture-specific meaning.” (2009, p. 338). Wierzbicka produces the following explication of this culture-specific meaning, as a sequence of postulates:

“common sense (approach)

a. it can be like this:

b. someone thinks like this:

c. “something is happening here now

d. I want to do something because of this

e. if I do some things, something bad can happen because of this

*f. if I do some other things, **something bad will not happen because of this***

g. I don't want something bad to happen

h. because of this, I want to think about it for a short time

i. if I think about it for a short time, I can know what I can do”

j. when this someone thinks like this, after a very short time this someone can know it

k. (because of this, this someone does something)

l. it is good if someone thinks like this

m. all people can think like this

n. it is good if people do things because they think like this

o. it is bad if someone doesn't think like this.”

(Wierzbicka, 2009, p. 351, original emphasis.)

What's valuable about Wierzbicka's description of common sense is that she makes explicit a series of components that distinguish the vernacular use of common sense from academic deployments of the phrase, that we have already touched on. While there is broad agreement that common sense is a pattern of thought (b. h. – j.), the notion that it is geared specifically towards pragmatic problem solving (d. – g.) is quite distinct from the Ciceronian tradition, while both the normative (k. – o.) and spatially situated (a. – c.) elements to the vernacular definition stand quite apart from the universal capacity for sensibleness proposed in Scottish Common Sense Realism, and its Aristotelean forebears. I suggest that, when the normative and ecologically-grounded aspects of common sense emerge as clearly from the etymology of the phrase as they do from its vernacular use, it is clear to see how these meanings influence its distinctly pragmatic character.

Wierzbicka's work is nonetheless constrained by her sources – namely, the titles of books and legal decisions from English-speaking countries, and the upper middle class cultural commentary of English-speakers like Paxman and Fox. Such material exists in a state of tension with the pragmatic, “empirical” nature of common sense itself, as we saw with Amherst. The authorship of cultural commentary, and the legal profession that provide Wierzbicka with so much of her material are both occupations that involve abstraction from the sort of immanent sensibleness that Wierzbicka herself acknowledges is the defining attribute of common sense. Although lawyers and publishers undoubtedly aspire to embrace common sense as a value - when producing accessibly-titled books and proclaiming reasonable legal judgments - both could be considered abstract professional domains that are attempting to *reflect* common sense, properly located elsewhere, rather than spheres where common sense

itself is generated, learned, and experienced in the first instance. Whilst bringing common sense into question by drawing attention to its distinct, vernacular uses, her analysis only takes us so far – as a linguist, she leaves unexplored the norms and situations where common sense takes place. *Where* is common sense properly situated? *What* actions are defined as “common sense”, and which are not – especially in the pejorative sense of those deemed to *lack* “common sense”? This, then, begs the question – what do social scientists and anthropologists say in answer to these questions, where common sense is concerned?

Currently, the ethnographic literature on this subject is remarkably sparse. No anthropologists, to my knowledge, have studied common sense directly as an ethnographic object in England, although some do deal with it as part of a broader enterprise. Most anthropologists who make use of, or refer to common sense at all, treat it as a human universal, in the manner of the philosophers. Although it is sometimes used as a means of invoking universal reason for rhetorical purposes¹⁸ (e.g. McFate and Fondacaro, 2008), the usual tack taken is more descriptive. In the manner of Cicero, Vico, and other more recent philosophers (van Kessel, 1987; Watts, 2011), many other anthropologists tend to implicitly treat common sense as “what the ordinary members of society think and do” – in short, as a synonym for received wisdom¹⁹ (e.g. Nadel, 1951, pp. 194–199; Stoler, 2009; Szeman, 2015; Webb et al.,

¹⁸ McFate and Fondacario, seeking to defend the Human Terrain Systems used by the United States armed forces, argue that: “The military does not make foreign policy, but is constitutionally required to execute that policy. **Providing them with the requisite knowledge to do so efficiently, carefully and with minimal loss of life is simple common sense.** If Professor González or others have concrete, practical suggestions for other means to achieve this goal – bearing in mind that the military has no control over US foreign policy – we would certainly welcome this input.” (2008, p. 27). The pragmatic thrust of the phrase is very evident here.

¹⁹ There are a great many examples of this, and the scholars chosen above are selected merely for illustrative purposes. For example, Webb et al, define Bourdieuan heterodoxy as “The set of beliefs and values that challenge the status quo and **received wisdom – or common sense – within a particular field.**” (2002, p. xiii), clearly intimating that the two are one and the same. Ann Stoler writes “[attending to the unwritten] seeks to identify the pliable coordinates of what constituted colonial **common sense** in a changing imperial order in which social reform, questions of rights and representation, and liberal impulses and more explicit racisms played an increasing role. As imperial orders changed, so did common sense.” (Stoler, 2009, p. 3). Imre Szeman

2002, p. xiii). The implications of this view are profound; particularly in terms of how social science engages with wider society. Agustin Fuentes points out that anthropology and common sense both purport to describe societal norms and their relation to universal human reason, so anthropologists must take it upon themselves to debunk fallacious commonsense claims; “we all need an effective, and robust, toolkit to interpret this reality. Anthropology can be of assistance... One must be an active learner and a critical thinker, always. Otherwise, we are doomed to sit back and ride the flow of common sense... and if you do this, beware of the hidden rocks, the perilous falls around the bend, and the particularly dangerous undertow of complacency.” (Fuentes, 2012). Proctor points out that this same point was made by prominent Indian sociologist Andre Beteille, who cast common sense as social science’s primary interlocutor. As Proctor puts it: “To give in to the assumption that what is “common sense” (the dominant way to do things) in a group is the *only* way, the natural way, to do things is dangerous and fallacious. Anthropology is an important instrument of generating social clarity in this regard.” (2012). For Beteille “[Sociology] has a body of concepts, methods and data, no matter how loosely held together, for which common sense of even the most acute and well-informed kind cannot be a substitute. For one thing, sociological knowledge aims to be general if not universal, whereas common sense is particular and localised. Educated, middle- class Bengalis, like other educated or uneducated people anywhere, tacitly assume that their common sense is common sense as such or the common sense of mankind.” (Beteille, 1996, p. 2361). Sociology, for Beteille, equips us with the intellectual tools to look beyond the reified beliefs of our particular frames of reference, to examine the actual conditions in which people live – an orientation that is, in his words “anti-utopian.” (1996, p. 2365).

Although Proctor, Beteille, and Fuentes’ broader point – that anthropologists can critique assumed truths that have damaging consequences – is undoubtedly an important one; it is worth noting that the definition of common sense as “the dominant way to do things” is not subjected to any sustained critique by any of them. This way of looking at common sense owes a significant debt to Clifford Geertz, who goes into greater detail regarding how one can treat common sense as a cultural system, that is “as a relatively organized body of considered thought, rather than just what anyone clothed and in his right mind knows.” (1983, p. 75).

claims “Entrepreneurship exists in the twenty-first century as a commonsense way of navigating the inevitable, irreproachable, and apparently unchangeable reality of global capitalism.” (Szeman, 2015, p. 473).

Geertz observes that common sense is purported amongst English speakers to lie in “in-the-grain-of-nature realities”, and that “‘earthiness’ might well have been adduced as another quasi-quality of common sense” (1983, p. 93), before subjecting this emic claim to critique. Attempting to prise apart the perception of the world from our attempts to make sense of it, Geertz argues that “When we say someone shows common sense we mean to suggest more than that he is just using his eyes and ears, but is, as we say, keeping them open, using them judiciously, intelligently, perceptively, reflectively, or trying to, and that he is capable of coping with everyday problems in an everyday way with some effectiveness. And when we say he lacks common sense we mean not that he is retarded, that he fails to grasp the fact that rain wets or fire burns, but that he **bungles everyday problems life throws up for him...**” (Geertz, 1983, p. 76). This, Geertz points out, indicates that common sense cannot be mere perception, but requires some degree of analysis or deliberation, too. For Geertz, common sense is first and foremost a cultural system that mediates naïve experience, at the same time conflating the two. This represents a qualification of the model of common sense proposed by the Ciceronian tradition – although common sense may well exist everywhere, *what constitutes* common sense, Geertz says, varies dramatically according to different cultures – “If we look at the views of people who draw conclusions different from our own by the mere living of their lives, learn different lessons in the school of hard knocks, we will rather quickly become aware that common sense is both a more problematic and a more profound affair than it seems from the perspective of Parisian café or an Oxford Common Room.” (1983, p. 77). Michael Herzfeld develops this position further. He agrees with Geertz that various kinds of common sense will be found in every society, and further stresses the extent to which common sense is revealed and obtained through practice, dwelling upon its significance in local power relations, and its ethnographic productivity (Herzfeld, 2001). With characteristic aplomb, Herzfeld moves in the last to assert, “We may then prefer to adopt a posture in which the discipline of anthropology becomes, quite simply, the comparative study of common sense” defined, ultimately as “symbolisms in use.” (Herzfeld, 2001, p. 2286).

Another intersection between common sense and anthropological theory exists in the study of the senses by environmental anthropologists (Bloch, 1998; Descola and Palsson, 1996; Howes, 2003; Petty, 2017). Concerned with exploring the universal and culturally specific dimensions to sensory experience through cross-cultural comparison, scholars working in this field clearly fall closer to the Aristotelean tradition, with its interest in universal cognitive or sensory capacities. Having explored the common features of human experiences of water,

Strang concludes that, “it appears that common human physiological and cognitive processes provide sufficient experiential continuity to generate common undercurrents of meaning... It seems that meaning is the product not just of human individuals and groups, but also of the common – and diverse – material characteristics of their environments.” (Strang, 2005, p. 115).

Geertz and Herzfeld’s commentaries on common sense highlight many of the features I have mentioned above. Geertz helpfully stresses the goal-orientation, and pragmatic “earthiness” of common sense as understood within English parlance, while Herzfeld highlights its normative and political power – a point echoed by Beteille, Proctor, and Fuentes for critical purposes. However, all these texts are somewhat brief, and are not based upon sustained *ethnographic* study of common sense, as an emic feature of English society – as such, common sense slips into becoming an analytical construct for academic use, that describes aspects of all societies, rather than a particular kind of “symbolism in use”, found in English-speaking cultures in particular. Wierzbicka’s argument – that English-speaking scholars frequently use culturally particular concepts that do a lot of conceptual work – is worth considering here. It’s also highly worthwhile to integrate the point – stressed by sensory anthropologists – that material circumstances have a direct impact upon forms of meaning. If we are to truly understand what common sense means in a vernacular English context, and therefore to understand the tensions between academic and popular thought that it highlights, more direct ethnographic evidence will need to be considered.

Common sense as a political object

Before I turn to my own ethnographic material, I wish to spend some time considering the political significance of common sense – and the tension between scholars and wider society it highlights - in further depth. To do so, I will begin from the sustained treatment of popular and elite knowledge in the work of Antonio Gramsci. For anthropology, perhaps the most significant fruit to emerge from Gramsci’s corpus is that of hegemony, which has been extensively applied in the study of subaltern societies around the world (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Feierman, 1990). But as Donald Kurtz (2013) and Kate Crehan (2002) have argued, many anthropologists have not paid particular attention to the sophistication of this concept in Gramscian thought. Crehan suggests that this is in part due to the popularity in anthropological circles of a succinct summary of hegemony penned by Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Williams chooses to set aside generalised power relations

pertaining to hegemony in society as a whole – about which both he and Gramsci are elsewhere very clear - in order to focus more fully on its implications for the study of literature²⁰. This is a gloss that Crehan and Kurtz claim has led many anthropologists to believe that hegemony is primarily an idealist phenomenon. This narrowing of Gramsci’s original formulation, referred to by Crehan as “Hegemony Lite”, is quite different to hegemony proper, which includes practical matters as well as abstractions within its purview (Crehan, 2002, p. 175). This can be contrasted with, for example, James Scott’s claim that hegemony is simply the word Gramsci gives to the position – originally articulated by Marx and Engels – that the ideas held by the elite occupy a position of total dominance within wider society (Marx and Engels, 2000, p. 192; Scott, 1985, p. 35). Crehan, by contrast, stresses the extent to which Gramsci’s prison notebooks are intensely concerned with the “*materiality* of power” (Crehan, 2002, p. 176, original emphasis). Gramscian hegemony, rather than simply reiterating the Marxist notion that the class dynamics dictate ideological patterns, attempts to demonstrate the intensely situated and particular nature of those power relations: how matter and ideas, consent and coercion tessellate uniquely in each and every instance (Gramsci, 1971, p. 12), to have the ultimate effect of reproducing wider inequalities (Silverman, 2000). For Gramsci, ideas were inherently tied to the political, and so the divide between thought and material facts was illusory (Gramsci, 1971, p. 326).

It is with this theoretical context in mind, that we turn to consider where Gramsci’s work addresses common sense. Common sense - or *senso comune* in the original Italian – is for Gramsci the residue left by philosophical introspection in broader social attitudes, lying somewhere between folklore²¹ and technical knowledge. Indeed, he states that “Common sense is the “folklore” of philosophy” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 419). Gramsci argues that intellectual effort continually percolates into wider society, informing perceptions and attitudes, gradually

²⁰ The fact that Williams is using “culture” here – in the narrow sense of “high culture” - in quite a dissimilar sense to how anthropologists normally conceive of it, is for Crehan a crucial factor behind this misunderstanding of hegemony, as is how Williams’ summary provides a clear and precise reading of what is – in Gramsci’s original writings – a decidedly complex and difficult idea.

²¹ Folklore, for Gramsci, was essentially the popular counterpart to elite discourse – the largely fixed, but widely held traditions, beliefs, and worldview of common people (Gramsci 1985: 188-190, quoted in Crehan 2002: 106-107). It is, I suggest, very close to how Geertz, Beteille, Herzfeld and others describe common sense.

becoming “common sense” and, eventually, folklore. But this process is highly situational and inconsistent, with different economic terrains – that is, classes - each giving rise to their own common sense (Gramsci, 1971, p. 330 in Crehan 2002, p. 115).

As Crehan acknowledges, *senso comune* - despite being a literal translation of “common sense” into Italian - is far less loaded than the English phrase, lacking the “connotations of practical, down to earth good sense in Italian that it does in English.” (Crehan, 2002, p. 98). *Senso comune* would perhaps be better translated as “public opinion” or “popular consciousness”. Indeed, Italian - English dictionaries opt to translate “common sense” as *buon senso* – literally “good sense” - rather than *senso commune* (“Italian Translation of ‘common sense,’” 2017). *Buon senso* also features in Gramsci’s thought; namely as the refined form of common understanding, commensurate with critical philosophy (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 325–326). Good sense is knowledge oriented towards the lived experiences of ordinary people, but purged of the limitations and shortcomings that Gramsci observed in *senso comune*.

Gramsci also comments on another key attribute of common sense in the English language, identified above - namely, its contested use amongst both intellectuals and wider society. According to Gramsci, hegemony is not merely a tool used by elites to subjugate and oppress, but it can also be used by radical actors to contest class dynamics and to generate popular revolutionary sentiment. The crucial role of all intellectuals, for Gramsci, was to foster hegemony to buttress their respective class. Traditional intellectuals – that is, academics, clergymen, and the like – served the interests of the propertied class to which they belonged (Gramsci 1971: 15). But Gramsci also described the role of “organic intellectuals”, who shared the interests of the poor, and developed counterhegemonic thought with popular appeal (Gramsci 1971: 12-13, Creehan 2002: 137-145). David Kurtz summarises the relationship of these organic thinkers to traditional intellectuals, being that of good sense versus common sense: “Common sense to Gramsci refers to traditional conceptions of the world, while good sense implies a coherent culture that is a desirable product of the work of organic intellectuals.” (Kurtz, 2013, p. 360). Organic intellectuals, in short would supplant the *senso commune* with *buon senso*, through their production of counterhegemonic ideas. Organic and bourgeois intellectual factions, for Gramsci, existed in a perennial state of tension with one another; it was their dialectical relationship that would lead to revolution. There is a pragmatic edge to Gramsci’s understanding of knowledge, here – *buon senso* is defined by its capacity to support

the discrete goal – for the poor - of supporting revolutionary politics, while *senso comune* supports the opposite goal – held by elites - of suppressing such movements.

We find an example of this dialectic in action in the polemical exchange between Thomas Paine and Edmund Burke - two of the key British political voices of the Eighteenth Century. Paine - a man from an ordinary background in the Norfolk market town of Thetford who strove to mobilise the Thirteen Colonies of America against the British crown, argued fervently for liberty and equality, moving to support the French Revolution in turn for similar reasons. Burke, the son of a middle class Anglo-Irish solicitor, sought to ensure that the Colonies remained part of the British Empire, wishing to maintain the status quo. Although their debate only fully crystallised after Burke spoke out against the French Revolution in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Burke, 2005), with Paine countering by publishing *Rights of Man I and II* (2012a, 2012b), it is Paine's earlier pamphlet – fittingly entitled *Common Sense* (2012c) - that is more instructive for our purposes here. In *Common Sense*, Paine sought to establish that not only was the cause of American Independence the morally right; it was also the most prudent course of action. Early in the text, Paine states that “I draw my idea of the form of government from a principle in nature which no art can overturn, viz. that the more simple anything is, the less liable it is to be disordered, and the easier repaired when disordered; and with this maxim in view, I offer a few remarks on the so much boasted constitution of England...” (2012c, p. 5). The text is littered with similar, matter-of-fact invocations, such as: “Small islands not capable of protecting themselves are the proper objects for government to take under their care; but there is something absurd in supposing a continent to be perpetually governed by an island. In no instance hath nature made the satellite larger than its primary planet; and as England and America, with respect to each other, reverse the common order of nature, it is evident that they belong to different systems. England to Europe: America to itself” (2012c, p. 23). Burke, too, strikes a similar tone in his speeches to Parliament at the time, seeking to reconcile the dispute and thus keep the colonies part of the British state: “Again and again, revert to your old principles—seek peace and ensue it; leave America, if she has taxable matter in her, to tax herself. I am not here going into the distinctions of rights, nor attempting to mark their boundaries. **I do not enter into these metaphysical distinctions; I hate the very sound of them.** Leave the Americans as they anciently stood, and these distinctions, born of our unhappy contest, will die along with it...” (quoted in Simms, 2008, pp. 142–143). Paine and Burke's arguments both rest not on abstract reasoning, moral principle, or a refined empiricism - but rather on concrete observations, drawn from the situation, goals,

and capacities of the intended audience. Paine's *Common Sense* offers not a **description** of common sense as such; but an **exercise** of it - indeed, that the rightness of independence is mere common sense is the very heart of Paine's argument.

If we apply a Gramscian lens to this debate, we can not only position Paine and Burke very easily within the dialectic of intellectuals, but this dialectic also explains why *Common Sense* was so successful. As an ordinary man, but a man of letters, Paine fits Gramsci's portrait of an organic intellectual, able to use his command of ideas to build a counterhegemony in service of his constituency - the 'ordinary people' of the colonies - thus successfully purging the *senso comune* of the American citizenry of the influence of traditional intellectuals, building instead a *buon senso* that recommended revolutionary action (Paine, 2012c, pp. 18, 34–38). The pamphlet was widely circulated, passed around by hundreds of thousands of American citizens over the course of the American Revolution, often read aloud in taverns. Although the Revolution was already underway once *Common Sense* was originally printed, it nonetheless galvanised support for the Republican cause and encouraged men to enlist in its armies. Its impact was so significant, such that "No other text by a single author can claim to have so instantly captured, and then so permanently held the national imagination." (Ferguson, 2000, pp. 465–466). Burke, meanwhile, positioned himself more as a traditional intellectual; using a similar rhetorical style to Paine, but with less success. Of course, not all American citizens were truly subaltern - many supporters of independence were virtually aristocratic, in terms of their relationship to the mode of production – and sure enough, more propertied figures like John Adams, and George Washington would come to alienate Paine over time (Kramnick and Foot, 1987; Kucklick, 2012). But this shouldn't distract us from the radical nature of Paine's own personal undertaking, as he saw it - indeed, it is undoubtedly this radicalism that led to his eventual ostracism by the propertied elite of the now independent colonies.

This brief historical sketch, bringing Gramsci's models into dialogue with Paine and Burke, not only helps us appreciate the trajectories of these two thinkers through the political realities they sought to shape, but it also helps us reframe Gramsci's own terminology to better apply it to the specific culture of the Anglophone world. Common sense - as Paine in particular understood it, and then applied it - is more akin to Gramsci's *buon senso*, than it is his *senso comune*. Common sense in England should not be understood as mere prevailing opinion - a cultural system that defines the obvious, as Beteille and others would have it - because of its connection towards pragmatic goals and actions, as both Herzfeld and Geertz remind us. It is

from this, to the English mind, that common sense gains its elevated status – unlike *sensio commune*, it has to work.

We find indications of the rootedness of common sense in the pragmatic, material realities of what works - and what Geertz identifies as its “earthiness” - in attempts made to communicate the subtleties of the English concept of common sense in other languages – especially in French, where, Wierzbicka points out, it is possible to speak of “*bon sens paysan*” (‘a farmer’s [healthy] *bon sens*’), *bon sens terrien* (‘the *bon sens* of [a man of] the soil’) (Wierzbicka, 2009, p. 341). These French attempts to articulate what makes English common sense different from the more familiar *bon sens* of French Cartesianism, points to an important iteration of the word “common”, discussed above, that is conspicuously absent from Wierzbicka’s account – namely, that of *common land*. Parcels of common land to which local people – *commoners* – had certain economic rights and obligations, possess a heady influence in the English imaginaries surrounding work, practical activity, and knowledge; after all, common sense itself is associated with such traits as being “down to earth” or “grounded”; “Earthy” classes of people are thought to be simultaneously practical *and* reliable, as well as being rude and non-intellectual²² – a construct that evokes the relative status in Medieval English society of “Those Who Worked” (the commoners), compared to the elite, intellectual status of “Those Who Prayed” (the clergy) and “Those Who Fought” (the nobility)²³.

I would suggest that bringing in materiality in the form of common land allows us to further develop themes raised by social scientific discussions of common sense. Although common sense is, as Wierzbicka claims, an *attitude* rather than a discrete set of actions, or norms in the vernacular English understanding, it is nonetheless an attitude dependent upon taking action (k.) within a given context (c.) where it has normative force (l. to o.)²⁴. This connection with normative pragmatic action, bequeaths the concept with a political

²² See the discussion of Paxman’s quotation at the beginning of this chapter.

²³ These “three orders” were the prevailing mode of social organisation across Christendom throughout the Middle Ages, finding clearest expression in the *Ancien Regime* of France (Dubey, 1982). Although they never prevented social mobility in Britain, the three orders nonetheless have a direct role on the political structure of the British State – with Parliament being divided into the Lords Spiritual (the clergy) and Temporal (the nobility), and the Commons.

²⁴ The letters here refer to the stages of Wierzbicka’s compound definition of common sense (see above).

significance – as underscored by Herzfeld. These political associations often take the form of discussions between different intellectual groups and non-intellectuals, whether we are talking about the friends of the Earl of Shaftesbury and their different common senses; Edmund Burke versus Thomas Paine’s organic intellectualism; between Parisian cafés and Oxford Common Rooms. But as Geertz reminds us, common sense in English also has a pragmatic, “earthy” quality; gained through it being put to use in the fields and factories of the English-speaking world. Given these two things – the importance of sharedness to common sense, and the importance of material, earthy matters – it is likely that common land, and the shared landscape in a broader sense should be a key site for the development and articulation of common sense as a concept. Highlighted by the fact that when English people speak of “a common”, they mean common *land*, it is this site for the expression of common sense, and the meanings and associations that arise from there, that I now turn my attention.

Common sense as a vernacular object

Below, I examine four instances where common sense became visible in the course of my fieldwork – in one specific landscape: the Mid Yare Valley and its watershed. As discussed in my introduction, the social landscape of the Broads is highly fragmented, so it was not possible to construct the sort of holistic account so characteristic of classic ethnographies without distorting my own material considerably. Instead, what I produce here is more of a *montage* (Grimshaw, 2001, p. 11) – a set of discontinuous snapshots of common sense in action. Each illustrates how common sense is deployed in distinct social situations, underscoring its pragmatic quality.

I arrived at the Shooting Estate²⁵ early on a bright and crisp winter morning. Walking boldly up the crunchy gravel driveway, I was somewhat intimidated by the sight of the place. A large, well-maintained manor amidst carefully tended gardens, this was one of the most formidable estates I had yet visited. I had been told to come to the back door, so I rounded the side of the building, and I saw the Estate’s marshes stretching out in front of me for the first time - flocks of unidentified birds wheeled in the distance, and the whole Yare Valley was

²⁵ Most identities have been disguised with letters in this thesis.

wreathed in mist. I passed a brace of pheasants hanging on a hook and a pile of boots by the door, and knocked.

Despite its grand and traditional exterior, the manor was comfortable and modern inside. The owner of the estate, C, was a straight-talking and welcoming chap in his 50s, with a booming voice but an affable manner, who briskly led me through to the kitchen and made me a coffee. As we sat waiting for the Estate's Conservation Officer, C talked in glowing terms about all the raptors he'd encouraged onto the Estate – gesturing to some feeding stations he'd set out where the smooth lawn of the manor's gardens met the rough tussocks of the marsh. When the Conservation Officer arrived, he was given a hot mug of tea, and we moved through to one of the sitting rooms and sat down at a low table. I had a view into the main hall, whose walls were covered with the mounted heads of African wild animals.

I interviewed them about the management of the Estate, which prompted C to discuss how there was great difficulty in spreading knowledge of how to farm with wildlife in mind, even within the industry. "Farming is not rocket science," he said, "but we currently don't have that centre of expertise." He then said that he felt some sort of central "think tank" of sensible, knowledgeable farmers who could provide practical advice would be a great way to fill this knowledge gap. This was contrasted to what was dubbed "hedgehog science" - whereby scientific experimentation was used to prove what was already sensible – "a matter of common sense" - for practically experienced landowners. When I asked for an example, the owner mentioned a recent experiment at a local nature reserve regarding pest control - that found shooting foxes caused a steep recovery in the success of breeding birds. This was the obvious outcome for both C and the Conservation Officer at the manor - "Any gamekeeper could tell you that!" - but a senior official at the nature reserve had exclaimed "We've now got the science to prove it!" This was felt by C to be utterly unnecessary. Why spend time and money trying to prove that something worked, when it was already common sense for anyone who had the requisite experience that it did?

What see in this case is common sense being paired with an antithesis; science. As a form of knowledge, common sense is everything science is not: intuitive, discretionary, vernacular, pragmatic. While both can serve pragmatic interests, science requires dedicated experimentation on point of principle – because it is *empirical* - while common sense merely arises organically from personal experience of what works. 'Hedgehog' Science has such faith

in its own method, that it does not consider any other technique for gaining insight to have sufficient power to prove anything – so even when common sense indicates that shooting foxes will lead to an increase in bird numbers, scientists will nonetheless insist upon testing the hypothesis. Such a duplication of effort on point of epistemic principle shows a lack of common sense. The common sense approach would be, by contrast, simply to take on board what is already known. If it works, then the pragmatic thing to do is to keep doing it.

This incident also reveals how the tensions described earlier in this chapter; between intellectuals and vernacular voices, play out in the field. Here, the disagreement was between common-sense led farmers and gamekeepers, and science-led statutory and conservation bodies, but it could equally have been ordinary local residents versus university-educated bureaucrats, or similar – this oppositional arrangement was a common trope in the Broads. It articulated the tensions between different fields over how the countryside should be managed. But this also demonstrates the provinciality and specificity of common sense; it is by no means a universal attribute of human reason, but rather a specific trait that is exhibited by particular people, in particular places, doing particular things. This becomes especially clear in the following excerpt.

*

Away from the lakes and fens of its wide, slow rivers, East Norfolk is largely an agricultural county. Countless acres of land are given over to the growing of sugar beet, wheat, herbs, and root vegetables. When travelling on the main roads that criss-cross the county, it was common to be caught behind large agricultural vehicles – trucks, tractors, combine harvesters – travelling from farm to farm, or taking produce to be processed or sold, especially during the sowing and harvesting season. The timetable of the X2 bus route between the regional capital of Norwich and the idyllic little market town of Beccles – where I spent much of my time in early 2015 – were therefore only ever approximate.

The movement of these vehicles, and the land they were tending, had remained something of a closed book to me until the spring of that year. I had spent many months attempting to speak to farmers, and yet I found it very difficult to secure an “in” – most were unwilling to speak to me, and those who did could only spare a couple of hours of their time. As such, the fields, and the movement of equipment between them were a text I could not read;

having not been to agricultural college, nor born into a farming family, Norfolk's agriculture was much like my view of it through the windows of the X2 – distant, indistinct, a pleasant view to be quietly enjoyed in passing.

I met P at the 2015 Norfolk Farming Conference; he questioned MP Liz Truss on her stance regarding the influence of agribusiness and supermarkets on farming, and I decided I had to speak to him. P was happy to talk, and had a lot to say about the state of British agriculture. But first and foremost, he offered to give me a tour of the fields of Norfolk, to – in his words – help me “get my eye in” – to be able to recognise agricultural processes.

P took great pleasure in helping me to see the landscape the way he did. He pointed out how the different shades of green in wheat and barley field indicated if they needed an application of fertiliser; leaves that had a yellow tint – looked “a bit *starey*” – would turn a dark green with an application of nitrogen. When we saw a suckling herd, P explained the impact of stocking levels on whether you could keep cattle outdoors over winter. As it was spring, the root crop fields were all ploughed and ready to be sown – P pointed out the distinctive bed structure for different crops, including carrots (three raised beds, with one deep trench), potatoes (one bed with two lines of raised earth by a deep trench), and sugar beet (lines traced in the soil). Great sheets of clear plastic also covered the beds. P described these as miniature greenhouses, warming the soil and bringing the crops on earlier.

P and I later moved on to discuss socio-economic trends in agriculture. Speaking about the shortcomings of existing sustainable food-growing projects, P mentioned how he'd been invited to join a suburban grower's co-op as an expert member of the team. In P's view, although this group was “aspirational”, they were not prepared to actually learn how to cultivate properly for sale, and so their business was not horticulturally sustainable – being merely “gardening on a grand scale”. Projects of this kind, P felt, simply scaled up techniques of food growing for domestic use, in order to increase production. “If you're running a garden, it's fine, but if you use those techniques on a field, it's backbreaking. If you use machines, it's still hard, but it's not as hard.” P eventually left; he decided to plough up the field at the beginning of the year, something he felt was “simple common sense”, but the organisers felt they should have been consulted upon, before this decision was taken. Here, we see an the *specificity* of common sense. In referring to a particular task as “simple common sense”, P is presenting it as routine, obvious, and necessary. No comment or discussion was required, in

his view; just like one wouldn't need to stipulate that someone shouldn't light a bonfire under a tree with low-hanging branches, or leave the handbrake off on a car parked on a slope. His colleagues, however, disagreed. They wished to be consulted. P saw this as patently ridiculous: evidence of their lack of engagement in the practice of horticulture and the common sense of farming.

Figure 4 – A Broad Taskscape. *Common sense arises from particular landscapes, and implicates specific people, while excluding others. As we shall see in subsequent chapters, this pattern is inflected within property rights – from private ownership, to rights of navigation along major rivers.*



Common sense, here, has clear limits – it leaves out certain people, and is tied to others (see Figure 4). P was not suggesting that his interlocutors lacked all capacity for reason; he was rather suggesting that they were not as familiar with how horticulture takes place, and therefore lacked the sense common to it. This would be bad enough, but they also lacked awareness of their own inexperience. By attempting to micro-manage P from a position of ignorance, they demonstrated that they did not have the flexible, practical mentality required to deal properly

with problems in a common-sensical fashion – in short, they breached certain vital norms. As such, P decided that further collaboration would be a waste of time, and ended his involvement.

*

Whitlingham Country Park is Norwich’s gateway to the Broads – 35 hectares of woodland, meadows and open water, lying South East of the city. Whitlingham Broad, despite falling within the National Park, is not actually a “proper” broad, as it is the flooded remnants of a modern gravel pit, rather than mediaeval turbary. Despite being geologically atypical, it is nonetheless an important site for the work of the Broads Authority; who co-manage the site with the Whitlingham Charitable Trust. The large visitor centre is generously supplied with leaflets and posters advertising the attractions in the wetlands beyond; the network of paths that spread out across the Park are lined with information boards that detail the natural history of the place.

Wardens employed by the Broads Authority tend the site, and from here patrol the rest of the Mid Yare Valley. I was fortunate enough to be allowed to shadow F., one of the most experienced wardens on the Broads Authority’s staff. He took me on a tour of the Park, as he completed his usual rounds, inspecting the paths and checking water levels, repairing fences and speaking with the local boaters. Towards the end of the day, we were approached by a man who lived on a houseboat moored up on the riverbank between the Yare and the broad. Clearly distressed, he complained that he’d been subjected to verbal abuse by another boater. F. discerned that the second boater had been speeding; the houseboater had called him to slow down, leading to a hostile verbal exchange by the two men.

F. headed out to confront the man in question, and took me along so that I might see what he felt to be an important part of his work: keeping the peace on the river. The Broads Authority has a statutory responsibility for navigation on the Broads; so that their wardens are responsible enforcing a wide range of bylaws concerning boat traffic upon the water. Conservation occupies only a third of a warden’s time – the remaining two thirds is taken up with overseeing navigation on their beat. We drove up to where the houseboater had told us the other man had moored up. F. got out, and asked me to stay in the van. When he returned, having warned the man concerned, F. started to explain what he felt was crucial to keeping the peace effectively. The Broads Authority only has a limited budget and amount of time to prosecute people who break their regulations. As such, it falls upon wardens such as F. to

exercise their discretion – to “use their common sense”- in deciding where there is sufficient evidence and public benefit to taking allegations of wrongdoing further. The method F. had developed to assist with this was what he called “The Attitude Test.” If he spoke to someone who had flouted a regulation, and they showed evidence of a genuinely positive attitude– they were polite, showed remorse, and made commitments not to break the same rule again – he would let them off. But repeat offenders, or people who seemed to have a poor attitude – they were rude, or antagonistic, or refused to apologise – would have charges brought against them. “You’ve just got to hope, when you’re dealing with people every day, that they will just show a bit of common sense, and work with you.”

F’s approach to his responsibilities fits cleanly with Wierzbicka’s definition of common sense. F. was faced with an array of problems – a limited amount of resources to support legal action; a responsibility for keeping the peace; a man speeding and verbally abusing another river user – and took the approach of making judgement calls in a very short space of time to ensure the best possible outcome. All of this pertains to a common resource (namely, the River Yare). Such an approach would be impossible, if F. himself lacked common sense.

But equally, it is arguable that the people to whom the Attitude Test is applied *also* need common sense. When presented with a problem – being confronted by a Broads Authority warden over a misdemeanor – in a short space of time, they need to decide how to respond. Do they behave in a conciliatory, respectful fashion, or do they act aggressively? The penalty of behaving aggressively is obvious; information regarding the Broads Authority’s statutes and penalties is circulated to all boat owners and renters on the Broads. If they make an incorrect choice – as deemed by the warden – then it is their attitude towards the river, and the warden, that is at fault. As such, F’s use of the Attitude Test doesn’t just evince his own, common-sense approach to solving problems, but also the importance of common sense as an enforceable norm in the Broads.

*

It was the last day of my fieldwork. RSPB Strumpshaw Fen – a nature reserve where I spent four months as a residential volunteer²⁶ - was holding a barbeque in honour of its 30 volunteers, who assisted the permanent staff with visitor engagement and the management of the reserve. People were crowding around the grills, or standing a little way off, talking to one another while sitting on plastic garden chairs. The air was convivial, but the scrupulously private approach everyone took to the food drew my attention. Everyone brought, cooked, and ate, their own food. Although there was a sense to it – not everyone wanted to eat the same things, and this approach allowed for more personal choice – I was struck by how this contrasted markedly with the communal eating seen in other ethnographic cases (e.g. Carsten, 1995). In that moment I realised what concept brought all my experiences in Norfolk together: *common sense*.

My boss on the reserve, O, was standing talking to my parents, who'd arrived to help me move my possessions out of the volunteers' cottage. After I cooked the salmon we were having, I went over to join them, and told them about the angle I'd decided to take with my thesis. O smiled, and looked into middle distance. "There's only two things I look for in residential volunteers," he said "Enthusiasm, and initiative. I can teach them everything else."

At first, this response might seem opaque – what relationship do enthusiasm and initiative have with common sense? It was clear from the way that O spoke, he wasn't disagreeing or correcting me: he offered his words as a meditation on mine. So what did O mean?

If we consider O's remarks in the context of the previous cases – F's seeking of the right attitude in instituting shared norms, C's emphasis upon direct, practical experience of the landscape, and P's experiences with those who lacked common sense, a possible explanation emerges. The two things O chose as important prerequisites for being a good residential volunteer – *enthusiasm* and *initiative* – are both prerequisites for the acquisition of the reserve's common sense. Enthusiasm is a particular kind of attitude; a set of internal dispositions consistent over time. Just as F sought out general cooperativeness as the right sort of attitude on the river Yare²⁷; enthusiasm was normative on the reserve. The hours are long, the work is

²⁶ The RSPB maintains properties on some of its larger reserves that allow for small numbers of full-time volunteers to live on site for extended periods..

²⁷ This recalls aspects of Wierzbicka's model above –

physically demanding, and occasionally dangerous, while the landscape itself can be very unforgiving. Enthusiasm for the work of the reserve was therefore crucial, both as a personal motive for individual staff members, and as an important source of bonding within the team. Individuals who did not share that enthusiastic attitude would thus be alienated, both from the work, and the other workers; and would struggle to work on the reserve effectively – and thus could not acquire the sense common to those who worked there.

If enthusiasm speaks of a normative attitude, initiative speaks to pragmatism. Initiative – often used in conjunction with the phrase “self-starter” – was highly prized on the reserve, and anyone exhibiting it was praised. It could manifest in something as simple as passing a colleague working on building a pond-dipping platform²⁸ screws as and when he required them, without being asked (see Figure 5). If you could correctly anticipate the needs of one’s colleague, and assist his work, then you were showing initiative. In short, initiative is being able to take *prompt, practical action independently* (Simpson and Weiner, 2009) – something that was indicated when another warden on the reserve, during an interview, described common sense as “doing what is required without thinking or being taught”²⁹. What is striking about P’s

l. it is good if someone thinks like this

m. all people can think like this

n. it is good if people do things because they think like this

o. it is bad if someone doesn't think like this.”

(Wierzbicka, 2009, p. 351, original emphasis.)

²⁸ Pond-dipping is a naturalist pastime, whereby a net is used to fish small animals – larvae, tadpoles, snails, and so on - out of the pond in order that they might be studied. A number of wooden platforms had been built beside ponds to facilitate this popular activity.

²⁹ Recalling other aspects of Wierzbicka’s model –

“g. I don't want something bad to happen

h. because of this, I want to think about it for a short time

i. if I think about it for a short time, I can know what I can do”

j. when this someone thinks like this, after a very short time this someone can know it

k. (because of this, this someone does something)”

(Wierzbicka, 2009, p. 351, original emphasis.)

story above is that he attempted to use his initiative – by ploughing up the field – he was castigated by his colleagues; he responded by saying that this indicated that they lacked common sense.

Figure 5 – Working Together. *Knowing when to pass a friend a tool as they needed it, or doing an obvious task that needed doing without being asked, were all signs of “common sense”.*



O's confidence that, aside from these two things, he could teach *anything else*, is also suggestive. Common sense is not just a form of knowledge that is non-academic, but – and this was confirmed by numerous informants - it is thought to be something that arises organically, without needing to be formally taught. When C discussed his idea for a centre for expertise in farming, he was not suggesting an institute for teaching common sense to his peers; good farming, in C's view, was not a wholly separate field to academic knowledge per se³⁰. Rather, what distinguishes landowners, farmers, and gamekeepers, from the practitioners of “hedgehog science”, was the pragmatic sensibleness of the former, in contrast to the excessive empiricism of the latter. Scientific knowledge, farming skills, conservation techniques could all be taught – what could not be taught was the kind of pragmatic attitude that allowed you to work with your peers, and develop the right *nous*³¹ to sense what actions were right and wrong, without

³⁰ C had an agronomist, for example, who he employed to advise him on what crop to plant, etc.

³¹ *Nous*, pronounced /naʊs/, is an informal English synonym for common sense, or practical understanding.

Because it is such a close synonym, I have avoided using it in my definition here.

being actively told. All these ethnographic cases indicate a key context for the exercise of this colloquial understanding of common sense: namely a **shared working environment** - a landscape shaped by working together. The role of common sense in shaping – and failing to shape – common norms will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 4, while the assumed unteachability of common sense will be considered in Chapter 3.

Conclusion: Common sense in vernacular use

Much of common sense as it exists in rural Norfolk is captured in Paxman's use of it in *The English: A portrait of a people*. Today, amongst the inhabitants of the Broads, common sense is used to talk about a particular kind of pragmatism, an experiential attitude geared towards problem-solving through trial and error, whose precise limits, values, and associations will be traced further in the following chapters. But Paxman's discussion also led me to reflect upon the intellectual history of common sense, which – despite being frequently cast as the antithesis of intellectual life - has embroiled a great many philosophers and intellectuals. What became apparent as I worked in the fields and fens of the Broads, though, was that the people I worked alongside experienced common sense quite differently to this long tradition of academic thought, while nonetheless owing a clear debt to it. Farmers, conservationists, gardeners, and gamekeepers, all were – through the practical demands of working in specific surroundings – in dialogue with those surrounds, as well as with the academic philosophising they sought to eschew. Their shared experiences of all kinds accreted into common senses particular to their own day-to-day working lives. Heretofore, social scientists have not explored ethnographically the transformations of academic “common senses” in these vernacular conversations. As a result, social scientists have underplayed the role of labouring in particular places, with particular people, plants, animals, objects, and materials, in shaping this concept – developing precisely the sort of plural and often contradictory common senses that Gramsci describes. This has led scholars to neglect how - as my Gramscian reading of my own ethnography, and of Paine and Burke's debate reveals - how common sense as *buon senso* rests, first and foremost, upon a common that is sensible.

With this in mind, we arrive at the following - ethnographically particular - definition of common sense, as a compliment to those already explored above:

*Common sense is a form of **pragmatic attitude**, developed through daily interactions with the shared material and social context – that is, the **commons** - of a defined group of people.*

This is a working definition in two senses: it is developed for a specific function (to aid the understanding of social life in the Broads National Park), but it is also a definition developed and established through work in the common landscape I will now move to describe.

Chapter 2: Kett's Shadow - The Broads as common ground?

During my winter in Norwich, I rented a room in a terraced house on Kett's Hill; a steep road close to the railway station, overlooking the river Wensum. Kett's Hill was named after the 16th century outlaw Robert Kett, who led a rebellion in 1549 against the enclosure of Norfolk's fields and rivers. Kett and his rebels captured Norwich, although they were routed by the Earl of Warwick and his mercenaries soon afterwards (Chandler, 2012). Before his ill-fated rebellion, Kett had presented a petition to Edward VI, stating that 'We pray that Ryvers may be ffree and common to all men for ffyshyng and passage...' and, perhaps indicating the involvement of the Broadlanders in the rebellion, that 'redegrounde and meadow-grounde may be at such price as they were in the first yere of Kyng Henry the VII' (Ewans, 1992, p. 12). Such demands indicate: it was the enclosure of common resources along Broadland's rivers – fisheries, navigation rights, reedbeds, and meadows – that prompted Kett and his fellows to rise up against the establishment. I didn't realise that one of my future colleagues at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen rented a place just across the road from me. He'd later confess that he'd never buy a property there; the hill was pockmarked with sinkholes, and there was a significant risk of subsidence. The sinkholes, and Robert Kett's doomed fight against enclosure came to mirror one another in my mind. Both were integral parts of local landscape, hidden beneath the fabric of the modern neighbourhood, but constantly threatening to undermine the very foundations of all that had been built there.

Above my house on Kett's Hill lay Mousehold Heath; a forested plateau that boasted one of the most ecologically significant areas of lowland heath in southern England. Mousehold Heath was a fragment of a much larger tract of common land; covering some 6,000 acres across 8 rural parishes prior to the Parliamentary Enclosures of the 19th century. Robert Kett's rebels had camped here. Centuries before, the last battle of the Peasant's Revolt was fought on the Heath, after Geoffrey Litster had slain the Mayor of Norwich and was proclaimed "King of the Commons", in recognition of his role in leading the resistance movement of commoners, camped on the common land of the Heath. The Mousehold Heath of today is more of a nature reserve or a park than a site of common resource extraction; the last commoners' rights were exercised here over 100 years ago (Rackham, 1997, pp. 299–301). It is managed by Norwich City Council, who at that time of my fieldwork subcontracted out some of the conservation work to The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), a national environmental charity. TCV

essentially acts as a middleman between landowners and the general public; coordinating opportunities for the latter to complete conservation tasks voluntarily on behalf of the former. Volunteers gain experience, training in manual skills and ecological knowledge, and an opportunity to socialize while doing meaningful work outdoors. Landowners obtain conservation management services at a substantially lower cost than if they enlisted a private contractor. From December until March, I spent Tuesdays and Thursdays volunteering with TCV, looking to gain some practical experience before I applied for placements in the Broads during the following summer.

On the days when I wasn't conducting interviews or exploring the wintry landscape of Halvergate or the Waveney Valley, I would join TCV Norwich's Environmental Action Group. TCV's volunteer pool was composed primarily of three demographics; retired people, students, and the unemployed³². Every Tuesday and Thursday at the TCV Office in central Norwich, anyone who wished to work that day would show up at 9am, where they would help load up a minibus with tools and refreshments, before we all drove out to one of the sites TCV was contracted to manage. Mousehold was one of the more frequent destinations; there we'd cut back scrub and fell small trees. This sort of work is a vital part of heathland management; without human intervention, trees from the wooded areas of Mousehold would gradually seed into and grow up across the areas of open heath, shading out heathland species over time, until the entire area would be covered by oak woodland – a process known as succession³³. As the Project Officer at the TCV Norwich described it: “A lot of what we do involves cutting stuff down, simply because succession is a process of growth, and a lot of habitats that we're trying to preserve are at a certain stage in succession, and so we're trying to halt [that].” But this “cutting stuff down” aspect of heathland management on Mousehold was a source of controversy (see Figure 6).

³² This distribution was typical of the conservation groups with whom I volunteered, though the distribution between these groups would vary according to factors like location, the timing of task days, and facilities. Because TCV Norwich was based in an urban area, its Environmental Action Group attracted far more unemployed people, whereas the Bure Valley Living Landscape group – based in the relatively affluent village of Acle – attracted more retired people. Strumpshaw Fen – which provided accommodation for long-term volunteers – attracted a lot of students.

³³ See Chapter 3 for a more detailed description of succession.

On my first day on Mousehold, I was surprised to note that the biomass we removed from the heath was simply piled up and burned *in situ*, rather than harvested for fuel or as a raw material. At first, I assumed that this was done for reasons of conviviality – fires allowed volunteers to warm themselves on cold days, and were a valuable focus for socializing on site. But it became increasingly clear over time from the sheer volume of material being burned that this was first and foremost a method of disposal. When I asked why we disposed of the biomass in this way, the reason given was political rather than practical: apparently, the City Council had sought to distribute the wood harvested from Mousehold to the people of the city. Despite harkening back to the ancient tradition of *estovers*, that entitled commoners to harvest firewood from common land like Mousehold, this initiative proved unpopular with some members of the local community. Dogwalkers, I was told, didn't appreciate the importance of conserving heathland habitat, and disliked the removal of trees and undergrowth. A rumour had surfaced that the City Council was only removing wood from the Mousehold so it could be sold for a profit; in order to avoid further controversy, the Council wound up the scheme. I was not able to locate any official documents that could provide any further detail about this story; nor did I witness any hostility from dogwalkers personally while I was working at Mousehold. Nonetheless, the opposition was independently attested to by many of the volunteers – so it was clearly a widespread feature of their understanding of their own immediate social milieu.

Figure 6 – Coppicing in progress.



The perceived hostility of local dogwalkers to heathland management, and the suspicion that had been shown towards the Council's efforts to make better use of the biomass produced by that management, was the source of considerable annoyance and frustration to those involved in conservation. But it is also symptomatic of a state of enclosure. Although dog walkers had right of access to Mousehold, the interruption of other rights of common – to graze sheep, say, or to collect fuel - had fundamentally changed the way they saw that landscape. Unlike the conservationists - the TCV team, and the council staff, who had direct, practical involvement in the management of the heath, and so knew what it needed and could reach a consensus about the best approach to managing it - the dogwalkers did not participate in Mousehold in a way that made them privy to these conditions of management. They could not see the need for felling trees periodically, and so they became hostile to the practice. Their only recourse, it was claimed, had been to spread rumours about profiteering by faceless bureaucrats, or to complain indirectly to the council hierarchy. These efforts were ultimately ineffective – in that the heathland was still being managed – and so little was achieved, from

the conservationists' point of view, except good biomass was now going to waste. This outcome, it might be said, showed a complete lack of common sense.

Coppicing had revealed a difference of opinion about how the Heath should be managed, possible only through the reduction of common rights, and I was curious to discover how the conservationists felt one might go about bridging that gulf. An environmental educator, L, who at times had worked with conservation groups at Mousehold, crafting the coppiced wood into objects on site. He reported that:

*Lots of people walked by, it wasn't a conversation of - "why are you cutting the trees?" - The halo comes up - "we're doing it to protect the heathland" - "yeah, but I like the trees" - And there's this sort of impasse that's reached, where they both disagree, and the dog walker walks on. Whereas, when I'm making a broom out of the birch that they're cutting down, it becomes - "What are you doing?" - "I'm making a broom." - "What are you making it from?" - "The birch" - And then, I talk about conservation, we're - "we're chopping it down, and blah blah blah, and with the stuff we've chopped down, we can make this with it, or make pegs with it, do you want to have a go?" - And they can have a go at making a peg. **And straight away, you've got a common ground, not that antagonist approach to things.** (Emphasis mine).*

The practical work of crafting, for L, serves a dual purpose. At one level, it demonstrates that felling trees is not mere destruction; it is a practice that is generative, too. And, unlike the positive outcome of a thriving heathland ecosystem, a peg or a broom is a tangible, rather than abstract product; its benefits are immediate, rather than deferred. It takes butterfly transects and wildflower surveys to gauge the health of a heathland; craft objects can be held in the hand, and passers-by can "have a go" at making such things themselves. While the direct aftermath of most conservation work looks like devastation and its beneficial consequences aren't always apparent to everyone; crafting is enjoyable to watch and its products can be created and appreciated at once.

But L is also drawing attention to another, deeper process at work. The ideologies of conservation – which support the felling of trees explicitly to preserve heathland species – run into trouble when they meet those whose concerns differ. The felling of trees for conservation purposes is treated by L, here, as a partisan issue, and thus a potential source of antagonism

between different constituencies. The broader resonance of this view amongst conservationists is evinced by the story about dogwalkers. Although they may believe their management practices to be pragmatically correct, conservationists are acutely aware that “conservation” itself is politically contested. Crafting, by contrast, is thought by L to cut across such different interests. It – ‘straight away’ – establishes *common ground* between all those involved. A metaphor that is particularly expressive here, as it highlights both the shared understanding that is established, and the material, “earthy” character of its establishment. Crafting, then, possesses a strongly *normative* dimension. Whereas the value of conservation and the value of dogwalking rest upon distinct interests that cannot, by themselves, engender to shared norms that include everyone who uses the Heath; the experience of making something establishes the opposite - *common ground* - a moral good that is compelling to everyone.

*

I’ve chosen to begin this chapter with three different narratives – historical accounts of resistance to enclosure; the opposition to heathland management shown by the general public, as described by land managers; and the role of crafting in cutting across the divided interests. All of them are set in a single tract of land on the edges of the Broads National Park. Each of them reveals attitudes and imaginaries, surrounding the management and use of that land, and its wider landscape. *The common* is one such theme, and is the one I seek to explore below. In recent social scientific scholarship, there has been an efflorescence of literature that uses the common or commons as an innovative theoretical tool, exploring political commons (Allmer, 2010; Hardt and Negri, 2009), urban commons (Blomley, 2008; Macfarlane and Desai, 2016), “paracommons” (Lankford, 2016), intellectual commons (Nonini, 2006; Strathern, 2003) and so on. Much of this literature deals with commons of quite a different kind from the sort of commons with which Robert Kett and his rebels were concerned in my first story; that is, common *land*. The contention of this chapter is that this classic sense of the commons - as a type of relationship between a defined group of people and distinct parts of the landscape - is an important symbol in English popular imaginaries about both society and the environment, and the prototypical understanding of shared resources in general. Like the sinkholes on Kett’s Hill, the trope of common ground belies many of the assumptions English people have about themselves. Opposing the ideological belief that Britain is simply a nation of individuals and

families³⁴, what we find is a more complex picture, in which collaboration, shared norms, and mutual understanding between individuals and beyond the intimate sphere of close kin are hoped for, forged, and collapse. As the other two stories from present-day Mousehold Heath – a common itself – demonstrates, such interactions can be fraught, and are often connected with the absence (and presence) of common sense³⁵. This serves to highlight the normative quality of common sense; something that this chapter will explore in detail. As L’s remarks express eloquently, the common also acts as a site of aspiration and moral creativity – a space where common ground can be plotted out, specifically through shared material experiences; materiality having been identified as a key medium through which commoning is expressed in recent discussions of the term (Jeffrey et al., 2012, p. 1249).

Pregnant with moral expectations and particular readings of history, the common carries considerable symbolic capital, even under the conditions of late capitalism - where the economic capital attached to usufructory right to land and resources is highly circumscribed, relative to the rights attached to private or public property relations (Amin and Howell, 2016, p. 2; Vasudevan et al., 2008, p. 1644). The nature of this symbolic capital will be explored in stages. Firstly, I will examine the role of the commons in the literature on Broadland, to establish the role of the commons as a feature of historical narratives about this region. As my first three stories indicate, these historical narratives suggest a connection between the common on the one hand, and the peasantry on the other. Secondly, I will consider the role of the

³⁴ A now infamous quote from former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, from an interview she gave to *Women’s Own* in 1987 - “I think we have gone through a period when too many children and people have been given to understand ‘I have a problem, it is the Government’s job to cope with it’ ... and so they are casting their problems upon society, and who is society? There are individual men and women and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first. It is our duty to look after ourselves and then after our neighbour ... and people have got the entitlements too much in mind without the obligations... **There is no such thing as society**” (Moore, 2010). This claim was made in a context of widespread academic scepticism about the usefulness of “society” as a concept, as evinced by the 1989 debate between Marilyn Strathern, Christina Toren, John Peel and Jonathan Spencer on the subject, that directly referred to Thatcher’s remarks (Ingold, 1996). This chapter is a testament to how controversial this denial of society was, and still is, in English society.

³⁵ I deal with the shades of meaning attached to the absence of common sense in detail in Chapter 4.

common in the management of contemporary Broadland. Thirdly, I will reflect on how the common helps us make sense of current trends in that management, in the employment structure that sustains it, and the public understanding of rural life. The aim of this ethnographic portrait of Broadland's pasts, present, and possible future will not be to make any historical claims. Rather, the goal is to treat the discussions about the past and future of Broadland as a space where the common's symbolic role and form is expressed and articulated.

With this ethnographic course laid out, I will draw upon the extensive anthropological literature on peasant societies, particularly Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the Kabyle household, to argue that the concept of the common has a doxic role in English thinking about social relations amongst certain groups, and that it acts as a "key symbol" in English social imaginaries in general (Bourdieu, 1977; Ortner, 1973). This helps explain an observation made by Macfarlane (1978) regarding the relatively minimal importance of the domestic unit in English rural life going back for centuries; part of his controversial argument for the deep roots of English individualism. In English society today, I suggest, it is not the household that structures how people think about "community", but rather the *parish* – and the set of ideas and institutions derived from it - in which common land, its individual inhabitants, and their common sense ideally exist in organic unity.

Learned voices: Common land in environmental histories of Broadland

The Broads' past is founded in the region's geology. Successive periods of inundation, erosion and glaciation have layered strata of silt, marl, loess, gravel and peat that compose the ground below Broadland; each of these types of earth, and the processes that created them, have had their own impact upon the human exploitation and management of the region over time.

As recently as the Roman Era, much of what is now the Broads was covered by an extensive estuary system – known as Gariensis – whose principal mouth stretched from Caister-on-Sea to Gorleston-on-Sea. Gariensis was an important waterway that allowed traders access to the East Anglian interior. But over time, longshore drift created a spit of shingle across the entrance to this stretch of water as sea levels fell, and gradually the waters of Gariensis disappeared, replaced by fen and alder carr inland, and saltmarsh closer to the sea. The port of Yarmouth was built on the spit, where it still stands to this day. Over the course of the Medieval Period, large amounts of peat – over 900 million cubic meters - were extracted in the region. Local monasteries led the extraction industry, particularly St Benet's Abbey, just

outside the town of Acle, overlooking the river Bure. The turbaries³⁶ were abandoned in the 13th century, due to a combination of rising sea levels that flooded the diggings³⁷, and the general shortage of labour in the wake of the Black Death. These flooded basins – the broads – were soon colonized by wildlife, and their anthropogenic origins were largely forgotten until the pioneering work of Joyce Lambert in the mid 20th century (George, 1992; Lambert and et. al, 1960).

Peat digging is not the only way in which the Broads have been significantly altered by human endeavor. The salt marshes have long been important as pasture, initially for sheep and horses, and then increasingly for cattle. Since the Middle Ages, tidal creeks and natural gullies were deepened, straightened, and sometimes entirely replaced with purpose-built ditches. The result was the creation of flat, open areas of wet grassland, crisscrossed by dykes and bounded by levees. Inland, fens and reed beds were also important for grazing, as well as for the extraction of a host of other products; marsh hay and marsh litter for livestock, reed and sedge for thatching, and flag iris and bulrush for mats, lanterns, and horse collars. Invasive tree species – like alder and willow – were cleared to maintain the conditions needed to produce these important resources. Even after the large-scale medieval turbaries fell into disuse, peat extraction continued on a smaller scale, creating areas of open water that could be readily colonized by reeds and sedges. The rivers and broads were important inland fisheries and conduits for commerce, as well as a habitat for waterfowl that were shot for their meat and plumage. Distinctive local sailing vessels called *wherries* carried coal, tar, wheat, barley, clay, timber, tiles, iron, millstones and other goods between Norwich and Great Yarmouth. To facilitate commercial travel, rivers were progressively dredged and straightened, new canals were cut, and trees were felled to allow the wind to fill the sails of the wherries without obstruction. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, windpumps were installed to further promote drainage. Although these were subsequently replaced by first diesel, then electric pumping stations, the windpumps have become one of the most characteristic parts of the region's built heritage (Matless, 2014, pp. 173–182).

³⁶ *Turbaries* are excavations where peat is extracted for fuel, and was one form of common right traditionally enjoyed by commoners.

³⁷ A particularly severe flood struck the region in 1287, when the sea broke into the Broads region – an event recorded by John of Oxnead of St Benet's Abbey, which sat by the side of the Bure (John, 1859).

Although the flood plains were heavily managed for agriculture and trade, they were largely devoid of permanent settlement. The main centers of population were instead located on the surrounding upland, where the risk of flooding was lower. Channels were often cut through the flood plain to villages that were built some distance away from the main course; allowing boat traffic access via parish *staithes*³⁸ (Dutt, 1903, p. 102). The upland soils surrounding these villages are some of the most fertile in the country, and while the flood plains were usually kept as reed beds or pasture, upland farms – then as now – supported arable crops like wheat, barley, root vegetables, salad greens, and herbs (Williamson, 1997, p. 103). For a thousand years the Broads, like the rest of Western Europe, had a largely peasant economy within which rural industries based on agriculture were fundamental (Dalton et al., 1972, p. 387; Redfield, 1969, p. 30; Whittle, 2000, p. 2). The landscape of East Norfolk was divided according to a manorial system, farmed by serfs and freemen, on behalf of the lord of the manor; who alone held allodial title (Stephenson, 1956). Crucial to this system of production were large areas of common land, owned by the manor but to which the ordinary inhabitants of the parish had certain common rights – particularly to gather fuel, to collect fodder, and to graze livestock (Rackham, 1997). Such common land was managed by manorial courts, chaired by the lord or his steward with verdicts being given by a jury of 12 local freemen. In the Broads, there were commons both on the upland, and in the river valleys – in both cases, they were vital for grazing, and in the upland included more open arable than other parts of the country (Patriquin, 2004).

Such large areas of common land are now rare, with most of it having been enclosed, broken up, and sold to private landowners. Williamson traces the “long and complex history” of enclosure in Broadland, pointing out that the process was both uneven and varied. It began slowly and piecemeal in medieval times, and speeding up over the centuries, finally reaching a peak with the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of 1797 – 1815, prompted by the high grain prices and an optimistic mood that encouraged capitalist farmers to invest in improvements, such as hedges, drainage pumps and embankments (Williamson, 1997, pp. 93–98). Parishes alongside the Southern Rivers were enclosed earlier and with less disruption than the Northern

³⁸ *Staithe* is a dialect word – common in the East of England, derived from the Old English *stæð*

- for a small quayside on a river or channel at which boat traffic may dock. Historically these were used in the Broads for commercial purposes, but are nowadays more often used by pleasure craft.

Rivers, for example, because of differences in the soils there. In the north, the upland soils were more fertile, while the lowlands were peat, rather than silt. This diminished both the incentive to enclose amongst the local gentry in the north - as peatier soils were less susceptible to improvement than the siltier soils to the south – and also made it harder to build a general consensus to enclose amongst a large community of smallholders sustained by the fertile upland soil. As such, only once Parliamentary Enclosure made the process easier, were the Northern parishes enclosed (Williamson, 1997, p. 97). The relationship between “improvement” and enclosure is a straightforward one; the beneficiaries of Enclosure Acts would seek to make drastic modifications to the land they acquired in order to increase their profits – the most visible reminder of this in the Broads is the proliferation of drainage mills during this period – to recoup the costs of passing and implementing the Acts. By draining the land, the stocking levels of sheep and cattle could be increased, boosting productivity. Vast areas of fen, reedbed and marsh were drained – albeit unsuccessfully in many places (Bacon, 1993). But the direct impact of enclosure on the landscape was mitigated somewhat by the fact that many of the products of undrained fen, marsh, and reedbeds were still in demand. Peat was still a valuable fuel, marsh hay and litter were still important for raising animals, and reed and sedge were still important for thatching. The marshmen – those employed to manage the wetlands of the river valleys - still continued their work; what had changed was for whom they were labouring.

Over the course of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, however, the Broads was subject to a drastic shift in land use. The arrival of the railway – the Norwich to Yarmouth line was built in 1844, the Norwich to London line in 1849 – coincided with the popularizing of the Broads’ natural amenity by a number of Victorian travel writers, such as G. Christopher Davies, E. R. Suffling, and John Payne Jeannings (Williamson, 1997, pp. 155–156). Large numbers of visitors from across the country began to come to the Broads on holiday, with the renting of pleasure boats being particularly popular. Shooting began to take its toll on bird numbers, which had fallen so low that a slew of acts of parliament were passed to protect falling populations in 1880, 1894, and 1899, while the Society for the Protection of Birds – later to become the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds – was founded in 1889 (Moss, 2001, p. 270). Reductions in manpower during and after the First World War, as well as a sharp decline in demand for marsh hay and marsh litter due to the adoption of motor transport in cities, meant that many fens and reed beds were abandoned. Coal and gas had replaced peat; petrol and soy-feed replaced marsh hay and litter. Though the reed and sedge market continued for a time – thatch still being a common roofing material in many rural parts of East Anglia– the arrival of

cheaper, imported reed from Poland has put even these industries under considerable pressure. Reed-cutters today must supplement their income with other jobs, while the majority have left the trade altogether. Once unmanaged, the fens, reed and sedge beds were colonized by alder and willow carr, that now covers large parts of Broadland. With the introduction of the Common Agricultural Policy and the productivist mentality of post-war European agriculture, many farmers sought to deep drain the grazing marshes on their estates, and plough them up. The changes in the upland were subtler. The inefficiencies of un-mechanised subsistence agriculture created “space for nature” as a matter of course – the wide margins at the edges of fields, so beloved of grey partridge, were kept as space to turn horse-drawn ploughs, for example. This meant that, prior to the 20th century, biodiversity was a by-product of, rather than a countervailing concern to, rural productivity (Cocker, 2008). With the introduction of modern, mechanized agriculture in the Broads, such inefficiencies were removed, and biodiversity began to decline (Moss, 2001, p. 161). While the number of people employed in managing the landscape fell, the number of people living in the catchment increased substantially, with Norwich and the surrounding villages having steadily increased in size since the 19th century – populated by an ever-increasing number of retirees, or tertiary-sector workers, who often commuted into Norwich or London for work.

This process of intensification – in terms of tourism, farming and residential development - has had a significant impact across the entire Broads catchment. The introduction of industrial fertilizers, combined with erosion caused by motorboats, and effluent from sewage treatment works catering to a booming human population led to a significant increase in the amount of sediment, phosphorus and nitrogen entering the Broads. This created the conditions³⁹ for eutrophication; and the once crystal clear waters rapidly became turbid, and the once gentle, reedy shallows eroded away (Ewans, 1992; Moss, 2001).

These various “crises” came to a head in the 1970s (Matless, 2014, pp. 183–190). Until this period, responsibility for the management of the Broads was distributed between a wide

³⁹ As Moss (2001) has argued, the increase in nitrogen (from agricultural waste) and phosphorus (from treated sewage) did not by themselves lead to the loss of the Broads’ water clarity – indeed, in the early 20th century, these nutrients caused the existing populations of water plants to grow rather better. Rather, elevated concentrations of these nutrients simply made it more likely that eutrophication would result. Once the eutrophicated state was triggered – which, Moss contends, was a result of the sudden collapse in the population of zooplankton that predate upon algae - it has been extremely difficult to reverse.

range of different agencies – the Great Yarmouth Port and Haven Commission (GYPHC) held jurisdiction over navigation for example, while Anglian Water monitored and enforced water quality, while the various Local Authorities were responsible for planning (Matless, 2014). Following two studies documenting the ecological decline of Broadland – one by the Nature Conservancy Council⁴⁰ published in 1967, another by the Norfolk Naturalists Trust (now the Norfolk Wildlife Trust) published in 1976 – a consortium of representatives from different local authorities was set up in 1978 to improve the condition of the region (The Broads Authority, 2014). The new non-statutory authority drew up a restoration plan, and built links with a variety of local stakeholders. One of the first major tests of the Authority was when the Halvergate Fleet and Acle Marshes Internal Drainage Board (IDB) applied to the Ministry of Agriculture for a major grant to deep drain some 2,024 hectares of grazing marsh, that would then be put under plough. The Authority objected to this and subsequent proposals to convert areas of grazing marsh to arable, citing concerns over the impact upon biodiversity. To encourage farmers and landowners to continue traditional forms of marshland management, the Broads Authority, together with the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Countryside Commission put together a programme that paid landowners to farm the area in environmentally sensitive ways, launched in 1985 – the first such initiative anywhere in Britain. This in turn led to the Halvergate Marshes being designated the UK's first Environmentally Sensitive Area in 1987. After five years, the Countryside Commission reviewed the performance of the Authority, and concluded that a single body should be constituted with sufficient powers and resources to manage the entire Broadland landscape. This led in turn to the passing of The Norfolk and Suffolk Broads Act 1988 (UK Government, 1988), which invested the Authority with the same status as Britain's National Parks (Ewans, 1992).

The Broads Authority has continued to pursue its objectives since that time, and celebrated its 25th anniversary during my fieldwork. Its current strategic priorities include fostering an integrated approach to the management of the entire catchment, improving efforts to conserve the region's built heritage, promoting tourism, and leading local adaptations to climate change (The Broads Authority, 2013).

⁴⁰ The Nature Conservancy Council and the Countryside Commission were amalgamated into Natural England in 2006. Like its predecessors, Natural England is a non-departmental public body that is responsible for the preservation and improvement of England's natural environment.

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The contours of environmental change laid out above are agreed upon within the academic literature on Broadland. But as this canon includes naturalists (Martin George and Brian Moss), social geographers (David Matless and Martin Ewans), and landscape historians (Tom Williamson and Keith Bacon) there is a spectrum of opinion beyond the generalities sketched out above. One of the areas of most strenuous disagreement – also one of the most relevant issues when thinking about the common – is how the socio-economic changes over Broadland’s history can best be characterized, particularly with regard to how these long-term changes relate to the damage to the Broads’ ecology over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries. Competing narratives of social and ecological change have emerged, all told through particular readings of the landscape. To put it another way, the creation of man-made lakes through peat extraction, the drainage of estuarine areas, followed by the near-collapse in Broadland’s biodiversity, the eutrophication of its waterways, and the intensification of farming and development in the Broads all attest to the fact that Broadland society has changed significantly over the centuries. Where scholars disagree is in terms of how best to characterise these changes, in terms of wider trends in English society.

Martin Ewans’ emotively titled *The Battle of the Broads* (1992) advances one particular model. He suggests that, between the medieval excavation of the Broads and the early 20th century, there existed what he dubs “The Marshland Economy”. For Ewans, the original pattern of land use described above – a combination of grazing marsh, fen, and open water, producing fish, waterfowl, peat, reeds and other materials - was responsible for creating a patchwork of habitats and landforms that supported the Broads’ unique ecology. He points to the vast catches of wildfowl and fish reported by 18th and 19th century writers as evidence for the thriving biota that such “traditional” land management was able to sustain (Ewans, 1992). For Ewans, “if one had to characterize in a single word the traditional way of life of the people of the Broadland marshes and villages, that word would be ‘self-reliance’. It is true that in a primitive sense of the term they ran a market economy, in that they sold their labour, produce and artefacts, often over long distances, and in return purchased many of the necessities of everyday life. But most villages of any size had a variety of trades within their community.” (1992, p. 25). This variety of local expertise was nourished by a landscape that provided a wealth of different raw materials close at hand. Even if commerce was a feature of traditional Broadland life, Ewans

would argue that its influence was initially only slight. And so, ‘it was only with the improvement of communications with the outside world and the immense increase in mobility of people and goods that the traditional Broads Economy began to break down.’ (1992, p. 25). This depiction of Broadland society – as largely static, in harmony with nature, and remote from the concerns and pressures of wider English society, yet doomed to be ultimately overcome by them – clearly owes much to the romantic descriptions of rural life authored by earlier pseudo-ethnographers of Edwardian Broadland, such as Arthur Patterson (Tooley, 1985), William Dutt (Dutt, 1903) or Richard Lubbock (Lubbock, 1845), and or photographers like Peter Henry Emerson (Emerson, 1885) or William Henry “Eugenia” Finch (Austin et al., 2011). Reflecting prevailing attitudes in British folklore studies at the time (Bronner, 1984), and in Boasian anthropology (Albright et al., 2002, p. 46) as well as invoking the recurring ethnographic trope of the “isolated rural community” (Rapport, 1993, pp. 32–33), the prevailing aim of such work was to document Broadland’s “traditional ways” – understood as being both largely static, and highly parochial – before they disappeared in the face of inexorable modernization, of which enclosure is a critical feature. Emerson, for example, concluded grimly that “when the land shall all be built upon and enclosed, and the peasant is no more, then may old England go grovel before the world” (Emerson, 1893, p. 27).

An alternative prospect is advanced by Tom Williamson, in *The Norfolk Broads: A Landscape History* (1997). *Contra* Ewans, Williamson is critical of attempts to invoke “tradition” as an analytical tool, arguing that environmental change has been pretty much a constant in the Broads, reflecting complex interactions between societal, economic, and environmental factors that are all in a permanent state of flux. For Williamson, tradition is a trope, that plays an important, but often quite negative role in both public policy and popular discourse - “the Broadland which we enjoy today is not some timeless entity but an amalgam of numerous phases of development, many of no great antiquity. Once the complexity of history is thus denied, ‘tradition’ becomes a guiding principle in landscape management but, unquestioned and undefined, this term is rapidly emptied of whatever meaning it once possessed, and the real world of life and labour is forced to masquerade as historical pastiche” (Williamson, 1997, p. 164). He argues that even “aberrant” features associated with the “decline” of Broadland – such as the increasing size of Broadland villages, riverside chalets, and other developments supporting tourism – are as much part of the landscape as anything else, and that many of the features of Broadland that are treasured today – such as wind pumps, easily navigable rivers, or even the broads themselves – are the products of industrial

exploitation that would, when they were first created, have horrified people today. The creation of common land as part of the manorial system, and its eventual enclosure as peasant agriculture faded away, is for Williamson but one thread in the diverse tapestry of Broadland's landscape history.

Such criticisms of the traditionalist position are echoed by Brian Moss (2001), in the postscript of his liminology of Broadland. *The Broads: The People's Wetland* (2001) is dedicated to a causal analysis of ecological decline in Broadland – with a particular focus upon eutrophication. In the postscript, he presents two, alternate visions of the future of this landscape – one dystopian, one utopian. In the former, Moss envisions a sequence of events where the Broads Authority is replaced by a private company, that turns the Broads themselves into a leisure space reserved for the very wealthy. Sea-level rise is kept back through embankments, wild animal and plant populations are artificially preserved through genetic manipulation and intensive husbandry, and local communities are replaced by Authority employees dressed in period costume (Moss, 2001, p. 350). The wider British landscape, meanwhile, is consumed by ever greater intensification – of industry, agriculture, and urban development. Moss' utopian alternative assumes a global shift toward an economic system where costs reflect environmental impact, rather than exchange value. This provides a much-needed boost to primary and secondary industry in Broadland (cast as a more sustainable alternative to global resource flows), which in turn prompts a return to forms of land management that support greater biodiversity (Moss, 2001, p. 356). The Halvergate triangle and the Upper Thurne valley are left to the sea, providing habitats for migrating birds and space for boating and watersports, while the rest of the Broads are managed to meet both human and non-human needs through local industry. Adopting an imagined retrospective, Moss goes on to say that “because Broadland had now become a working landscape again, there was much to be seen and a real sense of continuity with the past, which had, paradoxically, been interrupted in the doldrum years between 1960 and 2025. Then its management had largely been one of frantic attempts to preserve items of interest against forces that were inexorable and destructive” (Moss, 2001, p. 360).

Although Moss here confines these disruptive forces to the period from late 20th to the early (and imagined) 21st century, other historical accounts and events draw attention to conflicts over resources reaching over much longer timescales. They also highlight the relationship between those who work in the Broads, and commons – something integral to

Robert Kett and Geoffrey Litster's rebellions. These rebellions were resistance to a trend of increasing elite control of the landscape, a trend that intensified over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, referred to as the *Enclosure Movement*. Francis Pryor defines enclosure as "a way of partitioning the landscape to indicate that particular fields or farms are owned by certain individuals or estates, who generally possess written title to them, in the form of deeds. Enclosed land, unlike Open Fields (sic), commons, heaths and moors, cannot be owned by several people" (2011, p. 380). Enclosures organized by local landowners – known as enclosure by agreement – took place across wide swathes of the British Isles before the Enclosure Movement, although much of the Midlands, the South and East Anglia – such as the North Rivers - remained unenclosed until the passage of some 4,000 parliamentary acts passed between 1750 and 1830 (Pryor, 2011, p. 465). These acts sped up enclosure considerably, and formalized the process of enclosure by agreement, appointing commissioners to survey each parish, ensuring that public rights of way were maintained and that smaller landowners were not penalized. In practice, however, the Enclosure Movement concentrated landholdings into fewer, larger estates, especially as the petition to enclose only needed the support of those who owned the majority of the land in a parish, not the majority of the population, or even a majority of the landowners (Pryor, 2011, pp. 465–468). The Enclosure Movement ensured that "many manorial commons were converted into private freeholds, fenced, intensively stocked and often ploughed up by their new owners (Williamson, 1997, 2000). Numerous scholars have framed this in terms of destructive class or colonial warfare; Polanyi called the enclosure of the medieval open field system "a revolution of the rich against the poor" with the consequence that "the fabric of society was being disrupted" (Durie, 2011; Polanyi, 2001, p. 35; Wright, 2016, p. 90). That fabric is often shown in a positive, communitarian light, that regardless of its accuracy, is revealing of the attitude of the historians who describe it. Patriquin, for example, states that "this [common, open field] system meant that farmers had to cooperate with each other extensively. And in a communal environment, there was little room for individuals to force changes in agricultural techniques on the village. Alterations could only be made if they met with the approval of most members of the community...The community, through the manor court, established substantial bylaws with penalties to maintain efficiency and fairness." (Patriquin, 2004, p. 202). The precise contours of how this communal parish system was dismantled have been mapped by a number of Marxist historians, such as Robert Allen (1992), and E. P. Thompson (1991). This view is perhaps best characterized by Thompson, who in the same breath punctures any romantic idea that commons management was some sort of primitive communism, saying that: "Common right, which was in lax terms coterminous with

settlement, was local right, and hence was also a power to exclude strangers. **Enclosure, in taking the commons away from the poor, made them strangers in their own land.**” (Thompson 1991: 184, emphasis mine), referring to enclosure elsewhere as “plain enough case of class robbery” (Frake, 1996, p. 101; Thompson, 1980, p. 237; also Vasudevan et al., 2008, pp. 1641–1642). Ewans describes the aftermath of this estrangement in terms of mass emigration from rural communities (Ewans, 1992, p. 12). The injustice and anger caused by enclosure was not just in retrospect; it helped fuel the rise of Chartism, workers movements, and other left-wing political projects, in the increasingly crowded and dirty cities (Miller and Ayer, 1981, p. 379; Rosenman, 2015), a response to what Karl Marx famously described as “primitive accumulation” (Marx, 2000, pp. 521–523). Moss also stresses the harm that the enclosure and agricultural improvement associated with primitive accumulation did to the situation of the rural poor, echoing the grievances of Robert Kett: “The enclosures, though they had increased production by encouraging landowners to invest in new methods and machinery and to drain wet land, at first brought work to the glut market of labourers at the end of the wars, but then reduced them to servitude. Common rights - gleaning the fields, common pasture on the fens, free fuel and fish - disappeared. Poaching became a way of survival and was severely put down by Game Laws” (Moss, 2001, p. 162). Drawing on the work of Glassman (2006), Irvine et al contend that enclosure can productively be viewed as a continuing process in the English landscape, where “children find little place for themselves within the designation of spaces for development and of spaces for nature; in as much as they experience ‘naturedeficit’ it is precisely because they find themselves in the midst of a land-use conflict. Such conflicts reveal the ongoing character of enclosure in already enclosed spaces, particularly in the wake of the encouragement of housing development and a new commodification of the countryside for leisure... Yet, the rich examples of reappropriation we have found in our East Anglian research suggest that inherence and inclusion in local environments matter to children.” (Irvine et al., 2016, p. 949). In many respects, the utopian vision that Moss constructs constitutes a manifesto for the reappropriation of Broadland by restoring the character of the Broads as a “working landscape” to which the entire local community had clear rights; an ideological move that would allow it to live up to Moss’ titular epithet for it as “The People’s Wetland”.

Williamson’s attentiveness to the complexity of the area’s landscape history is taken up by David Matless (2014), whose cultural geography stresses both the multivocality of the region, and the intimate connection between culture and landscape – within which an

interweaving of different narratives in art, poetry, photography and literature catches animals, plants, people and technologies in the wetland warp and weft – “Parallel regional matters of hydrology and identity shape Broadland, whether in the maintenance of grazing marsh as an iconic regional landscape, contests over rights of navigation, or the defence of fen and reedbed as home for regional fauna and flora, against both human reclamation and natural succession” (Matless, 2014, p. 4). Matless tracks the unfolding of discussions around personal conduct, animals, plants, causes of ecological decline, and much-loved local icons; wherries and wind pumps (2014, pp. 5–6). Of particular relevance to our discussion here is Matless’ third chapter, in which he undertakes an analysis of local norms tracing the often vituperative disagreements between different groups in the region (Matless, 1998, p. 28, 2014, pp. 55–96). One such normative trajectory that emerged during the early 20th century, when “Broadland discovery [as a literary genre] was preoccupied with authentic regional conduct, on the part of inhabitant as well as visitor, working long-established conventions of seeing the rural worker (for Emerson the ‘peasant’) as both the bedrock of England and something internally exotic in a modernising county, at once English essence and internal other to urban modernity... Working lives, customs and dialect signalled cultural value, though their pursuit could be for varied political ends and different cultural effect.” (2014, pp. 64–65). From this perspective, as Matless goes on to explore, the damage done to the Broadland landscape in the later 20th century was seen as a consequence of poor conduct by visitors - “Eutrophication... suggested Broadland destroyed by excess, matching for some an equivalently excessive post-war human conduct, abundance all round destroying the region.” (2014, p. 184). As Matless describes, this is only one of many collections of “voices” that speak about Broadland, but it is the one that is most relevant to our present discussion – because it claims that the valorous, ecologically-sound work of Emerson’s peasants, proper to the Broads as a region with a common set of norms, was displaced by the damaging presence of tourists, who had no real connection to the landscape, nor any common sense of how they should behave there.

Working Voices: “Bad Farming”, Tidyness and the Balance of Contemporary Rural Life in Norfolk

Amongst the reed beds one sweltering August day, I was helping rake up cut reed with my line-manager, O. O had worked in rural industries his entire career, having begun as a stockman before transferring into conservation. In addition to being very knowledgeable, he was happy to talk about what he knew, so our time together was an excellent opportunity to collect material

for my thesis. On that occasion, we were talking about what motivates people to volunteer on nature reserves. O believed that people derive a sense of meaning from work, and that without that they tended to become listless. Work was, therefore, vital to people's self-esteem. O explained further, as he leant on his muck fork, that it was for this reason that so many retired people seek out voluntary work after they retire; "they want something to do". O referred to one of the volunteers he'd worked with as example – having retired from the police force, with a good pension, and no need to work, this man had nevertheless got a job with Norfolk Wildlife Trust, did a degree in Conservation Science, then got a job working with the RSPB. But O also felt that this drive to seek meaning did not prove to be sufficient encouragement for people to work if they didn't need to do so at all. People were, in O's view, fundamentally selfish and lazy - these being part of "human nature". It was only the threat of destitution, enforced by the rule of law, that kept economic life going. Within a short time, O had voiced two prevailing, somewhat contradictory, assumptions about human nature that I found to be highly prevalent in my field site: on the one hand, that human beings feel an inherent desire to be "productive", and that humans need to be encouraged to work, otherwise they would remain idle⁴¹.

Similar themes emerged in a discussion I had with the aristocratic owner, R, of a large estate in Broadland. For him, a culture of reciprocal obligation was what rural life was all about; something that he felt policymakers and urbanites couldn't fully appreciate. Driving past hedges and copses of trees that sheltered feeding stations for pheasants, we toured the fertile upland, overlooking the floodplain of the river below. He described the maintaining of this landscape in terms of "public duty" – trimming hedges was something that he wasn't paid to do, but "just did". But there were limits to how far this public-spiritness could extend, and where self-interest would intervene; "At the end of the day, I am running a business.". As we drove by a field, we saw two grey partridges in a fine example of their habitat: broad banks of long grass, with standing perennial weeds in the field itself. My host referred to these wide field margins euphemistically as "bad farming": farmers seeking to maximize productivity today would normally plough them up to make space for more crops, and wouldn't allow weeds

⁴¹ Although O treated these positions simple observations, obvious to anyone who works with other people, they both have a life as particular, and entirely arguable theoretical positions within social science. Both Marxist and Hobbesian views of human nature here have entered into the popular discourse of English society, to the point that people view both as simple statements of fact – often, as O demonstrates, the same people.

to grow in the open field over winter. Providing financial incentives for such measures is a key element of European Union-funded Agri-Environment Schemes, a fact that merely serves to underscore the norm of maximizing the area under the plough (Hackett and Lawrence, 2014, p. 8). An estate-owner, C, with whom I spoke on a later date agreed – saying that many farmers had a strong desire to “tidy up” their fields, to meet certain common standards of what a well-managed landscape should look like (See Figure 7).

Figure 7 – A depiction of weeds being allowed to grow on a harvested wheat field. *Though great for wildlife, such practices are widely rejected by many farmers in Britain.*



These vignettes capture many important, yet tangled features of rural industry – particularly farming - in England today. Firstly, the desire to increase profitability by ploughing larger areas and boosting crop yields – sacrificing one sort of margin for another – reflects the prominence of capitalist logic within contemporary British agriculture. The farmers I spoke to, like R, would emphasise that although they cared for the environment, often very deeply, they were ultimately “running a business” – which came with certain financial considerations. Self-interest, as O pointed out, was seen as fundamental. Burton emphasizes the connection between the productivist ethos of “good farming” and the desire to maximize the nation’s food supply (Burton, 2004, pp. 195–196), but the farmers I spoke to stressed their status as individual “businessmen” in equally strident terms –the two concerns are, I would suggest, mutually

reinforcing. There was a spectrum of opinion, with some landowners stating emphatically that stewardship of the rural landscape was more important than profit; for others the bottom line was the bottom line. But for all those involved in managing the land, getting the margins right mattered.

The second point is that intensive land management isn't solely a matter of economics; the concern for "tidiness" reveals a distinctly aesthetic – even moral - dimension. As Burton observes, "For many farmers [productivism] represents a picture of good farming practice, displayed in a manner that enables the farmer to obtain social status and recognition amongst their peers⁴² as a 'good farmer' and to judge the credentials of others" (Burton, 2004, p. 208). Hall points out the connection of this attitude to the broader policy environment, saying that "for over thirty years, the CAP has generated (and subsequently reinforced) **deeply internalised norms of 'good farming' that underpin how farmers see the world and feel about their contribution to society...** this worldview is based on internalised moral responsibilities of producing necessary food for hungry people" (Burton, 2004; Hall, 2008, p. 25, emphasis mine). Although this disposition was ingrained in the farming community by the postwar domestic policy agenda and the Common Agricultural Policy (Burton et al., 2008; Dobbs and Pretty, 2001, p. 2), it has old roots. Richard Irvine and Mina Gorji have described how a similar aesthetic was also a crucial discursive trope in the drainage of the Fens – the Protestant valorization of labour motivating a desire amongst landowners to make the "idle" wetland into productive fields, that remains compelling for contemporary farmers who are critical of re-wetting (Irvine and Gorji, 2013).

These two points are important, because they indicate the ways in which land managers – whether they are conservationists like O, owners of estates like R, or farmers like C or those studied by Burton – situate themselves in different positions along the axis of self-interested individualism and shared, *common* norms. Although farmers regarded themselves as individuals, the fact that "good farming" is tied to collectively-understood physical signs left by working the landscape in certain normative ways underscores the point made by L above – that working together is deemed to be generative of normative social relations, and thus ends

⁴² Although in the minimal sense this includes other farmers, farm workers, and landowners, it could also be expanded to include long-term or knowledgeable "locals" who were involved in agriculture indirectly.

up having this effect. Farmers, therefore, do not readily conform to an ideal type of capitalist entrepreneurs, but are informed by a range of dispositions, inculcated through their experience of being observed, and observing, the effect of other farmers' labours on the landscape. Even if they could earn more from an agri-environment scheme, for example, by behaving differently, the power of collective work is such that farmers' habitus mandates "tidiness" instead.

Rural sociologists emphasize the importance of habitus to farming, through which work "etched" on the landscape through practice in turn reinforces that habitus (Burton, 2012, p. 54; Hall, 2008, p. 36). I will return to this below, but here it is sufficient to juxtapose these observations with L's comments above – that working together sustains common ground. These collective assumptions about what "good farming" involves clearly do not displace self-interest or individualism. The overriding impression I had was that most land managers saw their working lives as being a balance between these two competing, yet equally natural interests. A dairy farmer I spoke to, S, made this explicit when I visited her business. She ran a small dairy farm with her father and other members of her family. Faced by falling milk prices, they had struggled to make a living with their small herd, and so S had decided to raise the price they could expect for their product by using their milk to create artisan cheese, which she now successfully distributed to farmers' markets and department stores across the country. Despite possessing strongly entrepreneurial qualities, S repeatedly emphasized to me the importance of maintaining a "balance" – between the "traditions" her father embodied, and business concerns. The essence of the balance, as S saw it, was the question – "Are we having a nice time?" – "we" meaning the humans, the animals, and the land. This balance was inimical to profiteering (which would cause the land or the animals to suffer) but also did not sit easily with the regulatory burden established by public bodies. Of the Common Agricultural Policy – of which more will be said in Chapter 5 - she remarked "How common it is, I just don't know."

Concerned voices: Current trends in Britain's rural economy

The comments I've discussed above were made at a time when rural industry in England was undergoing dramatic changes, that have direct implications for the ideal of a balanced relationship between self-interest on the one hand, and the common on the other. At the time of writing, a tiny proportion of English people – even in rural communities – work directly in

rural industries: just 1.3% of the UK population in 2012 (UK Government, 2012, p. 10), part of an ongoing pattern of “labour shedding” from the rural economy (Lobley et al., 2005, p. iii), and consolidation of rural businesses. I was shocked by how few farmers I met, even at the Norfolk Farming Conference and the Anglia Farmers Tent at the Norfolk Show. A great many “rural” people who I met were not farmers at all, but waged professionals - contractors, land agents, or estate managers – employed to farm land with which they had no long-standing relationship, on a purely contractual basis. Many were members of families who had once farmed small estates they’d owned, but had subsequently sold, usually retaining a small fleet of agricultural equipment that they would use for contracting; or they had retained ownership of the land, but rented it to another, more commercial farming operation. Since the 1960s, more and more farms, particularly small family-owned operations, have been aggregated into fewer, larger estates (see Strang, 2004, p. 14). Since 2000, for example, the proportion of English farms below 10 hectares fell from 33.8% to 12.5%, while the proportion of farms above 100 hectares increased from 18.3%, to 39% (Winter and Lobley, 2016, p. 20). In their 2016 study of a single West Country parish, Winter and Lobley found that of 26 farms which were operating in the district in 1941, 16 had ceased to exist - having sold their land to other operators. Only one of the remaining 10 farms remains a family operation, with the others either letting out their land to other farmers, being run as “hobby” farms by wealthy owners, or have become dependent upon non-farming earnings (2016, p. 25). Although small family farms remained a robust component of land management and rural habitation into the 21st century (Lobley and Potter, 2004, p. 508), it is also equally clear that rentiership is becoming progressively more important, posing distinct challenges for smaller operators (Winter and Lobley, 2016, pp. 34–35). As a result, many small landowning families – whose ancestors might have initially benefitted from enclosure – have over time followed the rural poor of the 18th and 19th centuries, off the land and into the wage economy, or even out of agriculture altogether. Such concentrations of landownership aren’t inimical with “tradition”. In the Halvergate Marshes, for example, most of the land is rented by graziers, who bid for summer lets at an annual auction in March at The Bell Inn in Saint Olaves, beside the river Waveney – a practice that, in its exercise, had become something of a tradition. According to a local historian I spoke to, Norfolk had “always been a county of big estates”, and so patterns of renting and waged employment in rural industry are by no means a novelty.

But even the traditional landed estates are not unaffected by the present economic trends. One estate employee explained that “the generation running these estates now mostly

have business interests in London and elsewhere. The estate is, that landed tradition, they go there for the shooting season, they might be there once a month, it's not necessarily their main residence – doesn't necessarily make them absentee landlords. They will have staff in place to run their estates... the overarching strategy is [the owner's], but the guy at the top does not do it himself... There are very few that have inclination to go to college and do the training, to give them the capabilities to run their estates. So they pay someone else to do it." Large estate owners of the present generation, like R, retain a deep sense of personal commitment to the management of their land, and occupy a strategic role within their businesses – unlike true "absentee" landlords, who demonstrate neither. However, it is important to note that they are already heavily reliant on other business interests, often pursued by other members of their family. As my informant went on to explain, the close relationship between estate owners and their estate was likely going to change for future generations as a result; "I think, if not the generation immediately coming up, then certainly the one below them... [sighs] the cynic in me thinks things will change... You won't have the same personal interest, that personal investment in these estates." The children and grandchildren of the current generation of gentry and aristocrats simply have different aspirations to their fathers and grandfathers.

The effects of these shifting expectations – even after a family has sold its holdings or moved off the land - emerged during a conversation I had with Brian Grint, a local historian from the Broadland town of Acle, who was born and brought up in the nearby village of Halvergate. Brian possesses a vast amount of knowledge about the local area, including the marshes of the Halvergate Triangle (see Grint 1989; Grint 1984), and offered to give me a tour of Acle and answer any questions I might have about the history of the surrounding landscape. Brian was a leading figure within Acle's Historical Society, and explained the past of various local landmarks, old and new – the church, the crossroads at the centre of town, and the site of an old market where cattle were once bought for grazing out on the marshes, but where a Budgens now stood. The Historical Society had added various new features, too – including a wooden causeway built by local families, and other footpaths. Brian was justly proud of what he had achieved – when I asked him if he felt the Society had been successful in encouraging interest in Acle's past, his response was unequivocal: "Absolutely".

By this point in my fieldwork, I had read about the disappearance of the marshmen – the cadre of rural workers who tended the wetlands of the Broads in the 19th century. I asked Brian where the marshmen's descendants were now, and he pointed proudly at himself and said: "They're here!". Although the marshmen's way of life had declined, their descendants

still remained in the area, he went on, albeit in different professions. Later, Brian said that his daughter – a photographer and producer – was based in Norwich. Although she loved the countryside, he told me she planned on moving to North Norfolk, if and when she left the city.

Brian's family history, I suggest, is illustrative of the changes affecting rural people across Broadland. In our collective imaginaries at least, Brian's ancestors were deeply rooted in the local landscape, having even leant their surnames to the marshes they once tended⁴³. Brian himself, however, took work as a film producer, and moved from his natal village of Halvergate to the nearest town of Acle. His connection with the local area was expressed not through the tending of the land, but through his personal interest in local history, pursued in his spare time – the majority of his working life being spent elsewhere. His daughter relocated to Norwich, travels the world for work, and has no plans to return to Broadland. Though the connection Brian had to "his marshes" was no less strongly felt for all this, the economic transformation in a matter of generations is nonetheless profound, and not everyone was as unperturbed as he was by these changes. As Anderson points out, "temporariness forms a barrier that significantly impacts on the type of interactions that occur between working holidaymakers and long-term residents." (Anderson, 2016, p. 6) – a dynamic that also applies, I suggest, when comparing recent arrivals to those whose families have lived in a place for generations, and interactions with the landscape as well as with one another (see also Strang, 1997, p. 288). As with the owners of landed estates, those personal connections are felt to be disappearing amongst younger generations, whose aspirations are tied to a far less local, and increasingly individuated set of priorities. The balance between the common and the self-interested individual is continuing to shift.

Even for those who remained working the land, this shifting of the balance had profound effects. My contributors stressed the extent to which farms themselves have been forced to diversify; becoming commercial businesses first and foremost, with farming being only part of an extensive portfolio. J and D – two brothers with a family history in the agricultural sector – began as solo farmers, before setting up a partnership in the North Rivers.

⁴³ Brian's grandmother Phoebe was descended from the Howard, Kerrison, and Mutton families – Howard

Level, Kerrison Level, and Mutton Level are all marshland areas in the Broads, each of which was drained by a single mill, tended by the family after which the level and its mill were named.

This partnership both farmed its own estate, while also providing contracting services for other landowners. This change, J and D said, was typical of the direction of agricultural sector as a whole⁴⁴, as it allowed farmers to benefit from economies of scale, and boosted efficiency. The meteoric rise of Anglia Farmers, an agricultural bulk purchasing group based near Norwich, also reflects this trend. Formed in 2003 from a merger of two, older buying groups, Anglia Farmers now purchases 10% of the UK's total farming inputs, and has an annual turnover of £250 million. Its members, the Chief Executive Clarke Willis proudly told me, farm 60% of Norfolk. In addition to the very existence of this purchasing group being a case of consolidation, Clarke also mentioned other important trends in the sector that indicated the commercialization of farming. Supply chains to consumers were becoming shorter and more integrated, with supermarkets showing a greater concern for maintaining their sources of key products than previously. Clarke also felt that most farmers, at least in Norfolk, would welcome the disappearance of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), as it “distorts the market”.

These trends – towards consolidation of land ownership into progressively larger holdings; a reduction in the size of the rural labour force; commercial consolidation due to market forces; and a gradual lessening of interest in land management by land owners – was observed by almost everyone I spoke to. Certain authors and commentators – such as Kevin Cahill, or Carol Wilcox – have stressed the inequity of land ownership in the UK as an overlooked cause of contemporary social problems, that allows for the transfer of vast sums of money in the form of government subsidy to the country's wealthiest citizens (Adams, 2011; Cahill, 2002). I would suggest that the inequity of land ownership is part of a much larger, cultural change. Fewer and fewer people are participating directly in working the land; and what's more, the *nature* of that work is changing. Rather than being overseen by family farmers or by hereditary aristocrats, and performed by the majority of the local population, an increasing amount of rural work is being done by a small number of professionals, or volunteers motivated by personal interest. Rather than being a way of life, then, land management is becoming either a job, or a hobby, for an individually-interested few. Under such conditions, people draw upon their basic assumptions about the commons, community, and the countryside in order to make sense of how their lives and surroundings are changing, even if their daily

⁴⁴ Christopher Deane is particularly well-placed to make such an observation, being the group secretary of the local branch of the National Farmers Union (NFU).

practices are structured according to self-interested, individual, and often commercial interests. The gradual collapse of the proportion of the population involved directly in rural industries, and the professionalization of this sector, has meant that the knowledges attached to them have, in turn, started to retreat from popular consciousness. As one land agent, whose family were farmers, explained to me, this meant that fewer and fewer children gained an interest in agriculture as a career; in her words, “We’re losing our young people.”. These sentiments were echoed by D, who claimed that education had “missed out a whole generation of children” with respect to farming. As another farmer I spoke to put it, “the people who want to work on the land are either farmers sons, or they’re special needs.”. English agriculture today has become increasingly specialized and professionalized; a technical practice as remote from the working lives of most British people as particle physics, and just as poorly understood.

This was something Clarke Willis wanted to stress. Half-way through our interview Clarke asked me, with an air that would have been pointed if he wasn’t so personable: “How long is the supply chain for milk?” I glanced at the jug of milk on the table beside our cups of tea. I searched the air for numbers. “A week? Maybe less?” Clarke’s eyes sparkled with in triumph. “Four years! It takes about that long to rear a milker; it would take this long to restore our milk supply if all our cows disappeared!” Clarke had vigorously demonstrated the ignorance of urbanised, metropolitan folk like me about the basic matter of how one gets from field to fork, starting from scratch. Under Clarke’s leadership, Anglia Farmers has attempted to address this knowledge gap; organizing public outreach events like Open Farm Sundays. But the very fact that such events are deemed necessary indicates that a fundamental shift has taken place. What once was common knowledge – knowledge found through the work that everyone would do in daily life – has become much more specialist. This trend was perhaps highlighted best by my experiences engaging with people at the opposite end of the scale to the sort of businesses interviewed so far.

B and K, two members of a farming co-operative at which I worked, mused about how few British people felt attracted to the notion of “peasantry”. K contrasted this against the French attendees at Farm Hack – an event they had attended recently - who actively embraced their identity as a modern, rural peasantry – devoted to self-sufficiency, community, and sustainability. This lack of popular investment in agriculture was echoed by a farmer I spoke to, who had attempted to offer his expertise to a community-supported agriculture (CSA) project locally. But the experience had shocked him:

“I had to teach grown men to use a spade and dig a hole, and teach them how to use a hoe. I thought there would be queue of people wanting to help build things, make things, do things, and be involved with the infrastructure of a CSA, and there weren’t...”

“No?”

“Nope. They weren’t there. They’re not there.”

The lack of interest in Community Supported Agriculture, and the low level of skill amongst those who were interested, was claimed to be indicative of how rural, “traditional” culture was in a state of collapse. We see, in these words and anxieties, echoes of Emerson’s lament over the fate of the Broadland “peasant”.

These trends in the rural economy had broader, social consequences, that were frequently lamented by local people. Broadland’s position between the three large urban centres of Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft has meant that many villages here serve as “dormitories” for affluent commuters or second home buyers, while poorer families from urban areas are relocated to villages with social housing⁴⁵. One of my contributors, a former reedcutter, had to move away from his idyllic natal village of South Walsham in the Bure Valley due to rising house prices. He explained that Ludham – a more distant village to which his entire family had relocated – was better because it “still had a bit of a community.” Another contributor, a resident of the village of Reedham, pointed out that the majority of locals commuted to Norwich for work. She explained that “The village is quite split now... We have got what I call ‘proper Reedham people’ still, you know, generations that have been to this school, that we’ve still got here, but we’ve also got other, new families, because when they built new houses in the village here, they’re what they call social housing...” W, who lived in Southwold, complained bitterly that the pretty seaside town was almost completely dominated by Londoners buying second homes. Young families who had worked on local farms, she said, had been evicted from a row of little cottages on the outskirts, which had then been sold for apparently vast sums of money to incomers who were hardly ever there. The situation had

⁴⁵ “Social housing” is a class of housing stock, owned by councils or not-for-profit housing associations, that is more affordable than private ownership or renting.

grown so bad, W said, that at Christmas, she recalled whole streets where only a third of the houses were occupied. Local residents were keen to link this process by which local people were displaced from local housing to a “lack of community”. The ethos of mutual aid and communal sentiment invoked by R above was, in the eyes of many of those who lived in Broadland, lamentably absent. Just as rural industries are becoming increasingly integrated into the capitalist economy of Britain and being drastically consolidated as a result, so are the villages where its peasant workforce once lived becoming increasingly interconnected with the wider, urban-dominated housing market. Individuals and families from outside the area, be they wealthy commuters or the recipients of social housing, are depicted as threats to the ideal of village community, rooted in the local landscape that it manages.

Analysis: Work, Common Land and the Process of Enclosure in Broadland

The ethnographic survey I have provided above deals with three main types of material. The first – the Broadland literature composed by intellectuals – is concerned first and foremost with constructing narrative pasts about this landscape; how it was formed, managed, and came to be the way it is today. Following Matless, I would suggest that what emerges from these accounts are specific norms; with the work of rural labourers of the past being deployed as a standard against which other groups and forces – including modern selfish individualism - are judged. The second source – conversations I had with present-day rural people about their work – shows that work has a normative force for them too; inscribed in a tidy landscape with all the right margins. But we also find a more nuanced set of attitudes. The individual, here, is not inimical to this working ethos, but is something that must be held in balance with it. Both common norms and individual interest are seen as natural parts of rural life. But when we turn to the third set of materials; broader economic trends, and people’s expectations about what these trends mean for the future, we see that this balance between self-interest and common-ground is felt to be shifting in favour of the former.

There are various points of contact between these three sets of materials – particularly the scholarly literature with which I began - and anthropological perspectives on cultural life and the environment. “It’s complicated...” has been referred to as the anthropologist’s favourite answer to any given question (Kaplonski, 2015) – and this same sensitivity to the specific is a clear theme in Frake’s, Williamson’s and Matless’ writings. Matless’ approach – treating the cultural landscape of Broadland as a colloquy whose diverse meanings can be

traced by the attentive participant, is profoundly ethnographic, and clearly owes a considerable debt to the interpretive anthropology of Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner, albeit with a view to, in the words of Patricia Price, “track[ing] culture, instead of trying to cage it.” (Price, 2010). As a portrait of the cultural life of a watershed, Matless’ work has close parallels to Veronica Strang’s survey of the meaning of water in the Stour Valley (2004). My aim here, is to build upon Matless’ work by exploring the relationship of these cultural processes to economic and managerial processes that he neglects, but that Strang explores (2004, pp. 129–192). In criticizing the conservation movement’s protectionist agenda, Moss echoes similar concerns voiced by anthropologists, who have criticized the way in which national parks in colonial contexts have often been protected through the wholesale eviction of local populations (Robinson and Redford, 1991; West and Brechin, 1991). As with Ewans’ writing, and the salvage ethnography of Lubbock and Emerson, the more recent phase of environmental history of Broadland therefore intersects closely with wider concerns within anthropology. But here I’d like to focus upon a comparison of my material with the anthropology of peasant societies.

The anthropology of peasantries is helpful for two reasons. Peasants feature within the discussion about Broadland’s past, and so comparing these discussions to ethnographic descriptions of peasant societies is a logical step. Secondly, both the qualities attributed to Broadland’s peasants – that their work invokes a strong normative framework; and that through this work they are connected intimately with their surroundings – are key traits identified in peasant societies by anthropologists. This perspective on the peasantry is perhaps exemplified by Redfield, who states “one sees a peasant as a man who is in effective control of a piece of land to which he has long been attached by ties of tradition and sentiment. The land and he are parts of one thing, one old-established body of relationships. This way of thinking does not require of the peasant that he own the land or that he have any particular form of tenure or any particular form of institutional relationship to the gentry or the townsman... [only that] they have such control of the land as allows them to carry on a common and traditional way of life into which their agriculture intimately enters, but not as a business investment for profit.” (Redfield, 1969, pp. 27–28) Redfield stresses, here, that ownership is not what defines the peasant, but rather “control of the land”, i.e. the fact that they manage it. This close relationship gives the land an almost sacred significance in peasant societies (Macfarlane, 1978, pp. 23–24). But this distinctive, hallowed working relationship between peasants and the land is disrupted by the logic of the market: “It is the market, in one form or another, that pulls out from the compact social relations of self-contained primitive communities some parts of men’s

doings and puts people into fields of economic activity that are increasingly independent of the rest of what goes on in the local life. The local traditional and moral world and the wider and more impersonal world of the market are in principle distinct, opposed to each other, as Weber and others have emphasized. In peasant society the two are maintained in some balance; the market is held at arm's length, so to speak." (Redfield, 1969, pp. 45–46). The penetration of wage labour – so ubiquitous in Broadland rural industry today - "destroys the economic logic" of the peasant class, while industrialisation removes its "*raison d'être*" entirely (Franklin, 1971, p. 99–102.). Wolf and Lewis view the trajectory of peasant societies exposed to economic development similarly, although emphasising the role of private ownership, rather than wage labour, and the technology of the plow; "[in Mexico] once private ownership in land allied to plow culture is established in at least part of the community, the community tends to differentiate into a series of social groups, with different technologies, patterns of work, interests, and thus with different supracommunity relationships" (Lewis, 1951, pp. 129–157; Wolf, 1956, pp. 1070–1071). Dalton develops this point further, concluding that "perhaps one may sum up the economic changes that transform the peasantry during the late stage of development and modernization by saying that rural households and villages become more dependent upon market forces and governmental services external to the village. The *Gemeinschaft* qualities of local life carried over from the feudal period and early modernization are further weakened as villagers and villages become less and less isolated from urban and national life, and more and more dependent on their transactions with and participation in institutions outside the village" (Dalton et al., 1972, p. 397), a portrait of socio-economic change that resonates strongly with the experiences of those living in my fieldsite. This suggests that, from the perspective of the environmental historians of Broadland, the status of contemporary farmers and rural workers could be deemed that of "postpeasants" – people whose way of life has undergone a shift from that a "true" peasantry, under the influence of modernisation and capitalization (Gamst, 1974, p. 11).

Although they strive for a "balance" with market forces, as we have seen, the connection between common and market sensibilities is anything but "arms-length" in Broadland. Individual self-interest has become part of local "common sense" as David Harvey

would contend (2007, pp. 3, 116–117)⁴⁶. As with other “postpeasant” contexts (Barnes, 1954), despite the clearly capitalist nature of the English rural economy, we still see some distinctly peasant-like attitudes in certain 20th century English narratives about community and the landscape. We see some of the economic practices of the peasantry in contemporary strategies adopted within the rural sector – from the way in which the “balance” invoked by S was centred around her extended family, working closely with their base of land and animals; to how large estates like that owned by R support themselves through sending out children to work in the wage economy, a practice that is also common for peasant households (Wolf, 1966, p. 67). Returning to the work of David Matless, *Landscape and Englishness* describes competing visions of what the English landscape should be like, that emerged in the mid-20th century (1998). Matless recounts how, in contrast to the dominant, modernist vision of the English countryside as a space for recreation, “an organic relationship to land is presented as dependent on and necessary for an organic social order... organicism envisaged an organic English body at odds with the planner-preservationist ideal of modern citizenship” (1998, p. 32). For organicist thinkers like Lionel Picton, Lord Northbourne, Harold John Massingham, maintenance of the soil was linked to maintenance of the social order: “Soil, family and community are to be nurtured together” (1998, p. 227). Agricultural practices like composting were viewed as having pro-social and pro-ecological properties; clothes and tools should be designed so that they can rot away, being returned to the fertility of the earth through the “rule of return” (1998, p. 154). And crucially, work was seen as having key normative role – “Beauty in organic England would emerge unselfconsciously through labour” (Matless, 1998, p. 151). Although, as Matless points out, this organicist thread to English cultural imaginaries did not achieve hegemonic status, it nonetheless remains influential – having prompted the formation of major UK NGOs, such as the Soil Association (Matless, 1998, p. 152).

There are clear parallels between the organicism described by Matless in *Landscape...* and the sort of ecologically-groundedness of Broadland’s norms, exemplified by Moss’ “people’s wetland” and particularly by Ewans’ “Marshland economy”. The peasants and marshmen of Broadland are recruited to defend a sort of “Broadland Organicism” – where modern tourism is deemed to destroy the wetland that the “Marshland Economy” continually

⁴⁶ Harvey uses “common sense” in the classic, Gramscian sense, rather than in the sense of the emic definition I developed in the previous chapter (2007, p. 39).

restored. I would go further, and suggest that not only does organicism reveal cultural attitudes in the Broads about the idealised unity of people and the land, realised through work, but that it shares many similarities with the ideologies that empower peasant political movements, elsewhere in the world. As Wolf points out, “simplified movements of protest among a peasantry frequently center upon a myth of a social order more just and egalitarian than the hierarchical present. **Such myths may look backwards, to the re-creation of a golden age of justice and equality in the past, or forward, to the establishment of a new order on earth**, a complete and revolutionary change from existing conditions.”(Wolf, 1966, p. 106) Wolf’s remarks, here, could just as easily be applied to the organicist ideology of Broadland – whether or not we’re talking about Ewans’ “Broadland Economy” in the past, or as Moss’ “working landscape” of the future – in which the commons was managed by the entire local community, with more hierarchical elements (such as the position of the manorial lord) being downplayed. The ideals of “good farming” as described by my contributors also reflect this pattern, although clearly they draw the lines of good and bad conduct somewhat differently to intellectuals like Moss and Ewans. Following Winkler (2005) and Morphy (2003), I’d suggest “good farming” constitutes an ‘aesthetics of proximity’ “in which local people, through their direct connection with working the landscape, develop aesthetic appreciations different from ‘bourgeois’ distant viewers—viewing the ‘beauty of the work’ rather than the ‘beauty of the land’.” (Burton, 2012, p. 53)⁴⁷, that socialises the senses of farmers in such a way that they can “get their eye in” to agricultural land (Morphy, 2003, pp. 258–259). Despite framing its aesthetic value differently, however, both Broadland’s farmers and organicist intellectuals – like Redfield’s peasants – agree that that the land has aesthetic value that carries normative force.

But this treatment of Broadland as a “postpeasant” culture is not without problems. Early economists, such as Alexander Chayanov, argued that “the first fundamental characteristic of the [peasant] farm economy of the peasant is that it is a family economy. Its whole organization is determined by the size and composition of the peasant family and by the

⁴⁷ To Burton’s point, I would add that “beauty” for farmers and bourgeois viewers can be expressed and experienced quite differently. While bourgeois aesthetics involves a rapturous “quiet enjoyment” of natural beauty, aesthetic appreciation for rural workers – as we have seen - is more expressed and articulated as a sort of “quiet satisfaction” of a job well done.

coordination of its consumptive demands with the number of its working hands” (Chayanov, 1931). Max Weber, in his analysis of English economic history, also emphasized the role of the household in the medieval economy, arguing that the disconnection of rural enterprise from the household was a key feature of the development of capitalism and the common law legal system (Weber, 1978, pp. 149, 980). Both Weber and Chayanov draw a close connection between the household as a basic means of production, and the peasantry; the domestic mode of production is cast as diametrically opposed to the capitalist mode of production, with enclosure facilitating the transition from the former to the latter.

This line has been followed by many anthropologists, particularly Teodor Shanin and Harvey Franklin, who see the household as the defining feature of peasant life. Shanin characterizes peasant households as the “basic nuclei of peasant society” (1971a, p. 30) that are each “operated as a highly cohesive unit of social organization, with basic divisions of labour, authority and prestige on ascribed family lines. Generally, the head of the household was the father of the family or the oldest kin-member. His authority over the other members and over household affairs by peasant custom implied both autocratic rights and extensive duties of care and protection. The household was the basic unit of production, consumption, property holding, socialization, sociability, moral support and mutual economic help. Both the social prestige and the self-esteem of a peasant were defined by the household he belonged to, and his position in it, as were his loyalties and self-identification” (Shanin, 1971a, p. 31). This domestic focus ensures that the role of the market is necessarily circumscribed, and that all other forms of social relations are subordinate to those of the kin group (Sahlins, 2003, pp. 92–94; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1971, p. 23). The general point made by Chayanov, and his followers in anthropology, is that the central focus of work in peasant societies is the household occupied by an extended family; this household-kingroup unit also determines wider social norms and ecological relations. Of course, if this is the case, then the presence of “peasant-like” structures in the individualized, profoundly market-oriented society of contemporary Broadland will need an alternative explanation.

This view of peasant societies as domestically-oriented is applied to English history by Alan Macfarlane (1978)⁴⁸. Utilising documentary evidence from two English parishes, Macfarlane argues that when one searches for evidence of the domestic mode of production in medieval England, it is either absent or contested with frequent exceptions – from nuclear families to a thriving land market - exceptions that are so frequent, that he argues that English society was individualistically, rather than domestically oriented, as far back as we have documentary evidence (Macfarlane, 1978, p. 201). In later work, he argues that the real origin of English individualism is a bilateral kinship system (Macfarlane, 1992, pp. 180–185). He warns that “The attraction of the ‘from peasant to industrial’ theory lies very deep in our hearts, since it also appeals to the still strong nineteenth century evolutionary mode of thought, with its idea of gradual growth from small, closed, immobile, technologically simple, subsistence economies where life was ‘nasty, brutish and short,’ towards the human, mobile, affluent society of modern western Europe and North America. It is, furthermore, attractive to think of this ‘progress’ from ‘lower’ to ‘higher’ as a more-or-less continuous line.” (Macfarlane, 1978, p. 192). In short, Macfarlane argues that the domestic mode of production was never a structurally dominant feature of English society, and as such, the English never had a true peasantry. If this is so, then Broadland’s inhabitants cannot be “postpeasants”.

Macfarlane’s argument was controversial amongst Marxist historians – it destabilises their account of the Enclosure Movement – but his claim about the cultural depth and specificity of English individualism struck a chord with the Thatcherite spirit of the late 1980s (Gamble, 1993; Ryan, 1988; White and Vann, 1983). But the validity of the historical argument Macfarlane makes is not at issue in the present discussion. Instead, there are two points about his argument that are relevant here. Macfarlane is right to be wary of grand historical narratives, especially seductive ones. I would add that the moral weighting Macfarlane describes above, can be reversed - it is equally tempting to condemn the modern, capitalist world for having shattered “traditional” peasant society; imagined as both ecologically sustainable and socially cohesive. Indeed, this is precisely what the intellectual narratives of Broadland organicism do, to varying degrees. In short, Macfarlane’s rejection of the conventional narrative about English rural life reveals something highly significant *about* that life today, irrespective of the historical

⁴⁸ Macfarlane draws heavily on Shanin’s work, and therefore can be located within the squarely Chayanovian tradition.

situation. It shows us that self-interested individualism must be a key part of any model of Broadland society we advance; not only does it highlight our contemporary preoccupation with the individual, but it demonstrates that the historical evidence can be read as evidence for the existence of individualism far back in English history.

Macfarlane also reinforces the diversity of England's economic history, in a way that wards off any attempt to - in the manner of the early Broadland writers - depict the rural past in terms of the collapse of an isolated, static tradition in the face of modernity. In the Broads, tradition and modernity have a long and productive relationship – after all, one of the Broads' most treasured features – the drainage mills - are a sign of capitalist “improvement” *par excellence* (Williamson, 1997, p. 165). Nor were the people of this region ever set apart from the rest of English society; from the very earliest periods of settlement, Broadland has been enmeshed in translocal legal and economic networks; its development guided as much by flows of resources, money, ideology and opportunity, as by the passage of its rivers. If London did not have much appetite for beef supplied by the Highlands of Scotland, then the “isolated” marshmen would have been out of a job. If ladies in Norwich did not want feathers for their hats, then the lifestyle of the “feral” Breydon punt gunners would have been impossible.

An alternative means of conceptualising peasant societies exists, however, where the domestic mode of production is not so central, and instead the *entire village* is the basic unit of production, within which common land and resources play a key role. When discussing the core features of the English peasantry, historian R. H. Hilton identifies (as the third trait) “(3) They are normally associated in **larger units than the family** - that is, in villages or hamlets with greater or lesser elements of common property and collective rights according to the character of the economy.” (Hilton, 1975, p. 13, emphasis mine)⁴⁹. Stirling describes how Turkish villages own common land – distinct from both private and public property – that is assiduously guarded by the entire village community from interlopers from neighbouring villages (Stirling, 1971, pp. 40–41). In Egypt, the prominence of the village over the kingroup in peasant life is even more pronounced, as “the village or its quarter, not the house, makes up the entity, a community more important in many ways than the family or clan.” (Ayrout, 1971, p. 49). A particularly clear case of commoning as a key component of a peasant economic

⁴⁹ In their review of Macfarlane's *Origin...*, White and Vann allege that Macfarlane overlooked this qualification in Hilton's work on the English peasantry (White and Vann, 1983, p. 350).

system is the Russian *mir*, or rural commune (Dunn and Dunn, 1967, pp. 9–12). As Gamst summarises, “The *mir* consisted of a group of households, each of which had the right by virtue of its membership to hold plots of land in various categories (crop land, pasture, hay field, forest lot, and so on). Tenure was vested in the *mir* as a whole, however, and the land was subject to periodic redistribution among the constituent households, usually adult males. The assembly was known as the *skhod*, from the verb *skhodit*’, meaning to come together. Through its agent, the *starosta* (literally ‘elder’), the *skhod* conducted all transactions with individuals (or other social units) and with the state on behalf of its members.” (Gamst, 1974, p. 36). Even more suggestive of the English situation where “the common” symbolises powerful imaginaries, is the fact that the word *mir* itself also means “peace” and “world”. The *mir*, like the common, is a case of collective management relations distributed across every individual (or, at least, heads of households) in a village, that also has both normative and geographical connotations. Importantly, it is not the house, but the village, that is fundamental to the *mir*. The social representation of a village as a fundamental unit of “solidarity” is influential, being an important feature of administrative discourse in rural Laos (High, 2006, pp. 26–32) – where ‘appeals to “working together’, ‘the common good’ and... (solidarity) evoke ideals of what a village could and should be” (2006, pp. 30–31) High goes on to describe how theorisations of Asian villages amongst social scientists vary between the construction of the village as a traditional, primordial social unit (e.g. Ireson, 1996, p. 219) with its own “moral economy” (Scott, 1976) and scholarship arguing that the village is a conceptual and administrative instrument of state power (e.g. Breman, 1988; Kemp, 1988). High summarises that “While we may accept that the village is a rather recent, state-sponsored invention, it does not follow that all contemporary experiences of village are purely administrative experiences... In contemporary Laos, the concept of village is bound up with concepts of belonging, place, mutual support, and aspiration. And these ideas are amorphous. They are never singular, and are often contradictory.” (High, 2006, p. 36). The contemporary power of rural locality – regardless of the historical character – finds expression in numerous other ethnographic cases, such as in how both established farmers and new entrants into farming in Tasmania both draw upon discourses of place-based locality – rather than domesticity - to construct their own narratives of dwelling and valorous work (Smith, 2016). Fillaili, further, points out that localocentric solidarity – as opposed to government intervention or familial collaboration – provides the basis for resilience in the face of regular flooding in Kabupaten Sragen, Java (Fillaili, 2016). The complexity of the working experience of local landscapes emphasised by High is also reflected Anna Tsing’s vivid descriptions of peasant landscapes and the vernacular

knowledge that arises from them. Tsing points out that, in Yunnan, “Peasant forests were a modern object – a result of decentralisation – not an old one, and the goal of forest experts was to make modern rationality possible” (Tsing, 2015, p. 187), while in Japan they are a subject of nostalgic attachment to the economic past, focused upon *iriai* common rights to the woodland, shared by local villagers (Tsing, 2015, pp. 180–187).

Without wishing to speculate about the precise nature of Broadland’s medieval economy, this alternative model of peasant societies helps explain how ‘peasant-like’ cultural forms – namely the association of working the land with normative social conduct – remain so influential in Broadland society today. If it is the commons and its parish; and not the household and its family, that is acting as the focus for these ideas, then the absence of the domestic mode of production would not diminish their power. So long as parochial communities continue to exist, then so will these attitudes. To be clear, I am not advancing an alternative to the domestic mode of production – say, *the parochial, or manorial mode of production* – and claiming that this holds in the Broads today⁵⁰. Rather, I suggest that the common and the parish simply act as an alternative way of “making sense” of space and human settlement, as opposed to the family household or the individual business. The presence of individualism, a wage economy, and private land ownership are not fundamentally incompatible with the common, in the same way as these structures are said to be with the domestic mode of production by the scholars already cited; as such, it is possible for common norms and individualistic, capitalist principles to be held in balance, *and not at arm’s length*. As Walker states, “the common is not to be confused with public property. It is a collective, productive resource that is antithetical to property, whether public or private.” (Walker, 2015). Ellis concurs, observing that “Common property resources are rarely based on ownership in its legal sense.” (Ellis, 1993, p. 266). Rather than the common existing as an alternative form of property rights to private and state property, the commons exists as a separate category of economic life entirely. Although privatisation may interfere with the realisation of this category in various ways (as we shall see in Chapter 4), it is **not** because it constitutes an opposing form of ownership. As such, what truly limits the commons, I suggest, is not the mere presence of wage labour, property, or the

⁵⁰ If we follow Macfarlane’s reasoning, it is arguable that reimagining community as a parochial commons (rather than a network of semi-autonomous extended families) was another outcome of the English bilateral kinship system.

market; but rather the related processes of the division of labour, and enclosure. It is these latter processes that shape the daily interactions of Broadland residents, moving people off the land, and thus reducing the role of the common to a symbolic one, rather than that of a structure of day-to-day practice.

To better understand this process, it is helpful to consider the work of Pierre Bourdieu, and how it has been applied so far to the study of farmers' attitudes towards work and the landscape. Burton utilises the concept of habitus to explore the aesthetic of tidiness and its association with 'good farming', pointing out that "for farmers, landscapes do not simply reflect established or historical aesthetic preferences. Rather, as landscapes play an important role in transferring flows of cultural and social capital between individuals and generations, the cultural meaning of being a farmer is heavily embedded in the landscape itself", arising through the lifelong socialisation of children on family farms (Burton, 2012, p. 66). As Riley points out, this means that many farmers think of farmed space "relationally", so that "the material space of the farm becomes indivisible from those people who have historically managed and created that landscape, and uncovers the crucial issue of how **past practice develops into a moral framework that guides and constrains how practices are performed today.**" (Riley, 2008, p. 1285, my emphasis). As progressively fewer people participate in that work, however, fewer acquire the habitus connected with farming, and those norms begin to break down. Some 90% of the Norfolk farmers surveyed by Hall and Pretty disagreed with the claim that people would never take advantage of or abuse their land (Hall and Pretty, 2008a, p. 2), indicating a perceived lack of shared norms between farmers and non-farmers. Crucially, agricultural knowledge is cited as a key factor in building trust between government agents and farmers (Hall and Pretty, 2008b, pp. 398–399) – it is arguable that the same applies, to a lesser extent, to everyone with whom a farmer comes into contact. But the fact that such a large proportion of the general public in England no longer have the requisite knowledge to participate in the agricultural common landscape, has left the agricultural sector somewhat socially isolated, and marginalized in public discourse (Hall, 2008; Talbot and Walker, 2007). Compared to such issues as welfare, immigration, healthcare, Britain's urban and suburban population are largely ignorant or apathetic about the needs and norms of farming. To follow Hall in utilizing Bourdieu's language, the symbolic capital of the agricultural field no longer translates effectively into social capital. While in communities where a majority of the population work in rural industries, such as the Norwegian fishing village studied by Barnes, "people living and working together inevitably have conflicting interests but in general they have also a common

interest in the maintenance of existing social relations. Individual goals must be attained through socially approved processes, and as far as possible the illusion must be maintained that each individual is acting only in the best interests of the community” (Barnes, 1954, p. 50). In amongst the commuters, tourists, second-homeowners, and recent arrivals of Broadland’s dormitory villages, such collective interests simply don’t exist, leaving many farmers feeling isolated and misunderstood; their common sense no longer held in common with those who share their surroundings.

What is lacking in this situation is a structuring structure according to which English social relations tend to develop; namely, the habitus of commons. Bourdieu explains that “the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g. the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way being the product of obedience to rules... collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor.” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). A classic example of Bourdieu’s own work on how class-dictated social space can engender a habitus peculiar to it, is his description of the Kabyle household:

“The meaning objectified in things or places is fully revealed only in the practices structured according to the same schemes which are organized in relation to them (and vice versa)... The house is organized according to a set of homologous oppositions - fire:water :: cooked:raw :: high:low :: light:shade :: day:night :: male:female :: nif: hurma::fertilizing:able to be fertilized. But in fact the same oppositions are established between the house as a whole and the rest of the universe, that is, the male world, the place of assembly, the fields, and the market... But one or the other of the two systems of oppositions which define the house, either in its internal organization or in its relationship with the external world, is brought to the foreground, depending on whether the house is considered from the male point of view or the female point of view: whereas for the man, the house is not so much a place he enters as a place he comes out of, movement inwards properly befits the woman.” (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 90–91)

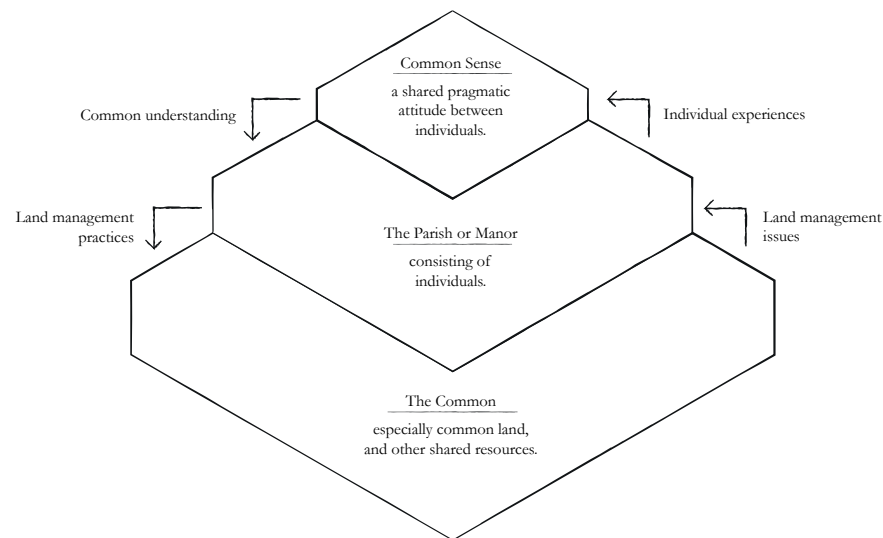
The important distinction between Bourdieu's formulation and the kind of structuralist anthropology on which it drew was, as Lane puts it "the locus of meaning had thus shifted from the system of binary oppositions laid bare by the detached intellectual observer to the movements and perspectives of the Kabyles themselves. **Meanings were generated not at the level of a purely theoretical, disembodied structure of difference but by the Kabyles in their everyday actions and movements**, in their 'practice' as Bourdieu was to put it..." (J. F. Lane, 2000, p. 98, emphasis mine.). In Bourdieu's own words, "all the actions performed in a space constructed in this way are immediately qualified symbolically and function as so many structural exercises through which is built up practical mastery of the fundamental schemes, which organize magical practices and representations: going in and coming out, filling and emptying, opening and shutting, going leftwards and going rightwards, going westwards and going eastwards, etc. Through the magic of a world of objects... each practice comes to be invested with an objective meaning, a meaning with which practices - and particularly rites - have to reckon at all times, whether to evoke or revoke it." The key difference between Bourdieu and a structuralist account of the same processes is the view that structures are not just patterns of thought but patterns of action; that is, *habitus*.

My suggestion is that what *the household does for the Kabyle (a peasant society) the common once did for the English – and does still, to a limited extent, for farmers*. Just as the broad scheme of social relations between genders, between residents and strangers, between animals and humans is redolent in the layout of physical space in the *Kabyle* household, so the shape of the household determines certain patterns of movement, and work that reinforce that scheme in the minds and bodies of the Kabyle. Farmers continually reinforce the *habitus* of commoning, by embodying particular common, normative practices in the labours they perform. But what power, beyond the farming community, and that of other land managers, does the common command?

In Ortner's discussion of the anthropological study of what she terms "key symbols", she identifies one particular type of key symbol that highlights the kind of role commons seem to have in wider English society; "Elaborating symbols [work by] providing vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action." (Ortner, 1973, p. 1340) This is precisely what we saw happening at the beginning of the chapter, I suggest, when L

used productive work to create “common ground”. His use of physical action and phraseology invokes the common as a key symbol, for the purpose of elaborating the proper relationship between people, place and knowledge. Indeed, I would go as far to say that the common – or rather, the parish, with a common land, commoners, and common sense - acts as a “root metaphor” (Ortner, 1973, p. 1341) in English culture (see Figure 8). As Strang points out regarding rural life in Dorset, “although interactions with the environment have changed radically, people still draw upon images of past communities and systems of management to formulate ideas about the present and construct ‘ideal’ models.” (Strang, 2004, p. 10). The common, I suggest, is one such image of past communities and systems of management. This metaphor is actively deployed through how one acts in the landscape, serving as the analogical basis for modern institutions of property ownership and economic propriety (Douglas, 1987). Farmers, for example, plan, plough, plant, fertilize, spray, and harvest – leaving direct physical traces in the landscape. The recreation of these physical traces reinforces embodied standards of “good farming” according to which they were first created. Although their land is privately owned, it exists within a shared community of fellow farmers, where each farm physically manifests the habitus of each farmer, and in turn creates the conditions for that habitus’ reinforcement. What for today’s farmers and farm workers is performed through everyday practice, was once an everyday practice too for the majority of the English population; engendering a habitus of the common across society. Contemporary attitudes towards about shared land, labour, “community” and resources, are a root metaphor, I suggest, grounded and naturalised in the premises of this common experience (Morphy, 2011, p. 262).

Figure 8 – The Common as a Root Metaphor.



Enclosure, therefore, as a process occurs not just at a legal or economic level, but at the level of habitus. Taking the example of the planting of hedges as fields were enclosed, Blomley argues “the hedge both helped to concretise a new set of controversial discourses around land and property rights, and aimed to prevent the forms of physical movement associated with the commoning economy... this spatial discipline was socially directive: in other words, it drew from and helped produce an emergent set of social hierarchies that rested on developing conceptions of private property. I wish to point to the body [of the commoner and their beasts, as the] site upon which new forms of discipline, materialised in the hedge, were to be realised.” (Blomley, 2007, p. 5). Enclosure entails a restrictive habitus, where access to the countryside is physically prevented, and sensitivity to highly exclusive categories of private property become paramount. Commoning, by the same token, can produce a very different kind of habitus, still found amongst land managers. The ongoing process of enclosure restricts the breadth of the habitus of the common, and so the common only attains broader relevance in English society as a root metaphor, rather than as a habitus. Much reduced though they are, commons – like Mousehold Heath in Norwich – represent crucial sites where this root metaphor can still be internalised through practice by the wider population, but to a limited extent⁵¹. Recent academic scholarship on the commons has underscored this view – also seen

⁵¹ An example of which would be the practice of “making things”, as described by L at the beginning of this chapter.

in historical narratives about common land as a site of community organising and management – that the commons, many of which have been reduced to halcyon-tinted collective memory, are founded upon deep-seated attitudes and beliefs. Although these attitudes are often unacknowledged or undermined by more dominant, pro-market or pro-state economic regimes, they nonetheless are deployed to sustain public life and social relations (Amin and Howell, 2016; Blomley, 2008, p. 319; Rose, 1994). By depriving the English people of their common premises – that is, large areas of land that are managed and utilised collectively – common premises of the intellectual sort are lost too. This understanding of engagement with the landscape will be developed further in the next chapter.

Conclusion: The Institution of Common Ground

At the beginning of this chapter, I reflected upon the controversies around the management of Mousehold Heath, a fragment of common land in the heart of Norwich. L's position – that work of particular kinds creates a connection between people with diverse interests – is founded upon a very specific set of assumptions; assumptions that, I argue, are encoded in the root metaphor of the common. Inspired by Veronica Strang's analysis of the meaning of water (2004), and drawing upon Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of the Kabyle house (1977), Sherry Ortner's understand of key symbols (1973), and the geographer David Matless' analysis of early 20th century organicism (1998), I have suggested that the common has *doxic* effects within English society – as a habitus of farmers and other land managers, and as a root metaphor for everyone else. The creation or imagination of common places that can only be managed collectively incorporates, objectifies, and reinforces the particular attitude identified by L. Commoning (through making) and enclosure are therefore two *competing* forms of habitus that reinforce the commons, and individualism of a particular kind – self-interested, *possessive* individualism- respectively⁵². With reference to classic anthropological discussions of English individualism (Dumont, 1986; Macfarlane, 1978, 1992), I suggest that the commons and possessive individualism both provide a framework through which social relations between individuals (the individual also being a *doxic* feature) can be created and sustained. The power of private ownership and market exchange at the expense of common rights, mean that it is possessive individualism that is in a hegemonic position in the Broads today. The common still has a role to play as a root metaphor – symbolising moral behavior, good sense, and

⁵² I discuss possessive individualism in greater detail in Chapter 4.

understanding culled from experience – but it is only experienced through the *habitus* of commoning under certain circumstances, such as by land managers.

My analysis also points to conclusion about the anthropology of peasantries. What I have argued above is that peasant-like qualities can exist in societies even where the domestic mode of production is absent. Indeed, rather than treat peasantry as a Weberian ideal type, it might be more useful to treat peasant societies in terms of a Wittgensteinian family resemblance (Ahmed, 2010, pp. 66–87). No single peasant society need express all the features associated with peasantry, for all peasant societies to resemble one another to a degree. Indeed, as Rapport points out, this same pattern reflects perceptions of community and place in rural England – “Perceptions in Wanet... form a family of resemblances, a bundle of partially overlapping cognitive constructions, and, as we shall see, it is individual interpretation of the relations of the moment which determines which consideration is pertinent, which construction is salient, when.” (Rapport, 1993, p. 51). We need not follow Weber and Chayanov when the ethnographic material indicates otherwise, and insist that all peasant-like qualities spring directly from the domestic mode of production. Fruitful comparison can be struck by, as Shanin exhorts us to do, treating peasantry as a process, rather than a static condition. Consider the following description of peasant sociality by Wolf:

“The peasant stands, as it were, at the center of a series of concentric circles, each circle marked by specialists with whom he shares less and less experience, with whom he entertains fewer and fewer common understandings... There are those close to him, peasants like himself, whose motives and interests he shares and understands, even when his relations with them are wholly tangential... These do not form a group characterised by enduring social relationships, but a category of people with whom interaction and understandings are possible on the basis of common premises... Characteristically, however, there is a shift of attitudes when the peasant confronts the person who has a lien on his surplus of rent or on his surplus of profit: the merchant, the tax-collector, the manager of a putting-out system who farms out craft production to the villages... the labor contractor... Economic interests are directly opposed, and are not counter-balanced by more personal involvements. Thus social distance is reinforced by an absence of shared experience. Hence, where we find peasants involved in network markets, we

also find that the merchant or storekeeper - even when he resides in the village - continues to be regarded as a stranger and outsider.” (Wolf, 1966, p. 47)

Although they are, squarely, “postpeasants”, Broadland’s people take an attitude to social life that reflects the dynamic expressed by Wolf above. The common is situated in the context they locate themselves – in the “farming community” say – while those who do not share that same working landscape, and the common sense that comes with it, are placed at greater and greater degrees of social remove. Where they differ, however, is in their attitude towards the market, and the profit motive. But just because self-interest is deemed to be natural in the heavily marketised economy of Broadland, the power of the common as a doxic, root metaphor shouldn’t be underestimated – as Burton points out, there has been little change to the productivist mentality of European farmers, despite extensive government intervention, with significant impacts upon biodiversity and water quality (Burton et al., 2008, p. 16).

*

Common sense reflects how English people think about both resources and social relations through a single frame – a move that has its roots in an imagined parochial ground, through both academic and popular discussions about the past. Common land serves as common ground – a place of collective interest and labour with which it is also good to think; that yields good thinking, as well as useful raw materials and products. In *Conversations in Colombia*, Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Rivera suggest that European folk culture represented a wellspring of ideas that informed later conversations by both political economists and cultures (1990). Here, I’d like to put forward “the common” and “common sense” as an example of such concepts, that are sustained by a dialogue between scholars and diverse publics. As indicated by wood carving on Mousehold Heath, practical work and reason coincide in English lived experience. Though it can manifest in any shared material context – something as simple as a piece of wood being carved into a usable object – the most powerful site for its expression, propelling what is a root metaphor to the position of a structuring structure, is common land. The fact that individualistic self-interest is prevalent within English culture and a key part of economic life does not preclude the possibility of common concern – as Strathern points out, to try to disentangle self-interest from other-interest is nonsense (Strathern, 2016, pp. 168–171). The two exist in tandem, and together structure English practices in social space.

Chapter 3 – Be sensible: How to acquire common sense

Overview: Strumpshaw Fen as a Place of Desire

RSPB Strumpshaw Fen lies at the heart of the Mid-Yare Valley National Nature Reserve (NNR), a network of interlocking designated conservation areas lying in the flood plain on both sides of the River Yare, between the villages of Postwick and Reedham. The constituent reserves – Strumpshaw Fen, Buckenham Marshes, Cantley Marshes, Surlingham Church Marsh, Surlingham Broad, Brickyard Marsh, and Rockland Broad - are cared for by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), one of the UK's largest and most influential conservation charities. Although the RSPB owns much of this land, a large part of Strumpshaw Fen – including the main visitors' centre, site office, workshop, and volunteer accommodation - is rented on a long-term lease from Strumpshaw Hall, a neighbouring estate. Strumpshaw Fen is the main point of arrival for visitors seeking to explore the valley; the Fen and its neighbouring fields and woodlands are criss-crossed by three main trails, which link together three hides, two pond-dipping platforms, and a nectar garden – all carefully signposted with waymarkers and interpretation boards, helping guide the visitors intellectually and physically through the Fen.

Key to this navigation process for the wardens was the notion of *succession*. *Succession* is the process by which open water – of the kind found in a broad or dyke – would gradually be colonised by, and altered by, sequential waves of plant growth. Each of the main habitats for which Strumpshaw Fen was known – reed swamp, valley fen, alder and willow carr, and wet oak woodland - represent different phases of succession. The open water at the edge of a broad would be first colonised by reeds (esp. *Phragmites australis*), who are highly tolerant of waterlogged soils. Each year, new growth from the rhizomic root systems formed by the reeds would displace the old, which would fall to the ground as litter. This litter would then partially decompose, forming a mat of peat that would in turn be colonised by other water-tolerant species – including sedges (g. *Cladium*), yellow-loose strife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*), rushes (g. *Typha*), and hemp agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*). The drier soils produced by such fen communities would in turn provide a foothold for wet-tolerant trees such as goat willow (*Salix caprea*), crack willow (*Salix fragilis*), and alder (*Alnus glutinosa*). Such species would draw large amounts of water from the sub-surface, creating yet drier conditions, favoured by

woodland species – like silver birch (*Betula pendula*), aspen (*Populus tremula*), oak (esp. *Quercus robur*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) and beech (*Fagus sylvaticus*)⁵³.

The goal of much of the management activity on the reserve was to interrupt this process from unfolding as it would – according to the wardens – under “natural” conditions. Without human intervention, the diverse range of habitats would in a matter of decades go through the full process of succession, and much of the reserve would revert to alder scrub or even oak woodland. O explained that, in prehistoric times, the periodic flooding of rivers like the Yare across the entirety of Britain would have created space in the primordial oak wildwood for patches of reedswamp, calcareous fen, and wet meadow to grow up. But with the rivers of Britain straightened, dredged, and tamed – held behind floodwalls and sluices, and held down by weirs – these marsh-making, erosive processes are now held in abeyance. As such, the artificial [that is, human] fabrication of those processes has become a necessity, if wetland plant communities are to survive. As such, the wardens, contractors⁵⁴, and volunteers who helped manage the reserve would spend each year coppicing invasive trees, cutting back and burning marsh and fen vegetation, digging out ponds, and dredging ditches. These labours stopped the reserve from becoming oak woodland, which was, in the words of O, “What it wants to be.” T, one of the wardens on the reserve, observed on two occasions that the acres of reedbed and fen may have seemed like a fragment of untouched wilderness, but that they were “about as unnatural as you could possibly get”, with the entire reserve being “a big garden... it’s all managed.” (See Strang, 2009, pp. 119–158 and Figure 9).

Figure 9 – Reed cutting. *Historic forms of land management that prevent succession was a major aspect of the RSPB’s work in the Mid Yare Valley.*

⁵³For full details of the botany of British fenland, see Mabey 1998. For a detailed survey of the botany of the Broads specifically, see George 1992.

⁵⁴The reserve employed contractors to undertake certain major works, or to support the warden team.



This need for careful management applies both to fenland, but also grazing marsh – a habitat that covered much of the northern bank of the Yare, from Strumpshaw meadows, through Buckenham Marsh, to Cantley in the far south of the reserve. Grazing marshes are a form of wet grassland where the water has been partly drained from the soil into ditches, creating pasture for herds of cattle. The pure water of the ditches makes them hotspots for biodiversity; inhabited by many rare plants and invertebrates, like water soldier (g. *Stratiotes*) and the great diving beetle (*Dysticus marginalis*). The fields themselves are favoured nesting grounds for breeding waders – especially lapwings (*Vanellus vanellus*) – in the summer, and provide winter grazing for migrants like bean geese (*Anser fabilis*) in the winter.

In addition to maintaining the gates and ditches, a wide range of other tasks that occupied H and A, the two wardens responsible for caring for the marshes. The *sward* – the community of grasses growing in each field - had to be carefully measured, then grazed and mowed to specific lengths to provide ideal conditions for different species. Weeds – such as creeping thistles (*Cirsium arvense*) and spear thistles (*Cirsium vulgare*) – had to be removed,

either by being dug up with a mattock, or through “topping” – the topical use of herbicide⁵⁵. Fields that were not being grazed would usually be cut to produce a hay crop; harvesting this was a major undertaking. Breeding wader nests are highly vulnerable to predation, so during the breeding season (February – April), the numbers crows (*Corvus corone*) and foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) had to be monitored and controlled, with larsen traps, the removal of nests, and hunting with guns by contractors. In both cases, the role of labour in “holding back” the land “from what it wants to do” was consistent.

This phraseology – of the land as “wanting to do” some things, which the wardens and workers worked hard to prevent – demonstrates sensitivity to the agency of the landscape amongst conservationists, and bears a similarity to the discourse of “good farming”, discussed in Chapter 2 above. Just as farmers looked to neatly ploughed fields, clear of invasive vegetation as indicators of effective management inseparable from the social history of the place, the wardens and volunteers of Strumpshaw regarded tracts of scrub-free reed bed, a well-maintained path, or a marsh full of lapwings in the same way; all evidence of “good conservation”⁵⁶. As V, the Area Manager based at the reserve put it “In the Broads context, we’re farmers. We’re just farming different things to other people. We’re landowners...” Although conservationists would sometimes be at odds with farmers⁵⁷ in the Broads, there was a tremendous degree to which practices and outlook were shared by both. Indeed, just as the RSPB were farmers in the Broads – after all, the grazing marshes were cut for hay or rented out for cattle grazing – many of Broadland’s farmers were committed conservationists.

In Chapter 2 I argued that the common working landscape of the Broads engenders a specific habitus, that in turn reinforces both the expectation that common social norms should exist. This latter group nonetheless retain the notion of the common as a “root metaphor” for social life, albeit one that is not habituated by their day-to-day practices. The habitus of the commons - engendered through working and sharing the landscape - clashes with the habitus

⁵⁵Herbicide (namely glyphosate) was very strictly controlled and administered with great care on the reserve.

⁵⁶ I observed my conservationist friends studying and commenting critically (or positively) on the management of the countryside we travelled through in much the same way as farmers would; noting hedges cut at the wrong time of year, overgrown footpaths, or bare fields as signs of “bad conservation” by the landowner.

⁵⁷ One such incident is discussed in Chapter 4 below.

of enclosure - engendered through the alienation or ownership of it. This chapter will examine both these kinds of habitus in greater depth, through my experiences at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen. As a site that is managed by a team of wardens and volunteers, as well as a place frequented by recreational visitors, both kinds of Broadland habitus manifest together at Strumpshaw Fen, making it a perfect site to compare them. This comparison allows us to trace the limitations of the deep affection held by seasoned visitors – so-called “Broadland Consciousness” (O’Riordan, 1969) – in reaching wider society; where the flood plains represent a “psychological barrier” rather than a place of common experience (Cocker, 2008). The overall goal of this discussion will be to illustrate – in line with my broader effort to explore the symbolic force and meanings attached to “common sense” in English social life – the broader socio-ecological significance of sensory experience in English society.

Underview: Thicket Description of *Working Your Way Through the Landscape*

If you were to find yourself beside the river Yare on a sunny day, watching the white boats and sailing yachts schoon across the water, you might be fooled into thinking that this shimmering waterway was the heart of the Mid-Yare NNR. The gentle bevel of the flood plain is the Yare’s handiwork, and the moods of this still-tidal river do have a significant impact upon the surrounding land. But the river is in fact sealed off from much of the fen and marsh on either side⁵⁸. It is only through the medium of electric pumps, and sluices – usually closed or switched off in the summer months – that water moves from the wetland into the river. Under most circumstances, the wetting of the plain is not the work of the river at all, but rather of fresh alkaline springs; low in nutrients and largely unpolluted, ideal for watering highly sensitive fenland ecosystems. The richest fens and channels, boasting the greatest diversity of plants and invertebrates, are therefore found tucked away under the skirts of the upland, where the springs are. The water of the Yare, meanwhile, is filled with effluent from fields and homes within its catchment, particularly the city of Norwich just upstream. Development has not just altered the chemistry of the river, but its very structure, too – the Yare’s once meandering, shallow course has been straightened and deepened to better accommodate boat traffic, and to decrease the incidence of flooding. Today, the wardens at the NNR take pains to ensure that this polluted water doesn’t flow from the river into the reserve. The only exceptions to this are times of

⁵⁸It is important to note that these seals are not perfect however – a limited amount of seepage from the river into the reserve was unavoidable.

drought, or flood, at which time the reserve acts as an overflow, containing water that would otherwise drown the settlements of Rockland Saint Mary, Brundall, and Claxton. When it behaves itself, therefore, the Yare is simply the recipient of any excess water in the drainage systems of the NNR. When it does not, it takes the role of a source of incipient risks – from flooding, to pollution events, to spreading non-native species. The river is also managed by outside agencies – namely, the Broads Authority, and the Environment Agency – and not local landowners. Perhaps even more surprisingly, RSPB Strumpshaw Fen is currently closed to river traffic. This means that boaters move through, and not into, the reserve. As such, the Yare is oddly peripheral to the NNR that bears its name. It is a concourse, a pollution source, a relay of risks, a boundary, a name, and a drain.

If you were to visit Strumpshaw Fen, therefore, the Yare would not be your way in. You would arrive by coming down Low Road, past open fields of wheat and salad crops, interspersed with lines of trees sheltering idyllic cottages. Upon entering the reserve, you would find the main visitors area, including the reception hide where tickets are purchased; a small pond and seating area; and the shady path that leads to the main paths. To the left of this is the workshop, which also houses toilets, a drying room, and a small office. Just beyond the workshop is the main office building, and a storage shed used by the visitor engagement team. Directly facing the crossing is the residential volunteers' cottage – where I lived for some four months. The visitor area is clearly demarcated from the main yard, onto which the cottage, the workshop, and the office all face, by a stout wooden fence. This demarcation of labour – between site management, and visitor engagement – was instructive, for it mirrors broader national discourses and debates about how land management and the general public fit together. The site management volunteers on the reserve repeatedly stressed how taking part in task days – essentially jumping the partition between the public side of the reserve experienced by visitors, and the management side, allowed them to “see parts of the reserve you wouldn't get to see otherwise”.

Geologically, the reserve is almost exclusively peat. The wardens enthusiastically impressed the depth of this soft, dark layer of waterlogged organic matter upon volunteers, by thrusting the handles of muck forks – which could be up to 1.5 metres in length – straight down into the ground with little effort, leaving little of the handle itself above the surface. Although the peat was largely safe to walk upon, in some parts of the reserve thick rafts of plant matter had grown out across what was once open water, creating a thick layer of sludgy liquid

underneath the matted roots. Walking on “hover” of this kind was an unnerving experience. What appeared to be solid ground was often nothing of the sort. Leaping up and down would cause the earth to ripple and tremble out in every direction. This meant that, while walking on hover, you had to be sure to check the strength of the ground ahead before you put your weight upon it; holes were common, and if you trod in them without realising, you’d fall straight through into the watery sludge beneath, deeper than a man is tall. These holes would lurk unseen, even in plain sight. While out on the fen one day with a working party who were cutting reed, I saw one of the volunteers stumble into one, and go down up to his waist. Even the dryer parts of the reserve were criss-crossed by old ditches, covered over with vegetation, so that they could surprise the inexperienced. It isn’t hard to see how, in the past, people travelling across undrained land feared unquiet wetland spirits, who liked to lure humans off safe paths with spectral lights, before swallowing them up in the hungry mire (Hall and Coles, 1994, p. 1; Porter, 1969, pp. 64–65).

This peat layer is the reason for, and is in turn caused by, the reserve’s internationally significant ecology. Arising from it is a variety of different wetland habitats for which the Broads are known, including reedbed, fen, *carr*, wet hay meadows, and grazing marshes. Each of these habitats has a distinctive character. Reedbed – also known as reed swamp (for reedbed is a sub-type of swamp) – is an area where the water table is at or above ground level for most of the year, allowing it to be dominated by common reed (*Phragmites australis*). Fen, by contrast, tends to be far more biodiverse than reedbed, with reeds and sedges being joined by a range of other plant species. Biodiversity in fenland ecosystems depends significantly upon water quality. Unlike either reed-bed or fen, which are largely open to the skies; the thick, tangled wet woodland of a *carr* landscape is characterised by small trees such as alder, birch, and willow, and shrubs such guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*) and bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*). Grazing marsh and wet hay meadows are different again – these habitats are partially drained by ditches and more heavily grazed, and so they are dominated by wet-tolerant grassland species. With this diversity of habitats and the ease of access for visitors, especially at Strumpshaw Fen, the Mid Yare NNR is known as an excellent place for members of the public to see wildlife distinctive to the Broads – including marsh harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*), bearded reedlings (*Panurus biarmicus*), bitterns (*Botaurus stellaris*), Norfolk Hawker dragonflies (*Aeshna isosceles*), and Swallowtail butterflies (*Papilio machaon britannicus*).

But the wildlife of the fen, carr, and marsh were not altogether peaceable in their dwelling. Biting insects breed in the ditches and long grasses throughout the summer. The clouds of mosquitos at dusk in the woods were so bad I couldn't venture out of the house after 6pm in June. Wasps would frequently nest in the fen, and could swarm and attack anyone who came too close. Saw sedge (*Gahnia aspera*) was so called for its serrated leaves that could cut through a leather glove if you grasped it. Crack willow (*Salix fragilis*) would drop its branches without warning. Highland cattle, much more aggressive than other breeds, would charge and could gore you if provoked. Even the reeds posed risks of their own: cutting your hands if you didn't wear gloves, and sheltering the fen from the wind creating a stifling layer of humid air. Wet leaves presented a slip hazard, dead wood a trip hazard. One of the most conspicuous traits of the fen wildlife was a rapid rate of growth. Every Friday, I was tasked with walking around the reserve equipped with some shears, a lopper, and – occasionally – a petrol-powered brushcutter. These I'd use to cut back stray vegetation to keep the path clear. During the growing season, when the reed bed turned bright green with fresh leaves, it was literally all I could do to keep the brambles, nettles (*Urtica dioica*), reeds, and other shrubs from blocking the path completely. But this presented me with a clear view of how competitive all the plants were with one another. When the reeds had grown up, they were soon choked and weighed down by fantastic amounts of bindweed (*Convolvulus arvensis*) – a climbing plant – whose broad leaves and large white flowers weighed down the reeds so much that on gusty days great mats of vegetation would fall into the path, slowing my passage around the reserve as I had to stop to cut them up – an unending wave of greenery, breaking over weeks, fuelled by sunlight and water (see Figure 10).

The swarming of mosquitos, the growth of saw sedge and reed, the cracking of willow⁵⁹, the ardour of cattle and – especially – the wobbling, hole-studded hover and the blockage of paths by bindweed – all these risky, obstructive qualities highlight the fecundity and flux of the wetland; the vigorous, unpredictable interplay of violent life and gelid geology (McClellan, 2011). The unstable peaty ground and the exuberant, ever-changing biota combine to lend a unique quality to the experience of moving through the wetland areas in the Broads.

⁵⁹Crack willow's dropping of twigs and branches is actually a way of reproducing. Because crack willows grow near water, any twigs that fall in this medium will be carried downstream to distant locations where they may take root if they wash ashore.

Unseen holes, rapid regrowth, and herbaceous succession render movement not only difficult (Lund, 2014), but also inherently unpredictable. An apparently sure footing may prove to be unstable when weight is applied; tracks that are clear one week are thick with briars the next. Maps are only ever a vague guide as to the presence of obstacles, and are no compensation for hard-won experience of the knowing the place through daily exposure to its varying caprices. The chaotic recalcitrance of geology and biology renders book-knowledge of little use when faced with the prospect of making your way through wetland.

Figure 10 – Overgrowth. *Keeping the paths and boardwalks clear of vegetation was a source of constant work for wardens during the spring and summer.*



It is in this fashion that I came to know the Mid Yare NNR. It resolved before me as a rich, rebellious community of plants and animals; all of whom had their own means of pursuing their various interests. As I worked on the reserve full time, this rough and tumble of their raw materiality scoured my own body – hefting chunks of wood knotted the muscles in my back; blades of sedge cut my hands and calloused my fingers; burning reed seared my arm hair and eyebrows; insect bites covered my skin as it hardened under the sun and rain; my blistered feet

toughened up from the difficulty of seeking sure footings. All the while, the effort of making my way in the reserve whittled fat from my body and made me stronger. Much as Vergunst mused that his own boots are more evocative of his fieldwork than audio or video (Vergunst, 2011, p. 210), the changes wrought on my own body were themselves a source of ethnographic insight (Jackson, 1990; Stoller, 1997). The tenor of my experience has, I suggest, taught me two primary lessons – the first being that practical activities have a profound connection with experience. The process of coming to understand a place is fundamentally changed when you've got to make a living there. Second, that the Yare valley acted upon my body through *all* my senses. I was not merely observing the fen, or smelling it, or touching it – I was doing them all at once. The experiential roots of common sense, therefore, depend not just on one particular, privileged sense – such as vision, so pivotal in Western ocularcentrism (Feld, 1997, pp. 91–137) – but rather the entire sensorium (Howes, 2003, p. XXII). If wardens merely watched, they'd never get any work done. Echoing the Aristotelean concern for the integration of sensory experience (see Chapter 1) it is only when all the senses come together, that the English common sense, as an attitude towards a common working environment, is possible.

But there is another factor to be considered – namely, the boundaries of the sensorium I attained, and thus the limit to the “common sense” it supports. I began this section describing the course of the river Yare; how this riparian landscape is essentially sealed off from its river – a river that has now become largely a conduit for tourists, and waste water. While the sensorium attained via working on the land as I did certainly provided a unique and richly textured vantage-point on the Broadland environment, the sensoria acquired through touristic or recreational participation will necessarily be quite different. While tourists and other recreational users would consume the landscape temporarily *at a distance* in the spirit of *quiet enjoyment*, volunteers and wardens would perceive the landscape through an *aesthetic of proximity* (see Chapter 2), gained by *working their way through* the fen and marsh, coming face to face with the recalcitrant desires of the land itself; something that quiet enjoyment tends to ignore. The river bank is a clear barrier; that separates not just water, but also groups of people and patterns of sensory experience.

Counterview: *Quiet Enjoyment* and Visitor Experience

While historically the RSPB treated engaging the public as peripheral relative to conservation management and monitoring, today this situation is quite different. Visitor engagement was a

critical part of the work done on the reserve; with half of the staff and most of the volunteers being occupied with assisting visitors. The RSPB’s workers – both staff and volunteers – were divided into those concerned primarily with site management, and those whose time was directed towards welcoming members of the public (see Figure 11). And, as with the Kabyle household discussed in Chapter 2, the layout of space at the site entrance – split between “the yard” that primarily supported the management of the reserve, and “reception” that supported visitors – translated the operational distinction between these two wings of the reserve’s activities into the physical movement and bodily activities of the workers and visitors. This pattern of spatial organisation was repeated right across the landscape – both between the river and the reserve as described above, but also within the reserve itself. But even here, the very layout of the landscape was carefully managed to cater to the needs of visitors; even down to the growth of individual plants. Stands of willow in the fen were allowed to grow specifically to block the line of sight between each of the hides – all of which were in sight of one another - so to create the impression of a wild, uninterrupted vista. As previously mentioned, plants were not allowed to grow in places where they would “get in the way” of the quiet enjoyment of visitors.

Figure 11 – A table showing the individual members of full-time staff (bold), part time staff, and groups of volunteers (italics) based at Strumpshaw Fen.

Site Management	Dual Responsibilities	Visitor Engagement
H – Warden.	T – Warden.	Y – Volunteer Manager.
O – Warden.	Z – Site Manager.	R-l - Volunteer Coordinator.
A – Warden.	V – Area Manager.	H-h.
<i>Thursday working party.</i>	<i>Residential volunteers.</i>	M
<i>Saturday working party.</i>		J-.
<i>Monitoring volunteers.</i>		D-n.
		S-e.
		E-d.
		<i>Reception volunteers.</i>

Employees are categorised according to their core responsibilities. The Thursday working party was a group of between three and six volunteers, most of whom were retired, who met every week and assisted the Site Management team. The Saturday working party met on the first Saturday of the month, and consisted of between ten and twenty volunteers, many of whom had full time jobs or were in full time education. Reception volunteers were also mostly retired, and took care of the front of house on the site; taking payment from the public, processing membership applications, updating the sightings board, and generally making visitors as welcome as possible. Monitoring volunteers were naturalists with expertise that the RSPB valued, and who undertook surveys of wildlife on the reserve as needed, especially during the breeding season. The broadest portfolio was held by the residential volunteers, usually young adults seeking experience of working in conservation, as part of their career development. They worked on a full-time basis, and were normally attached to the Site Management team, although in my time at Strumpshaw the Visitor Engagement team hosted a residential volunteer supporting the programme of events for families during the summer holidays. In return for their labour, residential volunteers received intensive training in a wide range of different conservation skills, accommodation on site for the duration of their placement, and assistance with finding future employment in the sector. Three of the wardens on the reserve had started out as residential volunteers.

Just as the workers on the reserve were classified into different groups, the visitors too were subdivided according to the kind of experience they sought. *Birders* were the core group of visitors to the reserve, easily noticeable by the equipment they'd carry – large pairs of binoculars and scopes – and the camouflage gear they'd wear. Keen birders who lived locally would often be regulars at the reserve, spending many hours sitting in the hides or at other viewpoints, equipped with sandwiches and thermos flasks of hot tea or coffee, watching the landscape quietly and patiently. Some birders would travel great distances to visit Strumpshaw at specific times of year to see rare species. News of “exotics” – birds that wouldn't normally be found on the reserve – would be posted on the reserve website, and would attract many birders from across the country.

Naturalists were interested in a different range of species to birders – particularly insects and plants. Naturalists would usually dispense with the big binoculars, and instead opt for smaller set, or a magnifying glass, paired with a notebook. Rather than viewing their specimens from a distance while standing still, they would slowly stalk around the paths of the

reserve, studying the plants at the edges or the insects that lived off them. If a naturalist wanted to collect any specimens, she would need to get permission from the reserve. Birders and naturalists were viewed as the “core” and “traditional” members of the RSPB, and so were valued as being potential members of the charity. Both birders and naturalists would often build a long-term relationship with the wardens – all of whom were keen naturalists themselves – and, if they lived locally, would often assist the wardens in surveying the population of key species. *Photographers* would look quite like birders and naturalists, except they’d be weighed down by a heavy bag full of camera equipment, and carrying a DSLR with a long zoom lens.

Where the movement of birders was patient and smooth, photographers were more sudden and punctuated – rushing to take the perfect shot at the perfect moment. *Walkers* usually didn’t carry any equipment, apart from possibly a backpack or a walking stick. Unlike the categories of visitor so far described, walkers did not come to the reserve specially – they were either local people who treated the reserve as a pleasant place to stroll, or tourists who were visiting the Broads in general, rather than Strumpshaw Fen. One woman I spoke to had been coming there for years, but had not the remotest interest in the ecological significance of the place. She’d never even heard of a Swallowtail. They’d normally move through the reserve steadily, admiring the view from a distance as they went, usually not spending very long at any hide or viewpoint, preferring to rest at the benches along the route instead. *School groups* would also occasionally visit the reserve, viewing the site according to the directions of a guide, taking down notes in the manner of naturalists.

Increasing strategic emphasis in recent years has been placed on the final group – *families*. Families were groups of visitors that included primary school-age children (4-11 years old), who would visit the reserve at weekends and during the holidays. They would normally stay closer to the entrance to the reserve, on a series of shorter circular paths with facilities dedicated to them. These included interpretation boards pitched at a younger audience, and activities like pond dipping, listening for bird-song, and making sculptures out of twigs. The engagement of families was a priority on the reserve, reflecting policy across the organisation. The RSPB argues that⁶⁰ – unless people care about nature, and see the benefit of it – then there

⁶⁰ The observations and arguments made in this report are based on research completed by the University of Exeter and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

will simply be nobody with sufficient interest in birds or conservation more generally to support their work in future (Royal Society for the Protection of Birds et al., 2013). Emphasis was placed upon encouraging local children to care about wildlife. *Networks for Nature*, an initiative on-going whilst I was on the reserve, involved RSPB staff and volunteers organising large public events and visiting schools within the NR13 postcode district to teach the children about the Broads and the importance of preserving its fragile ecosystem.

The important lesson to draw is that although all these groups have a different kind of experience on the reserve, these varieties of experience differ from that of actually working there. This is not to say that there was no overlap between visitors and workers – indeed, many of the volunteers were keen birders or naturalists who would visit the reserve when not volunteering, and wardens would often use the patterns of movement of birders and naturalists for survey work. But this overlap served to reveal the differences between the two sensoria, rather than indicate the lack of any divide. Volunteers themselves stressed the distinction, claiming that working “gave you a whole new perspective” on the place. Although the wardens and residential volunteers did occasionally use the visitor infrastructure as a base for doing surveys, survey work often required the wardens to head off the paths, and into the fen or across the marshes. Indeed, when we did use the hides to do one survey (of bittern nesting flights), one of the wardens said that it was “a bit of a luxury”.

Each of the groups of visitors listed above shaped the management of the reserve in distinct ways, that reflected their specific needs. The central concern of birders was quite straightforward – to get a good view of the birds on the reserve. The thick vegetation was cut back at regular intervals – both in front of hides, and at strategic points around the paths – to allow visitors to see into the fen itself. Hides allowed birders to sit and watch for extended periods, sheltering them from the weather while concealing them from the birds they wanted to see. Naturalists – including those with an interest in dragonflies, or rare plants – were catered to in a similar way: “meanders” were cut around pollen sources such as Buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*), viewpoints were cut onto particularly good habitats for certain invertebrates, and so on. Photographers could be more particular about the views on offer; some would complain about vegetation obscuring the shots they wished to take – despite the fact that the vegetation was what attracted the wildlife in the first place. Walkers preferred benches to hides, as their main aim was to get outside and enjoy the countryside in periods of clement weather. While birders and photographers merely sought out a good view, families were much more discerning

– looking for excellent facilities and a great, all round day out that their children would enjoy. The staff and volunteers on the reserve went to great efforts to cater to families’ needs, organising events throughout the summer holidays to entertain children and their parents. While keen birders and naturalists were felt to be more inclined to “rough it” – to do without food, drink, and loos - it was felt by the RSPB staff that such a situation would not be acceptable to families. And all groups, it was felt, needed the paths around the reserve to be kept clear, free of troublesome local wildlife, and dry. As such, an important task was “*Maintaining visitor facilities*” – a task that covered maintaining paths by keeping them clear of vegetation; ensuring any potholes were filled in; cleaning and repairing benches and hides; updating visitor information; putting up signs warning visitors of flooding or wasps’ nests; cutting viewpoints; mowing and cutting back vegetation in the reserve’s car parks; constructing pond dipping platforms and repainting the inside of the Reception Hide. Although wardens often led such tasks, much more of their time overall would be spent on monitoring and maintaining the habitat.

Members of the public would often pass me by as I worked, looking very relaxed and at peace. When we talked to one another, they’d often remark at how lovely it must be to work outside in “the peace and quiet”, and how “lucky I was” to work in a place like this. Such comments are illustrative, because they reveal the lens that many visitors to the reserve were applying – one of *quiet enjoyment*. From such a vantage point, even work in such a place becomes a form of leisure⁶¹; a perception strongly challenged by the embodied, harsh reality of doing the work. Indeed, these categories of visitors were contrasted with those who – in various ways – breached the official policy of the reserve, by engaging *too closely* with the site, in a way that caused damage or disturbance. Some of the regular birders I spoke to complained about one notorious case, where a photographer trespassed into the centre of the fen to take photographs of a bittern nest. He got into difficulty, and had to be rescued by the wardens. “Unauthorised collection” – that is, harvesting animals and plants from the site – was strictly forbidden. In one instance, I was required to stop a woman from picking blackberries. Although there were clear pragmatic reasons for such restrictions⁶², an unintended effect of

⁶¹ Some visitors I spoke to, erroneously believed that wardens were “paid to watch birds”.

⁶² Collecting bird eggs and picking wild flowers remain criminal offences in the UK, and the RSPB has been assiduous in bringing prosecutions for these and other wildlife crimes (Bibby, 2003; The Farmers Guardian,

this policy was that the boundary between visitors and workers – between leisure and labour – was reaffirmed (See Figure 12).

Figure 12 – Photographers crowding around Swallowtails. *The gaze of the visitors the reserve was highly concentrated upon specific vistas – such as a nectar garden full of butterflies (center) - reinforcing the distinction between leisure and labour.*



So far, I have traced how visitor engagement, and visitors, the management of the site, and conservation are delineated. This division between site management and visitor engagement should not be taken as indicative of conservation being sacrificed for visitor engagement. Indeed, the evidence I collected would strongly indicate to the contrary. The RSPB requires that all its staff complete timesheets to assess the amount of time they and the volunteers in their charge spend on all the varying tasks involved in running the reserve. This data is collated via a Content Management System (CMS). The Site Manager of Strumpshaw Fen, Z, made the data collected for the financial year from 2013-2014 (the year before I arrived) available to me. In 2013-2014, of the 14,901.25 hours of labour required by the NNR, 9,531.2 of those were supplied in exchange for wages (“Staff Hours”), while a further 3,971.3 were provided by volunteers (“Volunteer Hours”) – either as part of residential volunteer placements, or by day volunteers. Almost 80% of staff hours were taken up by conservation (including both monitoring and management tasks), with the rest being spent on either maintaining visitor

2004). Picking wild berries and harvesting wild food plants – though a legal practice that the wardens viewed as laudable – was not permitted on the reserve because it might deprive wild animals of food sources.

facilities or directly engaging the public. Volunteers spent slightly more on managing visitor facilities and public engagement (26%). Overall, 77% of all the work done by the staff and volunteers based at the NNR was directed towards habitat creation, monitoring, and administration, as opposed to public engagement. Clearly, most of the reserve's labour power, particularly its wage labour, was being directed towards conservation, rather than visitor engagement.

Compared to the relatively small proportion of the total labour power of the reserve it receives, visitor engagement has a large impact on the organisation of space on the reserve, and on the strategy of the RSPB as a whole (Clarke et al., 2013). The practice of maintaining visitor facilities was framed by RSPB staff as ensuring that visitors could access the site, and experience the various animals and plants who lived there. But in rendering parts of the site accessible - paths, hides, and seating areas - wardens nonetheless re-enforced the divide between the experience of the landscape they had, and the kind of experience enjoyed by the general population. Whilst we were cutting back the brambles that encroached ferociously upon one of the fen paths, T joked that this sort of work meant that, after a couple of months, all you could see as you walked along the paths was briars or leaves that needed cutting back. What to visitors would be a simple bank of verdure, or a lovely natural setting, was to workers on the reserve a living, material expression of present, and future tasks; in short, a *taskscape* (Ingold, 2000, p. 195). I was assured that – were the vegetation not cut back – within a month the path would be utterly impassable. This small admission highlights an important fact - all the work done by wardens to manage the reserve for visitors basically ensured that paying visitors **didn't need** to work their way through the reserve as volunteers and staff did. “What the land wants to do” as a result became less visible within the sensorium of visitors, held at bay by constant maintenance by volunteers and wardens. Through this, visitors are free to experience *quiet enjoyment* of the reserve; watching, photographing, and walking about, but not through, the fens and marshes. Wardens, volunteers, and contractors, meanwhile, are constantly confronted with the wake, reality and prospect of their labours, *working their way through* the landscape.

Interview: Farmers, Children, and the Acquisition of Common Sense

The previous section explores how the RSPB's efforts to manage their estate in such a way as to build public engagement in the environment enhance some kinds of sensory experience at

the expense of others. The labours of the RSBP's staff and volunteers, I suggest, end up reinforcing a distancing aesthetic of quiet enjoyment for visitors. This reveals a curious irony; in certain respects, the RSPB's efforts to heal the divide between people and the environment shores up the experiential aspects of that divide. Management itself, and the reason for it, ceases to be *sensible* for visitors. In the experiences of children within the *Networks for Nature* area - the NR13 postcode district - we can see why the RSPB's efforts might end up having this effect.

Concurrently with my own fieldwork, Richard Irvine and Elsa Lee conducted a series of walks with the children of primary schools in the Broads area: from the villages of Horning, South Walsham, and Reedham (Irvine et al., Forthcoming; Irvine and Lee, Forthcoming.) part of a wider study of children's environmental attitudes across East Anglia (Irvine et al., 2016). All these villages are a short drive away from Strumpshaw - indeed, both Fairhaven School and Reedham School were part of *Networks for Nature*, and were visited by the RSPB over the same period as Irvine and Lee's research was taking place. The spontaneous comments made by the children from different communities about their surrounds as they walked through them, are illuminating. The children took note of various features that highlight the role of land management in the local landscape (see Chapter 2) - recent thatching "done from local reed" (Irvine et al., Forthcoming, p. 18); local farming practices; the installation of flood defences; and the harvesting of blackberries with one's family (Irvine et al., Forthcoming, pp. 6-9) - responses of this kind being particularly frequent in Reedham (Irvine et al., Forthcoming, pp. 14-15), the most agricultural of the three villages. Recreational pursuits like fishing, "manhunt"⁶³, and boating - particularly in the village of Horning, which has a bustling river frontage - were also provided routes toward engagement with the landscape for the children. In these villages, the children voiced considerable anxiety over the spread of housing development over greenfield sites - reflecting a prominent anxiety amongst the adult population in the region, that was a frequent topic of conversation on the volunteer days at Strumpshaw.

⁶³A children's game that is a variant of hide-and-seek played in the dark - where one group of players (or sometimes, an individual player, who is "It") seeks to find members the other group.

Children in all the villages show a keen awareness of their landscape: being interested in, and clearly spending much of their time exploring and playing in what public spaces were open to them. But such engagements ceased at the edge of the wetland areas. This signifies that “the wetland has become a specific domain, defined by a particular division of labour which the children are not part of... Just as the villages themselves hug the margins of the Broads Executive Area, but are not (technically) ‘in’ the Broads, so too the children’s experiences are of dwelling on the margins of wetland habitats. Fen and marsh are, in this sense, sealed off from the children just as they are from the river that appears to run through them. The core characteristics of the Broads’ ecology are peripheral to the children’s embodied experience of the landscape.” (Irvine et al., Forthcoming, pp. 16–17) Irvine et. al. argue, following Rautio (Rautio, 2014, p. 462), that a “mingling” between children and the material world allows a shift from knowing *about* the world, to knowing *with* the world. They move to contest that “enclosure disrupts this mingling precisely by restricting movement, restricting every banal material encounters, and therefore placing children in a position where they are restricted in what they can ‘know with’.” (Irvine and Lee 2016: 4). I suggest that these “banal, material encounters” are central to how wardens and volunteers come to know the land they manage – but that visitors, including local children - by contrast and by merit of the “facility” of their access, have more constrained opportunities for such encounters.

An important example of how this kind of situated learning conditions the sensorium of wardens is how one learns to navigate the fen, when away from the paths accessible to visitors. On my first day on the reserve, O took me out to check on the three Highland cows at Surlingham Church Marsh. We walked through the lush fen, the soft aromas of water mint and wet earth rising up from every footfall. To me, we were completely lost in a sea of scented green. O, however, had “got his eye in” (see Chapter 1). On grazed fen, he could see the ditches from a distance, marked by long lines of reeds; the plants having grown tall because the cows couldn’t reach them. He knew exactly where he was. But even when equipped with this knowledge, I found it hard to see these lines. On subsequent trips to the fen looking for Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*), I couldn’t “get my eye in” and see the ditches in the reeds, and got hopelessly lost. Everyone on the warden team was adamant about the importance of this level of familiarity with the landscape, spontaneously mentioning it during interviews and in ordinary conversation. When discussing an encounter with a visitor who was trespassing off the path at Strumpshaw, T explained that:

“[He] was standing about off a trail, about a foot away from a blackcap nest, with a blackcap absolutely shouting crazily at him... And, and he obviously didn't have a clue, he was thinking “these lovely birds, singing away...” So he, he didn't have the natural, the naturalist's knowledge, that a) he should stay on the path because birds nest on the floor, and b) you know, (laughs) he was right next to this blackcap that was absolutely berating him, and he was like... “that's nice...””.

For H, familiarity with the land in which he worked – grazing marsh - arose less from “naturalist's knowledge”, and more from the experience of working with cattle and gazing land. When asked about how he translated the management plan into action, H said:

“If you're looking at creating a particular type of sward it's to do with... livestock management, so managing our stockman to put the right number of stock in the right place at the right time, or take them away, if they need to come away... erm, which comes from experience really... that's farming background... grazing... hard work... erm, and there's like the other agricultural element to that is machinery use, and using toppers, mowers to manage that sward.”.

For H, book-learning was less important than gaining practical experience of pastoralism; watching “what a cow does”, asking questions of those with whom you were working – such as graziers, stockmen, or the landowner. Though T and H's perspectives may strike a contrasting note – between “knowledge” and “experience”, the commonality of their approach becomes clear when they are asked to define common sense. From T's interview:

*“Doing what is required **without thinking or being taught**... but you can probably get better at. So someone with common sense, will almost, will do all the things you would expect them to do, without... y'know it's quite tricky, that one, it's a good'un!... it's basically **not doing anything stupid!** (laughs) Or, or not doing anything wrong unless, they believe it's the right thing to do for another reason...”*

(emphasis mine)

And from H's:

Jonathan: "Could you possibly define common sense for me?"

H: "(laughs) Am I allowed to think about that one?"

Jonathan: "You can think as long as you like!"

*H: "I'm not sure common sense is *common* sense."*

Jonathan: "No?"

*H: "It's not common to everybody - it depends on what you're doing - erm - common sense relies on your **experience and worldliness**... And, if my experience and worldliness in one particular area is not the same as yours, then we probably come to... (trails off)."*

Jonathan: "Different common senses?"

H: "Different common senses! Yeah. (laughs)"

(emphasis mine)

Here we get a sense of how "banal material encounters" inform the sensorium of wardens – a sensorium to which visitors have only partial access. When viewed together – especially with H's comments – these encounters reveal the assumption of a link between the development of competency in a particular landscape, and the honing of common sense. It is important to note that while T has a background of being a keen naturalist; something that brought him into conservation and still dominates a lot of his spare time; H had more of a focus with the agricultural aspect of the reserve. Their professional and personal histories are reflected in their statements about common sense. T's view has a more intellectualist bent (concerned with knowledge and stupidity), while H's is more invested in professional experience. But T nonetheless tells us that common sense requires no thought, nor formal teaching, and H insists on its plurality, arising from a specificity tied to particular places. Using these insights to reflect upon my own failure to "get my eye in" to Surlingham Church Marsh, knowledge of how to navigate through the fen in theory was not sufficient, until it was inculcated at a deeper – attitudinal – level. This suggests that, although knowledge and experience are both important, as T and H attest, common sense – appropriate to the specific place where you are getting experience of working – is also of pivotal importance; and is even positioned as a proper foundation of both knowledge and experience. There's also a clear

subtext here of normativity – as T’s story about the blackcap makes quite explicit. Not having the sense common to a particular landscape leads you to behave in the wrong way.

At this juncture, it’s important to return to the discussion of the previous chapter. Farmers, as we saw, develop what Winkler calls “an aesthetic of proximity [and] of the hand [that] does not necessarily have to leave out toil and suffering to create joyful experience, as is the case with the dominant panoramatic aesthetics. **Enjoyment even does not emerge without toil and time spent on the task.**” (Winkler, 2005, emphasis mine.). As in the previous section, I would qualify Winkler’s point to avoid romanticizing work unduly, adding that “enjoyment” for those who work the land is often more akin to a kind of grim satisfaction at tasks completed, than “enjoyment” per se. This qualification notwithstanding, the dichotomy struck here is helpful; what Winkler calls a “panoramic aesthetic” is the mode of landscape engagement that lies behind the practice of *quiet enjoyment* by the visitors to the reserve. Wardens and volunteers, meanwhile, spend most of their time developing the opposite kind of “aesthetic” – one rooted in practical action, painful toil, and a social history of successive management decisions by known and named people. This demonstrates how a particular attitude to the world – the sense of the common – emerges for Broadland’s land managers, ingrained through a collective habitus that structures (and is structured by) their working landscape. Visitors, by contrast, have a quite different habitus, that is both supported by and effaces the labour that goes in to the very places where it emerges.

In locating two, markedly distinct ways of relating to the landscape – the *quiet enjoyment* of visitors, and the *working through* of wardens - my study of Strumpshaw Fen has many similarities to Strang’s case study of Kowanyama Aboriginal and White rancher perspectives on the Mitchell river catchment in Far North Queensland (Strang, 1997). Strang argues that “human environmental interactions are largely an expression of cultural values; that these recur consistently through a range of interconnected cultural forms that, acting upon each other, maintain a coherent pattern of value; and that in articulation with a range of universal human imperatives and ecological pressures, this pattern of value creates a particular ‘mode’ of interaction with the environment.” (1997, p. 4). In the context of the Mitchell river, Strang points out, Kowanyama and White communities have a radically different perception of their surroundings. The indigenous population see their Country as densely textured, meaningful and social, concretising relationships between humans and non-humans extending over generations, revealed through stories, memories, and place-names (Ingold, 2000, pp. 116–121;

Strang, 1997, pp. 105, 220). This reflects the observation that, in indigenous Australian contexts more generally, that “all matter (human and animal bodies, objects, and environments) is conceived as the congealed labor of ancestral Dreaming beings. While the mythic actions of some dreamtime ancestors were concentrated at certain now-sacred sites, the land is more generally permeated by signs of their present-day intentionality and agency.” (Povinelli, 1995, p. 509). In contrast this holistic understanding of the landscape held by Indigenous people on the continent, White Australian society, by contrast, “in both cosmological and material terms, [is] characterised by immense fragmentation and abstraction” (Strang, 1997, p. 283), which, Strang draws on Miller to suggest, are two components that together create the prevailing sense of alienation in modern societies (Miller, 1994, p. 78). In conclusion, Strang advances a set of cultural attitudes that either encourage or discourage affective environmental values (See Figure 13).

Figure 13 - Encouraging and discouraging factors in affective environmental values – *selected from a more extensive list in the original.* (Strang, 1997, pp. 287–288).

ENCOURAGING FACTORS	DISCOURAGING FACTORS
Inalienable land ownership	Alienable land ownership
Land considered to be unique	Land commoditised
Continuity of residence	Discontinuity of residence
Inhabitation of one specific area	Changes in location
Cognitive encompassment of one area	Attempts to ‘encompass’ many areas
Cathection with one manageable area	Attempts to cathect with many / larger areas
Detailed knowledge of immediate area	Lack of knowledge of local environment
Long-term historic association with place	Lack of historic association with place
Socio-spatial forms mediated by place	Independent socio-spatial forms
Economic mode utilising local resources	Economic mode based on imposed resources
Economy aimed at sustainability	Economy aimed at growth / expansion
Material culture locally produced	Material culture imported
Activities relating directly to local environment	Activities relating to imposed elements
Geographically specific representations	Generic representations of landscape

Education focused on local environment	Education generic and wide-ranging
Intergenerational transmission of knowledge	Constant change separating generations

This list raises the possibility of societies and groups exhibiting varying degrees of affective attachment to place, based on the presence or absence of these factors. What I would argue here is that “common sense” – as experienced by farmers, conservationists and other land managers – denotes several of the factors identified by Strang as encouraging affective connections with place; specifically activities relating directly to the local environment, moral structures related to the local environment, detailed knowledge of the immediate area, and cathexis with one manageable area. These cultural values are themselves programmatic for certain practices and arrangements of space, and are in turn reinforced by those same practices. Many of the features Strang identifies strongly resemble the values of Broadland organicism (see Chapter 2); an outcome that is unsurprising if we consider the strong affective connection that many of those authors express for the Broads.

Television: “Broadland Consciousness” versus “Barrier Consciousness”

For those seeking to explore the Yare Valley in its present state of enclosure, the process is anything but straightforward. The nature writer Mark Cocker, in an intimate portrait of the Yare valley, states that:

*“I quickly found that [the Yare] held sway over an awkward, inaccessible landscape. In the entire stretch from Norwich to Yarmouth it’s bridged at either end in the towns themselves, but in between there is no physical structure across it. I routinely meet people who live on one bank and who have never visited the village opposite, although they may look upon the place every day of their lives. Once I even encountered a couple during a walk at Buckenham who’d lived all their lives in a village on the north side of the river, and didn’t even know the name of the village on the other side. **The Yare has become a psychological barrier.**” (Cocker, 2008, p. 20)*

This construction of the Yare as a “psychological barrier” stands in apparent contrast to the close and faithful devotion to the river and its environs expressed by the recreational visitors to Broadland, who number some 8 million per year (The Broads Authority, 2016) Amongst the

occasional visitors, there are those who have a deep and abiding affection for the region, and return year after year. These people possess what O’Riordan calls “Broadland Consciousness” (O’Riordan, 1969, pp. 44–45). As O’Riordan points out, this appears to be the product of a “sifting out” process, in which only “seasoned” Broads-lovers return to the Broads on a regular basis. One example of this sort of consciousness is the introduction written by the actress Olivia Colman to the 2014 edition of *Broadcaster*; an annual visitors’ guide to the Broads, published by the Authority. Colman recounts her idyllic childhood living in a cottage on the edge of Ranworth Broad, and at Horstead – an experience that was “lovely, feral, free”. Colman explains that it’s “almost impossible to offer children that kind of experience today. But in the Broads, you still can!”. She continues - “Wherever you are you’re always aware of water – rivers, broads, smaller waterways and the coast. If you want to try sailing or canoeing it’s an ideal place to start... When I think of the Broads, I think of a great place to escape to, whether you want activities to keep children (and adults) entertained or you just want to sit on a tranquil riverbank taking in the stunning scenery.” (Colman, 2014, p. 3). Colman’s recreational perspective on the Broads does not notice anything about its character as a working, industrial landscape. Instead, going to the Broads is an opportunity for an “escape”. Despite the fact that the scenery she admires is – as my ethnographic description in this chapter attests – entirely man-made, that making is not something she feels drawn to remark upon. This pattern is even more strongly expressed in *The Norfolk Broads* (Pullinger and Crawley, 2014) – a promotional publication sponsored by Richardson’s Boating Holidays, a private tour operator. While the numerous virtues and exquisite beauty of the landscape are extolled on page after page, marshmen are billed as a “dying breed” (2014, p. 11) while wherries are euhemerized as “beloved survivors” (2014, pp. 12–13). The management of the Broads is squarely located in a traditional past, or left out entirely from recreational representations.

Despite the doubtless passion of those seasoned visitors who possess “Broadland Consciousness”, the very fact that so many people are “sifted out” reveals the fact that such consciousness has real limits. I would take the “sifting” further, and stress the extent to which those who don’t belong to particular interest groups; those who aren’t enthusiasts with a stake in this particular landscape have no reason to go there at all. This means that, for all those people who possess “Broadland Consciousness” in the region, there will be many more who do not. Furthermore, the way in which these visitor groups engage with the landscape is quite different from the close, sustained, practically-oriented attention shown by the land managers I worked with. Instead of being a conduit for ordinary “banal experiences”, as for those who

work and worked there, for the enthusiast seeking quiet enjoyment, each broad is a destination – a beautiful place for fun and relaxation; set quite apart from daily life.

In the early 2000s, following the election of a Labour government in 1997 under the reformist Tony Blair, public spending was increased on average by 4.8% in real terms annually (Chote et al., 2010, pp. 4–5; Fielding, 2002). During this period of relatively abundant state funding, the Broads Authority could pursue initiatives that, it was hoped, would address the divide between the people and the landscape, and build trust in the Authority itself. As M, a former countryside warden explained: “[Our role] was being a linchpoint [sic] in the community to pass messages across, pass messages back and forth, and also practically to manage the footpaths, to make sure access was open to welcome people out into the Broads. And also to educate people about the Broads. So it was a mixture of hands on, practical... and also, getting people out there, and making them understand, and working with communities.” However, M was clear that there was no overarching sense of people living in the Yare valley communities had a sense of being connected to one another. Indeed, she reinforced Mark Cocker’s commentary about the “psychological divide” represented by the river:

“I think that side of the river [gestures to the South side], has no connection to this side of the river - at all. But that is very recent, really, in recent memory because there used to be so many little foot ferries across - there used to probably be about, between here and Norwich, there probably used to be about six. Erm, and there was always talk about getting some of those back and running, and that kind of never happened, really. But in the past, I used to know a lovely lady, her dad owned a pub in Surlingham, and there used to be a ferry across to Brundall, and that used to be a regular journey. And that’s not that long ago, she’s not that old, she’s in her 60s now. So, not within my time, but within living memory, this would have been a much more cohesive river valley.”

This “Barrier Consciousness” didn’t just hold people back from visiting the far side: in many cases, people steered clear of the river valleys entirely. In my time in the East Norfolk, I was shocked by the number of long-term local residents who had either neither visited the Broads, or considered them as distant to their ordinary lives. One dairy farmer who lived in Broadland District had never been to the Broads themselves, except one summer as a child when her

family had rented a boat – an experience she only dimly recollected. Some people I met in Norwich – despite the Yare flowing through their city – didn't even know the National Park existed. As one local resident in Brundall summarised this point very clearly, when he remarked “Do I think people are aware and value that they're in a national park? Locally here? I think they do if they sail, or if they're walkers. They don't have that much contact with it, outside of that... They're not in it, because they're out on the edge of it.” As a recreational landscape, the rivers, lakes and wetlands of the Broads can never be anything other than of partial interest for many people.

Conclusion: Common sense and English sensoria

My aim here has been to strengthen the assertion – made in the previous chapter – that the common - a configuration of the landscape as an open, worked space - engenders a specific sort of habitus, that contrasts sharply with the habitus entailed by inhabiting a landscape under a state of enclosure. This former configuration is still experienced in limited ways by land managers – both farmers and conservationists – in Broadland, and still has a powerful hold on the wider social imagination of England as a root metaphor. Both chapters treat enclosure and commoning not as binary states imposed on the landscape in an absolute way, but rather as processes that can be experienced by individuals to varying degrees. Strumpshaw Fen is private property, and therefore has in a legal and historical sense already been long enclosed. However, my point here has been to indicate that even heavily privatised landscapes contain the potential for commoning. Wardens, like farmers, can and do treat their workplace as a common, to which they have certain shared rights and obligations, and where a “common sense” is possible. And yet, visitors, by contrast, have far fewer opportunities for “commoning” of this kind on the reserve, and see the land quite differently as a result. This variety in relative levels of enclosure and commoning is revealed by different modes of aesthetic and physical engagement with the place – with RSPB staff and volunteers holding an aesthetic based on work and proximity, while the visitors opt more towards quiet enjoyment. Visitors view into the reserve from the paths or the river, while those who work there see through it all.

The critical position I'm taking here toward the conventional mode of viewing the landscape as mere scenery is echoed by Strang, who suggests that for White people in her fieldsite, “the land is a stage for human activities, rather than a medium of organisation, and the available roles could be performed interchangeably in any similar economic or social situation” (Strang, 1997, p. 280). My suggestion here is that this critique is itself something that can be situated within broader debates and anxieties in English-speaking cultures; a desire

to situate a common sense engagement with the physicality of the landscape against the distancing aesthetic of quiet enjoyment, with the former being a solution to the ecological problems signified by, if not directly caused by the latter. This intervention finds eloquent expression in recent climate change discourse:

*“Because this is a crisis that is, by its nature, slow moving and intensely place based. In the early stages, and in between the wrenching disasters, climate is about an early blooming of a particular flower, an unusually thin layer of ice on a lake, the late arrival of a migratory bird - noticing these small changes requires the kind of communion that comes from **knowing a place deeply, not just as scenery but also as sustenance, and when local knowledge is passed on with a sense of sacred trust from one generation to the next.** How many of us still live like that? Similarly, climate change is also about the inescapable impact of the actions of past generations not just on the present, but on generations in the future. These time frames are a language that has become foreign to a great many of us. Indeed, Western Culture has worked very hard to erase indigenous cosmologies that call on the past and the future to interrogate present-day actions, with long dead ancestors always present, alongside the generations yet to come. In short, more bad timing.” (Klein, 2014, p. 159, my emphasis)*

Within Klein’s polemic, it is possible to discover an important observation, which is concordant with the material presented in the previous two chapters – both from the spontaneous utterances of school children collected by Irvine and Lee, and from my own experiences and those of my colleagues in the Mid-Yare NNR. Klein identifies “knowing a place deeply” as knowing it as **both** scenery and sustenance, an exhortation of the importance of seeing beyond the beauty of nature, through a pragmatic engagement with it; from pleasant views, to banal material encounters. It is precisely this sort of synthesis that the “Barrier Consciousness” described above precludes. Klein’s words chime very strongly with the sentiment of the wardens regarding common sense; who although they did not subsist off the landscape of the fen, were undoubtedly engaged in the practical, difficult business of growing a “crop” from it. Thinking of engagement with the landscape in terms of component practices and values, that can be independently present or absent from one another, but that work in

concert to create different habits and notions of sensibleness, helps us to better understand the complex relationship between scenery and sustenance. Rather than thinking of the struggle between enclosure and commoning of the landscape as an either / or, the sensoria of English society today demonstrates the extent to which these twin processes are both gradual in nature.

Chapter 4 – Against the Grain: Silos and the absence of common sense in Broadland

The winter is a time for cutting things down. Most days from October to March you'd see a long column of smoke rising into the wide Norfolk sky above Strumpshaw Fen, as dry wetland vegetation was piled up and burned. On the first Saturday in February, 2016, I returned to Strumpshaw to go out with the Saturday Working Party. That day, we were tasked with cutting back willow scrub. Before too long, Nick and I were standing under a grim bank of alder at the edge of the reserve, stacking up long spindly wisps of willow that the rest of the group have been cutting down, out on the fen. It was steady, satisfying work; that became steadily more satisfying as we got the hang of it, experimenting and trying different ways of getting the willow branches to lay together. Initially, we just threw the branches as far as we could between the alders, into the mud, but over time our technique became more refined. The circumstances were constantly changing; the speed with which the branches were brought to us, the amount of space available, our own levels of energy, the size of the branches. We figured out that weaving the branches into those that were already stacked was the most efficient way to go about it; the thinner twigs broke off as you turned and snaked each branch in, meaning that each piece of brash took up less space, and required less energy to dispose of than trying to throw them further and further into the wood. We kept an eye on each-other, and paid loose attention to the wood and the work, while chatting about other things.

Nick asked me about my thesis. I had decided to write it about common sense, I told him.

He laughed. "Oh dear!" He exclaimed. "That must be difficult; there's not a lot of that around, is there?"

This joke – that common sense is scarce – was a common reaction to my chosen thesis topic. Indeed, I began to consciously crack this joke myself to English people I met, in Norfolk and back in Cambridge, to gauge their reaction. The result was always a laugh, or at least a knowing smile. The ironic scarcity of [supposedly] "common" sense was clearly a familiar refrain to English people. Humour can offer an invaluable insight into norms and paradoxes

(Swinkels and de Koning, 2016, p. 8) – in this case, the ample eye-rolling, and knowing looks were indicative of what was so funny: this observation was funny because it was true. English people believe that common sense *actually is* rather scarce. Not only is this ironic, but it is a sore point; a graze on the English body politic, wrapped in bandages of humour. Common sense – although it *should* be “common”, both shared and widespread – is lamentably absent from society.

In Chapter 2, I argued that the common serves as a crucial root metaphor in English culture, that it summarises prevailing views about the [ideally] organic, pragmatic, and sensible nature of social norms. In Chapter 3, I explored the role of “sensible” – wherein a common landscape acts as a medium into which those norms are materialized through a particular habitus for those who manage it. The claim that common sense is rather rare articulates these attitudes in two ways – firstly, when used in the form of a joke (as above), we see how it is inclusive; it invites the speaker and the listener to see themselves as part of the same moral community of “sensible people”, opposed to those who aren’t. When it’s used in the second sense – as a criticism – the emphasis is upon exclusion; picking out specific persons or classes of persons who lack this basic quality. These two uses cut in contradictory directions; the joke pits specific sensible individuals against a prevailing (and ironic) lack of common sense in society at large, while the criticism identifies particular agents or actions that reveal a lack of a sense common to a general, unspecified audience; pointing out errors of judgement that would be obvious to any right-thinking person. My goal here is not to resolve this contradiction – common sense means different, even contradictory, things to different people on different occasions – but rather to use this tension as a way into an important reality of Broadland society; namely, controversies over the management of its landscape. Within these controversies, the absence of common sense – in both its joking and critical guises – plays a key role. This absence, as I will go on to suggest, reveals further dimensions to the paradoxical relationship between the common and possessive individualism, established in Chapter 2.

Hickling Broad: A lack of common ground

Perhaps the best example that I came across of the how a “lack of common sense” can be deployed in Broadland is the case of Hickling Broad in the Thurne valley. Hickling Broad is the largest of the broads, the location of a National Nature Reserve in the care of Norfolk Wildlife Trust, and a popular spot for boating. In the late 1990s a major dispute erupted, in a

sequence of events recounted to me by Meg Amsden, a local artist and environmental educator, who was contracted by the Broads Authority at the time to produce a puppet show on the affair⁶⁴. I was also deeply fortunate to interview Dr Martin George, an expert on the natural history of Broadland, whose research on the history of Hickling Nature Reserve is foundational to my analysis below (George, 2016).

In the 20th century Hickling Broad's waters were heavily eutrophicated, although this was only partly due to agriculture. Instead, the major source of nutrients was a large flock of Black-Headed Gulls (*Chroicocephalus ridibundus*) who roosted on the broad, their population being kept artificially high by a local rubbish tip, that provided them with a large and consistent supply of food (George, 2016, p. 51). When the tip was closed, the gulls left the broad, and a huge bloom of Stonewort (*Chara* sp.), a nationally-scarce water plant grew in the water. Although local conservationists were extremely pleased that a rare plant was growing unexpectedly in the polluted water, the local boating community were extremely angry. The matts of thick foliage clogged the engines of their boats. This was after a successful campaign by the Broads Authority promoting a shift from more powerful diesel engines, to less powerful electric ones to minimize erosion. The new, less powerful engines couldn't cope with the weeds, and broke down. A series of tense meetings followed, as different user groups argued bitterly about how best to manage the broad. In the end, the Stonewort used up the nutrients in the water, and died back – but the controversy had left serious ill-feeling in the local community.

At the time, two academics from the UEA Environmental Sciences department, Tim O'Riordan and Rosie Ferguson, were asked by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the Broads Authority, and Natural England to interview the various stakeholders associated with the broad; including employees of the conservation bodies, boaters, and residents. O'Riordan and Ferguson found that, although the stakeholders shared a common vision of Hickling Broad as a place that supports both a healthy ecology and a thriving recreational culture, there was also a significant lack of trust between the main parties, exacerbated by a lack of clarity over management responsibilities, and a tendency for groups to form around common interests, that reinforced extreme and inflexible positions (O'Riordan and Ferguson, 2000). Ferguson and O'Riordan argue that the root of the problem – the climate of mistrust – was caused by misperceptions over the intentions of others, a failure to talk face to face, and a lack of

⁶⁴ “The Bloomin’ Weed” performed in 2000.

appreciation and mutual respect for how each party values the broad itself. I would add a further layer of commentary here. What we see at Hickling is the playing out of a tacit assumption, that underlies any accusation that someone lacks common sense – namely, that anyone who understands a situation *properly* will agree with you about the right and wrong ways to respond to it. To say “such-and-such lacks common sense” or “this person does one thing, when it would be common sense to do quite another”, the speaker is working with the presumption that there exists a sympathetic audience to his remarks, who share his own fulsome understanding, as opposed to his interlocutor, who does not. But as we see at Hickling, it is not just a fragmented *understanding* that leads to conflict, but fragmented *interests*. It was in the interests of boaters to have a broad clear of weed, while the conservationists were interested in the opposite outcome. Although everyone may agree on a general vision of what the broad should be like – biodiverse, and supporting recreation - when it comes to the specifics of how this vision should be realized, different expertise and divergent interests led to differences of opinion. But the assumption that it is a *lack of understanding* that leads to these different managerial positions shifts emphasis away from the diversity of individual expertise, preferences, and needs, towards collective, pragmatic norms. The opposition are transformed from a differently-interested party with their own set of expertise (Bodenhorn, 2014; P. Harvey, 2007), to fools and incompetents who violate basic norms. This impression is compounded by infrequent, shallow communication – as Ferguson and O’Riordan point out – via email or official letters.

The Hickling case can be compared to the models of common resource management, developed by economist Elinor Ostrom. Criticizing the prevailing tendency of policymakers to regard either state management and privatization of common resources as the only means of protecting those resources, Ostrom argues that alternative institutions – based on the collective management of pooled resources by extractors – can in certain circumstances be highly effective, because they account for the fact that individual choices and behavior can and do vary according to circumstances (Ostrom, 1991, pp. 8–23). Ostrom identifies eight design principles for common-resource management systems that succeed and endure:

1. *“Clear boundaries – that define both who has rights to a resource, and the bounds of the resource itself.*
2. *Rules regarding extraction and management that reflect local conditions.*

3. *A participatory system of management, including all stakeholders.*
4. *Effective monitoring by auditors who are either directly accountable to the stakeholders, or are stakeholders themselves.*
5. *Graduated sanctions, meted out by other stakeholders, or by officials accountable to stakeholders.*
6. *Accessible, low cost means of conflict resolution.*
7. *Autonomy from external authorities – especially governmental.*
8. *[for CPRs that are part of larger systems] “Nested enterprises” – CPR bodies existing in multiple layers.”*

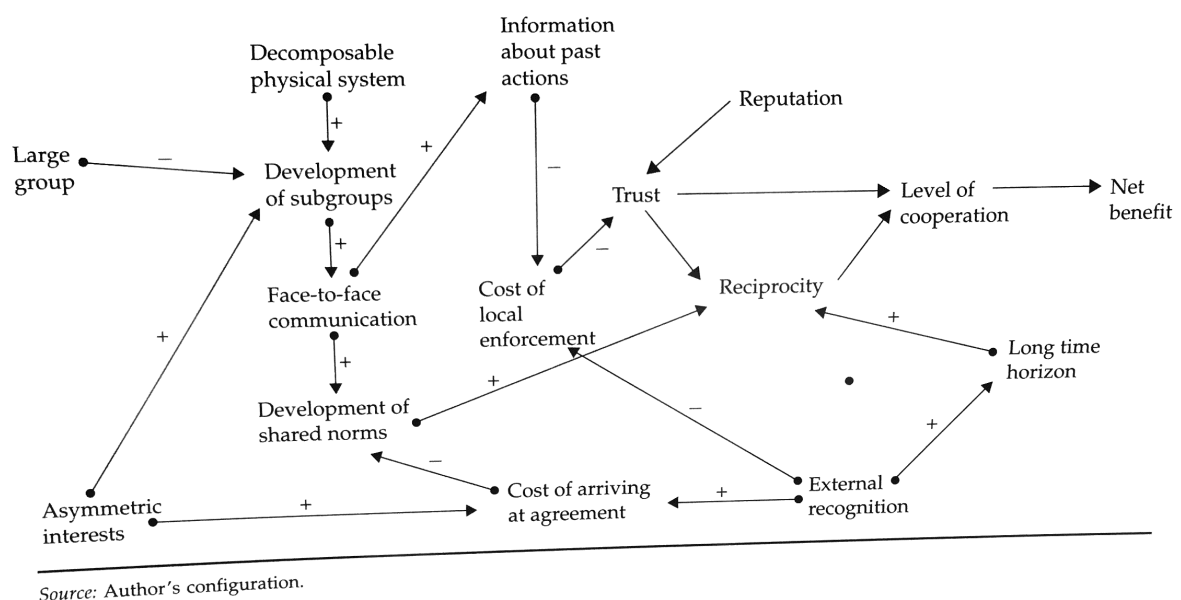
(See Ostrom 1991: 90)

These measures facilitate a key process in Ostrom’s models: “In many field and experimental situations individuals tend to use heuristics - rules of thumb - that they have learned over time regarding responses that have, in the past, brought them good outcomes in particular kinds of situations. Over the course of frequently encountered, repetitive situations, individuals learn heuristics that are better tailored to the particular situation. With repetition and sufficiently large stakes, individuals may learn heuristics that approach best-response strategies.” (Ostrom, 2003, p. 40). Ostrom’s CPR model attempts to develop these experience-based heuristics into effective tools for resource management; something that formal state regulation cannot achieve. These heuristics can be thought of as applying both to technical practices, as well as social actions; indeed, Ostrom claims that “One might think of norms as heuristics that individuals adopt from a moral perspective in that these are the kinds of actions they wish to follow in living their lives.” (2003, p. 41). It is clear that, for Ostrom, just as people are better informed about resources they know well, the same is true regarding their interpersonal relationships, with face-to-face interactions being the best method for becoming so informed (Ostrom, 2009, p. 113). The heuristic capacities to which Ostrom is referring here are more or less synonymous with the definition of common sense discussed above (see Chapter 1) – a normative and pragmatic reasonableness in a specific working environment. For Ostrom, then, effective commons management requires common sense. When these processes are absent, Ostrom believes that other outcomes – including the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin, 1968, p. 1244) are possible - “when individuals who have high discount rates and little

mutual trust act independently, without the capacity to communicate, to enter into binding agreements, and to arrange for monitoring and enforcing mechanisms, they are not likely to choose jointly beneficial strategies unless such strategies happen to be their dominant strategies.” (Ostrom, 1991, p. 183). But when individuals interact regularly within “a localized physical setting” for an extended period of time, they gain understanding of their shared interests, exchange promises, learn who to trust, and develop common norms, that in turn support collective management practices (Ostrom, 1991, p. 184). Quotidian communication, here and elsewhere in Ostrom’s work, is thus identified as a key component in the building of trust (Ostrom, 2003, p. 33).

Figure 14 - Ostrom’s analysis of the salient factors pertaining to the management of a complex water catchment, including a number of tributaries and landholders (Ostrom, 1991, pp. 60–61).

Figure 2.8 A Complex Scenario of Collective Action for Provision of a Public Good



But trust in Ostrom’s reading is not absolute – it is highly context-dependent, varying according to particular socio-economic and moral circumstances (Ostrom and Walker, 2003, p. 5). Due to the large number of individuals that rely upon them, the variety of activities that impinge upon them, and the difficulty inherent in their privatisation, water catchments like the Broads are prime, if challenging, candidates for management under a CPR format. Ostrom discusses a theoretical example of such a structure in her contribution to *Trust and Reciprocity* (See Figure 14). We can see within this scheme crucial junctions of possibility, where the

presence or absence of trust plays a key role, such as the “Development of Subgroups” and the “Level of cooperation”.

Although Ostrom identifies subgroups as a necessary precursor to converting a watershed – or any resource involving a large variety of heterogenous users - into a CPR, the Hickling case above indicates that the “Development of Shared Norms” through “Face to Face Communications” can actually make the maintenance of cooperation between subgroups more difficult. Ostrom herself presents a solution to this; “nesting” of CPR institutions would be required, beginning with small numbers of landowners operating within the catchment of a single tributary. Face-to-face interactions *within* subgroups should be accompanied by face-to-face interactions *between* them. Ostrom hypothesises that once one such organization was created, the economic benefits would encourage other commons to be created in other tributaries; these would then be able to work together to better manage the entire catchment, through face-to-face interactions amongst appointed representatives⁶⁵. With this proposed solution – that the commoning of a large system must consist of smaller, constituent commons – it is important to note that the boundaries of these smaller commons are defined by the resource itself; namely, the catchments of tributaries.

Ostrom’s modeling of common pool resources - stressing the reasonableness of heuristic strategies and conversational norms, taking place within clearly defined commons – is an academic articulation of many of the cultural attitudes I witnessed in the field⁶⁶. But as I’ve already indicated, the vituperative disagreements at Hickling demonstrate how the hopeful potential of Ostrom’s models can be frustrated – not least by the formation of subgroups with divergent interests who fail to speak to one another face-to-face, creating a climate of mistrust.

⁶⁵ Ostrom also argues that external governmental agencies could have both a positive and negative role to play: overruling design principal 7 above, Ostrom argues, would catastrophically undermine the networks of trust and reciprocity upon which such institutions rely – while offering expertise and financial support could hasten the commoning process.

⁶⁶ See in particular the quotations from wardens T and H in Chapter 3, and the reasonableness and specificity of “common sense” in the “Attitude Test” used by F at Whitlingham Country Park, and of the “simple common sense” of P’s actions with respect to a community agricultural project in Chapter 1.

Although there are common rights at issue on Hickling Broad itself – namely the right of navigation, as well as some fishing rights - these constitute a fragment of what was once a far more extensive network of common rights and obligations within the parish. As we have already seen in Chapter 2, the process of enclosure resulted in a profound social upheaval across England, in which many rural people were made strangers in their own parishes – dislocated from their “localized physical setting”, to use Ostrom’s phrasing. Regardless of whether the medieval peasant economy fostered the development of Ostrom-style heuristics, these heuristics and networks of face-to-face intimacy are hard to sustain in the marketised landscape of progressive enclosure, where private land ownership – and possessive individualism - prevails. The parish of Hickling is a case in point; with huge areas of common fen and marsh being enclosed and drained in the Enclosure Awards of 1808 (George, 2016, pp. 22–25), leaving two, tiny parcels of land for the use of the poor (See Figure 15). In the centuries over which enclosure took place social structures where communal land-use played a key role were progressively replaced by one in which private ownership – and the possessive individual – took centre stage. Williamson observes that “traditionally the common fens had been used in a variety of ways, and careful management was necessary in order to prevent conflict and argument. After enclosure, however, areas of private fen could be used by their owners in whatever way they chose.” (Williamson, 1997, p. 103). As in the rest of England, enclosure diminishes the incentive for working together at Hickling. Furthermore, those few fragments of common land that remained in the 19th century – the poor allotments – were, unlike the old commons, managed exclusively by middle-class residents; not the actual poor people who used them (Williamson, 1997, p. 99). Prior to Parliamentary Enclosure, the wet commons of Broadland were managed by manorial courts. Although such institutions were not independent of elite control, commoners nonetheless had a direct role in how the commons in the parish were managed – unlike the poor allotments (Williamson, 1997, p. 78) (See Chapter 2).

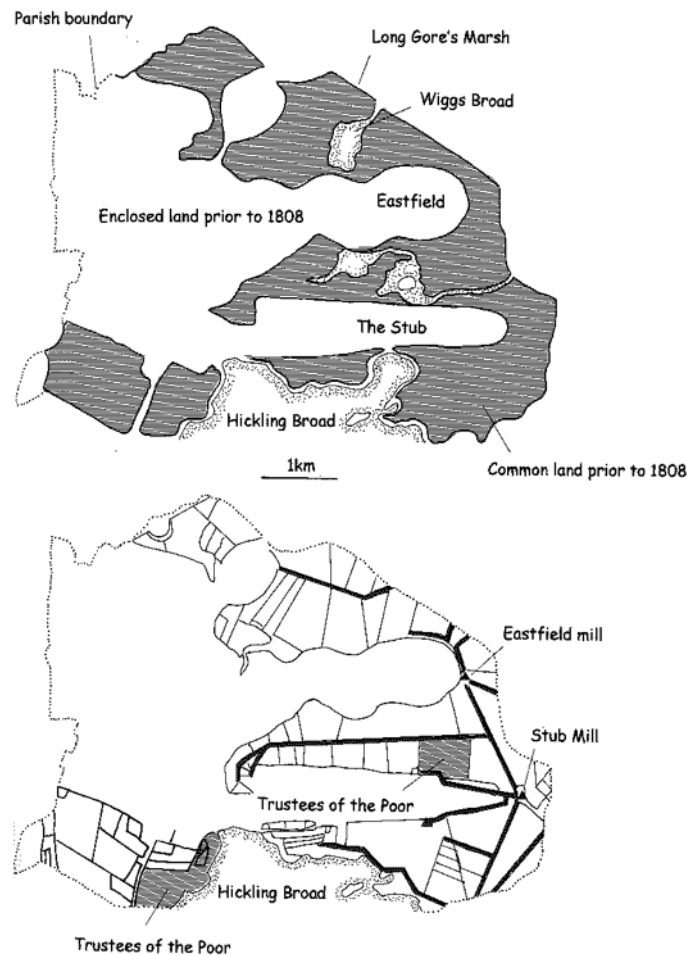


Figure 15 - Hickling Parish, showing the extent of enclosure of common land. *Note the extensive new drainage works – resulting in the disappearance of three small broads – indicative of large-scale intensification of land use for agriculture. Once extensive areas of common are reduced to two, much smaller “Trustees of the Poor”.*

Hickling Broad is privately owned – 644 acres of the site were recently purchased by Norfolk Wildlife Trust after a major funding appeal (BBC News, 2017; Norfolk Wildlife Trust, 2017). The merits of the Trust’s management of the site aside, such an arrangement can be compared to that of the poor trusts, in which land is managed privately by a small group on behalf of a particular interest (that of the poor; that of conservation), rather than collectively by all the residents of the parish or manor. This pattern of rights and responsibilities being segmented according to interest, I suggest, is not confined to conservation management for public benefit, but could equally be applied to all the distinct user groups that emerged in the course of the Hickling controversy – from fishermen, to farmers, to boaters. And this

segmentation is accentuated by the predominance of private property rights, over common ones.

Ultimately, what this piece of historical context serves to demonstrate is the extent to which the socio-economic common ground at Hickling – materialised by the common marshes and fens – has been undermined by an ongoing process of enclosure. Although we saw, in Chapters 2 and 3, how common understandings could emerge amongst land managers, in society at large possessive individualism is hegemonic. C. B. Macpherson suggests that, in Britain and other modern liberal democracies, “society consists of relations of exchange between proprietors” (Macpherson, 1962, p. 3), identifying this as a key assumption of what he calls “possessive individualism” (Macpherson, 1962, pp. 263–264), an ideology that also reifies the autonomy of the individual from any kind of prior social relations, a right that is protected behind a veil of legal obscurity (Frake, 1996, p. 104). I argue that the Hickling case indicates that, rather than individual interest and the common being held in balance as land managers strive to achieve, the individual – and the possessive individual at that – is the key economic actor in Broadland society, rather than the commoner. As we see with the privatization of the UK water supply, whether she is dubbed a citizen or a customer, the possessive individual, unlike the commoner, is not directly responsible for the management of their resources, and can only engage those who are in limited ways (Page and Bakker, 2005, p. 54). One businessman felt the implications were stark:

“In order for us to have a viable economy, we actually have to tear apart society... just look around you... it doesn't matter if this is urban or rural - what we're actually creating is a completely them-and-us society, and a them-and-us society means we hate government, government hates them, we hold everybody in contempt, everybody is trying to screw us for as much money, and ultimately it doesn't work.”

The optimistic assumptions of Ostrom are systematically undermined by a hegemonic state of enclosure where interested, possessive individuals struggle over what few commons are left – creating the fragmented society I found so methodologically challenging. The segmentation this creates, even within geographically distinguishable commons like the catchment of Hickling Broad, engenders an “them-and-us society” of which the Hickling Broad controversy is a prime example. Deprived of a shared working environment, people

increasingly form subgroups based on individual interest and expertise, rather than shared resources. Subjected to the continuing process of enclosure that makes working heuristics and face-to-face relationships difficult to sustain, acrimony and suspicion – often based around entrenched subgroups - was a likely outcome (Rothstein, 2000) (See Figure 16).

Figure 16 – Continuing enclosure. *The cricket ground in the centre of the village of Brundall was sold off for development during my fieldwork – replacing common open space with private properties.*



Bird Farmers: Catfield Fen and Landscape-Scale Conservation

I first visited Catfield Fen as part of my volunteering with the Bure Valley Conservation Group, a community conservation society set up in 2015 with the assistance of Norfolk Wildlife Trust. Consisting of roughly 30 largely retired local people, and with the help of two staff members from Norfolk Wildlife Trust, the group would meet every Wednesday morning at 09.30 outside Acle Library, before heading out to conduct practical conservation work; coppicing trees, planting saplings, raking wildflower meadows, or building bird boxes. The group would also periodically hold talks on naturalism, or conduct site visits to places of ecological significance in the Bure and Ant valleys, after our work for the day was done. One misty January morning, it was announced by that we were in for a special treat – we were going to visit Catfield Fen.

After a short drive, past the little village of Ludham and on, across the wide fields beside the Ant, we parked up under a long stand of wintry oak trees, piled out of the minibus, and headed off down the footpath that ran adjacent to the reserve. As we turned down the Rond – a raised grassy bank that bisected that part of the reserve – the flat landscape stretched out around us in foggy silence; the reeds a sheet of beaten copper under a silvery sky. We were told about the place, how it was officially designated as the finest valley fen in Western Europe, how it was inhabited by otters (*Lutra lutra*) and water rails (*Rallus aquaticus*) and king beetles (*Dytiscus marginalis*). As I looked into the mirk, I imagined that somewhere out there, red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) would be looking back at us; Britain's largest wild mammal, synonymous in my mind with the wild. Most important of all, Catfield Fen was home to some 5,000 fen orchids (*Liparis loeseli loeselii*) – some 90% of the entire UK population. Part of what made it so special, and so suitable for the orchids, we were told, was that it had been sealed off from the main Broads river system, preserving the quality of its spring-fed waters. Catfield, then, seemed like a magical place – tucked away from the problems of eutrophication and under-management that dogged other parts of Broadland.

Catfield Fen covers some 57 acres of open water and fenland, adjoining some 58 acres of carr woodland, lying to the east of the River Ant in the North Rivers region of the Broads (Harris et al., 2008). Half of Catfield Fen is part of the Catfield Estate, and is privately owned by the Harris family, who purchased the site in 1995 following the death of its former owner. The remainder of the fen is split into two nature reserves. Catfield Fen Nature Reserve, owned by Butterfly Conservation, was purchased by their Norfolk Branch in 1992 as a stronghold for the nationally scarce Swallowtail butterfly; Britain's largest. The neighboring Sutton Fen is owned by the RSPB, who also manage Catfield Fen Nature Reserve on behalf of Butterfly Conservation.

Neither Catfield Fen Nature Reserve, nor RSPB Sutton Fen are open to the public, due to their ecological importance. It is for this reason that, when I started as a residential volunteer at Strumpshaw Fen, my boss O insisted that I take the opportunity to visit Sutton Fen. As I found out more about Sutton, I realized that biodiversity wasn't the only reason I had to visit the site: the whole of Catfield Fen was at the centre of a dispute over water abstraction. Far from my initial impression of romantic wilderness, in truth Catfield was as thoroughly enmeshed in controversies over management and stewardship as any part of the Broadland landscape. After a couple of weeks of emailing back and forth to determine a day when we

could be hosted there, we decided upon the 8th September – a work day for the trusted team of volunteers who helped the RSPB wardens manage the site. G – one of the other residential volunteers – and I drove away from Strumpshaw, leaving the Yare Valley behind and headed north. The weather was warm and summery, and the roads were clear. We parked up beside the barns where the reserve's equipment was stored and the fields of grain that surrounded the wetland stopped, and got out of the van. As G headed off to chat to the other volunteers, the Site Manager E. led me into the site office to pick out some maps. E mentioned that he'd put the folder on water abstraction to one side and hadn't looked at it for quite some time; although the dispute was rumbling on. E. also mentioned that the matter was being taken to public inquiry - at which he was giving evidence. The inquiry would be led by a Planning Inspector, who would make a recommendation to Liz Truss, the Secretary of State for the Environment, who would make the final decision. E. was keen to ensure that his evidence was as robust and comprehensive as possible. Once we'd selected a couple of maps from a variety of folders – the one on water abstraction was by far the largest - and we headed out into the fen.

The very structure of the landscape reflects continuing management, that responds to broader fluctuations in the market. Parts of the RSPB-managed site had been dug for peat during the 18th century on a small scale to be used locally as fuel. The patchwork of dug and undug areas creates the range of habitats we saw out on the fen, because dug and undug peat succeeds at different rates - dug peat succeeds quicker, being more porous and more readily colonized by trees and shrubs. Peat cutting for fuel had now ceased, however. The fen was also cut commercially for marsh hay and litter up until the 1940s. Commercial reed growing for thatching continued until 2010 when the growing acidification and drying of the fen diminished the quality of the reed to such an extent that it wasn't commercially viable. This is unusual in the Broads, as normally, the management of the fen by having the reed cut and taken off would prevent litter from building up and would keep the ground level (and thus the pH) relatively consistent. But these traditional practices were no longer effective. Although it had been proposed that the sluice, sealing the fen off from the river Ant, could be opened to allow in an influx of more alkali water, this would bring salt, pollutants and fertilizer with it. As such, opening the sluice was a last resort. As we crossed a ditch, E. said that the water in the ditches was still very alkali, because they are deep enough to cut down into the alkali layer. So why was the upper soil so acidic?

The acidity of the soil was a salient factor in the dispute over water abstraction. Water had been abstracted adjacent to the fen since 1986, for use in local agriculture (Harper, 2015). In 2008, the Norfolk and Norwich Naturalists made a survey of the fen, and concluded that it was drying out due to this abstraction. These concerns were passed on to Natural England and the Environment Agency, the two statutory bodies with responsibility for water abstraction and the maintenance of protected habitats like Catfield Fen (Harper, 2014). On 8 May 2015, the Environment Agency denied the application by a local farmer – Q – for two water abstraction licenses that he used to irrigate his fields to be renewed, a decision which Q appealed. A coalition of environmental organisations – including Natural England, Butterfly Conservation, and the RSPB, provided evidence in support of the Environment Agency’s original decision (Harper, 2016). E., as the warden, had a key role in this process – providing evidence that contributed to the Environment Agency’s position, and was used to defend their judgement as the case ascended through the British legal system through progressive appeals. What the RSPB was arguing, E. explained, was that the abstraction of alkali water from the aquifer that fed the fen was causing the water level in the fen to drop. As the fen dried out, in certain places acidic rainwater was collecting. Without sufficient alkali water from the aquifer to dilute this rainfall, the soil in these patches became more acidic, which created a foothold for Sphagnum moss. This moss had the ability to further acidify the soil, allowing it to spread across the surface of the fen from these footholds, killing alkali-loving plants like the Fen Orchid. E. showed me one map; little yellow dots each showed a Fen Orchid, while irregular blobs of red showed Sphagnum patches. Pointing at one large red patch in the southern corner of the reserve, E observed “There used to be a good number of Fen Orchids there. Now they’re gone.” This information was submitted to a Public Inquiry regarding Q’s appeals, that eventually ruled against further abstraction (Case, 2016).

E. said that “conservation is as much about people and relationships, as it is about ecology.”. Engaging with diverse stakeholders and working with people was a vital part of his role, this isn’t something that falls within his comfort zone - “I know how to cut back scrub, cut reed, survey fen orchid, keep cattle, and build fences... but dealing with people is whole different exercise.”. This more social dimension to his role was a relatively recent development in the lifetime of the RSPB as an organization. E. mentioned how in the past, the RSPB only managed their sites with wildlife in mind, but this was changing as the RSPB realized the importance of working with people. From neighboring landowners, to visitors, the staff of the RSPB were being stridently encouraged to see engaging others as vital for improving outcomes

for wildlife. As part of a growing awareness in the conservation community that the whole of society's relationship with the natural world needs to be changed if biodiversity is to be protected, the RSPB has focused increasingly upon engaging other groups in society, as part of its Saving Nature Strategy (Clarke et al., 2013). In the Broads, this strategic imperative was reflected by two, principal initiatives: *Futurescapes*, and *Networks for Nature*. While *Networks for Nature* seeks to build engagement amongst the public – being directed toward changing gardening practices to create habitats - *Futurescapes* sought to build a common methodological approach amongst land managers in the region, that encourages wildlife. Initiated in 2006, *Futurescapes* represents the RSPB's contribution to landscape scale conservation - “the coordinated conservation and management of habitats for a range of species across a large natural area, often made up of a network of sites.” (Bourn and Bulman, 2005; Ellis et al., 2011, p. 1).

As H, another warden at Strumpshaw, explained - isolated nature reserves come with a series of problems. They only represent a very small part of the total land area, and they concentrate populations of rare species – a single extreme weather event or predator can have a dramatic impact on the overall population, as the situation at Catfield Fen demonstrates. Landscape-scale conservation addresses these issues, by extending conservation practices into the wider landscape. The Broads catchment is the leading *Futurescape* in the UK, and is therefore treated as an example of best practice within the RSPB. One part of this initiative was Broads Land Management Services, through which the RSPB made its skills and specialist equipment available to landowners through contracting. When the 540 agri-environment scheme agreements in the Broads were concluded in favour of Entry Level Stewardship and Higher Level Stewardship agreements in 2005, the RSPB moved to advise landowners on how to become eligible for the new funding sources. “It's good for us, but also good for the farmers. Some aren't just into growing cows, they're also really into their nature. It's not too dissimilar to our ANEs [Active Nature Enthusiasts – a segmentation of the public developed by the RSPB as part of *Networks for Nature*] - you just need to find an 'AFE'...” Tellingly, V concluded: “The only way you can do that is through personal connections, knocking on doors...”

Futurescapes served to build a respectful, collaborative relationship between the RSPB and other land managers in the region, including farmers. Indeed, one of my informants referred to the RSPB archly as “Bird Farmers”. But V embraced this epithet. “A landowner owns some arable land, he plants a crop, he's invested a lot of money in that land, so why

should his crop fail? The RSPB has invested a lot of money in an area of land to grow a crop - birds, plants, invertebrates etc. - why should that suffer?”. For V, this phrase encompassed the fact that conservationists and farmers – despite sometimes being at loggerheads, had a significant amount in common. “We have our own agronomists, they’re not called agronomists, they’re called ecologists!”.

There are several threads here that are insightful, in comparison to the Hickling case, and to what a “lack of common sense” reveals about the controversies surrounding land management in the Broads. The previous, “reserve-centered” approach to conservation – where privately-owned tracts of land were stewarded for the public benefit, in this case to conserve wildlife – shows continuity with the management of poor allotments; a professional body maintaining a small amount of land for wider public benefit, within a largely privatized landscape. But such provisions do little to change the character of the overall landscape, and the adverse consequences this has on wildlife. Wildlife, after all, does not respect property boundaries. Possessive individuals, in complete control of their private estate, are free to pursue practices in their interests that damage the public good. The biodiversity crisis in the UK today demonstrates this in action. Having recognized this problem, the RSPB, like other wildlife charities in the region⁶⁷, have refocused some of their efforts upon building face-to-face contact with their neighbors. *Futurescapes* indicates that a key component of this approach has been emphasizing the *continuity of interest* between the RSPB and other land managers – wild species simply being a different “crop” to domestic ones. Although disputes may emerge in such a context, one of the two kinds of framing with which we began this chapter – of anonymous opponents who lack common sense, versus the known individuals who possess it – was conspicuously absent.

Fragmenting Corporeal Attitudes: Habitus and “The Silo Effect”

Having outlined a series of ethnographic cases of Broadland disagreements, with or without the framing of scarce common sense, I shall now take a more analytical footing, and attempt to consider the broader significance of these issues for English society, and social relations in general. This effort will go from the micro-political disputes of the Broads, to a macro-political

⁶⁷ The Norfolk Wildlife Trust have also introduced their own landscape-scale conservation initiative - of which the Acle Conservation Group was part – called *Living Landscapes*.

one with direct implications for Broadland – namely, the 2016 UK referendum on membership of the European Union – and will follow an intellectual genealogy that moves from a work of popular anthropology to a connected strand of social theory, that speaks to how divisions of the kind discussed above arise.

On the 1st September 2015, whilst I was working on the fields and marshes of Strumpshaw Fen, Gillian Tett, a British financial journalist, anthropologist and author published *The Silo Effect: The Peril of Expertise and the Promise of Breaking Down Barriers* – a book that Steven Poole of the Guardian dubbed a “subversive manifesto” (Poole, 2015). In *The Silo Effect*, Tett argues that complex modern institutions, from multinational corporations like Sony to state bureaucracies like that of New York City, “are divided, and then subdivided into numerous different departments, which often fail to talk to each other – let alone collaborate. People often live in separate mental and social ‘ghettos’, talking and coexisting only with people like us. In many countries, politics is polarized. Professions seem increasingly specialized, partly because technology keeps becoming more complex and sophisticated, and is only understood by a tiny pool of experts.” (Tett, 2016, p. 16). These highly inward-looking and exclusive subdivisions, Tett claims, are structural features of contemporary cultural life, manifesting both in social organization and in terms of the categories we use to make sense of the world. Tett dubs this structural fragmentation “siloing”, and suggests that it leads to inter-group conflict, tunnel vision, and a blindness to risk and opportunity. As Green puts it in her review of Tett’s book, “closed, self-referential networks where socially constructed truths prevail and established ways of doing things are never challenged amount to silos which stifle innovation, limit adaptiveness and lead to organisational failure.” (Green, 2016). What was so subversive about this analysis of modern corporate life is that it runs counter to the prevailing assumptions about bureaucracy, that presume greater streamlining and specialization in the workplace lead to efficiency and reliability (see du Gay, 2000)⁶⁸. The cases marshalled by Tett – of both the success of those who master their silos, and the failure of those who are mastered by them – demonstrate that this is not always the case.

Tett’s *The Silo Effect* uses a clear and accessible parse of the life and theoretical contributions of Pierre Bourdieu – suitable for her popular audience - to develop her analysis.

⁶⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy, and for academic critiques of this model, see Chapter 5.

The silo mentality that fragments large organisations, and blinkers vision, is a consequence of the tendency of human beings to naturalise their own habitus – a tendency that Tett exhorts her readers to overcome (Tett, 2016, p. 61). Tett doesn't portray silos as necessarily bad – acquiring a specific habitus being part and parcel of social life – but the critical issue is whether people are able to step *outside* of those structuring concerns. Those who are able to mentally or physically disrupt the structures to which they are used, are able to staunch the problems that siloing creates. Those who do not face potentially serious consequences.

As with her predictions in 2006 that a financial crisis was imminent (MacKenzie, 2009; McKenna, 2011), Tett's warning concerning the dangers of siloing proved prophetic. Less than a year after *The Silo Effect* was published, the electorate of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, a result that shocked the intellectual and political establishment and sent an earthquake through the currency markets (Wheeler and Hunt, 2016). The vote in favour of Brexit suggests that both of the silo effects described by Tett – namely, the isolation of different groups within a common organization; and the mental inflexibility this engenders – were at play in British politics. On the one hand, the result is deemed to have revealed a lack of faith in the “liberal elite” that fuels a populist mood (Münchau, 2017), revealing a major divide between those who believed numerous expert voices warning of the dire consequences of a Leave victory – such as the IMF, world leaders, and the UK government itself – and those who distrusted those voices (Foster, 2016; Van Reenen, 2016). Secondly, few in the British establishment saw the result coming (Parker et al., 2016), with Prime Minister David Cameron resigning in the aftermath, as many commentators suggested his judgement of the public mood and his assessment of the likelihood of a Remain victory was fundamentally flawed (Kershaw et al., 2016). The country appeared to have been split into two, enormous silos.

What struck me most about the discourse surrounding the vote was the extent to which common sense was invoked regularly in media commentary. For the Remain side, Brexit meant economic ruin and destroyed our previously cordial relationship with European nations – as such, it flew in the face of common sense (Goet, 2016). Laurie Penny, for example, laments that “There's not enough tea in the entire nation to help us Keep Calm and Carry On today. Not on a day when prejudice, propaganda, naked xenophobia and callous fear-mongering have won out over the common sense we British like to pride ourselves on.” (Penny, 2016), while Zoe Williams exhorts us to “insist upon a snap general election as a matter of common sense” as a practical way to fix the crisis of Brexit (Williams, 2016). To those who supported Leave,

however, the result was a victory for common sense – a reassertion by sensible folk of control over matters that had been delegated to distant bureaucrats in Brussels and a metropolitan elite, whose “expert” decisions regularly frustrated common sense (Dunford and Kirk, 2016). From this point of view, as Charles Gasparino put it, “Brexit won because common sense prevailed” (Gasparino, 2016). Common sense itself, so it appears, had been cleaved in two. Consequently, the issue of whether to leave or remain in the European Union revealed deep differences between how large groups of people in England understood the world and chose to act within it.

Martin Harper, the RSPB’s Conservation Director, greeted the Catfield Fen decision in favour of the Environment Agency’s abstraction ban with the following observation: “While there has been a bit of a reaction from the farming community about this, this is just another example of the big conversation that we need to have as a result of the Brexit vote.” (Harper, 2016). Leaving the European Union would have a direct impact on the Broads in two main respects. Firstly, the EU has a broad framework of environmental protections – such as the Habitats Directive and the Water Framework Directive – that would cease to apply in Britain once the United Kingdom left, unless transcribed into UK law (Neal, 2016). Secondly, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) provides direct subsidy to British farmers and landowners, amounting to some €3,084bn in Pillar 1 payments in 2015, and access to a further €5.2bn in Pillar 2 (rural development) funding over the same period (The National Farmers’ Union, 2015). The management of much of Broadland is supported by agri-environment Pillar 2 subsidies – such as NELMS (the old scheme) and Countryside Stewardship (launched in 2014⁶⁹), both of which provided financial incentives to keep farmers from ploughing up and deep-draining marsh and fen. Now that Britain is due to leave the EU, these various funding streams and legal protections are vulnerable. The big conversations around Brexit, and the direct impact Brexit would have on Broadland, prompted me to consider carefully how Tett’s notion of “siloining” – the blinkered vision that results from people allowing themselves to be limited by their specific habitus - might represent a key process within Broadland social life, and English society more generally.

⁶⁹ I witnessed a presentation to the Broads Forum on the – reduced – funding available under Countryside Stewardship during my fieldwork; an account of which is available in the next chapter.

Tett's interpretation of Bourdieu draws extensively on one of his more ethnographic texts; *The Batchelor's Ball: The Crisis of Peasant Society in Béarn* (Bourdieu, 2008). Here, Bourdieu turned his critical attention to a cultural milieu with which he was intimately familiar: the rural region of Béarn, where he grew up. He centered his ethnography around a vivid account – quoted by Tett (2016, pp. 25–51) - of how at dances, the young women and fashionably-dressed men jiving in the limelight were surrounded by a corona of men in their 30s, dressed unfashionably, standing still and looking on (Bourdieu, 2008, pp. 81–83). These poor souls were deemed by local people to be “unmarriageable”; Bourdieu set out to explain why. Bourdieu embarked on a sophisticated description of Béarnaise kinship practices, detailing how the practice of primogeniture, combined with the payment of dowries to younger siblings once ensured the continuity of each farming estate was not threatened by the contradictory ambition to ensure equity of inheritance amongst siblings (2008, p. 38). However, due to intersecting economic trends following the Second World War, together with the penetration of modern forms of symbolic capital into rural communities, this same arrangement put the elder sons of peasant families who stood to inherit in a disadvantageous position relative to their younger brothers, or men from elsewhere, who worked in the towns and villages. As such, “the norms governing the selection of a partner were valid in rough terms at least, for the whole community: the accomplished man had to combine the qualities of the good peasant and the sociable man, and find a proper balance between *lou moussu* and *lou hucou*, the rustic and the urbanite. Today's society is dominated by divergent systems of values: alongside the essentially rural values that have been defined, new values are emerging, borrowed from the urban world and adopted mainly by the women; within this logic, priority is given to the ‘monsieur’, and to the ideal of urban sociability, quite different from the old ideal, which was mainly directed towards relations between men. Judged by these criteria, the peasant becomes the *hucou*.” (Bourdieu, 2008, pp. 46–47). Peasant heirs thus became “empeasanted”. The village, once integrated with the peasant farms that surrounded it, became culturally antithetical to them - “the barrier between town and country, between the peasant and the townsman, which used to run between people from Pau and Oloron and the people of Lesquire, without distinction, now separates the villagers, *lous carrerens*, from the peasants of the *hameaux*. The opposition between peasant and townsman now starts in the very heart of the village community.” (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 71). Consequently, the “small country ball is the scene of a real clash of civilisations. Through it, the whole urban world, with its cultural models, its music, its dances, its techniques for the use of the body, bursts into peasant life. The traditional patterns of festive behaviour have been lost or have given way to urban

patterns.” (Bourdieu, 2008, p. 83). The desires of young women, prefigured by a shift in the relative economic station of the peasantry, are out of keeping with the modes of dress and bodily hexis of its heirs (2008, pp. 81–93). Overall, Bourdieu summarises his project as follows:

My intention is simply to evoke the set of processes which, in the economic order but also and especially in the symbolic order, have accompanied the objective and subjective opening of the peasant world (and, more generally, the rural world), progressively neutralizing the efficacy of the factors which tended to ensure the relative autonomy of that world and to make possible... a form of cultural particularism, based on a more or less self-confident resistance to urban norms particularly as regards language, and a kind of localocentrism, in religion and politics. (2008, p. 183)

The erosion of this “localocentrism” – what we might call “parochialism” – due to the economic and social changes to French society in the course of Bourdieu’s lifetime had ensured that “this closed world in which people felt themselves to be among like-minded people has gradually opened up” (2008, p. 183). In short, the Béarnaise bachelors were victims of a historical process, in which the social capital of their habitus became dramatically devalued; being on the wrong side of a widening gulf between urban and rustic French society. To recall Wolf’s circles of decreasing familiarity, mentioned above, the “unmarriageable” peasants of Béarn were overcome by the circles of the merchant and other outsiders.

Though the historical circumstances are quite different, Bourdieu’s work here gives us a sense of how particular kinds of what Bourdieu calls “corporeal attitudes” – i.e. habitus (2008, pp. 84, 134) - can reinforce social divides that can constrain the rational strategizing of those on either side. This is highly pertinent to the Hickling case, and helps us to understand how Ostrom-like commons management failed to form there. In a landscape that is heavily privatized, people’s social expectations are underpinned by a prevailing assumption of possessive individualism, that each individual can (and should) pursue their interests independently from society; with society itself therefore consisting of “relations of exchange between proprietors” (Macpherson, 1962, p. 3). “Political society” meanwhile, “is a human contrivance for the protection of the individual’s property in his person and goods, and (therefore) for the maintenance of orderly relations of exchange between individuals regarded

as proprietors of themselves”, where individual freedom is experienced most keenly through property relations (Macpherson, 1962, pp. 263–264). As Macpherson goes on to point out, this system requires that all those with a voice in choosing the government must have basically coherent interests; a condition that was previously met by restricting suffrage to the propertied classes, but that broke down under universal suffrage (Macpherson, 1962, p. 273). We see this same process – by which the political order built upon possessive individualism is destabilised by diverse interests – happening in microcosm at Hickling. Though groups and associations of Hickling today do exist, they form around shared interests – fishing clubs, professions, boating companies, conservation charities, and local residents associations. Such groups have become socially and practically isolated from one another, something that leads to the development of their own distinctive habitus. Rather than the commons of Hickling being managed by all the individuals in the parish collectively, each interest group becomes, in a sense, a parish in its own right; distinguished by particular practices, possessions, styles of dress and management priorities that immediately mark them out, being particular to their interest – discussed with respect to the visitors to Strumpshaw Fen in Chapter 3. However, unlike the classic model of the parish or manor described in Chapter 2 - in which a group of human individuals share exclusive rights to a defined area of land - these interest-groups today have overlapping claims to the same tracts of country (usufruct of the Broad) as well as a core of private property they own absolutely – either as individuals, or as an incorporated association, that is itself legally an individual (possessions, boats, private homes etc.). As these overlapping claims often conflict with one another, political society at Hickling – that under possessive individualism should guarantee private interests – instead is perceived as a *frustration* to those interests. This experience is prefigured by a habitus of enclosure; day-to-day, the inhabitants of Hickling parish move through a landscape of private property, of mine and yours, of “them-and-us”. Only rarely do they encounter common resources; and when they do, the political controversies about how they should be managed are informed by that same habitus of enclosure – engendering a prevailing condition of possessive individualism, with all the conflicts that entails. The fact that possessive individualism has become so pronounced in Broadland society means that there is little common ground within Hickling that includes everyone, and so the fragmentation of corporeal attitudes and managerial approaches – siloing, in other words – is the natural result. This fragmentation has had concrete physical effects upon the landscape – from the improvement of agricultural land, to declining biodiversity.

The silo – an industrial storehouse for grain, built of metal or concrete, designed to isolate the bulk produce from its surroundings – is a particularly apt metaphor for describing the historical conditions that have led to the diversity of habitus that frustrates common sense; a synecdoche for the socio-economic condition of English rural social history. The Broads today has plenty of them, both metaphorical and physical. Perhaps the most striking example of these are the silos of Cantley Sugar Factory, an industrial plant on the edge of the little village of Cantley in the Yare Valley – at the far south-eastern tip of the Mid Yare NNR. For most of my fieldwork, these grey behemoths loomed in the distance, a constant presence in the landscape. Built in 1910 to refine beet – grown locally in vast quantities – into sugar, the factory is just one sign the presence of the market in the Broads; one set of silos amongst many. Just as Sydney Mintz used the single commodity of sugar to explore the history of Western colonialism and industrial modernity (Mintz, 1986), so I suggest that the silo is an excellent expression of the prevailing condition – one of progressive enclosure - that possessive individualism has created in the Broads. Silos contain the produce of industrial farming, and are a physical sign of agricultural maximization, just as they capture metaphorically the social conditions of individuation that now prevail in Broadland. Such social conditions are themselves actualized and affirmed by the creation of hedges, fences, signage, and gates – all of which limit access, demarcate property, and instill enclosure by fragmenting the bodily attitudes of local people (See Figure 17). Distinct forms of habitus do not necessarily lead to tension, however. As we have seen from Bourdieu's ethnography above, the result of the peasantry becoming siloed was their gradual economic and social marginalization, rather than the sort of hostility I have described in Broadland. For conflict to occur, a specific set of cultural dispositions is necessary – and this is where common sense, or the lack of it, comes into play.

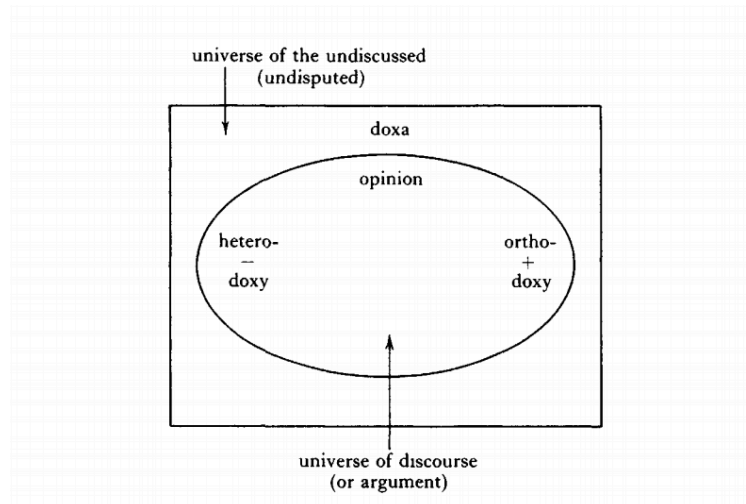
Figure 17 – Instances of Enclosure.



Trials and Errors: The trouble with common sense

To understand how the assumption of common sense, combined with distinct forms of habitus, led an event as dramatic as Brexit and the controversies of Hickling, it is helpful to consider Bourdieu's own discussion of common sense. Bourdieu uses two terms that are often translated as "common sense": *sense commun*, and *bon sens*, that are both discussed in Chapter 1. A number of social scientists who comment on Bourdieu's work have used "common sense" as merely the English language equivalent of the sorts of culturally specific, informally-acquired assumptions that constitute doxa (e.g. Hamel, 1997; Holton, 2000; Shiach, 1993; Wacquant, 2001). Bourdieu himself writes, in *Masculine Domination* (2001) that common sense (*sense commun*) is 'a practical, doxic consensus on the sense of practices' (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 33). Habitus plays a key role in the perpetuation of this consensus; "One of the fundamental effects of the orchestration of habitus is **the production of a commonsense world endowed with the objectivity secured by consensus on the meaning (*sens*) of practices and the world**, in other words the harmonization of agents' experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from the expression, individual or collective (in festivals, for example), improvised or programmed (commonplaces, sayings), of similar or identical experiences." (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 80). This "commonsense world" has obduracy because it resides in "the universe of the undiscussed" – that is, doxa (see Figure 18). "Because the subjective necessity and self-evidence of the commonsense world are validated by the objective consensus on the sense of the world, what is essential goes without saying because it comes without saying: the tradition is silent, not least about itself as a tradition; customary law is content to enumerate specific applications of principles which remain implicit and unformulated, because unquestioned." (1977, p. 167). Common sense-as-doxa is counterposed to the "universe of discourse", which can be divided into that which is heterodox (that which runs contrary to doxa) and that which is orthodox (attempts to restore doxa, without ever managing to do so) (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 164).

Figure 18 – Bourdieu's schematic of the relationship between doxa and opinion (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 168).



Bourdieu also provides a framework for how social critique and cultural change can develop, and how the doxic “universe of the undisputed” can be brought into dispute. For this to occur, Bourdieu claims, either “cultural contact” or “objective social crises” – such as ecological disasters, political unrest, or economic collapse – are needed: “The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structures, destroys self-evidence practically. It is when the social world loses its character as a natural phenomenon that the question of the natural or conventional character (*phusei* or *nomos*) of social facts can be raised” (Bourdieu, 1977, pp. 168–169). It is crisis, for Bourdieu, that has the power to unsettle our comfortable certainties (Argyrou, 2013, p. 96; also Lizardo and Strand, 2010; Morrin, 2015). In the gap that crises create between the subjective and the objective features of experience, Bourdieu argues, social critique – perhaps fueled by experiences of a different cultural context – can be constructed (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2002). Although doxa materialise through structures of habitus, and bodily hexis, the universe of the undisputed isn’t rigid or inescapable, but is constantly changing according to the experiences of those within it – an “open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures” (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2002, p. 133; García and Spencer, 2014, p. 47). In *The Silo Effect*, Tett clearly draws upon this notion of heterodoxy as her prescription for avoiding siloing. By seeking out different perspectives found in other cultural environs, Tett argues, silos can be busted – both conceptually and socially. Jeremy Lane, by contrast, alleges that “only those with the time and money to stand back from the realm of material necessity could [people] stand back from and achieve critical distance on

their own social universe.” (2006, p. 59). Hamel claims that “The epistemological rupture [of reflexive sociology] was thus marked by an opposition to the actors’ practical consciousness which is conveyed by common sense, seen by Bourdieu as false consciousness.” (Hamel, 1997, pp. 102–103). Hamel’s reading of Bourdieu reflects the characterization of common sense made by Vico, centuries earlier, that common sense is simply “judgement without reflection” (Marková, 2016, p. 49; Vico, 1948, p. 142). However, such characterisations of Bourdieu neglect the fact that what he proposes is a theory of *practice*, rather than one of abstract reflection. In *Outline*, for example, he stresses that the interest of the subjugated classes is to contest doxic ideas (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 169). Bourdieu’s discussion of the conditions of social critique in *Outline* is not definitive, nor does he specify precisely what sort of crises that can trigger critical movements (Bilic, 2010, pp. 380–381).

To apply Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to my ethnography above, I’d like to return to the observation made at the outset – that the absence of common sense is invoked in two particular ways. When referred to as a *joke*, it normally implies that the speaker (and the listener) possess it, even if everyone else does not. As we have seen in Chapter 1, holding common sense – by definition - yields “good” choices, both morally and practically. This “sense” is not a particular body of knowledge, or set of structures, but rather an *attitude that actively seeks out* those “good” choices - one thinks, for example, of the description offered by Paxman of English “empiricism” involving a process of “snuffling around a problem” until a route around it is found (Paxman, 2001). If we were to emplace this meaning of common sense – as an emic category – within Bourdieu’s model, it might be fair to argue that it proposes a kind of *practical heterodoxy*. This is not as formalized as the more academic reflexivity imagined by Bourdieu in *Outline*, rather, it is a pragmatic attitude towards particular problems, construed as small-scale crises that prompt critique of received wisdom. Through an iterative process of trial and error, in which solutions are sought to specific issues thrown up in the course of working together, individuals can develop a “common sense attitude” cast as a virtue that should be shared, but sadly is not. Indeed, in conversation with a Canadian forester who had visited a number of Broadland estates, he immediately identified “trial and error” as characteristic of the land management practices he found there. This practical heterodoxy, I argue, serves to characterize the sort of common sense attitude that lies at the heart of Ostrom’s model – a habitus of commoning, that creates opportunities for sensible working together in a common landscape.

But where a lack of common sense is directed as an *allegation* – directed at specific individuals, rather than ironically at society at large – we see a different set of meanings emerge, and ones that are directly pertinent to the controversy at Hickling. Invoking common sense in this latter way is a classic act of orthodoxy as theorized by Bourdieu; shoring up a doxic set of claims by characterizing your opponents as wrongheaded, because they second-guess what is merely natural (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 78).

The reason why there is such conflict at Hickling, I suggest, is because these two quite distinct, even contradictory meanings are carried *by the same term*. This encourages people to view the orthodoxy of their particular group (say, fishermen) *as* practical heterodoxy. This simultaneously makes each group both the moral majority, *and* the sensible party. By drawing upon their group's shared experience – of wrestling with weedy propellers, of excitedly tracking the spread of a rare plant - each person involved in the controversy fortifies their particular interests with experiential knowledge. By imagining that their specific ideas about how the Broad should and should not be managed are pragmatic and oriented against “mere opinion” in this way, rather than a particular perspective arising from specific interests and expertise, all of which are structured by a habitus proper to their own group, each group is predisposed to view any disagreement from other user groups as illegitimate, and foolish. This in turn exacerbates a lack of trust, and antagonizes the situation further. As such, Hickling Broad acts as a case study of how the distinct kinds of habitus can lead to a silo effect. Conservationists, boaters, local residents – all would have moved through and occupied the Broad at different times and in different ways, sometimes even working in entirely separate locations (see Chapter 3). This precluded opportunities for face-to-face contact, and engendered a quite distinct habitus for each group. When contrasted with Ostrom's work – which, as I have said, represents a sort of academic distillation of the root metaphor of the common – the etiology of this problem becomes quite clear. Ostrom insists on the importance of face-to-face contact, clear shared norms and so on; all of which would constitute each common pool resource as subfield. However, what we see at Hickling is what happens when this ideal situation is perturbed by the complexity of modern life; in which people live and work separately to one another. Rather than being the material expression of a subfield responsible for its management (“The common of Hickling”), Hickling Broad has become a site where multiple different fields, each with their own distinct habitus, clash with one another. This has meant that, in the wake of drastic environmental change in the form of a *Chara* bloom, the stakeholders around the common resource of Hickling Broad had developed all the

hallmarks of a silo mentality. Instead of a crisis creating an opportunity for reflection, it had the opposite effect; causing people to retreat into particular “interest groups”, and become increasingly suspicious of others with whom they shared the Broad. Since the Hickling controversy, the RSPB, like the conservation sector as a whole, has responded to the practical crisis of a crash in biodiversity by reflecting critically on their old techniques – conditions of practical heterodoxy, that in turn have supported them in stepping outside of their respective “silo”.

Thus far, I have drawn together conclusions from my previous Chapters – about the nature of common sense as an emic category; about the experience of working in a shared environment, punctuated by ordinary crises and conflicting objectives; and about the role of enclosure as a continuing process within the English landscape. These serve to underpin my contestation here, that, in addition to voicing an orthodox opinion, common sense in English contexts can also denote a folk model of a reflexive attitude – a practical heterodoxy – that is deemed to furnish the possessor with the ability to make sensible decisions, set within a common experience, with reference to a mutually apprehended context. Common sense exists in a state of mutual constitution with common ground. Through trial and error, English common sense and common life is deemed to come into being. This much is what is expected of common sense in its positive form. These expectations, however, fall far short of the reality amidst the lakes and rivers of East Norfolk. This, as I have said, is a land of silos, where common sense is thought of as hard to come by. Indeed, the very polysemy of common sense – as “practical ortho/heterodoxy” - is what gives common sense, even in its absence, its enduring power.

Conclusion: Chedgrave Common and the Apogee of Commoning

Attempting to build connections between heterogenous factions within Broadland society – especially between the Broads Authority and the wider community – has been on the agenda for many years. M, a former Countryside Ranger, characterized her role as that of an intermediary between the Authority and local people. The goal was to ensure that the inhabitants of villages in her “patch” of the Broads – namely, the Yare Valley – both understood and contributed actively to the management of their local area. This was not an easy task, as local people did not always view the Broads Authority positively. M said, “often, I’d meet a landowner, and they say “Oh, you lot...” And [sigh] they’d kindof have this idea that there’d

be hundreds of men in grey suits, doing things when - I had to say “Look, there’s only me out here now!” They had this false impression that the Broads Authority was massive and overfunded, and full of these grey suited - um - bureaucrats. When nothing was further from the truth, really.” As we shall see in the next chapter, this attitude is indeed influential within the Broads. Although many of the farmers I spoke to attested to the constructive relationship they had with the Broads Authority specifically⁷⁰, bureaucrats in general were cast as the pitiless enemies of common sense. In order to build bridges, therefore, M had to contest this inaccurate view of the Broads Authority as staffed by faceless administrators, lacking in common sense. To do this, M focused on creating what she called “relationships on the ground” – personal, face-to-face relationships with landowners, land managers, and local residents in her “patch”. An added complication to M’s work was that even the communities themselves in which she worked were often “multi-layered” – with different groups of people who often hardly socialized with one another; “There’s different communities even within that geographical space, and they all have different, you know, they’re not all singing from the same hymnsheet.” Through careful diplomacy and nurturing of “relationships on the ground”, M was able to build a collaborative network between a wide variety of stakeholders; from parish councils, to schools, from landowners, to birdwatchers – not only building links between these groups and the Broads Authority, but between these groups themselves.

M left the Broads Authority in 2006. Unfortunately, in order to save money in the wake of the 2008 Financial Crisis, the Broads Authority amalgamated the roles of Countryside and River Rangers – who were responsible for monitoring navigation on the waterways - shortly afterwards. The remaining Rangers were required to spend two thirds of their time on navigation-related duties, meaning that much of the labour M once did went undone. M noted with regret that the landscape itself had been directly, physically impacted by these recent changes – “For example in my area, and I know this is replicated in other river valleys. I was really lucky, I used to look after a local common at Chedgrave, and I used to do a lot of conservation work there, and we had local working groups, everything like that. Spent many a hot day pulling ragwort. I was there not that long ago, and it’s gone to rack and ruin because we’re not looking after it anymore, that’s not part of our remit... It’s not being looked after by anyone cohesive anymore, if you see what I mean, when that was one of our in-roads into the

⁷⁰ However, there is a distinct possibility that the farmers said this to me because they thought the Broads Authority would read my findings, and therefore concealed their true feelings in order to avoid controversy.

community was helping look after that... It's owned by a parish council poors trust." As with Strumpshaw Fen and the farms discussed above, the goal here for M was to create a particular sort of habitat – in which succession has been held back, and an “aesthetic of proximity” is developed; one that was possessed by local village communities and the Authority. But M argues that without continued support, the collective social and ecological possibilities unraveled.

The fate of Chedgrave Common, I suggest, maps the social role of enclosure in the Broads as a whole. As a poors trust, Chedgrave Common, like the poor allotments of Hickling, is a tiny fragment of a once extensive area of common land. Once managed and utilized collectively, it could have been a key site of local economic life, but it is now largely abandoned; surrounded by enclosed parcels that are fully integrated into an industrialised market economy. The conditions of late capitalism maintain a social landscape that is fragmented, so once state intervention is removed, public participation falls away; falling far short of the potential modelled by Ostrom. Cultural theorist Morag Shiach claims that Bourdieu's “analyses serve to specify the terms of our enclosure rather than offer us any escape” (Shiach, 1993, p. 219), a reading that is then picked up by Robert Holton, who describes this phenomenon as “enclosure by common sense” (Holton, 2000, p. 90). Not only does Holton's reading neglect the opportunities for critique Bourdieu proposes as “reflexive sociology” – opportunities that, as my discussion of the RSPB's activities indicate, can be pursued - I would suggest that this analytical move, in which common sense is treated as a straightforward translation of doxa and/or habitus, and then deemed to be an “enclosure” of individual possibility, is overly simplistic, and precisely back to front. As an ongoing historical process, enclosure does not represent an effacement of the individual, but rather *its wholesale institution* into economic life. As Strang points out “In historic patterns of enclosures in Dorset there is clearly as relationship between control over resources, social identity and the empowerment – or disempowerment – of particular groups. At every stage, increasing control over land and water has supported particular elites, while those excluded from such ownership have developed numerous strategies to try to fulfill their social and economic needs, to maintain their connection with the environment and each other. However, it seems that their enforced departure from the land has massively undermined the potential for the construction of localized communities and encouraged a shift to much more individuated forms of identity.” (Strang, 2004, p. 20). As we have seen above, the enclosure of the commons replaced the manorial collective rights with individuated property relations. Although the poor would have

indeed experienced this as a massive curtailment of their personal rights and privileges, the rich and middle-earners would have seen their individual autonomy expanded considerably, a process that, in turn, helped constitute the modern individual – with John Locke’s theory of property demonstrating the genesis of both the modern possessive individual and a theory of property that justified the enclosure of the commons (Locke, 1988; Macpherson, 1962; c.f. Tully, 1980, pp. 153–154; Wood, 1984, p. 66). As such, it is somewhat ironic to suggest that the individual action is “enclosed” by common sense: when in actuality, enclosure represents the effacement of a collectively managed and utilized landscape in favour of individuated and privatised one. This effacement prefigured the development of individualism as we know it today. In the next chapter, we will turn to the question of how this enclosed landscape of possessive individuals is organized and managed – if the sort of common pool resource strategies explored by Ostrom are so hard to sustain.

The silos that Brexit revealed at the high ebb of British political discourse arise from a landscape deep socio-economic divisions, rooted in what Tsing characterizes as the “ruined landscape” of late capitalism (Tsing, 2015). These conditions structure, and are structured by the habitus of enclosure of possessive individuals. And the impact of Brexit upon the enclosed landscape of the Broads is likely to be profound. The Environmental Stewardship Schemes pioneered in the Halvergate Triangle in the 1970s and 1980s and their successors across this fragile landscape have largely been made through the structure of the Common Agricultural Policy, and were themselves made necessary by CAP’s productivist orientation in the post-war years. The large landowners I spoke to and interviewed in the Yare Valley all relied heavily upon Pillar 2 environmental subsidies⁷¹; as one remarked to me, the business of owning a large estate is basically a matter of grants and tax avoidance. The major portion of the former are EU subsidies. Equally, a great many regulations, that protect the environment, restrict or mandate certain industrial and agricultural practices, may be altered or subject to question in the wake of Britain’s eventual exit from the EU. Leaving the EU as a geopolitical event will no doubt intersect with the sort of local disputes and initiatives concerning land management discussed in this chapter. The crisis of Brexit throws the doxa of the English countryside into question;

⁷¹ Pillar 2 subsidies are a tranche of funding within the Common Agricultural Policy that is earmarked for rural development. It contains three “axes” – one of which is designed to incentivise landowners to conserve and enhance the conservation value of the rural landscape – see above.

and attempts to bust the silos – through activities like the RSPB’s *Futurescapes* - will no doubt continue in earnest. Such efforts are, as my informants regularly told me, simple common sense.

Chapter 5: Paperchains – Total bureaucratisation and bridging the metabolic rift

“Where are we going this fine morning?

What are we doing this fine day?

We’re doing the same as every morning

We’re staying inside on this fine morning

Staying inside on this fine day

We’ll stare at a screen like every morning

And outside the window spring is here

We’re going to hibernate all year

Under a pile of A4 snowflakes”

- Stornoway, *We Are The Battery Human*, (2010)

“The peasant and the bureaucrat are as alien to one another as the horse is to the reptile.”

- Rolf Gardiner, *England Herself*, pg. 172 (1943).

Enclosed by a Wall of Folders: Total Bureaucracy in Broadland

I first heard of Meg Amsden’s work in September of 2014, while staying at the house of a Green Party district councillor in the Waveney valley. A passionate advocate for community organising and the natural environment, he and his wife ran a low-impact bed and breakfast, and were extremely well-connected in the local area. As we worked in their small orchard and lush gardens, harvesting the fresh produce that made up the majority of their diet, I explained my research interests and they, in turn, suggested people with whom I might like to speak. Meg, they told me, was an artist and performer who lived not too far away, near the picturesque seaside town of Southwold. She had for many years produced eco-puppet shows for the Broads Authority, that had introduced a generation of children and their families to the Broads and the various issues and controversies that washed across the region in the 1990s and early 2000s.

One of my main fieldwork objectives was to collect stories about the Broads for a database⁷² - and if anyone in the Broads could be said to be rich in its stories; it would be Meg Amsden.

Meg and I agreed to meet on the top floor of the Bicycle Shop - a trendy café in the heart of Norwich's alternative scene. As we sat sipping herb tea and comparing notes, it became clear we had a tremendous amount in common: Meg had herself completed an undergraduate degree in Social Anthropology at Cambridge, and had applied many of the skills and perspectives she had learned during her time at Cambridge in the course of her artistic career. She had conducted extensive research in the process of writing each show she had done for the Broads Authority, and still had all her fieldnotes. She kindly said that I would be welcome to consult them. The following summer, I took the bus down towards Southwold to do just that.

Meg's home was like a daydream. It was set on the end of a little peninsula, with the flooded plain of the River Blythe shimmering on three sides, creating the sense that the place was floating. In the lee of a thick flood embankment huddled a few, small cottages, leaning up against each other like old farmhands, surrounded by a tangle of old oaks, outbuildings, drifts of summer flowers and hedges thick with birdsong. The garden and workshop around Meg's cottage were filled with interesting curiosities – sculptures, paintings, bits of ironwork – the most prominent of which was a giant clock-mechanism, two-metres across, that looked as though it had come from a ruined church. The whole scene reminded me strongly of my childhood; the sorts of plays and the TV shows I'd loved at school all were reminiscent of the aesthetic that Meg herself embodied; her artistic oeuvre sharing that triple emphasis upon magic, creativity, and care for the environment that I recalled strongly from my schooling in the 1990s.

Meg welcomed me into her home, and after we had chatted a little in the warmth of her kitchen, she led me out to her office where her field notes were kept. When she opened the door, I was met by several bookcases, stuffed full of files. Surprised, I asked if these were all fieldnotes. Meg regarded the bookcases fiercely, and shook her head. The majority of the stuff up there was not the interesting material she had collected while preparing her shows, but “paperwork” – innumerable forms, receipts, reports, assessments, applications, and letters. This flood of paperwork, Meg said, had got “worse and worse...” beginning with when she'd been required to set up a limited company – Nutmeg Puppetry – to be eligible for DFID

⁷² One of the main outputs of the Pathways project is an educational resource, collating stories and narratives about the East Anglian landscape.

funding. Large funders, like the Arts Council, required “sheafs of stuff” from artists like Meg; stuff that, she feared, nobody ever read. She continued:

“There’s no trust, they no longer trust you to be a professional - it’s entered every profession now, to the point where people don’t want to do the things that they love... [Increasing paperwork] is to do with accountability, and people covering their backs. That’s what it’s about. There’s something innately corrupting about the grant-making process, it’s not to do with getting money... as an artist, you have to be true to what you believe in. If you as an artist have to adapt to what politicians or the money people want, then you should stop doing it; you’re lost. They always end up being stuck... it’s not long-term sustainable.”

Meg turned her attention to the two shelves that contained her notes, all carefully classified in paper folios. She picked out the ones that were most relevant to my interests – *The Menace of the Mud Monster* (1996), *The Blooming Weed* (2000), *Heatwave* (2003), *The Rubbish Monster* (2004), *Windy Old Weather* (2005), and *Knowliddle* (2007) – before going into her studio next door - where she actually created the sketches, puppets, costumes and other creative products used in her shows - and closed the door.

Meg’s lamentation of the onerous burden of paperwork is a common – even ubiquitous – refrain from my time in the Broads. Although there was a wide spectrum of opinion about the virtues and problems of paperwork – not everyone was as vehement in their criticisms as Meg, although the balance of opinion did tend to be negative - everyone I spoke to felt that the management of documentation was a major and increasingly time-consuming aspect of their daily work. Indeed, perhaps the best indication of this is the fact that literally every workplace I visited in the course of my fieldwork – regardless of sector, or scale – had an equivalent of Meg’s wall of folders (Mathur, 2012, 2015). Each such wall would represent a huge store of information. Curiously, custodianship of these bureaus would be invested in people who would – usually – not define themselves, or be defined by others, as bureaucrats. Like Meg - whose primary activity was that of an artist, not a bureaucrat – the farmers, conservationists, educators, landowners and entrepreneurs I met, all had their own personal bureau, that they needed to maintain, in addition to their main activity of their specific job.

Such a situation is, from a sociological point of view, somewhat surprising. As Max Weber famously argued, one of the most characteristic features of modern bureaucratic organizations is that administration ceased to be an ancillary activity of notables, who spent most of their time doing other things (Weber, 1978, p. 972), assisted by a small staff of clerks. Instead of the feudal lordship, or Classical patrimonial monarchy, developed bureaucracies are run entirely by professionally trained and certified bureaucrats, for whom administration is a vocation (*Beruf*), it demands all of the labour of those engaged in it (Weber, 1978, p. 958)⁷³. It is curious, then, that in a modern bureaucratically-organised society like the United Kingdom, that so many of ordinary people should be spending so much of their working hours undertaking administrative tasks. The aim of this chapter will be to explore this curiosity.

The anthropology of bureaucracy is a small but growing subfield, that has witnessed a flurry of recent publications – including a special issue of *Cambridge Anthropology* (Bear and Mathur, 2015a) – after many years of only sporadic interest. Much of this recent literature focuses upon the description of bureaucracy as a particular kind of ethical and moral enterprise; where virtues of transparency, accountability, and consultative democracy intersect with the messy realities of implementation (Bear, 2015, p. 53). Audit, for example – the object of Marilyn Strathern’s pathfinding portrait of academic administration (Strathern, 2000) – looms large in these accounts because, as Shore observes it “increasingly shapes our lives, our relationships, our professional identities and the manner in which we conduct ourselves” (Shore, 2008, p. 281). In the same paper, Shore provides a highly cogent summary of the pivotal role of bureaucratic audit procedures in contemporary English society, pointing out that “In the UK today, over 600,000 limited companies, plus hospitals, universities, local authorities, pension funds, schools, trade unions, housing associations and charities, need to have their financial statements audited by professionally qualified accountants... The image these [accountancy] firms like to promote is one of ‘pillars of integrity’ protecting public service

⁷³ Both the German word *Beruf*, and the English translation of “vocation” carry a dual meaning –referring to the feeling of being called to a particular activity, especially in a spiritual context; and in the more mundane sense of a specialist, exclusive career or occupation. Weber uses *Beruf* in both of these ways in his sociology; a continuity that Peter Ghosh argues reflects the direct link between the Protestant sects that developed the sense of a spiritual vocation, and modern professions like those of bureaucrats (Swedberg and Agevall, 2005, pp. 293–295).

ideals... The reality, however, is that these audit firms are private financial corporations whose rationale is the pursuit of profit – a legally-binding mandate that overrides any claim about corporate social responsibility” (Shore, 2008, p. 287) – a reality that, for Shore, reveals the fundamentally “neoliberal” character of audit; a character that is masked by the moral framing of transparency and accountability. Power draws attention to the role of risk management in bureaucratic cultures today, where it, like audit, “is much more than a technical analytical practice; it also embodies significant values and ideals, not least of accountability and responsibility” (Power, 2004, p. 11). Telesca makes a similar move, exploring the extent to which the public good of consensus at International Commission on the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT), when combined with the marketization of fish stocks, ends up generating, rather than resolving inequities in the distribution of resources; “In the ICCAT context, I found that the rich and the rogue influenced the conventional mode of decision making – consensus – while the poor and the disciplined did not” (2015, p. 50). Drawing the range of ethnographic cases together, Bear and Mathur identify certain key “orienting” values for bureaucracies; fiscal discipline, marketization, consensus, transparency, and decentralisation, concluding that “These values are associated with the market ethics of the economists’ public good and are linked to the new technical mechanisms of accountability. But their resonances as an ethos, a lived persona, a contested referent or a frustratingly impossible goal cannot be captured in their social reality by economists’ models or the analysis of audit techniques alone” (Bear and Mathur, 2015a, p. 20). Such ethnographic accounts of bureaucratic processes, in stressing the involution of moral concerns, technical procedure, politics and the profit motive, attempt to bring attention to the “webs of power” (Telesca, 2015, p. 61) and social relations that capture and permeate the formal rationality of any bureaucratic process.

By reflecting upon the “ethos” of bureaucracy, such scholarship travels the path laid out in Paul du Gay’s *In Defence of Bureaucracy* (2000). Unlike the tone of critique favoured in the anthropological literature, Du Gay swims against the current of both popular and academic scorn for bureaucracy, setting out “to defend the ethos of bureaucratic office from ‘unworldly’ philosophical and managerial bids to ‘establish commandments of identical life content’ across plural life orders” (2000, p. 10); the philosophical opposition being that of Alasdair MacIntyre (2007), Zygmunt Bauman (1989), and Tom Peters (1992), the managerial being the New Public Management school, that appeared in the United Kingdom in the 1990s (see J.-E. Lane, 2000). The criticisms made by these philosophers, du Gay argues, rest upon the “romantic” assertion that morality solely comes from a single source, namely a fully

developed moral individual; a source that bureaucracy, with its focus upon specialism and professionalism, splits in a violent fashion (2000, p. 11) so that, in other words, “the instrumental spirit of the bureaucracy makes individual and anomic what should be organic and whole” (2000, p. 3). The threat posed by New Public Management, for du Gay, comes from its (in his opinion, false) claim that state bureaus would be more efficient and flexible if they were run in a way more like private corporations (2000, p. 6). Du Gay contests these assertions, through the application of a re-reading of Max Weber’s corpus, suggesting that rather than bureaucracy being, in Weber’s view, an “iron cage” rolling out instrumental rationality as a universal principle, the bureaucratic ethos as one amongst many “different life orders” that “neither represent different versions of some single, homogenous good nor fall into any natural hierarchy” (du Gay, 2000, p. 11). This reading of Weber, based upon an exegesis of his political writings – particularly the lectures *Science as a Vocation* (1917) and *Politics as Vocation* (1919) – is intended to correct for an over-emphasis on Weber’s less celebratory writings on bureaucratic rationality. Du Gay concludes “In sum, it is both misguided and remarkably premature to announce the death of the ethos of the bureaucratic office. Many of its features as they came into existence a century or so ago remain as or more essential to the provision of good government today as they did then... These features include the possession of enough skill, status, and independence to offer frank and fearless advice about the formulation and implementation of distinctive public purposes and to try to achieve purposes impartially, responsibly, and with energy if not enthusiasm. Representative democracy still needs the bureaucratic ethos” (du Gay, 2000, p. 146). And yet, as Ingi Edvardsson has suggested, du Gay’s defence arguably goes too far the other way – stretching an unconventional reading of Weber in order to produce a stronger endorsement of state offices (Edvardsson, 2001, p. 338), glossing over Weber’s decidedly ambivalent view of what Fritz Ringer calls “the two faces of bureaucracy” (Ringer, 2004, p. 220). Edvardsson also points out that, while du Gay spends many thousands of words arguing against academic or professional critiques of bureaucratic governance, he dismisses popular exasperation out of hand as a simple confusion (du Gay, 2000, p. 2), and provides little sociological or anthropological data to back up his characterization of bureaus as praiseworthy; “No attempt is made to analyse modern society or the modern organizational world – by referring either to empirical data or structural analysis” (Edvardsson, 2001, p. 338).

The general trajectory of the anthropological study of bureaucracy might be characterized as attempting to take seriously both of bureaucracy’s “faces”, in a way Bauman,

McIntyre, and du Gay fail to do – attending to its expression of certain virtues and rationalist, utopian projects (Bear et al., 2015; Bear and Mathur, 2015a, p. 18; Graeber, 2015, pp. 149–205); as well as the often dubious role of bureaucratic regimes in perpetuating cultures of indifference (Herzfeld, 2001, p. 1), drawing labour away from core activities (Mathur, 2012, p. 180; Strathern, 2000, p. 2) and perpetuating structural violence (Das, 2007, p. 173; Graeber, 2012, pp. 31–34; Gupta, 2012, pp. 17–20, 75–76). While many anthropologists have drawn inspiration from du Gay’s invaluable emphasis upon the ethical and moral dimensions to bureaucratic identity, they also move to correct one of the central problems with du Gay’s analysis of bureaucracy itself. His understanding of the phenomenon is tied far too closely to its ideal type – that is, a Prussian bureau or *Kontor* in the 1910s – without much reference to how bureaucracy is put into practice in the real world.

My intention here is consider the sorts of commonplace complaints that du Gay evades – such as the frustration with paperwork voiced by Meg – and to explore what such protestations indicate about the nature of “every day practices of local bureaucracies” (Gupta, 1995, pp. 375–376) in England today. Meg’s hostility to a specific set of obligations – to produce sheafs of useless paper that nobody would read – is based on a quite concrete fact: the more of these forms she had to fill out, the less time she had to create the artwork that these forms were supposed to render transparent and auditable. The values of transparency and accountability – realised through audit – as I shall suggest below, constitute an attempt to overcome through bureaucratic means the process of siloing described in the previous chapter. As we shall see, in Broadland one finds ample evidence of what David Graeber dubs “total bureaucratization”, defined by Graeber as “the gradual fusion of public and private power into a single entity, rife with rules and regulations whose ultimate purpose is to extract wealth in the form of profits” (Graeber, 2015, p. 12). Graeber’s phraseology is useful for thinking about the Broads for two main reasons. Firstly, he casts it as a *continuing process*. Bureaucracy in the Broads is not a static state of affairs - established through a historical process of rationalisation that is already complete - but an evolving performance of abstract virtues and calculable goods; mediated through the exchange of papers, both physical and electronic (Pinker, 2015). As Meg complains, this process of exchange is monopolising more and more of people’s time and energy, with dramatic consequences for the other work they might wish to do.

Secondly, by characterising bureaucracy as a “total” phenomenon, centred around profit, Graeber highlights the fact that formal, bureaucratic rationality is strongly in evidence

in *both* private and public sector organizations. This is an observation originally made by Weber more than once (1978, pp. 957–958, 974, 988), with the caveat that entrepreneurs normally have some ability to resist bureaucratisation, due to the fact that they have superior knowledge of the market to the bureaucrats (1978, pp. 225, 994)⁷⁴. The role of private corporations is, as yet, understudied within the anthropology of bureaucracy, and building an awareness of bureaucratic processes in domains beyond the state has already been called for, as Heyman notes (Heyman, 2012, p. 1275). In the Broads, as we shall see, non-state processes of bureaucratic administration are a major part of the overall order of things – from small businesses like Meg’s, upwards.

I wish to take this point still further by developing a critique of total bureaucratization that rests on more than mere human subjectivities. Rather than renew the argument that bureaucracy is deficient from a humanist point of view, I wish to explore the ways in which bureaucratic rationality is unmoored from the ecological circumstances within which human society is found. Modern bureaucratic techniques frequently entail a central assumption that the public good can be defined economically, as Mathur and Bear have argued (Bear and Mathur, 2015b), and – as has been widely explored – many of the founding assumptions of popular economics are totally disconnected from our planetary limits (Urry, 2011; Wright, 2006). Given the utopian, and formalistic nature of bureaucratic rationality, a corollary of this is that total bureaucratisation is focussed not upon the landscape, but upon abstractions drawn from it. Rather than deal with siloing’s ecological and social consequences, paperwork draws thought, attention, and - most importantly – considerable amounts of labour, away from materiality of the landscape, and towards sustaining the utopia of papers (Mathur, 2012). As contemporary environmental protection is directly maintained through the bureaucratic instruments of statutory bodies, there is a tension here – between the formal *modus operandi* of bureaucracy and the substantive outcome of thriving ecosystems. This tension has real effects; as despite careful extension of environmental protection legislation over the past 70 years and some notable conservation successes, the British countryside has undergone a precipitous decline (State of Nature Partnership, 2016, 2013). This is precisely what we see in the Broads; as a landscape of the abstract. The problem here is not that the bureaucrats’ hearts

⁷⁴ This rests on the idea that “Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally dominion through knowledge” (Weber, 1978, p. 224)

and minds are in the wrong place, or that bureaucratic instruments are either bad or unnecessary entirely; the problem is that there are too many of them. The bodies of bureaucrats and (especially) non-bureaucrats are increasingly engaged in typing, printing, designing, phoning, clicking at computers; rather than cutting reed, herding cattle, deeding dykes, thatching roofs, or talking to others face-to-face.

In turning my attention to the physical resources and materials that are such popular objects of bureaucratic control: land, water, food, clean air, animals, plants, and machinery, I am seeking to build upon existing ethnographic work that has grappled with the materiality of the office - the papers, clothing, bodies, and buildings through which administration is performed. With the dawning of the Anthropocene, and the proliferation of global, national and local regulations, product marks, and standards seeking to manage biodiversity, toxins, carbon emissions, agricultural productivity, and sustainability that we see in the Broads, it is important to take the study of bureaucratic materiality beyond the office wall. In the last chapter, we explored how the root metaphor of the common, around which common sense circulates – is affected by the process of siloing, that reinforces the habitus of enclosure, over that of commoning. Below, we consider what sort of normative landscape is thought to be left as the commons disappears. The process of total bureaucratisation represents both an attempt to fill the voids that open up in everyday lifeworlds – to “paper over the cracks” – but is also complicit in the dynamics of political and economic exploitation (Pinker, 2015, p. 99).

A Utopia of Paper: From Paperchains to Living Documents

Here, I’ll consider the full spectrum of labour on paper in Broadland, through two particular cases – firstly, the comments made by farmers about the role of paperwork on their daily activities, and secondly on the emic category of “living documents”, and how the notion of “engagement” mediated through documents of this type is the form of social capital that currently vitiates the bureaucratic infrastructure of Broadland. Both these cases reflect existing scholarly accounts of bureaucracy discussed above in some respects, while also deepening such accounts in others. While farmers are burdened by an ever-increasing volume of paperwork, much of this is required by private corporations rather than the state. While the “living documents” I encountered in the field represent a continuation of the utopian visions of civic engagement as a public good (Bear and Mathur, 2015a), their vitality also extends into

marketing and other material forms that transcend the characterisation of paperwork and infrastructure as dry and rational (Harvey and Knox, 2012).

At the first project workshop for the Broads Landscape Partnership Bid, held in Acle in October 2014, various people mentioned to me that they were surprised not to see many farmers here as they'd expected. Indeed, during one of the plenary discussions, several people stood up and insisted that the Broads Authority do more to reach out to the farming community. When I spoke with the Broads Authority staffer responsible for the meeting afterwards, he remarked, rather sadly "We did ask them. Several times. But they just didn't want to come – we sent letters, and emails, and made phone calls... Farmers are very busy, it's so difficult to get them out to something like this."

This lack of active involvement by farmers in forms of strategic or community activity was not uncommon. Although I did occasionally meet farmers who showed a good of interest in my research and offered to help me further, none of them replied to my emails. When I circulated a brief questionnaire via a major local landowner to his tenants, only 13 people responded.

The reason for this, as I went on to discover, was that farmers already feel that they have *far too much paperwork to deal with already*. Like the Broads Authority, my efforts to reach them were mediated through papers of various kinds – emails, letters, questionnaires. As such, many farmers (but fortunately, not all) saw my requests for assistance with my research as a source of yet more paperwork that they just didn't wish to deal with. The sort of comments farmers I contacted made about paperwork were various.

One first-generation farmer, who ran 170-acre mixed poultry and arable farm bemoaned the amount of "red tape" involved in his business, and said that "most of it is box ticking for the sake of it and if you have not ticked a box there could be financial penalties.". Another arable farmer, based near Stalham, quipped that paperwork meant "more time in the office filling out survey forms!! Some of the regulation is unnecessary... A different matter when I can see the justification.". A third felt that "I think it has a place in modern society where we need more traceability etc. and ever evolving regulations are part of this. Lots are repetitive and are often too frequent.". A farmer from a family fruit and vegetable farm had a more strongly negative perception of paperwork, explaining that "the only benefit is reassurance to consumers but [I am] not convinced that message is passed to consumers. [It] occupies too much time." But such views were not universal; an arable farmer in the Bure valley regarded

paperwork as “good, with every business comes a framework of paperwork. Good paperwork is good housekeeping and closely monitors changes.”.

This spread of comments covers a range of impressions, but the majority view was certainly negative; all agree that paperwork takes up a lot of time, even to the point of being intrinsic to the business of farming today. Another farmer responded to the question of the impact of “red tape” on farming by simply saying “There is a lot”. During an interview, one horticulturalist was particularly outspoken about the damaging ubiquity of paperwork, from both state and non-state sources:

“In society it [paperwork] is a disaster, as far as I’m concerned. I mostly ignore it because I lose my temper so [my wife] does it! I have a mate who does muck shifting and oversight work, for Anglia Water and he was told the other day they have to use flat laces in their boots and not round laces, because the Health and Safety Executive have said that round laces are more prone to coming undone. We’re talking about boot laces here! So, there’s now a directive to say what sort of boot laces you should be wearing in your boots... Ludicrous! ... We’re not farming anymore, because erm, the value of our products - strawberries - went down and down, to the point that we couldn’t service the borrowing, or the input costs. So we had to sell up... It’s not a matter of negotiating a better price for your fruit [with the supermarkets] - you either take it, or you leave it. And there’s no negotiation over cheaper punnets, because the supermarket requires that you use those punnets. And the punnet manufacturer has given those supermarkets a couple of million quid to make them a preferred supplier. The same applies for labels, for transport, for a whole bunch of things.”

What comes out from these remarks is the same kind of bureaucratic relation being leveraged by both public and private bureaucracies – The Health and Safety Executive, and major British supermarkets respectively. Both types of organisation insist on the use of particular material objects, demonstrated through set auditing procedures, of invoices, contractual agreements, and other administrative instruments. This has the effect of out-ricing smaller producers, and restricting the options of all producers to either scaling up or cutting costs, increasing their stress levels and – ironically – reducing their willingness to engage in

other bureaucratically-mediated sources of income, such as environmental stewardship schemes (Stobbelaar et al., 2009, p. S182).

However, this perspective on paperwork was not the only one I encountered. As one of my six informants quoted above voices, there were those who viewed paperwork in quite different, and far more positive terms. One conservationist working for a national charity explained that – contrary to the situation when she first started “you have to fill in a form to do anything now, which is very bureaucratic. At one point I said to my boss, how am I going to get out to do any conservation, because you want me to fill in forms all the time? But it’s partly because... um... [the new Chief Executive] wants people to be more accountable, and she’s put all these systems in place, to a) try and save us money, and to b) make sure no bad decisions are being made.”. And these two points, she went on to explain, meant that – frustrating though it was – the increasing volume of paperwork was ultimately a good thing. Other conservationists, too, articulated a qualified support for regulatory steps; particularly those that protected wildlife or water quality.

X, an employee responsible for an ethical standard for farmers, set up by a conservation charity, helped me appreciate the bureaucrat’s point of view, about the sorts of public goods that administration was felt to create. The standard in question was backed by its corporate membership, including major supermarkets and government bodies like Natural England and DEFRA, who advised it on the content of the standard. X saw the process of attaining the standard as either a “nudge” towards being more sustainable, an opportunity to collaborate with like-minded farmers, or a recognition of things that the farmer was already doing. For X, there was a significant pedagogical, rather than purely regulatory aspect to the standard – the aim was to help farmers become more sustainable, rather than to constantly assess their activity. Indeed, I was somewhat surprised when X told me that nobody actually analysed the data they were collecting. Attaining the standard also had concrete advantages:

“what the government wants to know is who is high risk, and is it worth inspecting that farm, and who is low risk. And there’s a concept called “earned recognition”, so whereby if you’re a responsible farmer, if you’re a member of [the standard]... you’re deemed to be less risk, therefore there is less chance of you having an inspection.”

And:

“So yeah, so, one comment we used to get a lot of the times when we used to do the training for [the standard] “Why can’t there be one scheme that just covers everything?” But because there’s retailers that want a point of difference, because there’s a basic level of food safety requirement, and then there’s things like [ethical standards] or whatever it is, it just... it can then add up. Because... or they say “Why don’t you just trust us?” Well, we could do, and there is a, there is a... um, a desire to have a, sort of, an inspection free, sort of, um, culture... But it does depend on, um, building trust in that supply chain. Some retailers have close relationships with their suppliers, or, if you think about the Horsegate experience, that retailer didn’t really know who its suppliers were, and that lead to the, you know, horse meat entering the food chain.”

In these comments, we can see both how positive visions of transparency, trust, and sustainability intersect with complaints about burdensome paperwork caused by cross-compliance with multiple standards and forms of assessment. The standard in question was a decidedly “wily little actant” here, as Mathur described job cards used in the employment schemes set up under NREGA⁷⁵ (Mathur, 2012, p. 179). The standard both gave farmers the opportunity to reduce the onerous task of preparing for inspections by getting them classed as “low risk”, but it also creates the circumstances in which retailers – looking for a “point of difference” – could preferentially select suppliers who agreed to subject themselves to the charity’s assessment, simply in order to secure business in the buyer’s market of British agriculture. But the key point, for me, was as expressed by X as follows:

“Okay, so - with [the standard], um, within ten minutes of going onto a farm, an experienced auditor / inspector can have a look around, ask some provoking questions, and already know that where the heart of the business lies. And so then... they need to see some evidence, so when you get a copy of the

⁷⁵ The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) 2005 was a labour law and social security measure, undertaken by the Indian State to enshrine the right of work of the rural poor. The difficulties associated with implementing this complex and wide-reaching piece of legislation at a local level is one of the subjects addressed in Mathur’s ethnography (Mathur, 2012, 2015).

*[standard's] requirements, you'll see there's an evidence section that the auditor is looking for, and that's either a physical, um, there's either a written record they're looking for, there's a physical attribute, so they got out on farm to see, the, you know, irrigation system or the conservation system in action etc. or they'll ask a key member of staff, "is it really..." you know, so **the key thing with integrated farm management is, is it just in a policy in the plan, um, on your shelf gathering dust, or is it actually out working on the day-to-day management of the farm. But um, so the having a document is, is, is useful in terms of knowing what your business is committed to, you can then share other businesses that you can relate to, um, you can then communicate that with staff... because if you've done all the hard work in getting your policies in how you want to farm then, and your farm staff have got no idea and don't really care, they can then have ownership as well, and then work with you to get something out of the day-to-day... So having those documents in place, bit of pain to do it, but it's documenting, it's evidencing, it's making explicit, how you want to farm.**"*

The process of audit, here is hoped to generate a very particular kind of resource; namely *engagement*. What is important is not simply that the farmers have filled out their papers correctly, but that their employees understand and care about the policies those papers contain. This should be inscribed, not only in the physical structures of the farm, but in the character of the document itself; it should not be "on [the] shelf gathering dust, but actually out working on the day-to-day-management of the farm."

What Anthony is describing here, is not just any ordinary kind of paper, but something referred to locally as a "living document". One informant of mine referred to this phrase as a semi-official designation found in "council speak", that she defined - in relation to a programme encouraging people to use sustainable transport options – as follows:

*"My understanding is that you have a document, that is written, it represents how everyone travelled at the time, what everyone [in the steering group] wanted to do, the idea was to review it every year... **the idea was that they would sit, and once a year they would review the plan, and they'd decide what they wanted to do in the next year. So it was "Living" in that respect.**"*

“Living documents” are thus characterised by being the subject of continuing and enthusiastic attention – being modified, improved, amended, and adjusted - by the people they concern. It is a companion to their existing work, an invaluable resource. “Living documents” were frequently mentioned in the field; so frequently that initially I hardly noticed them as a distinct class of paperwork at first. The utility of the metaphor that referred to them – as documents that changed, did useful work, and thus were alive – seemed so obvious that I didn’t bother noting down mentions of them until relatively late. One particular example I have located is the “Integrated Access Strategy for the Broads” (Broads Authority, 2013a), billed as a living document that was developed to satisfy four key objectives: “To improve links between land and water and to the water’s edge, to improve access links to local facilities, settlements and visitor destination points, to encourage sustainable travel choices such as public transport, walking, cycling and non-powered boating, and improve links between public transport provision and visitor destination points and access routes, and to provide appropriate information and interpretation on access to recreational opportunities” (2013a, p. 2). It was hoped that this strategy would “evolve over time to take account of changing priorities, circumstances, and opportunities” (Broads Authority, 2010, p. 4, 2013a, p. 8, 2013b, p. 12). This capacity to “evolve” in response to circumstantial change is what made this document a living thing; but the labour of the people responsible for updating, and implementing it – their “engagement” – was what brought it to life in the first place. Whether these documents fulfilled these optimistic plans for continual revision is unclear – though I have been unable to locate any revised copies.

It should also be noted, that the aim of “engagement” – in addition to being manifest in their bureaucratic relations with farmers – is also directed overtly towards the public. On their website, environmental charity LEAF cite “Engaging the public in sustainable food and farming” as one of their key strategic commitments (LEAF, 2016), that they pursue primarily through Open Farm Sunday, Open Farm School Days, and demonstration activities. LEAF’s annual report reveals that “We saw 375 farms open and 207,000 people visiting farms learning about how their food is produced and meeting the farmers who produce it. That is now some 1.25 million people over the last 9 years...” (LEAF, 2014a, p. 24) A special report on Open Farm Sunday by LEAF, also issued in 2014, provides detailed breakdowns of visitor demographics and the sectors of participating farmers (LEAF, 2014b). On first glance what one sees within these documents is a series of bright, colourful pictures – smiling farmers,

happy children, green fields, and competent executives. Nonetheless, the content of these documents is deeply and inextricably bureaucratic – constituted by information extracted from various events and activities. This information will have been compiled by professional bureaucrats working in LEAF's offices up and down the country, but much of it would have been collected by non-professionals who actually participated in Open Farm Sunday; volunteers, teachers, parents, and the farmers themselves.

*

In November 2016, I attended a session of the Broads Forum – a consultative body of the Broads Authority, consisting of representatives of various organisations with an interest in the Broads – at Yare House, the head office of the Authority. The representatives – all men, all over 40 – included local businessmen, landowners, naturalists, members of professional bodies, charities, and community organisations. The meeting was chaired by Dr Keith Bacon, a prominent local historian, and parish councillor, and proceeded according to the formal standards of assemblies of its kind – beginning with apologies of Forum members who were absent. Then came announcements by the Chair, the formal acknowledgement of the official minutes of the previous meeting by those present, and a summary of actions taken since, before a space for questions by members of the public (none were raised). Following this, a series of other agenda items were considered, most of which were in turn supported by documents – both virtual and material. After a few hours, proceedings were concluded with the date of the next meeting being agreed by the attendees. The items considered by the meeting were circulated in advance in the form of an agenda; and the unfolding of the meeting itself was materialised in formal minutes, that would in turn be acknowledged at the next meeting. From beginning to end, the content and form taken by each meeting of the Broads Forum is framed and supported by the proper papers.

The reception of one particular item on the agenda drew my attention at the time, and brings together my argument here. Mike Edwards, a representative of Natural England had come to the Forum to present changes to agri-environment funding schemes that were slated for introduction in 2015. The European Union's Common Agricultural Policy had cut the funding available for environmental schemes, and the UK Rural Development Programme had been reformed in response. A new subsidy structure – called the Countryside Stewardship

Scheme, previously known as NELMS⁷⁶ – would integrate all previous schemes into a single programme, that was intended to provide a financial incentive for encouraging biodiversity and water quality over the entire landscape (Broads Authority, 2014, p. 6). In his presentation, Edwards made careful use of positively-framed language to describe these changes – billing them as a more “targeted” use of funds, to “deliver multiple outcomes”, while also giving a “fair deal” to farmers, policymakers, and the taxpayers. Such language was paired with well-chosen images of green fields, thick woodlands, and clear blue skies to evoke a sense of a well-managed, lush landscape.

The Forum members, however, were not won over; they pressed Edwards over the core question – how much of the countryside could feasibly be covered by these awards? He shifted on his feet awkwardly, and admitted that the area covered by the new Countryside Stewardship scheme would be 45%; a considerable reduction from the 70% of rural areas covered by the previous generation of funding⁷⁷. The response was one of consternation – the members huffed, muttered, and whispered mutinously at the news. In this exchange, we witness a sequence of transformations; the political choice to cut government funding under a regime of austerity is first depoliticised. It becomes a technocratic process of allocating scarce resources to meet the greatest possible range of divergent objectives. This transmutation – from contentious politics, to technical economics – is pithily described in development contexts by James Ferguson as “the anti-politics machine” (Ferguson, 1994a). Ferguson points out that “One striking feature of the “development” discourse on Lesotho is the way in which the “development” agencies present the country’s economy and society as lying within the control of a neutral, unitary and effective national government, and thus almost perfectly responsive to the blueprints of planners. The state is seen as an impartial instrument for implementing plans and the government as a machine for providing social services and engineering growth... where “bureaucracy” is seen as a problem, it is not a political matter, but the unfortunate result of poor organisation or a lack of training” (Ferguson, 1994b, p. 178). It is perhaps unsurprising that this recasting of political choices as mere artisanal execution was accompanied by the enclosure of Lesotho’s pastures, that were until this point held in common by local people, the

⁷⁶ New Environmental Land Management.

⁷⁷ In short, the budget for agri-environment schemes had been cut, so the criteria for being awarded money under the new Countryside Stewardship agreements were more exacting – so that only 40% (rather than 70%) of farmland would now be eligible the subsidy.

majority of whom were excluded by the enclosures (Ferguson, 1994b, p. 179, 1994a, pp. 172–177). The reduction of agri-environmental funding is “rationalised”⁷⁸ under a similar regime. The potentially contentious cost-cutting agenda of central government is substituted for a simple calculation over how to do more, with less. What Irvine et. al. refers to the “logic of enclosure” (Irvine et al., 2016, p. 936), coincides with the effacement of the political in both Norfolk and Lesotho.

But once a potentially explosive set of political realities were defused, Edward’s *performance* – a public reformulation of the grim science of agricultural subsidy into a positive vision of fairness, biodiversity and ecological purity – worked to re-politicise what could otherwise be a dry matter of economic exactitude, into an opportunity for public engagement. The scope of political action allowed in this context, however, is strictly limited. The structures of paper in which the encounter between the Broads Forum and the state is constituted, means that the options are few – one can engage, or one can dissent – but the framing discussions about the political constitution of British society, the rightness of austerity, and so forth, necessarily must occur elsewhere. Such a situation is like that experienced by the farmers with whom we began this chapter; the ability of paperwork to transform political choices into economic realities creates a set of chains that limit the agency of those entangled in them.

My argument here, is that the utopia of living documents, that engage, beguile, and persuade, reveal how a key attribute of political life – namely, public engagement, and thus consent – is fostered, and incorporated into a fundamentally de-politicised set of relations. What we see in this exchange is what Lippman memorably referred to as the “manufacture of consent” – in which a rational, professionalised class takes it upon themselves to manipulate the public will for the sake of the common good (Achbar and Wintonick, 1992; Herman and Chomsky, 1995; Lippmann, 1909, p. 434). But rather than do this through elaborate forms of propaganda or manipulated news that use sensationalism and pathos to build consent, what we find in the paper chains documented above is something quite different, but with the same ultimate effects. These chains mediate attempts to reconnect the bureaucratic world of abstract concepts – which, ultimately, constitute both legal permissions and financial capital - and the

⁷⁸ A term uniquely appropriate here. Not only is the restriction of funding defended through invoking the “rationality” of targeting the most important sites, but the reality is that state funds are being rationed – “rationalism” of a different sort.

actual world of physical actions and personal affects; an attempt to bring the two together, without collapsing the distinction itself. Living documents and marketing that mediate “engagement” represent an extension of biopolitical logics, classically associated with the collection and dissemination of rationally-appraised data about human life (Foucault, 2003; Garrison, 2013), into a form where that data lies just beneath the surface of the whole landscape. By producing a totalising superstructure of this kind, bureaucracy attempts to overcome and neutralise the damaging divisions and controversies created by the siloing of possessive individualism; siloing that relies on the same division of labour that bureaucracy relies upon.

Downstream of the Metabolic Rift: The Broads as a Landscape of Abstraction

Thus far, I have dealt with bureaucratic documents – both virtual and material – in the landscape of Broadland. Regardless of whether or not these exchanges on paper are viewed positively (as “living documents” that facilitate greater engagement), or more negatively (as red tape that wastes time and resources) – what emerges from all these accounts is something that we encountered in Chapter 2: the perception of a pathological “gap” between society, and the landscape. My aim here is not to consider the extensive literature on the ontological or metaphysical dimensions of this split (e.g. Descola, 2013; Ingold, 2000; B. Latour, 1993; White, 1967), but rather to reflect upon its economic and political aspect, as enacted through bureaucratic procedures, and then materially realised through the landscape itself. This will allow us to explore the following – final – question; *what is the significance of these bureaucratic regimes described above to the landscape in which they are located?*

In *Conversations in Columbia*, Stephen Gudeman and Alberto Rivera take as their object the peasant economy of rural Columbia; placing the accounts of economic life they found there into dialogue with scholarly works of political economy (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990, p. 4). Drawing upon Marx’s theorising of the circulation of commodities and the forces of production (Gudeman, 2016, pp. 111, 49–50; Marx, 2000, pp. 482–484), Gudeman and Rivera solder their own set of circuits, between the “base” and the market (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990, pp. 42–43). As a late capitalist society, that has moved wholesale towards mass industrial agriculture, Broadland does not recognise the house as a fundamental unit of agricultural production, regardless of the historical situation (see Chapter 2). I would suggest that this makes the framework developed by Gudeman and Rivera – featuring the “base”, rather

than a “household” – particularly appropriate here. “The base” they tell us, “is what you need to be able to start work; one works with the base and on it, and one is supplied by it... Land is primary, for it is the earth that gives. A base also includes seed or accumulated harvests, tools and animals” (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990, p. 54). The concept of the “base” is sufficiently broad that it could also encompass the variety of landholding entities and institutions present in the Broads today, even those that are not household economies in the classic sense. As we have already seen, most land in the Broads today is held in the form of private property, and although this does not preclude commoning of various kinds, it does create obstacles and limitations to it in certain situations⁷⁹. As Schott argues, the development of private property and the creation of bureaucratic institutions are closely linked (Schott, 2000, pp. 60, 67). Therefore, just as I seek to establish the “base” as a broad category, I would stress the coequality of the “market” in Gudeman and Rivera’s model, and of greater bureaucratisation.

In Chapter 2, we discussed in detail the various narratives about shifts in the rural economy and land use in the Broadland catchment over the course of the 20th century. Since the First World War, Norfolk agriculture has been industrialised and the service economy in Norwich grew, with the effect that the agrarian population of East Norfolk’s villages was much reduced, while the population of service workers who commuted into Norwich or Yarmouth each day in their cars, as well as the overall population in the region, increased substantially (Cocker, 2008, p. 94). With the exception of grazing marshes, most of the traditional industries in the flood plains – wildfowling, reed cutting, marsh hay and litter gathering - almost entirely collapsed (Williamson, 1997, p. 164), while upland agriculture became increasingly intensive and mechanized – with crops like potatoes, sugar beet, and salads being grown with markedly less need for human labour. By 2009, in the village of Strumpshaw where I did much of my fieldwork, there were no resident farmers (Peart, 2010, p. 52). This shift in land use has had numerous ecological impacts on the Broads (George, 1992). As Hall summarises for her fieldsite just to the west of Norwich, “Economic drivers have narrowed rotations, encouraged block cropping and ended traditional methods of restoring soil organic matter... Soils, particularly those of low suitability for continuous arable production, have consequently suffered from erosion and compaction... One consequence is that eroded materials pollute watercourses and create hazards on country roads” (Hall, 2008, p. 22). Agricultural runoff,

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2 and Chapter 4.

combined with sewage effluent, had the effect of contributing to the eutrophication of the Broadland waterways (Moss, 2001, pp. 188, 199).

Broadland's position – downstream of major urban centres, that are either direct or indirect sources of ecological damage – is suggestive of a very particular construct within Marxian geography: the *metabolic rift* (Clack and York, 2005, pp. 398–399; Moore, 2008). Coined by John Bellamy Foster, this idea develops a line of analysis pursued by Marx in response to the work of Justus von Liebig, a German chemist, who was confronting the problem of falling fertility in Europe's soils (Foster, 1999, p. 376, 2013). Marx claimed that fertility was bound up with social relations (Foster, 1999, p. 375), because “Capitalist production collects the population together in great centres, and causes the urban population to achieve an ever-growing preponderance. This has two results. On the one hand it concentrates the historical motive force of society; on the other hand, it disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil... **All progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil**” (Marx, 1976, pp. 637–638). Under normal circumstances Marx describes nature as possessing a “metabolism” that cycles nutrients within a given habitat, within which human labour directly participates (Marx, 1976, pp. 283, 290). Under capitalism, however that those same nutrients are dislocated over long distances from the countryside, to cities through an industrial linear process of market exchange – creating a desert at one end, and pollution at the other (Mancus, 2007, p. 273). In the hands of Marx (particularly in Foster's reading) this rift “reveal[s] the alienation of both labor and nature built into capitalism, as the basis for an adequate materialist and class analysis of this system and its crisis tendencies.” (Burkett, 2001, p. 129). Other scholars, particularly Jason Moore and Ariel Salleh, have highlighted the extent to which the metabolic rift – as a feature of the crisis-tendency of capitalism – has fuelled colonial expansion, seeking fresh supplies of key nutrients and resources as they are exhausted within Europe, and continues in contemporary inequities between the global rich and poor (Moore, 2003, p. 328; Salleh, 2010, p. 205).

Norfolk as a region has featured directly within this literature. Both Friedmann and Foster discuss the Norfolk four-course rotation – also known as High Farming - that would have dominated the uplands around the Broads for the decades immediately following enclosure in

the 18th century (Foster, 2000, pp. 473–474). High Farming, Foster and Friedman claim, was much more sustainable than modern industrial agriculture, using a labour-intensive rotation of four crops (wheat, turnip, barley, and clover) that continually rejuvenated the soil, augmented by manure from sheep farming and draft horses (Friedman, 2000, pp. 489–490). High Farming was abandoned, eventually, because of the same market forces that enclosed the landscape and thus originally made it possible, as cheap imports from the Americas made such a labour-intensive mode of agriculture unprofitable. Duncan (1996, pp. 50–87) argues that this example of sustainable capitalist agriculture was a product of very specific and unstable historical circumstances, and also relied upon the exploitation of a poor rural workforce, who had just been disenfranchised through enclosure. Indeed, once Norfolk’s High Farming landowners were undercut by cheap produce from the American West, the workers they laid off had little option but to emigrate, or move to the cities. This meant that, ultimately, “the enclosure movement and the privatization of land that accompanied the advent of capitalism created a division between town and country, displacing much of the population from the land and expanding the urban population. Intensive agricultural practices were used to increase yields. Food and fiber – along with soil nutrients – were shipped hundreds or even thousands of miles to distant urban markets.” (Clark and Foster, 2010, p. 127). Such nutrients, once digested by the proletarianised urban workforce, were then dumped directly into river systems through the sewers – were they ended up eventually creating the conditions for eutrophication, as in Broadland. Schneider and McMichael take this point further, suggesting that the metabolic rift does not just have ecological effects, but also cultural ones. Drawing on Duncan’s description of how agriculture relies upon locally-specific, embodied knowledge built up on a customary basis (Duncan, 1996, p. 67), they argue that “As people physically moved from the country to towns, they took with them not only their ability to recycle soil nutrients (as in Marx’s argument), but they also took culturally, historically, and geographically specific knowledges about farming practices and local ecosystems (among other things). Each wave of newly proletarianised peasants who came to work in the mines and mills of the capitalist world brought with them knowledges that they could not use, and therefore that could not be reproduced. Similarly, peasants who became agricultural labourers, while they were still involved in the processes of farming, did not make production decisions. Framed in this way, we can ask questions about how the capitalist town-country division of labour affected (and affects) the production and reproduction of knowledges about agricultural practice and local ecosystems. Is there a knowledge rift that accompanies a material, metabolic rift?” (Schneider and McMichael, 2010, p. 477) The answer, they conclude, is yes. “Just as the spatial

consequences of the metabolic rift erase sensuous knowledge of ecological relations and processes, so its social and ideological consequences obscure recognition of the ecological dimensions of economic/material relations and processes.” (Schneider and McMichael, 2010, p. 480). The Broads, as a place that has experienced an influx of eutrophying nutrients, resident possessive individuals, and tourists afflicted with “Barrier Consciousness” (see Chapter 3), is in a sense “downstream” of the metabolic rift; its environmental history and present siloed condition characterised by the consequences of these processes (See Figure 19).

Figure 19 – A Landscape of Abstraction.



To provide greater detail with how this “downstream” state actually works, we return to Gudeman and Rivera. The economic relations of the historical characterisations of Broadland made by Brian Moss or Tom Williamson, could either be characterised as what Gudeman and Rivera would consider to be the base toward the earth (base → base’) or base toward the market (base → market → base’). Under the former, the agricultural land (a part of the base) sustains the part of the base built upon it (say, a household, or a village, or an estate); under the latter, market exchange is used as a means of reinforcing the base through the sale of crops. As Gudeman and Rivera point out, the base – within which the land itself is primary - remains at the centre of this system. Households or other economic units that relate to the base in this way, although relatively insulated from market fluctuations, are highly vulnerable to ecological change (Gudeman and Rivera, 1990, p. 52). Because peasants rely directly upon the base for their subsistence, they are highly sensitive to (and incentivised to be aware of) changes

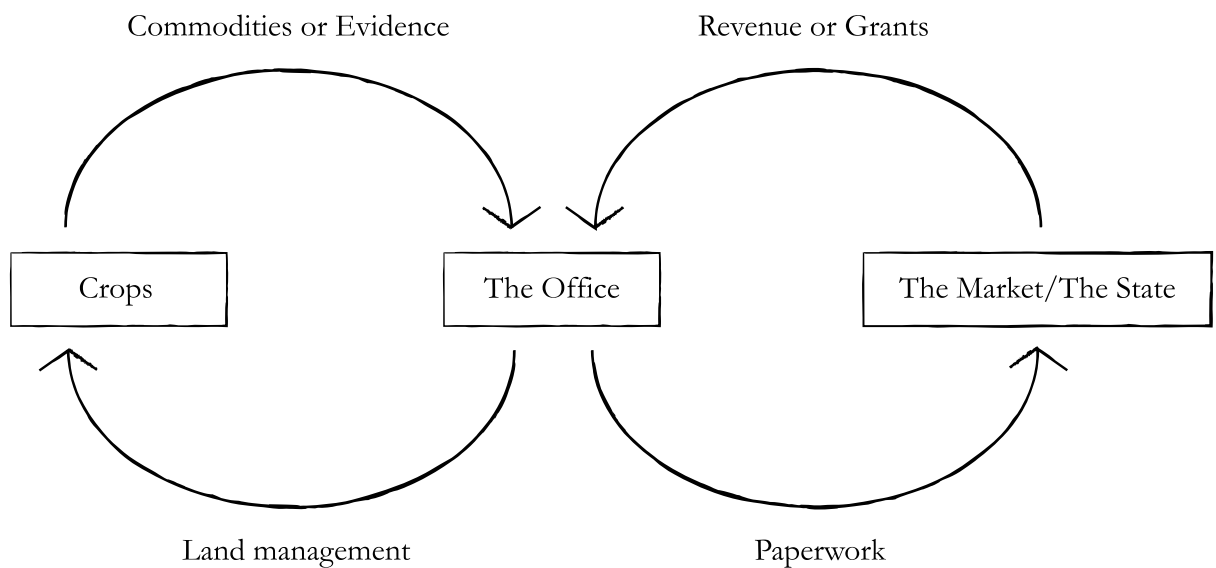
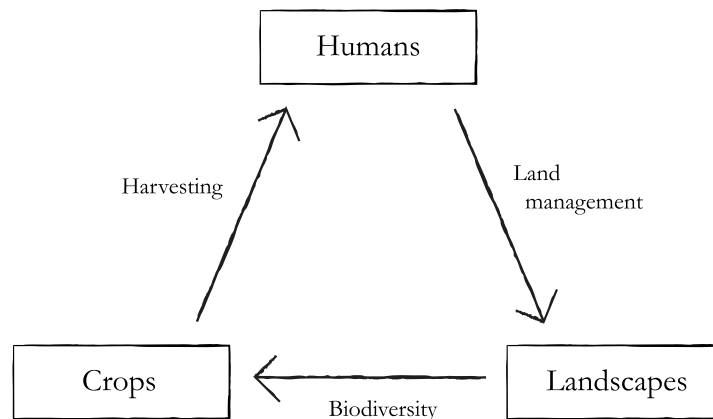
in the base that might damage this. Today, however, the situation is rather different. The prevailing economic regime in Broadland is one of capitalist exchange, in which economic institutions merely exist as a means of generating increased profit from capital invested; the capital in both instances being mediated through the market (market → base → market'). As we have seen above, these market exchanges with the landscape of Broadland – as a source of farmed produce, an object of conservation, and a destination for recreational activity - are heavily mediated by powerful corporate and state bureaucracies, both of which make extensive use of documentation. The arrow of Gudeman and Rivera's circuits is now mediated through paperwork. Just as being centred on the base makes people more vulnerable to ecological change, so in Broadland today, people are much more vulnerable to variations in the circulation of paperwork, which is itself directly connected to the vagaries of the market and national economic policy (Friedman, 2000, p. 485). This, I suggest has the peculiar effect of rendering Broadland somewhat abstract: a coalescence of statistics, targets, virtues, values, and figures; that can [and must] be recorded and tracked on paper, or alternatively a tranquil, idealised retreat from the daily grind, to be enjoyed quietly. Neither of these modes of apprehension overcome the metabolic rift, which ensures that the ordinary lives of the majority of people are spent away from the peat, silt, and water.

Documentation does not simply reinforce the metabolic rift, however. The positive aspirations of these bureaucratic documents are revealed when – through “engaged” labour of broad publics – they come to life. Though in their content they are more like conventional bureaucratic documents, with their emphasis upon “engagement”, colourful and beautiful Annual Reports, and evolving Living Documents have something in common with another genre of material we have already encountered – the magazines and publications designed as affective instruments to promote the Broads as a destination for recreational visitors. As we saw in Chapter 3, only half of the staff at RSPB Strumpshaw Fen were involved in land management – the rest, and most of the volunteers, were engaged in outreach or supporting visitors to the reserve. A sizeable proportion of their time was spent creating brand-compliant advertising materials, seasonal signage and information, educational posters, guidebooks – all papery or digital forms, with the goal of attracting visitors to the reserve. And even the wardens spent a good deal of their time conducting various administrative tasks; monitoring, recording, and analysing the populations of various animal and plant species, water levels and purity, tracking fuel use, herbicide use, and other controlled management activities – the data of which was fed back into a variety of databases and folders back at the office. The material collected

in this way would then be used to satisfy the regulatory demands placed on the RSPB by Natural England – such as cross-compliance – and ultimately to apply for grants and subsidies under agri-environment schemes. Rather than living organisms in the wider ecosystem directly benefitting from primary production – as happened in previous centuries - now special bureaucratic procedures need to be put in place to bridge the gap between the needs of plants and animals and the wider economy; mechanisation and efficiency themselves being the hallmarks of the increased bureaucratisation of those sectors over time.

Figure 20 –The Broadland Economic Circuits.

The first diagram represents the historic (base → base') or (base → market → base') circuits, the latter represents the contemporary (market → base → market') circuit.



If we consider nature reserves – or indeed, farms, or landed estates - they arguably produce two sets of material products. The first is their “crop”, which may be strawberries, grain, lettuce, sugar beet, wood or – in the case of a nature reserve – wild animals and plants⁸⁰ (see Chapter 4). However, the process by which this crop is distributed, exchanged, and consumed is heavily regulated by bureaucratic procedure, both private and public, as we have seen. Rather than being a “free” exchange of products subject to market forces, the primary products of Broadland are strictly controlled. Strawberries must match supermarket conformation, must be packaged, transported, and grown appropriately. But what about the

⁸⁰ See V’s remarks in Chapter 2.

wild species? These, too, require the correct papers to make it in a crowded marketplace – but in their case, it is promotional material (when the customer is a discerning visitor), or a rigorous, cross-compliant management plan with evidence of an increasing or stable population (when the customer is a regulator, such as Natural England). When these papers are in order, government agri-environment funding is awarded, and visitors arrive and make payment. The creation and circulation of the correct paperwork, therefore, is a vital part of the overall circuit; if this is not produced, then the circuit is broken. But the materiality of the products of the landscape is occluded behind the weight of paperwork, that becomes an increasingly vital constituent of the medium of exchange between the base and the market (See Figure 20).

In thinking about Broadland in terms of the metabolic rift, we gain a more precise sense of what paperwork – whether it is understood as good or bad – actually does in this landscape. When viewed positively, marketing and living documents help engage general publics in the Broads, at a time when – due to the primacy of the market in English economic life - the base, or at least, the base-as-land, is becoming increasingly peripheral to the ordinary lives of most English people. Papers in this guise attempt to bridge this metabolic rift, furnishing the environment with political and economic capital. They are treated as a corrective to the knowledge and cultural deficit that Schneider and McMichael identify. When viewed negatively, the onerous burden of drafting, reading, circulating, and responding to paperwork actively reproduce the metabolic rift, by taking people off the fields and into their offices. Furthermore, as seen in the previous chapters, such “paper” interactions are no substitute for face-to-face interactions between stakeholders, nor do they allow for the general public or regulators to gain access to the “banal, material encounters” generative of deep understandings of place. As such, these living documents cannot overcome completely the siloing and habitus of possessive individualism that characterises Broadland.

Within rural workplaces it is the site office that is the link between the base landscape like that the Yare Valley, and the flows of capital and labour represented, in Gudeman and Rivera’s model, by the market. It is here where abstraction is both perpetuated and challenged. As Rudy argues: “not only do general communal conditions of production mediate the relation between the capitalist countryside and the capitalist city but the state, in its multiple and manifold layers of irrationally rationalized bureaucracies, and partial openings to social movements and democratic participation, must be a moment in the analyses of ecological Marxists” (Rudy, 2001, p. 9). The convolution of bureaucracy and the landscape underscore the point, made by Moore, that maintaining a Cartesian divide between economic and

ecological crises is theoretically untenable, analytically problematic, and politically counterproductive (Moore, 2011, p. 39). The division of labour between town and country, sustained through vast archives and abstracted landscapes, does not create metabolic rifts; it is a metabolic rift (Moore, 2000, pp. 125–129, 2011, p. 7).

Conclusion: Bureaucracy, abstraction and the absence of common sense

In English society today, many formal documents – be they provided by state or private sector organisations – are circulated with the assumption that they will be retained, and stored in an archive, much like the one discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Sometimes this is explicitly stated in the document itself – “Please retain a copy of this document for your records” or even more strongly “DO NOT DESTROY”. This expectation highlights the atmosphere of caution and precaution that hangs over such documents; throwing them out should be done only when it is absolutely certain they will not be needed for some bureaucratic procedure – this surety is often obtained by adding a newer, more up-to-date version of the document to the collection, perhaps in the form of a “Living Document”. Although individual documents may be destroyed, the records of which they are part remain intact. Nor is it merely companies that retain a store of documentation in this way: private individuals, of course, do too. Pay stubs or P45s kept for tax purposes, bills and receipts that keep track of purchases, personal identification and licenses given to grant permissive access to restricted places, deeds and rental agreements that confer ownership on real estate; all these are forms of paperwork that must be possessed by the possessive individual. It is unsurprising, then, that if private citizens should be required to act as petty bureaucrats, that even the most entrepreneurial small business – the family farm, the independent artist – should be shackled in chains of paper; despite Weber’s expectations to the contrary (Weber, 1978, pp. 225, 994). Instead of creating an egalitarian, efficient, capitalist society managed by a dedicated few pursuing a bureaucratic vocation; English political economy continually enacts bureaucracy as a universal order, to be delivered by everyone – with the professional middle classes being an elite of notables with the experience and knowledge to navigate it most effectively. Weber characterised Britain as a country run by such “notables” (Weber, 1978, p. 972). I suggest that despite the proliferation of bureaucratic forms, little has changed on this score.

This chapter, unlike those that have preceded it, has involved relatively little discussion of common sense directly. This absence is itself an ample illustration of a central truth; that

common sense and bureaucracy are usually deemed to be utterly inimical with one another. The English yeoman meets his nemesis in the officious bureaucrat; one of the most common occasions when my informants would invoke common sense, would be when faced with some infuriating example of turgid administrative complexity. M, the former Countryside Warden of the River Yare, frequently cast the implacable enemy of the “good old boys” she met in the course of her work as “some grey-suited bureaucrat” from the Broads Authority. When taking us through meticulous briefings on health and safety at RSPB Strumpshaw fen, my boss O would apologetically say “it [what we were being told to do] is common sense, I know...”. Equally, if a regulatory stipulation was deemed to be complete nonsense by a farmer, it would be cited as an example of how the office-bound regulators simply had “no common sense at all”.

But looking to the edges of a cultural phenomenon can tell us as much about it as the search for an “essence” (Strang and Busse, 2011, p. 14). Locating the limits of common sense in a state of total bureaucracy points us towards a curious thing that both common sense and bureaucracy have in common: namely, that they are most often mentioned when they fail. One of the most frequent occasions for people invoking common sense – as evidenced by the quotes above, in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 – is when it was deemed to be absent in another person; someone who should have had it, but didn’t. And yet, bureaucracy is arguably invoked in the same way. As Michael Herzfeld points out “Bureaucracy is one of those phenomena people only notice when it appears to violate its own alleged ideals, usually those concerning a person’s place in the social scheme of things.” (Herzfeld, 1992, p. 3) It is curious that, in English, “bureaucracy” is actually used to refer to an unnecessarily complicated, often corrupt, administrative process; the polar opposite of how the Weberian ideal type of bureaucracy is understood. The fact that the English define common sense by its virtues, and bureaucracy by its failures is indicative of their true allegiance – not to the bureau, but to the common.

The reason why both common sense and bureaucracy are so opposed, I suggest, is not because they are completely different; but rather because they are both so similar. Both combine the normative and the pragmatic into a single attitude, both are meant to be embodied with the whole of one’s being, both are most noticeable when they are hard to find – and both are deemed to be inherently rational. Indeed, it is helpful to juxtapose common sense and bureaucracy with the contrast Max Weber himself struck between formal and substantive rationality:

“The term “formal rationality of economic action” will be used to designate

the extent of quantitative calculation or accounting which is technically possible and which is actually applied. The “substantive rationality”, on the other hand, is the degree to which provisioning of given groups of persons (no matter how delimited) with goods is shaped by economically oriented social action under some criterion (past, present, or potential) of ultimate values, regardless of the nature of those ends.”

(Weber, 1978, p. 85)

Calculating formal rationality, for Weber, is the very spirit of bureaucracy – delineating a set of rules and principles that can be consciously learned (Weber, 1978, p. 226, 1988). Substantive rationality, I suggest, is its conceptual “shadow” (Strathern, 2011, p. 33). Based on these definitions, I’d suggest that common sense is an attempt to theorise a rational social order that is *based on substantive rationality*⁸¹. Common sense and total bureaucratisation are so similar, therefore, that they effectively compete with one another; providing subtly different means of pragmatically organising the taskscape of Broadland (Ingold, 2000). While the substantive rationality of common sense gears itself toward an imminent landscape of certain goals and direct experience, the formal rationality of bureaucracy is oriented to the management of generalised, public goods – of transparency, accountability, consensus and engagement – in relation to which the land itself becomes abstract. In longing for the common, but faced with total bureaucracy, the English regularly find themselves sundered – and siloed – from their land, and one another.

⁸¹ This opens upon the extensive debate between formalist and substantivist economics, initiated with the writings of Karl Polanyi (Jongman, 2013; Polanyi, 2001). A detailed theoretical dissection of that discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Conclusions – The Thinking Reed

“Man is but a reed, the most feeble thing in nature; but he is a thinking reed.”

- Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* – n347, (2014 [1688]).

The above quotation is an answer to the question posed by the title of this dissertation – in what way do reeds, and the environment in general, provide counsel (*rede*) that shapes human labour and land management practices in Norfolk. Although I have not chosen to follow reeds as “actants” in the fashion of actor-network theory (Goodman and Walsh, 2001; Bruno Latour, 1993), they are nonetheless a constant presence in my ethnography – being cut in rotation on Strumpshaw Fen, growing along the paths I walked, and roofing the houses of many of my informants. For Pascal, these reeds symbolise human frailty. Human beings are so easily slain, what ennobles us as a species is not our bodily existence, but our thoughts; “It is not from space that I must seek my dignity, but from the government of my thought... By space the universe encompasses and swallows me up like an atom; by thought I comprehend the world” (2014 [1688], n348). In this classic Enlightenment refrain, human reason is both the highest accomplishment to which we might aspire, and a cavernous gulf between man and all else in creation. The sole counsel a reed can provide is as a metaphor.

Common sense and becoming

But it is possible to take the metaphorical juxtaposition of man and reed in an altogether different direction. As the sage Aesop once pointed out – in a story that has become a folktale in English culture – while an oak tree trusts in its strength and is blown down in a gale; the reed bends in the wind and survives. There is a very sound evolutionary logic to being flexible. It allows you to adapt to wide variety of niches, across many different habitats – when any one of those niches disappears, you can simply find another. Humans possess a suite of physical and cognitive features that equip us to be adaptable in this way, a central feature of which is a core concern of anthropology: *culture*. Culture can be acquired, changed, and dispensed far more rapidly than most physical traits. Like the reed, humans bend too. But contrary to Pascal’s grim pronouncements, our willingness to feebly go along with whatever niches pass by, is a source of our strength as a species, as much as it is a weakness. Pascal and his contemporaries

– so seduced were they by the Classical eidolon of transcendent, universal Reason, sundered from Nature – that they overlooked the power that comes with the naturalness of the human experience. Selective pressure has driven our species toward cultural flexibility rather than the doughty physical constitutions of other animals. Why incubate an inbuilt resistance to poisons, if you can take antitoxins from plants to treat them as and when? Why grow thick fur, if you can take it from other animals? Why invest in claws, when you can figure out how to make blades of stone, or bronze, or iron, or bone?

This point has direct relevance to the management of the Broads. In his stirring polemic, *Feral* (2013), journalist George Monbiot suggests that the ability of certain British tree species – like hazel (*Corylus avellana*), ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*), oak (*Quercus robur*), beech (*Fagus sylvaticus*), alder (*Alnus glutinosa*), and willow (*Salix* gen.) – to coppice, or re-sprout after their trunk is snapped, is evidence of the browsing of forest elephants during the Eemian interglacial 131-114 kya (Monbiot, 2013, pp. 90–91)⁸². Although Monbiot’s main point is to cite this as evidence for how far the baselines of mainstream conservation have shifted in Britain, I would suggest that this observation has far wider implications for the human relationship to the landscape. The ability of trees to coppice, although originally an adaptation to the predation of elephants, has been harnessed by humans as a way of sustainably harvesting wood for fuel, shelter, and tool manufacture. Humans have – in a sense – taken on an ecological niche originally filled by another animal, in a sense “becoming” forest elephants. This same process can be observed in a vast array of different tasks that humans undertake in the English landscape. When we mow hay meadows, cut down reeds or deedle dykes, we are performing the role of aurochs (*Bos primigenius*) or wisent (*Bison bonasus*); when we kill foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) or crows (*Corvus corone*) we are acting as wolves (*Canis lupus*) or eagles (*Aquila* gen.); when we build mill ponds and weirs we act as beavers (*Castor fiber*). Even the humble robin (*Erithacus rubecula*) – beloved by British gardeners for following them closely as they work – is just doing this because gardeners, in disturbing the earth’s invertebrates with their digging – are behaving like wild boar (*Sus scrofa*), that robins evolved alongside. Through our adaptability, humans are capable of occupying the niches of all manner of other animals, moving between them depending upon the circumstances. As Marshall Sahlins points out, “Tools, even good tools, are prehuman. The great evolutionary divide is in the relationship:

⁸² Monbiot first heard this idea suggested by a forester named Adam Thorogood, and identified the theory in a paper by Oliver Rackham, who may have originated it (Rackham, 2002, p. 3).

tool-organism” (Sahlins, 2003, p. 80). But the real difference, perhaps, is not the tenor of that relationship, but in the number of relationships one can forge. We are the universal keystone species, culture engaging us in a constant process of becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 256–352). Equipped with a cultural propensity to adapt, human beings can hop from niche to niche - the original silo-busters.

This alternative metaphorical engagement with humanity and reeds reveals a deeper, non-metaphorical point; that humans are, and have always been, enmeshed within the landscapes of which we are only part. We are not merely a thinking reed, but reeds – like all else in nature – are good to think; the very substance of our thoughts. Within an English context, common sense – in one of its vernacular guises as a pragmatic, substantively-rational attitude – is an attempt to take seriously, and embrace this ecologically-including-socially-situated flexibility. Common sense’s very particularity, its rootedness in particular working environments makes it localised, but its nature as an attitude toward life in general makes it mobile. Anthropologists have argued for decades about what defines our species – are we *Homo economicus*, *homo faber*, or *homo narrans*? I would contend that the nature of human beings has been under our very noses the entire time: the very nature of humankind is to step outside of culture, while never being able to fully escape it – to be insiders, and outsiders, of each niche we occupy. The practice of anthropology itself is a refinement of the essence of our species being – to bend in the winds of culture, but to simultaneously reflect upon it, to transcend it, and spin the webs of meaning anew. Anthropology is itself silo-busting in the same sort of way – it allows for human beings to think themselves out of their established cultural frames (See Figure 21).

Figure 21 – Thinking Reeds. *The reed-like flexibility of human culture allows our species to adopt numerous ecological niches.*



Gillian Tett, Robert Kett, and the Division of Labour

Though she does not mention his name, the process of siloing highlighted by Tett in modern societies has dramatic consequences for the theories of Emile Durkheim. His concept of organic solidarity – in which modern societies sustain cohesion through the economic interdependence of highly differentiated individuals (Durkheim, 2014, p. 102), predicated on the “necessary interaction of units” (Shanin, 1971b, p. 14) – is logical. The division of labour does indeed make collaboration vital. However, just because that collaboration may be deemed objectively vital according to formal rationality does not ensure that the individual people – or indeed, groups of people – will necessarily feel moved to collaborate, or have common views about the terms of that collaboration. There is a large gap between what will and what ought. As noted above, there are many common senses; particular to specific workplaces that, due to their material particularity, resist standardisation. Rather than repeat the divisions struck by the structure and agency debate, what we see here is a conflict between different heterogeneous, localised, structures – a patchwork of habitus. The division of labour, rather than serving as the ultimate force for social cohesion, has the opposite effect, an effect to which English society, with its shared aspiration for a community based on collective labour, is particularly vulnerable. Exasperated with the effects of siloing, English people lose faith in society, and withdraw from civic life – inadvertently making alienation even worse, leading to what Durkheim referred to as the “anomic division of labour” (Durkheim, 2014, pp. 277–290).

Bureaucracy, with its clearly defined roles and vocational spirit (Weber, 2003), is to the world of work what siloing – with its entrenched, inflexible thinking – is to sociality. Durkheim's theories have lent credence to a world of human individuals as cogs in a gloriously orderly machine, each with clear functions and the labour divided between them. It is to bureaucratic means that the people and organisations of Broadland increasingly turn, to repair the damage caused by the metabolic rift between society and the wider ecology by industrialised possessive individualism. But engagement through living documents is a countermeasure to the anomic state created by the very division of labour so particular to advanced bureaucracies. But cogs cannot change; they cannot adapt. This mechanistic vision diminishes humanity's greatest adaptation, and has laid waste to many of the ecosystems that selected it. The possessive individuals of Norfolk are reeds no longer; they are all oak trees now.

This insight is significant given the profound influence that Durkheimian sociology has had – and continues to have – with respect to English society. For the English, common sense is not just perceived to be an expression of social unity; it is deemed to be a precondition for social cohesion. Given that it emerges from working practices, as those practices become more specialised and divided up according to progressively more focussed kinds of professional expertise, the less any truly common sense can be found. The sprawling bureaucracies of England today, the state agencies and corporations that they compose, circulating flows of information and resources, rely upon an intuitive, unstated assumption of the validity of the concept of organic solidarity. By treating social cohesion – working together, building consensus, and sharing information - as a natural or necessary feature of highly networked social institutions, rather than an aspiration that needs to be constantly and actively pursued, such organisations are setting in store numerous problems, as Tett identified, due to tunnel vision and an incapacity to correctly identify both risk and opportunity. Such problems, I suggest, I have progressively compounded over the course of the past century, culminating in catastrophic events that have reshaped the political economy of the whole world – from the Financial Crisis of 2007, to the Brexit vote of 2016.

My fieldwork in the Broads also suggests that we must go further than Tett, and cultivate an awareness of how the division of labour affects not just human relationships, but the relationships between humans and their wider landscape. Kett's demands – rooted in rights to fish and pasture – are a case in point of how important this connection is; how questions of working together in groups is never that far away from questions of how we work with the

resources we have at our disposal. The division of labour does not just preclude social solidarity, but as we have seen it creates the conditions for the majority of human beings to become economically alienated from the landscape of which they are an undeniable part. Primary industries like agriculture, aquaculture and forestry are professionalised, personalised, and mechanised in the Broads today. For the majority of people, the Broads is simply one destination amongst many; a place one goes to, not a place to which one belongs – a commodity you can take or leave. In response to the removal of words like *acorn*, *bluebell*, *cygnet*, *hazel*, *mistletoe*, *otter*, and *pasture* from the Oxford Junior Dictionary, in favour of ones like *block-graph*, *broadband*, *committee*, and *cut-and-paste*, Robert Macfarlane laments “a basic literacy of landscape is falling away up and down the ages. A common language – a language *of* the commons – is getting rarer.” (Macfarlane, 2015, pp. 3–4, original emphasis.) Reflecting upon the bureaucratic abstractions of the previous chapter, it is perhaps unsurprising that so many of the neologisms Macfarlane identifies are connected with paperwork. What Macfarlane observes in language, I suggest, are lexical traces of a broader ecopathology – a gradual dissolution of English people’s intimate familiarity with the substance of the landscape; a rift that is both metabolic and intellectual in nature. Late capitalism, with its mechanistic, abstract logics, has imposed upon humanity a series of entrenched silos that threaten our ability to respond to the changing circumstances in which we find ourselves (See Figure 15).

Figure 22 – Oak trees killed by rising water levels in Cantley Marsh. *The division of labour encourages specialisation and inflexibility; in the Anthropocene, such traits are highly maladaptive.*



And while many people's interest and labour has been diverted elsewhere, the impact of their inhabitation has not. Carbon dioxide, treated sewage, agricultural runoff, and urban sprawl radiate out from the human parts of Broadland, all with their concomitant impact upon the local flora and fauna. The metabolic rift that has emerged between the People and their Wetland ensures that even the professionals tasked with managing the latter are constrained by the demands and rhythms of the market, forcing ecology into the orbit of the economy, rather than the other way around. Despite the considerable progress that these professionals have made, they are in a sense, fighting against the tides of market forces. This process of enclosure and alienation, I suggest, is a major reason why English people continue to disagree about climate change – the majority simply aren't paying attention. Stuck in the silo of a service-sector dominated economy, divided from the land by their specialised labour practices, they simply don't pay much attention to the way their country is changing all around them. As Tett warns, such blinkered tunnel vision can lead people to ignore catastrophic risks until it's far too late. For the Broads, with its tidal rivers and the low-lying topography, is one of the most acutely vulnerable parts of the British Isles to climate change and rising sea levels, a topic of acute concern to conservationists and local officials (Woolley, 2016). And despite the fact that official figures predict that the seas will have risen by 37cm by 2080, putting properties in the

lower reaches at risk of flood damage (Conti and Long, 2011, p. 19), riverfront properties are continuing to fetch high prices on the local housing market. It is deeply ironic that a social order that aspires toward something called *organic* solidarity should have the ultimate effect of being so utterly destructive to all living parts of the Earth system. The same socio-economic process that has encouraged the people of Norfolk to become oaks, has raised up a storm.

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