

**Touching Topography: Negotiating Landscape Encounters with  
'Several Parts' of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.**

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## **Abstract**

This collaborative research project explores the significance of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as a meaningful site for contemporary society and especially for a small selection of artists who reside there, some of them, for over thirty years. The research has enquired as to the possible agency of the landscape in expressive media and the artist's part as catalyst in the creative process.

Over the last four hundred years, many representations of landscape in Western Europe, including those of the Wye Valley, have reduced human experience of topography to a vertical, flat and oblong plane. By being framed, drawings, prints and paintings have hedged in foliage, cordoned vistas and fenced off panoramas. Such depictions have arguably reduced a comprehensive, corporeally centred encounter to an 'ocularcentric' one. Subsequently, due to the continued nature of framing, photography, and more recently, smartphone photography has done little to dissolve the frame placed between us and the world we witness. Such photography repeatedly reinstates the visual values of others and continues to centre on the visual account of reality.

A botanically abundant setting such as the Lower Wye Valley is arguably a sensorially stimulating site; a place within which to be near living (and dying) matter; investigations were therefore situated within the predominantly arboreal landscape along the Wye, roughly between Ross and Chepstow and through the implementation of a broad range of intentionally immersive research methodologies. By using auto-ethnography, observation, ambulatory interviews, researcher-led group walks and making pilot-studies, it was hoped that any resulting data would be informed by actual encounters with the material nature of the location. By adopting a physically centred approach to the study, it was the intention to elicit primary responses from participants as part of

endorsing a more multi-modal approach to experiencing landscape with the intended result being a more ecologically and empathetic relationship with place.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

This collaborative research project, conducted between Birmingham City University and The Wye Valley AONB Management Team, aims to procure a deeper understanding in *how* humans encounter the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The location is infused with human narrative, abundant in natural beauty and as a result, has provided inspiration for artists and pleasure seekers for over two and a half centuries. Does the area still stimulate people? Are profound experiences still to be had in the location? If so, can we sustain such meaningful moments for future generations?

From the outset, it is important to state my position as a practicing artist and the fact that this has influenced my approach to the research project. My personal practice has grown from an inclination to work with a broad range of materials, a love of being physically immersed in landscape and an ongoing interest in experiencing such events with other people. My approach to producing art has been driven by direct material manipulation, more specifically, by a haptic response to materials and a creative process driven by the *feel* of things. This has also influenced the way in which I read and perceive landscape; I consider terrain in terms of tactility, a set of circumstances that can be touched in real and imaginary terms. I was keen to test the legitimacy of this way of seeing and enquire as to its presence within other artists who are concerned with creatively depicting their own experience of the Wye Valley.

It is also important to note that an emotionally profound encounter with landscape, on the volcanic Japanese island of Kyushu in 2009 and the experience of spending three months hand-making paper in Mino City, Gifu Japan in 2012, became embedded into my conceptual concerns and formed the basis of my Master's in Fine Art dissertation: *Stress Relief: Geo-Emotional Relationships and the Embodiment of Extent* (Dunn, 2013). The work explored the embodied relationships that develop between people and

place; more specifically, the ways in which a location affects artists, and the material manifestations that are produced through their respective art practices.

This thesis is therefore concerned with a selected group of artists (in which I include myself), how they individually experience their surroundings and how they subsequently interpret their physical relationship with the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) through the act of making art. It also considers the possibility that the artists are aesthetically prepared for the experience by pre-existing visual standards, some of which were established in this exact location.

In questioning to what degree, the artists' approaches are coloured by 'The Picturesque', the research examines the aesthetic legacy of 'The Picturesque' in the production of art; whilst also evaluating other contemporaneously relevant aspects of the philosophy and its experiential inheritance in the understanding of place. The thesis also examines the temporal progression of myself, the researcher, a practicing artist, documenting my immersion into the unfamiliar materiality of the Wye Valley and charts my transformation from *outsider* to *insider*.

The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty provides the geographical setting within which this investigation takes place (Fig.1.0). The research project itself was conceived as a collaborative doctoral project, with the Wye Valley AONB Management Team and is fully funded by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council). The Wye Valley, designated an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty' in 1971, "...covers 72km of the lower reaches of the River Wye totaling an area of 326km<sup>2</sup> (128 square miles), being 45km North to South and 11.3 km at its widest (East - West) point..." (Wye Valley AONB Management Team, 2014). The AONB Management team act as arbiters for the landscape, advocating for its welfare, deeply concerned with its promotion and

protection. There are 46 AONB's in total in the United Kingdom and some of their objectives are:

To promote the conservation and enhancement of AONBs, advance the education, understanding and appreciation by the public of AONBs, and promote the efficiency and effectiveness of those promoting or representing AONBs, other Protected Areas and those areas for which designation might be pursued.

(National Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty; NAAONB 2016)

The specific region of research stretches south from Ross and approximately 38 miles south to Chepstow (Fig.1.1). These locations emblematically acknowledge the beginning and the end of 'The Wye Tour'; a trip taken for pleasure, it was initially a boat journey, established by the Rector Doctor John Egerton in 1745 (Mitchell, 2010; Andrews, 1989; Matheson, 2007). Taken over the course of two days, Dr. Egerton's guests were immersed in a landscape, one that played a pivotal role in the formation of guided tourism is well documented (Ibid). The dramatic, vegetally fringed terrain was (and still is) particularly varied, being vertically impressive in parts and more pastoral in others, with mellow meadows scattering out from the river basin. The imposing topography made for an impressive expedition and one that subsequently became the material vehicle for a newly defined aesthetic paradigm – 'The Picturesque'.

The tour became a popular past-time; one which generated income for the residents of Ross and at other locations along the route. Amateur artist and teacher, Reverend William Gilpin (1724-1804) took the tour in 1770. He documented the occasion using pen and ink, in a manuscript which was released in print over a decade after the original journey took place. The resulting publication was called *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales etc. relative chiefly to picturesque beauty; made in the Summer of the year 1770* (London: 1782). Gilpin arrived at the Wye Valley with other landscapes in mind, most notably the often-imaginary topography depicted by artists such as Salvator Rosa (1615-1673) and Claude Lorrain (1600-1682) (Moir, 1964;

Andrews, 1989; Mitchell, 2010). As with tourists visiting the valley today, Gilpin arrived equipped with viewing technology; he brought a Claude Glass, through which he saw the world over his shoulder. The small convex, oval mirror reduced the complexity of the world into a manageable frame from which Gilpin could sketch his own ideal world.

Acknowledged by Harold Osborne in the *Oxford Companion to Art* as “the apostle of the picturesque” (Osborne, 1970:868), Gilpin became the shepherd to the tourist masses, described by C.S. Matheson as a “veritable flood” (Matheson, 2013:140). The movement fuelled the democratisation of visual aesthetics and popularised the idea of physical terrain being a site for alluring natural beauty (Porter, 2013). The newly moneyed middle classes were willing disciples to the Reverend’s visual rules and subsequent visitors to the Wye, (with the book as their guide), sought to categorise the topography and frame it through Gilpin’s eyes.

My own artistic practice has centred on the relationships that develop between people and place; the ways in which a location can affect its occupants and how those occupants ultimately respond to their surroundings. This notion became the subject of my Master’s dissertation *Stress Relief: Geo-Emotional Relationships and the Embodiment of Extent* (Dunn, 2013) mostly written whilst working as an artist in residence in Japan.

The dissertation documented my research journey concerning the history of UK mountaineering, my experience of the hand making of mulberry paper in Japan; reflecting upon the corporeal connection I found with, what I initially perceived to be, an alien location. Being physically present in the Japanese landscape was pivotal to facilitating an intense experience, with my whole body contributing sensory material upon which I could reflect. The resulting artworks embody the emotional and physical entanglement I experienced with the landscape and culture of Japan (Figs 1.2-1.5).



**National Parks and equivalent areas, and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales**

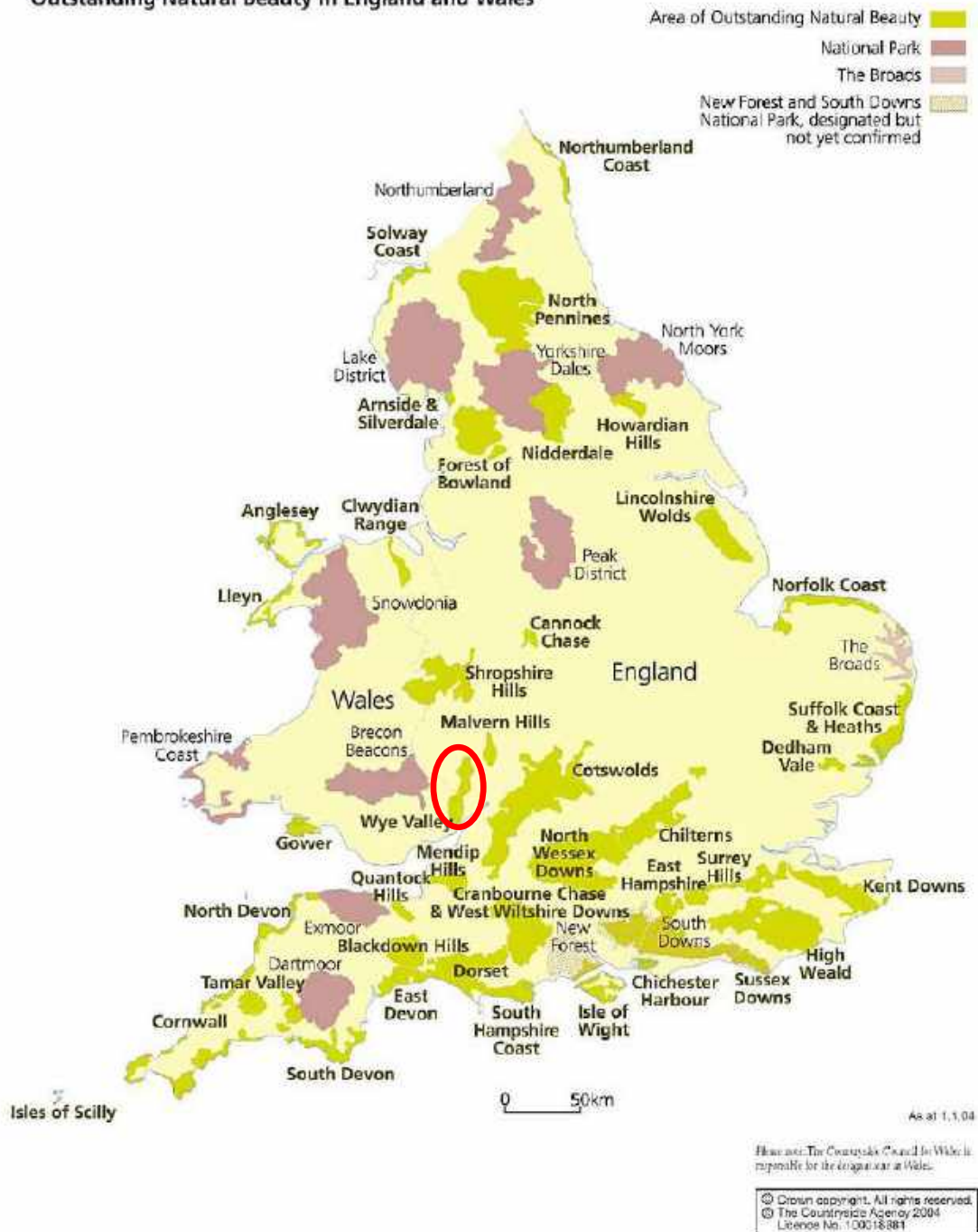


Fig.1.0 UK location of the Wye Valley AONB



Fig.1.1 Map of the Wye Valley AONB area

The same multi-modal approach has underpinned the research framework for this project, activities such as walking, kayaking, canoeing, driving and cycling have provided the means to move through the landscape; they have also acted as a dynamic and stimulating vehicle for discussion. Initially, a sizeable proportion of the peripatetic research was undertaken in isolation. However, as the project progressed, it became important to walk and talk with others; the conversations which occurred and the resulting reflections, moved the project in unpredictable ways.

The research investigates how historical modes of looking, influence a contemporary and physically centred account of place. Conversely, it examines the agency of the Wye Valley AONB, in the embodied creative process of a set of living contemporary artists and explores the level to which to an artist's creative practice defines their approach to seeing and experiencing the world.

### **1.1 Aims**

The research aims to:

1. Investigate contemporary experiences of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty through the lens of artists and creative processes.
2. Assess the cultural relevance of 'The Picturesque' as a historically constructed mode of landscape participation and explore the ways in which it has influenced contemporary experiences of landscape.
3. To inform strategies for maintaining protected landscapes for current and future generations; thus, help to underpin and advance the strategic management objectives and actions of the AONB Management Plan.

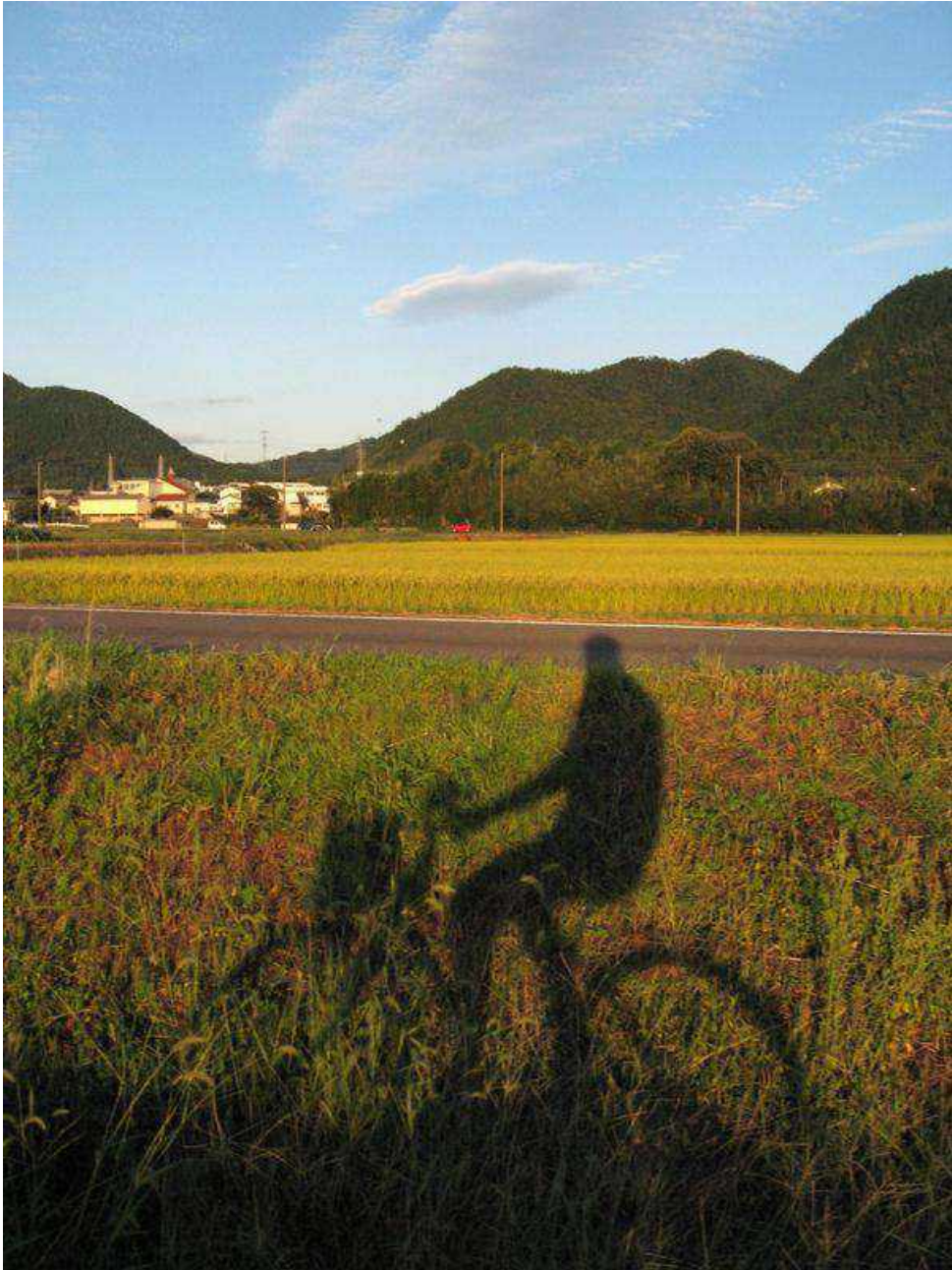


Fig. 1.2

Self portrait in Rice Fields. Mino, Japan, 2012.

(Photo: GD)





Fig.1.3 Making Mino Washi – Mino Paper Museum 2012



Fig. 1.4 *Man and Wife*: Pressed Mino Washi Squares, 2012. (Photo: GD)



Fig. 1.5 Mino Washi, Japanese Newspaper, Ginkgo Leaf, Fern, 2012.  
(Photo: GD)

## 1.2 Objectives

To achieve the first aim, I will immerse myself in the materiality of the Wye Valley AONB and employ a mobile approach that considers touch as being integral to the perception of place. As part of an established creative process, I will explore, record and reflect upon what happens. Local artists are interviewed to understand each of their specific user-defined iconographies and to test variabilities in influence of the location upon their respective practices. Pilot studies are also initiated to reveal degrees of influence of the location, upon the experience of contemporary visitors.

To assess the cultural relevance of 'The Picturesque', the empirical influence of The Reverend William Gilpin in the Wye Valley, is re-evaluated by partially re-enacting some of his seminal explorative activities. I limit the consideration of his literary output to *Observations on the River Wye: And Several Parts of South Wales, & Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty, Made in the Summer of the Year 1770*. Early landscape depictions by Gilpin (Manuscript-Chepstow Museum) are contemplated and recent academic texts considered; to assess the legitimacy of his influence upon contemporary aesthetic and environmental appreciation.

In being temporarily incorporated into the AONB Management Team and integrated into various public-facing activities, the research is now informed with a more legitimate understanding of the significance of a protected landscape to all stakeholders. By participating in various outdoor leisure activities, like those experienced by other visitors to the area, I could personally report upon the effectiveness of current site management, test existing interpretive signage installations and consider contemporary experiences of the location - a key aspect of the first research aim. Furthermore, presenting research findings to professionals and the public alike, re-asserts the collaborative projects' broad advocacy for the area; promoting its relevance, to contemporary society and as a means

of understanding the potential future value of the Wye Valley AONB as a sustained site of corporeal curiosity.

### **1.3 Thesis Structure**

Within the initial literature review, and as a means of understanding the broader cultural context of contemporary approaches to landscape, material has been gathered which is concerned with the experience and interpretation of natural landscapes in their broadest terms. I have amassed books that are detailed and historically descriptive; texts which have highlighted key thinkers in the genre and identified movements within the field of the visual arts, (particularly with regards to the depiction of landscape). However, landscape theory is a substantial reading field, an already established subject area and has subsequently opened further avenues of enquiry.

Overall, I have focused upon various *haptic* approaches to landscape. Author and academic, Abbie Garrington defines *haptic* as a human sense that:

...combines touch – the reaching and touching of any part of the human skin – with kinesthesia, or the body's appreciation of its own movement. It also involves proprioception, a bodily sense of position within space...  
(Garrington, 2010).

This definition resonates with my own experience of landscape and expresses an approach that is informed by my personal making proclivities and haptic interaction with materials.

The methodology summarises the multifarious research activities, employed to enable a deeper corporal acquaintance with the physicality of the Wye Valley AONB. It also describes purposefully immersive activities facilitated by The Wye Valley AONB Management, as a means of heightening my familiarity as a researcher with the research location. The locations of specific artworks of a historical and contemporary



nature were also regarded, as a means of contextualising the practices of various living artists.

Notable Wye Valley visitor, The Reverend William Gilpin, is the focus of Chapter 4; with consideration being given to his use of technology; in mediating the landscape and the ways in which he alluded to numerous artworks and art forms in his comprehension of the natural world. Re-consideration is given to Gilpin's definition of 'The Picturesque', as described in his 1782 publication: *Observations on the River Wye: and several parts of South Wales, etc. relative chiefly to picturesque beauty; made in the summer of the year 1770*. I have chosen to largely limit my analysis of his writing to this book, because it offers an early record of insights informed by immersion in the research location. My analysis is also intended to highlight the simplistic aesthetic guidelines he proffered and the subsequent mis-readings, which ensued as a result (Thompson, 2006).

The chapter continues with the proposal that Gilpin's approach to experiencing the world was *ecocentric*, in that he gives the landscape a certain agency and therefore considers the landscape to have, '...intrinsic value as an ecosystem' (Gagnon Thompson & Barton, 1994:2) and one that is outside the realm of human understanding. I propose that Gilpin's approach was dynamically motivated, with movement being central to his encounters. Finally, I argue that such an approach is highly commensurate with contemporary modes of landscape perception.

Chapter 5 describes aspects of the 2014 Wye Valley River Festival and examines its contribution to the research. The event was organised by the AONB Management Team with collaborative partners, Desperate Men, And Now and Mr and Mrs Smith (to name but a few). Through my early observation and subsequent participation in numerous performative activities, my research became enlightened by the emotional

effect of shared temporal moments; galvanising dramatic encounters and those that took place outside the theatrical frame of the proscenium arch.

The chapter also considers other appropriate collaborative activities, focusing on a 'mindSCAPE' Dementia session, held for the past four years at Bracefields Adventure Centre in the Forest of Dean. Although located just outside the border of the AONB, it was conceived by the AONB Management Team in conjunction with other stakeholders. The description and analysis is intended to substantiate the physical agency of the forest, in this instance its potential for the treatment of people with Alzheimer's disease. Finally, Chapter 5 closes with a reflection upon selected themes from the 2016 AONB National Network's Annual Conference, at which I took part in conference activities and presented preliminary findings from the research project.

Chapter 6 charts the transformation of the researcher from outsider to insider and eager advocate of the Wye Valley. Using the language of my existing creative practice, I peripatetically encountered, recorded and revealed my initial responses to being physically immersed in the location. Repeated exposure to the enveloping proximity of botanical spaces, elicited new vegetally based iconography and one which can be experienced frequently throughout the research location. Having studied Gilpin's *Observations on the River Wye...* I deemed it essential to experience the Wye Valley from the low level of water. Re-experiencing Gilpin's exact initial approach to the Wye Valley from Ross in a canoe, allowed me to reimagine and reappraise the cultural significance of the spectacle and consider the worth of the location to contemporary artists.

Finally, this chapter reconsiders the experiential data I elicited from myself and my participants, and contemplates certain expressed proclivities, as being indicative of a haptically centred approach to landscape perception. I speculate, supported by the

literature, that the senses of touch and sight are closely related senses and that the Wye Valley is a particularly suitable site for such a perceptual system.

Considering contemporary creative approaches to the Wye Valley becomes central to the research in Chapter 7. Interviews are carried out with four art practitioners; each is a resident in the locality, each possesses a material acquaintance with the location and participates in a relationship with the land, which has evolved over at least forty years. The interviews investigate the agency of the landscape in their respective artistic processes and explore the possibility of an eco-haptic association with the topography. To test this notion, I consider the works *Eco-haptically*, an investigative approach, coined by Professor Derek Gladwin, which is explained later in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter 7 concludes by studying some work by deceased Tintern-based artist, Keith Arnatt (1930-2008). A practitioner, whom I was initially unaware of, Arnatt, had lived in the Wye Valley from the early 1970s and unfortunately died in Chepstow 2008. His globally respected and exhibited practice focussed heavily upon photography and certain projects questioned the notion of 'The Picturesque' to contemporary society. Arnatt's output yielded one particular set of images, *A.O.N.B (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)*, 1982-1984, (which I witnessed at Tate Britain, London in 2013), that interrogate the very notion of a how an area officially designated as beautiful, should look.

Chapter 8 documents and analyses some of the numerous activities and stakeholder collaborations that I initiated during the research. Research participants were enlisted from a diverse set of backgrounds; some people were from other countries and were totally unaware of the area; some had lived and worked in the Wye Valley all their lives. Events were initially designed to peripatetically test the effect of the landscape on people through observation, conversation and photographic memory elicitation.

Other studies, informed by the wider research, denied the participants of the mechanical activity of image recording, to test the temporal effect of landscape experience and the pre-ordained desire to perform roles associated with that of the *tourist*. Sand was utilised to test the universality of the afore-mentioned eco-haptic approach to landscape perception and led to me having to re-evaluate my approach; leading to a further interview with one participant- an art historian and local walk guide.

The conclusion chapter considers the findings produced over the course of the research project and questions the relevance of the Wye Valley to contemporary society. Historically, the area has been a pivotal site, in which a significant and democratic shift in our relationship with the natural world was facilitated. The research suggests that, rather than closing off the world, framed, formative explorations in this particular location opened it up; highlighting the precious nature of physically immersive encounters, in the materiality of the real world.

#### **1.4 Terminology**

The thesis has elaborated upon concepts conceived within my MA Fine Art Dissertation, *Stress Relief: Geo-Emotional Relationships and the Embodiment of 'Extent'* (Dunn, 2013) (Fig. 1.6). Defined by myself in 2011, after a visit to the Japanese island of Kyushu, 'Geo-Emotional' is a personally constructed term intended to describe an embodied affiliation with a materially specific environment; more precisely, the term is intended to describe corporeally felt emotional sensitivities and consider apparent physical traces of such encounters. 'Extent', in this case, refers to an aspect of philosophical theory, as proposed by environmental Psychologist's Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, as part of their concept of *Attention Restoration Theory* (Kaplan, 1995).

The term 'picturesque' is used throughout the thesis. Originally used to denote a mode of experiencing and categorising subsequent representations of naturalistic

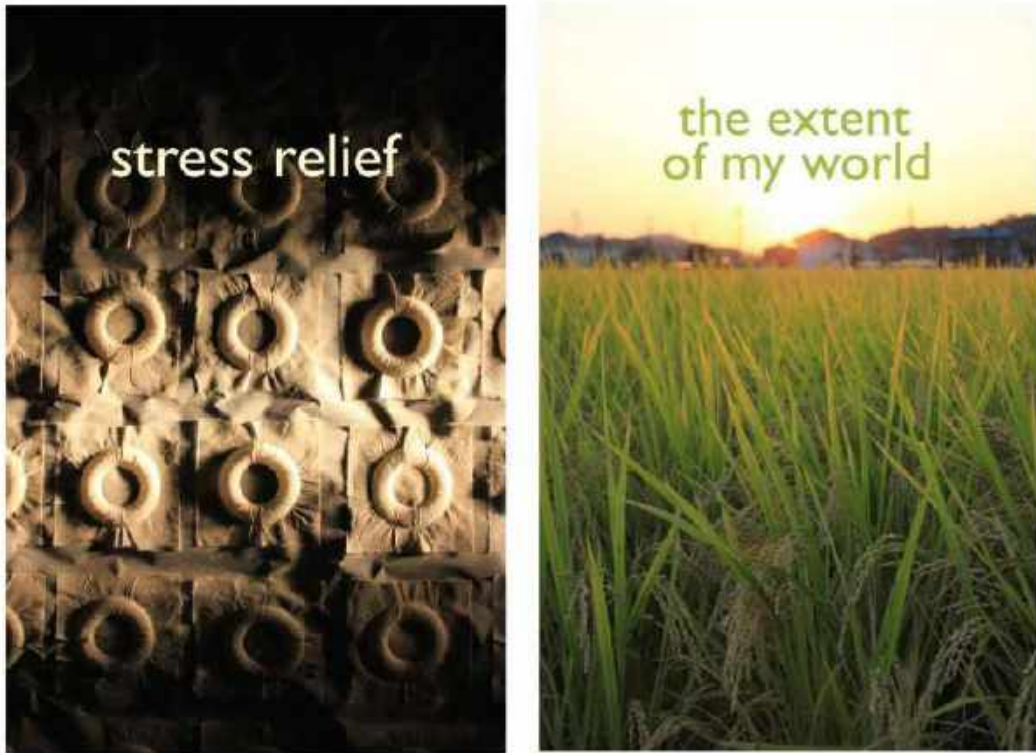


Fig. 1.6 Image from Masters Dissertation: 'Stress Relief: Geo-Emotional Relationships and the Embodiment of 'Extent'. (Photos: G Dunn)

landscapes, its modern usage has developed into a narrow and visually descriptive term, frequently applied to describe naturalistic landscapes that look ‘visually alluring’ (Broughton, 2008:16).

The term has a complex etymological background, being the subject of much philosophical debate, particularly within the aesthetic category of garden design. I will employ the term as outlined and practiced by William Gilpin in his seminal work on landscape aesthetics, *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales etc. relative chiefly to picturesque beauty; made in the Summer of the year 1770* (London: 1782).

‘Haptic Visualisation’ is drawn from the writing of film theorist, Laura U. Marks. Marks adds to the historically amassed notion of a haptic approach to experiencing artworks (Berenson, 1952; Benjamin, 2008; Deleuze, 2005; Sobchack, 2004). Marks describes the process of ‘embodied spectatorship’ as the experience of touching and being touched by an artwork (in this case film), when seeing inherently tactile stimuli; she suggests that this is as a result of an amassed array of corporeally stored stimuli and one that the viewer unconsciously draws upon. Marks goes as far to speculate upon the personally understood notion that eyes are organs of touch (Marks, 2000). To some degree, Marks is joined in this view by Eva Hayward, who having researched the optical/haptic sensory organs of marine corals, uses the term *fingereyes*, to describe the inter-sensual interface with the world:

Cup corals seem full of touch, of sensing, or rather of being literally tact, touch; their tentacular sense—their fingereyes—respond to surface effects, caressing.

(Hayward, 2010:577)

Finally, and for the specific purposes of this landscape research project, I wish to reference professor Derek Gladwin, both here and in Chapter 6 and his appropriation

of Marks' embodied haptic-approach, to reading photographic representations of landscape. In the 2013 article, *Eco-Haptic Photography: Visualizing Irish Bogland in Rachel Giese's The Donegal Pictures*, Gladwin offers the term 'Eco-Haptic Visualisation', elaborating upon Marks' original term. He argues that reading imagery as a broad collection of sensory stimuli, recalling how things might feel to the touch, for example, we can promote a more ecocentric understating of the environment and ultimately, he says, endorse an empathetic view of our world. This methodology, although originally used to consider photography, appropriately informs my approach when considering the creative output of a few artists in Chapter 7 and is further explained by Gladwin below:

...landscape photography serves as an ideal subject in forming what I am calling the eco-haptic, which uses visual tactility to develop a deeper, abiding relationship with the environment, resulting in a greater capacity for empathy and responsibility. (Gladwin, 2013:161)

In conclusion, this thesis is intended to embody a research journey and bear witness to a physically centred account of the materiality of the Wye Valley AONB. It is also offered as means of raising the profile of a set of creative practitioners and the precious ability they have, in somehow capturing our experience of place. However, the overall purpose of the work is to evidence the value of the valley to contemporary society and to substantiate the argument for continued bodily immersion in all 'protected' landscapes.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

As a means of understanding the broader cultural context of contemporary approaches to landscape, I have set out to gather literature on the experience and interpretation of, largely natural landscapes in their broadest terms. Literature has been investigated which is detailed and historically descriptive; texts that have highlighted key thinkers in the genre and identified movements within the field of the visual arts, (particularly with regards to the depiction of landscape). However, landscape theory is a substantial reading field, an already established subject area and has subsequently opened further avenues of enquiry, most notably, architectural theory. Overall, the focus has been upon *haptic* approaches to landscape perception and I have endeavoured to be selective in my choices; following consultation of on-line journals, via search terms such as *embodiment, phenomenology, haptic landscape, walking and well-being;*

It is clear there is a wealth of literature on the above topics. Although the articles I have chosen to study are largely British in provenance, which given the geographic area of research is relevant and beneficial, writing has also been obtained from global sources. The articles are as up-to-date as possible and from journals related to the social sciences, psychology and therapy; where relevant in providing empirical evidence of the benefits of landscape.

The literature search had a staged methodology. Firstly, in order to deepen my understanding of the theoretical discussion surrounding the term 'landscape', I sought to understand the significance of this term within the field of contemporary arts and society in general. As it has been important to consider it as a form of artistic categorisation, I have better acquainted myself with the history of landscape art. Books have been primarily consulted for this purpose, reading descriptions of works and critical



debates around landscape art, theory and perception. To keep abreast with contemporary thought and criticism, I have attended conferences and symposia centred upon the subject of landscape art and practice. Social media such as Twitter has also informed the research, being a site of ongoing up-to-date debate.

Secondly, I have also sought to examine literature concerned with rationalising the beneficial aspects of encountering landscape, especially those landscapes largely vegetal in content and character. This strand of research crosses over fields of psychology, social sciences, neurology and philosophy and is currently, an active field of research; therefore, there is currently a wealth of literature within journals of this nature.

Thirdly, historical documentation by William Gilpin, produced around the notion of the Picturesque, has been examined. Primary objects have been considered, in the form of actual artist diaries, notebooks and manuscripts, as well as secondary research documentation in the form of re-printed books and images.

## **2.1 The Wye Valley and its Historical Significance**

The Wye Valley is an area of the UK, rich in historical narrative and was a key setting for early explorations in visual representation in Western landscape art. Contemporary landscape depiction has therefore been defined by numerous historical encounters with this particular landscape. The location possesses unique physical features, key in illustrating the visual principles of the 'Picturesque', a series of aesthetic guidelines, devised by the Reverend William Gilpin (1724-1804) (Andrews, 1999; Copley & Garside, 2010; Murphy, 2005; Porter, 2013). Gilpin, recognised by Harold Osborne in the *Oxford Companion to Art* as "the apostle of the picturesque" (Osborne 1970:868), first visited the Wye Valley in 1770; travelling southwards by boat between Ross and Chepstow over the course of two days. He was following in the footsteps of English poet, Thomas

Gray (1716-1771), who had travelled down the Wye earlier that year; documenting the journey in *Catalogue of the Antiquities, Houses, Parks, Plantations, Scenes, and Situations, in England and Wales* (1773). Gilpin documented his own travels in an illustrated manuscript, published over a decade after the original journey took place, as a first edition of 800 copies (Sloan, 2000:160) as *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales etc. relative chiefly to picturesque beauty; made in the Summer of the year 1770* (London: 1782). The book's popularity with the subsequent visiting tourists, a populous described by C.S. Matheson as a "veritable flood" (Matheson 2013:140), was due in part to the recently invented Aquatint printing technique. The technique was particularly good at depicting "light and shade" (Walford Davies & Fulford, 2013:116), qualities that would more effectively represent topographical depth in greater quantity. Gilpin's publication fuelled the democratisation of visual aesthetics for non-artists "for whom the aesthetics of landscape were a new and unknown science" (Mitchell, 2010:11), "becoming the height of pictorial fashion" (Ibid) and helped popularise the idea of physical terrain being attractive and a site for alluring beauty. The Wye became "synonymous with the picturesque" (Porter, 2013:166) and the newly moneyed middle classes were willing disciples to the Reverend's visual rules; with the book as their guide, they sought to categorise the topography and surrogately frame it as if through Gilpin's eyes.

It is important to mention that Gilpin's early written descriptions of landscape were as important as his visual representations, in attracting people to the Wye. However, it has been argued that Gilpin's illustrations, considered by some to be very reductive in their representation of reality, were often the starting point for criticism of his contributions to aesthetics: "The illustrations were derided...they baffled tourists because they simply didn't look like the place they depicted" (Mitchell, 2010:11). Gilpin produced imagery, as an idealised version of the real world and something pleasing to *his* eyes. It's my

belief, that the Wye Valley had been a material vehicle for Gilpin's imaginative engagement and he in turn, empathised with and embodied the landscape.

Gilpin had acted as a creative catalyst; his knowledge of painting and his timely encounter with an impressive "site of information overload" (Walford Davies & Fulford:116) natural environment, had merged to create something new. Davies & Fulford go on to describe this as a "trompe l'oeil" a situation that asked its viewers to,

...test the scene before them against various 'picture[s] of the mind' and a raft of pre-existing material representations. Thus, for tourists the Wye seemed to exist, strangely, on two interconnected planes of reality... (Ibid)

William Gilpin's picturesque experience of the Wye, including his subsequent intellectual and artistic output, was fundamental in placing the location at the centre of the ensuing aesthetic debate. As will be discussed in chapter 7, artists are still similarly entangled with the temporal and physical aspects of the area; continuing to creatively evidence its powerful effects. To evidence its broader contribution, I would like to quote Isis Brook, writing in 2008, who extols the virtues of the picturesque as still being laudable, relevant and possibly key to developing a more environmentally centred view of the world:

At the heart of the picturesque is a love of wild nature in a small compass. I believe this impulse is a likely contributor to our current sensibilities and it certainly has still more to say if we are to further develop our sensibilities to appreciate and care for our environment. (Brook, 2008:112)

As will be argued, Gilpin's picturesque is an ecocentric viewpoint, relevant for contemporary society to embrace.

## **2.2 Environmental Perception and the Eco-haptic**

Initial research has shown that photo elicitation can evoke an effective visual reminiscence of a landscape (Tonge, Moore, Ryan 2013; Dandy & Van Der Wal 2007; Millman 2013). The research thus far suggests that individuals may overlay their own

experience upon a site and draw upon their understanding of visibly similar places, in order to make sense of what they see; an act of eliciting existing memories (Abram, 1997; Paterson, 2009; Serres, 2008; Tuan, 2001). This suggests that encountering a site is a fuller reminiscence, which is multi-modal in nature and might rely more upon how it feels *to be in* a landscape. This leads the research to the subject of phenomenological enquiry (Paskow, 2008). For example, John Wylie in (Howard et al. 2012) offers an argument for contemporary phenomenological research when he says:

...from a phenomenological standpoint, landscape is more-than-visual and more-than-symbolic. To study landscape in this way involves attending instead to myriad everyday embodied practices of interaction with and through landscape. It also involves on-going reflection on more abstract and first-order questions regarding the nature of subjectivity, and human relationships with the world. (Wylie 2012:49)

Wylie supports a phenomenological approach that is highly relevant to this research; an approach that in this study requires the research subjects and the researcher, as their guide, to be immersed in the landscape of the Wye Valley. Physical encounters encourage connectedness (Howell, Dopko, Passmore, & Buro, 2011) between visitors and selected art practitioners from the past and the present; providing a sense of wellbeing and belonging. Isis Brook eloquently supports the necessity for a more comprehensive, bodily encounter in visually curating and representing landscape, when she says:

Our thoughts can reach further to the context of that landscape in history and in the wider environment through many channels of information. Our thoughts can also sift the emotions, responses, impressions, and intuitions that arise in order to arrive at considered aesthetic judgements, which can then be discussed and debated. However, none of this can begin before the experience itself; experience is the bed-rock of the aesthetic and without it we just recycle the thoughts of others and never enter the aesthetic field.

(Brook, 2013:117)

In addition, Derek Gladwin, in his essay *Eco-Haptic Photography: Visualizing Irish Bogland in Rachel Giese's The Donegal Pictures* (2013), offers an appropriate method of reading representations of landscape. Gladwin examines the landscape photographs produced by Giese as a physical encounter, (and I would argue as a *corporeal* way), via the sensory mode of 'haptic visuality' or 'seeing as tactile'; a way of seeing first described by Gilles Deleuze in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (2005) and later Laura U. Marks, who examines it within the discipline of film analysis in *The Skin of the Film* (2000). Gladwin proffers:

Through this tactile-quasi experience, the viewer develops a deeper relationship with the landscape and the photograph, thereby bridging the separation between viewer and object in what media scholars have called "embodied spectatorship" (Gladwin 2013:157).

Gladwin, like Tim Ingold (2000) and Mark Paterson (2007;2009), describes a connection with two-dimensional imagery through physical means; conceptually developing the idea of haptic connection with physical landscape. These authors are united in their suggestion that our ocular senses effectively touch the scene beyond the vertical plane of a painting, photograph or screen; thus, providing a deeper emotional and empathetic engagement with subject/location. This also resonates with the notion of a *Geo-Emotional* (Dunn, 2013) experience of place; a physically centered engagement with a material habitat. A noteworthy consequence of such an approach is that it mutually connects the viewer with their surroundings:

Landscape photography serves as an ideal subject in forming what I am calling the **eco-haptic** which uses visual tactility to develop a deeper, abiding relationship with the environment, resulting in a greater capacity for empathy and responsibility. (Gladwin, 2013: 161, my emphasis)

The research builds on this method of image analysis in greater depth – especially as the means of capturing and endorsing a deeper feeling of connectedness for the research participants.

### 2.3 The Framed World

Whilst Malcolm Andrews, author of *Landscape and Western Art* (1999) clearly recognises Reverend William Gilpin as a highly influential advocate of the cordoned vista, he appears to be critical of Gilpin's approach to standardising the depiction of nature when he says "...The formulae derived from Picturesque conventions reduce novelty and variety to secure uniformity. The Picturesque makes various places seem like each other. It encourages us to edit out diversity, eccentricity, startling departures from the standard. It chooses to reassure not to shock..." (Andrews, 1999:129). Gilpin compiled simple rules to be followed, when identifying so-called "*pleasing*" topographic elevations (Gilpin, 2005 [1782]:29). As will be discussed in chapter 4, he utilised contemporary optical viewing technology, in the form of a handheld, convex and tinted mirror called a Claude Glass, through which "the landscape is processed" (Andrews, 1999:116). The device, also called a "Black Mirror" (Maillet, 2009) is not without its detractors, but it was used extensively to mediate the scene for Gilpin; possibly dislocating his bodily perceptions, whilst inevitably framing the view. John Ruskin later described the Claude Glass in 1857 as '...one of the most pestilent inventions for falsifying nature and degrading art which was ever put into an artist's hand...' (Ruskin, 1857: 201). It could be argued that the result was a controlled depiction of the natural world, leading to a somewhat artificial representation of landscape, which Gilpin further visually augmented by adding fictional details such as buildings or ruins:

But when we introduce a scene on canvas — when the eye is to be confined within the frame of a picture, and can no longer range among the varieties of nature, the aids of art become more necessary, and we want the castle, or the abbey, to give consequence to the scene. Indeed the landscape-painter seldom thinks his view perfect, without characterizing it by some object of this kind. (Gilpin, 2005 [1782]:25).

Gilpin explored the ideas of the Picturesque through his utilisation of a Claude Glass and the subsequent production of manuscripts (Andrews 1999:167; Gombrich

1950:330); his eventual aquatints represented the Wye and thus the world in more idealistic terms. Gilpin's illustrations offered creatively manipulated scenes that conformed to his own particular aesthetic ideals, which led to:

...aestheticising the natural and often commonplace scenery of Britain, the Picturesque awakened a large segment of the population to the realization that aesthetic judgement was not the gift of the privileged few but could be learned by anyone and applied to just about anything. (Bermingham in: Copley & Garside 2010:86)

Essentially Gilpin *enclosed* the broader landscape and embellished it, to possibly reflect his philosophy on life, but in ways that have accorded with the perceptions of others; enduring over centuries even though criticised by authors such as Andrews, (1999). The idea that the world has been defined further, by framing it to the point that everything seen is now *pre-framed*, is a most interesting notion and one which underpins the debate on how we perceive the landscape. For example, Michael Newman elaborates, by giving the example:

The tourist makes a decision about framing. Their snapshots are framed for them and by them, and also in accord with memories of images, so that their pictures are also pre-framed. So if we take the problematic issues of landscape perception/interaction as, at least in part a problem of framing, the question becomes one of how to transform framing itself. (Elkins, et al 2008:138).

Documented in the book *Place* (Dean & Millar, 2005) is another notable discussion about the framed depictions of landscape and its residual presence in subsequent experiences of the real world. Artists Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, writer Simon Schama and art historian Joseph L. Koerner, contemplate subjective representation and more specifically here, landscape representation in Western art. As I have previously suggested in this chapter, when considering the influence of the Picturesque, they offer the notion that the world we see is continually mediated by artworks; "framed" by previous visual representations and that, as a result, individuals are rarely free from

these depictions. Simon Schama continues to suggest that to become a “modernist” (or to contemporise our approach to our surroundings), we can begin by “unframing the world” (Dean & Millar 2005: 182). Schama is suggesting that artists, by universally adopting the convention of the oblong canvas, have selectively delineated, limited and organised space for their audience. As a consequence, viewing such standardised imagery has possibly limited our own complex perceptions to an oblong and two-dimensional plane. It has been important therefore to consider alternative ways and means of landscape representation, which has led me to engage with artistic alternatives, such as Land Art (Robert Smithson, Richard Serra) and Walking Art (Richard Long, Hamish Fulton) movements; including modern practitioners such as George Shaw and Clare Woods – exponents of the *occluded* view (as opposed to the open vista often celebrated in traditional landscape art).

When considering examples of framing today, it is possible to extend a comparison of historical use of the Claude Glass to the use of smart phones by contemporary society (D. Graham Burnett, 2012; Dillon, 2009) Brian Dillon observes that:

Tinted glass mirrors, flat or convex, were part of the paraphernalia of the picturesque: that 18th-century mode of seeing which sought to domesticate the more unruly vistas of the natural sublime...tourists and amateur artists were encouraged, for example, to turn their backs on views of the Lake District and gaze into their “Claude glasses”: hand-held black mirrors that now seem like precursors of the digital camera’s ubiquitous screen. (Dillon, 2009)

Retrospectively regarding imagery taken with a digital camera, or smartphone and considering their subsequent provocations can be defined as *photo-elicitation* (Tonge, Moore, Ryan 2013; Dandy & Van Der Wal 2007; Millman 2013). Whilst this largely ubiquitous tourist activity has been argued by some to impair accurate memories of a situation (Henkel, 2014), it does democratise the act of investigative selection, image capture and offers a methodology, available to almost all visitors to the Wye Valley. It



also follows that visual representations of the Wye Valley, (for example, those presented in aquatints by William Gilpin in 1782) and other historical representations, can be subjected to eco-haptic scrutiny; in the same way as more contemporary representations of landscape, such as those found upon the internet, smartphones and photographs taken by visitors to the AONB.

However, there are other aspects which impact upon the study; for example, in considering the movement of individuals through the landscape, its bearing upon the complex experience of place and how we make sense of the resulting interaction. This appears to be a more accurate description of Gilpin's approach. In recent work by Costa (2014), the author articulates kinesthetic experience in accounts of environmental interaction, when moving through predominantly vegetal areas (Bannon in Coles & Millman, 2013). In her study, Costa identifies that the pace of walking changes from rapid to slow, in instances of intense meaningful interaction with habitat. Such instances may contain features open to eco-haptic scrutiny, particularly as they compelled participants to stop, stare, sit down or take a picture. The narratives which accompanied Costa's observations clearly demonstrated that framing was occurring to a sophisticated extent, that it was at its most refined when static or possibly required the observer to be static and that the observer derived great contentment through the process of being in the landscape and remembering significant positive events cued by the qualities of the vegetation. The indications are that representations of the landscape, as moments of time/experience/framing, or as a series of framed events, (possibly embellished through drawing or narrative), represent a sophisticated method of perception, which can be incorporated into participatory testing and subject to qualitative scrutiny.

## **2.4 The Therapeutic Landscape**

Although the continuing themes centred around well-being, as established within my MA Fine Art Dissertation, *Geo-Emotional Relationships and the Embodiment of 'Extent'*, it is

important to state that an extensive body of literature exists, which explores perception of the landscape in relation to its 'restorative effect'. Prevailing debate which focuses around an innate response to the landscape, versus a cultural or learnt response, is one which appears to divide opinion, as to what is an integrated process of landscape experience (Coles and Millman 2013; Coles 2014).

Because many areas of the Wye Valley are largely green and vegetal in nature, it can be identified as a region largely appropriate for psychological restoration (Hartig, 2007; Kaplan, 1995; Pearson & Craig, 2014). Its characteristics are also in keeping with previously tested places, deemed to be physiologically beneficial to humans; as evidenced by academic researchers, such as Catharine Ward Thompson et al.,. As '...[t]here is evidence for a positive relationship between access to green or natural environments and people's perceived overall general health...' (Roe et al., 2013), the location might also be an appropriate site to produce a *Therapeutic Landscape*, as defined by Karolina Doughty. Doughty uses the term to describe activities that generate a feeling of well-being and create a situation in which people can, '...share a sensory appreciation of the countryside...' (Doughty, 2013:145). Doughty's co-created and embodied methodology reveals that a therapeutic landscape is formed, particularly when working with groups of people moving through the landscape. Doughty suggests that:

...the therapeutic countryside walk scape is understood as a mobile field of supportive relations that unfolds with the walkers through shared movement. It takes an expansive view of both the therapeutic landscape concept and in its consideration of the 'therapeutic' process. This affect might be experienced in a group or on an individual basis. (Ibid)

Having considered the literature outlined within this section, I felt it necessary to test the similar approaches within the Wye Valley and to research its capacity as being a place for the generation of feelings of well-being; some of these approaches are outlined in Chapter 8.

## 2.5 Landscape Perception

This research project is concerned with human sensitivity to landscape; including how British artistic practitioners from the past have visually represented and attempted to articulate their encounters. The Wye Valley AONB has been an important site for such artistic output and this is acknowledged through its designation as a *protected landscape* - a site deemed to be of national cultural importance and why it is the geographical focus for the study. I intend to argue that past works of art and literature produced in the Wye Valley, enrich and enhance contemporary interactions with the location; enlightening our present day understanding of physical space. This in turn may have an uplifting effect upon an individual – leading to a feeling of well-being and connectedness to a wider world. One of the aims of this research is to classify and examine apparent visual motifs in historical landscape representation; to contrast and compare these connections to the contemporary human experience of the landscape.

A deepening of understanding of the term 'landscape' and its context in contemporary society is instigated through this research; it has emerged that the term is multifarious and is open to numerous interpretations. In her essay 'One with nature' in *Landscape, Language, Empathy and Imagination* (Elkins; DeLue, 2008) Architecture Professor, Anne Whiston Spirn states that, '...Landscape associates people and place...' (Whiston Spirn in Elkins; DeLue, 2008:54); a theoretical framework which supports my own inquiry into the relationship between humans and their environment. Whiston Spirn clarifies the depth of this connection by saying that '...landscape is not a mere visible surface, static composition, or passive backdrop to human theatre...' (Ibid). She suggests that landscape is more than an expansive two-dimensional plane; perceiving it as moveable, deeply constructed, composed of multiple layers of interconnectedness with present and previous encounters. Whiston Spurn implies that the landscape is a merged palimpsest: a layered location, embroiled in numerous perceptual entanglements – a viewpoint with which I have much empathy, and which has contextualised this research project.

To expand upon Whiston Spurn's view, I would like to offer anthropologist, Tim Ingold's essay, 'The temporality of landscape' (2000) which goes further to explain our corporal connection with landscape; describing humans as being in an inter-material state, existing in a world that is physically un-demarcated and ultimately borderless. Ingold states "I reject the division between inner and outer worlds – respectively of mind and matter, meaning and substance" (Ingold, 2000:191). Ingold is suggesting that human beings are part of the material process of the world and not separate from it. He also observes that "it is important to note that no feature of the landscape is, of itself a boundary. It can only become a boundary, or the indicator of a boundary, in relation to the activities of the people (or animals) for whom it is recognised or experienced as such." (Ingold, 2000:193). I take this as being an explanation of our need to find meaning in the landscape, or at least to build a relationship with it.

Anne Whiston Spirn also reads the human connection with our world in terms of metaphorical parallels. She suggests that our connection to terrain can be expressed via linguistic metaphors when she says "Rivers reflect, clouds conceal. Water and fire purify and destroy. Circles have centres; paths have direction" (Elkins; DeLue, 2008:55). Thus, Whiston Spurn presents an observation that may be appropriate when symbolically reading two-dimensional visual representations of the Wye Valley. As the artist is an interpreter of their experience of the world, part of the focus of this research will be the analysis of artistic re-presentation of material features; features that can also be read in metaphorical or allegorical terms.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

As I initially considered myself to be a 'Stranger' (Simmel in Weinberg, 2002: 25,26) to the Wye Valley, an apparent outsider, I deemed it necessary to establish a personal acquaintance with both the physical aspects, and broader cultural context of the research setting. Over the course of the investigation, a broad range of 'qualitative' (Flick, 2011; Weinberg, 2002; Rallis & Rossman, 2003) approaches to data gathering were employed. At the interview stage, it was agreed between the Director of Studies and myself, that research activities should be conducted in the Wye Valley and I would need to live there for no less than six months. This approach would promote and facilitate a deeper connection with the research site; facilitating and supporting the development of a working relationship with the collaborative stakeholders, the Wye Valley AONB management team.

The methodological approaches I chose to employ are contextualised by the fact that I am an artist and well-versed in the direct physical manipulation of materials to produce tangible artefacts. As I practice a hands-on approach to the production of art, I deemed it appropriate to approach the project as a physically immersive, lived experience, emanating from embodied environmental interaction, reflecting upon my own encounters with the research location and the individuals I happened to meet there. Being physically present in the Wye Valley enabled research participants (including myself in an auto-ethnographic capacity) to develop a largely corporeal familiarity with the material and spatial characteristics of the location. Qualitative research methods were broadly employed to gather more emotively derived data; these activities were taken in the form of location-specific peripatetic discussion (Doughty, 2013), observation, semi-structured artist interviews, auto-ethnographic field-notes, a 'photo-elicitation' activity (Rose, 2011:298) and a 'sand-boxing' activity (Mannay, 2015). Said

events provided a myriad of intimate encounters with the landscape and offered opportunities to provoke primary responses to the experience of place.

By fostering an approach that can be described as phenomenological, i.e. "...known through the senses rather than by thought or intuition" (Abram, 1996:276) or "...only phenomena confirmed by the sense can be warranted as knowledge" (Flick, 2011:69), it was my intention to pay attention to bodily reactions to an immersive environment. Art historian, James Elkins elaborates on the role of our corporal selves within material space, when he says "Like the body, landscape is something we all feel ourselves to be inside. It's our subject, but we're also part of it: we help make it; we live in it" (Elkins, 2008: 88). Here, Elkins is alluding to an immersive state, a mutually affective relationship between humans and landscape, an interwoven materiality that, for me, has been a key feature of some of my experiences in the Wye Valley.

Psychologist, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) established the philosophical discipline of Phenomenology in the early twentieth century; a broadly defined theoretical position that has undergone much iteration, it was founded upon the idea that the world is comprised of objects and events as they are perceived by humans, and not of anything independent of human consciousness. Phenomenology can therefore have said to have placed importance upon, "...our lived experience of the things around us" (Abram, 1996:36) and can be posited as an experientially driven framework in which to consider environmental perception.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) put forward an account of phenomenology that foregrounded perception as being central to human experience of the world. He also endorsed *corporeity*, the notion that our world view is multifariously informed by our bodies' perpetually merging senses; not a clear, demarcated body and mind state.

Archaeologist, Christopher Tilley in *The Materiality of Stone: Explorations in Landscape Phenomenology* (2004), scrutinises Merleau-Ponty's approach to world perception and helpfully, for the purposes of this research project, describes the material-centric position that the human body occupies in environmental perception. Tilley goes as far to suggest that our thinking process, and therefore our thoughts, are produced through material means:

From the point of view of a subject, the body is not an object outside of consciousness but the only way of being present in the world and being conscious of it. In other words, **consciousness is corporeal**. The lived body is a way of viewing and feeling the world and the way a subject comes to know and express this viewing and feeling...It is rather a bodily presence in the world and a bodily awareness of it.

(Tilley, 2004:3 my emphasis)

From the outset, my enquiries were intended to develop a comprehensive physical account of the material location and utilise as much 'primary' evidence (Thomas, 2009:31) as possible; the rationale being that this would result in a more contemporary assessment of the site and more accurately reflect the lived experience of research participants, residents and visitors alike. An auto-ethnographic approach (Rallis & Rossman, 2003) was originally employed to personally reflect upon a set of immersive, peripatetic activities, which contributed to building a fuller experiential record of the location. Responses were recorded manually in 'reflective' notebooks (Bold, 2012:81) and text was also recorded digitally on a smartphone.

As existing aspects of my artistic practice, the social media platforms *Twitter* and *Blogger* were initially utilised, as the vehicle for a certain level of data dissemination (Fig. 3.1). As the project progressed, the research focus shifted from my reflections as the researcher, to participant responses; as a result, the use of social media diminished, to some degree. The intimate responses given by research participants were often

recorded on Dictaphone; these recordings became more central to the research process. Consequently, with due respect to ethical practice, the importance of the need to publicise their personal interactions lessened.

As this project is collaborative in nature, it was vital to consider the activities of the other research stakeholders (The AONB Management Team), particularly as their core concern is the research site. Familiarising myself with the unfamiliar roles and related activities of the AONB collaborative partners, whilst utilising their collective local knowledge, enabled me to quickly become acquainted with the locality; becoming more effective at research, appropriate site exploration and subsequent event observation. It was anticipated that the results of my enquiries would contribute to the future management of the Wye Valley AONB, and this is further discussed in the conclusion chapter. This thesis provides a written account of my experience as researcher, represents a tangible contribution to knowledge and offers the AONB Management Team in new ways in which to consider their surroundings.

### **3.2 Ethical Considerations**

The methodologies, outlined within this chapter, required me to interact with members of the general public and, as a consequence, I need to state the considerations I have made, to ensure that the research is ethically rigorous. As specified and agreed in the preceding Research Degree '9R' Registration Document, dated October 2014, any field visits required me to consider the health and safety of participants; I also completed an institution ethics form (See Appendices). All contributors were over the age of eighteen and of reasonable health. It was necessary to request that partakers wore suitable clothing and footwear for variable outdoor conditions, have money to purchase food, drink and to have sufficiently eaten before commencement of any of the walks that took place. It was also my responsibility to take the names and addresses of a personal



contact from each person in case of an emergency (such details will be kept confidential).

All participants, before taking part on walks, interviews and other encounters, asked for informed consent to use any imagery, sound or text produced during the field visits and subsequent workshop sessions. On some occasions, participants were required to complete and sign a consent form (BCU Tintern & Making Moments events), asked for permission to use photographs of themselves in any resulting literature and informed by me of how and why the information was being collected, stored and disseminated.

### **3.3 Familiarisation with the Wye Valley through walking**

Walking was principally employed as a research methodology, to elicit a personally defined and broadly physically centred account of the Wye Valley. By incorporating lone walking into my personal art practice, it was my intention to explore the Wye Valley AONB *through the lens of artists and creative processes* – an important aspect of the first research aim. By exploring the landscape on foot, as opposed to being enclosed within the space of a car for example, it was the intention to build a deeper, embodied understanding of the landscape. It was hoped that by undertaking the research in this way, the resulting evidence would reflect an experience open to a broad range of visitors to the area.



Fig. 3.1 Example of a tweet

*On the evening of 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2014, I walked in the fields surrounding Monmouth. It had been raining and the crops were very wet. My 'waterproof' boots couldn't cope with the soaking and my feet soon became immersed in water. However, it was a pleasant walk and the water only heightened my senses to my surroundings.*

In adopting a multi-disciplinary approach to reading, one that bridged fields of environmental psychology, landscape, aesthetics, architecture, fine art, philosophy, social and media studies, the intention was to obtain a very broad view of how a modern and diverse society might consider a place defined as 'Outstanding, natural and beautiful'. The wide scope of the literature search was intended to contextualise the physical reality of the encounter. By experiencing bodily insertion into the location (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) and embracing a 'multi-modal' approach to the investigation, involving 'total bodily immersion' (Coles, Millman, & Flannigan, 2013:832), the body could be seen as an actual 'instrument of research' (Volvey in Paterson & Dodge, 2012:108).

Having elected to investigate human encounters with the material landscape of the Wye Valley, it was imperative that any initial research activity centred upon acquiring a physical familiarity with the research site. Being unfamiliar with the Wye Valley and in considering myself to be an *outsider* to the area, I began to visit the area in person from September 2013; driving from Worcester to Chepstow, Wyndcliff and Tintern respectively and moving through the landscape, by participating in walks as I would normally, with my partner. We approached the site as a tourist might, for indeed, I considered myself to be a tourist at the time. For example, we made enquires at the information centre in Chepstow, procuring advice from centre staff and literature for walks. Often, during walks, the on-site interpretative materials we encountered mediated our intellectual experiences. In October 2013, I participated in a short canoe trip with members of my family, from Ross to Symonds Yat West; an event inspired by reading the William Gilpin account of his journey in the Summer of 1770. In the same way that tourists had followed the Reverend, to re-create picturesque views over two hundred years ago, I considered it vital that I re-inhabit the same view-point (from the river) as Gilpin, as early as possible in the research project.

The proximity of the research landscape increased immeasurably upon moving to Monmouth in May 2014. My new situation allowed the frequency of these peripatetic activities to increase significantly. At the commencement of the six-month residency, I elected to employ the practice of recording and sharing daily observations (for thirty days), uploading them to the online blog (Fig. 3.2). Posts were written in prose and alluded to a poetic response to the landscape, a practice that I had begun on my Fine Art Master's degree.

My artistic process at the time, also involved the activity of recording various personal encounters with a digital camera (or smartphone camera), an audio recorder and the writing of notes in digital format. I also utilised hand-written notebooks, within which I recorded thoughts, a diary of research activities, references and sketches. The Internet has previously been an indispensable tool as a creative diary, for sharing thoughts and publicising my activities as a contemporary practitioner. Since 2004 I have utilised an online blog (<http://dunn-roaming.blogspot.co.uk/>) to share aspects of my artistic practice. In addition, in August 2012, I opened a Twitter account (@roamingdunn) to share my three-month experience of being an artist in residence in Japan.

I studied the environment as if part of my own artistic process, familiarising myself with the physical aspects of the landscape, moving through it and reflecting upon the experience. I lived away from my family, as the idea of a semi-ascetic approach appealed; the vague notion of getting closer to nature by being alone seeming reasonable, almost *romantic* to me. Upon reflection, such a change in personal

Monmouth: Day 21 (Part 2)

*Biblins Bridge & Back.*

*Swallows by the bridge playing effortless giddy games.*

*Ferns of excellent succulence.*

*Foam fringed rapids.*

*Lead lipped pinnacles.*

*Just crossed the border into Wales.*

*Everything spongy and porous.*

*Boa constrictor beech tree roots.*

*Green squeezing down now.*

*Pushing me - pulling me - into and through.*

*Irresistible ramps - the rumps of trees.*

*I can see The Seven Sisters with my own eyes.*

*Vacuous space full with birdsong.*

*Me and a Crow and a cold fire pit.*

*Choc/lime pipeline.*

*Nothing for my eyes to latch onto - smoothly flow through the undergrowth.*

*Aeron eirin tagu and roller coaster May Flies.*

*Feeling down the valley.*

*The exit ramp forest lines leading to town.*

*I've had no choice but to use my eyes to touch and feel.*

*I've had to imagine being touched.*

*I used to be hungry to be held.*

*I became hungry to hold.*

*Through another muddy gate.*

*Galvanised latch and swinging hinges.*

*Moving with the river now.*

*Gliding with the spirals.*

*Battery almost dead and Mino in my head.*

### **Fig. 3.2 Transcription of a Blog Entry**

Tuesday, 27 May 2014

(<http://dunn-roaming.blogspot.co.uk/2014/05/monmouth-day-20-part-2.html>)

circumstances might have been inappropriate for the project; it may have been prudent instead to live at home and travel to locations as needed.

During the sixth month stay in the Wye Valley, I continued driving, walking, cycling and running by myself; as such activities perpetuated a single-minded approach that had been commensurate with my previous practice. Whilst living alone in a caravan (Fig. 3.3) on the outskirts of Monmouth, I began to recognise that a socially isolated method altered the way I perceived the location and was not how I typically experienced landscape. As the residency only represented one aspect of my research methodology and even though I was keen to embody the location and heighten its affect upon my being, acquiring a knowledge of the locality (even if that was being shared through social media) was arguably a one-way process. Therefore, continuing in this manner would only narrow the research and discount the experience of other individuals.

Walking with other people became an enjoyable and invaluable research activity. I continued to walk with my wife, my wife's family, AONB staff and with other artists; notably Anna Falcini, Sam Underwood and Mark Walker (they all accompanied me on a walk to the Devil's Pulpit from Tintern Abbey). In addition, I also walked as part of a group led by local historian, Heather Hurley, an experienced Ross-based walk leader who directed us on a walk around the lanes of Ross. The occasion allowed me to give little consideration to the destination, with more emphasis on social exchange and landscape appreciation along the way; being *led* created a different experience of landscape and one that according to Doughty (Doughty, 2013) is 'therapeutic' (which is how it felt for me).



Greg Dunn グレゴリー・ダン

@roamingdunn

The F.R.V. (Field Research Vehicle) installed on a camp site in Monmouth. Thanks to the family for all your help:-)



5:37 PM - 6 Jul 2014

Fig. 3.3 Field Research Vehicle (Caravan)

*The small German caravan, that I used for my stay in Mitchell Troy, Monmouth, attracted a lot of attention from other long-term residents on the Glentrothy camp-site. Upon reflection, I think the peculiar design of the vehicle placed within the conservative confines of a residential campground contributed to my feelings of conspicuousness as the project advanced.*

Using the dynamically centred research of Doughty, discussed in the previous chapter, as a starting point, it became imperative to walk with larger groups; in the co-production of heightening landscape awareness, co-operatively producing data, and collectively improving well-being. The accumulated experience gained by living in the Wye Valley, allowed me to feel more comfortable in acting as an advocate for the location, along with its visual appeal and the potential it has for meaningful moments, especially when experienced as part of a group. My role as a qualified artist, and Doctoral Researcher, imbued me with confidence and permitted me to perform the role of leader in front of the group; whereby I became *the observed*, rather than *the observer*.

Whilst I was also being observed at my place of residence, this conspicuousness as an outside observer on the camp-site, where I stayed for the last four months of the residency, was not immediately problematic. I had hoped to question fellow campsite residents, as part of my intended research methodology; perceiving a good opportunity to ask regular visitors, as to their reasons for choosing the Wye Valley as a place to stay. However, far from fitting in, my German-made 'Eriba' caravan was exotic compared to other vehicles on the site; particularly as it was placed in the centre of campground, in full view of all the other residents. The peculiar caravan's presence meant that I had attracted attention very quickly and I felt surprisingly uncomfortable when explaining the reasons for being present on the site; preferring to largely describe myself as a landscape artist, working with the Wye Valley AONB management team. I also became uncomfortable with, what I considered to be, an invasion of people's privacy, as I quickly deduced that their presence on the site was largely because of wanting to relax amongst like-minded people. The whole experience contributed to making me feel *on show*.

### **3.4 Familiarisation through observation of the AONB Management Team Activities**

The 2014 Wye Valley River Festival provided a good opportunity to temporarily move to Monmouth and to observe AONB Management Team activities in person. The occasion



was used not just to observe, but also to become involved in team activities; I was warmly welcomed and quickly felt accepted. In addition to making the tea, I prepared signage for the festival and generally helped when it was needed, on festival performance sites. The events that I witnessed were recorded with a camera and submitted to the AONB team.

There were many opportunities to witness and participate in activities organised by the AONB Management team. At the time of the residency, a recent graduate, had been appointed as a Learning Environments: Marine, Urban & Rural (L.E.M.U.R.) scheme trainee. Mentored by AONB Development Officer, Andrew Nixon, the trainee's role was to assist the team in numerous activities, by conducting landscape surveys, participating in AONB promotional activities and supporting the team in general. I became acquainted with L.E.M.U.R. activities and attended numerous events, joining an open day in Herefordshire, where all current L.E.M.U.R. students were present; sharing examples of good practice and demonstrating aspects of their activities on the L.E.M.U.R. scheme (Fig 3.4).

The AONB team has close links with other organisations which have a stake in the local landscape. The Gwent Wildlife Trust held an open day at their headquarters in Dingestow, near Monmouth and the AONB team were present, setting up a branded tent, which housed printed information available to the public. Sarah Sawyer used the occasion to question people about their preferences in landscape and had designed a 'Landscape Olympics' game. A4 printed pictures were pinned on a series of display boards, the images being of several types of landscape. People were asked to rate the landscapes in terms of their own personal preference, awarding a gold medal to their favourite and descending to bronze, for their least favourite. People were surprisingly willing to complete the task and the event provided a good opportunity to explain my research to a broad range of visitors.

Working all day, alongside the Wye Valley AONB Management Team, at the Gwent Wildlife Trust open day, allowed me to meet the public, legitimise my place to some degree, raise the profile of my presence in the research project and question people as to their landscape preferences. The latter activity would address *the cultural relevance of 'The Picturesque' as a historically constructed mode of landscape participation and explore the ways in which it has influenced contemporary experiences of landscape* - the third research aim.

The overall 'winner' of the competition turned out to be what I would describe as, and what my research has taught me, the most 'Picturesque' (in Gilpin terms) of all the landscape examples; an image taken from a low viewpoint, containing occluding screens of foliage and leading to a distant viewpoint. The image, in my opinion, underlined the timelessness of Gilpin's original observations and, I would argue, goes some way to reinforce the presence of a recognisable residual visual template, for what constitutes an 'ideal' landscape (Fig. 3.5).

I was invited to attend the Joint Advisory Committee Meeting by Wye Valley AONB Manager, Andrew Blake. I accepted the invitation as a means of attending to the research aim: *inform strategies for maintaining protected landscapes for current and future generations; thus, help to underpin and advance the strategic management objectives and actions of the AONB Management Plan*, to publicise my presence in the locality, gain better understanding in local governance and to pre-warn attendees as to the possibility of me approaching them for an interview at a future date (I met Debby Blakeborough and then Walter Keeler through the event).



**Greg Dunn** グレゴリー・ダン  
@roamingdunn



Amazing Friday spent in the company of enthusiastic L.E.M.U.R. participants at their Kington open day. [#inspiring](#)



7:17 PM - 11 Jul 2014

Fig 3.4 Tweet about the LEMUR event

*I was invited by the AONB LEMUR trainee to attend an open day, held at Birches Farm, near Kington. The site had recently been acquired by Herefordshire Wildlife Trust. I spent the day in the company of all the participants and observed them sharing knowledge and examples of nature management/observation practice.*



Fig. 3.5 Tweet on Landscape Olympics

*It was AONB Community Officer, Sarah Sawyer's idea to hold a landscape 'Olympics' at the Gwent Wildlife Trust open day at Dingestow Court. A popular idea with the public, various photographs were graded as to their subjective appeal with the overall 'winner' receiving a gold medal. The activity allowed me work alongside the AONB team interact with the public and gave me opportunity to raise the profile of my research with local organisations and individuals.*

By attending a Joint Advisory Committee Meeting held at Forest of Dean District Council, Coleford, I could see the ways in which the AONB Management Team, as part of the partnership, are required to contribute to issues centred around planning and landscape governance. Andrew Blake introduced me to the assembled members of the committee; I was familiar with George Peterken and Chairman of the planning and regulatory committee, Phil Cutter, (who incidentally became very supportive of my activities in the latter stages of the project). I witnessed numerous planning requests and permissions, including many items that I deemed to be, irrelevant to me or my research.

A Volunteers Day was attended, which began at Ross on Wye Cider & Perry Co. Peterstow, Herefordshire; the intention being to use the location as a vehicle to thank volunteers, for their efforts over the previous year and to enlighten them as to the activities of local partner businesses. As part of the day, volunteers were educated in the growing, harvesting and pressing of Cider apples and Perry pears. I was asked to give a short presentation of my research. The assembled group were, in the main enthusiastic and responded positively, when I asked for possible volunteers for future projects.

The opportunity to witness an art enabler working directly in the landscape, came at the 'MindSCAPE' creative session held at Bracelands, Christchurch, Coleford and facilitated by artist Rachel Shilston. 'mindSCAPE' is a Lottery Funded project (£129,296) formed in collaboration with the Forestry Commission, Forest of Dean District Council, Dementia Adventure, the Alzheimer's Society and Forest of Dean Dementia Alliance (Big Lottery Fund, 2013); whose aim is to '...deliver outdoor activities to people with dementia and their carers living in and around the Forest of Dean's rural landscape...'. (Big Lottery Fund, 2013). Attending the mindSCAPE session offered the possibility to obtain research data with regards to the following aim: *Investigate contemporary experiences of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*

*through the lens of artists and creative processes.* It presented the unusual opportunity to witness the practice of an arts therapy/ intervention in the unusual setting of the densely arboreal setting of the Forest of Dean; sitting on furniture carved from resident trees, individuals with dementia and their carers had the opportunity to focus upon the experience of making in an outdoor situation. I describe the session in greater detail in Chapter 5, highlighting interaction between individuals, location and the production of items using found materials.

It was the intention, to research the importance of the Wye Valley to a broad age range of the local population. Through the residency, I encountered lots of mature individuals, apparently comfortable in their ability to express their fondness for landscape and it became important to consider a broader view of the location. The opportunity to professionally connect with young people in the Wye Valley, came at the end of the 2014 summer educational term, in an 'activity day' organised by Sarah Sawyer. The plan was to walk with a group of young students from Monmouth Comprehensive, from Symonds Rock via Symonds Yat to Monmouth. I delivered an explanation of my creative output on the Rock viewpoint, illustrated with laminated photographs, in which I explained my work, my approach and my advocacy for the area. Along the way, we removed Himalayan Balsam from the river's edge, as a means of encouraging landscape awareness.

### **3.5 Review of artistic works relating to the Wye Valley AONB.**

A range of approaches was utilised, involving the collection of visual and verbal narratives surrounding landscape encounters; examining the ways the interaction with the landscape is expressed in art works, by a range of different users. Visits to the Victoria and Albert Museum and Tate Britain in London, in August 2013, offered the chance to physically experience imagery located in the Wye, by the Reverend William

Gilpin (1724 –1804), James Mallard William Turner (1775–1851) and Keith Arnatt (1930 – 2008; ‘Sausages and Food’, photography exhibition).

To acquire a more historically comprehensive account of the Wye Valley, as an established site of artistic inspiration, I attended three talks organised by Chepstow Museum Curator, Anne Rainsbury. All were held at the Drill Hall in Chepstow and all were well-attended. Beginning on the 7th May 2014 with ‘The Wye Tour and its Artists’, Monmouthshire resident, script-writer and author Julian Mitchell gave an illustrated talk, as a chronological guide through his book of the same name.

The next talk attended, ‘Sites of Inspiration’, held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2014, was hosted by Dr Suzanne Matheson, Associate Professor, University of Windsor, Canada. Matheson and her partner, artist Alex McKay, have worked extensively with Rainsbury; re-imagining William Gilpin’s journey and incorporating contemporaneously constructed black mirrors, into modern day explorations of Gilpin’s various viewing sites (McKay, 2007). The talk was organised as part of the exhibition, ‘Sites of Inspiration: Tintern Abbey’, held at the Chepstow Museum from 24th May - 28th Sep 2014. Matheson was concerned with the history of guided tourism in the Wye Valley, after Gilpin and more specifically with the tourist guiding literature of Charles Heath (1761 – 1831). She saw Heath as being integral to the tourist experience at the beginning of the nineteenth century and credited the author as being central in shaping their experience and indeed “priming” their encounter.

At the final talk entitled ‘So What Was the Picturesque’ at the Chepstow Drill Hall on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2014, I was given the opportunity to review a broad collection of historical Wye centred imagery; presented by Malcolm Andrews, Emeritus Professor School of English University of Kent, author of *The Search for the Picturesque and Landscape and Western Art* (M. Andrews, 1989,1999) and Professor Charles Watkins, School of

Geography, University of Nottingham, Co Author of *Uvedale Price: Decoding the Picturesque* (Watkins & Cowell, 2012).

During the research, I considered works of art produced by living contemporary artists who resided in and around the Wye Valley. Upon reading *Collins New Naturalist Library – The Wye Valley* (G. Peterken, 2008), I became familiar with the work of Susan Peterken; her book *Landscapes of the Wye Tour* (2008) brought to my attention the painter and Forest of Dean resident, Doug Eaton. Although primarily focused upon landscapes found in the Forest of Dean, Eaton regularly paints Wye Valley scenery.

By attending academic conferences and symposia, I wanted to expand my knowledge of contemporary scholastic and artistic approaches to landscape research. The initial intentions were to assess the broader influence of the Wye Valley and the Picturesque movement, in modern academic and creative circles. *Uncertain Exchanges*, a symposium organised by the creative practice-led research group 'LAND2' (<http://land2.leeds.ac.uk/>) and held at Southampton City Art Gallery and Museum, on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2013 was the first event I attended. Held in conjunction with an art exhibition, the keynote speaker was Southampton City Art Gallery curator, Tim Craven. The title of Craven's presentation was 'Questions for a landscape artist'. Aspects of his monologue resonated with me, particularly when he was presenting images by Paul Nash (1889-1946) and he described Nash's landscape as "a metaphor for the human condition" (see also Neve, 1990). Craven went on to describe the 'occluded' visual characteristics found in the work of contemporary landscape painters, George Shaw (b. 1966) and Clare Woods (b.1972). He described such features as communicating "feelings of enclosure, privacy and introspection". He contrasted such closed views with the open panoramas, typically found in more broadly appreciated landscape painting. Such features are typical of those I have personally experienced, on walks in locations such as Piercefield and Tintern.



### **3.6 Walking Tours**

Participants were recruited for various pilot walking tours, firstly, to test the effectiveness of photo elicitation using mobile phones to record the experience. In another, photography was removed as recording/expressive medium and replaced with sand, to test its suitability for expressing embodied memories of an experience of landscape.

Finally, in collaboration with AONB Education Officer, Sarah Sawyer, I conducted a walk, as a means of physically transporting a group of individuals through the effects of the First World War, via the physical characteristics of the Wye Valley landscape. My methodology drew upon early readings of Gilpin (Gilpin, 1783), in considering the ways that visitors and local people frame the landscape, to construct manageable 'modes of seeing'. I was interested in the details of the associations and features selected by participants, including the ways that these are framed by the individuals. The aim was to address issues regarding the diversity of experience, as well as seeking those aspects that might be universally common to all experiences. This included examining the significance of specific factors, in leading to my identification of key parameters in environmental haptic associations, which express framing, both cultural and individual.

### **3.7 Testing the integration of historically informed technology into research methodologies.**

In being aware of the use of mediatory technology by visitors to the Wye from an early stage in the project, I was familiar with the fact that Reverend Gilpin, following in the footsteps of Thomas Gray (1716-1771), who had, '...popularized the use of the Claude mirror in his 1769 "Journal in the Lakes" (C. S. Matheson, 2007), had himself utilised a Claude mirror (Maillet, 2009; McKay, 2007) on his first visit to the area in 1770. I had encountered contemporary reflections upon Gilpin's activity, most notably the work of New York based artist, Ellen Harvey who had re-considered the oval framing of subjects by William Gilpin, in works shown as part of a group show organised by Meadow Arts,

'Time Will Tell' (9th March – 3rd November 2013) at Croft Castle, Herefordshire. Harvey used a similar approach, using a Claude Mirror, to portray the present-day Citadel Park in Ghent, Belgium, a site first visited by Gilpin in 1799. Harvey produced a series of painted works in response to the location, one of which can be seen in (Fig. 3.6) (Ellen Harvey, 2009).

As the project progressed, I became interested in the experiences I was having *moving* through the Wye Valley. On numerous occasions, the landscape, or at least the shape of it and its proximity to my body, was conducive to forward motion; it pulled me in and moved me along. I made numerous attempts to record my movements with a smartphone and DSLR camera. Stop-frame, time lapse and standard video recording methods were used, to capture the experience in some way. The results were largely unsatisfactory, low light and uneven ground resulted in footage that was visually unstable and grainy; carrying such equipment also proved to be distracting, ultimately reducing the pleasure of walking in nature. As a result, I began using a chest mounted 'Go-Pro' action camera, as an intended extension of my body, which would leave my hands free to stabilise myself, to safely touch and feel my way through the landscape.

I began using one in July 2014, whilst kayaking down the Wye with the AONB Youth Rangers. Kayaking is a physically active leisure pursuit, *a contemporary experience*, enjoyed by many modern visitors to the Wye Valley. Kayaking with the Wye Valley AONB Youth Rangers and Community Engagement Officer, Sarah Sawyer, gave me the chance to experience the river Wye in a physically demanding activity and offered the chance to, not only be physically immersed in the materiality of the location, but also to encounter and, in line with the third research aim: *to inform strategies for maintaining protected landscapes for current and future generations*, question those who might have a say in the future sustainability of the Wye Valley AONB.

The Go-Pro footage produced, proved to be clear and sharp; echoing the kind of optical experiential evidence, that might be seen in an extreme sports video. Further trials (Bream Scowls in the rain), created a visually dynamic state, a more cinematic outcome, reminiscent of the first-person encounters one might experience when playing a contemporary videogame (Fig. 3.7).

Contemporary modes of image collection were considered; a key approach to gathering image research data was photo-elicitation, taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the mobile phone. The intention was to employ the technology and association, as a modern counterpart of the Claude Glass (D. Graham Burnett, 2012), as a “lens” (McLuhan in Hayward, 2010:585). Continuing in the tradition of Gilpin, participants were invited to undertake a day (short by comparison) ‘Wye Tour’, led by myself, where they were encouraged to record their own visual experiences; an approach capable of great refinement to accommodate research findings, moving from an initial pilot stage, to target specific aspects of eco haptic interaction. User experiences were recorded via mobile phones and the participants were later invited to submit images, with accompanying text that explained their image choices.

Participants for the WW1 and the Making Moments events were recruited with the help of AONB Community Links Officer, Sarah Sawyer; taking advantage of the organisations connections with community and special interest groups to integrate data gathering with routine activities. Scope also exists, in the future, to target a range of users and specific aspects of the environment via the type of interaction; e.g. walking (Coles & Millman, 2013; Keating, 2012; Toda, Rei Den, Hasegawa-Ohira, & Morimoto, 2013), kayaking (Magnussen, 2007) and cycling (Davidson & Stebbins, 2011).

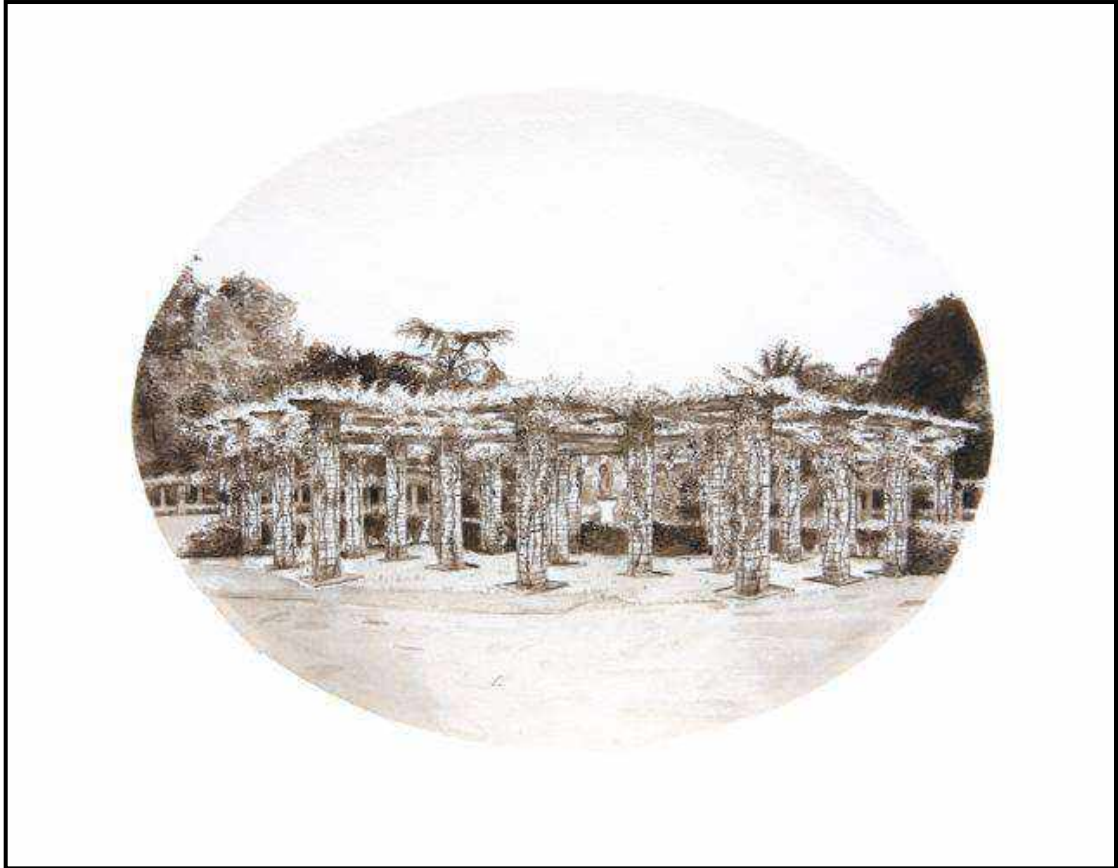


Fig. 3.6

'Rose Trellis of the Citadel Garden' –  
Watercolour 2009 Ellen Harvey



Fig. 3.7  
Video screen grab from Chest-mounted *GoPro* camera.  
Taken at 'Bream Scowls'.

Building upon the historically constructed tradition of the Wye Valley, as a site for artistic inspiration (Andrews, 1989; Peterken, 2008), face-to-face interviews with local artists were carried out. Regarded by Rossman and Rallis as "...a generative way to get rich, detailed data about how people view their worlds" (Rallis & Rossman, 2003:156), the interviews were intended to capture their respective viewpoints regarding the influence of the landscape upon their practice. Interviews were semi-structured and numbers were kept low, to allow for a more detailed response. Continuing the phenomenological approach, I felt it was important to encounter the artists in person, within their own home and in the presence of their artwork. The interviewees were all long-term residents, each having lived there for at least thirty years and were selected because of an assumed familiarity with the landscape surrounding their home.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The methodology outlined here, is broad and multifarious. However, in line with the project aims, the intention has been to personally procure an extensive range of *contemporary experiences* from the Wye Valley AONB. By approaching the area as a tourist, utilising image gathering technology and re-considering other early touristic explorations of the area, I have attempted to deepen modern society's understanding of the experience of environmental discovery and have done so particularly through the process of walking alone and in groups.

In considering the research location from the viewpoint of a trained artist, it has been appropriate to re-consider historical correspondences with the area and review their relevance to modern society. Interviewing experienced living artists was intended to investigate the potential of creative engagement with the Wye Valley AONB and to explore a materially demonstrated connection between people and place.

## **Chapter 4. Not just one man's viewpoint**

### **– William Gilpin and his art of looking at landscape**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter will begin by considering how technology has historically mediated artistic encounters within the Wye Valley, including reflections on my own experiences of visiting the area. Why have artists felt the need to use equipment to aid in their observations and what was its effect on their creative output? I will discuss the resulting aesthetic effects of these interventions and consider how the incorporation of such equipment into the artistic process might have subsequently shaped societies broader expectations and subjective experiences of landscape. Finally, to substantiate the relevance of Gilpin to contemporary culture, I will examine his influence upon specific works of recent and contemporary Land Art and attempt to unearth how the artists that produced them integrated aspects of the Picturesque into their practice.

Before the commencement of this research project, I had encountered the Wye Valley on very few occasions, visiting St. Briavels from time-to-time, in the early 1990s to visit my wife's elderly grandmother. I have vivid memories of moving along the southbound section of the A466 between Monmouth and Bigsweir Bridge (Fig. 4.1). As a road runs alongside the river, for a substantial proportion of the Lower Wye Valley, many visitors will inevitably travel through the topography by automated transport. I therefore deemed it to be appropriate to reflect upon the activity of driving along the road so that, as described in the second aim, I might obtain a contemporary understanding of the area. The road always struck me as being tunnel-like, a materially immersive situation made more so by the low-hanging vines and dense tree foliage that closely envelopes the quickly moving traffic. The river Wye closely escorts the car upon the right-hand side and its forward flow echoes the movement, driving down through the tubular topography. The vascular highway motions the car down the valley and I have always felt that we

were somehow being physically pulled down and *into* the landscape. The largely botanical passage is apparently unchanged and still impressive; it is still a compulsive experience and one that I have observed is curiously framed by the car's windscreen. The rubber-rimmed, toughened glass mediates the speeding spectacle, separating and shielding the body from its broader sensory faculties. The protective shell of the car reduces the moment of movement to a largely visual set of circumstances. This fundamentally reductive meeting with the Wye Valley is an affective one for me personally; the experience visually resonates with the spatiality I have encountered in today's ocularcentric situations. The oblong windscreens of our cars echo the panoramic nature of widescreen television, the projector screen of a cinema or the rectangular display of smartphone.

Humans still control the window of the oblong lens in a digital video or film camera and in turn the equipment records the operator's pathway through physical space. The equipment visually archives the body's physical progression and the passing of time. The landscape is progressively witnessed in front of the lens, it continues to the side and then moves on behind. This self-centred circumstance is surrogately experienced by the viewer and subsequently places them in the middle of a substitute encounter. The vertical, rectilinear plane acts as a delineating line between lived and recorded realities.

Only when I have canoed or kayaked along the same stretch of the valley have I received a more intimate and physically comprehensive understanding of the location. On such occasions, the connection is more broadly satisfying as it is unhindered by the separative cover of a car and my full sensorial system has served to enhance the encounter. I have felt the physical agency of the river flowing below the boat and at times I have felt vulnerable to the possibility of its capacity to do me harm.





Fig. 4.1 A466 Driving south from Monmouth.

(Photo: G Dunn)

Wearing a life preserver has limited the likelihood of being overawed by such fears. Such technology has limited my own fear of physical injury or indeed drowning; it has succeeded in cordoning off overwhelming anxiety and allowed me to feel more at ease with the world beyond my body.

As a technology, photographs, for me, serve as a reminder of a physical encounter and offer a means of quickly recording visual material that may become part of a future work. I also use images retrospectively, reviewing them after the event to validate motifs in my works and echo the existence of the piece. I have approached this research project as I would an artistic one, by visually chronicling the experiences for documentation purposes (Fig. 4.2). I often take photographs as part of my own artistic practice and have utilised a mobile digital SLR camera, a body-mounted 'Go-Pro' action camera and a mobile phone to capture still and moving images of the Wye Valley. I have witnessed people doing the same and have observed the situations within which they have used them.

The Wye Valley is a location that outsiders visit. It's a place where people can act out the role of tourist (Edensor, 2001; Urry, 2002) and I have observed corresponding behaviour in the Wye Valley's sites of interest (areas we might term "honey pot sites" due to their attractiveness); people disembarking from cars, coaches and motorcycles. People photographing ruins and each photographing other, in front of those ruins. I have walked amongst visitors on a Bank Holiday Monday and witnessed visitors asking other visitors if it's worth walking along a certain path or not.



Fig. 4.2 Tweet about technology and images

*Whilst living in the Wye Valley, I realised I was using a mobile phone more than any other technology to record experiences. However, this process distracted from my sensory perception of the moment, so I began to use it less and less, relying more upon a combination of my own memory and the memories of other people who might accompany me on various walks. This Tweet was intended to illustrate the collective distance from somatic encounters that technology produces.*

Throughout the various stages of this research project, I have endeavoured to uncover how current inhabitants and contemporary visitors to the Wye Valley mediate and manage their experience of this location. It is important to mention that my own investigative approach has been grounded in work that I have done in the field of art and design and rests upon themes that might be broadly be termed as *environmental perception*. Since 2011 my explorations in the field have led me to investigate the emotional effect of initially unfamiliar and largely natural landscapes upon humans. My focus was pulled toward this aspect of reality whilst employed as an artist in residence in 2012, Mino City, Gifu, Japan. During the three months I was there, I accrued a feeling of being connected to the material constituents of the landscape in Japan. I found emotional relief and solace in the agricultural scenery that I had initially dismissed as aesthetically uninviting. The experience had the effect of honing my interest onto my surroundings and my relationship with them. I became interested in an interrelationship between people and place (Serres, 2008) and went onto write an account of my experience for my MA work in practice dissertation: *Stress Relief: Geo-Emotional Relationships and the Embodiment of 'Extent'* (Dunn, 2013). Within the work, I made the case for physical landscape agency and how it manifests itself upon the human inhabitants who reside there.

#### **4.2 Meeting and Mediating the World through technology**

In the eighteenth century, gentleman carried a device called a Claude glass in order that they might see the landscape with the golden tone of a Claude. (Clark 1956:106)

The visual features of Lorrain's paintings, especially his treatments of light, became an aesthetic ideal among tourists and artists searching for the picturesque. In order to charge experiences of landscape with aesthetic qualities reminiscent of Lorrain's paintings, tourists and painters started using optic devices called Claude glasses or Lorrain mirrors.

(Willim 2013: 357)

The Claude Glass is a small handheld mirror employed by an individual to reflect and subsequently frame a view (M Andrews, 1989; Brook, 2011; Maillet, 2009; J. Mitchell, 2010). Widely used in the eighteenth century, the diminutive scale of the convex, oval outlined mirror and the monochromatic nature of its reflective/tinted surface had the effect of limiting the unbridled expanse of a potentially overwhelming vista. As Kim Sloan writes in *A Noble Art: Amateur Artists and Drawing Masters* “From the mid-seventeenth century professional artists had recorded the use of a convex mirror for reducing large views to a more manageable compass and, at the same time, for composing the view” (Sloan 2000:175). Art historian Malcolm Andrews describes the distorting effect of using the mirror and quotes William Gilpin (Fig. 4.3) likening the results to a stage set, “The Claude glass image flattened the features in a landscape of any depth, much as binoculars do, so that, as Gilpin observed, they look ‘something of the scenes of a playhouse, retiring behind each other’.” (Andrews 1999:118) The mirror simplified the view, reducing the vista to fewer component parts and in turn, possibly lessening its complexity. Consequently, the artist rendered an image that was a simplification of reality, diminished in detail but easier for the viewer to comprehend without feeling overwhelmed. A noted advocate of the Claude Glass, the Reverend William Gilpin (1724-1804) (Fig. 4.4), was advised by his father on how to draw and paint (Captain John Bernard Gilpin (1738–1776). Not only did his father encourage him to copy original works of art but also to sketch outdoors (Sloan 2000:159). As a result of his father’s influence (J.B. Gilpin was a landscape artist) Gilpin became absorbed in the appreciation and representation of landscapes, both natural and manmade.

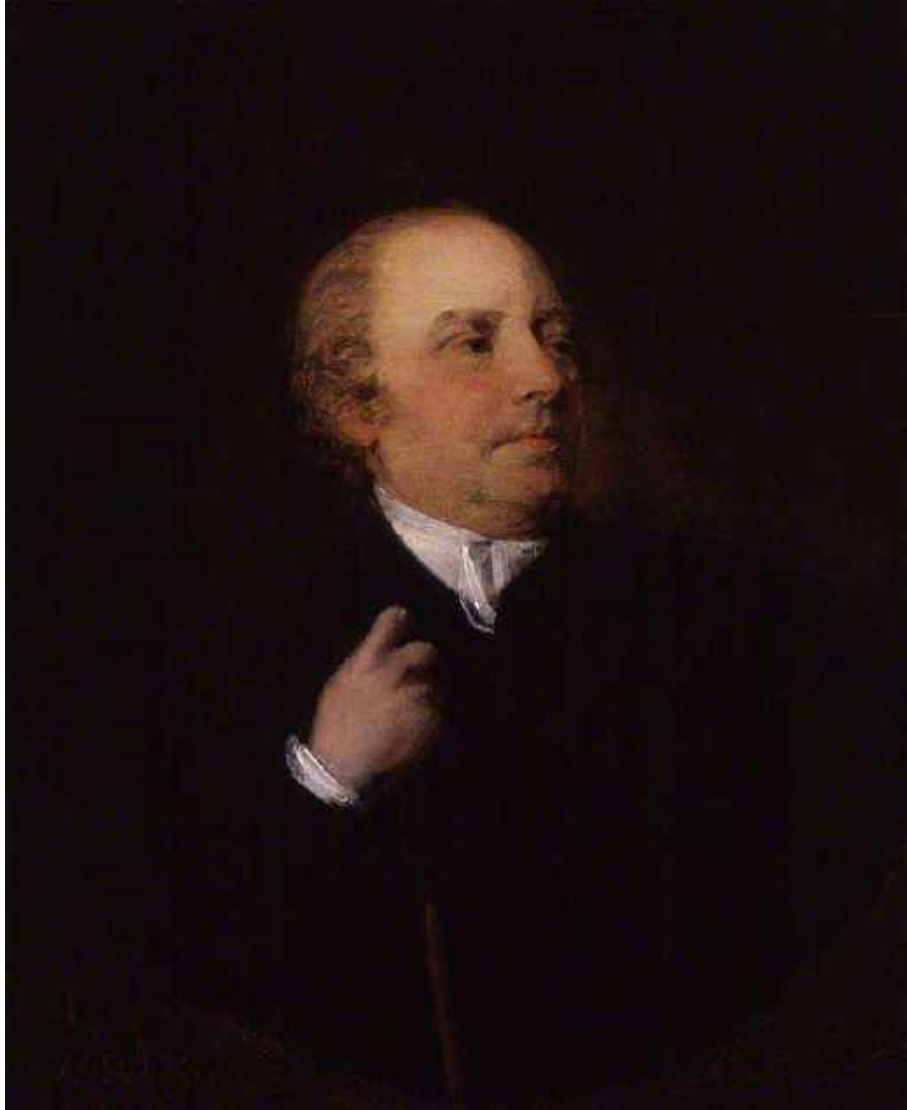


Fig 4.3  
William Gilpin by Henry Walton. Oil on panel, 1781  
254 mm x 203 mm. National Portrait Gallery, London





Fig. 4.4

'Door'. Ellen Harvey 2009. *Watercolour of William Gilpin holding a Claude Glass*. Harvey, in my opinion, has chosen to portray Gilpin in a somewhat humorous and I would argue, derogatory manner. Unlike the previous image, the artist has exaggerated his stomach, depicting it as a distended ball, bursting forth from his jacket. For me, this has the unfortunate consequence of reducing the significance of his contribution to aesthetics.

(Image: Ellen Harvey - <http://www.ellenharvey.info/Projects>).

In the eighteenth century, 'gentleman' like Gilpin took it upon themselves to visit stately homes and their complementing *designed* gardens (Moir 1964: 58-76) and Lord Cobham's estate at Stow was a notable example (Mitchell 2010:8). Charles Bridgeman and Sir John Vanbrugh had initially crafted the grounds, along with James Gibbs, William Kent and Lancelot 'Capability' Brown ([www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe](http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/stowe)).

Gilpin wrote of his appreciation for Stow in *Dialogue upon the Gardens of the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Cobham at Stow in Buckinghamshire* (1748). Author, Alexander Ross highlights the importance of this account, which subsequently underpins my own research approach, when he says that Gilpin, within the book, "...hints at the *primacy* of natural scenery for the landscape artist" (my emphasis) (Ross, 2006:4). Kim Sloan, British Museum Curator of British Drawings and Watercolours before 1880, also raises the significance of Gilpin's contribution to the landscape aesthetic canon, by offering the notion that his writing was experientially informed and intended to encourage engagement with landscape. Gilpin did this by contextualising topography, by making comparisons with pre-existing descriptions and depictions of idealised worlds:

Gilpin's first publications were sermons and dialogues on gardens he had visited; these were not guidebooks, but attempts to awaken aesthetic pleasure in the contemplation of landscape through associations with other natural and painted landscapes, and with those described by classical authors such as Horace and Virgil. (Sloan 2000:159)

Every Summer from 1768 Gilpin would journey to a different part of Britain (Sloan 2000:160). Whilst travelling, he produced journals, recording what he saw with a combination of text and sketches. The subsequent manuscripts were distributed amongst friends; they served not as guide books but as picturesque tours 'in which writing and illustrations complement one another to sing the praises of nature' (Barbier in Sloan 2000:160).



Nothing is more delusive, than to suppose, that every view which pleases in nature, will please in painting. In nature, the pleasure arises from the eye's roaming from one passage to another; and making its remarks on each. In painting (as the eye is there confined within certain limits) it arises from seeing some select spot adorned agreeably to the rules of art.

(Gilpin in Moir 1964:123-124)

The relevance of this quote to the research project lies in the phrase "pleasure arises from the eye's roaming from one passage to another", a feeling I have experienced whilst moving through landscape and particularly when moving through the Wye Valley. Gilpin also expresses an early awareness of the perceptual limits of a painting's frame and again suggests that superimposing artistically constructed ideals of landscape over the real world, can also be very pleasing, a view with which I have come to concur.

#### **4.3 Setting the scene (Landscape as theatrical metaphor).**

".....The enclosing shape of the picture was a limiting condition, or norm, that was shared with the art of the theatre...'

(Greenberg & O'Brian, 1986:87)

Gilpin visited the Wye Valley in 1770 and explored the river between Ross and Chepstow in a small covered boat. The journey took two days, with Gilpin stopping along the way to sketch sites of artistic curiosity. Unlike the contrived gardens of Capability Brown *et al.* the Wye Valley, observed from the low viewpoint of the river, formed its own natural auditorium with Gilpin having the best seat in the house. The scenic qualities of the space were additionally emphasised by the boat passing below the geological splendour of the steep-sided gorge and its monumental limestone outcrops; only this scene was naturally hewn and not created from the hands of man.

The views on the Wye, though composed only of these simple parts, are yet exceedingly varied. They are varied, first, by the *contrast of the screens*: sometimes one of the side screens is elevated, sometimes the other, and sometimes

the front; of both the side-screens maybe lofty, and the front either high or low.  
(Gilpin 1783:25)

Gilpin clearly made an experiential comparison between a theatrical stage set and its screens and the landscape of the Wye Valley (Punter in Copley & Garside, 2010:222). Malcolm Andrews also suggests that this is in turn partly due to Claude Lorrain's tendency to have done the same thing within his compositions. As Andrews says, "the simplification of Claude's characteristic compositional pattern could only encourage analogy with the theatre – framing trees resembling the wings in a stage set" (M Andrews, 1989:29). And as previously stated, Andrews also goes on to quote Gilpin to reinforce the argument, "something like the scenes of a playhouse, retiring behind each other" (*Ibid*). It is a very specific metaphor and one that suggests that theatre was for Gilpin, an immersive and possibly moving experience. This approach to topographical interpretation suggests Gilpin may have needed to manage the natural world to not let it overwhelm him. He may have initially had feelings associated with the *Sublime*. Written eight years after Gilpin's description of the Gardens at Stowe, Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, published in 1757 had "Immense influence on aesthetics in Europe" (Malcolm Andrews, 1999:132). In the book, Burke suggested that profound feelings of fear, provoked by encountering extreme topography, such as mountains, high cliffs, deep gorges or vast waterfalls, were beyond rational comprehension and owed their intensity to frail corporeal comparison with the enormity of the outside world.

Gilpin essentially framed the experience in a way that was reassuringly comprehensible. The resulting illustrated book *Observations on the River Wye: and several parts of South Wales, etc. relative chiefly to picturesque beauty; made in the summer of the year 1770* was the first of his manuscripts to be published, being printed and distributed in 1783. The delay in publishing being due to Gilpin's search for the most appropriate means of

printing. Aquatint proved to be “better able than any previous mode of reproduction to capture effects of light and shade” (Damian Walford Davies, 2013:116) (Fig. 4.5). Gilpin’s nephew, Sawrey Gilpin (1733-1807) produced the seventeen plates contained in the book. According to Kim Sloan, 800 copies “sold quickly” (Sloan 2000:160) and tourists, equipped with their guide would visit the sites Gilpin described “searching for the exact views he illustrated” (Sloan 2000:160).

Upon encountering the Wye Valley for the first time, The Reverend William Gilpin might well have experienced awe in the face of the austere and geological immensity. The Claude mirror might well have made the experience more manageable and consequently more palatable in similar way to how the life preserver mediated my fears when canoeing. The mirror-possibly eased the insurmountable task of capturing the view with paper, pen and ink. Gilpin, and other artists like him, are reputed to have stood with their back to the view and held the mirror in a way that reflected the view behind them. They would have proceeded to record the view by traditional means; sketching the view on paper with pen and ink; the result was a simplification in the apparent complexity of nature.

Malcolm Andrews, in his book *Landscape and Western Art* (1999) acknowledges the Reverend William Gilpin as aesthetically influential within the genre of landscape depiction. Gilpin devised a set of rules outlining what, in his opinion, creates the ideal view. The ‘Picturesque’ is recognised by its reduction in the depiction of landscapes to their most rudimentary elements. I would like to suggest that the phrase *cordoned vista* might more accurately describe his approach and its effect of essentially disregarding the bigger picture of what constitutes an accurate experience of landscape.



Fig 4.5

Aquatint image from 'Observations...'

"They are varied, first, by the *contrast of the screens*: sometimes one of the side-screens is elevated, sometimes the other, and sometimes the front; or both the side-screens may be lofty, and the front either high or low".

(William Gilpin, 1783:25)

It is an attitude that reduced the complexities of the world. Andrews seems to be critical of Gilpin's approach to standardising the depiction of nature when he says;

The formulae derived from Picturesque conventions reduce novelty and variety to secure uniformity. The Picturesque makes different places seem like each other. It encourages us to edit out diversity, eccentricity, startling departures from the standard. It chooses to reassure not to shock. (Andrews, 1999:129)

Gilpin essentially *framed* the landscape; he made it more palatable for himself and in a sense more manageable for others that might have looked upon his manuscripts. He embellished the natural forms and considered ways of altering existing ancient structures in order that they might comply with his ideal vision. He dressed the stage-set of nature so that it might comply with his own set of aesthetic beliefs. Like Claude Lorrain before him, Gilpin had no qualms at using his skills and the materials at hand to attempt to improve upon the world and gently impose visual balance into a scene.

The idea that we have defined the world by persistently framing it to the extent that a lot of what we see is now *pre-framed* (Malcolm Andrews, 1999), is a most interesting notion for me and one which underpins the debate on how we perceive the landscape today. Broglio insinuates that framing the view in the didactic way that Gilpin did had the unfortunate consequence of systematically reducing the view to a simplistic human construct (2008). Man's aspiration for visual correctness became superimposed upon a landscape that should not have to comply:

Mediated through a theodolite, a Claude glass or a mental construct a picturesque "framed" scene, the land becomes ordered according to a mode of seeing. (Broglio 2008: 57)

#### **4.4 Graduated, progressive un-folding of space.**

To enable viewers to visualise his descriptions of landscape, Gilpin illustrated his tours with aquatinted landscapes, which, like Cozen's view of Lake Albania, were prospect landscapes conceived in terms of graduated, **progressive** un-folding of

space, and were which were intended to bring out the most picturesque aspects of the view.

(W. Mitchell, 2002:87)

'Progressive' for me refers to movement here - a landscape experienced by moving through space. A dynamic experience - not one to be had standing still (Fig. 4.6). I would like to suggest that not only were the illustrations that Gilpin produced for *Observations* produced whilst moving through space (being on a boat on the Wye for two days), they also reflected that movement and his body being the central to that experience. The rules of which Gilpin speaks in the book appear to have grown out of that journey and would not have existed without it. With Claude's composition in mind and the apparently imaginative construct of a stage set incorporated as a pre-existing physical metaphor, the 'side screens' offer forms to move past whilst the mid-ground and distant backdrop present a place into which one can move in one's imagination.



Fig. 4.6

Tweet about experiencing immersion in the landscape

*Mitchell's phrase "graduated, progressive un-folding of space" (2002:87) used to define one aspect of the picturesque experience, perfectly described my own experiences of moving through the Wye Valley. I had recorded such moments using video, stop frame photography and time-lapse techniques. The image is intended to capture the temporal nature of the experience, the movement in the moment and the lure of the landscape.*

Gilpin overtly offers his point of view. He offers his pre-existing experience of place as the sites of performance. Gilpin is the actor upon the stage and I would say he is suggesting that the experience of theatre can be recreated in a landscape. But not just any landscape. Not an open landscape with broad and expansive vistas such as those on an estuary, lake or a cliff path. The Wye Valley's place, it's agency, in the picturesque is clear in my view - particularly since experiencing the location at a low level, the same level as Gilpin had in a boat. The low prospect offers the landscape as if it were on a stage with the viewer – me – sitting in the stalls.

What the journey offers the viewer here however is bodily immersion - a multi modal occurrence. Although we face forward - our proprioceptive faculties and our proximal awareness is fed by the knowledge of what we've physically passed, are passing and will be passing. It is for me a far more engaging experience than looking at a drawing, painting or photograph of the same scene. But one experiences such experiences with traces of other similar encounters - the body registers and remembers what has gone before (skin etc.) and this informs optical views.

I'm reminded of way-finding in video games; areas ahead of the player's position in space are lit to attract and fascinate the eye. They are purposely placed there by the game designers and programmers to entice and move the protagonist (the player) forward. They draw the player along a selected path that has other fascinations along the way. Game progression is the intention; participants have their pathways pre-determined. They manifest themselves as spot-lit foliage in a forest, electrical sparks in the corridor of a space ship or an obscured dark cave entrance for example. The key is the feature's contrast with the rest of the scene: light on dark or dark on light. The context, theme or setting of the game denotes the design of the visual cues. These essentially act like turning pages in a book, although this comparison is more binary in nature. Light and dark in a painting move the viewer/player along a path via the sense



of sight. They take them to the next point of interest, the next place to make a choice. Here then, the viewer/player is involved in choosing a path for themselves; risk is taken if you can't see around a corner, or what lies beyond a closed door (you can decide to open it or leave it shut) and or see what may wait at over the horizon. The key to a plot-leading scenario is giving the player enough choices and persuading them that they have the choice and have not 'been led up the garden path'. One might need to feel in control to some degree and with the result engaged in their present resulting in a favorable future.

#### **4.5 William Gilpin as Eco Advocate**

There have been many surprising anecdotal occasions during this research project when my mentioning William Gilpin has provoked notable derision from other people. I must admit to have been somewhat amused myself, when first becoming acquainted with the Reverend's "rules of picturesque beauty" (Gilpin, 1783:17). How can the complexity of the environment be reduced to a simple set of rules? I have elected here to use the term *Eco Advocate* to describe the Reverend, as a means of his highlighting his contribution to a sympathetic awareness of the world and one that nurtures an empathetic engagement with nature. Isis Brook substantiates my initial findings and resulting reservations but also offers justification as to his popularity and wide-reaching contribution to landscape experience, depiction and subsequent appreciation:

Gilpin's simple rules about what makes a good picture and his prescriptions about where to find views worth sketching seem terribly restrictive to the modern eye and sensibility used to engaging with nature. Even so, it is arguable that his guidebooks gave many people who lacked the education of the Grand Tour and access to painting masters the license to look at nature and the confidence to record it in a way that would be deemed acceptable to others. (Brook, 2011:172)

As the project progressed and I read more of Gilpin's writing, it became apparent to me that William Gilpin was an advocate of the environment, an eco-advocate and not, as

one might have expected from a Reverend, a person to have proselytised the countryside as being the handiwork of God. There is no mention of divine intervention in his *Observations*. Instead the book largely describes what Gilpin sees whilst *moving through* the landscape and being immersed in a series of locations that Gilpin pronounces as “exceedingly varied” (*Ibid*). One description leaves no doubt as to his admiration for the location:

As we left Monmouth, the banks were at first low; but on both sides, they soon grew steep and woody; varying their shapes as they had done the day before. The most beautiful of these scenes is in the neighbourhood of St. Briavels Castle; where the vast woody declivities on each hand are uncommonly magnificent’ (Gilpin, 1783:39).

Having personally experienced the river valley from the low position of a canoe (Fig. 4.7) it’s an account with which I strongly concur. Much of the lower valley landscape is similarly impressive and moving slowly through it only increases the effect of its presence. Its agency is continually negotiated as a potentially overwhelming presence.

Numerous academics support the belief that William Gilpin was an environmental advocate, they also offer the notion that aspects of his practice are relevant to contemporary society (Brook, 2011; Miall, 2005; Thompson, 2006). Dr Ian Thompson, Reader in Landscape Architecture at Newcastle University describes the Picturesque as “the whipping-boy of landscape theory” (Thompson, 2006:237).



Fig. 4.7  
The River Wye from a canoe. (Photo: G Dunn)

Thompson argues that academics, in particular, have been overly judgemental of Gilpin's contribution to the appreciation of landscape, with some going as far as describing his aesthetic assessment as a "tyranny" (Howett in Thompson, 2006:239). Thompson argues against the view that "the Picturesque privileges vision over all the other senses", and "even shuts down the opportunities...for other forms of visual appreciation" (*Ibid*). He cites landscape architect and theorist, Elisabeth Meyer, who in her reconsideration of the "Picturesque's contribution to modern art and architecture, has referred to the 'thickening' of the picture plane of the Picturesque, whereby its kinetic and experiential aspects can be recovered" (*Ibid*). 'Thickening' is a most appropriate term, especially when considered in the original context of Myers article: "The picture plane of the picturesque is thickened to include past and present, natural and cultural history – *all understood through movement*" (Meyer, 1993:172, my emphasis). Having pursued a line of enquiry that has fostered an experiential broad account of landscape, this is an impressive validation of the endurance of Gilpin's first explorations of the Wye Valley. According to Thompson and Myers, The Picturesque appears to be as much about temporal encounters and the act of dynamically moving amongst the natural world, as it is about attempting to capture such moments in a drawing, painting or a photograph. Perhaps film/video are mediums more suited to expressing the philosophy due to their ability to capture multiple images? Or as I am about to consider, perhaps some recent and contemporary artists have already incorporated the Picturesque into their practice in other ways and were unaware of its experiential influence?

#### **4.6 Land Art, Robert Smithson and the Picturesque**

I visited the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2016. Having studied architecture as a cultural studies module at Derby University back in 1993/1994, I was aware of the building and work of its Canadian architect, Frank Gehry (b. 1929). I was very keen to experience the structure for myself. The building did not disappoint, it was

sleek, coiled in nature and clad in gently rippling semi-reflective titanium sheeting. On a hot Spring day in Spain, it seemed perfectly suited to its situation, being sited next to the Nervión River and flanked on one side by elevated urban greenery. The interior spaces facilitated a natural flow of curious progression and effortlessly enabled our inquisitiveness. Housed in the largest space of all, was an impressive sculpture by Richard Serra (b.1939), *The Matter of Time*, 1994–2005 (Fig. 4.8). When initially approached at ground level, it was difficult to determine the overall scale of the piece as our view was obscured by the ten-foot walls. The oxide-red, thick steel curved corridors invited deeper inspection, they beckoned to be investigated and we were soon immersed in its narrowing inward spiral.

I was surprised by the way in which the piece *moved* me. It moved my body, gently forcing my frame to roll from side to side as I walked between the ever decreasing and enveloping walls. The space above remained consistent, left open to my relief, but the funnelling tunnel of smooth steel summoned my body forwards and onwards. When I reached the empty centre, I reflected upon the fact that the sculpture, unlike a maze, had offered me no choices, no alternatives or ways out. I was disorientated by the experience and eager to find my way out. It had also frightened me to some degree, the way I had willingly succumbed to the artist's intent, been motioned at speed through the tapering channels of tall brown metal to an eventuality that made me feel trapped with no alternative ways out. Upon reaching the outside again, I cried; the journeys inward and outward had *moved* me to tears.

The piece had a cleverly concealed inevitability; it was a physically progressive journey with an obscured ending and one unable and therefore not allowed to



Fig. 4.8

*The Matter of Time*. Detail. (1994–2005) Richard Serra.  
Eight sculptures, weathering steel. Variable dimensions.  
Guggenheim Bilbao Museum. (Photo: G Dunn 2016)

be accurately captured by a camera. The unseen impending spaces were hidden, occluded around smooth and seductively unfolding curves and, in my view, the inescapable linearity of each elapsing moment was a step nearer to the end of the representation of a human life. The free-standing sculptures varied in size and shape but all incorporated aspects of movement, progression and a tantalisingly concealed conclusion. In my view, each was representative of an individual's corporeally situated journey through time and space.

The experience was immediately and surprisingly reminiscent of those I have had in the Wye Valley. Moving through the sculpture was physically reminiscent of walking through 'Trunnels' (Fig. 4.9), a term I have given to describe densely foliated paths, lanes or roads, that give the effect of a green tunnel. Trunnels motivate movement and occlude open views; they are not unique to the Wye Valley but are a common feature of the area. In my experience, they have beckoned me and my fellow walkers onward giving the feeling of moving inside rather than moving forward. Within Trunnels, the body is shifted into, over, under, around and through physical and temporal space. Again, it's an experience not easily represented by a photograph; it's an undertaking that requires all our bodily means and modes of recording to give a true picture of the experience.

To illustrate the of the tunnel-like trails found in the Wye I feel it appropriate, to briefly mention author, Roger Deakin (1943-2006), who in *Wildwood, A journey through trees* (Deakin, 2008), describes a visit the home of ecologist and woodland specialist, George Peterken OBE in St. Briavels (I will go on to discuss George and Susan Peterken in chapter 7). Of interest, is his description of the peculiarity of the areas topography, it's corporeally immersive



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Seems I'm not the only one to have used the word 'Trunnel' to describe places like this - [thedispersalofdarwin.wordpress.com/2010/05/16/tru...](https://thedispersalofdarwin.wordpress.com/2010/05/16/trunnel/)



8:50 PM - 22 Jul 2014

Fig. 4.9

Tweet. *Trunnels*. Although, a word meaning a wooden peg used in the construction of timber framed buildings, the combination of the word tree and tunnel to make 'Trunnel' has now become part of my family's nomenclature. When researching the word, I only found one other online mention at: <https://thedispersalofdarwin.wordpress.com/2010/05/16/trunnel/>



woodlands and, like Mark Cocker, whose Guardian article I describe in chapter 6, compares aspects of the terrain to a *tunnel*.

The high woods along the Wye are ribboned with ancient green lanes. In Coxbury and Wyegate Lane above the river at Lower Redbrook, Sue, [Peterken] and I trampled uphill along a deep Holloway scoured out by winter floods dashing down in torrents, washing away the earth year after year from the smooth limestone boulders. We walked between hedge banks of pollarded limes and holly in a green *tunnel*.

(Deakin, 2008:133, my emphasis)

During the walks, that I have done in the Wye Valley, both at Piercefield and Tintern, I have experienced the 'ribboned ... ancient green lanes' when, for example very old yew and holly trees shrouded the paths; they lined the way like a borderless railing. I have experienced the 'green tunnel' effect in the woods. The effect of the 'tunnel' upon the body is, in my experience, to pull it onward – to give the body a direction, a way to go and restricting of choice. That, for me is one of the joys of being in such landscapes, direction is defined by the shape of the place, movement is suggested by *its form*. The decision, as to where to go, is somewhat taken out of your hands, the land decides for you. This feeling of intellectual liberation is what I love about places like these.

Upon my return to the UK, I considered Serra's work and researched the artist to explore the possibility of the Picturesque as an influence upon his work. I was most surprised to read the 1984 paper, 'A Picturesque Stroll around Clara-Clara' by Yve-Alain Bois and translated by John Shepley, (Bois/Shepley 1984). 'Clara-Clara' is the name given to the 1983 installation by Serra. The article describes how Serra, puzzled by artist Robert Smithson's (1938-1973) observation, that after having encountered his work *Shift*, (Fig. 4.10) had described the work as 'Picturesque'. Serra commented:

I wasn't sure what he (Smithson) was talking about" (*Ibid*). His large, monumental steel works were consciously constructed by the artist to be free from pictorial categorisation so Serra's confusion and apparent defence at the

work, being reduced to a single mode of experience, is therefore understandable, especially when, as Bois describes, 'As early as *Shift*, and then in connection with all his landscape sculptures, Serra has insisted on the discovery by the spectator, while walking within the sculpture.

(Bois & Shepley, 1984:34).

We can deduce that Smithson had concluded that the work was Picturesque because of experiencing the piece by moving through space; it had engaged his whole body and not just his sense of sight. As I shall argue in the next section, Smithson was aware of Gilpin's account of moving through the landscape and was also familiar with the writings of landscape architect, and Picturesque proselytiser, Uvedale Price (1747-1829). The following quote by Price, from *An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful* (2014) demonstrates his understanding of the multi-modal nature of the Picturesque:

...the qualities which make objects picturesque, are not only as distinct as those which make them beautiful or sublime but are equally extended to all our sensations by whatever organs they are received.

(U.Price in Ross, 2006:42)

Serra's large steel works were site specific and it's important to note that the works were intended to move you through the location. The artist's intention was increase your awareness of the works' location and the features present in the physical context. It is also important to note that the works were produced as a direct response to their location and removing them profoundly de-contextualised the work. An example here is the case of *Tilted Arc*, installed in Federal Plaza, New York City in 1981. When the sculpture was removed due to public dissatisfaction with the work, it was then destroyed at Serra's request (Serra, 1994).

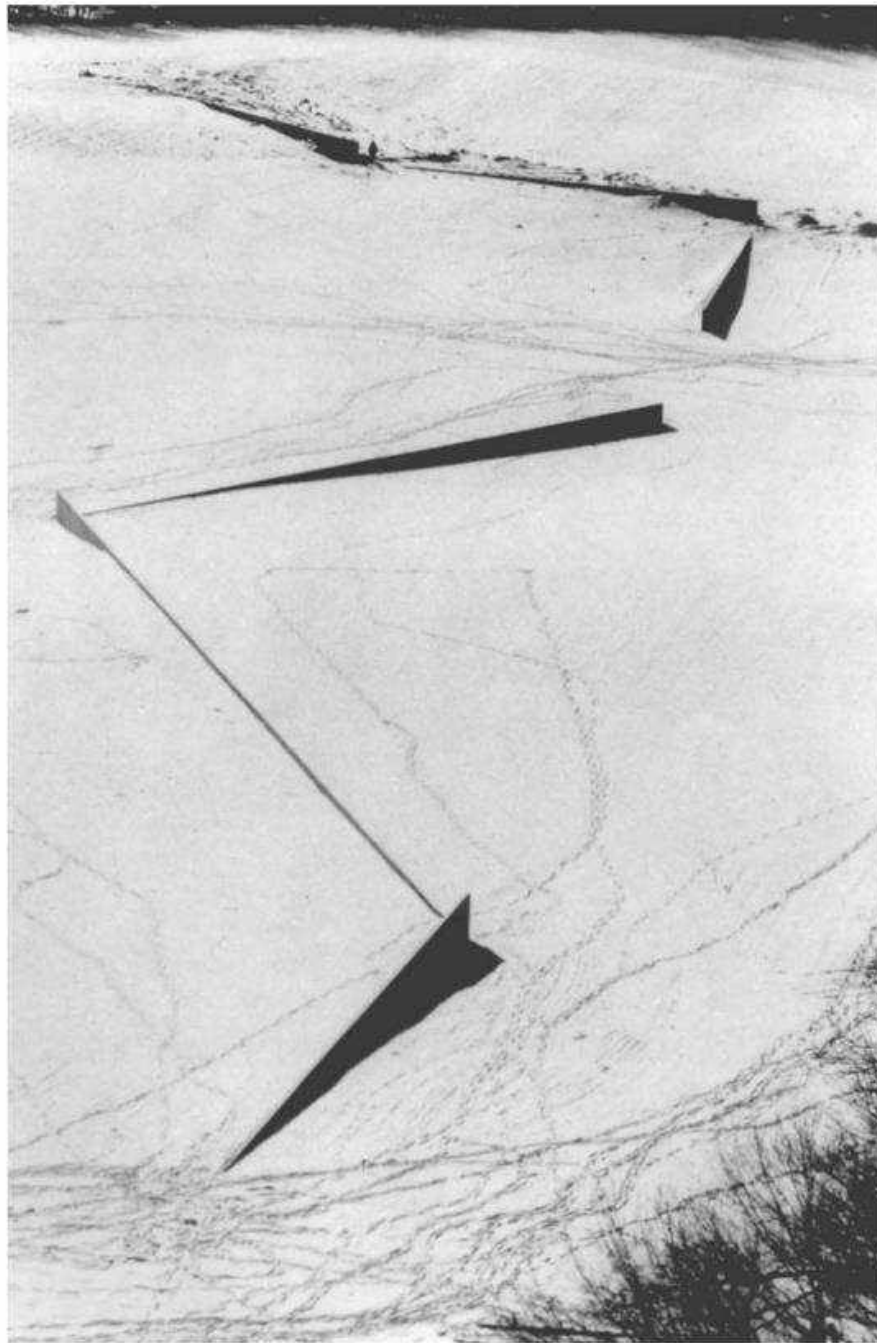


Fig. 4.10  
'Shift' 1971-1972 Richard Serra  
Concrete (150cm x 20 cm x 27-75m per section)

The following quote once again, demonstrates the importance of movement, and in particular the action of 'walking' when experiencing Serra's large-scale installations:

The site is redefined, not re-presented...the placement of all structural elements in the open field draws the viewer's attention to the topography of the landscape as the landscape is walked (Serra, 1994)

Described in *Uncommon Ground: Land Art in Britain 1966-1979* as an "attitude" to landscape (Alfrey, Sleeman, & Tuffnell, 2013), Land Art came to prominence in the late 1960's and was largely perceived as a reaction to works situated in an art gallery (The Saylor Academy, 2017). The creative grouping of artists and artworks, also known as 'Earth Art', became a largely transatlantic concern, producing conceptually driven and largely non-commodifiable works of art. The works were usually produced in the landscape itself and often made from the materials that the artist found there. Due to the ephemeral nature of some work, photography would be used to record the piece, in the case of Richard Long for example, whose practice was centred upon the activity of walking. This photography documentary method became essential and, like other artists, useful "for the purposes of consumption" (Bois & Shepley, 1984:32) and communicating his peripatetic process to a wider audience.

Some other notable practitioners were Robert Smithson, Nancy Holt, Michael Heizer from the United States, and Richard Long, David Nash and Keith Arnatt from the United Kingdom. Many the afore-mentioned artists were included in the exhibition, *Earth Works* at the Dwan Gallery, New York in October 1968, where the movement is said to have begun (Ibid.). Until this research project, I would have considered Land Art to be at conceptual odds with the Picturesque, in as much as Land Art appears not to have been concerned with pictorial representation and pre-determined aesthetic rules set in a flat, vertical plane, but more by a mark (however ephemeral) recording a human moment upon the material landscape.

#### 4.7 Robert Smithson

American artist, Robert Smithson (1938-1973) is considered here, not merely because of his materially centred and environmentally situated practice, but because of the strikingly relevant relationship he had with the Picturesque, particularly as defined by The Reverend William Gilpin:

The picturesque, far from being an inner movement of the mind, is based on real land; it precedes the mind in its material external existence. We cannot take a one-sided view with this dialectic. (Smithson 1973:119)

Described by Art Historian, Timothy D. Martin as “a key figure in the land art movement” (Martin, 2011:166), Smithson’s practice considered the world outside of the traditional picture frame. Often produced by shifting and shaping the land, his work could be large in scale and physically impressive, ideally requiring physical engagement with it in some way.

Writing in the book that accompanied the 2011 John Paul Getty Museum Los Angeles exhibition, *Anglo-American Exchange in Postwar Sculpture, 1945-1975*, Martin helpfully highlights the influence that William Gilpin (and Uvedale Price) had upon Smithson’s practice. The artist is probably best known for his work *Spiral Jetty*, constructed in Utah and completed in 1970. Martin considers Smithson’s 1973 *Artforum* article, ‘Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape’ (Smithson, 1973) to illustrate the creative exchange between British and American artists. In the article, Smithson makes explicit reference to the writings of William Gilpin (*Three Essays: On Picturesque Beauty; On Picturesque Travel; and On Sketching Landscape: to which is Added a Poem, On Landscape Painting*) (W Gilpin, 1792) and Uvedale Price (*An Essay on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful: And, on the Use of Studying Pictures, for the Purpose of Improving Real Landscape*) (Price, 1794) and proffers their influence upon the work of landscape

architect, Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) and his experiential intentions when he designed New York's Central Park.

Smithson writes about one walk he experienced in the park in 1972. He describes the nature of the location that *shaped* his encounter: "One has the sensation of being in a sunken forest...sense of engulfment" and "The network of paths he [Law Olmsted] twisted through this place out-labyrinthed labyrinths" (Smithson 1973:126). Smithson's words could be describing a walk in various parts of the Wye Valley. Gilpin's movements through material appear to have influenced Olmsted; Smithson again, usefully testifies to this observation when he says, "Price and Gilpin, were for Olmsted, 'professional touchstones' whose views he esteemed" (Smithson, 1973: 119).

Art Historian, Dr Joy Sleeman, in the 2014 article, "*Nature, like a person, is not one-sided*" states that Robert Smithson travelled to England in 1969 with his partner, Artist Nancy Holt (1938-2014) (Sleeman 2012:211). Smithson and Holt took the opportunity to visit the UK as his work was being exhibited in London; their intentions were to investigate their British ancestry and to explore various quarries, archaeological sites, and designed gardens (including those of Capability Brown, whom William Gilpin had been so enamoured) Smithson constructed artwork within the landscape, whilst Holt produced her own representations through the mediums of film and photography (Figs. 4.11 and 4.12). They had very clear objectives as to what they wanted to do and as to the importance of Gilpin, as Holt said in an interview with *Tate etc.* editor, Simon Grant in 2012:

Bob (Smithson) researched in advance some of the places he wanted to explore. At the time we were both interested in the ideas about the Picturesque put forward by the Reverend William Gilpin, as well as Uvedale Price's *Essay on the Picturesque* 1794. (Grant, Holt 2012)

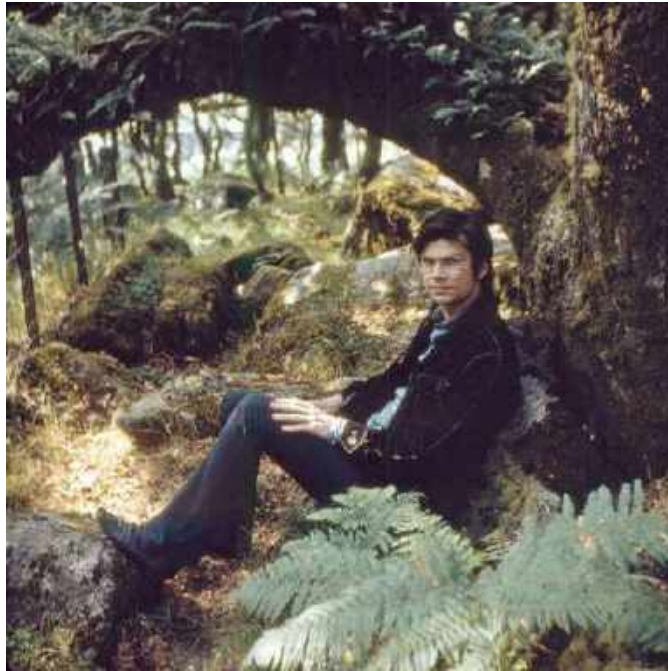


Fig. 4.11  
Robert Smithson in Wistman's Wood, Dartmoor,  
photographed by Nancy Holt 1969.



Fig. 4.12 Nancy Holt in Wistman's Wood, Dartmoor,  
photographed by Robert Smithson 1969.

The visit to the UK had preceded the 1973 article Smithson wrote about his walk in 'The Ramble' area of Central Park by four years. His New York experience appears to have been influenced by an aspect of the Picturesque that, through my research, I too am only now acquainted with. As Sleeman points out:

After his visit to Britain, Smithson understood that the picturesque was not merely a theory but manifest in the real a material dialectic 'an endless maze of relations and interconnections' forever shifting and changing. (Sleeman 2012:211).

The Picturesque, as described by Gilpin, was not only concerned with two-dimensional aesthetics, it was driven by a physically centred approach to landscape experience and appreciation. Smithson's word, 'interconnections', quoted here by Sleeman insinuates a deeper material association with the environment and a suggestion that the landscape has *agency*. It is a philosophy that promotes the notion that actually meeting the material world through, what Elizabeth K. Meyer describes as "somatic experiences" (2008:7), society can foster a more physically centred empathy with their surroundings.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter commenced with a discussion centred around the uses and effects of mediating technology when experiencing landscape. From personal experience, I have found that its continued use is largely separative, disruptive and distracting from a meaningful engagement with place. However, technology, in the case of the Claude Mirror for example, or digital camera has facilitated creative engagement by enabling the act of selection and eventual choice for their users.

As discussed, William Gilpin's Picturesque has often been derided for its perceived visual dictatorship. However, as I have evidenced here, Gilpin's contribution to landscape aesthetics, has been broader than its occularcentric reputation suggests.



Movement has been key to the philosophy, demonstrated by the Land Art of Smithson, my own experience of Richard Serra's art and the landscape design of individuals such as Frederick Law Olmsted (Central Park New York). Progressing through the landscape, particularly when immersed in a proximally close set of material circumstances and feeling its effect, is at the heart of what Gilpin describes in 'Observations on the River Wye...'.

Alexander M. Ross directly quotes Gilpin to demonstrate and reinforce my view that, what ultimately makes him relevant to contemporary society, "The general idea of the scene makes an impression, before any appeal is made to the judgement. We rather *feel*, than survey it" (W Gilpin, 1792 My emphasis). Ross says, "In his emphasis here upon "impression" and "feeling" as being prior to intellect and "the rules of art," Gilpin's aesthetic is *modern*" (Ross, 2006:7 My emphasis). Gilpin intimates that the body is central to the experience of an affective landscape and that the encounter is corporeally understood rather than examined through the rational scrutiny of thought. Dahlia Porter, further validates this view when she says, "Gilpin's innovation, then, was not introducing the picturesque into landscape description, but placing aesthetics and its attendant concerns of taste and *feeling* at the centre of the topography's empiricist ethos (Porter, 2013:168 My emphasis). The Picturesque is therefore closely related to my own notion of Geo-Emotionality; emotion stimulated through a physical, rather than an intellectual response to a given space.

Chapter 5 serves to test aspects of Gilpin's methodology by personally experiencing location specific activities and test the notion of the embodiment of place.

## **Chapter 5. Witness to the Wye**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Whilst resident in the Wye Valley and by positioning myself as a ‘Participant observer’ (Rallis & Rossman, 2003; Flick, 2011), I was situated within a privileged position, able to witness a broad and stimulating range of activities organised by the Wye Valley AONB Management Team, the wider AONB ‘Family’ and some of their collaborative partners. The intention of this chapter is to describe some of the pivotal moments that occurred, during my observations and participation and to reflect upon their relevance to modern society. It underpins the wider importance of activities centred around public engagement, education and sustainability. Finally, the chapter highlights the potential of the Wye Valley as a site of future collaboration, its agency in creative planning and the relevance of the areas unique features holds for contemporary visitors.

### **5.2 Reflections on the 2014 Ross-on-Wye River Pageant & Waterside Festivities**

The inaugural *River Festival*, held between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> May 2014, was formulated after a series of public events held back in 2011 that were designed to elevate and celebrate the Picturesque heritage of the area. This *Overlooking the Wye* Landscape Partnership Scheme project, supported by a £3.1 million Heritage Lottery Fund contribution, had provoked a ‘great local demand for a repeat event’ (Tilbrook, 2014). The *River Festival*, described as a “successful collaboration” between, public bodies, artists, performers, industry and the public (*Ibid*) was initially pivotal to the research project and became the vehicle for my personal integration into the research location. Aspects of the festival provided profound immersive moments and occasions that were communally experienced in public places. The Festival ultimately revealed how

shared, location specific, experiences can galvanise a community and how they can alter our view of familiar surroundings.

My wife and I attended the festival on the Saturday 4th of May, on its the second day. The intention of attending with my partner was to experience the day (and other subsequent research activities) in a manner that I/we normally do; to experience and later discuss the day's events as if we were members of the public. Neither of us had been to Ross on Wye before. We had arrived before any events had commenced; stalls selling food and drink were already in place as were local community organisations such as the Ross 'Twinning Society'. Battle re-enactment groups (the Welsh Fusiliers and Worcestershire Yeomanry) occupied a significant area of the site; they had erected tents and periodically fired muskets and cannons. The weather was sunny, dry and there appeared to be a good turnout at the Rope Walk festival site. Approximately 4000 people had attended on the day, according to the AONB festival report (Tilbrook, 2014). We explored the location, buying an ice cream, discovering the beer and cider festival, located near to the Ross rowing club, whose members also appeared to be taking part in the day's festivities. People were already dressed in pirate attire ready for a water pageant, taking place, later in the day. These aspects of the festival were typical of similar events we have attended before. It felt like a fete or carnival and initial impressions pointed to it being a predictable affair. The outlook for the rest of the day appeared to be enjoyable but, in our view at that time, creatively safe. The festival ended up being far from predictable, at times it was emotionally rousing and in my experience, potentially dangerous.

We went on to witness the 'Water Olympics', (Fig. 5.1) conceived and hosted by local performer, William Wilding (Fig. 5.2). Wilding effortlessly involved the game's participants with his mischievous commentary and at times he had us laughing uncontrollably. Wilding's un-vindictive wit appeared to be particularly appealing to

adults in the audience. He cleverly and comedically coerced contestants of all ages into competing in simple water-based games. People got wet throwing water filled balloons to one another, transporting liquid in wheel barrows and all the while laughing whilst they did so. I was comfortable playing my usual role as a passive spectator of the spectacle, an anonymous viewer happy on the side-lines as others partook in the activities and display but that was all about to change.

Our introduction to festival collaborators, Desperate Men, came not in the manner of watching a performance from the stalls of a theatre, but as a wave of music, raised voices and chaotic commotion approaching through the surrounding crowd. 'Ratty the Water Vole', played by Gareth Clark (one half of performance duo Mr and Mrs Clark) was part of a narrative called *Ratty on the Run*, conceived and written by Richard Headon (Nixon, 2014). 'Ratty' appeared at our side, playing a ukulele, and accompanied by actors dressed as other animals; amongst these were a squirrel played by Marega Palser (the other half of Mr and Mrs Clark) and a door mouse played by festival choreographer Chloe Loftus.

Palser proceeded to approach people to procure nuts from their person. I was startled when she invaded, what I perceived to be, my personal space and investigated my rucksack for said nuts. Being shy of performance of this kind I reacted by swiftly swinging my shoulder away. Initially I felt embarrassed but quickly became complicit in the performance, laughing off the actor's improprieties as she (thankfully) moved on to other members of the audience. The encounter startled me, it had a physical affect that required me to be something or somebody else for an instant, I had no choice and there were too many people watching.



**Greg Dunn** グレゴリー・ダン  
@roamingdunn



Lots of family fun in the sun in Ross on Wye at the River Festival @wybeauty



4:12 PM - 4 May 2014

Fig. 5.1

Tweet with images from the River Festival, including a race that was part of the Water Olympics. (Photos: G Dunn)



Fig. 5.2

Photograph of Water Olympics host William Wilding (Black blazer Jacket).

(Photo: G Dunn)

Being physically central to the action was surprisingly de-centring. Standing in the middle of the moment, being centre-stage, as opposed to being a bystander and witnessing the performance from afar, changed the way I experienced the whole scene. The actors' actions obliged me to uncharacteristically collaborate in a reciprocal, corresponding manner and in a way in which I momentarily forgot myself; I was less self-conscious – but just for an instant. I empathised with the character of 'Squirrel', was on the level with an animal and forgot the actor that played it. It happened so quickly and the confrontation (because that's how it initially felt to a selectively shy person like myself) was profoundly effective. The experience triggered feelings of empathy within me, a deeper sense of understanding with something I normally consider to be wild and an enduring sense of connection with the natural world. The performers continued to weave their way through the crowd. The audience seemed happy to interact, especially children, some of whom appeared to have completely suspended their feelings of disbelief (Fig. 5.3), it would take another encounter with the animals for this to happen to me to a greater degree than I have ever experienced before.

### **5.3 River Festival. Monmouth: 'The Trial' Parts 1 and 2**

At the commencement of the festival, I was lodging in a Georgian house in Monmouth and had helped prepare for ensuing events. I had begun to work from the AONB offices in Hadnock Road on Wednesday 7th May (Fig. 5.4) I helped with practical preparations for the festival at the AONB offices and





Fig. 5.3  
Photograph of Ratty. (Photo: G Dunn)





Fig. 5.4

Publicising the project through Twitter.

*It was my intention that an image of me holding this large preserved salmon, brought into the AONB offices by Wye Valley Gillie, George Woodward, would begin to visually and publicly reinforce my inclusion in AONB management team activities.*

(Photo: S Sawyer)

surrounding area. I roped off areas at St. Peters Church, Dixton Lane, Monmouth, one of the proposed settings for the Ratty narrative. I installed signage, helped laminate festival road signs and colour placards with felt pen. I enjoyed 'mucking in', being part of a team and being given instructions (Fig. 5.5). I was willing to do anything that was asked of me, including making tea, I don't drink tea myself and so I quickly learned how to make it, my efforts were appreciated and quickly made me feel like an 'insider'.

The events that took place on Friday 9<sup>th</sup> and Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May in Monmouth continued Desperate Men's' Ratty narrative. Ratty was captured on Friday night, he was 'wrongly' arrested in the grounds of Dixton Church. The murky scene was dramatically illuminated by numerous ground dwelling flames (designed and set up by pyrotechnicians 'And Now') dotted around the graveyard and an illuminated sign stating, "Smell A Rat" (Fig. 5.6). People happily sat on the grass as the events unfolded. Two dancers from the Chloe Loftus dance company, dressed as bats, performed an entrancing sequence of movements, hanging from a tree and lulling us into a unifying almost sleepy state. As a result, Ratty's arrest came as loud surprise. He appeared in front of the church, snared in circular spotlights. The white church framed the scene of people, dressed as Badgers and Mink, clad in oily black coats, apprehending Ratty and leading him away (Fig. 5.7).



Fig. 5.5  
Publicising the project through Twitter.  
(Photo: S Sawyer)

*This image was intended to further reinforce my inclusion in AONB management team activities and deepen the intrigue as to my activities and the nature of the event being produced as part of the 2014 River Festival.*



Fig. 5.6 and 5.7  
Ratty captured in the Church Yard. (Photos: G Dunn)

He was swiftly placed in a cage, mounted high above us, on the back of a tractor wheeled vehicle (Fig. 5.8), a contraption, powered by people that moved slowly across the wet grass towards the centre of Monmouth (Fig. 5.9). The strange human machine was peculiar, intimidating and really added to the bizarreness of the scene. The audience, including myself, now had a chance to physically participate. We were issued with metre long barbecue candles; we lit them and were instructed to processionally follow the prisoner. Lanterns held aloft, we proceeded to walk behind the vehicle. It was quite dark by now, so the effect of the flame torches in the night was incredible; being part of this group felt more like being part of a mob; it felt like a pagan ritual. The physical reality of the flames and the dramatic task in hand connected us to the unreality of the narrative. We continued over the fields, entering Monmouth by passing under the A40 via a tunnel and into the Georgian grandeur of St James's Square. Ratty's eventual destination was the Town Hall. With great and noisy ceremony, and lit by the flames of the crowd's torches, Ratty was dislodged from his cage and committed to spend the night in a prison cell and would be tried in the morning.

The Trial, took place in the actual Town Hall courtroom, adding tangible material gravitas to the story and the public were invited to witness the proceedings. With Ratty in the real dock, Desperate Men used the space with effective theatricality, highlighting the real environmental issues that water voles are facing in the Wye Valley. The event provided an entertaining and engaging thematic vehicle for local environmental specialists from the Gwent Wildlife Trust (Fig. 5.10) and the Wye and Usk Foundation, as well as local *Gillie* (Scottish name given to hunting/fishing attendant), George Woodward (Fig. 5.11), to argue the case for the water vole; one by one the experts provided compelling empirical evidence of alien species threatening the indigenous population.





Fig. 5.8  
Ratty captured and paraded.  
(Photo: G Dunn)



Fig. 5.9  
The human-powered contraption transporting Ratty  
(Photo: Jim Ozanne).



Fig. 5.10  
A Wildlife Trust 'Witness' testifies at Ratty's trial  
(held in Monmouth Town Hall).

*Professional wildlife 'witnesses' were given prosthetic latex noses (visually integrating them with the Desperate Men cast) to wear whilst they described various acts of environmental mismanagement. (Photo: Jim Ozanne).*





Fig. 5.11  
Publicising the project through Twitter,  
local Gillie George Woodward at Ratty's Trial

*By showing AONB Officer, Andrew Nixon in an unusually diminutive state (in reality, he is similar in stature to Mr Woodward). Mr Woodward is a 'larger than life' character, a friendly man who appears to be well respected by the AONB team. I had hoped to share the feeling that the festival had the effect of changing an existing point of view – making the familiar into the unfamiliar.*

However, as convincing as the real-world evidence was, it wasn't enough to prevent Ratty from being found guilty of his crime.

Events re-convened that evening outside the Town Hall. Ratty had been sentenced to death, and like before, he was to be transported to his fate in the mechanical contraption we had escorted the night before. It had become evident to the audience, and not the characters of the story, that the character of Squirrel had really committed the crime for which Ratty was being punished. As events unfolded down Monmouth high street and we, once again held our torches at arm's length, the Squirrel moved in and out of the crowd, encouraging us to send Ratty to his death (Fig.5.12). Nearing the Monnow bridge, Ratty's eventual destination, Squirrel taunted me; she goaded me enough to want to thrust my barbecue candle in her direction! This dangerously contravened health and safety regulations (in which we had been instructed at the commencement of the parade). Artistic Director, Kim Tilbrook screamed at me to stop.

In that moment, I had forgotten who I was. In that instant, I was in the story, I was physically immersed and imaginatively integrated into the narrative. Being alongside the actors, sharing the stage, and not being separated by it, had pulled me in. I've never felt so connected to live performers as I did on that night. It occurred to me that by removing the separating frame of the proscenium arch, the physical and, for me, the associated cultural barrier had been dissolved. I'd become more empathetic and emotionally entangled as a result and felt in touch with the other cast members.

It was a profound experience and a timely one, as my research at that point, had been influenced by the pictorial framing of William Gilpin. The experience



Fig. 5.12

Publicising the project through Twitter – the Squirrel.

*This image of Marega Smith as ‘Squirrel’ highlights the effectiveness of the ‘Ratty’ narrative and its ability to immerse the audience in the storyline (note the woman in the background covering her mouth with her hands).*

now resonated with Simon Schama's proclamation, that in his opinion, we can contemporise ourselves by 'un-framing the world' (Dean & Millar, 2005: 182). I would suggest that Schama's statement is a call to experience the world for ourselves, perform our own role in physical reality and to be immersed in its materiality. I would go further and suggest that removing mediating technology and its separative properties will only enhance the experience to an even greater degree.

#### **5.4 mindSCAPE and "What's beyond the frame?"**

On July 25<sup>th</sup> 2014 I was invited by AONB Communications Officer, Nikki Moore to attend a 'mindSCAPE' session at the Bracelands Adventure Centre, Coleford. Following on from work undertaken on the 'Inside Out' project, '...an arts and health project which provided access to the landscape and arts activities to under-represented groups, mainly through use of a forest school type site. People who benefitted from this included those visually impaired, with learning difficulties and age-related conditions' (Critchley, 2016). 'mindSCAPE' is a four-year community centred project funded by the Big Lottery to provide a creative and stimulating space for people living with dementia the chance to reconnect with the landscape of the Forest of Dean. The project is a collaboration between a number of organisations including the Wye Valley AONB The Forestry Commission, the Forest of Dean District Council, Art Space Cinderford, the Dementia Alliance, Dementia Adventure and the Alzheimer's Society. The scheme was clearly instigated to not just support individuals with Alzheimer's, but also to support their carer's in the physically impressive setting of the Forest.

Arriving at the centre on the morning of the session, I was met by Nikki and we walked to the site of the session. In the forest clearing sat a purpose-built ring of substantial, sawn and laid down tree trunks, measuring about twenty feet in diameter, it was to be the location for the making session. The site was unfortunately in a state of disarray, someone, possibly from the nearby camp-site, had apparently had a party the night

before, litter lay strewn around the site and so we set about clearing it up; this interestingly evidenced the fact that this is a shared site and open to all.

Soon after arriving, I met self-employed artist & 'Creative Facilitator' Rachel Shilston (<http://www.rachelshilston.co.uk/>) (Fig. 5.12), who immediately impressed me with her commitment to the day, especially when I saw the sheer volume of making materials she had brought along. I explained my reason for being there and described my research project; I could not take it for granted that, being with Nikki from the Wye Valley AONB Management team, would validate my presence in any way. When considering the ethical reasons for my presence, I asked Rachel for permission to speak to those present, with the caveat that I would ask carers for their consent to include their responses in my research. It is also worth noting that Rosemary, not only gave me verbal permission to use her words but also to use her first name and that of her partner, Graham, who was unable to give permission himself.

Participants began to arrive and there were about eight people in attendance. As I didn't know the group, it wasn't immediately obvious as to who were the carers and who had Alzheimer's. We all sat on the logs; I was introduced to the group by Nikki and we were quickly instructed in our task for the day.

Rachel had brought along several bicycle wheels; she wanted the group to thread materials through the spokes, echoing the design of a Native American 'Dream Catcher'. Rachel had bought along ribbon, string, foil and other forms of plastic to weave into the wheels. We were split into three teams; it was made clear however, that the activity was not a competitive endeavour and no prizes would be awarded: I liked this approach. I joined Graham and his wife Rosemary, a couple who were both probably in their sixties, they kindly allowed me to work alongside them.



Fig. 5.13

'Creative Facilitator' Rachel Shilston with the materials at the mindSCAPE day. (Photo: G Dunn)

Graham, being a man in the late stages of dementia, hardly spoke and his dextrous abilities were extremely limited; as a result, Rosemary did most of the making...and the talking. Graham did not appear to be put off by his disability, he was very attentive to the activity and gave the impression of wanting to contribute verbally. He would look at Rosemary as if the words were there to be said but he could not find a way to get them out. I experienced frustration at wanting to hear him speak but Rosemary quickly spoke for him, increasing my feeling of surrogate frustration for Graham. I need not have worried. Rosemary was impressive and like Graham, she was tenacious, her colour sense and attention to detail were admirable. Throughout the activity, she talked to Graham and she talked to me. I worked on the floor, handing them materials to the couple, as they worked them into the wheel.

Rosemary and I talked about my research. She was a keen art gallery-goer and expressed enjoyment at having recently visited the Tate Modern, London, to view a collection of work by Henri Matisse (1869-1954), she had loved it and immediately expressed the desire to see more.

Because of her interest, she appeared to be at ease with my articulations and academic terminology; this made me feel very relaxed when I continued to explain my current preoccupation with framing. This encouraged me to talk more, describing the effect of remembering something because of seeing it within the enclosure and the contemplative notion of what existed *beyond* the enclosure of the frame. She offered a perceptive and enlightening point of view, one that was unexpected but crucial in the advancement of the project.

When considering what is outside the frame, Rosemary offered the 'Madelaine moment'. It was a term that I must admit, was unaware of. She was referring to an incident described in *Remembrance of Things Past*, first published in 1913 by Marcel

Proust (1871-1922). Quoted below, it details the moment when the adult narrator eats a madeleine cake, dipped in tea and after repeated tastings, is struck by the vividness of the resulting recollections from his childhood. It takes time for his mind to articulate when the feeling in his body had first been felt:

No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. (Proust, 1913)

The sensation is initially expressed as an embodied feeling and appears to have little to do with spoken language and as author Charles Fernyhough says about the passage, 'It is as though the gustatory memory needs to make contact with the visual one, and they don't quite speak the same language' (Fernyhough, 2011). Physically located memories from his youth are eventually accessed but the immediacy of the moment lay in the protagonist's flesh – his body.

I believe that Rosemary had deep confidence in some sort of momentary recovery for Graham and was suggesting that, by participating in activities such as the one, organised by 'mindSCAPE', manipulating might help retrieve something lost from his past, something might appear in the making moment, something might manifest itself within the boundary of that creative session, connecting him to the world outside the forest, to his past, to the person he had once been and to the Graham she had once known. Rosemary demonstrated admirable staying power; this event allowed her to be expressive, creative and to consider the possibility of fragments of recovery in her life partner. It was a moving notion, and one that becomes even more profound when reading the words from the original passage to which Rosemary referred:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, still, alone, more fragile, but with more



vitality, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, the smell and taste of things remain poised a long time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection. (Proust & Scott-Moncrieff 1966)

The session, effortlessly hosted by artist Rachel Shilston, heightened my awareness to the needs of carers and people with Alzheimer's Disease. The forest setting facilitated a playful, but nonetheless credible and creative atmosphere. With dappled sunlight illuminating the workspace, the earthy smell of humus heavy on the air, it felt vital, but it also felt benevolent and safe. And now, almost three years later, when reflecting upon the session, I am suddenly reminded of my own childhood, of times spent in similar circumstances, making elaborate Elder twig dens and not caring for anything but the task in hand. I had not realised that the environmental time travel, enhanced by the session's location, had shifted me temporarily into another state, perhaps Rosemary was onto something, perhaps Graham was, just for a short while, free falling in the activity and unconsciously permitted to recall similar situations from his past?

Back at the AONB office in Hadnock Road I was reflecting upon the mindSCAPE experience with Sarah Sawyer. I was thinking about what Rosemary had said, and how it related to what artists choose to include within a frame. When recounting artists, that I consider to be, expert in framing under pressure, I mentioned my admiration for the moving photography of ex-war photographer, Sir Don McCullin (b.1935) and how he and his peers could aesthetically contain horror so quickly, so elegantly and under, what I perceived to be, incredibly pressured circumstances. I commented on how they could somehow locate "Beauty in horror". Sarah brought to my attention other images taken in the Vietnam War by people like McCullin, images of execution and people in pain. Sarah remarked that there was no "beauty" in these images, only the stark reality of people's suffering and she was right. She highlighted the need to ask the question

“What’s beyond the frame?” when considering such imagery. What were the political motives for framing the image in that way? What do the photographers want you to see and what do the images obscure from view? The only way to have known a truth would have meant witnessing the event for yourself and witnessing it with your own bodily senses. I committed the idea to my notebook, illustrating the concept to clarify idea of a landscape that lies beyond the frame. (Fig. 5.14)

### **5.5 AONB Annual Conference Lilleshall, Shropshire**

In June 2016, I was given the opportunity to speak at the eighteenth Annual AONB Conference in Lilleshall, Shropshire. The event, well attended by representatives from all forty-six designated AONB areas was themed around the notions of *Sharing, Learning and Inspiring*. Having never been to an AONB conference before, I was keen to see how other AONB management parties compared to the Wye Valley AONB team and if the ideas I was to present would resonate with people from other parts of the UK. I took notes at the conference and have directly quoted the speakers in the following paragraphs.

AONB Chief Executive, Howard Davies opened the conference with a presentation that highlighted the strengths of the organisation, repeatedly referring to the AONB as a “whole being greater than the sum of its parts”. Davis made another notable point when he said, “Most people are bystanders. We need to ensure they are part of the landscape not bystanders.” His comment underscores the approach, already implemented by the Wye Valley AONB Team, evidenced by events such as the River Festival and underpins the environmentally immersive approach the team and I have endorsed during the collaborative research project.

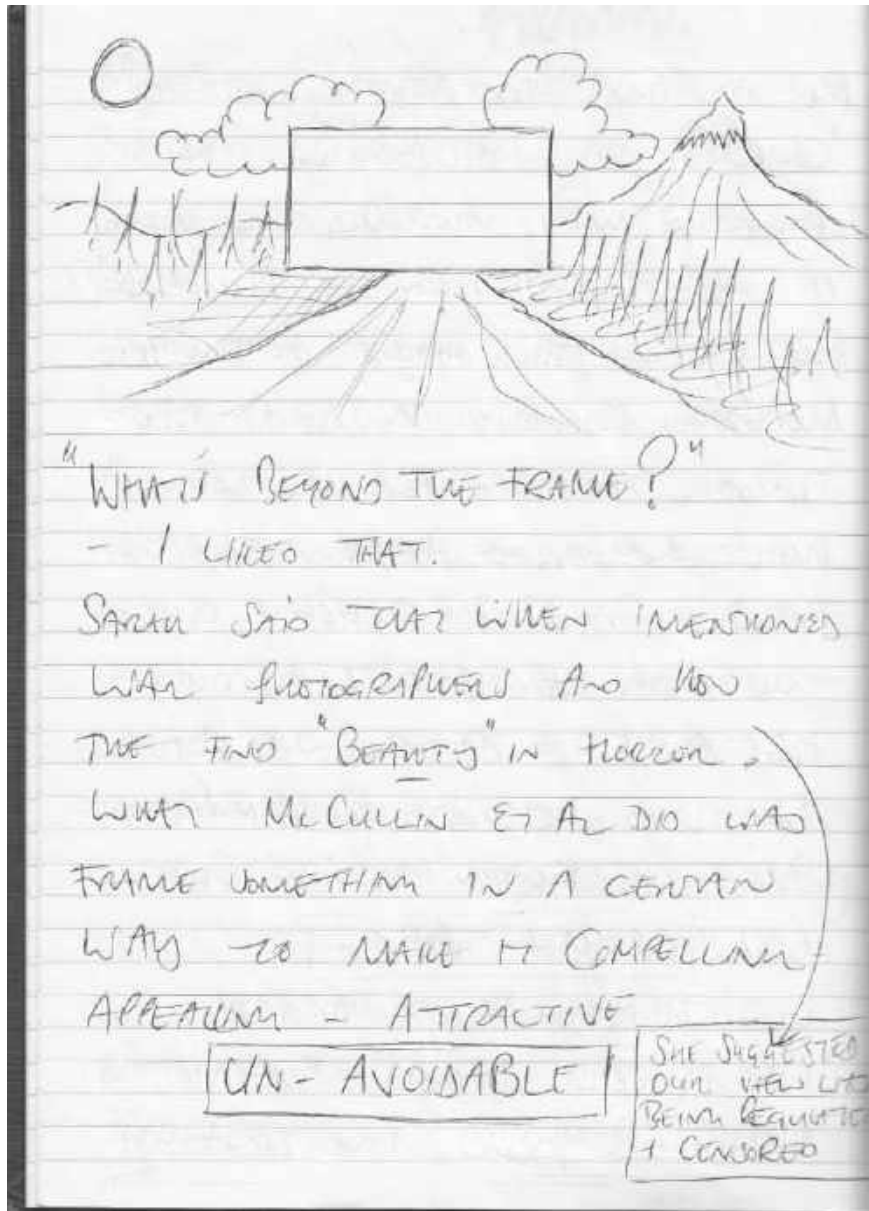


Fig. 5.14  
Extract from research notebook

Howard Davies also spoke of AONB members being “resilient to change and development”, adding that this was a real strongpoint of the organisation. From what I witnessed over the three days of the conference, I would strongly agree with that remark. With regards to finances and funding applications, I overheard lots of anecdotal conversations between AONB ‘Family members’; people were apparently having difficulty procuring money for projects from external funding bodies. However, I got the impression that there was a highly supportive network in place to assist with such matters. It was clear that individual AONB employees (and indeed volunteers) are unified by a love of natural spaces and go above and beyond their job remit to protect what they believed is important to society. The tenacity and pro-active approach that I repeatedly encountered was remarkable; the individuals really did appear to be, “greater than the sum of its parts”.

Another notable presentation was given by former GP, Dr Caroline Jessel, from NHS England. Jessel spoke of “protected landscapes” being “a wonderful asset for all of us”. She also alluded to the idea of a corporeal connection with the world when she said, “There’s something in our biological needs that responds to the environment”. For the purposes of this research project it was encouraging to hear Dr Jessel express this opinion, especially when she said that time in a protected landscape can have the effect of “enlivening the senses and building sensory memories”; adding that they are places where we can “engage all the senses actively”. This reinforces the research methodology, a multi-modal approach that promotes immersion in the landscape. It also strengthens the argument for building a bodily account of experiences and accruing a ‘somatic’ record of events (Damasio in Dunn, 2013) rather than a rationally formed interpretation.

She went on to suggest that eco-empathy arises precisely through direct and primary contact with animals and the environment, “How can you care about something if you’ve

never experienced it?” she said. This appeared to very important to her and she evidenced this by describing ‘The Dandelion Time’ project in Kent (<http://dandeliontime.org.uk/>), of which she is a trustee. The project helps ‘troubled families’ improve their well-being through contact with the environment. She emphasised future sustainability as being a valuable outcome of the project but most importantly, the project aimed to facilitate and inspire such families, to seek out similar experiences in future.

Finally, Doctor Jessel applauded the work carried out by organisations such as the AONB Family and reminded us all that certain sectors of society will perceive the countryside as strange, saying, “People need a kind of brokerage to access the landscape”. I heartily agree with this point; people who are unfamiliar with nature, and rarely go there, need appropriate guidance, or an appropriate context, as a means of framing their initial experiences and lessening the possibility of it becoming overwhelming.

### **5.6 My AONB Conference Briefing: *Tactile Tourism in the Wye Valley***

The fifteen-minute ‘Briefing’ that I presented to the AONB conference was delivered to approximately thirty delegates. The room was full, with a few people standing and there was an engaged question and discussion session after my presentation. Delivered under the title: *Tactile Tourism in the Wye Valley*, my aim was to suggest the possibility of removing technological mediation, in the form of mobile phones, from contemporary visitors’ experiences of landscape. I offered the premise that we might reflect upon being present in the moment of experience, “somatically storing” the event in our bodies rather than externally and digitally capturing evidence that we were there. I suggested to the audience that we might ultimately trust our internal memory storage as opposed to

relying upon external hard drives that can potentially de-centre and dis-locate physical experience.

I prefaced the outline of my research residency in the Wye Valley with a succinct review of the last five years of my artistic practice; this was intended to enlighten the audience to the approach an artist might take when encountering a landscape for the first time. I described my own particular interest in materials, rhythm, routine and 'flow' through walking, that had been strengthened by the artists' residency in Mino City, Japan. I described feeling connected to the material constituents of the landscape and finding solace in the agricultural scenery that I had initially dismissed as being aesthetically uninviting.

To help clarify my current and personal approach to landscape, I presented images of artworks by Giuseppe Penone (b.1947) (Fig 5.15), Lucy McRae (b.1979) and Bart Hess (b.1984) (Fig 5.16). The audience were unfamiliar with the works and, as a result, nervous laughter could be heard when I confronted the room with some of the slides. The works were included in my MA Fine Art dissertation and signpost an interdependent and multi-modal way into the world; an alliance between natural substances and a somatic exchange between humans and our material surroundings.

Physical interaction, and not mere imaginative representation, are central to the works; re-enforcing my own immersive approach and physically emotive response to the research location.



Fig 5.15

Giuseppe Penone. 'It Will Continue to Grow Except at this Point' (1968–2003)

'Tree of Heaven' (*Ailanthus altissima*) and bronze.

(Image Taken in 2008 Photo © Archivio Penone)



Fig 5.16  
Lucy McRae 'Germination – Day 8' 2008



I briefly described my two encounters with ceramicist, and Penallt resident of forty years, Walter Keeler (see *Chapter 7*). I explained how elements of Keeler's ceramic works appear to mirror those features found in the natural world and their appearance, as he has explained to me, also belongs to an extensive tradition of makers who find inspiration in the natural landscape. His personal process requires him to repeat actions, acquire muscle memories and habitually commit to his chosen craft. It appears to me as if Keeler's physical routine and experiential presence have been somatically stored, haptically imparted through the medium of clay and subsequently sent out into the world as functional pieces of art.

During the latter part of the presentation, I speculated that competition for actual landscape interaction might come from the leisure technology sector. Sony's Virtual Reality system was about to be released (October 2016) making the medium more ubiquitous, and I suggested "more democratic"; and virtual experiences of landscape would therefore become more commonplace in contemporary society. I explained that Virtual Reality has gone through steep technological improvements in recent years, (screen definition for example has increased) and the result could be a very "seductive" experience, particularly for younger generations and those who want to experience a location without physically travelling. However, I argued that the experience is incomplete, experientially deficient, a sensorially narrow set of circumstances, largely reliant upon the senses of seeing and hearing. Although seemingly immersive, Virtual Reality does not currently incorporate all our senses and I argued that *actual reality* as opposed to *virtual reality* would continue to be the more affective and meaningful option.

To close the session, and to offer a positive end to the presentation, I offered the observation that that the Wye Valley and other protected landscapes contained physical characteristics that fully and meaningfully immerse and affect its inhabitants. I expressed that I had been moved by my sensorial encounters in the area and felt that

technology was not close to replicating the multi-modal conditions that are currently exclusive to the real world.

The audience appeared to be very positive about the presentation, with one person commenting that they had been required to reconsider the way they personally experience landscape and that it had offered a new way of thinking about, what had become, an overly familiar set of circumstances. This highlighted the fact that, people who often work in protected natural environments, might “take for granted” the experience they are having and that it is helpful to be reminded of just how deep broadly and affective the experience can be. Another person expressed the desire to experience virtual reality, so they could make their own comparison between the digital and factual for themselves.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

Unfortunately, I do not have the time to describe all the meaningful moments that I have experienced in the Wye Valley (See Research Matrix in Appendices for a list of research activities). However, I would like to conclude this chapter by once again referring to Simon Schama, when I say that I did experience a largely physically unconstrained and ultimately ‘unframed’ world when taking part in activities in the Wye. Schama’s assertion that such an approach is ‘modern’ resonates with Alexander M. Ross, whom I quoted in Chapter 4. Ross also used the word ‘modern’ when describing Gilpin’s aesthetic: a visual viewpoint that came because of a set of immersive experiences and primarily out of witnessing the Wye.

The events that I have briefly described in this chapter, and indeed those that I have not (See Research Matrix in Appendices for a full list), were all witnessed *first-hand*. I have personally observed activities in which the AONB management team and their collaborators already bring different people together. They enable the public to go

outside, facilitate emotionally immersive situations that subsequently *galvanise* groups of individuals.

By removing the frame, the theatre's proscenium arch and eliminating the dividing line between stalls and stage, the *Desperate Men* connected communities along the river Wye. As previously described in chapter 4, the theatrical metaphor soundly resonates with William Gilpin's own personal approach to contextualising landscape and I would argue that the 'Ratty' narrative was an engaging emotional vehicle upon which people travelled and the landscape was the location upon which it was played.

*mindSCAPE* facilitate sessions through which individuals are momentarily moved away from their normal lives. Occupied by the task-in-hand, especially when performed in the context of a forest, the participants whom I met, that are living with dementia, were temporarily distracted from the negative effects of living with the disease. By being briefly occupied in the woods, it was hoped, by said participants, that individuals with Alzheimer's' for example, might benefit from the recollection of memories through making.

Because of my *primary* experience of the Wye Valley, the people that I have encountered there and the statements I have heard from health professionals like Dr Jessel at the AONB Annual Conference, I would argue that getting people to leave their own personal and limiting frame of safety, through the facilitation of physically emancipating events, be that their homes, working or leisure routines, can be highly rewarding and I would argue: *life-changing* for those that choose to do so.

## **Chapter 6. Testing Modes of Engagement.**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter recounts the various modes of engagement used in a conscious attempt to transform me as the researcher from *outsider* to *insider*. It also offers a deeper review of literature to reinforce the phenomenological approach to enquiry briefly signposted in the introduction and literature review. By becoming physically acquainted with the research site over time, an approach underpinned by the notion that physical immersion is essential to a more profound understanding a given landscape (Tilley, 2004; 1994) the reader will see how physical engagement with the topography of the Wye Valley became central to the experience of place. Activities were often recorded on camera, Dictaphone and smartphone and uploaded to social media platforms such as *Blogger* and *Twitter*. The resulting artefacts serving as digital evidence of my process of investigation and a means of publicising and communicating the progress of the research to interested parties and collaborators.

In the section titled, 'Canoeing: Drifting Down the Wye in the Wake of Gilpin' I have written a personal account of travelling along the river with members of my family. The intention of the day's activity was to loosely re-enact part of William Gilpin's 1770 journey, with the aim being to witness the landscape from the low viewpoint of the water and have fun doing so. It was also intended to mirror the shared experience of other visitors that elect to explore the Wye Valley by boat.

The chapter concludes with an account of my own particular way of seeing the Wye Valley and considers it with regards to an Eco-Haptic (Gladwin, 2013) approach to environmental engagement.

Returning to an early iteration of my research proposal, my original aims were to test the notion that physical immersion in the Wye Valley is essential in the comprehension existing the area's unique landscape features. This coupled with one of the original research objectives, which was to live in the location and facilitate others with an actual experience of the Wye Valley, was underpinned by the notion that a more accurate reminiscence of site is multi-modal in nature and relies more upon how it *feels* to be in a landscape (Tuan 2001; Serres 2008; Abram 1997).

This led my research to explore themes focused around a more bodily centred and experientially based enquiry (Paskow, 2008). John Wylie in (Howard et al. 2012) offers an argument for contemporary phenomenological research when he says:

...from a phenomenological standpoint, landscape is more-than-visual and more-than-symbolic. To study landscape in this way involves attending instead to myriad everyday embodied practices of interaction with and through landscape. It also involves on-going reflection on more abstract and first-order questions regarding the nature of subjectivity, and human relationships with the world. (Wylie 2012:49)

Wylie's argument supports my decision to take a phenomenological approach to this research. This is a method that requires the research participants (and indeed their guide) to be immersed in the landscape of the Wye Valley:

Phenomenology is a philosophy that, above all, stresses the importance of lived experience, of the human subject's ongoing immersion in the world; and that thus seeks to move away from a description of subjectivity in terms of rational, distanced observation, towards an alternate understanding of human being – of what it is to be human – in terms of expressive engagement and involvement with the world. (Wylie, 2012:56)

Physical encounters with largely natural habitats encourage 'connectedness', as well as feelings of well-being (Howell, Dopko, Passmore, & Buro, 2011) between visitors and their surroundings and this is arguably universal and no different for the ramblers, day

trippers or professional artists (whom I will go on to discuss in Chapter 7). Within my own artistic practice, I have developed a preoccupation with the physical properties and material make-up of landscape and this is underpinned by encountering the topography of my choice; consequently, my instincts, largely guided by material based artistic practice, have moved me to relate to the Wye Valley in terms of touch and feel. The varying material proximities of the scenery there seems perfectly suited to my way of experiencing the world. Aesthete and academic, Isis Brook eloquently supports the necessity for a bodily encounter with place before considering how to visually represent landscape when she says:

Our thoughts can reach further to the context of that landscape in history and in the wider environment through many channels of information... However, none of this can begin before the experience itself; experience is the bed-rock of the aesthetic and without it we just recycle the thoughts of others and never enter the aesthetic field. (Brook 2013:117)

Looking back to the inception of this research project, it was not in my lexicon at that time to say that to truly know a place we must go there. My first experience of conscious, and I would suggest, meaningful fieldwork research occurred whilst of living and working in Japan. Japan had previously been a regular holiday destination since 2004, however my experience as an artist in residence for three months in 2012 demonstrates this point that I had not fully realised that to truly know a place we must go there. The time I spent in Mino City became less about being on holiday abroad. It became less about the curiosity inducing, exoticism of a new cultural and topographical landscape, but instead more about the routine of repeatedly going to work and the associated responsibilities that I was contracted to carry out. As discussed in my Masters Dissertation (Dunn, 2013) my role as artist in residence privileged me with a comparatively un-exotic familiarisation with the unremarkable and mundane aspects of a place of work. As an employee, I passed the landscape on my commute to and from my place of work. The landscape became a habitual encounter, something that I passed by, that I began to ignore and take for

granted. However, the ordinariness and unexotic nature (due it being a site of industrial and agricultural activity) of the landscape became a place of solace and physical comfort when my work duties and their associated responsibilities became too much. The exotic became the invisible which in turn became the benevolent and necessary.

My MA Fine Art research in practice led me to the writings of archaeologist and anthropologist Christopher Tilley who is a noted proponent of a direct 'phenomenological' approach to landscape studies as outlined in his book *The Materiality of Stone* (Tilley, 2004). Although Tilley has encountered some resistance to his proposition that archaeologists, and indeed the broader population, can acquire 'non-functional meanings' of past landscapes by experiencing them 'with their own bodies' (Widell, 2017:5); in *Explorations in landscape phenomenology* (2004) Tilley presents a personally convincing case for a physically intimate and measured approach when becoming newly acquainted with a new location.

Understanding place is a gradual process of familiarization ... Sensing, perceiving and understanding are conjoined in a fundamental way. Understanding and experiencing a place is a process of learning how to understand and how to feel. It involves a gradual act of familiarisation equivalent to getting to know a person, in which first impressions can, as often as not, be misleading. (Tilley 2004:223)

A day trip may leave an impression upon the visitor but as to what that is and to what depth of affect that encounter might have had is questionable. Being bodily present for landscape research is central to Tilley's philosophy and it's an approach with which I emphatically concur and consequently endorse. I have also come to highly regard certain works by Leslie Stephen to be central to my approach to experiencing the world as described by Caroline W. Hollis' in her account of his relationship with the physical act of mountain climbing. In *Leslie Stephen as Mountaineer: Where does Mont Blanc end and where do I begin* (Hollis, 2012) the academic convincingly proposes the importance of physically experiencing landscape. For me, it is precisely because 'his [Stephen's]

ideas were informed by a personally measured bodily acquaintance with the material world' (Dunn, 2013: 9/10) that they resonate with my personal research approach.

## **6.2 My Personal Written and Visual Responses to the Wye Valley**

Living in Monmouth allowed me to consider *contemporary life* in the research location and is commensurate with the second research aim. I was able to consider the *current and future* generations that reside there. By lodging in the centre of the town, I was able to witness how the modern population move and flow on a daily and, because I lived there for six months, on a seasonal basis. I could witness the daily influx and departure of school children, the ebb and flow of rush hour traffic and the gradual arrival of tourists to the town from Spring to Summer. Being there allowed me to have access to local library and museum provision and work closely with the members of the Wye Valley AONB Management team; I was able to attend numerous events at varying times of the day, without travelling from my home town of Worcester (fifty miles away).

At the commencement of this collaborative research project, my Director of Studies, Professor Richard Coles and I agreed that I would reside in the Wye Valley for six months. Six months seems like a reasonable amount of time for a place to become familiar in my view and is a length of time where seasonal change could be witnessed and experienced. As previously stated in chapter 5, I was living in temporary rented accommodation from May 7th in Monmouth, lodging in a large and spacious Georgian house, located in a square, close to the centre of the town. My landlady lived by herself in the house and was employed as Director of Drama by the nearby Haberdashers' Monmouth School for Girls. Her historical knowledge of the area and its cultural activities was extensive; she had organised local film and music festivals, as well as having business dealings with the Wye Valley AONB management team.



Whilst resident in Monmouth, and as previously described in chapter 3, I elected to record my research activities in a series of online blog and Twitter posts, examples of which can be seen in (Fig.6.1 & 6.2). This method of recording responses had served an effective a research methodology whilst employed in Japan, where I had utilised social media to express, record, and broadcast my thoughts quickly. The method provided a useful and chronologically ordered record of my activities in Japan and one that I have been able to repeatedly review since my return to the UK. Tilley substantiates the importance of text based output when responding to landscape when he says: 'writing is essential to the task at a later stage because it produces a vision and feeling for place' (Tilley 2004:223).

Although I take issue with the author's proclamation that 'Taking photographs or making video recordings of places are, by comparison (unless well scripted in advance), relatively passive acts which do not produce knowledge in the same way' (*ibid*), photography, when utilised in my own practice, is not at all passive, it is pro-active, is about choice, focus and is a useful method of evoking thoughts and emotions from a location (Rose in Bennett, 2013).

As I had only been to Monmouth twice before (once to meet my eventual landlady) I was keen to somehow record and share my initial reactions to the location just as I had done in Japan. I followed my intuition on what to do with my time, and thus, my responses were instinctively procured. During May 2014, I uploaded thirty online blog posts to my Blogger.com web page: <http://dunn-roaming.blogspot.co.uk/>, writing short notes into my smartphone as I walked in the location and regularly stopping to type text into the keypad. My intentions were to document my immediate responses to the location in a contemporary way and record how these reactions might change over time because of living in the location. I arranged my written observations in a poetic manner and it is worth noting that I had utilised this style of verse to underpin the conceptual concerns of my process during my Master in Fine Art studies (2011-2013).



Fig 6.1

Example of a Tweet.

*This Tweet records a moment on a lone walk on the evening of the 13<sup>th</sup> May 2014. It was one of many walks I took in the town to familiarize myself with the location. I was impressed with the Wisteria growing on the front elevation of this Georgian House, typical style of architecture found the area in which I was residing.*

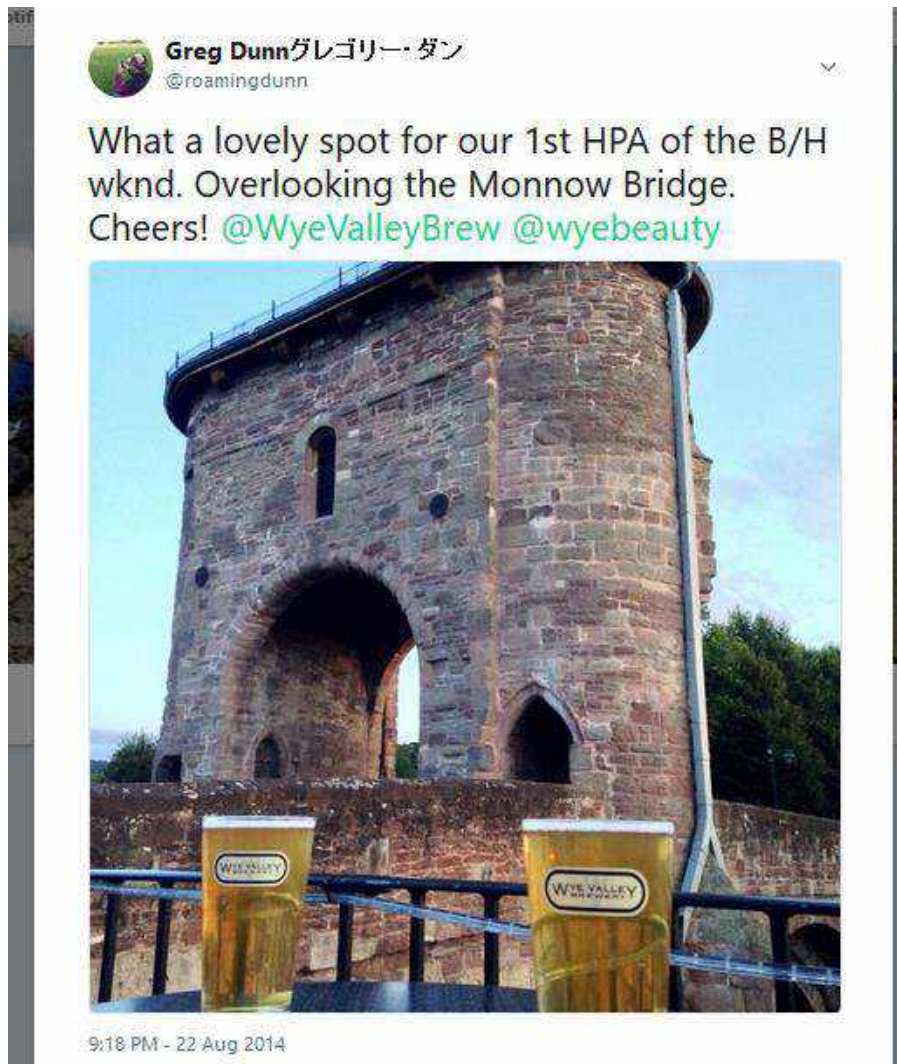


Fig 6.2

Example of a Tweet.

*Being the only 'sole remaining mediaeval fortified river bridge in Britain where the gate tower stands actually on the bridge' (Thomas, 2009), Monnow Bridge is a very distinctive local architectural feature. This image logs the moment my wife and I sat outside the Gatehouse pub. I was aware at this point, that I was advocating attractive local sights to a broader audience outside the Wye Valley.*

Whilst walking, running and cycling in the Wye, I used poetic devices such as rhyme, repetition and alliteration to reflect the flow and feel of the activity to my imagined reader. I used this peripatetic process to reflect upon how I was feeling or sometimes to simply describe what I could see. I registered fragments of overheard conversation from people that I passed along the way and quoted interesting text from various sources. Finally, I would describe myself as a visual artist; it therefore seemed appropriate to upload photographs from the walks as well as broadly sourced imagery, that in my view, had relevance to the research. Upon finishing the descriptive walks, I would check my spelling, format the text and upload it to the web.

Whilst resident, I became sensitized to the cycle of the seasons and their effect upon me and the landscape. I walked out regularly in rain and sporadically ran along the river in the sunshine. I noted my experiences on my blog as means of reaching out beyond the perceived physical confines of the valley's steep sides. By living in central Monmouth, I witnessed the town's daily population swelling and shrinking in response to the school commute; at these times, the streets became impassable with traffic, noisy and edgy with teenage fervour.

The time I spent in the offices of the AONB Management Team was invaluable to my successful integration into Wye Valley life. It provided me with a base from which to legitimately observe and become acquainted with the day to day activities of the working group that are based there. It provided me with a position that physically integrated me into the location and enabled me tap into the moments that would take place there.

I established a working routine that provided me with primary experiences of place and, to some degree, normalized my presence there. Travelling to and from the AONB offices allowed me to become familiar via the routine of the short commute. By living

within the research site, I was able encounter the locality at various times; on weekdays, at weekends, during business hours, during public holidays, during day and night-time. I witnessed the arguably mundane rhythms of daily life and became acquainted with the circadian cadences of the population that lived in Monmouth and the surrounding area evidenced in the words I wrote on my blog on 21.05.2014. (Fig. 6.3)

The resulting observations, descriptions and representations highlight the tactile nature of the topography. For example, on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May I went for a run along the bank of the River Wye in a northerly direction from Monmouth (Fig. 6.4). Whilst moving through the landscape, I periodically stopped and typed a short entry into my mobile phone. I intentionally used a poetic structure, utilising alliteration and rhyme for example, as I have previously done before in my artistic practice. I used descriptive language that reflected my movement through space as a way of mirroring what I was seeing.

It appears I was affected by the experience in a peculiar way. I am suggesting that the landscape has agency particularly when I say: "The corridor of the forest sucks me into its centre". I describe the location as a tactile prospect and one that is mutually capable of touching me when I state that: "Moss flocked roots, finger-like, flow below". I relate to the foliage as another body, intensifying my feeling of mutual connection to the place. The final description, "Bright broccoli topped woodlands invite my hands to caress" explicitly depicts the way in which I wanted to handle the far-off forest that I could see, to bring it closer to my grasp.

**Monmouth: Day 15**

*The routine is emerging.*

*The beautiful is becoming everyday.*

*I'm now moving amongst the mundane.*

*Squeezing my words through the laptop.*

*I'm processing my process.*

Fig. 6.3.

Blog entry (<http://dunn-roaming.blogspot.co.uk/search?updated-max=2014-05-23T02:15:00-07:00&max-results=7&reverse-paginate=true>)

### 6.3 Trunnels and Spatial Temptation

In *The rainforest of the west*, an article published on the Guardian web-site, by Mark Cocker (Cocker, 2014) the author describes a walk through Highbury Woods, Redbrook, a site located at the heart of the Wye Valley AONB. He describes an appealing exploration prospect. I recognised the tubular shape of the landscape in the image included in the article (reproduced at Fig. 6.5), as one which I had seen repeatedly throughout the Wye Valley. Cocker refers to this landscape symbol as a 'Holloway'.

A 'Holloway' is a landscape feature that was brought to my attention in the book *Holloway* (Macfarlane & Richards, 2013), where it is used in relation to land formations in South Dorset. A short volume, written by Robert Macfarlane and Dan Richards; the book is illustrated by artist Stanley Donwood (Fig.6.6). The authors relate an account of visiting the Chideock Valley, exploring the rounded ancient lanes and sleeping overnight in the rain.

Holloway – the hollow way. A sunken path, a deep & shady lane. A route that centuries of foot-fall, hoof-hit, wheel-roll & rain-run have harrowed into the land. A track worn down by the traffic of ages & the fretting of water; and in places reduced sixteen or eighteen feet beneath the level of the fields' (Macfarlane & Richards, 2013:3)

Cocker says: 'In some places, there were **Holloways** so tunnel-like it felt as if we were journeying into the Earth, not passing over it' (my emphasis) (Cocker, 2014). It is also worth noting his suggestion that visitors feel as they are moving *into* the land, not over it; this is a feeling I have an affinity with and again emphasises the immersive of nature of the location. Cocker's article also alludes to the notion of the agency of place in the Wye; I have highlighted elements of the passage that illustrate this:

# Dunn Roaming - @roamingdunn

"We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing." George Bernard Shaw

Thursday, 22 May 2014

## Monmouth: Day 16

*First run with the river.*

*Flatland fat sheep, gnawing on ground.*

*Traffic crunching hastily down valley.*

*In the open the river alongside running away.*

*Clatterback gates.*

*Lolloping limbs rise and fall below me.*

*The corridor of the forest sucks me into it's centre.*

*Comfortable cysgodi and sticky soles beneath.*

*The river now beyond foliage lies in limbo - still.*

*Moss flocked roots, finger-like, flow below.*

*Rough skeletal frames knee deep in nettles.*

*Drumlin-like domes at the base of a vine wrapped rock-face.*

*Invisible Mock Orange aromatic cloud.*

*Doe skinned wrinkled fitness face.*

*Eye level swans flapping down valley.*

*Bright broccoli topped woodlands invite my hands to caress.*

### About Me



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March (1)  
November (1)  
August (5)  
July (2)  
June (10)  
May (29)  
April (2)  
March (3)  
January (2)  
November (3)  
September (5)  
August (3)  
June (4)  
May (2)  
April (6)

Fig. 6.4

Screenshot of Blog entry concerning the run from Monmouth.



...We entered a world an East Anglian never knows: a place of fern and tree that loves the wetter conditions of the west – **large-leaved lime, broad buckler fern, spleenwort, hart's tongue and polypody** – even the names sounded exotic. No patch of tropical rainforest could have been wetter or greener. A long line of ancient dark yews and beech trees, which ran all across this steep ridge high above the river Wye, **sealed us under the closed canopy, and we were cocooned in warm, damp emerald air**. In some places, there were holloways so tunnel-like it felt as if we were journeying into the Earth, not passing over it. ...At times in these Wye valley woods, where you can stand in some open field with **the dense trees cloaked on all horizons, the oily brown Wye itself muscling downstream**, it was as if blackbird music, rich and soft-soiled, rose like steam from them all. The bird's very blackness seemed the essence of all that chlorophyll, and the song itself a higher distillate of everything green and free. It is England reduced to sound and no tourist-drawing, ruined, famous abbey could express it more truly. (my emphasis) (Ibid.).

The authors' language is sensual, poetic and conveys a palpable sensation of a corporeal connectivity. Repeated reference to the colour green has the effect of insinuating a fresh, clean and benevolent landscape and one that alludes to a nurturing disposition. His passage through the woods is comparably visceral in its depiction of the landscape and I would suggest that when Cocker speaks of moving 'into the Earth', he is likening the habitat to a living body; further evidenced by use of the word 'Cocooned', which conveys an intensely immersive situation and acknowledges the enfolding agency of the landscape.

Highbury Woods seemed like the perfect place to measure the effect of a place upon people. I began with myself as research subject on a walk on the evening of the Thursday, 26 June 2014. I was keen to experience the location on my own and reflect upon the experience on my blog. I was pleased that it was forecast to rain which would hopefully add another dimension to the journey.



Fig. 6.5

Highbury Woods – The Guardian 8.6.2014

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2014/jun/08/highbury-wood-gloucestershire-rainforest-west>. Mark Cocker



Fig. 6.6

*Holloway* – Stanley Donwood. 2013 Letterpress print image.

<http://archive.slowlydownward.com/ahway.html>

*Donwood's illustration, although a depiction of another location, emphasises the same enfolding and tunnel-like feeling that Cocker describes in his description of Highbury Woods. The image also corresponds with my own experience of the site and others like it, situated throughout the Wye Valley*

The location did not disappoint. I moved quickly up the land and through the copiously foliated woods. Like in Cocker's description of his experience, the rain facilitated a more visceral response in me; a series of corporeally steered moments that manifested themselves in an account of the physical (Fig. 6.7). The language of my blog entry emphasizes this physicality, for example '*Bumpy bowel of a Beech tree's bough. Wrinkle knuckles*'. Rain moistened every perceptible surface and accentuated the feeling of physical connectedness with the environment. Raindrops rattled on the beech leaves; the increased volume intensifying the aural spectacle even more. The shiny wet surfaces elicited a more sensitised visual encounter within the darkness and the steep elevation of the site upon which I was moving. I under-estimated the lack of light on the return leg of the walk; the lessening light motivated me to move quicker and made want to escape into open space. I was relieved to get home but the experience left a lasting impression and one which I recounted in the subsequent blog post.

#### **6.4 Canoeing: Drifting Down the Wye in the Wake of Gilpin.**

'If you have never navigated the Wye you have seen nothing'.

(William Gilpin in Andrews, 1989:89)

Early in the research, and as previously described in the thesis, I had become aware that the Reverend William Gilpin in 1770 had journeyed, over the course of two days, down the Wye in a small boat (Andrews, 1989; Mitchell, 2010; Moir, 1964; Peterken, 2008). According to Malcolm Andrews, the above quotation was written by Gilpin to a friend on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 1770; it is certainly a bold statement, but one that I was keen to test. I was also keen to experience the valley from the same, low viewpoint as Gilpin and the 'stream of ardent tourists' (Moir, 1964:125) that followed him, had once done.

Andrews also asserts that, the low vantage point was a key component of the early picturesque experience, with the effect being that, 'the spectator has much more the

sense of being enveloped by the landscape' (Andrews, 1989:61). The low view, preferably screened off and lacking in overall prospect, facilitated humility when stood, '...before the untamed grandeur of Nature' (Andrews, 1989:64); it made the participant feel humble and thus its effect, at the time, was appropriated in the garden designs (as opposed to the organised and open formal gardens that had gone before) of Capability Brown et al (Andrews, 1989). The notion of an 'enveloping' environment such as the Wye Valley can promote a more physically centred engagement with place is what is to be tested here.

In accordance with the first research aim, whereby I suggest that I will *Investigate contemporary experiences* in the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty my family and I participated in a canoeing trip to procure a contemporary version of how it feels to travel down the river Wye at water level. The account is a purposefully subjective account of a short (five hour) journey by canoe down the river Wye. The aim is to roughly re-enact Gilpin's first encounter and to describe our collective first impressions of seeing the historically impressive landscape for ourselves. Discovered by a relative on the web-site 'Groupon', the outing was a reasonably priced means of travelling down the river Wye; the excursion was described on the company web-site in the following way:

The Ross-on-Wye to Symonds Yat (West) is quite simply one of the most scenic journeys one can make on the Wye. Travelling through a range of historic sites, observing the countryside, wildlife and scenery - **where you'll wish to have your camera to capture a truly unique view of England.** (my emphasis)  
(Canoe rental company Web-Site - anonymised).

Members of my family were aware that I was doing a project based in the Wye Valley and had expressed an interest at wanting to participate from an early stage. The description made the journey sound idyllic and worthy of us wanting to seize the moment with a camera. The inclusion of other people would offer the opportunity to observe other

immediate responses to the location and compare them with my own. We (B: 47yr female; O: 46yr male; E: 46yr male; L: 19yr old male) would start from the canoe centre in Symonds Yat West at 10:00am and be given a safety briefing. I had never been to Symonds Yat (West) before and was very surprised to see a rather run-down caravan park and associated leisure park with an amusement arcade, café 'The Bistro' and a club in a place where I expected to find beautiful scenery. The scene was very reminiscent of images produced by artist, Keith Arnatt, that I had seen the Tate Britain earlier that year, (I describe these in greater detail in chapter 7). I had seen I described the setting as 'reesty' in my notes, a slang word, understood by my family to mean 'unpleasant' or 'run-down'. I think my view was clouded because I had previously been to Piercefield Park near Chepstow where I had enjoyed a comparatively natural habitat and experienced a long, strenuous walk under the canopy of trees, interspersed by impressive views over the Wye and out towards the Severn estuary.

We arrived at the embarkation point by the river in Ross. The area by the water was gently undulating, grassed, contained a children's play park and a bandstand. It's a place I can imagine is popular with car confined day trippers on any given Sunday. The guide requested we stand back whilst he unleashed and unloaded the canoes from the trailer of his old transit van. He did this rather unceremoniously. Pulling the canoes one by one, he let them crash to the ground (Fig. 6.8). They scraped and banged their way onto the floor and once again, I was little perturbed by the lack of care shown and glanced at my family to acknowledge my lingering fears. My look was reciprocated, much to my relief. Two by two, we carried the canoes across the grass and to the concrete platform. We decanted our rudimentary belongings into two canoes. Two people were in one, and three were in the other. We said our, rather surprising, goodbyes to the driver and agreed as to where we would be meeting later that day.

**Blog Post, Thursday, 26 June 2014.**

*Redbrook - Highbury Woods Walk - (7:45pm start)*

*Just me and the angry Blackbirds.*

*Stately ancient Yews*

*Tonight's walk framed by film and slightly forced.*

*Pellet-like rain.*

*Leaves tinkering in waves from ear to ear.*

*Bizarre phone light.*

*Footsteps dull underfoot.*

*Bumpy bowel of a Beech tree's bough.*

*Wrinkle knuckles.*

*Furious green slope drops below.*

*'Man trap' gates.*

*Rain coming in closer - leaves now hugging me with sound.*

*Fig. 6.7*

Blog entry on walk through Highbury Woods





Fig. 6.8  
The canoes being unloaded. (Photo: G Dunn)



I sat in the middle of the one canoe. My brother in law at the rear and my nephew at the front. My sister in law and other brother in law were in the other boat and all we had was a laminated map to guide us (Fig. 6.9). I placed a Dictaphone around my neck and proceeded to record the day. I also took photographs with a digital SLR camera. The light was dull and it was not cold. We soon were on our way, having circled around, getting used to the feeling of being on the water. The canoes were quite stable, if we kept seated and paddled at an even pace.

The rhythm of rowing came slowly; it was not immediately intuitive. The resistance from the water was unusual, not at all like running; it had a different kind of sensual feedback. It was a peculiar feeling, floating down the river. The slightly raised riverbanks on either side were not too high. We could see cattle on the surrounding fields and were aware of the agricultural nature of the area. It was not what I had expected. It was not what other people had expected. *What had I expected?* I wondered how could the landscape I was seeing inspire anybody to write anything as influential as Gilpin's seminal work? What made this place beautiful? What made it so special?

My recording captured how my nephew and I expressed disappointment:

*Me: Isn't this strange? It isn't at all like I imagined it was going to be.*

*L: You know? I expected it to be higher, not mountains but more hills.*

Our expectations had not been met. He and I were expecting a more dramatic landscape, one that we would find impressive and would leave an impression upon us. Looking back, we were discovering the place for ourselves and following the rudimentary map we had been given (Fig. 6.8). We expected something more extreme, something worthier of recording in a 'YouTube' video and posting on the internet.

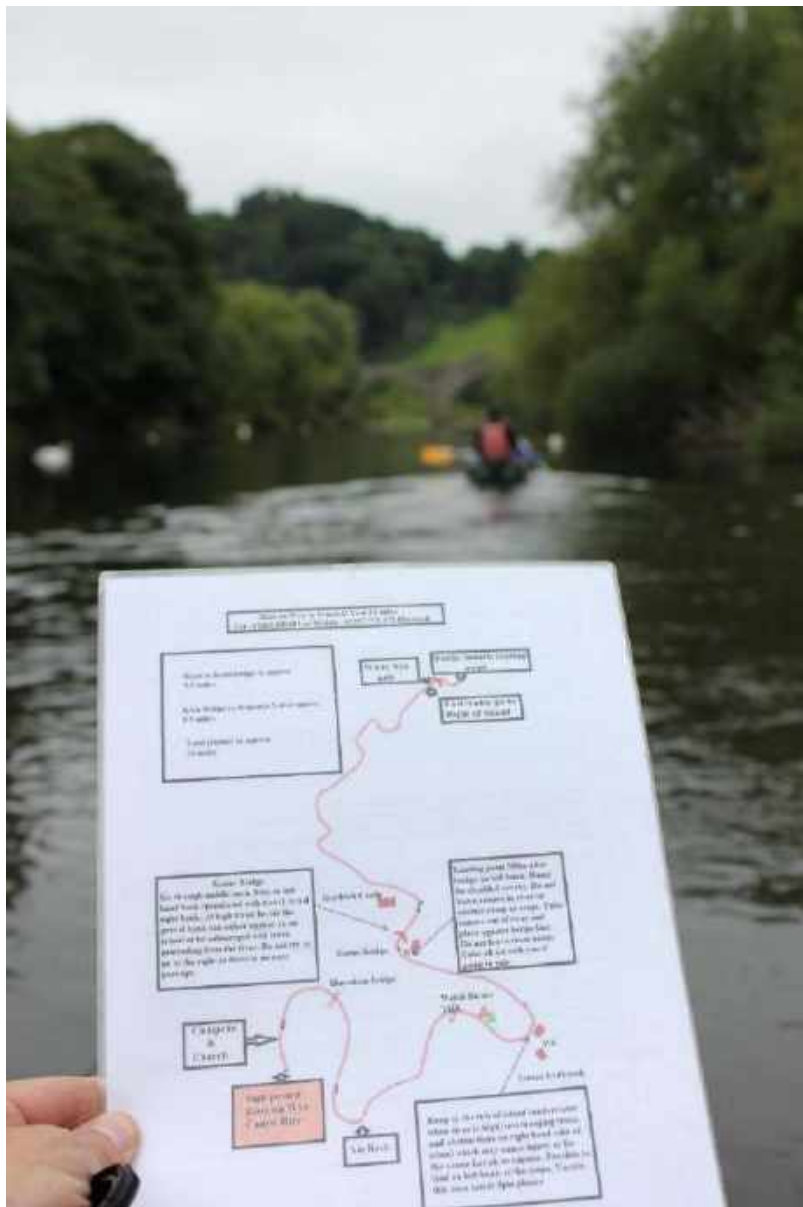


Fig. 6.9  
The laminated map we were given as a guide. (Photo: G Dunn)

I did not expect to have so little to reflect upon and so little to be in awe of. I had to undo my pre-conceived ideas of what a canoe trip might be. I had to *unsee* all the rock music scored videos of people screaming down the faces of waterfalls in tiny kayaks, I had to remove previous visions of American snow-capped mountains, pine fringed and crystal-clear bodies of smooth blue water. I had to forget it all and start again. I think we all did:

*Me: The thing is, the lower down (the river) you get, it turns more into a gorge.*

I think I felt I needed to apologise here. I think I needed to give L (and the others) something to look forward to and to demonstrate that the whole project I was attempting to do was not a waste of time and that the river Wye was a beautiful place on which to spend four years of your life.

*L: That's what I like, that's what I want to see.*

I think L was guided by my response a little but I think his desire to see more extreme scenery, was, like mine impatient and premature. The journey was expected to take four or five hours and we had only been on the water for just under ten minutes. When I now reflect upon the day and consider Gilpin's original journey, described in 'Observations on the River Wye...', it's helpful to read what Gilpin said about the area south of Ross: "The first part of the river from Ross is tame. The banks are low and scarcely an object attracts the eye" (Gilpin, 1783:30). The landscape was just as Gilpin had described, I could have taken the book along or read it the night before, to prepare for this, I decided not to. I/we wanted to create our own impressions, make our own discoveries and in doing so experience our own rewards and disenchantments.

To deflect from the immediate disappointment of the day we started to fool around. We were safe, never standing in the boat (as we had been instructed) and continued to paddle. We exchanged banter, harmless at first but it became more profane as the

journey went on. We joked about bodily functions as our family group often does in some situations, but I brought it back to the experience we had just had:

*Me: It's a funny little outfit, isn't it? (About the canoe company)*

This brought the conversation around to John Boorman's 1972 film, 'Deliverance' and its cast of characters. Someone made the stereotypical comparison of the organisers of our canoe company to individuals in the film and we laughed at the inappropriateness even more. L had not seen the film (and to my knowledge still has not). Being of a similar age, the adults in the group shared the cultural memory of knowing about the film; we had probably seen it on terrestrial television or on VHS video at some point in the early eighties. The group re-counted the shared the memory of the male rape scene (with much inappropriate hilarity) and I reminded them about the strength of character of the landscape as the setting for the dramatic events.

*O: It's a good film.*

*Me: And you get a real sense of the place in it don't you? You really, really feel the water.*

*O: What for... what was it? 1978? It's a really graphic film.*

As a family, we enjoy the ironic contrast and disobedience of doing or saying something we should not in any given situation but I was beginning to express anxiety as to no not knowing where I was:

*Me: You know, it's quite amazing. I've got no idea where I am. No idea where I am at all. Weird (no response from the others)*

*Me: And now we're getting a bit more 'landscapey'.*

*L: Ah, here you go, this is what I wanted.*

I was also trying to concentrate on the place a little. I was attempting to draw the focus of the group to the project, to the reason we were there. In hindsight, I was doing this too early in the day. By doing this, I was anxiously forcing the group to change their approach to the experience. It was better to observe, listen and record the day without intervening in the gradual acclimatisation to a new situation and a new location.

O went on to recount an anecdote about being chased by a swan on a previous kayaking trip. He told us how the male swan was very aggressive; it followed him and his father for over half an hour – it was very angry with them. Upon reflection, O was evidencing what is previously discussed in chapter 2 where I state that, to make sense in new circumstances, individuals draw upon memories of similar situations from another time. O's swan anecdote made us feel wary of nature at that point but we were noticing more birds now. We saw Ducks, Swans, Cormorants and Kingfishers. The Kingfishers were beautiful; an otherworldly iridescent blue and they really made an impression upon all of us. Things started to change. The trip became something of worth, something different to the everyday – a day trip – an excursion.

We passed anglers; barely visible fishermen hunkered down in between bushes. We nodded in acknowledgement of our place in time, our location within the location. They did their best to ignore us; unfortunately, they could not ignore the washing waves we sent them from the bows of the boats. I was consciously looking and anticipating the views to come:

*Me: I'm looking forward to seeing Goodrich. Cause I've seen paintings of it and drawings of it but I've never actually seen it.*

Whilst canoeing, I had in my mind, Gilpin's images in *Observations*. I was following in the reverend's aesthetic 'wake', like the tourists who, I have previously described, had followed in the decades after his 1770 journey. I was looking forward to seeing a feature, a previously identified viewpoint, a ruin or a point of focus – something out of my daily life and out of my normal realm of understating. Analysing the recording I can recognise now that I was looking for something away from home, a view as a souvenir of the day, a memorial 'trinket'. In hindsight, I can recognize that this was more complex than it felt at the time. I was looking for a souvenir, but for whom - me, or my followers on Twitter?

I wanted to discover and prove whether the journey would have been worth it. Was the day about the journey or the destination? Or telling people about it all?

What was apparently happening was that the group was ignoring their surroundings somewhat. In the face of the ordinariness of the farmed landscape and all hailing from villages sited in similar agricultural settings, we were going onward but inward. The conversation revolved around our nervous response to the flat landscape, the unexpectedly mundane place – we were routinely going down the river.

The shape of our conversation was circular and largely insular and did not really open up until the landscape changed, or at least until we had seen more wildlife. We started to pick fault with the scenery, became critical of what people had done to the place. We blamed other people for spoiling our view, our experience and ultimately our enjoyment.

*Me: Well I wish I couldn't hear the traffic to be honest*

*O: I know, it's spoilt it a bit.*

*Me: Yeh, I can see power lines over there as well.*

*O: Who's idea was it to build it there.*

*Me: Shall we beach up? (For lunch)*

*B: Ah, isn't this ace (As we beach up – this phrase is a turning point in the journey).*

The lunch was a serene moment, the canoeing had almost become a routine and something we were doing without too much emotional engagement. We ate our food in relative quiet and I think this is when we started to take in what we were doing, we started to take notice and the foolishness subsided somewhat. It wasn't long before we were back on the water and the landscape was changing again, becoming steeper and more forested. E felt the need to comment upon this and I did too:

*E: This is absolutely fantastic, I'm loving this.*

*Me: Now this is what I imagined it was like. Trees like this*

*E: Absolutely loving this.*

*Me: I must say, I like it more when the trees are higher. So that's the castle, up there.*

*Me: That is the castle (Goodrich). I've only ever seen a drawing or a picture of that you know? I've got to photograph this – first view of it.*

I clambered to take photographs of Goodrich castle (Fig. 6.10). I remember thinking it looked nothing like the images Gilpin had produced (Fig. 6.11). It was high above the river and did not fill the frame the way Gilpin had depicted it. This provided an early realisation and confirmation for me that Gilpin did not always sketch and paint what he saw – he depicted what he wanted to see. At least it was a mark ticked off the must-see list – we had done the 'done thing' – or had we?

People were quieter, not saying so much. They appeared to be more relaxed, not only in the place but in each other's company. Not much further on, the group encountered some rapids. Again, my own experience of canoeing (over two decades ago) was not something I drew upon. My more recent viewings of extreme sport videos and Olympic games events were where my personal knowledge now resided, a series of unembodied, virtual experiences and vicariously experienced encounters. I was (as were my fellow canoeists) therefore unprepared for the actual moment. It was scary. There was the threat of tipping over and the very real possibility of injury or death as we flowed over the not very hilly water. The feeling of closeness to the edge was real and to any expert in the field might be considered to be ridiculous. But it was the 'acquaintial' (L.Stephen in Dunn, 2013) scale of the material that posed a genuine threat. To all of us, it felt very real and very dangerous.

I was at the front of our canoe, with my brother in law at the rear. The weight of the two of us caused us to ground upon a large rock. We stopped momentarily, considering our options; I considered vacating the boat but thought better of it. We scooted the canoe off the rock, scraping, the already battered base of the boat upon the surface of the



Fig. 6.10  
Goodrich Castle. Taken from the water. (Photo: G Dunn)



Fig. 6.11  
Goodrich Castle. Aquatint. 1782 William Gilpin



boulder. Moving feely away and returning to the flow of the river, we were relieved at having got away. The moment brought us closer together. The laughter was initially tempered but began to flow again as we moved away from the danger.

We landed not long after. Walked onto the banks at Lydbrook and looked at the interpretation boards that were sited there. We had a few minutes rest. Our muscles were getting sore; the day's activities were having a tangible, physical effect. When I got back into boat I felt weird. I felt more at home in the boat than on solid ground; I had become accustomed to the movement and shape of the boat in a surprisingly short time. I would like to suggest that the shared effect of experiencing the rapids and the verticalising landscape was the reason we were more outwardly aware. As a unit, we shared the excitement and the exoticism of the location:

*Me: Ah isn't this beautiful? I do much prefer it now that we're in high landscape – like this.*

We were encountering something new, something extreme and memorable to take away with us. The shape of the place helped. The steep sides that shrouded the river were a place we could project our mysticism upon, we could overlay our imaginative wanderings (Fig. 6.12). We could also point at things and share them with one another; the landscape was the focus of our collective experiences; a place we could meet, join and share outside of the group and outside of ourselves.

As the journey down the river progressed, it appeared that we could reflect on where we were more, reflect on what we might usually be doing and what it meant to us.

B: (I asked B to repeat what she had said a short time before). *I said 'I can't believe I'm doing this on a Monday and not sat at a computer arguing with people and not having to deal with some bollocks'. 'No computer No problems'*



Fig 6.12  
Approaching Caldwell Rocks (Photo: G Dunn)

We became more able to relax.

*Me: It's nice because the only direction is the way the river is going – you don't even have to think about that.*

What I was trying to say was that there were fewer decisions to make on the river. There were less opportunities to decide direction; we were moving forward and going any other way, made no sense. The activity was framed by the flow. The journey was limited by the physical force of the river pushing us from behind – we had no choice at all really, except to go and stop but with the flow behind us; we could relax knowing that we would eventually get to our destination.

*B: It's nice because you go into neutral.*

*Me: Ooh it's getting steeper and narrower look; I love it. Oh yes, you can see the rocks up there look covered in (I attempted to take more photos).*

The sides of the valley become steeper on one side in particular (our right side). Meadows roll off and over to our left. We decided to rest again at another beach-like stop on the edge of the river. We take to messing about again but the nature of the banter changes, it does not seem as hostile – it seems fun, playful almost.

We approached Symonds Yat Rock, high viewing point, hundreds of feet above our heads to the left. To the right was agricultural land, inhabited by livestock. Above our heads people looking down at us going down the river in some canoes. We must have provided some scale for the onlookers. We passed a dead cow and huge, incongruous boulders. The foliage encrusted cliffs were possibly the highlight of the day; their sheer scale and dizzying altitude seemed comparatively enormous due to our humble position on the river. I think at this point the world was forgotten – we were floating in neutral, not thinking about where we were going or where we had been. After passing the heights of the Yat lookout, the landscape began to disappointingly fall off. The views opened out

again, over farming fields and past houses and places where people lived. We passed a church and L commented on feeling like he'd been there before.

Upon re-listening to the recording of the day, it goes very quiet towards the end of the trip. Just the sound of the paddles going in and out of the water, birds like Buzzards, Cormorants and traffic in the far-off distance – or maybe it's tourist boats. We sensed we were soon approaching the Symonds Yat Leisure park. The first clue that we were nearing our destination was the onset of tourist boats (Fig. 6.13). People sat facing one another in glazed pleasure vessel; safe from the elements and bodily connection with the landscape. They did not appear to be looking beyond the confines of their craft. Our canoes wobbled wildly because of their passage and we were relieved when they had gone. I reflected upon the tradition they belonged to, the centuries of people coming to the area to experience a day out, a day trip an excursion in a different place. But if they had not seen what we had seen, had it been any different? Or was difference important to them – was 'home-from-home' a more important pre-requisite?

Nearly at our landing point, we encountered a group of young people; maybe a secondary school party with two adult guides, all white wearing white helmets and afloat in aluminium boats. They were noticeably noisy and metallically rattled as the teenagers splashed each other with their paddles. Alighting at another concrete platform. We pulled the plastic canoes from the water, heaved them onto the grass flats where we were to leave them to be collected. We got to experience the Leisure Park on foot. I took photographs but felt self-conscious in doing so (Fig. 6.14/15).



Fig. 6.13  
Approaching Symonds Yat Leisure Park (Photo: G Dunn)



Fig. 6.14 Symonds Yat Leisure Park (Image G.D)



Fig. 6.15 Symonds Yat Leisure Park (Photos: G Dunn)



We purchased a coffee, sat outside and ate the rest of our food. I found the experience of the park somewhat nostalgic; I was reminded of my grandmother and the coach trips I had taken with her as a child to Blackpool, 'Holiday on Ice' (Wembley) and the Walsall Arboretum, as well as numerous childhood holidays with my family in North Wales and North Devon. The image in (Fig. 6.16) is reminiscent of imagery I had seen by the artist Keith Arnatt in the Tate Britain, earlier in the year (Fig. 6.17).

The day made me reflect upon what I had once known for leisure and what I know and love now and the two could hardly be further apart. I (and my close family) usually choose to spend leisure time away from other people. We have been continuously drawn to sparsely populated areas largely abundant in natural characteristics. We rarely visit places where we can follow a pre-defined walking or cycling path and let ourselves be led along the way. Whilst canoeing down the Wye we had been given temporal freedom. As B had said earlier in the day, we had been in "neutral" between Ross and Symonds Yat Leisure Park. For a brief time, the river had carried us and the landscape had cradled us in a day that was more about the journey, than the destination.



Fig. 6.16  
Symonds Yat – Leisure Park (Photo: G Dunn)



Fig. 6.17  
A.O.N.B. (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)  
Keith Arnatt. 1982-1984  
Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper (220 x 283 mm)



## 6.5 Handling the Land

It has been pointed out to me by family and friends that when describing a geographical location, or giving someone directions, I utilise my hands a great deal. This way of describing the world cannot be unique to me but it has been fundamental in shaping my methodological approach to the research site of the Wye Valley. I have reflected upon this practice and how I use it to describe the actual form of a landscape.

When recounting the features of a location I motion my hands, not only to allude to the motional flow of directional movement. I use my hands to create the form of the land mass and the shape of the place I am describing. I consider the underlying structure of the land and I contemplate the apparent tactility these features hold for my sense of touch. I envisage holding the landforms in my hands and cradling the objects of topography with my grasping palms. It is not an imaginative exercise for me, it is a literal and physically manifested account of what I know to be true.

When describing the Wye Valley, I tend to cup my hands; I describe the concave, sloping valley sides and how they fall to the horizontal plane of the river at their base. I smooth my hands down the vertical surfaces of virtual cliffs and stroke the rock faces with the tips of my fingers. To offer an opposing example, I find that when describing the Malvern hills, a feature easily seen from many points in my hometown of Worcester, I am partial to rolling my hand to mimic the convex, lumber-like line of the hills spine. One is concave and the other one is convex or '(u-n)'.

I personally consider the physical shape of the Wye Valley (and the Lower Wye Valley in particular) to be a somewhat benevolent form. When walking beside the river or through the forested walkways of its inclined sides, I feel protected, sheltered and somewhat safe from harm. I sense the land above my location and consider its existence as a sheltering influence, its agency is felt beyond the field of my vision. The

land's presence allows me to relax, reconcile the moment, switch off and, as a relative once said, "switch into neutral". (B 23.9.13).

When encountering views, panoramas and long-distance vistas there is a tendency for me to feel the need to reach out and want to caress the spectacle. This is particularly the case when the prospect is encrusted with eye pleasing green foliage; countless leaves provide a tantalising visual surface over which my eyes can forage. I would suggest that the senses of sight and touch are not demarcated here; the ocular and the tactile become entwined in a different perceptive mode; it's a notion that I attempted to visually articulate in (Fig. 6.18).

## **6.6 Environmental Perception and the 'Eco-Haptic'**

The thread of my research has been physically centred; an approach that is comfortably reliant upon small numbers of participants as a means of emphasising the intimate and personally driven nature of the project. Existing literature by Abram, (1997), Paterson (2009), Serres (2008) and Tuan (2001) is pertinent, as they substantiate my belief that a comprehensive means of recording and subsequent recollection of site is achieved via physical immersion in a location. An experience that makes demands upon a broad modality of senses, a more multi-modal encounter, experiencing how it feels to be in a landscape will produce a more comprehensive set of data outcomes.

Prior to this research project, I have speculated upon my vocation as an artist with a materially focused practice (Dunn, 2013). I have identified a personal affinity with manipulating materials; I use my hands and employ tools and techniques to work with materials in the creation of artworks.

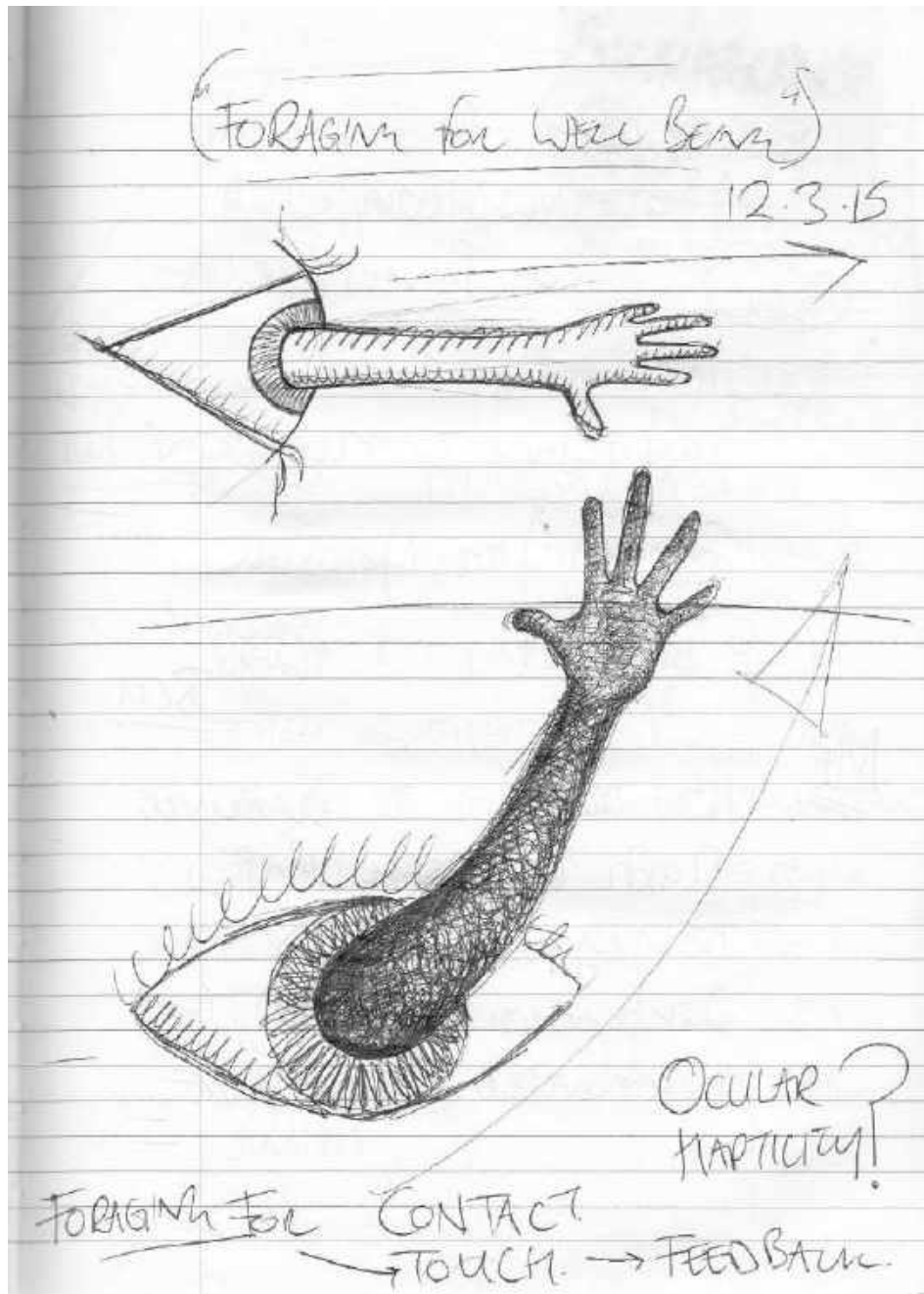


Fig. 6.18  
Notebook sketch.

Haptic encounters have driven my designs, bodily responses to the physical characteristics of stuff have fashioned the results. Consequently, I believe in an approach to experiencing the physical world before us that is haptically motivated; the overriding tendency to touch is intermingled with a visual sensitivity to texture. Distant trees are therefore, no less touchable. Ranges of hills are traceable landforms, malleable masses and textured prospects are within the hands grasp.

I have approached this research project as an artist concerned with the sensual qualities of materials and hand-centered material manipulation; I believe that for me, the world is experienced in a way that has been shaped by such encounters. I have endeavored to understand if this approach is more widely felt. Literature to substantiate such an outlook has been procured from a broad range of sources and has yielded content that comes close to confirming my hypothesis.

When considering the role touch plays in experiencing the world, anthropologist Ashley Montagu (1905-1999) stresses the importance of the skin as a sensory organ in his book *Touching: The Human Significance of the Skin* (1971). I consider Montagu to be alluding to the idea of an intermingled set of sensorial circumstances when he says: 'Touch is the parent of our eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. It is the sense which became differentiated into the others, a fact that seems to be recognized in the age-old evaluation of touch as 'the mother of the senses.' (Montagu, 1971:1). He also describes human skin as being a physical repository for memory when he says: 'Furthermore, the skin, as we know from human faces, carries its own memory of conditions experienced in the remote and immediate past' (*Ibid* :3). (This substantiates aspects of my theory of 'Geo-Emotionality' (Dunn, 2013) which I will refer to elsewhere in this thesis).

Montagu further illuminates the centrality of skin to human experience and its entanglement within our culture when he says:

The 'feel' of a thing is important to us in more ways than one; and 'feeling' for another embodies much of the kind of experience which we have ourselves under gone through the skin. A deeply felt experience is 'touching.' Pleasure in a work of art gives some of us 'goose pimples'. (Montagu, 1971:6)

It is useful, for my argument, to have Montague describe the expression of physical empathy of both the animate (humans) and inanimate ('works of art'). He makes no distinction between the two states and, I would suggest, is proffering the notion of emotion as a physical manifestation; a combination of cutaneous and optical states, of touch and vision.

My own personal notion of an integrated account of sight and touch has synergies with the work of Professor Katrín Anna Lund (University of Iceland, Reykjavík Institute of Life and Environmental Sciences) as outlined in her paper *Seeing in Motion and the Touching Eye Walking over Scotland's Mountains* (Lund, 2005). Lund proposes that mountaineers, encountered during her fieldwork in Scotland, look out upon the world through acquainted bodily involvements and more specifically moving encounters within the location. Lund observed that participants accrue a materially centred experience, one gained through peripatetic encounters with mountains and speak of this knowledge colouring the view of any subsequent encounters with similar topography. Lund introduces the terms 'the reflecting eye' and 'the touching eye' (Lund, 2005:29), the latter being the most appropriate for this research. I have also encountered similar descriptions of eyes as a touching appendage for example in the phrase 'The eye licks it all up instantaneously' when Virginia Woolf comments on her first experience of cinema (Woolf & Bradshaw, 2008) and 'Feely Eyes' by Eva Hayward, talking about tentacular corals (Hayward, 2010). Lund states of observing mountaineers that:

My argument is that in order to understand how the eyes perceive the surroundings it has to be examined in relation to the moving body and how it moves. I claim that incorporated in the movement is a tactile sensation that needs

to be considered in order to understand the vistas appreciated by the mountaineer. (Lund, 2005:28)

Lund claims that the mountaineer's movements contribute to their physically centred account of the topography (see also Stephen, L. in Dunn, 2013). Their embodied experience informs the visual and ocular prospect and readies the individual for the oncoming exertion. They feel their way up, over and through the landscape. They become well-versed in the requirements of what lies ahead with their movements measuring the way. Lund says:

To be able to realise the body as a landscape the mountaineer must see, as well as hear and smell and, *most importantly, touch*. It also appears that through the process, in which the mountaineer and the surroundings emerge, a degree of distance is needed for measuring. This brings me to my final discussion or that of the touching eye that sets out to gaze over the surroundings. (Lund, 2005:37, *my emphasis*)

Lund describes how the embodied peripatetic experience of landscape informs the drawing process of several Scottish climbers; how they map the world, not as views but as physically educated accounts of nature. Lund also makes a useful reference to William Gilpin, acknowledging him as a proponent of a dynamic approach to experiencing the landscape, an approach that gives a more comprehensive account of the world; one that promotes an experience of 'atmosphere' (Gilpin in Lund, 2005:32) and not just the conformity of place to picture.

When considering human/spatial relations via a haptic/optic approach, it is also helpful to consider the writing of Finnish architect, Juhani Pallasmaa (b.1936). Although describing how humans relate to architectural space, Pallasmaa's book, *The Eyes of the Skin: Architecture and the Senses* (2005), usefully articulates the experience as an embodied situation that is rooted in touch. His account can also be appropriately applied to predominantly natural spaces found in the Wye Valley:

All the senses, including vision, are extensions of the tactile sense; the senses are specialisations of skin tissue, and all the sensory experiences are modes of touching and thus related to tactility. (Pallasmaa, 2012:10)

Pallasmaa supportively speaks of a materially pre-determined approach to sight. He argues that the way we see has been educated by what we have touched and that this applies when experiencing objects at close and in distant proximity:

Vision reveals what touch already knows. We could think of the sense of touch as the unconscious of vision. Our eyes stroke distant surfaces, contours and edges, and the unconscious tactile sensation determines the agreeableness or unpleasantness of the experience. The distant and the near are experienced with the same intensity, and they merge into coherent experience. (Pallasmaa, 2012:42)

The Czech filmmaker and Surrealist artist, Jan Švankmajer says on touch/vision (b.1934)

Quite a special relationship exists between Touch and Vision that is not found among the other senses, at least not in the same measure. In the course of the working process, Touch has become significantly dependent on Vision. It established a kind of perceptual unity that could be regarded as false synaesthesia. (Švankmajer, Dalby, & Vasseleu, 2014:79)

A noteworthy consequence of approaching research with this rubric is that it proposes a mutually beneficial connection between the viewer and their surroundings; Recalling what Derek Gladwin says, '...landscape photography serves as an ideal subject in forming what I am calling the *eco-haptic* (my italics), which uses visual tactility to develop a deeper, abiding relationship with the environment, resulting in a greater capacity for empathy and responsibility' (Gladwin, 2013: 161). I would argue that a broad range of creative media is capable of endorsing such an effect, especially as a means of endorsing a deeper feeling of connectedness for research participants.

It follows that visual representations of the Wye Valley, (formally represented in Aquatint by William Gilpin in 1782) and other historical representations can be subjected to

'visual haptic scrutiny', as much as are contemporary representations of landscape such as those found upon the internet, Smartphones and, those contained within the dynamic visual realm of videogames and in photographs taken by visitors to the AONB. However, there are other aspects which impact on approaches to study regarding the movement of an individual through the landscape versus the recording of a moment in time via an image. There is evidence to suggest that they are part of an interrelated complex of experience of being in the landscape and making sense of the interaction, rationalizing it, or as discussed, framing it within a personal context of experience. This seems so in Gilpin's approach where he embellished his drawings to enhance subjective framing and in recent work by Costa (2014) which identifies more fully, the kinaesthetic experience and rhythm of interaction (Bannon in Coles & Millman, 2013) when walking through highly vegetal areas. In her study, Costa identifies that the pace of walking changes from rapid to slow and in cases of intense meaningful interaction, which can be described by both the eco-haptic and framing concepts which appear to align, being compelled to stop and stare, sit down or take a picture. The narratives which accompanied Costa's observations clearly demonstrated that periodic framing was occurring to a sophisticated extent, that it was at its most refined when static or possibly required the observer to be static and that the observer derived great contentment through the process of being in the landscape and remembering significant positive events cued by the qualities of the vegetation.

The indications are that representations of the landscape as moment of time/experience/framing, as a series of framed events, possibly embellished through drawing or narrative, represents a sophisticated method of perception which can be translated into a methodology.



## **Chapter 7. Life Outside of the Frame: Encounters with Wye Valley Artists**

### **7.1 Introduction**

When the amateur artist, Reverend William Gilpin, described a journey he took down the River Wye in the Summer of 1770 and published it as *Observations of the River Wye* in 1783, he unwittingly unleashed an arguably visually myopic (Howett in Thompson, 2006) tourist population upon the area. Predominantly framed portrayals of landscape, visually steered by the standards that Gilpin defined as Picturesque, have gone on to influence artistic encounters of visitors for nearly two and a half centuries (Peterken, 2008). This chapter directly questions the influence of the location upon contemporary practitioners and considers Gilpin's way of seeing and its relevance to artists living and working in the area today.

This chapter examines views expressed, about the Wye Valley AONB, by a set of living artists. The artists (listed in chronological order of interview date) are painter and writer, Susan Peterken; potter Walter Keeler, painter Doug Eaton and photographer David Hurn. Although the line of questioning developed over time, naturally evolving from each successive meeting, the collected responses centred around the effect of place upon people and practice and in particular the effect of Lower Wye Valley from Ross to Chepstow. Each of the practitioners is a resident of, or lives close to, the Wye Valley.

As geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan states:

The visual quality of environment is quickly tallied if one has the artist's eye. But the "feel" of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years.  
(Tuan: 183)

To evidence Tuan's statement, I specifically chose to interview individuals that have been involved in art practice for at least thirty years; a parameter I imposed on the selection. Each artist was interviewed utilising a semi-structured interviewing style to

procure a personal viewpoint, and one that would emerge from a face to face conversation. “The aim of the interview,” Uwe Flick says, “is to obtain the individual views of the interviewees on an issue. Thus questions should initiate dialogue between interviewer and interviewee” (Flick, 2011: 112). Few questions were initially asked of the interviewees, the intention being that conversation would flow more naturally and therefore lead to more interviewee centred responses.

As I was approaching the project from the standpoint of being an art practitioner myself, my aesthetic expertise and networking abilities would be most effectively utilised to meet and foreground the work of other living artists. Artist interviews were central to the research project, as they adhered to two out of three of the stated research aims. Interviewing living artists, asking them to reflect upon their individual processes, gave us the opportunity to: *Investigate contemporary experiences of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* and logically led us consider the location *through the lens of artists and creative processes*.

Being a trained artist, it is important to draw attention to the first work of art to physically and emotionally connect me to the Wye Valley. It was a pastel drawing by long-time St Briavels resident (twenty-four years in 2017), Susan Peterken. It depicts the rock formation known as the Caldwell Rocks, sited next to the river between Ross and Symonds Yat East (Great Britain. Environment Agency. 2008). I have seen the rocks with my own eyes; viewed them from the river as I canoed past them (Sept 2014). They are blanketed in foliage, topped with trees and as a result are not as proud as they appear in Peterken’s pastel rendering. They merge into the valley sides; glide by in a boat and you might miss them.

I first saw a depiction of the image in *Landscapes of the Wye Tour* (Peterken 2008), a book based on *Based on the Wye Tour* exhibition held by the Wye Valley Art Society in 2004 (Fig. 7.1). The second time, I saw the actual pastel rendering when interviewing Peterken at her home on Monday July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014. Viewed in the flesh, I found it's stark and smooth verticality, visually fascinating; it reminded me of a favourite charcoal rendering of the Hoover Dam (c.1941) (Whitney Museum of Art, 1986:6) by Hugh Ferriss (1889-1962) (Fig. 7.2). I consider it to be a highly original work and one which is enormously contrary to the aesthetic expectations of the landscape genre usually elicited in the Wye Valley AONB. Unlike the actual location, Peterken's arguably tactile topography is devoid of any foliage, life-forms or indeed, anything that hints at the scale of the piece. It's a volumetrically depicted landscape, described boldly, simply and for me personally, it invites a kind of haptic interaction; I want to touch the shapes and hold them with my hands. Peterken has used warm hues, tones of red, orange and pink; the work is almost body-like in that its depiction has more in common with the biological than the geological.

My most recently considered representation of the Wye Valley (encountered on 29.03.2017) is by Edward Burra (1905 – 1976). Titled *Wye Valley I* and painted between 1968-1971 after visiting the area in 1968 (Stevenson, 2007:476) the image is produced in pencil, watercolour and gouache (Fig. 7.3). Apparently produced from memory (Causey 1985), the painting offers a remarkably similar approach to the depiction of the landscape with that of Peterken's and one which I would argue, is equally analogous in its appeal to the sense of touch. The formal arrangement is equally conducive to haptic sensibilities with only Burra's white birds left to bely the handheld scale of the haptic prospect.



Fig. 7.1  
Caldwell Rocks - Pastel. Susan Peterken

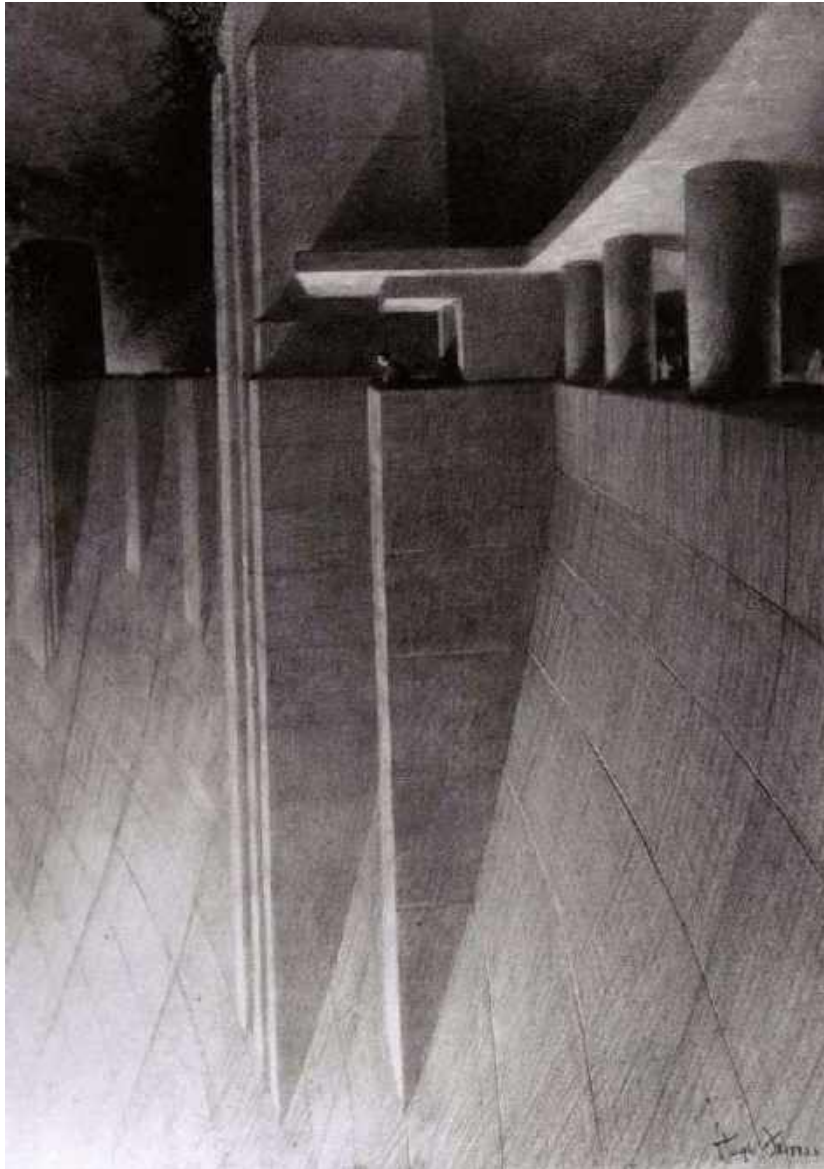


Fig. 7.2  
Hoover Dam (c.1941) - Charcoal. Hugh Ferriss.



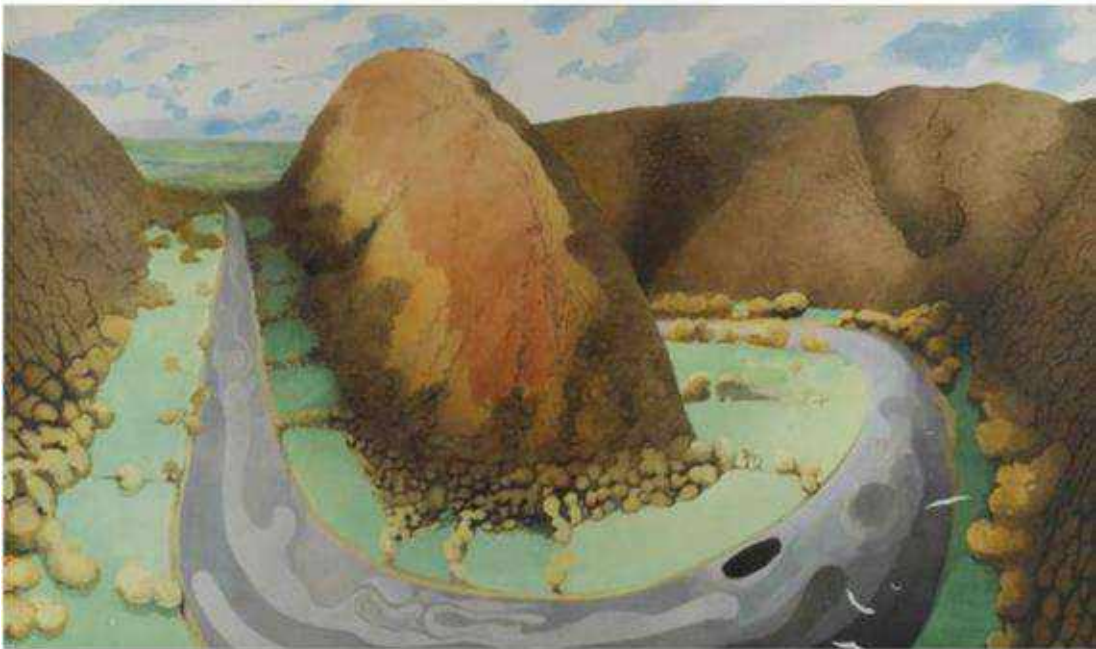


Fig. 7.3

Edward Burra, *Wye Valley I*, Pencil, watercolour and gouache  
80cm X 136cm.

In the 2011 BBC documentary, *I Never Tell Anybody Anything: The Life and Art of Edward Burra*, writer and presenter of the programme, Andrew Graham Dixon appropriately and satisfyingly supports my own view of Burra's landscape as being something anthropomorphically human in context when he says:

Burra's landscapes are evidence of his prescient environmental awareness, but they also express more complicated emotions than a simple and sentimental love of nature. His version of the natural world is a metamorphic, shape shifting place. *Hills and valleys swell and heave like living forms. Clefts made by paths or streams often resemble the orifices and declivities of a body. Skies pulse with ominous energy. Clouds haunt the land like spirits.'*

(Graham Dixon & BBC, 2011; 52:05, *my emphasis*)

Neither artwork reflects the previously defined and confined iconography; the compliant foliage filled, aesthetic palette of the 'Picturesque', established nearly two hundred years ago.

As far as I can see, neither work is traditionally obedient in that way, but they do share a similar vantage point; a prospect projected from the living body, which is a response to the body presence of the earth. The work of both artists echoes my own experience of landscape perception and illuminates the associated investigations into the intrinsic haptic qualities of the Wye Valley.

## **7.2 Susan Peterken**

Susan and George Peterken arrived in the Wye Valley in 1993. At the time of the interview in 2014 they had spent over half a century together; "they had met 52 years previously, as students at the University College London on a botany field course" (Norfolk Coast National Trust 2014) (Fig. 7.4). It is worth mentioning here that George is a highly acclaimed woodland ecologist who received an OBE in 1994 for his services to forestry. Susan and George had a home that was welcoming, comfortable and visibly

established. They declined my request to record the interview and so my work here is reliant on notes I made at their St. Briavels home.

The interview was informally structured, I prepared a few questions before but did not go into detail as I wanted the conversation to be serendipitous in nature (Interview transcript in Appendices). When I asked about their reasons for moving to the area, George jokingly recounted the time he had said to Susan (after a Wye Valley work visit in the nineteen seventies) that “he would retire in the Wye Valley”. He had clearly been impressed by the place and they did not wait for him to retire; they moved to the Valley in 1993. Upon their arrival, it had not been immediately obvious to Susan, that the area was the site of guided tourism and a key location in the formation of the Picturesque art movement. The Wye Valley’s place in the formulation of the aesthetic appreciation of landscape hid under the canopy of the trees and beneath the overgrown riverbanks. The area, as someone else had said to me “is a good place to hide” (Wragg-Smith 2014) and as George remarked, “it’s an area that’s overlooked”, a place deemed to be “not far enough away for people”. Without the intervention and interpretation that is offered today by the AONB for example, it’s easy to see how the area’s history could so easily have remained hidden. As an amateur artist who was painting before her arrival, Susan “decided, almost on impulse, to join a creative writing class in 1995” (Wye Valley Writers, 2008). She is quoted in her bio on the Wye Valley Writers web-site:

I have been a painter for very much longer than I have been writing and am amazed at how similar the creative processes of the two can be. A feeling of calm certainty very occasionally washes over me when writing or painting are flowing particularly well, as if someone else is taking over the creation. These rare moments are what keep me painting and writing. (*Ibid*)

This quote gives an insight into the long-time importance of the creative process for Susan Peterken. I asked her to tell me what she looks for in the landscape and how she approaches the world, particularly when painting.





Fig. 7.4

George Peterken and Susan Peterken (Blakeney Point, Norfolk May 2014)

<http://norfolkcoastnationaltrust.blogspot.co.uk/2014/05/>

Interestingly, Susan quickly remarked that “there are no rules if you are a painter”; a somewhat remarkable statement, considering her undoubted knowledge of the Picturesque movement and its associated ‘rules’.

Early in the interview I asked Susan, “Do you have an empathy with landscape?” I was interested in her response, particularly when she mentioned a personally meaningful location by name: “Place, as a child, was very important to me. Every view is in my brain. Moving to Boscastle made me appreciate landscape.” I have a personal acquaintance with Boscastle, although I have never lived there. I have been there many times over the past thirty years. I have known it in different weathers and at various times of the year. Susan Peterken’s perception of the landscape’s agency is understandable, particularly in that part of North Cornwall, the thickly foliated valley shelters the village’s inhabitants from the harsh coastal forces of wind and sea; and the rough and rolling coast does not offer any means of protection to people bold enough to rise out of the compassionate valleys. I can see why Susan would find the location inspirational; it’s contrasting, steep and arboreal entwined features feel corporeal, like an extension of our own bodies.

When I asked Susan Peterken about the pastel depiction of Caldwell Rocks, she responded by saying “I was trying to do landscapes that looked like they hadn’t been done before...through a new way of looking”. She also expressed the opinion that the work is “not expressionist or emotional”. I would argue that the work, in my view, is both “expressionistic” and “emotional”. I wanted to understand why? I feel she has succeeded in presenting an unusual view of the Wye Valley, one that she coincidentally shares with Burra and myself. She went on, again referring to the image when she said, “the shapes and colours are as important as the subject”. She appears to have weighed up the cost of not employing direct representation (being un-conformist) with one that could just as easily have been captured in a photograph (and thus probably been more

aesthetically palatable to others). She has chosen to offer a more somatically centred account of the world; one that is clearly articulated when she says: “I have felt that curve” commenting on a line she has drawn from the landscape. This also shows that she recognises the agency of the mass and form of the topography. This evaluation is further enhanced by her statement that “I aim to get the feel of the structure of the place”.

Nearing the end of the interview, and referring to how artists portray the world, Susan Peterken said, “you’ve got to simplify it”. I would argue that she was referring to sensory, as well as aesthetic simplification. Was she overwhelmed by the task of portraying the natural world in every detail because our sense of sight is ultimately too limiting? Being open to considering the sensation of touching the topography, as opposed to purely seeing it, may have heightened her memory of the encounter and distilled the moments into a more powerful set of components. It is prescient to note that Susan consciously considers alternative modes of sensory experience when working, evident when she said, “Through walking...I know what the landscape *feels* like” (*my emphasis*). It’s apparent that an alternative view of the world can be garnered by not placing so much importance upon our ocular perceptions.

### **7.3 Walter Keeler**

Whilst setting up the site at Llandogo for the Wye Valley River Festival, in May 2014, Wye Valley AONB Community Links Officer, Sarah Sawyer introduced me to Monmouthshire County Councillor, Debby Blakebrough (Councillor for Trellech United ward). Debby and I talked about the collaborative PhD research project and it soon transpired that she knew the studio potter and ceramicist, Walter Keeler (Fig. 7. 5). Walter is a long-time resident (forty years) of Penallt and I am familiar with his work, having seen it whilst studying Applied Arts at the University of Derby (1993 - 1996). Walter trained at Harrow School of Art

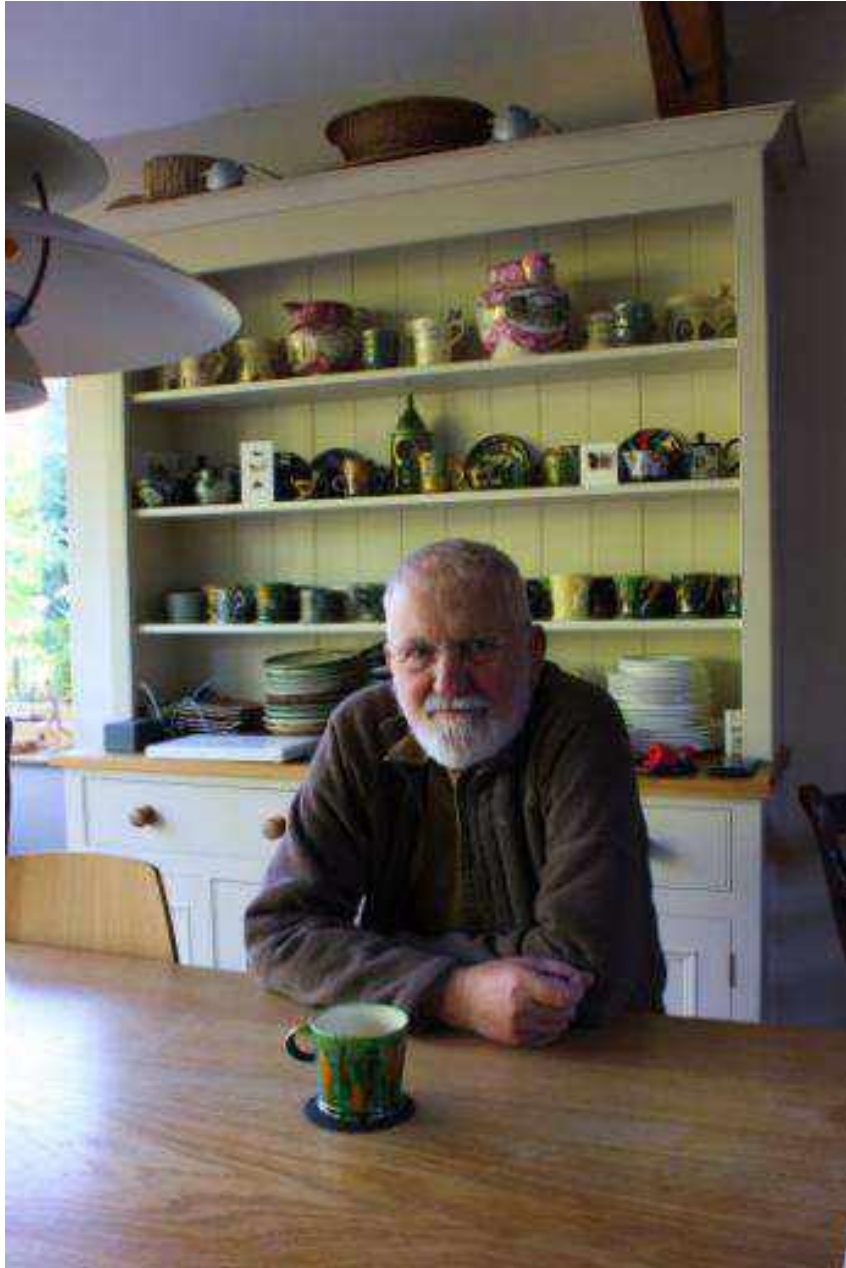


Fig 7.5  
Walter Keeler at his home in Penallt. (Sept 2015)  
(Photo: G Dunn)

from 1958-1963 under the tutorage of Michael Casson and Victor Margrie. He has tutored at various UK art schools, notably Harrow, Central School of Art, London and then in Bristol at the University of the West of England, where he became Professor of Ceramics in 1994. He set up his Penallt pottery with his wife Madoline, also a studio potter in 1976 (Casson 1991).

His work is well-known and can be found in galleries world-wide, and his work is very distinctive. He has become known for his blue-green salt glazed domestic-ware; clean lined, almost machine precise vessels that are inspired by sheet metal tin oil cans. His more recent output is largely earthenware, inspired by eighteenth century Staffordshire Ware and brightly glazed in colour, and for me are, the colours are reminiscent of those covering Chinese Tang Dynasty burial pottery. Walter's contemporary ceramic profiles are what drew me to him; his latest works integrate features found in nature

Walter's ceramics now incorporate elements abstracted from nature, tree trunks, twigs and thorns now appear from his pots, echoing the historically sourced 'Crabstock' features found on some eighteenth-century teapots. Crabstock pottery became prevalent in Staffordshire in the Eighteenth Century, it's broadly described as ceramic design incorporating features found in nature, twigs, leaves and vines for example (Smith 2012). For me, Walter's work is as tantalisingly tactile as ever but interestingly they now contain details that might be considered repellent to a modern audience more used to a modernist formalism.

Debby kindly contacted Walter by email on my behalf to ask if he would mind being interviewed. He agreed to see me and I subsequently interviewed him at his home in Penallt on two occasions, firstly on 24<sup>th</sup> July 2014 and again on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015. The weather was sunny on the day of the first interview. The road from the campsite, where I was based, to Penallt was extremely steep but I cycled the route all the same; I

was determined to arrive on time and not disappoint Walter. Arriving half an hour early, I explored the surrounding area; I took a short walk down a tree lined tunnel of a lane near Walter's house and was taken with how similar the scene was to others I had experienced, elsewhere in the Wye Valley. Later in the day, I photographed the scene and uploaded the images onto my 'Twitter feed' (Fig. 7.6). The nature of the location seemed fitting for an interview with an artist and appropriately set the scene for my enquiries.

I recorded the interview, which took approximately one hour to complete (Interview transcript in Appendices). We spoke informally, either side of the recorded discussion and Walter made me lunch, gave me a tour his workshops, storage space and kilns. I had pre-prepared broad questions such as: why did you move to the Wye Valley? Were you aware of the Wye Tour or the Picturesque when you moved to the area? And do you think the Wye Valley is reflected in your work? These were intended as a means of leading the conversation to a point where I could talk about framing. I had become interested in the concept of framing because of my enquiries in to the Reverend Gilpin's cordoned vista assessments of the Wye Valley: captured in his 'Claude Glass' and visually contrived into his resulting manuscript, (I would go on to speak about contemporary framing at the Royal Geographical Society Annual Conference in London a few weeks later.) I started by asking Walter about place and how it affects his work. He responded by saying:



Fig. 7. 6

Twitter Image 24<sup>th</sup> July 2014

*I had arrived early in Penallt, for the interview with Walter Keeler. I was very hot as I had cycled from the base of the Wye Valley to the common, climbing a steep ascent of over 200 metres. Initially passing Walter's house, I decided to rest at the entrance to a shrouded pathway. It was so cool underneath the trees and the draw to walk into the woods was irresistible. I rested there, cooled down for about 15 minutes before setting off again and knocking upon Walter's door.*

You know, I'm making tea pots, pots and mugs but those mugs are me – they are who I am. You are implying (from our conversation so far) that the place has an effect on you as well. I mean partly, it's a question of choice, isn't it? I decided I'd rather live here instead of the middle of London or in a village (we're in a fairly isolated spot). I mean I'd quite like to live in a village I guess but I'm very happy here because I like being close to nature, in a way but then there's nothing very natural about the British landscape at the best of times. (0:38)

Walter says that “choice” has played a part in his practice. He identifies that the ceramics that he makes, reflect who he has chosen to be, and I would argue, they aesthetically reflect where he has chosen to live. He has elected to live in an environment that is largely vegetative in nature as opposed to London where he was brought up. I would suggest that, after meeting Walter, in his home and seeing the work he produces there, he is a man that is sensitive to his surroundings and consciously incorporates its characteristics as a means of communication, but what is he trying to communicate?

Walter was born and brought up in London. He told me that during the 1950s, when he was a boy and when the city was pock-marked by the bombs dropped during the war, he had enjoyed “Mud-Larking” - playing alongside the river Thames, finding fascinating vessels, fragments of ancient pottery and taking them home. It is also interesting to note that he said, “We were *river focused*” (my emphasis). He expressed the opinion that those experiences had sown the seeds of a long and active interest in British pottery and I would suggest that his “River focus” might have been decisive in his “choice” to move to Penallt.

Walter is a practitioner for whom making is largely inseparable from who he is. He has worked with clay for over fifty years and he intimately knows the material, and its inherent properties, intimately. My line of questioning was attempting to unearth how conscious he was as to the influence of place upon the resulting material manifestations. Walter



is aware that the vegetation that surrounds his home is not inherently 'wild'; man's hands have intervened in its formation. Walter also recognises that the actions of man have influenced, not only his artworks but also conceptually underpinned the reasons as to *why* they were made in the first place.

...it's also that sense of it being an ancient landscape that the influences (or the forces) that people have brought to change the landscape are still in evidence. Sometimes, and especially in the Wye Valley, there all sorts of strange and wonderful things; you could be in the wildest and kind of natural seeming environment and then you think what's this over here, you come across a bit of old machinery because it was a tin works. The fact that it's been transformed from a wild place to an industrial place in effect and then it's kind of found its way back again. And the odd bits that you find around the artefacts, maybe odd bits of wood and so on are rather special – you come back to the eighteenth century and the Picturesque and that sense of time passing – things crumbling and getting ivy on them. So, all of that is part and parcel of me and what I find rewarding in the place. (2:40)

It was good to hear Walter mention the "Picturesque". The artist suggested that the roughness and broken lined aesthetic, inherent in its visual catalogue, is easy to locate in the Wye Valley. It's interesting because it resonates stylistically with eighteenth-century ceramics produced in the UK at the time. Walter collects such examples of historical domestic-ware and, as I shall go on to demonstrate, it's interesting to see how they pertain to the same visual index: one grounded in ocular aspects of the Picturesque.

Walter suggested that he is part of an ongoing cycle of makers, he employs a visual vocabulary drawn from the past, where he lives and from collecting historical objects that visually echo human/environment interaction. He recognises the interweaving connection between place and people and the significant part that nature plays within that relationship. Walter can command clay, but he is still really open to the possibility that the material can teach him something. He allows the clay to have agency and become a co-creator in the process. He says:

One of the things I love about pottery is the clay will always, always respond; whatever you impose on it, *the clay will always have its say* and I love that because I impose a lot sometimes and I can be very dogmatic when I'm handling the stuff. (8:50, *my emphasis*)

He admits to “provoking” clay, and in turn the clay “provokes him”, to yield new and unpredictable creative conditions. Walter admits to having allowed the landscape to enter his work. Though the influence was apparently unconscious at first, Walter now appears completely aware of the extent to which his surroundings affect him and his practice. He appears very content to engage with the world through material means, accrediting his approach to a preceding global history of potters. The resulting works communicate his recognition of the ever-changing face of the fields that surround his home.

Walter expressed his frustration at the apparent depletion of “skills” amongst contemporary artists and makers. This disappointment with diminishment extended to what he perceived to be a lack of respect for such abilities by the wider world. Walter seemed to be suggesting that we can learn much about ourselves from direct material engagement. I took this to be his belief in his practice and (importantly for this research) his approach to our corporeal relationship with the natural world.

Walter’s way of working is largely process-based, revealing a mutually guided reciprocity that has developed over decades. His openness to outside forces has been curiously reflected in other ways too. His efforts to manage his large garden (and a series of adjacent fields) have resulted in nature, in the form of wild flowers and orchids, repopulating said areas in a way that Walter said he finds pleasing and ultimately fulfilling.

Being a predominantly visual communicator, it is essential to consider Walter’s specific visual vocabulary and how the landscape is embodied in his creative output. Consider

the two vessels on the next page (Figs 7.7 and 7.8). The first is an image of an earthenware teapot produced by the Whieldon-Wedgwood partnership in Staffordshire between 1754 and 1759 (McDowall 2013). Its earth-based hues are indicative of its rural inspiration, as are the leaves that cradle the pot's body. The gently gnarled spout and handles are abstracted and contorted into domestic service. The teapot could have appeared from the hedgerow or appeared from under a gooseberry bush; it is of the earth and has clearly been brought from there.

Academic, Kate Smith, a specialist in Eighteenth Century material culture writes that ceramics of this kind, mostly produced in Staffordshire potteries in the mid-to-late Eighteenth Century, were designed to be held, they were made to be touched and their polished finish made them attractive for other reasons, "The shiny surface reflects light, and is perhaps more pleasurable to touch, linked as it is to polished metal, a valuable material in eighteenth-century culture" (Smith, 2012:7). Objects like this were inherently valuable in haptic terms and I would argue that Walter's work is equally as valuable today.

Walter's 2006 teapot faithfully follows the feel of the two-hundred-year-old Whieldon ware. Walter however, has exaggerated the 'Crabstock' features, almost caricaturing them and he has simplified the overall form. This makes for an equally inviting piece of work. The teapot is commensurately modern and undeniably contemporary in its appearance. This is largely due to its refined outline, its shiny and saturated, bottle-green body is more mechanically reminiscent than its earthier predecessor and therefore more indicative of Walters machined influences. Walter's teapot displays an integrated manifestation of an authentic production process and the 'natural' world with the artist being the catalyst.



Fig. 7. 7

Teapot, Thomas Whieldon, Staffordshire, England. Circa C18<sup>th</sup>

<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/a/a-to-z-of-ceramics/>



Fig. 7. 8

Walter Keeler, Green Thorn and Crabstock Tea Pot, 2006

Green Whieldon-glazed earthenware H 22cm W 19cm D 12.5cm

<http://www.adriansassoon.com/contemporary/ceramics.html?view=artist&id=16>

He has exaggerated the cut stems from hedgerows and united them with the simplistic bodies of the pots in a mutually supportive symbiosis. The growth has been pruned, giving the impression of the hedges that surround the artist's home. He voiced his fascination with the 'Crabstock' features; the branches, twigs and stems often used to embellish the pots. He recognised that these historically sited features are reinforced annually in the place he calls home.

I began to notice that of course that was being influenced by the hedges. Because the farmers, these days. Very few hedges are laid these days. Because they flower back every year or every other year and then where they've been chopped off they sprout again and then they're chopped off again and they sprout again so they get these very distinctive growth structures. So that has been a strong influence directly from the landscape from just walking down that green lane – round and about. I didn't ever consciously think about that until I spotted it. (28:58)

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, I intended my enquiries to be centred around framing the natural world and the formulation of Gilpin's Picturesque guidelines. I wanted to question Walter as to the existence of framing in his work. I put it to him that people are framing the world in a comparable way to Gilpin when I said:

He [Gilpin] said in the frame you should have this, this and this and will be beautiful and it's interesting that he used the Claude Glass [Walter gasped]. And he did used to stand in front of something and paint it over his shoulder. And of course, people are now taking 'selfies' of themselves with a similar sized item. It's framing now. (44:26)

Walter responded rather obliquely by contextualising his practice as being *framed* by an inherited tradition; a tradition that linked him to countless generations of makers that had existed before him. He acknowledged their efforts, how they had done the groundwork, in terms of technical progression, but had also by laying down an aesthetic recognition of the natural world. Walter's response was an interesting one which I had not

considered. His practice was defined, to some degree, by pre-existing making guidelines, aesthetic standards, domestic necessity and its associated nomenclature.

I see what I'm doing in the context of the activity having carried in for as long people have lived settled lives. As long as people have lived settled lives they've found ways to make pots. However primitive they might be and however crudely fired. And there's the relationship between those objects and people's lives and I can see that (45:00)

But within the frame of being a studio potter, Walter stated that he has constantly made attempts to experiment and push the envelope of his making process. He mentioned that he has interrogated the role of "ethical pot" and the technologically minimal approach to making. He acknowledges that he is influenced by mass production manufacturing, considered taboo by some ceramic purists, notably Walter mentioned Bernard Leach as being a proponent of the hand-made in its simplest form and as someone who might have been an opponent to his way of working.

The interview was beneficial to the research project because of the artist's self-conscious clarity of the connection between the Wye Valley, his process and the subsequent artefacts he produced. Walter was profoundly affected by the knowledge of intimate contact that his work goes on to have with people; mouths drinking from his mugs and people holding them in their hands. Walter's accrued material and intellectual knowledge is put to good use in communicating his own intermingling relationship with nature, as well as those of previous human encounters and I would go as far as including William Gilpin in those encounters. His ceramics act as a means of distilling an amassed experience of place and allows direct physical contact with his understanding of the world.

## 7.4 Doug Eaton

Many have identified Doug's works as abstract or semi-abstract, but this does not really do them justice. With his creative twist and masterly handling of paint, he imbues them with a personal imprint that portrays pattern, light, form and colour, but can always be discerned as a tangible scene. ...His passion for the area is palpable in every painting and it's clear that it's not just the light shining through the trees and the colours that are created in this way that affect him, but the entire landscape; the social and industrial aspects of the location he knows so well.

(Hodge 2013)

The landscape painter, Doug Eaton first came to my attention via internet searches that I conducted in mid-2013. My online investigations centred upon artists that principally use the Wye Valley as the main focus of their work (Fig. 7.9). The Forest of Dean is Doug's home; he describes himself as a "Forester", he was born there and has lived there for most his adult life. Along with wooded areas in the Wye Valley, it's a place he regularly paints. I thought it appropriate to interview him because he is a painter of *occluded views*, a common feature of the Wye Valley and one which I described in chapter 3. He is a prolific artist and one who paints every day. He employs a broad spectrum of brilliant colours, angular mark-making and un-conventional composition to convey a dynamically experienced view of the landscape (Fig.7.10). His view of landscape is, by his own reckoning, not one that is naturalistic or purely representational.

I interviewed Doug at his home in Mile End, situated on the edge of the Forest of Dean (Interview transcript in Appendices). His house faces the forest and he paints in a room out of which he can see nothing but trees. We sit at the back of his house, share coffee and biscuits and I ask him questions. Like Walter Keeler, Doug is aware of the industrial heritage that exists in the area and understands the role that it has played in physically manipulating the shape, colour and character of the landscape. It has played a key part in influencing the content of his paintings:

This is an area that has been traditionally very industrial. Very fundamental stuff like getting coal out the ground, stone out the ground, colours out the ground, the iron out the ground. So, if you like, it's changed now so you haven't got that. It lingers there like everything else – it lingers. There are little tiny bits of evidence of that everywhere. (7:19)

Doug calls our attention to the elemental colours of materials excavated from the ground; (iron ore and paint pigment used to be mined in nearby Clearwell). The forest may have obscured such material excavations, holes, caves and caverns but Doug knows they are there, he's aware of the fact that they are part of the forest now. Susie Hodge, in the magazine 'Painters' (and the accompanying web-site 'Painters articulates the notion that Doug incorporates more than what he sees into his work.

His passion for the area is palpable in every painting and it's clear that it's not just the light shining through the trees and the colours that are created in this way that affect him, but the entire landscape; the social and industrial aspects of the location he knows so well. (Hodge 2013)

Returning to my intended line of enquiry, I ask him if he is aware of William Gilpin and the legacy of the Picturesque in the Wye Valley?

Gilpin, Oh Christ yeh', fairly early on, obviously I was fairly aware of what had happened and who had come to the area. I knew that Turner had painted in the Wye Valley and things like that. I managed to get my work in the window of a local shop and that was like ...I was only a kid – you know, what would I have been? twenty/twenty-one. I'd just finished College at Cheltenham. I had to get out because my dad died; we had no money and it was the second year of my Diploma. I had to pull out of the course and leave and get a job – see? (22:17)

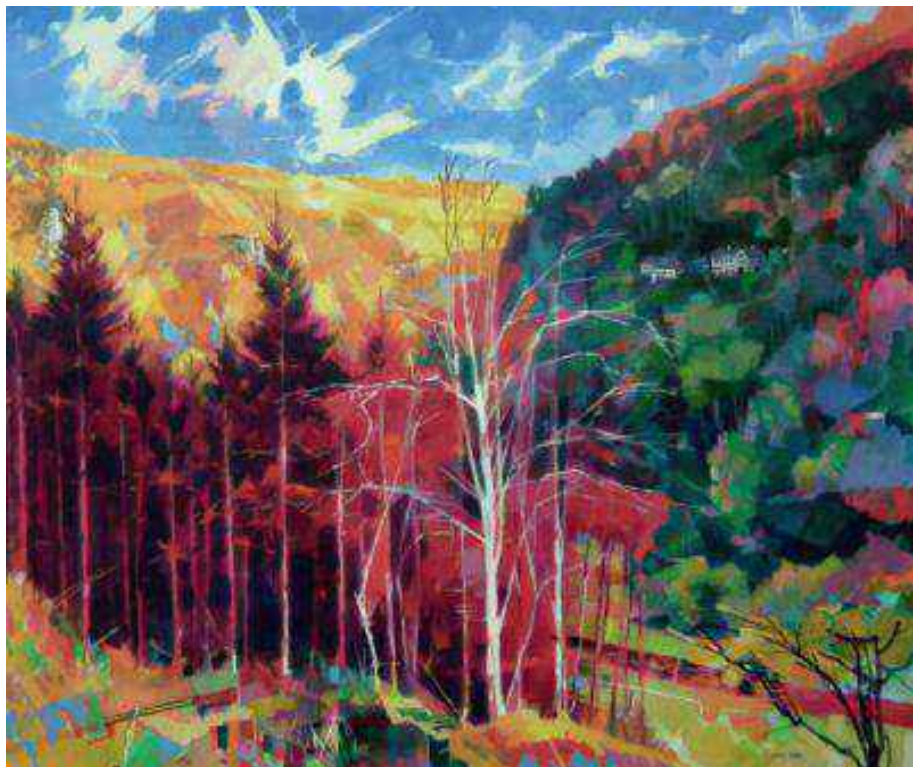
Doug had encountered the life of a working artist at an early age; it must have been a rare occurrence in such an industrially focused location. It subsequently influenced his career choice and gave him the confidence to follow a different path to the rest of his family, one which he is still walking today. He left art college, found work in the local cardboard factory, carried on painting and remains largely self-taught to this day.





*Fig. 7.9*

*Doug Eaton Symonds Yat Gorge, acrylic on canvas, (100x120cm).*



*Fig. 7.10,*

*Doug Eaton, Symonds Yat Gorge, acrylic on canvas, (100x120cm).*

“The job brought me down to earth” he said, “I was there for ten years, but I didn’t care because I knew I was going to be a painter”.

Doug Eaton mostly depicts the landscape in vibrant hues; they are often criss-crossed with sharp incisions of contrasting colour, but they are always, easily read as a landscape (Fig. 7.11). As nature is predominantly the subject he chooses to paint, you would expect his compositions to be dominated by green but he gives space over to other colours that inject emotion into the prospect and are evident of a more complex and emotional entanglement with the location. I wanted to find out the reason he paints in this way; he soon explained why:

Some of my early work is really quite traditional you know? - Because I was looking to sell stuff. I was doing work that was more landscape based but I began to think I am sat in a hugely unique landscape. *This isn't a normal landscape. This is a landscape that has been altered by man since time immemorial.* So, it's easy enough to trace it all the way the back to the Romans and beyond. This I, I thought, is where I am. This is what I know. This is where I've grown up and so this is hugely of interest to me. (28:28, *my emphasis*)

Why is the Forest of Dean and the Wye Valley, in Doug's words, not “a normal landscape”? What is a *normal* landscape? The wider topography consists of limestone and has been hewn by the natural forces of water and wind. It has also been heavily excavated historically for its plentiful resources. Timber, iron, copper and tin are just a few examples of material taken from the location. It is not unique in this, but because it began centuries ago, the scarred topography is a legitimately tangible feature of the landscape to those, like Doug Eaton, that choose to see it. The landscape's exterior surface now appears to be healed, it is visually balmed by vegetation and quieted by deepening leaf matter. Not digging too deep, not straying from the path, keeps visitors away from the deep sites of long-lost trauma.



Fig. 7.11.

Doug Eaton, *River Wye near Foy* Acrylic on canvas, 60 x 46cm

Doug Eaton has chosen not to ignore this hidden history; he celebrates the combined truths of the contemporary landscape and sees it is an amalgam of emotional and material realities. His use of artificially intense colour and geometrically aligned mark-making reinforces this view in my opinion, as does what he went onto say about his approach to painting:

I've chosen that edgy thing because I think it helps in a stupid way to actually get that more dynamic feeling. The reality of it is some of them haven't been altered that much from reality. I have always found it strange how many straight lines there are in landscape and corners and bits that you think Christ! That's like a razor going through there. And it's not all soft and moulded. I suppose the intention was to convey the idea that this was an industrial place and it was heavy, and it was stinky and it was black. It's all those sorts of things wrapped up in that as well. I just thought a *razory* sharp edge in the landscape is an interesting thing to play with. (35:40)

His repeated encounters with the Forest of Dean and, more recently, the Wye Valley (which he has been regularly painting since about 2008) have allowed Doug to consciously develop a unique and, for the purposes of this research project, prescient visual vocabulary. His view has been defined by tall trees, the spaces between their vertical pillars and the resulting light that is infused with the positivity that he finds in it.

His emotional responses colour the compositions and present a patch-worked sensorial palate that openly communicate his connection to the world. Whilst the compositions of Doug's paintings are largely occluded scenes, images that appear not to offer traditional extensive and spatially beckoning vistas, they exude energy by using bright and vivid colours, electrifying and razor-sharp brush and palette work.

There appear to be grids dissolved into paintings – underlying structures that apparently acknowledge the man-made foundations of the deceptively 'natural' scene. (Fig.7.12)  
Doug talked about how applying paint forcefully and at speed yields an interesting effect:

“I try to be quite physical with the painting as much as that some of the marks that are put on, are put on in a hurry in some sort of form”. I responded by saying, “There does seem to be a lot of energy in the them (the paintings); a lot of movement and moving around. You know, like your eyes darting over the thing.” Doug was excited by my observation and said in a loud voice:

Ah, that’s it! That’s it exactly. That’s what I want. I find if I’m presented with something I find a way I look at it is that I look at it. I get drawn to all sorts of different things and I find my eyes, actually, moving all over the place and so when I paint I try to achieve that for somebody else to look at. (Audio File 2 12:25).

I re-iterated the point, buoyed by Doug’s enthusiasm. I said: “That’s what’s happening. For me there are lots of planes that your eyes rest upon and it also makes me think of that sparkling effect you get in sunlight on sea or water and it’s jumping around the picture again.” I believe this to be a key aspect to the effectiveness of Doug Eaton’s painting style. In depicting arboreal landscapes in this way, he captures the fascination that exists in forest foliage. The myriad of surfaces leads our eyes incessantly onward and through into the next vale of visual appeal and this is an arguably picturesque approach.

Doug Eaton voiced how being free is central to his identity. Freedom is important to him, both in terms of land access and also in terms of creative freedom. He is highly-politicised and this became apparent when he talked about the HOOF (Hands Off Our Forest) campaign.





Fig. 7.12.  
Doug Eaton, Forest of Dean - 'Waterloo Screens'  
Acrylic on canvas 80 x 70cm

He was an active participant in the movement and fought to keep land near Speech House for public use. He spearheaded (and indeed paid for with his own money) a postal petition to prevent the purchase of the land. The appeal was successful and he was obviously proud of being active in a community that cares about individual autonomy. His approach to land rights, is echoed by the independence that he consciously exhibits in his creative process:

I made it my thought process that everything belonged to me, everything. The whole landscape was mine. Because obviously of the freedom that you've got to go anywhere. You can trot yourself into the middle of anywhere and nobody has the right to tell you to go away. And that is a very strong thing to have. (28:28)

He closely guards his right to roam, to paint freely and states he has a born right to do it in the area where he was born:

I do feel as though my roots are here. I belong here and its mine (as I said) this is the important thing: **it's mine**. The palate belongs to me; no other bugger. It's such deep entrenched feeling. (24:48)

This is the beginning of a notable theme with Doug Eaton. He is fiercely, and understandably, territorial in the sense that he wants to protect his freedom to roam through the land where has grown up. He has invested his entire life in the Forest of Dean and does not want it to be taken away from him. He has followed the genetic trails of his relations and the topographical pathways of animals (such as deer, sheep and boar) woven through the woods. The place appears to have not only given him physical direction; it has also given him achievable aspirational direction and provided boundaries within which he can be free to express his feelings, emotions and political passions.

When asked about framing, Doug Eaton expressed the idea that by being in a particular place and equipped with extensively detailed local knowledge, enables him to be more visually articulate and accurate in how he subsequently represents it:

Well I frame the world as being this little tiny aspect here. Because this is my world. And again, the more knowledge that you have about it the more effective you can say something about it. (41:24)

Doug's response to his immediate location appears to be way more significant and more valuable to him than the broader geographical context of England, Great Britain, Europe and the World – the Forest of Dean is his world. He admitted he felt very happy where he lives, he expressed the view that going on holiday, vacationing somewhere else, held no interest for him.

I haven't got that draw you see (to travel far on holiday for example) mainly because the worthiness of this area is something that I feel I need to concentrate on and so, to be honest, I feel like I'm on holiday all the bloody time! (40:06)

I recounted to Doug the fact that anecdotally numerous people have said the same thing. One person had said that the bother of leaving the Valley (to go on a foreign holiday) is sometimes not worth it – especially when they return to such a beautiful place as the Wye Valley. His response was equally as accepting and spoke of the contentment the area brings to its inhabitants.

I can understand people wishing to do that (go on holiday elsewhere) I've done it as well and enjoyed it, at the same time as that, it's a holiday. You come back and think, Christ aren't I lucky to be here? (40:06)

Doug Eaton, by his own admission, is willingly locked onto and keyed into his physical surroundings. It was telling, that when I asked him what he thought of the sea, he could only say, "well it's a nice noise". The space for example that coastal geography offers, seemed to be unimportant to Doug; he appears to be happier in the enmeshed proximity of arboreal landscapes. He went onto say, "Nothing draws me to paint it (the sea) because I don't know it. I just haven't got a clue what the sea is". Doug alluded to the idea that he needs to know what is beneath the surface (both conceptually and physically) in the case of landscape. Doug is keen to know of a location's geological as



well it's anthropological history. It appears to matter to him also that a place must have tangible human history; he appears to like the fact that someone has existed in a place before him. The fact that people have previously mined the area for minerals and other such resources seemed to underpin his approach to painting (Fig. 7.13). He is 'mining' a seemingly inexhaustible supply of visual material; the seasons go on providing an ever-changing set of aesthetic circumstances for him to commit to canvas.

Finally, as we appeared to be nearing a natural end to the interview, I revisited the subject of framing. I explained to Doug Eaton that I had first seen his work within the frame of the backlit screen of a PC. I said that I thought his work "competed" really well with "the screen", I said "it actually compliments your work". What I meant was, I thought his work shared many aspects with LCD screens (of any size) in being bright, angular and almost high definition in their performance. Doug's response was interesting, he expressed a pro-active response to wanting to create work that consciously competes with technology:

What I'm saying is if I'm producing a picture, it is static. It is hung on a wall. It doesn't move. It's on exhibition. If somebody walks by it I need my painting to stop them. They're on the move, I'm static. I'm not a pad in their bag. I'm static and I've actually go to stop them – somehow. (1:07:29)



Fig. 7.13.  
Doug Eaton, Mine in Sallow Vallets,  
Acrylic on Canvas, 1000 x 1000mm

I responded by making the observation that the now ever-present oblong of the back-lit LCD display is maybe disengaging people's imagination; in the way, a painting can engage your imagination, memories and your senses and the viewer must *complete* the picture. But Doug defended technology, he argued that people "have only got more sophisticated" since the invention of the internet; "it's opening people up... they're able to contend with something that twenty or thirty years ago, that they wouldn't have been so able to contend with". I retorted that I felt something had been lost through such pervasive technology, our has been seductively foregrounded with a degree of universal and arguably passive acceptance. Referring to the frame of the screen I said:

Whether they engage with things as imaginatively as they did before. You know, imagining what's not on the screen. Because often it's so easy to be satiated by what's on a screen and then you not just think beyond that; beyond the frame of that. Maybe that's what painting is good for, is actually suggesting what's outside it. What's off... outside it. (1:08:08)

Doug's final words provide, what I believe to be a fitting and appropriate end to the interview:

Again, the edges of paintings are very important to me. Edges of paintings have been important since 1967 when I thought I'd discovered them and now I still continue it – inasmuch as that *the very edge of the painting is a suggestion as to what might lay outside of the painting.* (1:10:26, *my emphasis*)

Taken on face value, we might think that the edge of a painting is the end of the image, the limit of the prospect and the end of the seen world. But as Doug Eaton suggests, it's just the beginning. Our world, the artist's world, exists outside the cordoned oblong canvas. Paintings are essentially, sensory windows, corporeal openings, that lead us into a wider world of human imagination and experience.

## 7.5 David Hurn

When making early enquiries about the Magnum agency photographer David Hurn, (Fig 7.14) who I had found out lived in the Wye Valley, I was surprised to find that few people had heard of him or knew that he still lived there. Born in the UK and of Welsh descent, David Hurn is a self-taught photographer who began his career in 1955 as an assistant at the Reflex Agency. He gained early recognition and a reputation with his reportage of the 1956 Hungarian revolution. He joined the Magnum photography co-operative as an associate in 1965 and became a full member in 1967 (Magnum: David Hurn Bio, 2017). In 1973, he set up the reputable School of Documentary Photography in Newport, Wales. He is resident of Tintern, where he has lived since the early 1970's, in a house that overlooks the Wye. He works from home, he continually photographs, and is still internationally in demand as a lecture and speaker. He is responsible for some of the most iconographic images of the 1960's, having photographed Sean Connery as 'James Bond', Jane Fonda as 'Barbarella' and The Beatles on the set of *A Hard Day's Night*. However, it would be a mistake to reduce his career to that of celebrity photographer. David Hurn's photographs have more recently centred around identity and documenting the lives of the living. Since the late sixties, he has photographed Wales, his ancestral home, and its people, to better understand it's culture and consequently, his own Welsh identity (Fig 7.15).

David Hurn was open and receptive to my email request to interview him and I did so, at his home on the 2nd September 2014 (Interview transcript in Appendices). David's small house by the river didn't immediately give any indication that he was a world-renowned photographer. He and I sat in his kitchen. I explained ideas behind the research project and it was not long before I mentioned William Gilpin and the Picturesque. "So why is he your "pet hate?" I asked.



Fig. 7.14.  
David Hurn at his home in Tintern 2016  
(Photo Owain Banfield)



Fig. 7.15  
David Hurn: Golden Jubilee – Tintern 2012

Well, because, I think, I'm very puzzled by the enormous influence this, not desperately well-written, not very long article, by a not very distinguished painter – the unbelievable effect it had, primarily on, what I would call *Sunday Afternoon painters* and camera club photographers ... what it seems to have done is dictated a kind of ... a kind of style almost in both photographers and paintings which does not allow for any real individuality. (DH 00:35.)

I had clearly struck a chord. David was vigorous in his distaste for Gilpin and his subsequent enduring aesthetic influence, and I was interested to know why. David Hurn accused Gilpin of restricting self-expression in the creative arts. He alluded to the Picturesque being a religious movement, when he stated, "It's almost as if it imposes that this is *Gods will* as to what is perfection" (my emphasis). David was suggesting that Gilpin's view was held in very high esteem and he didn't understand why. In response, and somewhat through a slight sense of fear, I found myself mildly colluding with David, "But just like the Bible. The Bible was written by a bunch of men. There were rules in there that needed to be adhered to". (GD 01:55) The tension did not subside, and David became more animated, delivering the final blow of criticism regarding the effect of Gilpin's activities:

I'm simply saying that I think, that in exactly the same way that I think most religions, to me, are more destructive than constructive. I just think that he [Gilpin] is probably, if you take in to consideration the size of it, it's *the most destructive* article written on the arts that interests me. (02:07)

I responded by stating that my interest in Gilpin stems from my own tendency to question rules. Rules, I offered, are often imposed in human society, rules act as guidelines and are indicative of desired social behaviour but to impose rules upon nature as Gilpin did seemed ludicrous and futile to me.

David Hurn's opinions oddly elevated my empathy for Gilpin and the flocks of Wye Valley tourists who sought out the prospects of the Picturesque. I felt myself becoming

somehow defensive of the Reverend and his desire to categorise nature. But by doing so, had Gilpin not raised the awareness of the natural world? Had he not encouraged people to look away from the factories and out into nature? I said:

Well back to framing, I think what he did give people was guidance. Away from chaos, away from Edmund Burke's Sublime, away from *the terror* of nature. I think he gave people a sense of containment. All this beauty, all this world that we can't understand, at least by doing that with it; by saying, right, choose your elements in there, you might get some kind of understanding by putting borders around it. (03:54)

I felt this was a good argument, an approach that suggested that Gilpin, when faced with the burgeoning spectacle of nature, was overwhelmed by its complexity and how to comprehend it; he appeared to have super-imposed the lens of seventeenth century Italian art to alleviate his fears and manage his awe of the landscape. David Hurn suggested that what Gilpin did was nothing new when he said,

Are you suggesting that all the painters before him didn't actually do that? You know, I don't of any painter that didn't paint within a frame. It seems to me that what they're actually saying is somehow in this big wild world, I want to condense down a tiny bit of it and show you what I found interesting; almost by definition that has to be within a frame. (04:27)

Now, when I reflect upon David's words and when I re-consider Gilpin's early landscape representations, it's the simplicity of the imagery that he produced that made his approach, and by association, the approach to landscape, so *accessible* for other people. By reducing the landscape to, 'four grand parts: the area, which is the river itself; the two *side-screens*, which are the opposite banks, and mark the perspective; and the *front screen*, which points out the winding of the river.' (Gilpin, 1783:25), Gilpin condensed and interpreted, the potentially overwhelming experience of nature, to a new audience. Author, Julian Mitchell, substantiates this observation when he states that, 'Gilpin's rules...never caught on with any but the most amateur artists...for non-artists, for tourists for whom the aesthetics of landscape were an unknown science, and who



needed help, first to look in the right direction, then to know how and *what to feel*...they were a godsend' (My emphasis) (Mitchell 2010:11).

As a defensive retort to David's criticism of Gilpin's arguable narrow framing, I said that I was considering technologies of representation with no frame. Virtual Reality (VR), a technology my wife and I recently experienced at the Sidney Nolan Trust on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2016 (See Fig. 7.16), for example, has no optically limiting edges, like the real world, there is no frame and as VR pioneer, Jaron Lanier eloquently puts it, in VR, 'The body and the rest of reality have no prescribed boundary' (Lanier, 2011:187). This contemporary technology has much in common with the *Panorama*, a visually immersive mode of landscape representation, that allowed the spectator to almost become a participant within, and not be separated from the view (Andrews 1999). Cinema, although framed, filmed, directed, acted and edited, is an experience that can be deeply engaging and immersive; as Professor Ágnes Pethő says, 'Cinema has always had a profound experiential quality...' and one in which, '...we get to be immersed in a unique environment that stimulates our senses and our minds on different levels



Fig 7.16.

*Tweet. My wife and I experienced Virtual Reality for the first time in 25 years at the Sidney Nolan Trust. The visual contrast of the traditional farm and the headset made for an interesting juxtaposition of images. Australian artist, Sean Gladwell shared his work and made the comparison between VR and cinema. Gladwell suggested that, "There's no behind the scenes anymore; you're in the scene".*

Of consciousness and perception' (Pethő, 2015:1). David Hurn's response was interestingly dismissive of these newer modes of representation:

I just find those staggeringly uninteresting. I mean I find them interesting in the technical side, in terms of how they were done. I find them interesting that someone had the tenacity to do it. But what they end up with, I find uninteresting because it's not specific to something ... It seems to me that it fits into what, I suspect, is the culture of today and that that's coming and that's "I don't want to make any decisions about anything". (06:47)

David was suggesting that, to some degree, by recreating the experience of reality, *the real*, people are not being *shown* anything at all. By not isolating something or cordoning it off from the cacophony of sensory choices, people are not being asked to focus on details and to make their own choice as to look or not. I believe that David Hurn was offering an argument for the artist here, the photographer or the film-maker. He sees artists as catalysts for creative communication, inquisitive intermediaries that offer a myriad of innovative viewpoints of our world.

Upon reflection, it made sense that David appeared to mistrust Gilpin's influence and considered his visually restrictive template to not be conducive to a broader description of creativity; the Picturesque, for David, had evolved into an aesthetic box-ticking exercise; a pastime that, he felt commanded no intellectual engagement but compliance to a set of pre-defined standards and with no decision making required. David's profession involves making decisions, in this way, he saw himself in direct opposition to the water-colourists he described at the beginning of the interview, who apparently following a comparatively pre-determined creative path.

It is interesting, to make a here link between David's suspicion of the practice of creative neutrality with the enjoyment, detailed in the last chapter, that my family and I had experienced whilst canoeing. My relatives' respective employment often requires them

to make tough decisions; the canoeing trip was satisfying because they were free from making many choices, they could momentarily disregard the decision-making process and enjoy being in “neutral”.

The conversation moved on to the internet with David admitting that technology had aided his creative process and said that he had adopted many forms in his practice - his workroom was impressively equipped with up to date image handling hardware to evidence this. I acknowledged that I was using *Twitter* and *Blogger* to assist with my research; I explained how the social media platforms had allowed me to “Narrow the field” of information, focused my enquiries and made the overwhelming profusion of information more manageable. David argued that the content produced on social networking sites has, “no content” and expressed his frustration at “the masses and masses of pictures that go onto Twitter and everything else”. David re-iterated the lack of conscious creative choice of its creators, when he said, “I mean the one thing that they have is a total lack of anybody making a decision about something, it’s all very arbitrary and it’s all to do with “*I did it, therefore its important*”. Whilst I agree with David, that such a narcissistic approach is not always positive, I would also defend social media’s facility to temporarily free ones-self from decision-making; it can be an enjoyable past-time for those whose working lives involve making decisions for a living.

David continued, arguing the case that he thought creativity should revolve around a more meaningful artefact and not the personality of the creator: “In my world, the fact that that person did it is not the least bit important. You know the only thing that’s important to me is whether the end result enriches my life in some way”. Again, he was arguing the case for artists but stipulated that they might produce something that enriches the lives of others. Upon reflection, it would have been prudent to ask David how he relaxes in his spare time and does it involve relinquishing decision making in any way?

David Hurn talked about what, in his view, makes some photographers extraordinary. To illustrate his argument, he proclaimed that the act of photography is largely a universal and accessible process; “the miracle to me of photography” he said, “is that everybody has a box with a hole in the front; a camera cannot be more than that, that’s what it is, and at the back there is something that allows the *trace* of something to be recorded in some way” (my emphasis). This appealed to me at the time, the decisive instant (the moment of choice) being a “trace”, a vestige of visual material with innumerable possibilities for the end viewer. I said, “It’s funny you’ve picked up on *traces* because you’ve identified a theme I hadn’t recognised before on this project; I hadn’t thought about the image as a trace. David continued to speculate how good photography comes about:

Photography really has only two ways of controlling it, where you stand and when you press the button. That’s all it is. So, if you stand in the right place and press the button at the right time you will all take the same picture ... basically. But what is extraordinary is the ... you have to show me ten or twenty pictures, but if you show me ten or twenty pictures by Robert Frank, by Cartiér Bresson, by Ansell Adams ... I’ll tell you who took them. Now how can that be? That somebody with the same bloody box, with the same hole in the front, can produce something which is visually different? (22:08)

Photography, particularly in Western society, and especially with the advent of smartphones, is a convenient, accessible means of image capture (Henkel, 2014). David suggested that just because it is convenient, it does not mean that everyone can produce an outstanding photograph; this is open to subjectivity. David’s long established, self-taught acquaintance, with the work of other practitioner’s, is consciously made present in his process. You might say that, aesthetic traces of other photographer’s choices have informed his visual selection, they have primed his view, in much the same that Rosa and Lorrain prepared Gilpin’s.

Gilpin is not here to defend the choices he made in *Observations on the River Wye*, so when David expresses the opinion that the text is, "...*the most destructive* article written on the arts" (my emphasis), he is being very contentious. My research has led me to believe that Gilpin's guide interpreted an alien landscape through, an assumed familiarity with, the visual vocabulary of theatre and painting. The book comfortably escorted people into the unfamiliar world of the Wye Valley and by contextualising the experience through art, allowed them to momentarily float on the river and make sense out of what they found there.

### **7.6 Keith Arnatt (1930 - 2008)**

Keith Arnatt lived in Tintern from the early nineteen seventies until his death in 2008. Unfortunately, as there is not the opportunity to question the artist about his reasons for living in the Wye Valley and the effect it had upon his practice, I will focus upon works produced whilst living there and reflect upon their contemporary significance as a depiction of an *Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*.

On Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> August 2013, I visited the Tate Britain. I arrived with the intention of viewing landscape depictions by JMW Turner and to examine a set of photographs by deceased conceptual, performance and land artist, and one-time Tintern resident (1969-2008), Keith Arnatt (1930-2008). The *collection-in-focus* exhibition was titled: *Keith Arnatt: Sausages and Food* and was curated by Andrew Wilson (<http://www.tate.org.uk>). The works on display offered a small sample of his photographic output and contained a series of images produced in the Wye Valley between 1982 and 1984.

In the early nineteen seventies, Keith Arnatt's creative process was expressed through the medium of photography, a discipline shown to him by fellow Tintern resident, David Hurn. According to David Hurn, he and Arnatt were good friends, and the relationship was fruitful, with photography becoming the mainstay of Arnatt's later creative output. It

is worth noting that I was unaware of both Arnatt and Hurn when I began this project and there seem to be few indicators, in local museums and galleries for example, that they ever lived or worked in the area. I have now accrued familiarity with their work and it has highlighted the importance of their respective contributions to creativity in the Wye Valley. They have both considered the Wye Valley in artistic terms and contemplated its influence upon professional artists and amateurs alike. Regarding this project, I would like to stress the value of Arnatt's view of the location, his subsequent representations of the Wye Valley and their place in defining a contemporary appreciation of the area.

The 13 photos were grey in visual tone and devoid of contrast. There was little light, no open sky; the weather appeared to be overcast and cloudy. The photographs were displayed in a row and the line of the horizon seemed to join one picture to the next - like one long super panoramic landscape - this gave the appearance of a contained terrain and framed it in a longitudinal way. There is no theatricality - no cinematic drama, deep contrast, spatial depth or volumetric extent in the images. The tone is arguably unromantic - more reality than unreality. The works don't work like a stage set, they apparently contain no artificiality. People are not generally present but I wouldn't expect any performance to take place on these sceneries. They feel like they were taken from the outside, by someone on the outside looking in, when no one was looking.

Bins and rubbish feature heavily in the images (Fig. 7.17). The landscape is represented as a blurred backdrop - a fuzzy outline - framing symbols of modern society. Cars, signage and farming utensils. Only one person exists in the photos - a woman, looking out over the Wye to a ruined black and white timbered house (Fig. 7.18). The image is horizontally cut in half by the river and the figure of the woman bridges the gap between the top and bottom of the overall composition. The images appear to be disparate at first probably due to my own aesthetic prejudice, feeling that they don't appear to conform to

a traditional landscape image. As apparently unappealing as they are, they appear to have been composed very carefully. It appears Arnatt may have deliberately attempted to compose the everyday into peculiar beauties.

The presence of a Porsche 924 in (Fig 7.19) is interesting - it seems to stick out punctuate the image - suggest pretentious aspirants - visitors to the area - coming to see what? Coming to see something they have been told to come and see - something they have been told is beautiful or at least was years ago and the tradition of unthinking procession to the area has continued but why? Are people really looking at the area? Is it really 'beautiful, is it really picturesque?

The works felt very personal, almost private and maybe reluctant to be there. It was good, knowing that Arnatt's work was given equal exposure in the Tate to that of JMW Turner, whose images of Tintern were being shown in the gallery next door. The river Wye connects their experience and their physical location in the Tate Britain over time. You might say that they are poles apart but the two artists are possibly here because of William Gilpin.





Fig 7.17.

Keith Arnatt: A.O.N.B. (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) 1982–4

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper. 275 x 357 mm



Fig 7.18.

Keith Arnatt: A.O.N.B. (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) 1982–4

Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper. 275 x 357 mm



Fig 7.19  
Keith Arnatt: A.O.N.B. (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) 1982–4  
Photograph, gelatin silver print on paper. 220 x 283 mm

## 7.7 Conclusions

The interviews allowed me to openly enquire as to how the artists creatively respond to the Wye Valley. It was interesting that Susan spoke of wanting to get the “feel” of the place and to “simplify” the experience, an approach that, I would argue is prefaced by Gilpin’s, and is indeed, echoed by my own artistic process. Walter’s eco-haptically centred practice could be attributed to an approach also fostered Walter Gilpin. When Walter said, “...that sense of time passing – things crumbling and getting ivy on them”, he articulated an approach that is essentially Picturesque. For me, Walter’s ceramics clearly incorporate and simplify aspects of his physical surroundings and he freely admitted to this aesthetic integration by agreeing that he receives a, “...strong influence directly from the landscape”. But interestingly, when Walter said that “...the clay will always have its say”, he was suggesting that materials are also persuasive, they mingle with man’s intentions and contribute to the shape of the eventual outcome.

By using harsh angularity and a colour palette saturated with synthetic hues, Doug Eaton consciously combined the industrial past into his painting process. By integrating the deeply rooted history of human endeavour, symbolised by using razor sharp marks, with the relatively shallow surface of flora and fauna, his intention is to portray a place as an intertwined set of circumstances. It is a place that appeared to be deeply personal to Doug and personally re-assuring in terms of framing who he is.

David Hurn refuted the influence of Gilpin upon his own work; he also expressed frustration at the widespread influence of Gilpin’s text over, “...Sunday Afternoon painters and camera club photographers”. I would argue that David, in his own assertion that the production of “interesting” work lies in the author making good “choices” and not blindly following previously defined rules of representation, supports what Gilpin did, when faced with a complicated prospect. By simplifying the scene, reducing the

complexities of the natural world to a manageable scope, he was focusing upon what was appealing to him and making choices to make more sense of the world.

It has been encouraging, when considering the Wye Valley AONB through the lens of artists and creative processes, to encounter people whose methodological approach is ecologically centred. The artists integrate their respective environments into the frame of their practices and each apply their own skill in taking the agency of the land and communicating something new. I believe this is ultimately evidenced by Keith Arnatt's photographs, although not here to explain his superficially un-picturesque works, I believe his pictures to have been skilfully selected as strangely aesthetic images that highlight the artist's very personal environmental sensitivities.

**Chapter 8. Working with the Wye: ephemerality, the agency of place and addressing the ‘un-representable’.**

**8.1 Introduction**

By walking with others, it was my intention to, not only test *‘The Picturesque’* as a historically constructed mode of landscape participation and explore the ways in which it has influenced contemporary experiences of landscape - the second research aim. Here I describe and reflect upon a series of participatory research interventions, with one notable case study, having been designed in collaboration with AONB Education Officer, Sarah Sawyer. The overall intention was to broadly test a variety of perceptions of landscape, initially in ways in which I would normally do so and to gradually de-centre and democratise the experience of landscape away from my own point of view. By broadening the research participation, it was hoped that other individuals would respond to the location and express themselves in ways that were largely universal in nature.

By organising a ‘Day Trip to Tintern Abbey’ for my culturally diverse University peer group, I was keen to test a method of “priming” a group of individuals before their arrival in the Wye Valley. This phrase was used in the context of tourism, by Dr Suzanne Matheson at Chepstow Drill Hall on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2014, when describing how, historically, Wye Valley tourists were prepared for their excursion through printed literature, produced most notably, by Charles Heath (1761-1831) (Matheson, 2013). It would also be interesting to see, to what degree their expectations of place are predisposed by pre-existing visual influences. Visiting a location for the first time, particularly one designated as an *Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* might generate an experiential expectation, one that potentially colours the view of tourists and frames the occasion in a series of ‘roles’ that need to be performed (Edensor, 2001; Urry, 2002).

Building upon the notion of 'Geo-Emotionality' as defined by myself as an experience grounded in, "...human sensitivity in the relationship of the body in material space" (Dunn, 2013:4), the 'World War One Walk', planned and led by Sarah Sawyer and myself was intended to harness the proximal materiality of the landscape as an emotional provocative medium to deepen the collective remembrance of World War One. The participants were taken on a topographically dynamic and physically immersive journey through a series of moments of communal recollection. The eco-haptically centred approach was intended to leave the walkers with an embodied account of the day and hopefully acquire a deeper feeling of empathy for others.

The opportunity to "...make the familiar strange" (Delamont and Atkinson in Mannay, 2015) with a group of people (whom I addressed as "co-researchers") a term first brought my attention by Deidre Heddon at the 'Performing Place' symposium in Chichester on 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> June 2015, came with the execution of the 'Making Moments' walk held in Redbrook. I liked the apparent democracy of the term co-researchers because I felt I had much to learn from the participants, some of whom, I would go on to learn, had a deeply rooted familiarity with the area. I also felt more comfortable addressing them in this way as I felt they would be happier to work alongside me than under my instruction.

By developing aspects of the 'eco-haptic': the landscape as an entity experienced through real and imagined touch, an approach, I felt had been effectively employed in communicating themes on the WW1 walk, it was my intention to encourage people to use their hands, in the manipulation of sand, to express the experience of place as opposed to using purely visual means of recording, such as a camera. This methodology was contextualised by a personal confidence in my practice as a maker and one in which I relate to the world through touch.

Finally, I describe a conversation in which, Chepstow based art historian, experienced walk leader and research participant, Phil Mundell and I reflect upon the 'Making Moments' intervention as a means of gaining a better understating of the resulting research outputs.

## **8.2 Tintern Walk 1272 – following a tourist trail**

As a reconnoitre of the route I had identified as a possibility for a group intervention, I walked with my wife in autumn 2013, along an established route in the Wye Valley. The 1272 route, on which I subsequently went on to walk with artist Anna Falcini, Sam Underwood and Mark Walker over the course of the research period, was located on the *Walking Britain* web-site, started and ended at Tintern Abbey and was briefly described as follows:

The highlights of this walk along the River Wye include the Devil's Pulpit, Brockweir and Tintern. Visiting the counties of Monmouthshire and Gloucestershire, the route also includes a section of the Offa's Dyke National Trail. (Johnson, 2013)

As I had done with the canoe trip (see chapter 5), I deliberately wanted to recreate the typical tourist experience of visiting with family or friends, so I walked with my wife rather than solo. This also enabled me to observe her reactions, to predict and to prepare for leading a group along the same route. What follows here, is an account of the day, written soon after the event, in which I capture my/our reflections of the walk. I also took photographs to illustrate the account.

Tintern Abbey is initially quite imposing when you stand next to it. It's a religious structure. It's tall spindle thin stone arches effortlessly impress upon you their scale – their history – their baggage. Even though you're stood in the base of a beautiful and vast valley, the natural landscape recedes behind the monolithic, man-made nature of the ruin.



It was a beautiful day for our walk, and the route began with us walking along riverside. We were following an old railway line parallel with river. There were leaves on ground and we could see the river occasionally through the foliage (Fig 8.1). The river was moving quickly; it was brown and flowing in the same direction as us. We gradually rose above the water. The forest distracted us from the fact we were rising away from the valley floor. As we followed the tiny signs, it slowly got steeper and steeper; the foliage got thicker and the view was more occluded (Fig. 8.2). It felt like we were going deeper and steeper into the foliage. Eventually we reached Offa's Dyke path and turned left along what appeared to be a well-maintained path and we had reached the ridge. The landscape now dropped away to our left; no longer looking for views, we'd become accustomed to the close proximity of trees and settled with our views being close. We took a moment to photograph the immersed moments in the foliage, me documenting the multi-coloured carpet of leaves underneath my feet (Fig. 8.3) and Jo requesting that I visually record the tactile qualities of sweet chestnuts, she had found lying on the forest floor (Fig. 8.4).

Then suddenly, we reached an opening and the view blew open and outwards. Tintern Abbey sat flat on the valley floor (Fig 8.5). It's power now seemed more diminutive, it looked pocket-sized, adorable and away in the distance. We were elated and felt that we had been rewarded for our efforts. The land had lifted us up, elevated our endeavours and highlighted the power of the land to transform – to transform place and our perception of that place.



Fig. 8.1.  
Glimpses of the river and the Abbey ruins



Fig. 8.2.  
The thickening foliage as we climbed up the route away from Tintern  
(Photos: G Dunn)



Fig. 8.3.  
Boots bathing in Autumnal colour.



Fig. 8.4.  
Hands holding irresistibly tactile sweet chestnuts. (Photos: G Dunn)





Fig. 8.5. Tintern in the valley

*Then suddenly, we reached an opening and the view blew open and outwards. It's power now seemed more diminutive, it looked pocket-sized, adorable and away in the distance. (Photo: G Dunn)*

We were quickly annoyed though as we approached the area on which to sit. It was lunchtime and we wanted to sit and admire the view with our sandwiches. We often crave solitude, but here somebody else had 'beaten us to it' though – with the same idea. We said "hello' which was half-heartedly reciprocated (so the feeling was obviously mutual). We were forced to sit in an alternative spot and consider our position looking out across the valley. Sitting down looking at the open panorama and not physically moving. Our eyes were able to move around the landscape – to go off into the distance placing our imaginary selves on points in the void. It was meditative, calming and quiet. Only when we reached the viewpoint, were we able to establish our location and understand how far we had ascended. The journey had been exhilarating but pleasurable and was rewarded with a grand panorama with the Abbey at its centre.

Soon we were walking again, not descending yet though. We were still skirting the ridge of King Offa's Dyke. The tubular path's leaf lined surfaces sped us flume-like along the top of the valley. The ancient yew trees, bleached and pale and fringed with scarlet berries, thrust outward between rocks and signposted the way. Berm-like turns added momentum to the oncoming descent. We fell with ease and soon left the canopy, bursting outward onto open fields and vistas once more. We walked through Brockweir, over the old iron bridge, a white icing mesh straddling the gravy sloop river, and down to the Old Station for coffee and cake.

To conclude, the overall, most of the walk was void of expansive views. The intimate material proximity of the tunnel-like trails prohibited us from seeing where we were going, so we became disorientated. But the disorientation was not unpleasant. I would argue that we were temporarily freed from care by our predicament, not being able to see where we had been and where we were going, we became absorbed in the moment. Even though we were moving onwards, upwards, with no visual view of the future or panorama of the past, we were in a temporally neutral state. This reflection resonates

with my observations on page 74 in chapter 4 where I suggest that 'Trunnels', the narrow-wooded corridors found in the around the Wye, can facilitate a feeling of freedom, enable "intellectual liberation", merely through a lack of directional choice or spatial opportunity. It is also reminiscent of our experience of, canoeing on the river Wye, where my relative, making the comparison with a car's range of gears, expressed the opinion that they were in "neutral".

### **8.3 Tour of Tintern': Pilot photography walk**

By arranging for a group of Birmingham City University Art, Design and Media PhD Research Students to participate in a walk, beginning at Tintern Abbey and ending at the nearby Old Railway Station, it was my intention to *investigate contemporary experiences of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty through the lens of artists and creative processes*, the second of my stated research aims. By encouraging the group to use mobile phones, a *contemporary* image gathering technology, to obtain visual information from the location, it was my goal to re-create the activity that other visitors (tourists) might use to record their experience of the day. To further clarify my understanding of the images produced by the students, I asked each to submit accompanying text, to ensure that their aesthetic intentions were fully understood. The reason I chose the students was to gain access to a broad range of opinions due to the multi-cultural makeup of my peer group, (Chinese, Spanish, Saudi, Greek and U.K).

I led a group on a walk, following the same route of walk 1272 from Tintern, that my wife and I had previously followed. I wanted to discover what people find visually stimulating when taken to an unfamiliar location and one which is deemed by to be of *Outstanding Natural Beauty*. I wanted to observe how they recorded the event, through technological means, and how they reflected upon the experience after the event. The participants were somewhat familiar with my research, as many of them were my peers in the BCU PGCert program. It was therefore essential to consider how students should be prepared

before they arrived at the site. I referred to the occasion as the 'Wye Tour' and to the participants as 'Wye Tourists', alluding to the locally established tradition of visiting the area for its beauty and natural appeal.

As a result of attending a talk in Chepstow by Canadian academic and "specialist in British Romantic literature, visual culture, and history of the book" (<http://web2.uwindsor.ca>) Suzanne Matheson on 3 June 2014, I wanted to avoid preparing, or in Matheson's words, "priming" the group as much as possible. Matheson spoke in great depth about Monmouth based publisher, Charles Heath (1761-1831) and his contribution to guided tourism in the Wye Valley. Matheson stated that:

"Heath's contemporaries clearly regarded their fellow entrepreneur...as one of the inventors of late eighteenth-century Wye Valley tourism ... His publications include a guide to Tintern Abbey that ran to eleven editions between 1793 and 1828, the high summer of picturesque travel in Britain" (Matheson 2013: 138).

Heath was thus instrumental in tourist preparation and guidance at the end of the eighteenth century. The guides he produced were popular, partly due to their low price. In the same way that the internet might provide travelling assistance today, Heath's publications provided a 'rich intermediated process' that was 'induced by his (Heath's) own experience'. In contrast, I wanted the participants to avoid any pre-conceived anticipations of the area and expectations that might be coloured by visitor reviews, photographs or statements. I did circulate an image, I considered to be visually intriguing (Fig. 8.6).

The role of *visual* tourism in the Wye Valley was key in this particular pilot study. The Picturesque movement was unintentionally initiated by the Reverend William Gilpin after touring the area for himself over the course of two days in a covered boat. As previously



Fig. 8.6

Path leading to the 'Eagles Nest', Wyndcliff. (Photo: G Dunn)

*This was the single image that I showed to the group before our walk. I chose it because it encapsulated the character of walks I had encountered for myself in the Wye Valley. I felt the image, it's soothing dappled sunlight, the narrowing pathway leading to a distant point, would also be inviting for potential participants.*

discussed (see chapter 5), he journeyed down the Wye from Ross in 1770, noting his explorations and subsequent observations in his book, *Observations on the River Wye...*



(Gilpin, 1783). The publication contains aquatints based on Gilpin's original manuscript sketches and these are subjectively ideal depictions of landscape. Gilpin considered the Lower Wye Valley to be an exemplar in visual appeal and compared its features as visually commensurate with the landscape iconography found in the art works of Salvator Rosa (1615-1673), described by Esther Moir as "generally popular" in the eighteenth Century (Moir 1964:74), and the works of Claude Lorrain (1604/5-1682), also profusely collected by newly wealthy English landowners. Just like the artists Rosa and Lorrain, Gilpin adjusted his compositions. He curated the resulting panoramas to create a new and personally attractive prospect:

Nothing is more delusive, than to suppose that every view which pleases in nature, will please in painting. In nature, the pleasure arises from the eye's roaming from one passage to another; and making its remarks on each. In painting (as the eye is there confined within certain limits) it arises from seeing some select spot adorned agreeably to the rules of art. (W. Gilpin in Moir 1964: 123)

In the pursuit of leisure, subsequent visitors who followed him, employed Gilpin's illustrated guide as an aesthetic escort; an aid in the consideration of the area's peculiar, and in Gilpin's eyes painterly, topographical characteristics. It was my intention to test what contemporary influences people would bring with them when considering a new location. Gilpin is cited as being influenced by Italian landscape paintings from the late 17<sup>th</sup> Century, a genre popular with contemporary collectors in the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> Century (Andrews, 1989; Mitchell, 2010; Moir, 1964). Gilpin projected his pictorial ideals upon the land, super-imposed his accumulated aesthetic proclivities onto a place that was seemingly exotic and chaotic in nature (particularly in the rain); visually sorting the wild and its naturally disordered visual logic may have enabled him to feel less overwhelmed by the *sublime* spectacle as described in chapter 4.

Contemporary tourists might record their experiences with a digital camera, either a stand-alone unit or a camera integrated into a smartphone or tablet. Online social facilitators such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat, and the ability to transfer data over 3G telecom networks, has led to a massive and public emancipation of landscape imagery. As Larsen (2006) is quoted as saying in *“Word-of-Picture” in attracting tourists to distant destinations*, “When people travel to far-away destinations, photography becomes a ritual practice. Tourists often take pictures of objects, places, cultures and people” (Alam & Binti Aminudin Head, 2016:3). Although, the article is concerned with long distance travel, I would argue that the same can be said when people visit any location of the first time. The recording and distribution of individual experience is widely available to contemporary tourists and, I would suggest, that for many people around the world, taking a photo at an elevated or visually impressive viewpoint, has become a default response.

#### **8.4 How the walk unfolded**

All participants were asked to complete a consent form (See Appendices) and were informed that written responses would be anonymised to protect their privacy. Arriving by mini bus at Tintern Abbey car park, we followed the previously tested walk. Crossing the river via an old railway bridge, we turned right along the tree veiled riverside path. Being summer, the weather was good, we were shaded from the heat of the sun by dense leaf foliage and the ground was muddy underfoot. We walked for three kilometres before ascending to our left along an open gravel access road. The steep climb and the heat of the middle of the day made the climb difficult but it was improved by our immersion in the cool forest once again. Despite having tested the route beforehand, I underestimated the gradient of the walk and the relative lack of fitness of some of the group. Being anxious of the time, I quickly led the group, hurried up through the woods and onto Offa’s Dyke. The pace was quicker than comfortable for some people; in

hindsight, it would have been prudent to walk slower and offer the group more opportunities for refreshment breaks.

I was relieved to reach the plateau path of Offa's Dyke; allowing for people to catch their breath and have a drink. We then progressed up the last ascent toward the 'Devil's Pulpit'. I retreated to the rear of the group and accompanied one member: a female participant clearly distressed through feeling dizzy. By getting her to sit down, eat something and drink some fluid, she felt better and I was able to encourage her to continue the journey. To my relief, she went on to safely complete the leg of the journey to the top of the hill, where we would properly rest and eat lunch.

The real effort that the walk had required from all of us on that hot July day, apparently paid off for participants. Upon seeing the vast and open outlook over Tintern, lots of participants were heard saying "WOW!". People immediately started taking photographs, holding their smartphones up in front of the view, before removing their bags etc. The moment was reminiscent of a previous walk in the same location with artist, Anna Falcini (14 February 2014). She had expressed a desire to take a photograph when she saw the view over Tintern: "Wow!" she said "You see, now I want to get my camera out" at exactly the same point on the walk. On each occasion, the strenuous effort of the walk was momentarily put aside, for Anna, myself, and the university students the spectacle was distractingly impressive. The group rested for approximately twenty minutes (Fig.8.7). Sitting in a row on the low wall, the same wall that my wife and I had sat upon on a previous walk the year before, it was most satisfying enjoying the prospect of looking over toward Tintern Abbey.



Fig. 8.7.

The student group rest for lunch

*'The feeling of a **school trip** is really lovely. It was a very nice **shared experience** with the friends/colleagues, and also an **educational immersion** in the nature. A trip with both **social** and **natural** attributes (but of course it also depends on how we define "social" and "natural")'.*

(Image and words: YW)

One student, M, decided he would say his prayers toward Mecca. He unravelled a prayer mat from his bag and proceeded to recount his prayers. I was surprised and slightly humbled by such an action and so I chose not to look too intensely. M said he wanted to say his prayers “in a beautiful place”. Leaving the picnic site, we descended back down into the valley. We walked as a closer group along Offa’s Dyke for some way and as I described in my notes that day, “Down through tunnels of trees – snake like”. One male participant had dropped back, and we thought we had lost him. I ran back to get him and found that he was “enjoying himself”. The participants felt more like a unit and they also seemed happier; I was happier. They were taking photos of each other and natural phenomena. Maybe due to the downhill nature of the walk, the clear signposting and possibly due to the cool tunnel of trees leading the way; we marched down the valley without any worries. We could freefall, go into neutral and momentarily forget the exertions from earlier in the day.

We suddenly appeared into space, open space (Figs. 8.8 and 8.9). An open and hot space, as we emerged onto the sloping meadows above Brockweir. We were no longer sheltered by the forest; no longer squeezed between the trees. The heat of the day hit us but the soft ocular sensation of the open grassy meadow eased us outward and downward. Male participant, RC describes what he experienced:

This is for me the real reveal, moving from woodland, cool dappled light, into the meadow, full sun, suddenly hit by the heat, the view revealed with no intrusion of buildings especially cars and tourist dross. The grasses are wonderful, butterflies wonderful, trying to identify the species, meadow brown, marbled white. My twin brother



Fig. 8.8  
Walking in the meadow (Image: SK)



Fig. 8.9.

*Sat in Grass – this participant wanted to be photographed amongst grass and wild flowers. She looked really happy and relaxed. The participant seemed to really enjoy this place. It was interesting that she was keen to be photographed. She sat on the floor, almost bathing in the grass and looked on at the view of Brockweir below. (Photo: G Dunn)*

is a Lepidopterist he would know all the species so he immediately came into my head and in essence was there with me. I wanted to ask about which species was which. Orchids a bonus but too many people to be a real discovery. Again, lots of childhood associations eg edges of Dartmoor. Colleagues not really obtrusive as the experience was shared.

It is interesting that RC's initial and negative observation "tourist dross" is tempered by the positive recollection of the physically felt contrast between the interior space of the woods and the hot exterior openness of the meadow. He also experientially contextualises the moment, relating it to his twin brother and their mutual love of nature which is interesting, because he appeared to be happy to be by himself at many points throughout the walk. I also understand that he felt that it was good being part of a group and happy to share his "discovery".

Female participant, JT also reflected on this moment:

We had been walking for a while in a very woody area, which was quite shady and enclosed. Whilst I was highly engaged in this environment by being immersed in it, I felt that at the same time I was starting to adjust to it surrounding me. When we came out of the wooded area, we came out onto this field and I had a real 'wow' moment (which I remember exclaiming out aloud!) – the brightness of the green grass as highlighted by the sunshine, wild flowers in contrasting bright colours scattered though the grass. This was partially enunciated by the contrast between the closedness of the previous woody area and the openness and vividness of the field. But also, I thought the group looked pretty cool spilling out and dispersing onto the field – possibly heightened by the camaraderie we had developed.

Again, JT describes the dramatic contrast from occluded to open space as being a pivotal moment in the day. She suggests that the effect was made even more dramatic because she had become comfortable in the highly immersive forest environment. It was also evident, that like RC, she had felt positively at being part of a group even using the word "camaraderie" to describe the relationship.



Female participant, SC, (LEMUR trainee at the Wye Valley AONB) was the first to identify orchids in the meadow (Fig. 8.8). I had previously had this kind of orchid pointed out to me on an earlier walk that summer with SC other members of the AONB team but was still surprised to see so many of them in this particular location. I was pleased for the group that they too had seen them; it clearly moved some of the participants enough to want to record and comment upon the moment (Fig. 8.10/11).

Everybody, without exception, reacted excitedly to the news. I think it was received by the group as a reward for the day; it re-enforced the purpose of their determination and their apparently unifying effort. Interestingly, female participant, GW decided to share the moment with me by offering a photograph of her own shadow as opposed to the more predictable action of recording the orchids (Fig. 8.12). She emphasised the importance of recognising something special when it happens, however fleeting it might be. It might be immaterial and temporary, but it still has the power to momentarily overwhelm all the same.

I would like to think that everyone had had a good time on the trip but this was a somewhat selfish attitude to have taken and made me question the reasons for organising the day in the first place. Was it supposed to be a leisurely paced?



Fig. 8.10.

Wild Orchids.

*SC spotted orchids! Everyone immediately photographed them and the expansive view down to the village and the river. Some participants took both close-ups and wider shots, framing the orchids within the landscape.*

(Photo: G Dunn)



Fig. 8.11.

Wild orchids.

*'I chose this image because I felt that even if this landscape might seem familiar, classical, traditional, there is always a surprise that makes you understand how special this place is.'*

(Image and text: Female participant, MP)





Fig. 8.12.

Orchids and shadow

*'I took this on the meadow when we were descending, the heat was incredible, we had also just spotted wild orchids and a shockingly pink butterfly (which cheered me up no end). Imprinted on the landscape with a shadow ~ I've always felt that there is an intangibility to nature, it can envelop every sense but without trace ~ the changing sense of time I experienced whilst in the Wye was incredible.'*

(Image and text: GW)

experience? Was it supposed to be a *treat* for the group? What was this ethical position on this intervention within the research project?

I considered it to be my role to organise the day and recruit everybody as research participants but not to entertain them. It was possibly a mistake to make the group walk so far and so quickly, especially considering the hot weather on the day. OP, a male Fine Art Master's student, whose specialism is photography, offered some feedback to this question within his response. OP offered constructive criticism of the day (Figs. 8.13 – 8.15). It is clear by reading his annotations that OP was expecting a more sedate approach to landscape, more solitude and the opportunity to relax. I am interested that he wanted to 'lose himself' and think about 'nothing in particular' – intellectual neutrality? a sentiment echoed by my relative (B) on the canoeing trip in September 2013. As I also expressed on the day, I had felt that we had achieved a feeling of "going into neutral" as we were ascending towards the meadow and this continued all the way to the Old Station at Tintern where the reward of a rest, coffee, tea and snacks awaited.

OP's choice of imagery can be read as overtly subjective. He has carefully curated the photos under the heading 'Into the Forest', this title and the order in which the images appear and the textual content echo that of a journey or a narrative. The images are indicative of an aesthetically driven sensibility, (he is a trained artist and photographer), but are contrary to those we might expect to see from a traditional 'day tripper'. Notably they conflict visually with most the pictorial choices made on the day.

Figs. 8.13- 8.15. INTO THE FOREST By OP

*From my point of view, you need to be alone and for a long time into the forest in order to get in contact with nature and feel a complete immersion. It is very important to lose yourself in this place without thinking in anything in particular.*



*There is something cultural and not natural in the way we experienced the trip in the Wye Valley. The goal, the hurry, or the awareness of our duty there put me off, you cannot feel the sublime, be aware of your smallness and your lack of importance within the landscape. Reach the top of the mountain in a specific timing draws the attention from the point.*



*The forest is dark, the sun doesn't reach the ground. You cannot see far away. You are inside something and surrounded by it. You are embraced somehow and at the same time completely nude and vulnerable. That's the beauty of a deep immersion into the wild.*



*It is interesting to observe how there is something about the forest related to the supernatural and the myths. Devil's monuments are something you see in almost all cultures. There are holy trees, wicked fountains and enchanted corners along the path which feels like human beings are trying to name the strangeness of nature.*

The images are taken close-up, foliage fills the frame and occludes any discernible view. They lack any recognisable composition, there is no horizon, no vanishing point; nothing to relate to in terms of space and prospect. The images and text were submitted a week after the trip; the author, therefore had time to reflect upon his expectations, experiences and subsequent memories of the day. It appears he has edited his visual submission to reflect how restrictive he considered the day's activities (or indeed the physical space) were in terms of spatial and intellectual freedom; by travelling quickly, he had not been able to reflect upon his surroundings and consider their meaning which is clearly important to him as an artist.

With the benefit of hindsight, I believe OP to be correct in his observation that the event was culturally formulated; my frivolous use of the term 'day trip' had unfairly shaped the groups expectations of the day. I had not researched the phrase adequately enough to understand the expected associations of such a historically shaped and societally driven ritual. It is worth noting that due to his nationality (he is Spanish) Parasiego's expectations of the day may have been driven by his own cultural understanding of the term 'day trip', presumably as a more relaxed-pace affair.

The participants were aware of their role as research tourists and the expectations associated with such a position (Every participant completed and signed a consent form before the pilot study commenced). I had asked them to take at least three photographs and to annotate these with text. OP was clearly aware of what was expected of him and voiced the fact that this had undermined his ability to fully engage with the environment in a personally meaningful way: "The goal, the hurry, or the awareness of our duty there put me off." It's interesting the participant feels he had a duty; was there an obligation to perform because they had accepted the offer of a free day out?



OP's observation of 'the goal' obsessed behaviour of the group (led by me), could be described as "Summit fever ...a hiking term that refers to someone who focuses on a goal-like climbing to the summit of a mountain in a lightning storm-despite serious risks to themselves and others". (Stevenson, 2010:21). By stating: "Reach the top of the mountain in a specific timing draws the attention from the point" OP felt that the focus of the day had not been the relaxed contemplative activity he had expected, but more of a race to the top. Another participant observed that "we were more aware of our surroundings after the steep incline, with a focus on making it to the top." I had arguably risked the health and safety of the participants and shifted the focus away from the surroundings (my overall intention for the day) to a 'goal'. The speed of the journey and steep rise of the walk had been gruelling for the group, particularly in heat. I regret that I had facilitated unusually strenuous conditions that were not overly conducive for relaxation and contemplation of the environment.

However, despite this weakness in my methodology, all is not lost in terms of the research findings from this intervention. OP articulates a response to the location that is resonant with my own and that of other participants. OP observes that the location is highly commensurate for corporeal encounters and is ultimately "immersive" in its appearance. Privacy is provided by the canopy; occluded views inspire introspection and the corridor-like pathways promote the meandering movement of curiosity. He also uses physically located language to convey a benevolent and 'wild' place that is equally caring in its intervention:

The forest is dark, the sun doesn't reach the ground. You cannot see far away. You are inside something and surrounded by it. You are embraced somehow and at the same time completely nude and vulnerable. That's the beauty of a deep immersion into the wild.

JT, like OP and myself, is an artist; it's interesting that, like OP she articulately alludes to the notion of this place being physically absorbing or immersive. This is particularly

relevant when taking into consideration, one of the original research aims: To *investigate contemporary experiences...through the lens of artists and creative processes*. JT recognizes the enclosing landscape and alludes to its agency in her experience, when she says:

...the terrain shifted and changed quite a few times – the ground became more ‘hollow’ and soft, it felt more lush and green (although it is possible that we were more aware of our surroundings after the steep incline with a focus on ‘making it to the top’). We had been walking for a while in a very woody area, which was quite shady and enclosed. Whilst I was highly engaged in this environment by being immersed in it, I felt that at the same time I was starting to adjust to it surrounding me.

JT and OP autonomously articulate how corporeally affective this location can be; how it can be deeply physical and how it submerges an individual with its material agency. I had previously described the location in similar terms on my blog in May 2014: “Pushing me - pulling me - into and through ... The corridor of the forest sucks me into its centre.” I consider these statements to be indicative of a physically permissive set of circumstances; allowing the landscape to move us and facilitate embodied moments that arguably enable a deeper connection with our surroundings.

On the day, the flowing footpaths drew us in and along, and once again, when reviewing what I had thought about the day, I had remarked on the feeling of *neutrality* as we descended down through the woods, as being central to my enjoyment of the encounter.

### **8.5 World War One Walk**

As part of the 2014 Monmouthshire WW1 themed walking festival, I carried out another walking intervention as part of this research. This time the intervention was co-designed and co-facilitated with Wye Valley AONB Community Links Officer, Sarah Sawyer. In brief, we conducted a 4-mile forest walk on the Piercefield House Estate in Chepstow,

aiming to utilise the location as a material portal; a tangible threshold to corporeally connect the walkers with WW1 and its soldiers' creative legacy.

The Monmouthshire Walking festival is an annual event. The theme of 2014's festival was the centenary of the outbreak of World War One. Sarah Sawyer and I discussed organising a walk as a vehicle to connect with landscape through the discussion of related art, music, poetry and literature. It was our intention to incorporate the landscape as a dynamic participant in the day's events and not just as a backdrop to the day's activities.

Recognising the agency of place and the part it can play in the co-production of emotionally engaging content, we wanted to utilise features of topographical iconography as a means of transporting people through time, space and a series of emotional states. With regards to the First World War, we sought to utilise the shape of the land, to physically move the walkers *through* events from the war, through its subsequent effects and out the other side to recovery. As the original 'post-it' note, on which we sketched the outline of our initial idea, shows, the walk would *descend* into war and *ascend* into recovery using the landscape as a material vehicle (Fig. 8.16).

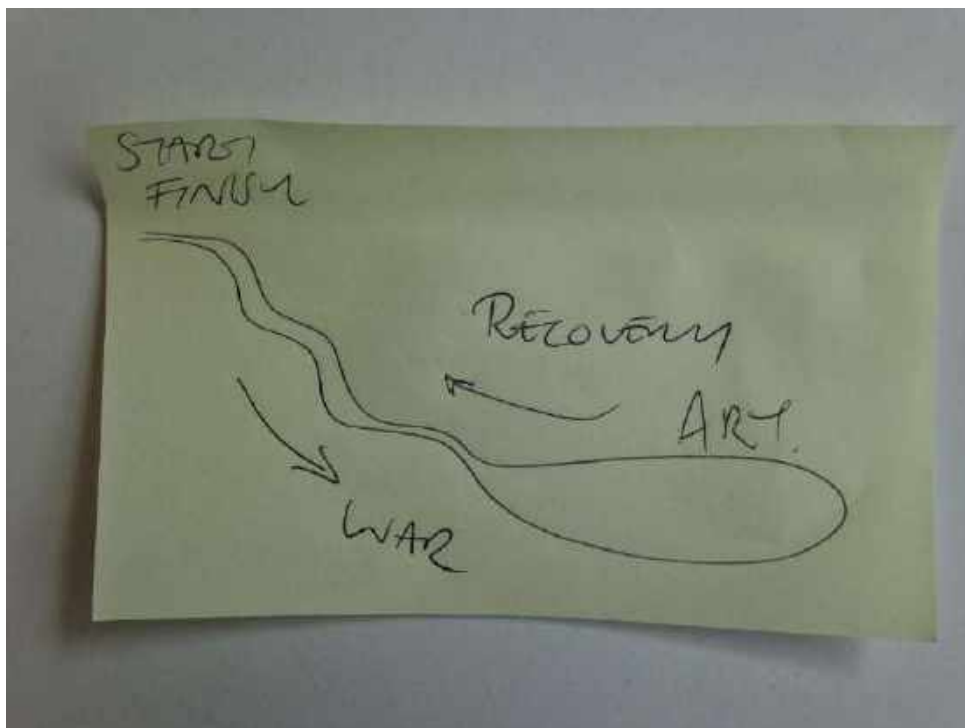


Fig. 8.16.  
Original walk concept as written on 'Post-it' during planning  
discussion with Sarah Sawyer. (Photo: G Dunn)

Sarah and I pre-walked the Piercefield route a week before the actual date of the event. Starting at Lower Wyndcliff car park we descended toward Chepstow, stopping at various points along the way. Notable sites for consideration were the *Plunge Pool*, the *Giants Cave* and eventually Piercefield House itself. We decided that Sarah would use an electronic tablet to deliver music, images and speech concerned with WW1. We tested the sound and display brightness levels. We were surprised with the quality of the reproduction of sound, the small speaker was an effective means of broadcast – enhancing the fragile and primitive nature of the recordings. We decided it would add something to the experience and enhance the subject matter – make it more *real* and improve the emotional connection. We decided that a multi-sensory approach to the exercise was essential in increasing the possibility of a deepening the participants understanding of the themes and increasing a greater sense of *connectedness* with the landscape. Hannah Macpherson, in *Landscape's ocular-centrism - and beyond? Offers* the following to underpin this approach suggesting that landscape has the potential to corporeally connect through numerous pathways:

Landscape is not free-floating; it has a materiality to it which can affect our perceptions and experiences. These perceptions and experiences have multi-sensory and embodied qualities. (Macpherson, 2005:101)

Sarah and I, in keeping with the research aim of, *investigating contemporary experiences of the Wye Valley AONB through the lens of artists and creative processes*, decided that upon reaching Piercefield House I would introduce myself to the group as an *artist*. I would present my work, (using an electronic tablet) emphasising imagery which considers human perception of landscape and how it affects our emotions and my own personal material manifestations of such interactions. I would explain terms such as *Geo-Emotional*, previously referred to and defined on page 16. The walk would then continue and I would utilise two or three further locations to first: explain the work of World War One artist, Paul Nash (1889-1946) and his personal relationship with

landscape. Secondly, consider terms such as the Sublime and Picturesque and thirdly, conduct an open-air *Critique* whereby the participants would collaborate with myself in trying to understand a specific Paul Nash image.

The walk was advertised to the public via the Monmouthshire Walking Festival website as *The Wye Valley War Time Experience* with the following description:

The Wye Valley is in imminent danger. Rumours of enemy troop sightings are rife. Volunteers are urgently needed to patrol the Piercefield Woods and viewpoints. Step forward to serve your country.

(<http://www.walkinginmonmouthshire.org/>)

Sarah's description is theatrical in style, offering potential participants the opportunity to take up the role of being military personnel, described here as "volunteers". The advert framed the intervention as consensually performative event, with the landscape being the immersive stage within which proceedings took place. The description primed the group in a way that the student walk in Tintern had not. Being contextualised as a collective activity, partakers were required to be somewhat extrovert in character and perform in some way. It is also important to note that walkers were asked to pay £5; I believed this obliged Sarah and myself to research and present thoughtful content, conduct ourselves in a professional manner and consider issues more deeply, such as health and safety.

On the day, Sarah and I arrived in early at the Lower Wyndcliff car park, half an hour before the rest of the group was expected to appear. Our early arrival allowed us to prepare ourselves mentally and welcome individuals as they arrived at the location. The group consisted of six females, who gave their verbal consent to be photographed, and one male participant, Phil Mundell, who did not appear in any of the photographs. They appeared to be all over fifty years of age. Some of the cohort regularly walked in a group on a weekly basis (Thursdays) and all were in good apparent health for a walk of this

type. Most of the attendees admitted to knowing the stated Piercefield route and to having previously walked it before.

It was a fine and dry October day. It had rained the day before and the temperature was adequate for people not get cold if they were stationary for short periods of time. The group had dressed appropriately, wearing sturdy walking boots and shoes, fleeces and anoraks. Some had brought rucksacks containing drinks and food. The previous day's rain meant that the ground, (largely leaf covered) had become slippery and would need to be considered in terms of health and safety – Sarah Sawyer stated this as a cause for consideration.

Sarah Sawyer began the session by introducing herself and me, describing my position as an “Artist” and “PhD Research Student”. Sarah also briefly explained her role and the function of the Wye Valley A.O.N.B. Team. Sarah then went on to contextualise the afternoon as part of the WW1 centenary commemorations loosely outlining the structure. The participants were asked to walk to the car park viewing point and consider the River Wye and its surrounding countryside; consider it as being British and belonging to the nation and its occupants (Fig. 8.17).



Fig. 8.17

Sarah (wearing the grey hat) and the “Volunteers” overlooking the Wye from Lower Wyndcliff picnic area at the start of the walk. (Photo: G Dunn)



Sarah went on to explain the events of 1914 and how, after the outbreak of the war, people were initially keen to volunteer and join the conflict. The view substantially reinforced the proposition that this was a valuable place, as did Sarah's suggestion that this is what the soldiers were fighting to save. The prospect played its part in the moment, it elevated us all, high above the river; it facilitated a spacious and opportunity filled outlook. The view of the lush, bountiful and tree-fringed meadows over the Wye were evidence enough to the further the soldiers' cause and justify the journey we ourselves were about to take.

Sarah played the song 'It's A long way to Tipperary', understood to have been sung by "soldiers of the Connaught Rangers singing the song as they disembarked in France in August 1914" (Malone, 2014). The music accompanied the group down the footpath toward Chepstow. Sarah and I led the group, whilst the only other male participant, Phil Mundell, who I interview later in the thesis and is an experienced Chepstow walking guide, walked at the rear of the group to ensure everybody was safe.

Sarah stopped at another location and to inform the group about the Gloucester born poet and composer, Ivor Gurney (1890 –1937). She paid particular attention to his early life in Gloucestershire and his subsequent participation in the First World War. Sarah highlighted the connection that Gurney felt with his native landscape and his use of poetry and music as creative vehicles to express this emotional bond. Sarah went on to play an example of Gurney's musical composition, aurally re-enforcing her research and engaging a sense other than sight.

Upon reaching the site of the *old plunge pool*, the participants were requested to stop and consider how people communicated during the war. Sarah informed the group that, unlike today, letters were the most popular means of inter-communication between soldiers and their families. To demonstrate the scale of the movement of postage, Sarah

encouraged the group to engage with some pre-written postcards that she placed on the floor. Upon these cards were written questions and answers to be paired by the group.

The following are examples of the questions and answers that appeared upon the cards:

Q. "The Number of mail bags that crossed the Channel each day"

A. "19,000"

Q. "The number of ships carrying post lost to enemy attack"

A. "134"

Q. "The time it took for each letter to reach the front"

A. "2 Days"

The participants worked together to elicit answers and match up the cards in their correct order (Figs 8.18 and 8.19). The postcards materially amplified the nature of the subject matter – the opportunity to haptically engage with such objects appeared to physically emphasise the nature of the subject matter. Involving the body in the task appeared to be important in physically connecting the group with their past. Upon concluding the task, the group stood around the cards. They appeared reverent, respectful and expressed awe of the efforts that had been made to communicate under such difficult circumstances (Fig. 8.20).



Figs 8.18 and 8.19.  
Question and Answer cards (Photos: G Dunn)



Fig. 8.20.  
The group respectfully stood looking at the matched cards.  
(Photo: G Dunn)

Sarah concluded this part of the session by playing a video of a contemporary actor reading a soldier's letter written in WW1. I found the moment to be emotionally touching, it encouraged more contemplation and was made more profound in the context of the completed activity. Before continuing, Sarah requested that the group not talk for the next section of the walk. Instead, the participants were asked to think about what they had been through, what they had learned and begin to sensorially consider their surroundings. The group continued to walk along the forest path in silence and in single file. Upon arrival at the next location, The *Giant's Cave*, Sarah asked the group how they were feeling; did they enjoy the period of silence? Had it helped to contemplate the physical experience?

The cave (only being twenty feet deep and high) seemed to offer a logical and physical punctuation, not only upon the walk but the metaphorical journey being travelled by the group. Sarah asked the group to stay in the cave. She stood with her back to the entrance, silhouetted against the brightly lit entrance, so her face could not be seen (Figs. 8.21 and 8.22).

Although not completely dark, the space physically surrounded and contained the group. Sarah and myself stood in the way of the apparent exits to prevent progress and to allow Sarah to deliver some more information – this time related to WW1 trenches, mining and the participation of miners from the nearby areas of the Forest of Dean. I considered the physical space and its proximity to the body of the participants to have been effectively utilised to enhance the sense of claustrophobia the WW1 soldiers and engineers might have experienced whilst working underground. To alleviate the growing sense of confinement Sarah allowed the group to leave the cave and approach the next viewpoint.





Figs. 8.21 and 8.22  
In the 'Giants Cave'  
(Photos: G Dunn)

As the group moved out into the light, Sarah played *Lark Ascending*, a piece of music written on the eve of war in 1914 by Gloucestershire born composer, Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872 – 1958), an individual who had apparently volunteered to join the war in the same year (Thorpe, 2014). The music, having been written by an Englishman, and the subject matter being the Skylark, a bird, whose summer home is usually British agricultural land, was played to emphasise the pastoral domesticity of the bucolic landscape laid out before them. The view combined with the positive and uplifting music enabled the group to leave the experience of the cave behind them. The group could take in the comparatively voluminous space of the view and hopefully feel an increased sense of appreciation for the freedom achieved by the efforts of the allied forces. For me, the visual extent of the view physically exaggerated the feeling of openness and was heavily contrasted by the dark and enclosed space previously experienced in the cave.

The walk continued up hill, intentionally we led the group upwards to convey a positive approach to the future. Only when we reached Piercefield house (a mere fifteen minutes' walk) did we stop, take a drink and observe the ruins of the house. Sarah informed the participants of one or two facts about the house and told them that I would be taking over the *journey* from that point. I introduced myself as an *artist*; briefly explained how I had come to work with the A.O.N.B. team and how my interest in landscape had developed during my artistic residency in Japan. I showed the group a number of images produced whilst studying for my Masters in Fine Art (Fig. 8.23). I quickly explained my thesis of *Geo-Emotionality* and how (for me) landscape can be a material vehicle for human feelings, emotions and subsequent artistic output. The group viewed the images, moving in close to see the examples and familiarizing themselves with my individual way of seeing the world (Fig. 8.24).

We continued with the intention being to now return along the route upon which we had arrived; physically ascending the landscape and on to a unifying state of recovery. Ten

minutes into the walk and at a physically suitable location, where the landscape dropped steeply away from behind me down the river Wye, I introduced the group to the work of WW1 artist, Paul Nash. I gave a short biography of Nash's life with images to illustrate his specific view of the world. The imagery chosen purposely reflected my own imagery in my artworks that I had shown the group. Nash's flesh-like terrain, the war scarred and marked topographies produced by the artist after experiencing the horrors of close combat.

I referred to another painting by Nash, one produced whilst he was convalescing in the 1930's from poisonous-gas-induced Asthma. I described how I understood the image to contain clear and lofty, lung-like trees; a metaphorical depiction of breathing vessels. I explained how I had suffered with asthma in the past and therefore personally empathised with this depiction of landscape of well-being. I introduced the word 'Sublime' into the critical lexicon of landscape art. I asked if anyone knew what the word meant. Somebody said "Beautiful; something *really* nice"; Phil exclaimed, "Terror". I explained my own understanding of the Sublime being a personally understood momentary comprehension of one's own mortality in the face of perceived danger, for example, in the face of an entity such as an extreme landscape. I used the physical location where we were stood to illustrate my definition. A member of the group said "I have never thought of sublime in that way".





Fig. 8.23.  
The artist sharing his practice with the participants.



Fig.8.24.  
The Group moving in to study the images of my art work.  
(Photos S. Sawyer)

I asked the group to continue walking, thinking about the Sublime until we got to our next planned stopping point, the *Giants Cave* viewpoint where we had earlier listened to the *Lark Ascending* by Vaughan Williams.

As we had seen the view before, I asked the group to turn their backs on the landscape. I asked them to sit on the wall if they were happy to; to make themselves comfortable whilst I handed out prints of a painting by Paul Nash, *Landscape from a Dream* (1936-38) (Fig. 8. 25). I did not initially reveal the name of the artwork. I sat amongst the group and told them that in art education, it's customary (and necessary) for us to look at the artistic output of others and try and understand what the work is about – what the artist is trying to say. The name for this kind of activity is a 'Critique' or 'Crit.' and normally, the artist would be present. However, in this case the artist is not able to say what is right or wrong. I explained: "The only person who knows the true meaning of this picture is not here – he's actually deceased – we are free to discuss the picture and share our thoughts, the pressure is off".

The group seemed tense at first and visibly anxious. I asked them to simply describe (and say out loud) what they saw in the picture. It appeared to be easier for some, than for others, but soon everyone was describing the composition. I then asked them to say what they thought was going on. Someone described the picture as a "Universe"; another "like a dream". Somebody fixed their focus upon the main figure (a bird-like individual, standing upright and viewing themselves in a mirror-like structure); the participant wondered who this person was, why they were there and were they bird or human or both? Was it the artist?

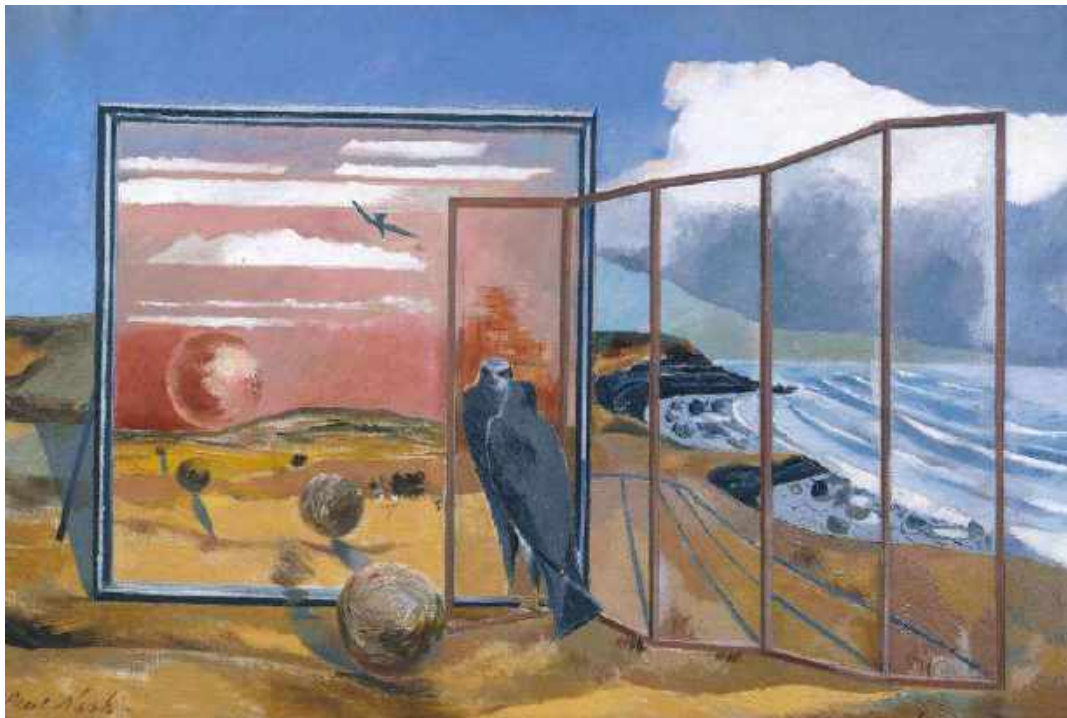


Fig. 8.25  
Paul Nash 'Landscape from a Dream'  
1936-38 Oil on Canvas 679 x 1016 mm  
(Tate Gallery)

Because of time constraints, I quickly drew the session to a close. I thanked the group and congratulated them upon their observations; feeding back the fact that everyone's contributions had been diverse, valuable and (for me as an artist) really interesting. The participants were keen to know the title of the work. I revealed the answer; they appeared delighted and somewhat relieved that they had seemingly understood the subject of the painting. I reinforced the democratic nature of the process and re-emphasised the fact that everyone's opinion matters and to re-consider reading the title of an artwork (when visiting an art gallery) after you have considered the artwork on its own merits. I thanked them for their participation and we continued walking back up the hill to the start point (Fig. 8.26).

One of the participants, had said to me previously on the walk that she sometimes she was afraid of heights. She was particularly scared of walking near precipices whilst walking downhill. Initially anxious at the prospect of having to do this, she ably descended a particularly steep sided section of the walk with my help (I held her hand after asking permission to do so). It was a moment of trust for us both and a situation that seemingly galvanized the group; it appeared that a mutual moment in the sublime had brought us all closer together, legitimised our experience and deepened our connection with each other and the landscape. During our return walk to the car park, the conversation flowed freely with participants giving me positive feedback and expressing interest in doing something similar in the future. As the route became steeper, more physical effort was needed and naturally conversation dwindled, and people appeared to focus on the finish.





Fig. 8.26  
The walk back up to our starting point. (Photo: G Dunn)

The physical proximity of the landscape had underpinned the day's conceptual journey; the walk had been punctuated with various interactive activities to enhance haptic connection with the day's themes. Sarah and I had employed a multi-modal approach. We had aimed to appeal to as many human senses as possible. By using spoken word, music, videos, games and the act of walking itself we had attempted to deepen the group's connectedness with local historical figures including a composer and artist, and with the English countryside itself. Sarah finished the guided walk by asking the participants to light a small tea light and place it at the base of a large beech tree. The group willingly obliged, participating in an act of corresponding tribute to both human and ecological endeavour (Figs. 8.27 and 8.28). To finish, Sarah read a short poem and the group stood silently in apparent respect and reflection.

The afternoon felt very positive and worthwhile. It appeared that the themes of the day had been enhanced and largely legitimised by our physical presence in the landscape. Phil commented that he had never experienced art and history in this manner. This is interesting as he is studying an MA Art History with the Open University. He went to say that he had looked at the works of Paul Nash in a "completely different way".

The WW1 theme and the physical topography framed and subsequently situated everybody's performances on the day. The information that Sarah and I had shared on the Piercefield Estate was intended to be embodied, an effect emphasised by being immersed in the material landscape. The *matter* of the land, its location within the selected biographies, testimonies and works of art, were intended to act as a kind of corporeal connector to a historically situated experience. Hopefully the result was made more intense because it appealed to a broader sensorial realm than what is seen.



Figs. 8.27 and 8.28.

Candles lit as a ritual of respect and remembrance.

(Photos: G Dunn)

## 8.6 The 'Making Moments' Walk

The Redbrook *Making Moments* activity came from the notion that I wanted to facilitate a collaborative research walk with a group of locally situated individuals. I had attended the *Performing Place* conference at Chichester 19<sup>th</sup> June 2015 and witnessed the key note speech given by Professor Deirdre Heddon, Professor of Contemporary Performance at the University of Glasgow. I was motivated by her suggestion that academic investigators might utilise "Arts based methods as research tools" in their methodology. I was also interested in Hedden's phrase "Co-researchers" referring to participants; this alluded to a more democratic approach to collaborative research, which I favour.

This *Making Moments* intervention was intended to actively deny a group of contemporary individuals the opportunity to select and frame a location with the rectangular *viewfinder* of a camera. This was in opposition and contrast to the Wye Tour walk discussed earlier in chapter where I actively instructed the participants to be selective and frame what they saw. The Making Moments' walk and its activities were designed to question what are a possibly deeply embedded set of aesthetic conditions and whether they exist in our consideration of a specific location, in this case, the Wye Valley.

As briefly discussed in chapter 5, within the book 'Place' (Dean & Millar, 2005) there is a notable discussion about landscape art that is framed. Artists, Tacita Dean, Jeremy Millar, writer Simon Schama and art historian Joseph L. Koerner combine to contemplate the subjective palimpsest topography, more specifically here, in terms of Western art. They offer the notion, and one with which I currently concur, that our world is mediated by visual residue; an overlay of preordained imagery and are indeed 'framed' as some of those previous visual representations. They suggest that as a result, we are rarely free from these depictions when considering our surroundings. Simon Schama goes



onto suggest that to become a 'modernist' (or contemporise our approach to our surroundings) we can begin by 'unframing the world' (Dean & Millar 2005: 182). Schama is suggesting that artists, by universally adopting the convention of the oblong canvas, have selectively delineated, limited and indeed curated space for their audience. Landscape art has developed over centuries but has been spatially organised in an arguably homogenous way.

Repeated exposure to standardised landscape representation such as that found in painting, photography, film, and indeed the active production of such media, may have limited our own complex perceptions of the world to a universally agreeable, though ultimately limiting, oblong and two-dimensional formula. It has been important therefore to research alternative ways and means of landscape representation and test its sufficiency as well as their deficiencies. Art movements such as the Land Art and Walking Art portray an experience of landscape that is largely 'unframed' and as exponents of the *occluded* view, contemporary painters such as George Shaw and Clare Woods offer an arguably transgressive challenge to pictorial cliché. On a personal note, I am interested to know to what degree my own view of the world has been influenced by cinematic framing and visual representation.

Following the positive responses, expressed by participants as part of open air critique I gave on the WW1 walk, I wanted to enable a group of non-artists to have fun making with me and produce something with their hands to see if they could utilise bodily stored knowledge of place in their output. I wanted to collaboratively conduct an event that explored the visually haptic nature of topography, utilised location-specific physical iconography as source material and would test the assumption that hands reveal what the mouth cannot. I am an educated and professionally experienced artist. I am aware that I have unwittingly intimidated people whom may have had no existing artistic proclivity or training. As previously discussed, my experience as an artist and sculpture

technician has provided me with a very broad range of material knowledge. I am comfortable with manipulating traditional and non-traditional art materials and utilising them as a means of creative expression. I therefore chose a making material that has no traditional associations with art. I sought a solid, domestic in nature, low in cost and relatively easy to work. By using building sand, I hoped that the participants would not feel overwhelmed by the need to produce a finished artwork and be more inclined to elicit physically instinctive results, as opposed to producing skill-based outcomes. There were also other reasons for my choice to use sand. My rationale for this decision also drew on the Sandbox concept from video games and the use of sandboxes as a visual research method (Mannay, 2010, 2013).

Videogames are a fact of contemporary leisure life; I have personally played videogames since I was a child and have utilised them at all stages of my development. I drew partial inspiration for this intervention from the 'Sandbox' videogame genre, which is defined as:

A sandbox is a style of game in which minimal character limitations are placed on the gamer, allowing the gamer to roam and change a virtual world at will. In contrast to a progression-style game, a sandbox game emphasizes roaming and allows a gamer to select tasks. Instead of featuring segmented areas or numbered levels, a sandbox game usually occurs in a "world" to which the gamer has full access from start to finish. A sandbox game is also known as an open-world or free-roaming game.

(<http://www.techopedia.com/definition/3952/sandbox-gaming>)

The sandbox model from video games provided a metaphorical means of framing the research activities for this intervention. More literally, I decided that using sand could be beneficial in the intervention. Not only is the material relatively malleable, it is inexpensive, non-precious and I presumed, largely free of creative expectation when taken out of the context of the children's playground or a building site.

Dividing the sand into shallow trays has been utilised in other qualitative studies in the production of visual data, most notably by Dawn Mannay, Senior Lecturer in Social Sciences (Psychology) at Cardiff University. Mannay encouraged research participants to use the material, combined with small toy figures and to express in three-dimensions their own personal inner narratives (Mannay, 2015). However, as the focus of my research is on the landscape, I decided to omit the use of any other objects, preferring to simplify the task and rely upon the participants skills with using sand, to re-create their own experience of a given topography.

I also decided that it might be more beneficial for my purposes not limit the participants to separate trays. I therefore decided to place sand in the centre of a shared workspace and invite people to utilise as little or as much sand for their own needs – the table becomes the far less limiting canvas within the frame of the research room. I envisaged that it may be that people choose to work together and express their memories of the walk as a group effort.

Taking Dr Mannay's participatory and visual research method, 'Sandboxing' as the starting point, I wanted to test the role of the framed image in formulating a universally amenable landscape for contemporary individuals. By utilising sand as the eventual expressive medium, I hoped to disrupt the familiarity of recording subjectively meaningful moments in an arguably habitual way. I am alluding here, of course, to the idea that topographically situated photography is, to some degree, a performance; an activity played out by people in places where it's *expected* to happen. People appear to want to take a photograph at a universally impressive site and not a personally significant one. Is it because the vista conforms to pre-defined ideals of beauty? or is it because they wish to capture the moment, share it or use it as an *Aide Memoir*?

Susan Sontag offers support to the view that tourist photography is largely habitual, separative and even interrupts the dynamic experience of place when she says,

Most tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter. Unsure of other responses, they take a picture. This gives shape to experience: stop, take a photograph, and move on.  
(Sontag, 1979:177)

Interestingly, Tim Edensor cites Judith Adler in *Staging Tourism: Tourists as Performers* (2000) as a way of explaining how tourists act and how they are susceptible to previous encounters with place. Adler says that tourists are "...enframed and informed by different discourses which provide practical orientations and cultivate subject positions, specifying what actions should take place at particular places and times" (Adler 1989:1384, in Edensor 2000: 325). Adler is suggesting that tourist activity is well rehearsed, and this elegantly aligns with Gilpin's comparison of landscape to a stage set.

Furthermore, it is also interesting that Adler suggests that tourist activity is to some degree directed by the shape of a location. The stage-like, elevated prospects and foliage screened steep sided valleys were notable examples sites of geological interest, identified by Gilpin and are in abundance in along the lower Wye (Gilpin, 1783:25). Edensor elaborates and expands on Alder, and indeed Gilpin, with his notion of a landscape setting being a stage and the visitors being actors and suggests that it's the locations constituent characteristics that affect activity to some degree:

Having proposed that spaces and places constitute stages, it is suggested that the form of space, its organization, materiality, and aesthetic and sensual qualities can influence the kinds of performances that tourists undertake, although not in any predictable and deterministic fashion. (Edensor 2000:327)

With the *Making Moments* intervention, it was my intention to have the research participants physically investigate the "space, its organization, materiality, and aesthetic

and sensual qualities” (Edensor, 2001:63), with their whole body, without the aid of “ocularcentric” (Howard, Waterton, & Thompson, 2012:290) devices such as cameras to record the event. I wanted to observe how the removal of the arguably reflexive and habitual action of digital photography affected their experience, subsequent modes of memory and resulting creative output. After all, as cognitive psychologist, Linda A. Henkel says in *Point-and-Shoot Memories: The Influence of Taking Photos on Memory for a Museum Tour*,

Given the ubiquity of digital photography in people’s lives, understanding how memory is affected by the act of taking photographs is a meaningful avenue of research.(Henkel, 2014:401)

We can presume that many contemporary visitors to the Wye Valley involuntarily act, to record the time that they spent there, via the means of digital photography. It was going to be interesting to see how, when having removed the choice to record memories in such an established way, people would remember meaningful moments in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

As described earlier in this chapter, the research site for the *Making Moments* intervention had come to my attention after reading *Wildwood, A journey through trees* by Roger Deakin and became even more appropriate after reading, *The rainforest of the west*, an article published on the Guardian web-site, by Mark Cocker, dated 8<sup>th</sup> June (Cocker, 2014) (*See Chapter 6 for more detailed analysis of the newspaper feature*). To become familiar with the research site, I walked the route three times shortly before the actual event took place. This time my preparation combined walking alone on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> June 2014, with AONB Education Officer Sarah Sawyer on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015 and with my wife on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August 2015. Having reflected upon previous led walks, my rationale for walking the route on three separate occasions was to acquire deeper knowledge of the location, allowing me to be more confident when leading a group of participants, with the desired result being that walkers would feel safer in my charge. By

walking separately with Sarah (the expert) and Jo (the amateur), I had hoped to accrue different views upon the route and to discuss my ideas for the day with each walking partner.

The 'Making Moments' study walk was scheduled for the morning of 12<sup>th</sup> August 2015 from Redbook Village hall along a steep and physically immersive forest path (partly along 'Offa's Dyke') to the highest level in Highbury Woods. The planned route would then return via elevated, open meadows that facilitate some expansive views of the valley and surrounding districts. At the time, I felt the walk encapsulated in a relatively small area many of iconic physical features I had recognised as being particular to the broader Wye Valley area (including tunnel like forest walks, elevated meadows and intermittently revealed panoramas). I arranged for the hire of the Village Hall at Redbrook to use for the activities after the walk. Sarah Sawyer, Education Officer from the Wye Valley AONB, publicised the event on my behalf, emailing people she thought might be interested and available on the day. Sarah included a description of the walk, written by myself, as a means of preparing potential participants. She invited twenty-one people, consisting of walking festival guides, county council workers, musicians, poets and AONB volunteers. Having discussed my intentions with Sarah, I trusted that the selected participants would be appropriate. The research aim, of testing the experience of landscape through creative processes, would be addressed and events were shaped by the knowledge that participants had some familiarity with the Lower Wye Valley. It is worth highlighting that following the *Making Moments* day I discussed my personal expectations of the research intervention with one of the participants, art historian and walking guide Phil Mundell in a follow-up interview at Chepstow on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014 (Interview transcript in Appendices). (Phil had also participated in the World War One walk.) Therefore, the later interview data, as well as the data collected on the day, informs the following description and analysis of *Making Moments*.



Figs. 8.29 and 8.30  
The reference material and individual research packs for participants.  
(Photos: G Dunn)

Ten people attended the walk. I did not feel comfortable asking the participants for their ages at any point, so I resisted from doing so. The group comprised of six adult women (including Sarah Sawyer) and four adult men (plus myself). All participants arrived on time and proceeded to help themselves to the drinks and cakes I had provided. I brought a selection of books related to landscape art, the picturesque movement and landscape studies in general (Fig. 8. 29). I prepared a research pack for each of the researchers; the *Ziploc* bag contained a pencil, notepad, nametag, my business card and a Dictaphone (Fig. 8.30). I considered the fact that some people would be happy to write, some to draw and others might prefer to speak into a Dictaphone.

I had a checklist of subjects to discuss with group:

- Health and safety – emergency exits.
- Before the walk, I introduced myself and the research I am undertaking.
- Who are you? – please introduce yourselves.
- Describe the project simply to the group – embodied experience.
- No photography of any kind please.
- Apologise for cryptic approach – can't bias results.
- Please take a research pack (Dictaphone, note pad, pencil) & sign consent form (See appendices).

The weather was good, with clear skies and it was warm. People wore shorts and short-sleeved shirts. In line with my research intention to explore what happens when people are actively denied the opportunity to select and frame a location with the rectangular *viewfinder* of a camera, I requested that as part of the study none of the participant-researchers take photographs at any point during the day. I explained and gained their consent that I would take photos and use a Dictaphone as a means of recording the event. I did take photos both with a digital SLR camera and my smartphone. (I made all the photos available to participants online at a later date.) We left the village hall on time



and proceeded along the pre-determined path. I led the way toward the trail head which is signified by a red arrow in Fig. (8.31).

Some people naturally aligned themselves to people they knew, whilst others chose to walk by themselves. One participant elected to use their Dictaphone almost immediately and intermittently talked for the duration of the walk. We ascended from the road, into the woods along Coxbury Lane (Fig. 8.32). Once in the woods, the path degraded into a tree lined track that in turn morphed into Holloways at certain points. Further up the hill, the group fragmented to a greater degree with people appearing to enjoy the solitude of standing alone whilst being immersed in the tree-lined tunnels (Fig. 8.33).

Meadows opened out through arboreal frames, the spectacle held us in our place and we came together as an audience might in front of the theatrical valley. We marvelled at the space and breathed in the distance. We gathered at a gate (near the Coxbury woods interpretation board) discussed the experience and I handed out flapjack to those that wanted it (to ensure that people would have enough energy for the activity – an issue highlighted by the BCU Tintern Walk as described in chapter 8.3). People expressed at their fondness for the forest and collectively expressed regret at the presence of rubbish amongst the foliage.

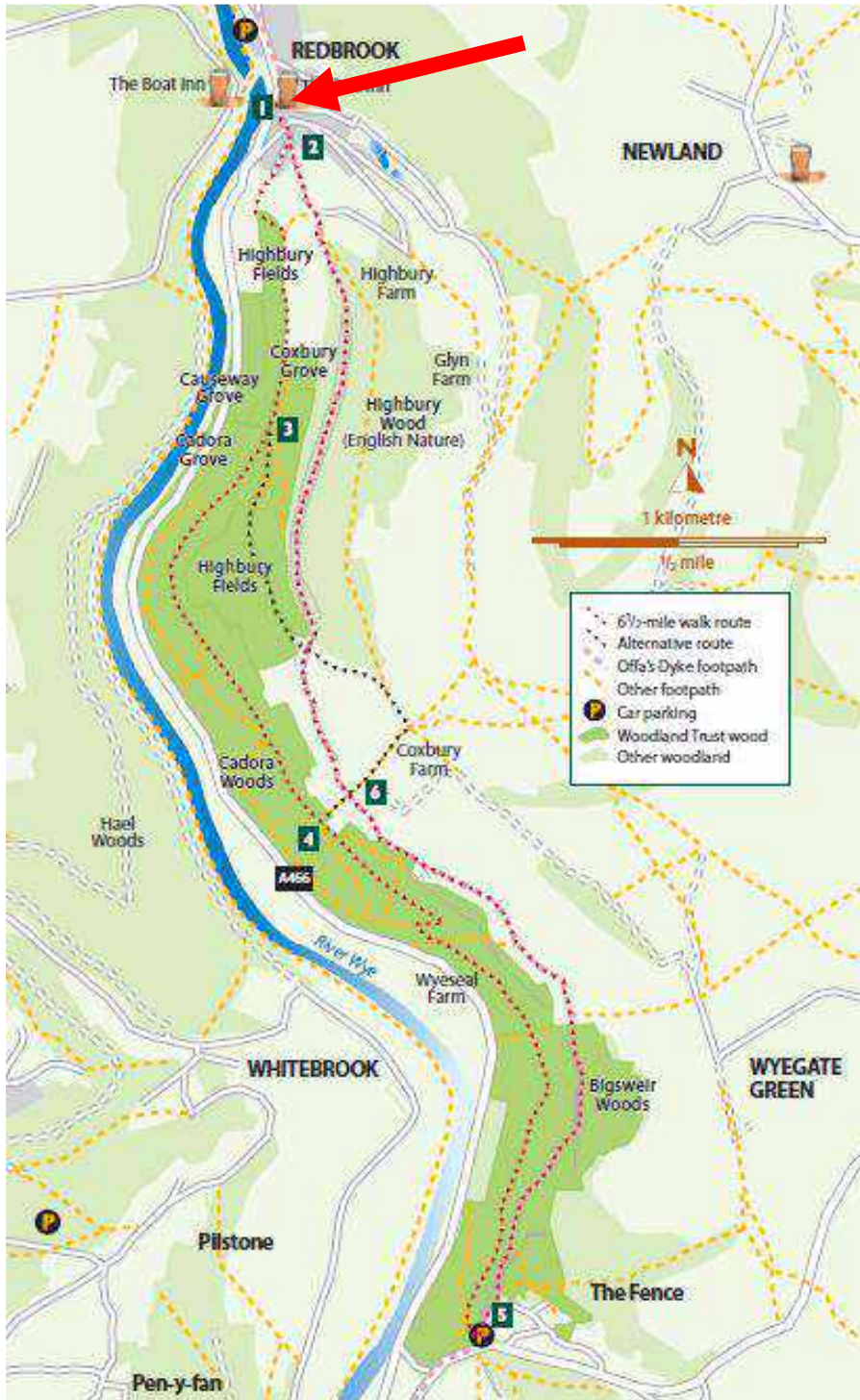


Fig. 8.31.  
Walking Routes (Beginning and end marked with red arrow)



Figs. 8.32 and 8.33  
The Making Moments group ascends into the woods.  
(Photos: G Dunn)

At the uppermost elevation of the walk, we entered a plateaued forested location demarcated with a wire fence, an area cordoned off by the Woodland Trust possibly due to its value as an area of Special Scientific Interest. I had previously explored on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> June. Moving through a kissing gate, the section of the walk was lined on one side with ancient Yew trees; these fringed the ridge of a wooded escarpment that fell steeply away to the left-hand side. It was at this point that, following Sarah Sawyers example in the WW1 walk, I spontaneously elected to break the group and encourage everybody to walk by themselves until we reached the next revolving gate:

I'm just going to pull the group apart again. I will lead the way this time. Just building on what we did before, it would be nice if we walked quite a bit of this by ourselves and it would be nice if we did it singularly; you know, had some space between each of us. Not for a long time but it was interesting to hear what about what people were saying about what happened last time. Let's just see what happens. Okay? I'm enjoying this! If you just have some space between you and go ahead.

(Greg Dunn: 14:23)

Sarah volunteered to walk at the back of the group to ensure that we didn't lose anybody. They walked alone for approximately 20 minutes (Figs 8.34 and 8.35) and we gathered again at the next gate and briefly reflected upon the experience. We waited for everyone to catch up. The walk descends downwards and suddenly opens into another open meadow. The view shocked one person; A was stunned by the view and told me off for not allowing her to bring her camera by swearing at me. I presumed she was frustrated at not being able to record the view and not being able to take it away with her.

I had sent all participants an email before the walk in which I had stated that "Clay will be used to explore the encounter (Absolutely no previous experience of working with clay is necessary)".





Figs. 8.34 and 8.35  
Making Moments participants. (Photos: G Dunn)

I had originally been planning to use clay with the group, a tactile material with many creative possibilities. However, I had decided that clay as a material may have been imbued with too many creative allusions that would colour the expectations of the group, leaving them intimidated by the task. Instead, as previously outlined, I had decided upon using sand.

In introducing the activity once we were back in the Village Hall, I was purposefully guarded about what I exactly wanted them to do; I was sensitive as to not wanting to prejudice their approach with my expectations. In the interview with Phil conducted at a later date (Interview transcription in Appendix), he made me aware of the group's expectations of the day and the associated concerns that many of them had:

Phil: What struck me on that day and I think that all of us were daunted by the fact we had to do something with either sand or clay.

Greg: I hadn't been prescriptive about what I wanted people to do; which made it tricky. It's like having the first page of a sketchbook, what do you do? So that was a little bit unfair of me in a way.

Phil: Well everyone I've spoken to, had the same sort of feeling. They were not really happy about it (even before arriving there) Not happy about playing with clay or playing with sand. People were saying, well I don't know what he's expecting from us.

I was disturbed to learn that the group had felt "daunted" by the task and some had discussed this with each other before the day. I was perturbed that, even though I thought I had considered their lack of art making experience, I had not predicted the limits of their confidence in creating anything. Making can be a very performative activity and I neglected to consider that more deeply. I had underestimated just how comfortable I am with making and the performativity of the process as well as the final artefact. I had not considered the fact that some individuals might have been happier to work, by themselves, to one side, and out of view of the rest of the group (Fig. 8.36):

Phil: For me, the one that I thought was a fantastic piece of work was the lady who did the... and I thought that's amazing; the intertwining roots across the paths .... I would have loved to have been able to do it, to see it; to recognise that this is something that's good. But there is that sort of peer pressure there. You know, they're doing it, I'd better do something. It was just a matter of looking around and let's get something out of this.

The work Phil describes is partially visible in Fig. 8.37. I felt heartened that everybody present had willingly participated, even though some of them had apparently expressed feelings of doubt to one another. I had not realised that by placing the sand on a central table I had made the act of making a very public one. I had intended to make the session a collaborative activity but I had given no consideration to the fact that some people would be reluctant to reveal their responses to the rest of the group. It is therefore no surprise that the activity proceeded as a largely separative endeavour, with people segregating sand to produce their own formal reaction to the walk. The act of representing something came quickly to some participants (most notably an amateur jazz musician and the AONB education officer), whilst others took time to work with the medium and covertly observed what others were doing.

It is clear, when considering Phil Mundell's response at interview, that the task was an alien act for some people. Even though I had made continued attempts to relieve the group of the pressure of making anything legible as a work of art, people were bound by their pre-conceptions of art and by their own feelings of self-doubt at being an artist.



Fig. 8.36.  
The sand table before participants started making. (Photo: G Dunn)



Fig. 8.37.  
The 'roots' made in the sand by one participant. (Photo: G Dunn)



I had brought my own pre-conceptions of being an artist to the table; I am comfortable making in front of other people and I have years of experience of doing so. I am also at ease with material centred learning as opposed to producing an artefact with pre-defined design outcome.

Despite these issues, there were useful findings that arose from the activity in relation to participants' responses to the landscape. People used their hands to move the sand and a valley shaped motif soon became the apparent in most people's work (Fig 8.38). The group appeared to be representing the topography, reproducing the collectively assumed geography but not apparently signifying their own experience of the day. I had hoped people might have expressed more individuality and have taken the time to express their encounter in more visually articulate ways. However, I now know this was an unreasonable expectation.

As I had said to Phil Mundell, I had not wanted to be 'prescriptive' but upon reflection, the participants would have benefited from an aspect of framing the task and the instruction of clear aesthetic guidelines, (for example, don't just recreate the landscape and consider using the sand to symbolise the journey or use shapes that depict the way you felt).

It might have been prudent to demonstrate handling the sand myself to dispel any anxiety. As a result of the various interviews, conducted as part of this project, I now realise that visual expression takes time to acquire, it also takes time to accrue the necessary vocabulary of making skills and use them as a means of non-verbal communication.



Fig.8.38  
Making valleys in the sand. (Photo: G Dunn)

As the session progressed, more individually expressive forms were appearing from certain individuals. One participant produced strand like shapes; when asked what the forms represented, I was told they were the tree roots (see Fig. 8.34). Still a literal representation to some degree, but their execution was more in line with what I had expected to see; something new and unique to the maker and to me. My intentions can be clarified by my declaration in the interview with Phil Mundell:

Greg: I was trying to get at the tacit knowledge. Stuff that you were not necessarily aware of; your body was remembering something from the journey but you might not have been consciously aware of it. The way we moved up the slope, the way that we went down, we had those openings. We went through tunnels. As a thing, as a collection of senses, what was it going to bring back that our training couldn't tell us. My training would produce something different to someone who is untrained. But our bodies are in those situations, so we must have some kind of universality.

Even as an artist, I have never used building sand to produce art, so how could expect other people to do the same? The group had never used building sand to make art.

Upon reflection, I should have rehearsed the activity myself, experienced the feel of it to assess its suitability as a modelling material. It was clear by the views expressed by some of the group, that building sand was not ideal for the task in hand. It was cold, wet, sharp and not as sensual as I'd hoped. People removed their rings through fear of damaging them, echoing the harsh nature of the sand.

A notable moment in the proceedings was the coming together of the group in the final making act. The group combined their resources in the construction of a scale model of the Wye Valley (apparently seen from the meadow above Redbrook earlier that day). The collective memory of the group united in producing a form that was clearly inspired by the Wye Valley. They appeared pleased and comfortable in the production of the

model, as is evident in Fig. 8.39. The participants were apparently happier if their production was a team and did not single any one person's efforts out for scrutiny.

I must admit that I became frustrated with the group's initial output. Upon reflection, I think this is as a result of my lack of clarity in the aims of the task. I was keen for them to produce results, results related to the senses, to the body and to their experiences. All the time I was photographing and talking to the group, I avoided giving instruction and just gave reassuring words of encouragement. As the session evolved, Phil and I got into a conversation regarding what it was that I wanted from the group – maybe he could sense my frustration, he certainly voiced his. This is dialogue led to my decision to do a follow-up interview with him.

However, looking back through some of the notebooks that I had given to the participants before the walk, there is clear evidence that the view of the valley had clearly made an impression on upon them. A (Female) drew a sketch that depicted a remarkably accurate view of the valley with Redbrook bridge at its base. A had been struck by the view and made a point of jokingly telling me off for not allowing her to take photographs at the viewing point:

A: You told me to leave my bloody camera at home. I can't capture this moment.

Greg: You're right, you can't capture this moment. How can it be captured?  
Just take it in.

A: Ooh you swine!!

Was she somehow bereft at the thought of not being able to evidence the moment or was she anxious at the possibility of forgetting the impressive prospect? She had never been to the site before and explicitly made it clear to me that she wanted to take the view away with her somehow.



Fig. 8.39.

The group appeared to happy when working together to produce a scale model of the Wye Valley in sand. (Photo: G Dunn)

A chose to draw the view and one could argue that she did indeed capture the view and she did reveal that it had made an impression upon her. It only made sense for her to form the view from sand. A's sketch reminded me of the images produced by William Gilpin. The screens were there, the river too; the only difference was the raised point of view (Fig. 8.40).

When Phil reflected upon the walk in the interview, he referred specifically to the view that A had also appreciated and had also sketched.

My experience, my training is to look at pictures and the things that struck me from the whole of that walk were two visions, if you like. The one was where we came through the gates, there was a pasture and we'd come all the way through those tree tunnels. We came to the gate and the gate was open, there was a track across the field, to a house down in the corner of the field. I thought, that's fantastic, it's almost like a nineteen thirties 'Shell Guide' picture waiting for somebody to fill in blocks of colour in order to create that particular vista. And the next one was when we came up over the top and were coming down the bank going back into Redbrook and *we crossed a field we saw the Valley below and thought, that's another visual memory.* (Phil, My emphasis)

It is worth noting that like A, he too sketched the view in his notebook (Fig. 8.41). I had also photographed A and Phil looking at the valley view (Fig. 8.42). It is interesting to note that the two individuals took time to take in the prospect and were next to each other when they did so. I had no clue to the fact that they would both draw the view at this point. What did they say to each other? Why did they decide to draw the view and no-one else did? Did it have anything to do with their shared moment, their shared connection? It is also interesting to note that A voiced her frustration at being told at school that she "was no good at drawing". I tried to reassure her by suggesting that there was no right or wrong in art and that the intent of the artist could never be fully understood without the artist being present to confirm or deny enquiry, this response appeared to put A at ease.

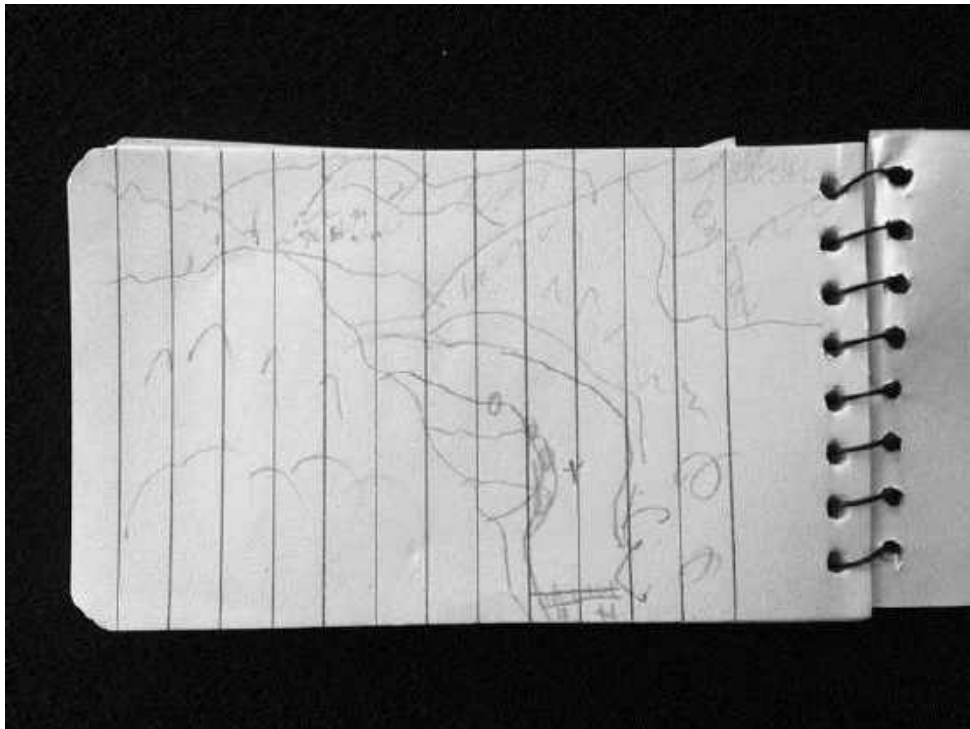


Fig. 8.40

A: Redbrook Valley Sketch (Photo: G Dunn)

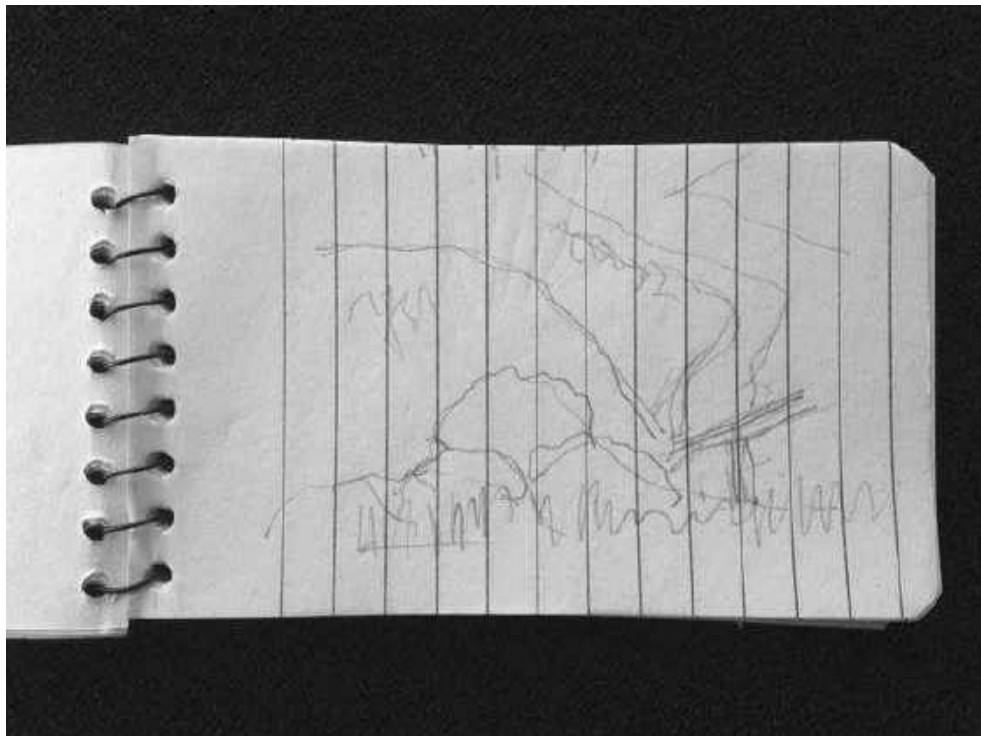


Fig. 8.41

Phil: Redbrook Valley Sketch (Photo: G Dunn)

Finally, I would like to reflect upon the temptation to draw, that both Phil and A experienced. Walter Keeler, when I interviewed him for the second time (Interview transcript in Appendices) said something during the conversation that seems appropriate to mention here. I had expressed my frustration that smartphones appeared to have made people stand with their backs to the view, particularly when taking a 'selfie'. I have anecdotally witnessed, tourists acting in this way and have experienced feelings of frustration that they're not looking at the view or the item of interest that they've travelled so far to see.

Walter agreed and articulated what it is about drawing, as opposed to photography, that makes it a more personal and physically means of recording the world. He said:

But of course, the other thing about drawing is that in order draw something you've got to look at it. You've got to look at it in an analytical way or in a way that enables you to transfer what it is you have seen there. It's not necessarily the literal truth but it's what it is in that object or that building or whatever that excites you, that you're putting on to the paper. So that it's an interpretative way of looking as well as pulling information from it, you're actually coming to some understanding what it is that *tickles* you. (My emphasis).

I expressed pleasure at his use of the word, *tickles*, as he appeared to be alluding to a physical relationship with what we see, a theme that has run throughout this thesis. The personal nature of drawing, that Walter describes, also underpins the approach that William Gilpin's rather impressionistic sketches appeared to have taken.





Fig. 8.42

A and Phil looking over the Redbrook Bridge (Photo: G Dunn)

## 8.7 Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I would like to begin with a substantial quote of myself speaking to Phil Mundell in the interview at *'Coffee #1' in Chepstow*:

What I am trying to get at; what I was trying to get at with that research day was the way I have always seen things is by touching them and holding them. Touch has been very important to me and when I'm not able to touch something it frustrates me. All these years of going to art galleries and looking at Henry Moore's and all the rest of it, because I've just had to stand back and manage it. That has leaked out into the way I see everything and anything. I just want to tap into the fact that I think Gilpin – in the little drawings that he did; there is something very tactile about them for me; there was just something very handheld about them – that's very personal. I'm trying to find out if that's more universal and not just me. This area, this part of the world is very...you look down the valley and you want to do this (motion hands to touch landscape ahead, stroke the topography) ...I'm just trying to find out if other people see the landscape and landscape painting/depiction in the same way. That's what I'm just trying to prove.

In this paragraph, I explicitly describe my approach to experiencing landscape to Phil. One aim of the Making Moments study had been to test if other people process place in the same way. Phil's questioning of the making activities performed on the day, and their role in representing the un-representable aspects of the walk, had made me consider that this is a very personal view of the world and one which has been developed in art education over a time span of thirty years. Within my formal art education, I have developed a making process that is centred on my response to the tactile qualities of materials and concepts underpinned by decades of encountering the work of other artists. My approach to the Wye Valley and the research that I have performed there, has therefore been primed by a pre-existing, intellectual and haptically driven skill-set.

The Making Moments study had also been useful to test how sites, that might normally be experienced in a traditional touristic manner, could be recalled and represented in

non-traditional ways. Although, I had wrongly assumed the making abilities of the group, by using my own creative confidence, as the artistic yard-stick, the day had been useful to test Sontag's previously stated observation that, "...tourists feel compelled to put the camera between themselves and whatever is remarkable that they encounter" (Sontag, 1979:177). When not able to take a photograph the view, A and Phil had reverted to another traditional means of capturing the moment in a method, reminiscent of William Gilpin's approach.

As demonstrated through the WW1 walk, the role of artist, played by myself and the role of historian, played by Sarah Sawyer, showed that a group of individuals, who allowed themselves to, could be guided through an unfamiliar conceptual landscape in a largely familiar physical location. The group paid us to safely lead them through a series of, what I would describe as, emotionally challenging situations. Sarah's written description had prepared them for the occasion and given them the opportunity to accept the role of 'volunteer' on the day.

The students who participated in the Wye Tour, held in July 2014, were visually, and I would suggest, customarily primed. By calling the event a 'Day Trip' I had unwittingly framed the occasion as an activity in which to relax and unwind. As stated earlier in this chapter, the artist, OP, articulated their frustration about the day and how it had not met their expectations, "There is something cultural and not natural in the way we experienced the trip in the Wye Valley. The goal, the hurry, or the awareness of our duty there put me off..." The exertion experienced on the day had removed the opportunity for participants to reflect upon the time in the landscape and apparently diminished some of their individual enjoyment.

Overall, I found that there is a place for leadership when experiencing a given landscape, as proved by the WW1 walk. Feelings of freedom can be facilitated through the correct

and appropriate preparation of participants before an activity, as evidenced by the canoeing trip. Leadership need not be human; feelings of independence can be facilitated through clear, suitable interpretive materials and subtle signage.

Finally, the Wye Valley itself facilitates freedom. The river carries the load to some degree, floating with the river, eases the effort required, allowing for contemplation and reflection. Seemingly endless tree-lined tunnels (Trunnels) possibly motivate movement through the tantalising mystery that they offer. Occluded views, although initially frustrating, increase the desire to see the way. Open views, when eventually experienced, are subsequently intensified as a result.

## **Chapter 9. Findings & Recommendations**

This chapter concludes the thesis and summarises the research activities, relating them to the research aims and intended outcomes. Its purpose is to evaluate the accomplishment of the project's various objectives and offer a series of recommendations for the project stakeholders to consider. As previously outlined, the location has been important in providing a material testbed for all physical explorations and collaborations, by surrounding all those concerned in a corporeally immersive set of circumstances. The Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty has been integral to the research project; not only has it provided the physical framework for all peripatetic investigations, it has also underpinned the conceptual inquiry.

To understand the contemporary cultural significance of the research site and to address the cultural relevance of 'The Picturesque', it has been necessary to re-consider local environmental explorations, technological mediations and subsequent articulations of the location by the Reverend William Gilpin. Although, something of a forgotten figure and often dismissed as being pejorative to those involved in contemporary landscape aesthetics (Miall, 2005; Thompson, 2006), Gilpin played a significant role in attracting visitors to the Wye Valley (Andrews, 1989; Mitchell, 2010). Reviewing his historical survey of the Wye Valley has led to a re-evaluation of Gilpin's contribution to contemporary aesthetic culture and illuminated his role as a modern eco-advocate. Moving through landscape was key to the Reverend's initial comprehension of the research location. The processes of literature and artwork analysis, location-specific event participation and observation, have demonstrated progressive movement to be a fundamental factor of how modern people experience similar locations.

**Finding 1. *Being There*. The only way to experience the un-representable aspects of a landscape is to physically experience it for yourself.**

As well as being supported by the literature, the witnessing and participation in various site-specific activities, such as those organised by the AONB Management Team, allowed me to experience the freedom and liberating remission of self, skilful leadership can facilitate. Leadership encompasses many forms of guidance; in terms of practical approaches to landscape navigation, I have experienced the framed freedom offered by professionally organised walking, kayaking and caving. My family expressed feelings of freedom, whilst canoeing down the Wye; moving with the current, to a pre-defined destination, allowed us all to relax, experience a sense of *being in neutral* and enjoy the journey. I have unwittingly performed as a character within a seamless stage set and found myself connected to the convincing narratives created by the Desperate Men in the 2014 River Festival; their ability to emotionally enmesh the crowd into a story made a deep impression on me. Taking part in a large torch carrying procession, allowed me to follow the flow and become anonymous to some degree. Being incorporated into the movement of the processive group allowed me to rescind responsibility and lose myself in the moment.

Referring to the aspect of the second research aim: *the investigation of contemporary experiences of the Wye Valley*, subsequent engagement with the research location was tested by repeatedly replicating a tourist's experience. Temporarily living in the research setting allowed me to inhabit the space in a more quotidian manner; an approach in which I was able to witness seasonal change and various populace activities. Ensuing observations, responses and reflections were recorded in notebooks and publicly broadcast on internet social media platforms, *Twitter* and *Blogger*, deemed by myself at the time, to be a contemporaneous way to record and disseminate significant moments to a broader audience.

Having now performed the role of tourist, and tourist guide respectively, and by walking with my family, friends, artists and co-researchers, I have experienced, and witnessed people experiencing, the feelings of freedom that being guided, can facilitate. Walking can provide a thematic vehicle for conceptual learning and a mobile conduit into the landscape, as seen in the WW1 walk. It can be employed to sensorially enrich the embodied experience. My personal assumptions that making, can elicit experience of place for people, were largely undermined in the Making Moments' walk. I am a formally trained artist with decades of experience in taking creative risks, it was unrealistic to expect that people, comparatively inexperienced in the field of the expressive arts, could do the same. Underestimating the differentiation in the making skills of a group of participants led to some participants expressing feelings of dissatisfaction. However, the difficulties led to the fundamental question being asked of myself, most notably, how do we see the unseen aspects of landscape perception? or as participant Phil Mundell stated, "You're asking us to represent the un-representable". The event highlighted the need to have rehearsed the activity for myself, to have primed participants more accurately, and to have increased skill expectation at a slower and more gradual level to ensure individual confidence in making.

**Finding 2. Brokerage: The importance of priming people's expectations of place.**

I have come to understand the importance of preparing people's expectations of place, priming them, through practical and conceptual means, for a more appropriate and meaningful experience of landscape. As Dr Jessel said at the 2016 Landscapes for Life conference, inexperienced individuals, when first approaching landscape, need "brokerage" to learn how to comprehend the encounter. I now understand the importance of expert intervention, such as that exhibited by the AONB Management and the associated responsibilities that accompany such a role.

Leading the BCU students on a walk in the Wye Valley, allowed me to curate the location and thus, their experience of place. By framing the day as a 'day trip', the group's expectations were contextualised by the idea of it being a pleasurable experience; in fact, having received participant feedback, many perceived the activity to have been a rushed and arduous encounter. Having subsequently led many walks, I now take care to consider the effect of informed experiential preparation and ensure that I carefully communicate my peripatetic intentions to people, to allow them to feel fully informed before they agree to participate.

Reflecting upon the BCU day trip and taking into the account, the feedback supplied by the students, also allowed me to better prepare the World War One walk, with AONB Community Links Officer, Sarah Sawyer. The activity permitted us to bestow our knowledge upon participants in an appropriately ordered and sensitive manner. The event was carefully planned, tested and suitably executed with a group of individuals who were prepared, to some degree for the events that took place. Because the group had been primed for the activity by accurate advertising, we were able to obtain their trust and stretch their experience within the boundaries of a guided walk.

By facilitating the WW1 walk and acting as experiential "brokers" between participants and the landscape, Sarah Sawyer and myself, employed the location as an intimate conceptual vehicle onto which we transposed historically situated themes. The dual aim was to enlighten the group to the value of the Wye Valley as an area of national importance, one worth fighting for, and the art of individuals involved in the struggle to keep the landscape under the ownership of the British people. Walk participant, Phil Mundell's proclamation that he looked at the art of Paul Nash in a "completely different way" after the intervention, was an important testimony, and one that re-assured Sarah and myself as to the effectiveness of the day's events. The event was a good model of



collaborative practice and one which, I would suggest, could be used to communicate other socially important themes.

**Finding 3. *Touching Topography*: Creatives exhibit a material engagement with their surroundings. Visual intelligence can be informed by meeting landscape through haptic means.**

The first research aim was to: *investigate contemporary experiences of the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty through the lens of artists and creative processes*. By interviewing local artists, I sought to find evidence to test the notion of the agency that this protected landscape has upon creative output and to consider how each of them relates to the physical world. The amount of time that each artist had been resident in the Wye Valley (at least thirty years) was taken into consideration, as was the work that each artist produced. It was hoped that long term familiarity with the landscape might have elicited similar creative proclivities. To address the research aim: *Assess the cultural relevance of 'The Picturesque' as a historically constructed mode of landscape participation and explore the ways in which it has influenced contemporary experiences of landscape*, I questioned each artist as to their knowledge of the genre and investigated and analysed its possible influence on their respective practices. Each artist, although expressing their connection differently, exhibited a material entanglement with their surroundings and one, that each artist stated, reveals that the Wye Valley is significant to their process.

Artists occupy a position within society, from which they are expected to communicate their individual, observations, experiences and ensuing engagements with their surroundings. Artists perform many roles, one of which is that of *interpreter*. Simon Fenoulhet, Deputy Director of Welsh arts organisation, Cywaith, Cymru Artworks, Wales, substantiates this deduction when he says, "...the real skill that artists have is as

interpreters of ideas. An idea or a piece of history need not be fixed to the page; it can be much more vivid when it is brought to life through an individual artist's interpretation.” (Countryside Recreation Network, 1996:10). Fenoulhet also goes on to say, “The artist's skills of observation and interpretation are a way of drawing out what is particular to a place in its geology or plant life and presenting it in a way which *adds to* rather than detracts from *the experience of nature*” (Countryside Recreation Network, 1996:11 My emphasis). Artists then, enhance the experience of the outdoors by applying their accrued skills to raise awareness of what others might not normally notice.

As suggested in Chapter 7, Wye Valley based artists like Walter Keeler, Susan Peterken act as a communicative catalyst, being part of a process that incorporates their material surroundings into their creative practice. I would go further and suggest that their interventions demonstrate an expression of how they simultaneously see/feel the landscape, an approach that evidences eco-haptic participation with the material world. I would also propose that, they have this in common with William Gilpin, in that, two hundred and fifty years earlier whilst moving down the Wye, he captured a fleeting impression of the journey, roughly rendering a depiction of an alien and irregular terrain. His eye had been “irritated” by the landscape (Smethurst, 2012) and I would argue that he too, had been touched by the topography.

Artists continue to be involved with the material world and I would postulate that, for many creative practitioners, their value to society derives from their capacity to present the familiar as unfamiliar. Rebecca Fortnum, Senior Tutor for Research in the School of Arts & Humanities at the Royal College of Art, says in her article, *What is visual intelligence and how do artists use it?* that artists possess “visual intelligence”:

...the term I am proposing for the interconnection of thinking and making is ‘visual intelligence’. The term seeks to address the fact that most visual artists make a number of decisions whilst making their work that aren’t purely

conceptual or only to do with material and technique but lie in the relationships between these aspects of making. (Fortnum, 2006:1)

I would elaborate upon this definition by suggesting that visual intelligence is further informed by makers meeting the materiality of landscape via haptic means. Peterken, Eaton and Keeler all interact with a physical medium, they make multiple, minute decisions and they record, explore and exhibit aspects of eco/human relations, specifically in The Wye Valley, an area with enormous potential for deep, sensory engagement. In a time where technology increasingly mediates between us and the outside world (Treadaway, 2009), there are people for whom concrete corporeal encounters are still central to being, a key component of their creative practice and we might applaud their efforts in the face of the sensory deficiencies of the impending virtual world.

**Finding 6. *Immersion Encourages Empathy: Artistic interpreters and advocacy of the natural world.***

During the 2014 River Festival, the Desperate Men acted as artistic interpreters and deliberate advocates for the natural world. They dramatised the predatory predicaments of a Wye Valley Water Vole, raising the status of its vulnerability, to aggressive and predatory invasive species; this was achieved by relaying the narrative at human scale. The actors moved *amongst* us, they included us in the action and in doing so, made us complicit characters in the unfolding story. The jeopardy, faced by the main character, was tangible and the newly conceivable fate of its tiny endangered counterpart, became more real. Because of immersive engagement with the narrative, the characters and their environment, increased my own compassion for the natural world. The empathy that the events generated came as a result of direct engagement, physical interaction and remission of self. The event was instrumental in raising awareness of the fragility of an ecosystem but at the same time, it's execution was a legitimate and highly entertaining performance. Art can educate and communicate non-artistic themes and I would argue

that the Wye Valley AONB provides an affective and physically immersive set of circumstances in which to perform such communication.

**Finding 7. *Motion can be Emotional: Proprioceptive movement and emotion.***

The second aim was to assess *the cultural relevance of 'The Picturesque' as a historically constructed mode of landscape participation and explore the ways in which it has influenced contemporary experiences of landscape.* Like most people, I was unaware of William Gilpin when I began this project. I was introduced to him by George Peterken in the Wye Valley edition of the Collins New Naturalist Library (Peterken, 2008). As I was practicing a phenomenological approach, I felt it necessary to become acquainted with some of the physical realities of his experience, that of travelling down the river. I needed to do it for myself and I also wanted to do it with other people. I initially focused upon what Gilpin might have *seen* from the river, but as we moved downstream, we could share, compare and connect through mutually meaningful moments and ultimately build an embodied account of place.

My own, initially myopic, view of Gilpin's influence on the creative arts, in that I considered his influence to be solely visual, was unexpectedly challenged when I encountered the work of the American Land Artists: Robert Smithson and Richard Serra. Smithson, having walked alongside Serra's work 'Shift' claimed the piece possessed "Picturesque" qualities (Bois and Shepley, 1984). In 2016, I experienced another of Serra's works, the immense steel sculpture: 'The Matter of Time' (1994–2005) housed in a custom-made gallery at the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao; the experience literally moved me. The Cordite steel corridors manoeuvred me into the heart of the installation; the work's impressive scale, combined with the proximal intimacy of its interior walls, had reminded me of moving through the Wye Valley. The work had communicated with me proprioceptively, a *felt* rather than *seen* aspect of our world. The moment moved me to tears. As movement is personally felt, it is visibly un-frameable and can therefore be

considered *modern*. Movement is difficult to represent in a still image but has been an integral and repeated aspect of the research activities. I have observed other people moving through haptically inviting, green textured topographies and the tantalising pathways located in the Lower Wye Valley. Motion is a contemporaneous way of approaching the Wye Valley and highlights the *unseen* legacy of William Gilpin and W.J.T. Mitchell's description of Gilpin's journey as a, "...graduated, progressive unfolding of space" (Mitchell, 2002:87), elegantly describes dynamic characteristics of the Wye Valley. Driving, walking, cycling, running, canoeing, kayaking and caving have provided ways in which to move *through, around, up, into, under* and *over* the landscape. These are felt notions, experienced by the whole body and therefore, open to a more and extensive sensory realm than just sight. The global influence of the Picturesque, as revealed in Bilbao by Serra, and in the USA by Smithson with his 'Spiral Jetty', highlights the significance of the Wye Valley as a landscape conducive to dynamism; a place that facilitates exploration, mobility, freedom and, for those that crave it, cognitive, I neutrality. We can therefore, reclaim Gilpin's Picturesque and see it as an important asset for the future of the Wye Valley AONB.

The final aim highlights the fact that the research project was a Collaborative Doctoral Award and was fully funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council. As the research is publicly funded, the notion of the research having broader societal impact is important and one that contextualises my responses and subsequent recommendations. The final aim was: *To inform strategies for maintaining protected landscapes for current and future generations; thus, help to underpin and advance the strategic management objectives and actions of the AONB Management Plan.*

**Finding 8. Artists can interpret the visible and invisible aspects of a, counteract overfamiliarity and be open to a more extensive and sensory realm than just sight.**

During my time on this research project, I have witnessed the ways in which people experience landscape and the how they arrive there with different expectations. People manage landscape in ways that make them feel more comfortable, as well as in ways which challenge their everyday experience. Organisations involved with protecting material landscapes, deemed by some to be historically, aesthetically or therapeutically important, and who are charged with sustaining its relevance to contemporary visitors could benefit from continually working with artists from all disciplines. Artists can be employed to re-interpret the visible and invisible aspects of a location and refresh stakeholder's over-familiarity with their surroundings.

As described in the previous finding, proprioception and movement are an effective but under-examined means of understanding of place, I would suggest that more research, which employs artists/performers to explore this notion, particularly in the Wye Valley, would offer new ways in which to engage the broader population with the research site.

**Finding 9. *Keith Arnatt: A hidden cultural asset.***

By investigating the historically established tradition of creative intervention in the Wye Valley, it has come to light that the area possesses a vast variety of important cultural assets. Not only have I foregrounded and re-evaluated the contribution of William Gilpin, but I have also recognised and highlighted the contribution of Keith Arnatt, an internationally renowned conceptual artist who placed the Wye Valley at the centre of his practice; a location specific intervention, in the form of an artist retrospective might be effective in attracting a modern and more diverse audience to the valley. Engaging with the Tate organisation to curate an exhibition, might be prudent, in which the work of Arnatt and David Hurn are brought together and exhibited in the specific locality.

The Wye Valley is an imaginatively vital and stimulating landscape and the thesis has demonstrated its appeal to a group of artists. I have explored its physical topography and recognise its eco-haptic potential as being relevant to a broader cohort of

contemporary practitioners. Its innately tactile qualities, its botanic materiality, is broadly appealing, encourages feelings of well-being and I foresee an increasing number of visiting practitioners to the area as technology and its subsequent separative effects will only continue to minimise physical contact with the environment.

**Finding 10. Facilitation of social connection.**

As demonstrated by the River Festival, described in Chapter 5 and the World War One walk, described in Chapter 7, the Wye Valley has the potential to galvanise groups of people, alter states of awareness and facilitate imaginative performativity; its place as a setting for meaningful entanglements with nature is clear to me and the participants I observed. Helena Nordh Caroline M. Hagerhall and Terry Hartig in *The Routledge Companion to Landscape Studies*, re-enforce the notion of green spaces and their ability to facilitate sociable connection when they say:

Natural settings are also thought to promote health by providing a context that invites and sustains contacts between people, *opening possibilities for shared positive experiences* and the development of social resources that in various ways can help people to better cope with the demands of everyday life. (Howard, Waterton and Thompson, 2012:299 My emphasis)

**Finding 11. Game On: The Wye Valley as a site for imaginative and physical enquiry for gamers.**

In priming new visitors to the Wye Valley, it would be advisable to raise awareness of its potential for dynamic corporeal exploration and the notion that that it can facilitate experiences there are comparable to those found in other media. As discussed in Chapter 4, William Gilpin, made experiential comparisons to the theatre, I would again like draw attention to the fact that moving through the Wye Valley can be compared to the experience of playing a 'First Person' videogame or watching a film, an observation I first made in Chapter 3. Thomas Crick in *The Game Body: Toward a Phenomenology*

*of Contemporary Video Gaming* makes the comparison between the real and the virtual digital when he says, "...a game's virtual world is a space that can be roamed like the physical one and thus is experienced as an inter-enactment as well as an embodiment of vision" (Crick, 2011:265). This supports the notion that the two states share more than just the optical: they are corporeally comparable.

In 2017 it was estimated that there are "31.6m game players in the UK; of this number, 42% are thought to be female and 58% male; the largest demographic within this number, are said to be 15-24-year-old males" (Ukie, 2017:34). Videogames are played by a lot of people and these are potential visitors to the research location.

Making the landscape both physically and psychologically accessible, to as many people as possible, is the overall aim of the AONB Management Team and the Wye Valley, as I have experienced, is rich in intriguing and explorative potential to facilitate this. I would like to suggest that the location has particular potential to enable greater imaginative and physical enquiry for those conversant in the language of video-games and film. The landscape, as we have shown, is already a material vehicle for affective accessibility but there is the opportunity for further collaborative research. The Wye Valley has the added appeal of stimulating a broader sensorial realm, than just sound and vision, and with more people playing video games than ever before, this is an untapped approach that could be utilised to prime people for an experience that eases them into the unknown and reduces their fear of the unfamiliar.



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## **Glossary**

### **Autoethnography**

Is a reflective research method in which the proponent directly records and reflects upon personal experience of a given situation or location and subsequently relates it to a broader cultural paradigm.

### **Augmented Reality**

Describes the combination of technologically sited imagery, super-imposed onto real-world locations; often viewed through a mobile phone, tablet or head-worn apparatus.

### **Claude Glass (Black Mirror)**

A hand-held convex mirror often, darkened in hue and used to visually comprehend a landscape. The mirror would be placed in a position that one could see the reflection of a view, with the effect being, an aesthetic simplification of the landscape; a less detailed depiction of reality allowed the viewer to more easily draught the view with traditional drawing/painting materials.

### **Corporeal**

A term used to describe the human body in material terms.

### **Eco-Haptic**

Professor Derek Gladwin, in his 'Photography and Culture' article, "Eco-Haptic Photography: Visualising Bogland in Rachel Giese's The Donegal Pictures" (Gladwin, 2013) describes a series of photographs, produced by artist, Rachel Giese. Gladwin suggests that they stimulate an embodied sense of touch as well as that of vision and the article builds on a similar premise, put forward by Media Professor, Laura U. Marks in her book, 'The Skin of the Film' (Marks

2000), where she describes an embodied reading of somatically appealing visual representations in film as 'Haptic Visuality'.

### **Geo-Emotional**

A personally defined term devised to describe a 'human sensitivity in the relationship of the body in material space' (Dunn 2013). Geo-Emotional defines is a physically centred (unlike Psychogeography which is partly concerned with a psychological) connection with location, and the subsequent emotions that the encounter, goes on to elicit.

### **Haptic**

Refers to the sense of touch, particularly in relation to touching objects and materials.

### **Phenomenology**

A philosophical approach concerned with the study of experience from a first-person perspective. Developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), German philosophers, who developed the method from the standpoint that the world of objects is perceived and understood within human consciousness and has no agency outside of this system.

### **Photo-Elicitation**

A qualitative study method utilised to provoke a response from research participants. Subjects are shown images, either taken by themselves or someone else, and are then asked to comment upon what they see.

### **Picturesque**

A term, whose use increased in popularity during eighteenth-century, largely due to the real-world observations and subsequent writing produced by the Reverend William Gilpin (1724-1804). Used to categorise aesthetic features of a given landscape and to make a comparison

to those visual characteristics found in a painting, the is used by contemporary society to broadly describe a beautiful landscape.

### **Psychogeography**

A term broadly used when considering the influence of the environment upon human psyche and is a phrase most notably appropriated by French Philosopher, Guy Debord (1931-1994) during the 1950's. It is widely used by contemporary practitioners with regards to the activity of walking and particularly with reference to peripatetic activity in urban areas.

### **Sublime**

Widely used by contemporary society to describe something that is extremely beautiful; for the purposes of this thesis, the most appropriate translation of the word can be drawn from *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, (1757), written by Edmund Burke (1729-1797). Burke suggested that profound feelings of fear, provoked by encountering extreme topography, such as mountains, high cliffs, deep gorges or vast waterfalls, were beyond rational comprehension and owed their intensity to frail corporeal comparison with the enormity of the outside world.

### **Virtual Reality**

American computer scientist and author, Jaron Lanier (b.1960) is credited with inventing the term Virtual Reality (or V.R.) in the 1980's. VR refers to an electronically generated digital environment, largely experienced through ocular and aural means. The participant engages with representations of real-world environments and objects, through the wearing of a physically immersive headset.

## Interview

### Doug Eaton (DE) with Gregory Dunn (GD) in Coleford.

DE

“This is an area that has been traditionally very industrial. Very fundamental stuff like getting coal out the ground, stone out the ground, colours out the ground, the iron out the ground. So, if you like, it’s changed now so you haven’t got that. It lingers there like everything else – it lingers. There are little tiny bits of evidence of that everywhere”.

DE

“We’ve got a very special right around here which is the free miners rights. It’s a very sort of important right and it needs to be held onto as does the whole of the forest as well.”

DE

“I can’t understand anyone in their right mind wanting to go near that place with the idea of building substantial infrastructure just because of the big holes that are underneath it....here is very undermined.”

DE

“Well you get lots of airshafts all the way through these woods.”

DE

F.J. Harvey – Forest born poet. Far more important literary figure than was first thought – he got the Military Cross – for hand-to-hand combat.

“He’s turning out due to this archive to be a far more important literary figure than they thought. He was an amazing bloke; the one thing that amazed me about him was he got the Military Cross in the First World War for hand-to-hand fighting with the Germans. Because they’d gone out in the fog and found a bloody trench – a machine gun outpost and they had to take this machine gun outpost on and they won the post. But a poet hand to hand fighting (to kill another man) doesn’t quite square with me inasmuch as – how the fuck did he do that then?”

DE

“With his knowledge of life and his appreciation of life and so on and reacted positively to it. It’s astonishing, I find that.”

GD

“Part of the reason I wanted to contact you is your work (and the work of Susan Peterken and other local painters)”

“You know about Gilpin; I didn’t until fourteen months ago. At what point in your life did you know about him?”

DE

“Gilpin, Oh Christ yeh’, fairly early on, obviously I was fairly aware of what had happened and who had come to the area. I knew that Turner had painted in the Wye Valley and things like that. There were all sorts of painters; when I was a kid there was one called Willis Pryce (George Willis-Pryce 1866-1949) who was probably just a jobbing painter, you know literally paint a picture and swap it for food or whatever and flog you for rent. Bang on doors and sell em’ and stuff. And I found that his...he used to put his work in Coleford, in what was (when I was a kid) a newsagents – but was also a private library. I managed to get my work in the window of that shop and that was like...

GD

“How old were you then”

DE

“I dunno’ – I was only a kid – you know, what would I have been? twenty/twenty one. I’d just finished College at Cheltenham. I had to get out because my dad died; we had no money and it was the second year of my Diploma. I had to pull out of the course and leave and get a job – see?”

*Doug explained that he had been initially refused from getting into Art College at Cheltenham. He was called back and the staff apologized to him and gave him a place there and then because he was so talented. He stayed there two years and was told he would need to do some teaching to stay on. He refused to stay – saying that he just wanted to paint. He left and remains self-taught to this day. Worked for a cardboard manufacturer and taught “a lot about the real world”. The job “brought me down to earth”. “I was there for ten years”. “I didn’t care because I knew I was going to be a painter”. “I left there on the 16<sup>th</sup> September 1977”. “I had to do other things (affiliated loosely) with painting “bounced around the bottom all my life.*

DE

“I’ve bounced around on the bottom all my life – ah basically. Doing what I like – or trying to. Trying to find a language that I could develop in the way that I painted, I found truly difficult”

DE

“Some of my early work is really quite traditional you know? - Because I was looking to sell stuff. I was doing work that was more landscape based but I began to think I am sat in a hugely unique landscape. This isn’t a normal landscape. This is a landscape that has been altered by man since time immemorial. So it’s easy enough to trace it all the way the back to the Romans and beyond. This I, I thought, is where I am. This is what I know. This is where I’ve grown up and so this is hugely of interest to me.



DE

“So I made it my thought process that everything belonged to me, everything. The whole landscape was mine. Because obviously of the freedom that you’ve got to go anywhere. You can trot yourself into the middle of anywhere and nobody has the right to tell you to go away. And that is a very strong thing to have.”

DE

“But then trying to find a way to paint this landscape – it’s taken me until I began to change in 2002. Because some horrible things happened to me. I started to paint again in 2002 – in memory of my friend (and business partner) who had suddenly died. It was no good giving up on that – that’s what we we’re working and striving for”.

DE

“Once I’ve done pictures, I don’t really think about them anymore. Because it’s always the next picture that’s important”

“Now I’m 68 – I think, Shit, I better bloody do something if I’m going to sit here and be a painter”

“I haven’t got that draw you see (to travel far on holiday for example) mainly because the worthiness of this area is something that I feel I need to concentrate on and so, to be honest, I feel like I’m on holiday all the bloody time!”

GD

*I recount to Doug, the fact that numerous people have said the same thing. One person had said that the bother of leaving the Valley (to go on a foreign holiday) is sometimes not worth it – especially when they return to such a beautiful place as the Wye Valley.*

DE

“I can understand people wishing to do that (go on holiday elsewhere) I’ve done it as well and enjoyed it, at the same time as that, it’s a holiday. You come back and think, Christ ain’t I lucky to be here?”

DE

“I think if work is doing it should occupy you all the time. It’s not something that you can just put in a box. I think people who are able to put it in a box are getting the least from life because they’re not actually living the twenty-four hours of it”.

GD

“That leads me to a question. “Put in a box” - you just said; with your work, going back to Gilpin – one thing that has come out is the research is the way we frame the world. Have you got anything you would say about how you frame the world?”

DE

“Well I frame the world as being this little tiny aspect here. Because this is my world. And again, the more knowledge that you have about it the more effective you can say

something about it. And as I said, this place has changed enormously. Take St. Briavels Common for example. When my grandmother was a girl that common was the last place in the world that you would want to be...because that's where the absolute poorest of poor would be. And a lot of my family lived on the Common actually. They lived on that Common."

DE

"Well my family basically occupied Whitebrook Valley and then that faction of the family moved up to the Common and went onto Chepstow..."

DE

"...all my lot are buried in St. Briavels Church. My immediate family are buried up here in Mile End and I'll be chucked out in the wood."

"The building of Worcester Lodge, when it was started, was seen as a form of enclosure that they didn't want. So as soon as they started to build it they burnt it down. The locals. You know, people are terrible with fences around here; they'll cut it, hit it down."

GD

"But this is again bringing it back to framing. This makes me think that these are just frames – kind of like. These are cordoned off places that people don't want and you talked earlier about feeling very free and being able to go anywhere you like around here. The idea of something being shut in and closed off."

DE

"We don't do enclosures here, at all. The *HOOF* (Hands Off Our Forest) campaign, again we had various things going on in various places and a big place for me is the Garden Café in Lydbrook and the field out the back of Speech House. Somebody rang up the night it was decided that the sell off was on. Somebody announced it on the radio. And I immediately had a phone call from a mate (who's not from the area) and he said "they're gonna' sell it mate". And I said "Righto', ok." And he said "well, aren't you worried?". And I said "No, because it ain't gonna' succeed". He said, "well it will because they've passed it" and I said "Well I don't care what they've passed because it wont succeed". I said, "I tell you what shall happen next shall I? I said "there will be a meeting, people will get themselves together and there will be a meeting and do you know where it will be? It'll be in the Speech House field out eh back of the Speech House. It's a place traditionally used as meeting place to discuss issues that affect the local area happen. It's out of doors. And that's exactly what happened".

DE

"I try to be quite physical with the painting as much as that some of the marks that are put on are put on in a hurry in some sort of form..."

GD

“There does seem to be a lot of energy in the them; a lot of movement and moving around. You know, like your eyes darting over the thing.”

DE

“Ah, that’s it! That’s it exactly. That’s what I want. I find if I’m presented with something I find a way I look at it is that I look at it. I get drawn to all sorts of different things and I find my eyes, actually, moving all over the place and so when I paint I try to achieve that for somebody else to look at.”

GD

“That’s what’s happening. For me there are lots of planes that your eyes rest upon and it also makes me think of that sparkling effect you get in sunlight on sea or water and it’s jumping around the picture again.”

GD

“You mentioned Matisse, earlier but we haven’t talked much about your influences. Do you know? You don’t have to tell me. You might not know. You might not have any”.  
*He gives me something to read – a magazine article (Interview with Susie Hodge in The Artist – May 2013) about his work. Rather than tell me.*

DE

“I try and do the landscape but try and get that feeling (Volumetric Shapes I (GD) had seen in Susan Peterken’s work) The River Wye – the Valley then. I like the idea of almost you feel as though you’re falling into that valley; or you have to climb up to the top of the valley. I’ve got a view below and a view above. And I just like that idea that you’re torn between the two. Where do you go, up or down, you know?”

GD

“There is a divide it feels between down there and up here. We have cars now but even then it’s a struggle”

DE

“No, no it’s hugely important the two rivers cutting this place off is the reason for it being almost. Then you’ve got the physical nature of it, trying to get in. Even as late as the last Olympics; if you look, the torch actually skirts the Forest of Dean. It didn’t come in. We ran our own torch up here. They got so fuckin’ fed up with them. Right, well we’ll do our own. Bigger em’. Fuck off Westminster”. The Royal Forest of Dean explained here. The Newland Church. Brass Plaque. The miner. “hugely important” walking over a plumed helmet. “The working man has more rights than the nobility who so-say own it”. Also explains why the foresters have rights. Civil War mine underneath castles who were against the king. Build big fires to bring castles down.

DE

"I do feel as though my roots are here. I belong here and it's mine (as I said) this is the important thing: **it's mine**. The palate belongs to me. No other bugger. It's such deep entrenched feeling."

*DE described writing letters to Parliament. Locals signing. He paid for envelopes and postage. Every letter had to be answered. Wanted to get Westminster to grind to a halt. To produce an irritation and a problem. "You imagine a fence going around that wood."*

DE

"It's ok; and if you like that's fine. It gives you an idea of where you are and where you're going but I mean the whole point of this place is just to be able to walk straight in it. Following the paths which were put there before and even been made by an animal. It's as likely to be an animal as anything else".

*(Talked about following sheep trail to the top of the Seven Sisters – he had done it off his head at midnight – me "BOOM!!" remarking on appearing at top of cliff over Wye).*

GD

"How are you with the sea? How are you with open and openness?"

DE

"I don't do the sea."

GD

How are you with views of the sea? Are you comfortable with that space or not?"

DE

"well, it's a nice noise".

DE

"I'm sure the sea has different effects on different people. And I do like it. I like the experience of it. Nothing draws me to paint it because I don't know it. I just haven't got a clue what the sea is. I need to not cover things up because I need to know what's underneath it as well".

"I've got to know what the geology is."

"That's there because of (refers to geology). "The Wye Valley is the world example of an incised meandering river" – obviously I heard that at school.

"Hockney was a huge influence on me"

GD

"I see the incised, the sharp as opposed to soft like Hockney"

"I've chosen that edgy thing because I think it helps in a stupid way to actually get that more dynamic feeling. The reality of it is some of them haven't been altered that much from reality. I have always found it strange how many straight lines there are in landscape and corners and bits that you think Christ! That's like a razor going though

there. And it's not all soft and moulded. I suppose the intention was to convey the idea that this was an industrial place and it was heavy and it was stinky and it was black. It's all those sort of things wrapped up in that as well."

"I just thought a *razory* sharp edge in the landscape is an interesting thing to play with". (I describe the way I read his works through eyes as hands running over the surface of things).

"Hockney was a huge influence on not just me but the whole College"

*Talks about knowing Dennis Potter's family – (knew his mother) and the fact that people (his family) didn't like some of his writing.*

*Mentions 'Stand Up Nigel Barton' – play, political. "very political animal".*

"I would use Potter if you could".

DE

On the Forest: "It is (a country) it's a republic. That's exactly how I feel about it. I've consistently left the Wye Valley alone and the Severn alone for many, many years. I didn't start painting the Wye Valley and the Severn in any respect until probably about four or five years ago. That was the first time that I would attempt the Wye Valley and attempt the Severn because they were like different areas again. What I had was what was inside that and I didn't know enough about the rivers to do anything about it. Gradually I've moved and developed a way of painting the (Wye) valley.

DE

On the F.O.D. as film location and story setting: "It is a ready made spot for drama and film really. If you've got it publicly owned you can do all sorts. Once you start to enclose it and sort it out as private land. The scowls are much better than Puzzle wood. Probably the most dramatic."

*I describe my theories about us all seeing the world 'cinematically'. Constantly sound tracked, framing, of what you're seeing.*

DE

"We've become so screen orientated. I also decided in 2002 that actually one of my main things to compete against was a screen because that's what I'm competing against with my paintings. The screen is everywhere now and I could see that it was going to be everywhere and it would be what people looked at."

*I explained that I had first seen Doug's work on the screen of a PC – back lit. I said I thought that his paintings competed really well with the screen – the screen actually compliments his work.*

DE

"What I'm saying is if I'm producing a picture, it is static. It is hung on a wall. It doesn't move. It's on exhibition. If somebody walks by it I need my painting to stop them. They're

on the move, I'm static. I'm not a pad in their bag. I'm static and I've actually go to stop them – somehow.”

DE

“Every generation is set with the problem of trying to do different; something that has been done. Painting is only too obvious in as much that everything that could be done has been done and so you are up against that from day one. And that's what I've tried to put my energies into and get away from that – that isn't different but maybe has a tendency enough to make someone look at it. And if you like come out on the side that they hate it – I don't mind – I couldn't give a fuck. That's how it's developed. The headlong fight into hating it (the work) is fine – I really quite like that. Because the last thing you want really is for everybody to like something because that way you can only be bland. Really, people have only got more sophisticated since the Internet and now looking at things they've been introduced to by the Internet and by a screen. And if you like, that's good because it's opening people up and they're able to contend with something that twenty or thirty years ago they wouldn't have been so able to contend with”.

GD

“Whether they engage with things as imaginatively as they did before. You know, imagining what's not on the screen. Because often it's so easy to be sated by what's on a screen and then you not just think beyond that; beyond the frame of that. Maybe that's what painting is good for, is actually suggesting what's outside it. What's off... outside it.”

DE

Again, the edges of paintings are very important to me. Edges of paintings have been important since 1967 when I thought I'd discovered them and now I still continue it – inasmuch as that the very edge of the painting is a suggestion as to what might lay outside of the painting.

THE END

**Walter Keeler (WK) with Gregory Dunn (GD) in Penallt**

GD

“You were saying about the place as being a sort of thread”.

WK

“Yes, there are few ways the place directly feeds into the work. But I think one of the things you sort of discover in a way when you’re working in the creative world, rather than just doing a job is you discover you are who you are that whatever the ambitions for your work you can only make what you can make. I for example, make very tight things. I have often had the ambition to make things that are very loose and free (laid back) but I can’t because it’s not me. And that’s something you wouldn’t necessarily discover if you were working in an office – doing whatever people do in offices. It’s the fact that you’re working with material and working in a very open-ended way. You know, I’m making tea pots, pots and mugs but those mugs are me – they are who I am. You are implying (from our conversation so far) that the place has an effect on you as well. I mean partly, it’s a question of choice, isn’t it? I decided I’d rather live here instead of the middle of London or in a village (we’re in a fairly isolated spot). I mean I’d quite like to live in a village I guess but I’m very happy here because I like being close to nature, in a way but then there’s nothing very natural about the British landscape at the best of times.

WK

But it’s also that sense of it being an ancient landscape that the influences (or the forces) that people have brought to change the landscape are still in evidence. Sometimes, and especially in the Wye Valley, there all sorts of strange and wonderful things; you could be in the wildest kind of natural seeming environment and then you think what’s this over here, you come across a bit of old machinery because it was a tin works. The fact that it’s been transformed from a wild place to an industrial place in effect and then it’s kind of found its way back again. And the odd bits that you find around the artefacts, maybe odd bits of wood and so on are rather special – you come back to the eighteenth century and the Picturesque and that sense of time passing – things crumbling and getting ivy on them. So, all of that is part and parcel of me and what I find rewarding in the place. The pots I make also have a link with the past because pottery’s an ancient craft; it’s been made in all sorts of places in all different times and different approaches to the material and they’re always fascinating.”

WK

“You’ve got Leach, on the one hand, saying oh you’ve got to make ethical pots and you’ve got to be honest to the material and that you mustn’t make meretricious things, things that just look good but in fact have got no heart and substance to them. And yet,

I am very influenced by eighteenth century, what he (Leach) would have probably thought of as industrial ware – pots that were hand made in factories by a team of makers rather than one individual. And each one of those makers had a particular skill (was master of a particular craft) and so there was a designer involved who had an overview of the object and each one of those people contributed their bit to it”

WK

“Somebody threw the pot. Somebody turned it on a lathe. Somebody added a sprig to it. Somebody put a handle on it. That, I think, is a wonderful way of working. I tend to use similar techniques; press moulding, lathe turning. I’m doing all the jobs. I have discovered about myself I can’t delegate.

WK

“That tub; that rusty looking tub over there and the other. They were some pieces I made when I was teaching at Bristol as part of a research project that was to respond to industrial artifacts being re-absorbed into the natural world. I just like the idea of making some pieces for a garden and they could just ‘mingle’ as it were. They would have associations with mechanical things like metal drum, for example and casting that could have been part of a machine of some sort.”

GD

“Did you ever do engineering? Were you ever interested in engineering? Because all of these processes, all the lathe work etc. could quite easily have been metal.”

WK

“Yes, it could but I’m not good with metal. I like metal actually, I love working with metal but it demands a certain precision. If you’re going to silver solder two bits of metal together you’ve got to have a fairly tight join for it to capillary through the run. With clay (laughs) there’s always that little bit of flexibility; a little squish here, or push there and you can overcome the lack of precision. One of the things I love about pottery is the clay will always, always respond; whatever you impose on it, the clay will always have its say and I love that because I impose a lot sometimes and I can be very dogmatic when I’m handling the stuff”

WK

“I always feel that a lot of the reason for imposing a lot onto the clay is getting it to respond to that treatment so that for instance if you try and create a very sharp angle; you can be pretty bloody minded and get a sharp angle, but you can do it in such a way that you get a burr on the edge and that burr reflects the nature of the clay. Sometimes I put more of a burr and I provoke the clay just to respond a little bit. That’s my technique; my techniques and the timing of when I do things to the clay are to do with responses I want to get from the material. That’s why I get frustrated with Leach saying that it’s got



to be ethical because I think well, what's unethical about turning leather hard clay on a lathe (I laugh). There are all sorts of qualities about the clay (on a lathe) that a bit of soft clay on wheel won't reveal. And that speaks of the material – clay.

WK

“It also hints at metal too – the fact that you can burr a burr on metal but also that you can have a folded joint or a rolled edge – all sorts of things. We're in a world now where conservation and ecology are a major issue – probably the major issue if it wasn't for people shooting each other in between. The other thing that we're not conserving is human skills and abilities.

WK

“I heard a program on the radio the other week about railway enthusiasts and keeping all that footplate work going; people who actually take the engine to bits and mend them. The last generation of people who did that for real – actually worked in engine sheds and maintained steam locomotives when they were working, are into their eighties heading for the nineties, dropping off the peg. I know myself, with lathe turning pots, that twenty years ago you could have gone to at least one factory in Stoke where someone would be turning every day on a lathe – turning tea pots. Now it's very hard to find (admittedly I haven't scoured the earth) anyone who has done it seriously. People often say, oh yes, I did it when I was back in college in the 19...whatever it was. I remember we did this and we did that. Well I've see footage of these old boys – it's concentric before you can take a second look – blink and he's turned it and he's got it off again. It's just astonishing skill. And they would do it all day, every day, their whole lifetime.”

WK

“The issue for me too is however controlling I am of the material I use, the material I use dictates what I make; it dictates an awful lot to me. Not only does it dictate but it also provokes. You think it will be good to do that. You just know how nice it is. I looked at a lot of pots before I took up pottery. As a kid I used to pick up pots from the Thames foreshore when the tide was out; so I knew pots really intimately just from fragments and then looking at pots in museums and thinking, ah yes that's what that bit is that I've got at home. And also looking at pots in museums and figuring out how they were made – why did they do that? Why did it end up like that? What did they do? And you'd think, ah yes, well they threw it upside down. Or that's two bits and they join like that. It's fascinating really and also it tells two stories. It tells stories about the material. It tells stories about the mind and the ingenuity of the person that made it. Sometimes pots are made of rotten stuff and yet they find ways of dealing with that. There's a famous quote from Hamada (Shōji Hamada) isn't there? Somebody said, “Oh Mr Hamada how long

did it take you to throw?” and he said, “Oh it took me twenty years (I laugh) If I’d had better clay it would have taken longer (I really laugh)”. So, the bad clay actually informs you more than the good clay; the good clay will do it for you. With the bad clay, you’ve got to really know what you’re doing.

GD

“That’s interesting you mentioned Hamada. You appear to have been largely influenced by English Ware, did you reject Japanese ceramics consciously or were you just not interested?”

WK

“I wouldn’t say I consciously rejected it but I certainly and deliberately didn’t embrace it. Because I found the British and European pottery so fascinating and culturally I am fascinated by Japanese culture and it is wonderful. The gardens, the architecture, the whole thing and the ancient and modern. It’s not for me, and the thought of making seventeenth century Shino tea bowl, if you’re an Englishman living in Yorkshire; it seems quite bizarre.”

WK

“I just feel that there are some Japanese pots that I really love and I got a huge respect for the tradition but I find it very hard. The ‘Goldmark Gallery’, they actually market fine art - prints mainly. Matisse prints, Picasso prints, Eric Gill, whoever but they also run a ceramics gallery up in Derbyshire somewhere and they have a stable of British potters all, pretty much with the exception of maybe of Clive Bowen, very much oriental orientated. Clive is a slipware man, but very much again a very laid-back potter. And they’ve got a few Japanese potters. One their potters Mitsukushi Ken – I think; he’s a Mashiko potter and his work is very traditional in lots of ways and he makes quite a lot of Oribe. He’s very innovative, his pots are not traditional and they’re certainly not reproductions of old pots.

GD

“I’ve seen your more recent pottery. The yellow and green. Reminded me of Chinese burial pottery (Tang)”.

WK

“That whole series of pots was based upon my love of eighteenth century British pots. Whieldon Ware. And that, I’m sure was influenced by Tang Dynasty pottery. I love runny glazes. Some of the pots from that period are lovely. Quite simple forms with these earthenware glazes dripping and dribbling down. But that’s not where they sprang from; they sprang from eighteenth century Staffordshire”.

GD

This is great. It's lovely in the sense that it ties in with the fact that my focus from the beginning has been our old friend Mr Gilpin and his book the 'Observations on the River Wye', which I didn't know about till fourteen months ago. So, it's great that your area of influence is still that period of time.

(WK and the white salt glaze as well)".

WK

"The other thing too from the eighteenth century. I guess when tea was first imported, which was sometime in the late seventeenth century, people didn't know about tea pots; they'd come to terms with coffee by then and hadn't sort of worked out tea pots. So, I guess the only model they've got for tea pots is a far eastern one and I think that tea pots were probably brought in in the tea because tea is perfect packing material for pots."

WK

"So, a lot of the teapots, or maybe all of the tea pots were influenced by far eastern pieces and one of the things you see in old tea pots is handles and spouts that look like bits of trees. The thing is they're called Crabstocks in Britain – I suppose Crab Apple tree stocks with truncated branches. I looked at those and thought how incredibly odd; you've got this teapot that was made for people who going up in the world; they probably couldn't afford a silver tea service so they would buy a white glaze tea service a bit like porcelain and it would be quite a refined form maybe, but it would have this funny knobbly tree, branchy handle and spout on it and it would make me smile. I started to make versions of that; simplified versions of the Crabstock idea. Putting little branches on and then the little branches got bigger and then I suddenly made bigger and more kind of. I got more interested and involved in them; more kind of obsessive about them".

WK

"I began to notice that of course that was being influenced by the hedges. Because the farmers, these days. Very few hedges are laid these days. Because they flower back every year or every other year and then where they've been chopped off they sprout again and then they're chopped off again and they sprout again so they get these very distinctive growth structures. So that has been strong influence directly from the landscape from just walking down that green lane – round and about. I didn't ever consciously think about that until I spotted it."

WK

"I loved the city of London – I grew up there and my family were Cockneys on both sides actually, going back to my grandparent's generation. The London I knew was the city in the 1950's – post war – bombed completely – great holes in the ground. Buddleias and St. John's Wort grew. You had the whole medieval street plan of London there and the

cobbled streets and we'd go mud-larking. And the city's tiny, you know? If I could have lived in that London I would have been quite happy, I think the city was fascinating then. Billingsgate was still thriving down on Lower Thames Street. You'd walk along to the Tower along Lower Thames Street; all the porters and the Billingsgate blokes working there and then there was a shed, painted dark green, on wheels, outside the Tower of London where you could get a cup of tea and a bacon sandwich with all the fellas who were working the market. I didn't ever go to Smithfield. We were river focused, mud-larking."

GD

*(I recount the fact that other people are relieved to get back to the Wye Valley after a holiday – ask themselves why did they bother, almost?)*

WK

"Yes, it rather (a relief). We travel. It's very often to do with the pottery in fact mostly to do with the pottery...it tends to be focused on people or a job. The thing that gets me down now is that everything is dominated by tourism. I can remember. I know it sounds stupid. I know I'm old but you would go into London. My dad would say for example "Let's go to Westminster Abbey" and it echoed to the sound of your footsteps and you just walked around and the same in any cathedral or any stately home and Stonehenge – I remember going to Stonehenge and it was this vast wild place; you could see Stonehenge. There's a little shed, painted dark green, the Ministry of works and there were black and white postcards – really crummy ones and you got a sort of raffle ticket and paid sixpence. You got a mauve coloured ticket and you just wondered up."

GD

Something that has become prevalent in my research is framing. And the fact that William Gilpin defined a frame 250 years ago. He said in the frame you should have this, this and this and will be beautiful and it's interesting that he used the Claude Glass (Walter gasps). And he did used to stand in front of something and paint it over his shoulder. And of course, people are now taking 'selfies' of themselves with a similar sized item. It's framing now.

GD

"How we frame things. How we frame our lives. I'm not just talking about context; I'm talking about bracketed experience almost. Have you got anything to offer on that? Anything that comes to mind about your approach to living here and working here? Maybe in life, how do you frame things?"

WK

"I see what I'm doing in the context of the activity having carried in for as long people have lived settled lives. As long as people have lived settled lives they've found ways to

make pots. However primitive they might be and however crudely fired. And there's the relationship between those objects and people's lives and I can see that, for example, France is a good example because the pots that people made were to do with the food the people cooked and they were inter-dependent; you couldn't cook that particular dish without that particular pot. That was also moderated and modified in some way by the constraints of the material process of the potter. He was limited to the range of shapes he could make to some extent and the processes he had available to himself. But within those relatively free constraints anything was possible so that the pot would be bound up with the clay that was available, the potter's experience, the tradition that it came from and the food that was grown and produced and the way that it was prepared and joined together. And that seems to me to be very profound and it means that even now although our lives aren't closely bound to the soil and our culture. You just pick up whichever cookbook, Chinese, French. So, we're released from all the kind of geographic soil chemistry dictating what you eat if you live in a certain place. Nevertheless, there is a relationship between the user of the pot and the maker of the pot. When I make mugs, people are going to put those to their mouths. Put their lips to the thing that I've made. I think, well how many other people in the arts (broadly speaking) make an object that people, on a daily basis, pick up, hold and have an intimate contact with their lips, of all things. They almost kiss the thing that you've made and that seems to me, to be an interesting "

WK

"It is just awful. The thing I think I found most distressing, that there was perception for a very long time that skill was something to be disdained; that mere skill, good at doing stuff. Making can liberate you. Gives you means of expression".

GD

*I explained the research so far and the fact that Wye Valley is largely "Overlooked" (George Peterken et al.).*

WK

"Which is a blessing" (*I found myself agreeing with him*) which is a terrible thing about the world. You see in a paper like the Observer the fact that you can win a camera for submitted holiday tips. You think, well ah, that's wrecked that then. (*I agreed and gave examples in Cornwall*).

GD

"Stronghold of the historical archive in the Wye Valley"

"Also, in terms of framing. We allow it to have its say (on nature and the fact that he and his wife Madeleine have encouraged meadow lands on their land). Like I said that the

clay had its say – its contribution. Our garden, obviously it's a lot of work, but it dictates and makes its own decisions.

THE END

**Walter Keeler (WK) with Gregory Dunn (GD) (2<sup>nd</sup> interview) Penallt (30.09.2015).**

GD

The thing with a mobile phone is it does frame things inevitably. You know, visually it does frame it and contextualises it in a sort of tourism way. You go to a place you do that (motions the action of taking a photo) the role of a tourist to go to a place.

WK

I was in the V&A (Victoria and Albert Museum London) and I was walking through the museum quite quickly and I saw this little kid go up to up to a, I think, it was a fourteenth century panel, he held his phone up to it and took a picture. And said, "Hang on a minute, have a look at it", I said "you've got a picture of it but have you had a look at it? Because the picture will remind you of what it was like but your eyes and your experiences will be much more profound". I don't think he took any notice but it just seems to me that that's what people do. You know, they say, we are in Venice, There's the Doyuse? Palace  
CLICK!

GD

And I've got examples of that. When we were in Brussels, we visited the 'Atomium' and 'Manneken Pis'. It was interesting for me to see what people do when they see these things. There was spot where everybody was (I show Walter a photo of a tourist with their back to the Atomium taking a 'selfie'). It was just great, everyone was just photographing the thing with their back to it. Photographs looking through the frame and photographs with it reflected in this thing – just like the Claude Glass. The same occurred with the 'Manneken Pis'. All the people doing that (photographing) and then going off. I stood there for a bit and watched them and looked at it and really thought about the size of it. And I thought how crazy that this thing has become so famous.

WK

It's fun bit it's not exactly a great work of art.

GD

So that's an example of it. And you saying about that, there has been some research done about that very thing, about going to museums and not being able to record things. They gave some people phones and some people not and they've actually asked them to look at fragments of displays of things that were in there and actually could they remember what it was or not and they could. But seeing a whole photograph of the whole thing seemed to dull down the memory's ability to remember.

WK

I think coming from the sort of background that I do, I go to a museum without an agenda really. You know, I might say I'm going to look at nineteenth century pots or something because I'm very interested in techniques but of course, you don't but you do; it's all the

other things that you encounter that you didn't expect. You know you think, bloody hell I've never seen that before.

GD

Yes, that always happens to me.

WK

It might be a little tiny odd thing that's nothing to do with anything much but there's something about it that you need to record. You can use the phone or make a drawing even (and I don't often carry a sketchbook I must admit). But of course, the other thing about drawing is that in order draw something you've got to look at it. You've got to look at it in an *analytical* way or in a way that enables you to transfer what it is you have seen there. It's not necessarily the literal truth but it's what it is in that object or that building or whatever that excites you, that you're putting on to the paper. So that it's a interpretative way of looking as well as pulling information from it, you're actually coming to some understanding what it is that tickles you.

GD

I like that, "tickles you", how you latch onto it.

WK

More and more, people's work doesn't give them any interaction with materials and processes. You're tickling the keyboard or you're tapping it onto your pad. Sometimes, occasionally you might write on a piece of paper; seldom draw. You'll never ever, unless you've got a private passion for something, never ever need to pick up a hammer or use a saw or cut up a piece of paper with scissors. It's basically a world devoid of those sorts of tactile experiences.

GD

It's dis-location isn't it? That's dislocation that you're talking about. That's a shame. Whilst you were saying that I was thinking about the analogy of an architect. I don't know exactly how many architects actually handle material early on in their education or their career. Do they make better architects than the people that don't?

WK

Yes, that's an interesting question. I mean my daughters partner is a builder and he is very good at making wooden structures and he designs them as well as makes them and I'm sure that his designing is very much informed by the practice of making; the two are inseparable. I'm always surprised by how many architects like my work. And I think why they like my work is because of the way that I use process and develop things out of process. Obviously, there's the spatial element, the fact that you are making things that fill spaces in the same way a building fills space; your concerned about the interior to some extent as an architect but the interior is important. Then there's the whole



business of relating one part of the thing to another part of the thing as you might in a building. You know, if you've got to accommodate a staircase that's travelling through two levels; will that influence the outside of the building? Will it not? Will it be contained in the core? So, they're all sorts of issues that a potter deals with; whether its putting a spout on or should there be a bigger or smaller handle and it's partly functional, because the hand is of a limited size, and it's partly an aesthetic one. When I look at this building do I know how to get into it? Or do I need a sign to tell me? When I see this jug does it invite me to pick it up? You know, it's the same sort of issues. There's that to it and I think that this business of experience and 'experientialism' (Pointing to mind map I had given him) if you want to make a long word out of it. It's a diminishing aspect of people's lives, I think. Genuine experience, experience that touches you in some way that makes you respond. I can remember going to Tate St. Ives; one thing that struck me was that you had a handrail made of wood running very close to the wall (it was attached to the wall with brackets) running very close to a wall with a really aggressive spattered finish, stone spattered onto a render and it was excruciating (we both laugh out loud) because I don't know whether it was a or thing or a bad thing, I tend to think that was a thoughtless bit of design because if you should accidentally catch you hand on it, it would hurt, it would draw blood. On the other hand, you could say that's going to excite people's senses; they're going to think ooh and actually understand that they are in a situation where they've got a soft surface under their hand but they're close enough to a very rough surface to hurt themselves if they're not careful. Maybe this is something you can look at in design. Funnily enough I think I do touch on it in my work sometimes; I make pots that are, to some extent, not exactly repellent which offer a challenge if you are going to use them; for example, dishes with spikey branches. Sometimes they are quite blade like, sometimes they are quite prickly like brambles almost, so that you are saying, "Use me but you will have to be careful". And also, the fragility, you know? Use me but you've got to be careful. This idea of, in the past people had experiences; a man cutting the verges would have a Sickle and he'd have a Bill Hook, sharp tools and he would know how to handle them and they could be dangerous. Now you'd have a Health and Safety Officer.

GD

Of course, every time he hit it he'd get physical feedback, wouldn't he? Soft but, hard bit and you'd have to hit harder, so all the time your body is having to negotiate the material of that and getting feedback from it.

WK

And he'd also know his Elder from his Hawthorn; not just in terms of the look but the fact that one's soft and easily cut and the other's resilient and spikey. Now he sits in the cab

and the machine threshes it all down willy-nilly. Okay, he's good at using his machine but it's a rather limited experience and he zooms over many linear miles (or kilometres) of a verge in a day whereas our old road-man, when we lived in Buckinghamshire knew every inch of it and he knew the gullies that had to be dug out, otherwise the road would have a big puddle in it which the bloke on the machine doesn't notice and nobody bothers to clear them so you end up with big puddles; people like me or my neighbours go and clean them out.

GD

That phrase "Limited experience" and the diminishing aspect of touch, that's really, really key actually where we are and where we are going and do we want to continue to go? I am of a seesaw generation if you like, I'm there in the fulcrum. I've got a lot invested in the hand-made and material and everything but I'm also tipping towards...I like automation and I often like what it produces...Things like this are good example, that lampshade (I point to the lampshade above our heads by Danish designer, Poul Henningsen) but I also think, where's it going to go, like you said, if there isn't that experience of maybe spinning something like that or shaping it...where's the next stage on from that? I don't suppose people really think or care about that?

WK

No, I don't think they do although people often respond to hand-made things, they find a reward in hand-made things that they don't find in other things, shall we say? You know, you can pick up mugs every day of the week and then someone sends you a very hand-made mug; my mugs aren't obviously hand-made because I'm using techniques that were used in early industry and at the same time they do have a very different quality than something that came out of a mould or a machine. I think people respond to that.

GD

You must have seen it all these years; the difference in response to the obviously hand-made then compared to yours and also your compared to that. You've seen the whole spectrum; that's quite valuable.

WK

It is. Yes, it is. I think even the *community* of people, if that's the right word who consume studio pottery, and are indeed involved in making studio pottery, have their own agendas. Broadly speaking, amongst the people who make useful pots, especially if they make them on a wheel, tend to be very resistant to the sort of things I've been making recently which are made out of an industrial type of clay – it's not quite like the clay that was used in industry but a very dense, white clay. I turn it when it's leather hard and I turn it on a lathe sometimes so I'm getting a very different set of results which, I

think are, equally sensual and exciting as working with a soft bit of clay that wobbles all over the place.

GD

And having done wood turning myself, there is that micro-feedback that you get. You know, you might have something quite rough with a knot in it that might split but then you get something that is equally as beautiful. I don't know, what would can I think of that is dense and knot free? I don't know, Lyme? (Walters suggests Box Wood) I retort by saying I've turned Lignum – I have as a possible pattern for metal spinning). Your taste in 'feedback' must have changed then? Your proclivity for material feedback...

WK

I've always liked the fact that you can get so much detail and crispness into a smooth clay when it's stiff and leather hard. Since I've been working on a lathe it's just thrilling in a way that it can be thrilling to have a very soft, coarse lump of clay on the wheel and attack it with a rib and it's very different; it's a plastic response; cutting it away on a lathe and revealing a very different quality. It always makes me think about Leach's (Bernard Leach) 'Ethical Pot'. Now in Leach's terms, what I do on the lathe is not ethical because he would say, it's not true to the material; you're not allowing the material scope to respond to what you're doing; in fact *it's all about* the material. It's all about the potential of the material, it's all about revealing possibilities. We could go on all day...Trying to get back to how people respond to an experience like walking in the Wye Valley. One obvious thing is, for a lot of people who come from the town it's a total opposite to what they're used to; they might walk in a park occasionally; they might enjoy gardens but the Wye Valley is completely different. It's full of living things, of living plants on all scales, but they're not on a flat...they're on the sides of a valley, some of them clinging to rock faces. The river at the bottom, changes its mood from way up in Rhayader and way down through; it's a living, moving, changing force and you're aware of its power, you know? That volume of water moving down.

GD

Do you think your response to landscape is sort of...Because it is really important, everything you have been telling me about being an artist and your response to material and everything has become really important for this project. It was just the same for Phil who was trained as a Draughtsman and that gave him a way of looking at the landscape. He said, "I just see it as constructed lines, as converging lines, as perspective and I want to know how it's put together". So, everything we have talked about in terms of material and how you manipulate that, I hear that it's led to a broader way of experiencing the Wye Valley – if that's not too *vague*. And I'm not trying to pin you down.

WK

No, I'm trying to think about how I feel about the Wye Valley. We live right on the top. Before we planted all these trees we could look straight over to St. Briavels on the Gloucester side of the Wye Valley, totally unaware that there is a valley. There is a bit of a dip and I know it goes down six or eight hundred feet to the water at the bottom where there's this river running through and as it goes through the different rock structures, hard and soft, craggy and not, the river has found its way through to the Severn Estuary is all part and parcel of what we have as an environment between Monmouth and Chepstow. It's dramatic and essentially, I think of it in terms of *form*. I think of it as simply what it is, a valley with steep sides and it is in places it's fairly pastoral, you have room for meadows at the side of the river. In other places the rock faces, apparently come, straight out of the water. All of that I suppose, there is a primary *visual catalogue* of the sorts of places there are as you go down through the valley. I don't take advantage of it you see.

GD

Visual catalogue – that's lovely. That's not far off from the Picturesque idea. You say you don't take advantage of it but it's like anywhere you live.

WK

I don't take advantage of it but I don't take it for granted. I know it's there. I love the fact that it's there.

GD

And you must know it well because you've lived here how long now...thirty-eight years?

Walter

It'll be forty years next year and I know bits of it pretty well, you know? There are places like Cleddon Falls, the way down to Tintern from here; a place where you would always stop and have a look to see what the water was doing. Another thing about the Wye Valley, it has all the se streams and rivers coming down and feed into it. At Cleddon there's a fairly generous stream (it's not big enough to call it a river but in the Winter, especially after a period of high rainfall, there's a great sort of cataract of water cascading down what is at least a forty-five-degree angled slope – just falling down there. If you stand on the edge of it has a sense of vertigo. That's just one little bit and there are endless little bits like that.

GD

Time and time again; it's nice... I mentioned that walk to you, you didn't know. Similarly, I've mentioned other walks to locals and they've said they've not been there... There are *so many opportunities for something new* (and at different times of the year too).

WK

And it's so full of mystery and full of potential; places you have never been. The number of times, just around here, that occasionally... I take the dog on a normal loop and every now and then I think, I'll just cut down that way and come back another way. Every time you do that you see things that you've never seen before.

GD

And the seasonal change, I'll mention it again, it really does change it...

You know, what you were saying about cities being quite different to this... I am a country dweller myself and even though we lived in London for seven years and now live in the middle of Worcester; I think my years of play and enjoyment in terms of the landscape, riding motorcycles and things like that, was taken from being in forests and caves and things and I think there's a great potential for that here as well. I also see, when I go to places like the Barbican, one of my favourite places in London, you get tunnels, you get the lovely tunnels and I've put them into some of my work because I've made that link. I really want to know what's at the end of there and I want to keep going and keep being drawn down there – in a city. So, I think there are aspects you know? There is a visual catalogue that, people from urban places, can latch onto here.

WK

Do you know the, I suppose you would call him an Architectural Theorist, Christopher Alexander?

GD

No, no I don't.

WK

I've got a couple of his books there. He is very interesting because he, in his book called 'Pattern Language' (A pattern language – 1977) Also the Timeless Way of Building' which is another book by him which precedes that one.

GD

It's interesting that you have architectural criticism books on your shelves too.

WK

The Timeless Way of Building examines buildings from all over the place – all over the world and it looks at how you respond to them and looks at how you feel when you're in those places and the book comes up with the term 'The quality without a name'; which is, when you're in a place it's a sense of (I guess this is why it doesn't have a name because it's difficult to put into terms) rightness, it's a sense of contentment and safety. It could be a sense of being on the edge of something that might be rather difficult to handle – you know a great big drop. But somehow, it's a good place to be that stimulates you or makes you feel safe, comfortable and *included*. And it also probably excites your

curiosity, you don't feel bored in this place, there's lots of ways to stimulate your experience. And the second book, 'A Pattern Language', sets out a series of patterns, as he calls them, which enable you to achieve the *quality without a name*. I did mention one of them earlier, I can't remember in response to which. One of them, which connects with your walk, is the 'Zen View'. The tendency is, if you live in the Wye Valley and you live in a house overlooking the Wye Valley, you'll have a huge *picture* window looking over the valley. In the end, if you're not careful, it'll be like a telly left on all day. You know, ah that's just the window. The *Zen View*...when you approach the Zen Monk's, the place where he dwells, you approach along a path and the path is flanked by a wall. As you approach his house there is a little hole in the wall and through that hole in the wall you see a breathtaking view and then you carry on to his door. So that you're actually using the view, you're not allowing yourself to see too much because you'd be blasé and think, oh yeh' that's the view. The fact that you're building into an environment a way of intensifying the view and making the view an exciting surprise when you come across it; you know, you are walking across the landing and you come across a little window and think...ah look at that! You might be nipping upstairs to change your trousers to go out shopping or something and then you think ahh look at that! So, that's one of the patterns. Another one, a simple one is light on two sides of every room, because most office blocks are built around a core and the light in most of the rooms comes from one side so that people are either in silhouette or they're looking into the light – it's not a very pleasant environment. So light on two sides; not only does that mean you've got a better view of everything because it's lit more fully but you've also got opportunities to see different things. Our windows here, looking out into the yard face east but the skylight up there looks west obviously because it's the opposite side and sometimes you look out of one window and you've got blue sky and you look out the other window and you've got huge black clouds.

Another idea is the 'Intimacy Gradient', if we're using jargon. The other one I mentioned before was the obvious place to enter a building...As you approach a building, you shouldn't have to think, how do I get in here? Where's the sign that tells me? You should look at the building and go, ah there's the entrance. And then once you get to the place, there's a porch maybe, which is public; everybody can see the porch, everybody can see what's going on. You're invited in, you go into the hallway; the hallway's a general space, it doesn't tell you very much about the people in the house but it gives you little hints. Then you move into the different rooms; you'll move in to a sitting room or of you're a friend or someone that you feel is on that sort of level of contact, you take them into the kitchen. Then sitting room is formal, relatively speaking (not in our house – we laugh) and the kitchen is personal, it's where you do the cooking and the family sit down and

have their breakfast and so forth. Then of course, bedrooms, you can say, well the bathrooms up there. But bedrooms are private; you don't take everybody that comes into the house into the bedrooms unless there's some reason, to show them a picture on the wall, whatever. So, this is the intimacy gradient of a building; so that you gradually bring people into bits that are more private. And there may be some very private places, like a little study or something where you kind of go off and do your drawing or tickle your ivories or whatever. I think that's really quite an interesting concept.

GD

But those aspects, I think, a lot of what you've talked about, could actually apply to natural (I say natural in inverted commas because we've talked about that before) not wholly natural environments.

WK

The Zen view is your tunnel and then it opens out. If you could see the whole of the vista all the time you are walking it would just be the vista; but because you're walking through the tunnel, which itself is rather wonderful to be walking through and then (I can't help laughing at this point – through realisation of the apparent truth of what Walter is saying) suddenly you're seeing something completely different – quite mind blowing, you know? You've been focusing maybe on the leaves that have fallen off the trees or the bark of the trees...

GD

...or maybe you're talking in a group which is what happens. You've just provided me with the key to open the door to describe that situation; that's exactly what happens and it's really nice. The occluded view as we've been calling it and the un-occluded view. It astounds me how the Wye Valley keeps providing those moments. You know, a woman on the walk, bless her, she said "You told me to leave my bloody camera at home, I can't capture this moment" and I said "You're right, you can't capture this moment. How can it be captured? Just take it in" she said "Ooh you swine". It was really funny; she was really frustrated. It was the view from the top, overlooking Redbrook, with the bridge at the bottom and then out towards Monmouth. She said "I've never seen it from this aspect" and she's an experienced walk leader as well so... But that's what's so nice; people have just found their place down here to go, and there's so many of them. You can't go to them all, well I guess you could. The Wye Valley keeps providing those moments. It's great.

WK

The other thing it makes me think about is the Fenland. Before we moved here we looked all over the place. We were in Buckinghamshire before we lived here, in the Chilterns. We looked in various parts of the country but one of the places we looked was East

Anglia; we looked around Cambridge and a bit beyond. We found the flat landscape terrible and I couldn't have lived there. The thing that really frightened us was we saw wonderful house, a brick-built farmhouse with a pan tile roof and out buildings and it had a four-acre lake set in its grounds, it probably had ten acres in all. There was a drain, it was 'King' something or other 'Drain' and it was, I think, built in the seventeenth century and it was an embankment; and when you stood on the embankment and looked down at the roof of the house. And in this embankment, at the top of this embankment was a totally silent, deep, wide river and it just whizzed past and there were long strands of water plants growing it and they were pulled out horizontally. So, it was rushing past and the silent mass of water higher than your chimney pot gave us the willies!

So, we headed west. We ended up in the Wye Valley. On the top of the Wye Valley.

GD

I had an experience when I was at derby (University) when I went out to Norwich to interview a really nice glass artist called David Reekie. I remember the landscape flat, flat, flat, flat, flat and getting a bit, not agoraphobic, that's too strong a word. My eyes were hungering for a view or at least something to latch onto. I like to have visuals to latch onto. I grew in the Severn Valley, it's the place we used to play; a river at the bottom and there was always the sense of the valley around us. We did actually *play* in that place. That's just to re-enforce what you've said.

WK

People who live in the Fens love it and they feel claustrophobic when they come to a place where there are deep valleys because they can't see the horizon and the sky is kind of framed by the hills. Whereas they like that sense openness and the sense of sky and the horizontal.

GD

I might have said last time, I met some Dutch people, on the campsite that I was staying on last year, they said they just loved the foliage, we love all the trees, we love it and it's a real holiday for us. This is what we crave. They weren't going to stay here for three weeks in the Wye Valley but they ended up staying for three weeks. Because they loved it so much.

WK

But it is so rich, isn't it? If you just take the stretches between Monmouth and Chepstow which is about fifteen miles at most. The astonishing variety in that area and the number of nooks and crannies, you'll never find them you know?

It's just so full of secrets.



GD

You're not the first person to say that which is nice. I might have said to you last time but somebody once said to me that the Wye Valley is a "good place to hide". Howard Marks used to live across the way in Trellech (Walter remarks that Trellech is just up the road from where we are sitting). I'm mixed up now, thinking it's over the other side of the river but no, it's up here. So, it is a place you can hide and there are "secrets", and there are "nooks and crannies" and all those things appear in stories, I guess and fairy tales and all the rest of it – so they engage our imagination, that part of our minds I suppose.

WK

And as I say, it's *concentrated* into a very, very small strip. We visited friends in Montana a couple of years ago and you can travel for miles and miles and miles; you can drive all day at sixty miles an hour and the mountains don't seem any nearer.

GD

Imagine experiencing that landscape on a horse, in the past or on a horse and cart. Days and weeks travelling through it; a car would make it go that much quicker. (Walter comments – slow motion).

WK

In the Fens, you can walk for miles and it's still flat; you can still see lots of sky and still be in roughly the same sort of environment.

GD

That's almost all about *contrast* then. Things that contrast draws my eye in; draws my taste in. Sounds silly, but there's nothing I like better than a mince pie but it's got to be served with something cold to contrast it; warm with ice cream or cold cream. There's that stimulation, like you were talking about, between the smooth and the rough, there's just some stimulation there...visually.

WK

It's like *Desert Island Discs*. I remember Desert Island Discs. It was, whatshername? Nigella Lawson. She had one disco record after another. I don't know if it was a ploy. She had eight records that sounded pretty much the same to me. Some people have a huge variety; they have some rock n' roll, they have Dido's lament (Purcell), Elgar's Cello Concerto. It's that thing, you know, contrast?

GD

Well I think some of us *need* contrast, I guess. Whether things we are looking at just become too bland. Whether or not, what you're experiencing becomes too bland; that again diminishes the senses. That really you need some stimulation in a place like this really.

WK

Well as I say, one of the things I find stimulating is going to a city. But usually an old, intricate city. It always brings me back to architecture and the fact that most architecture, and when I say architecture I mean most domestic architecture, these days is just deadly boring.

GD

Well I live in a two up, two down, terrace; it is a box, a 'machine for living' but ironically the Corbusier building that I use that phrase from – they're absolutely incredible – they're not machines for living – they're really exciting and quite different to the two up two down house I live in. I have experienced some of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings. I'm really glad you've really made me think about that because I do have an interest as well – in the spaces and I have been moved to tears by a space. Did I tell you about Kettle's Yard? (I had) It moved me so much that I just had to sit in the corner and have a quiet weep. It was just the space. Something about it; only been there once, slightly afraid to go back to be honest. I'd really like my wife to experience it.

WK

But this is *quality without a name* again, you see.

GD

Absolutely, I'm glad it's got a name now!

WK

It's got nothing to do with idiom, has it? It's got nothing to do with whether it's ancient. It could be a modernist piece. It can excite you just as much as a beautiful traditional building in the middle of the desert somewhere.

GD

It really can. I have experienced the Seagram Tower in New York (1958, Mies van de Rohe) and it's surrounded by buildings that followed it, lesser versions of it, and I was really moved by it. When I first saw that great big blank space in front of it (the 'plaza') that obviously cost a lot of money to leave, because above it there is absolutely nothing and then you're faced with this grey, black granite, glass block that doesn't look a day old, a day older than it did the first day it was built. It was built in the fifties and was the one that the Rothko's were going to go in the top of. It's incredible actually. As you say, it's got a quality that *does not* have a name. For me, it almost puts you in your place. But this (*referring to the room in which we are sitting*) feel extremely pleasant.

WK

Well, that was the plan. That's what you want, somewhere that feels right you know? It's quite spacious, it's quite tall but it doesn't feel intimidating, you don't feel intimidated.

Some of those *Grand Design* programmes, some people have built themselves an airport, a waiting lounge you know?

GD

And I don't know who that's for, is it for them or for everybody else so they can say we live in this kind of house. But there are some really good spaces on there though (Walter agrees).

Walter

But you think, what a big, empty space. What are you going to do in it? And structurally they're not that interesting often. You think of a great hall in a medieval house and the structure might be a particularly interesting roof structure or something. I don't know, it just makes it totally wonderful.

GD

You've just reminded me, we went to *Open House* when we were in London recently. We went into one of the Inns of Court – it was the Gray's Inn, which we'd never been in before. There was a hall that was just incredible – coats of arms everywhere. The good thing about this room was, yes, it was built like a banqueting hall, the guide said that that all the teaching used to be done in there, after meals. I know I'm drifting of subject here but there is a point. There were benches where everyone would sit. We were stood on one point with a table across to our right and more to our left. Well actually, the guide said, you're standing on the bar – 'Called to bar'. When you are called to bar you have the senior judges up here, then there's a sort of hierarchy; you start off down there, you don't even start in the room, as time goes on, year after year, you move up the table until they call you up to the bar which is this literal line across the room. That space had a lot of poignancy about it and it felt a real privilege to be in there, it shouldn't be privilege, it should be open to everybody, but the space was quite powerful.

WK

Those sort of rituals, as it were, especially when they are played out over decades and centuries, but it's all shut in that building. Most people walk past that building every day and have no idea what's going on in there and have no idea what the Bar's all about. It's extraordinary and again it comes back to the Wye Valley because there are all of these secrets. There are places that were hives of industry; lots of them along the Wye Valley. There were steel works, iron works, tin plate, nail works, paper mills – industry. And now that's been drawn back and this is all part of that Picturesque tradition in a way. Whereas Turner was drawing Tintern Abbey, people now are looking at eighteenth century/ early nineteenth century sites. You come across bits of old blast furnaces which are covered in ivy.

GD

Well that's, not fashionable, but ruins are very interesting, certainly modern ruins, when you think about Cold War ruins – that a s anew Picturesque, if you like.

WK

I think, one of the sad things about *the old* Picturesque is that places like Tintern Abbey, as wonderful as it is and I wouldn't knock it for a moment in any way, but whereas it would have been crumbling with ivy all over it asnd ravens nesting in it and so on, it is now rather sanitized (I respond with "it's clinical"). But what do you do? The conservation? (me - "plastic ivy – just to soften the edges?")

GD

I'm with you on that, it leaves me cold and I'm a person that now knows the history and all the different the different ways that it's been depicted but that makes me think that it's a shame. I guess people go there, are put on a coach, are dropped off there, take a photograph and leave – "We've seen Tintern Abbey". Tintern Abbey is in people's ideas of 'a place to go'.

WK

I'm old, well I'm seventy-three and as a kid I belonged to local history society in Wembley and we used to have coach trips; one of the coach trips was to Stonehenge. You got off the coach, there was nobody else there. There was a little green hut, a Ministry of Works hut. You opened the front and there were black and white postcards and you paid sixpence and got a raffle ticket thing – a little ticket off a strip and you went and wondered around Stonehenge. You could lean on the stones, you could climb on them, you could do anything you liked. And it was there in this bleak, sometime like March or November, a windy dull day and it was just so atmospheric and it was just so wonderful. We were the only people there and it was astonishing. We went to *Longleat*... in the nineteen fifties and it was... Meadow grass came up to the house and I remember knee high dried grasses that hadn't been mowed for years and that was Longleat – a wonderful house. I remember the stone features along the top. There were no lions, there were no vintage cars and there were no lawns as such. It should have been a bit more formal than that...

GD

I'd imagine it engaged your imagination? It's fixed in there obviously, more than someone that's going to go there, drive around, see the lions and then look at the house; it's probably the lions that sticks on their memory...

Walter

...or the Pot Pourri in the gift shop, the café and all that.

GD

That's a point, like latching your own imagination – do you think it's successfully gone in there because you were able to put something of yourself into it?

WK

Yes, possibly. Especially with Stonehenge. You know, Stonehenge was just moving basically. There it was, there you were on the top of this plain, just with the wind blowing and no sign of civilisation anywhere around, just this isolated place.

GD

Don't you think you can? I have had that feeling here. Being away from other people, as you said, stumbling onto things and it's engaged my imagination and it's physically surrounded me, so there's every means I have to remember a situation; which is everything different to looking on a flat LCD screen and so on.

WK

And it's that sense of timelessness as well. Often, I've been standing in a place and thought...Especially when you can't hear any aeroplanes or strimmers or chainsaws. You think, I could have been standing here at any time in history and wouldn't have appreciably different.

GD

But there is a lovely attachment I think to past civilisation here, especially when you go up a *Holloway* or something. Or you go up an area, that I have been told, was used for moving goods in out of the forest and has become round – that's all very nice.

WK

Because that's the other thing that it's easy to overlook with the Wye is that it was a commercial waterway. *Trows* and stuff up and down as far as Ross probably. And again, just extraordinary industry. And the mill stones from Penalt, they were rolled down to the river. When we moved here in 1976, the most significant drought in living memory happened. The river was very low, a trickle in the middle and at a certain point, not far from the Boat Inn, you could see all these mill stones. I presume they would have lowered them down on ropes or something and then occasionally someone would lose control and they would just roll all the way down into the river. And they just left them in the river. I suppose it was too difficult to get them out.

GD

(On the back of what Phil had said about artists *needing to communicate*)

What are you trying to communicate? If anything? Do you need to?

WK

I think yes, I do. On a very basic level, not every day or every minute, I get pleasure from what I do. I find it rewarding, I find it pleasurable. I find it fulfilling to make what I make.

That's to do with how I feel about my materials, how I feel about using them and the whole process of firing pots and it has to do with the way that my work fits into the context of ceramic pottery history, particularly. I feel that pottery has cultural significance unlike anything else that people make, because it not only has practical significance, technical and scientific significance. Whoever burnt clay for the first time, made one of the greatest discoveries, man has ever made technically and its enabled mankind to make objects which have lasted a millennia and speak as vividly now of the time and the life they led as they did at the time they were made and used. So that, I feel part of that, I always refer to it as an *eerie community* of potters over time. There's a sense of almost, the ghost of all those other potters, men and women, have contributed or in some way. I've in some way inherited from them the ability to do what I do now. So that I feel that I'm, in the same way that they unintentionally reached out to me, I'm sort of unintentionally reaching out to generations to come; if only because my stuff will last that long. People will look at it, wonder about it. So, it's important for me to put something into the work that I think... For instance, I was talking about these lathe turned pieces that link directly to eighteenth century pots (there's a teapot on the shelves behind you) that was made in about seventeen seventy something, which I bought on eBay the other week. That excites me because the techniques used are the techniques that I used and I can respond to what they did by making things myself. They made it under very different circumstances; they were basically overworked, underpaid, died of whatever illnesses and so forth. That's all part and parcel of what I do. I also make salt glaze as you know, and that relates to a different aspect of ceramic history going back to Medieval German pots through to eighteenth and nineteenth century and even early twentieth century pots and sewer pipes and all sorts of crazy things. So I want people to... On one hand, I want people to respond to what I'm making as objects; so they will pick up a mug and say, "I like that mug, I like the feel of it, I like the colour of it, I'd like to use that mug"

GD

And you'd said before about it being a very intimate relationship between your work and the user that adds a different aspect to it, doesn't it?

WK

Yes, it does. Somebody shopping for a mug, sees my mug and says "I've gotta have it. It's a bit expensive but I want that". And once they've got it they might look at it and they wander through a museum one day, or a stately home, and think "that pot reminds me of my mug" and then think "Oh, why's that?".

GD

So, it's a means of keying in to history?

WK

So, they will then maybe think “Oh, I wonder if he knew that?”. And the same with the salt glaze, “Oh, I’ve got a mug with that ripply surface on it” Maybe he knew about that, maybe he didn’t. Other people who will go to a gallery or a shop and say, “That’s a Walter Keeler mug, that’s one of eighteenth century ones”. He’s using eighteenth century techniques.; It’s a question of both deliberate communication and less deliberate communication; of messages being in there of people are aware of them; if they’re not aware of them it doesn’t matter, they can still enjoy it, for whatever reason.

GD

Do you think there are days when other aspects will go into the work? That are different to other days. A weekly, daily difference? In terms of how the way you are feeling does it change your approach – a day like this?

WK

Possibly, yes but not a dramatic one but it maybe. I think the weather does affect how you feel and I think the way you feel can affect the way you work and the quality of what you do. I have been potting for a long time so I’m professional enough to turn out a decent pot regardless how I’m feeling. I’ve felt pretty low sometimes and still managed to make decent pots.

GD

I have to say about the *Eerie Community*, the old Standing on the Shoulder of Giants thing... Well my father-in-law, he’s talked about this a lot, like me, he’s interested in Japanese culture, and he’s talked about the fact that there is a huge acknowledgement by living about their fore fathers/mothers whatever, generations and thanking them and being here because of that. So, it’s lovely to hear that you’re part of a tradition – it’s quite moving actually to hear you say that you are part of that because you are *undoubtedly* part of that and you pay homage to the giants that you’re standing on the shoulders of.

WK

It’s the old potters that stimulated me to be a potter at all because, I’ve told you before, that I used to collect bits of pottery from the Thames. So that’s where it began, I began with bits of old pots and it was the character of those old pots that made me think that I wanted to do it. When you say other things that influence the work, it’s not all from pottery history. Some of those ‘branchy’ pieces I make have a lot to do with the hedges around here, they get flailed about this time of year and then in the Winter you see the skeletons of them, where they were flailed the year before and how they have grown a little bit more.

GD

You told me that last time and you drew my awareness to it and actually there is no doubt, there's no doubt that it's in the work, no doubt at all. It's nice because it physically links you (I refer to suing photos of these works). It's clear to me and I think it would be clear to anybody else who sees the work. The influence is clear of the outside, you being the catalyst and it coming out the other way. That's lovely, you're working in a different context, a different framework. Somebody I interviewed though Gilpin was being 'manipulative' when he was drawing (*I show him an image from 1770*) the sides screens, foreground, backdrop etc. but instead of being able to go and find this – this was his idea, this was his construct. It doesn't necessarily exist. There are moments, when you're in a kayak or canoe and it does evoke a film evolving, a stage like experience. I guess that was the nearest thing he could think of, a stage with things appearing on it.

WK

I think that's perfectly legitimate, he's trying to capture the feeling, the essence, the quality of the place and as I said before, drawing is not just about getting the details right, copying it down, literally as it is. It's also to do with interpreting or picking out the qualities, in what you are looking at, that excite you most, which precisely what Gilpin is doing in those drawings.

GD

It's precisely what he's doing. It's precisely what I've told younger students over the years is, the reason you have a sketchbook is, not that we want to see a photographic portrayal, we want to see what your eyes pick up on and want to see what your hand picks up on and you need to just tell us.

WK

Yes, it's a selective process. And it's also a creative process, it has to be said. If you are being creative, it's not actually breaking any laws. Obviously, when it comes to accounting it can, but where a drawings' concerned it doesn't. It also reminded me of a coach trip I once went on with students to Provence. We were driving through the country side, a marvellous man called Peter Reddick was with us, he was a wood engraver, he died a few years ago – quite elderly. There were lovely little hill farms, just tucked into the hills as we drove along and we were roaring along quite fast roads. He was busy drawing away and I sat next to him and I remember saying to him "That's amazing, how do you manage to capture those things so precisely when it's such a fleeting glimpse?" and he said, "oh well it's partly memory but it's also, I know what it felt like and I just draw it how I felt it was". They were wonderful, evocative drawings. If you went back along the routes slowly and tried to pick out one set of buildings and separate it from another, they would not be precisely like any one of his drawings. It's just reminding



yourself of what it was like to be there. Which is why you take the picture. But how many times have you looked at something and thought god that's magnificent, that's fantastic and then you get your camera out and you think, hang on do you need to stand further back, do you have to zoom in, zoom out? It just doesn't work. You know, I can't capture it. But if you're drawing, you can. Even though perhaps you are telling a lie about what it literally looks like. But it's about what in that object, view whatever thrilled you.

THE END

## David Hurn Interview - Tintern

GD 00:30

So why is he (Gilpin) your “pet hate”?

DH 00:35

Well because, I think. I’m very puzzled by the enormous influence this, not desperately well-written, not very long article, by a not very distinguished painter; the unbelievable effect it had, primarily on, what I would call, Sunday Afternoon painters and camera club photographers. And I think that both of those people, not within themselves. I mean, I’m absolutely for easel by the side of the river and painting away; it seems to be much more constrictive to do that.

DH 01:29

But what it seems to have done is dictated a kind of...a kind of style almost in both photographers and paintings which does not allow for any real individuality. It’s almost as if it imposes that this is Gods will as to what is perfection.

GD 01:55

But just like the Bible. The Bible was written by a bunch of men. There were rules in there that needed to be adhered to, as opposed to...It’s just another comparative reason.

DH 02:07

I’m simply saying that I think, that in exactly the same way that I think most religions, to me, are more destructive than constructive. I just think that he (Gilpin) is probably, if you take in to consideration the size of it. It’s *the most destructive* article written on the arts that interests me.

GD 02:30

I think that’s truly what drew me to him. Is a set of rules. Because a set of rules doesn’t necessarily apply to nature....it doesn’t.

DH 02:41

It doesn’t even apply to himself because the second that something changed he went and wanted to change it. He did something else and he faked so many things...you know, vies and things you realise are not there. At one time, I actually thought it would be an interesting little thing to try, to trot along and see what he said. You suddenly find that there’s nothing that he describes is actually there.

GD 03:10

I think it’s his fallibility and his desperation for understanding that, I ultimately think I sympathise with and you can’t have any control over it. You can’t have any control over it.

GD 03:22

But it is amazing that, as you say, I totally agree, how many people and... just how many people followed it...

DH 03:33

...and still do. On Sundays, they sit all along here with their easels, the only good thing about it is that it gives me something to photograph in the village! Because they do everything, they wear the hats.

GD 03:54

Well back to framing, I think what he did give people was guidance. Away from chaos, away from Edmund Burkes Sublime, away from *the terror* of nature. I think he gave people a sense of containment. All this beauty, all this world that we can't understand, at least by doing that with it; by saying, right, choose your elements in there, you might get some kind of understanding by putting borders around it.

DH 04:27

But are you suggesting that all the painters before him didn't actually do that? You know, I don't of any painter that didn't paint within a frame. It seems to me that what they're actually saying is somehow in this big wild world, I want to condense down a tiny bit of it and show you what I found interesting; almost by definition that has to be within a frame. There is no other way of saying that this is my particular bit of interest. I mean you can write about it philosophically; the thing about the visual arts, it seems to me is that they're very precise. They are usually about *a little bit* of something.

GD 05:20

But this is where technology comes in, the Claude Mirror. And because of other technologies since then, because of other technologies since then. Cameras, TV all those things...all those things have inherently had a box around them; they have inherently had a frame on them.

DH 05:38

I repeat...they are bound to because somebody, what somebody is struggling to do is to say, this is my specific point of view on this tiny bit of the world. Almost definition, it has to be put into some sort of framework. I don't see how it cannot be. So I don't think it's a coincidence, right from the earliest, apart from say, cave painting which wasn't within a frame.

GD 06:12

So now I'm thinking about technologies without frame. You know about virtual reality? People wear headsets, their eyes are covered and so on. Well the latest versions of that; it's very small very compact, it completely fills your field of vision, completely and I suppose, you might say, the old panoramas, the circular panoramas, that you used to

walk into the middle of; it's a smaller equivalent of that really. So there's going to be no frame.

DH 06:47

I just find those staggeringly uninteresting. I mean I find them interesting in the technical side in terms of how they were done. I find them interesting that someone had the tenacity to do it. But what they end up with, I find uninteresting because it's not specific to something.

GD 07:06

That's nice. That's because they've not made any decisions...

DH 07:08

It seems to me that it fits into what, I suspect is the culture of today and that that's coming and that's "I don't want to make any decisions about anything".

GD 07:18

Yes, that's lovely, I'd go with that. Absolutely. And actually, making decisions, in this world is going to be preferable, people seem to be going towards that, towards making decisions there. In fact, no, the only decision they will make is to put the thing (the helmet) on.

DH 07:35

I see it's the same with all the masses and masses of pictures that go onto Twitter and everything else. I mean the one thing that they have is a total lack of anybody making a decision about something, it's all very arbitrary and it's all to do with "I did it, therefore it's important". In my world, the fact that that person did it is not the least bit important. You know the only thing that's important to me is whether the end result enriches my life in some way. Somebody with their iPhone pointing at the bottom of their bed doesn't enrich my life very much and as I get older, and suddenly realise, I've probably only got another, whatever...it enriches it even less because I don't like my time to be taken by stuff my mother could do. My mother makes lovely cakes and that enriched my life but her photographs, I suspect didn't or wouldn't have. So, I repeat, if people do it and they get fun out of it then fine, but I suspect they seem to think that somebody else should be enriched by it... You know, they probably don't because they actually think about that. They're so bound up in "this is me" that.

GD 09:09

It's a narcissistic exercise for sure and I do use, not as much as I might, but I'm certainly using Twitter in terms of helping me, to use the phrase, 'Frame' my research and narrow it down. You realise when you start this, how much you don't know and how much there is to know and you need to narrow the field by doing that; it's been quite useful and I've

found out about papers, exhibitions and CFP's, so in terms of academic... it's been very useful actually.

DH 09:50

One of the things that I wanted to do in the book I've been doing, is the Picturesque, based on Gilpin, of flooding. I suddenly thought that this is really interesting; there are these people being flooded and put out of their homes, and yet within it, it's very Picturesque. So how in the hell do I know where it is? This Picturesque. Well it's very simple, I ask a friend to go onto Facebook and Twitter and say "What's at the bottom of your garden?" "Is there anything interesting?" So I could go to exactly the best places to take this Gilpinesque, artificial, invented Picturesque of something which is horrendous.

*The Picturesque of Disaster.*

GD 10:56 (I get my laptop out)

There's one or two images I've been playing with taken from video games, from video game environments. I've been looking for the Picturesque in a video game. I think, he's like a strange foil, you know? Gilpin for me. I think he's somebody to start with, in terms of how we look. It's like Freud with cultural studies, or any kind of psychoanalysis; it's been a place to start. It might not be right but it's a place to start, a control for everything else.

DH 11:33

I can't argue against that.

GD 11:38

And actually, is he relevant today?

DH 11:40

To me, he's relevant today in that I still don't understand how he had such an influence. I don't understand how that bit of writing, had such an influence. I can understand how Burke had such an influence because he was such an intellectual writer etc.

GD 12:00

But you say that, and I found that book ('the Sublime and Beautiful') easy to read and I don't read that well. I found it really approachable.

GD 13:59

Right, so you've got that image there and I went into a videogame called Skyrim and did exactly the same. I followed his rules, he'd said manoeuvre backwards and forwards and look for the side screens. I did exactly the same, so I'm interested in virtual environments and that just shows that there is a direct link between... I think these places have been designed with this deeply imbedded cinematic picturesque way of seeing, whether they're conscious of it or not. I think the games designers design environments, not necessarily referencing the real world....

DH 14:38

To me, what am I trying to say. To me basically what's happened has, that painters etc have always understood that by and large what they're painting about is content. They understand some sort of content and the trick is to make a picture which is a kind of geometric series of patterns, that are balanced and are pleasing and to make that geometric pattern in such a way that, that content is projected and so good design is about projecting content to me... Now I don't think... if you want to call that Picturesque the problem with the picturesque is it doesn't have any content and it has rules which are so tight that it doesn't allow you to find another way of doing it. But by and large, you can go right through the history of painting, as far back as you like, and all the time, the picture is about design projecting content so.. you know, the cross is always on the right place, this is in the right place and the drape goes on a diagonal all the time because that keeps leading you into something. So it seems to me that they all have something in common which must be so powerful and so *correct* if you want to use a silly word. Look, everybody's done it; everybody does it and these people are people who enrich your life enormously and whatever we call them, geniuses or this that and the other, whatever you like to use. If they all seem to do the same thing, then it seems to me that it's worth thinking about. This other sort of, almost rule about what everybody does. I remember, I was very friendly with the pianist Daniel Barenboim; I knew him and his wife, Jacqueline Dupré. And I remember going to a concert that he gave, with him and at the Welbeck Hall. After it, I said to him "Look, what you did is not possible" I mean that's my definition of genius. Is that they do something that's not possible. Mentally, you think, that's not possible, and yet they do it. And I said "what is it that's the essence of being a concert pianist?" He said "Oh, you play the piano a lot". I've used that so much in lectures, because you suddenly realise that one of the things that nearly all these kind of people have in common, is the *enormous* amount of work they did. And I remember seeing a Turner exhibition, presumably at Tate Britain. I remember going in and looking at sketches and drawings and I worked out that if he had done something every day from the day he was born, he produced a painting every day of his life. Now if you think how big some of them were... But that extraordinary volume that this man does is one of the things that is on common with Matisse, it's in common with Picasso, it's in common with virtually everybody is that they produced, even those who seemingly produced not so many in terms of numbers, you suddenly realised worked for a year and a half on one of them. They didn't not work.

GD 19:28

Is this about the school of skill? The school of skill, you know, doing something, repeating it, it becoming part of your body. You have these pots. You understand the skill that it has taken to make that, the bodily connection with it. Is this something you admire?

DH 19:50

Enormously! I can't think of anything really that doesn't enrich my life that doesn't involve a combination of things of which one of them is skill. In other words, I think you have to have to have the skill to actually say what it is you want to say. It's no good having a thought that you want to say, but not be able to say it, because you don't have the skills to do it. I can think of wonderful music, but the reality is I can't play it. It's no good me pretending to play the piano, you can either play it terribly well or you can't. Now I'm not suggesting that sheer technical ability produces a great pianist, it obviously doesn't. There have been many pianists that extraordinary but they don't have that extra whatever it is that somebody whose wonderful has. The mere fact that somebody like Barenboim can hear something and tell you who's playing it. It's to do with having an ear that can pick up, what one would loosely call 'style'. I can do it with photography. My eyes have been filled with millions of pictures. But the miracle to me of photography, is that everybody has a box with a hole in the front; a camera cannot be more than that, that's what it is, and at the back there is something that allows the trace of something to be recorded in some way. It doesn't matter what's at the back

GD 21:50

It's funny you've picked up on 'traces' because you've picked up on a theme I hadn't recognised before on this project which, I hadn't thought about it as a trace. An image, a trace. I did say something left. Sorry, A box with a hole at the front...

DH 22:08

Photography, really has only two ways of controlling it, where you stand and when you press the button. That's all it is. So, if you stand in the right place and press the button at the right time you will all take the same picture...basically. But what is extraordinary is the...you have to show me ten or twenty pictures, but if you show me ten or twenty pictures by Robert Frank, by Cartier Bresson, by Ansell Adams...I'll tell you who took them. Now how can that be? That somebody with the same bloody box, with the same hole in the front, can produce something which is visually different?

GD 22:59

But there's something that they do time and time again that tells you who they are.

DH 23:06

You see, the wonderful thing I think about photography is, if it's done from the heart and the head and the intellect etc. and the guts... it allows the individual personality of something to project onto that trace (the film or digital sensor) in some way. That's why,

the whole thing, with the Flickr's and things are never going to work because they are not allowing all these things to concentrate into the picture they've taken.

GD 23:40

We're flooded, absolutely flooded. Somebody did a lovely talk last week about ruins. The whole session was about ruins, which is so hot right now. Whilst she was talking, the speaker said, I've been going all around the world taking photographs of ruins... I've got this incredible catalogue, collection of them and she said, she just played them and every five seconds... there were just so many of them and she said it's ridiculous, I can't make any selection of them. It just means nothing, I don't know what's going to happen with it. It's like when you go to someone's house and they reshowing you photographs of their holiday...after ten or fifteen you've lost it. The thing with film 12, 24 or 36 exposures meant that you had to be more selective, especially if you were a poor art student or hadn't got a lot of money. You knew how much it cost and how much it would cost (in terms of time) to develop and print it. You had to be far more selective.

DH 24:44

Yeh, but that's selection imposed upon you, you can self-select. And the great photographers, that's what they do. So the difference between a McCullin for example, in war situation, and most people including myself in a war situation is that I don't have the... I don't have the sort of personality, which allows me in that situation, to *select*. I'm so busy, getting the picture because I don't want to be shot. Whereas McCullin in the same situation, *selects*. And all the great photojournalist photographers...they do that. They have that ability, in the most extreme conditions, to still select. I'm sure it's the same with a bloody guy climbing a mountain.

GD 25:50

Well I was going to say, you know what it's like? Because I'm familiar with motorcyclists, somebody who is really good at motorcycling, racers are the calmest, quietest, most passive people you'll ever meet. Their heart must operate at such a lower level that when they get onto a race track and they're going really quick, they seem to come to our normal level. They just seem to be able to do everything.

DH 26:18

Absolutely, the war slows down for them.

27:36 Material feedback – Me. Naturally good at it.

28:07 Heart, Head, guts – don't be afraid of utilising all of them.

28:40 - Paper making Mino – discipline. Push out the world.

31:08 - "Better than sex" – terrible sex life.

32:48 - I'm very aware of what I can and can't do.



33:10 – There's a place that I particularly want to go back to, called Fairy Glen, which is in Betwys-Y-Coed which is probably the most photographed place in Victorian times. By the Bedfords and the Friths and Valentines. Almost everybody went there and photographed it. Its interesting because virtually everybody did the same view and I remember going back there a long time ago. I did an exhibition which was to do with 'a hundred years on', It was based on a friend of mine, who lived in Arizona, who had done the same in the desert there. It was to get pictures a hundred years ago and then go back and re-photograph them, from literally within yards from the same viewpoint. He did it by using video cameras and overlaying. He was that precise that the geographical society could measure erosion in the desert.

34:22 - So as I was saying, I was fascinated by Fairy Glen because, it seemed to me that, everybody sort of photographed painted the same view, and so you think, I wonder why that is? And when you go there it's very simple because there's just one flat rock where they can put a tripod, so every photographer who went there would go onto the same rock. And so they all photographed from an identical point.

I laughed at this, and realised that technology had led the way. The low light, the need for a steady camera in such conditions – the needed a tripod – one rock one view.

35:16 - I'm pretty certain I can't get out to the rock now, because it means jumping from rock to rock and I can't do it now.

GD35:36

I saw an exhibition recently of Keith Arnatt's work at the Tate and that was an absolute revelation to me. To see his work, because knew of one or two things, that he had done, I am an artist the burial pictures. But I hadn't seen the AONB pictures.

DH 35:55

Well he changed you see, very much in 1973 when I went to Newport. Basically, what it was. I had seen Keiths work at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and at Tate Gallery and I didn't know much about conceptual art and I found it a bit (raspberry sound) but I did like what he did because it funny. And you very rarely find humour in that kind of art. And I liked that and I remembered it and it made me laugh. The simple thing of somebody standing there with a thing around his neck say "I'm an artist" to me was funny. That's why, of those people, he stuck in my mind because of humor.

DH 37:11

When I went to Newport, which was a semi-con job by a guy named Peter Jones from the Welsh Arts council. Who almost dared me. He said, "we don't have a phot course in Wales, do you think you could devise one?". I said "If I was starting from scratch I probably could, and there no academics involved in the thing" and it was based on people wanting to come and earn a living. I come from a background that was very hard

working, you know and to me its very important that people earn a living, so anyway. It's always been, to me a very pleasant job (photography) that I love. But it's a job in the way that if I don't get paid I die of malnutrition.

That's my definition of a job. We set up the course. I set it up as what was called at the time, a tops course. A training opportunity, for people who had been made redundant, they were given grants to trained in something. So I was getting all the old steel workers and types like that. I can teach them to take portraits on their housing estate and tit then developed from that.

DH 39:03

But anyway to what was an art college, I heard that Keith Arnatt was there and I thought it would be fun to meet him, anybody that's got a sense of humour like that is going to be fun. And I'd been there just about a week and I was, almost inundated by everybody talking about bloody art all the time. And I kept saying to them, "what do you mean you're an artist?" "What do actually mean by that? I can understand if you say you're a painter, that means you paint. If you're a sculptor, it probably means you make something in 3d. But I don't understand what you mean by you an "artist". There seems to be, being a bit controversial, there seems to be some implication that you think you're better than...almost like a status symbol, I don't mind that, if by saying that you're an artist you're going to get paid more money. That seems to be a sensible ploy. Anyway, his would go on, people talking about their work. They didn't know much about photography, they knew certain people. You know, I said, I knew these people personally and they work for magazines. You're sort of decrying journalism or anything that's published as though it can't be art but the people you're quoting, most of the people worked for Picture Post or holiday magazine. That that they did within that was what they did.

DH 41:13

So I decided to do a talk called art or commerce. What I did is I showed the work of Bill Brandt and Diane Arbus and all worked for magazines but were now being called by all these people, artists. In my opinion and cynically, because a gallery realised they could make some money out of them, as artists. S

DH 41:42

So I gave this talk to the whole college. This was a time when staff would come and everything and you would do a big, grand talk. Anyway, Keith came up to me afterwards and said "Hello, I'm Keith Arnatt. I said that's lovely I knew who you were and I was going to try and contact you. He said I'm fascinated and I would love you to teach me to take pictures. So the easiest way to do it, why don't we try and switch some of your hours a couple of days of the week and you could join the students and do the same course that they do. And he would come in and learn how to develop film, do this that

and the other and one of the first assignments, he lived in Tintern, which again is a staggering coincidence, why don't you just photograph tourists that come to the Abbey. This will give you something to do and so he did this whole series on Tintern visitors which was the first thing. Of course, the man is extraordinary, and everything he did fitted in perfectly with his thought process. From that day on until he died, I saw him virtually every day. And we talked about everything and I think one of the things we came to conclusion was that although the style of what he does is totally different to the style of what I do, the way we did it was exactly the same. And the whole process, the experimental process of messing about, in a way, not knowing quite what you're doing and then suddenly finding something that seems to work and then developing that... it's exactly the same in what he does as what I do.

DH 44:16

The problem with conceptual art to me was that it would spend a great deal of time doing something which I had seen on toilet walls which was better. And by that I mean, I remember seeing on a toilet wall 'fresh air smells funny', well that has stayed in my mind more than any other conceptual thing I have ever known. Another one 'Due to lack of concern tomorrow has been cancelled'. I don't need more than that. That's what I used to keep saying to him and he, was a very intellectual guy, but he more or less agreed with me. There was basic idea, which was a literary idea, that could be quite nice, and somebody would do a whole stuff around it which would improve that idea.

DH 46:18

There is a book called, 'What good are the arts' by John Carey. I think it's wonderful book. He tries to define art. In the end, he says, I have come to the conclusion that art is what anybody thinks is art but only for that one person. I love that. like Clement Greenberg who says "Art is anything that will go on a gallery wall". Henry Moore who said "Sculpture is anything that will go on a plinth". To me it is that simple. In a way that's what art is. It's a bit like being knighted to me, it's a term you give to somebody else.

THE END

**Phil Mundell (PM) & Gregory Dunn (GD) Chepstow. (14.09.2015).**

GD

What I am trying to get at; what I was *trying* to get at with that research day was the way I have always seen things is by touching them and holding them. Touch has been very important to me and when I'm not able to touch something it frustrates me. All these years of going to art galleries and looking at Henry Moore's and all the rest of it, because I've just had to stand back and manage it. That has leaked out into the way I see everything and anything. I just want to tap into the fact that I think Gilpin – in the little drawings that he did; there is something very tactile about them for me; there was just something very handheld about them – that's very personal. I'm trying to find out if that's more universal and not just me. This area, this part of the world is very...you look down the valley and you want to do this (motion hands to touch landscape ahead, stroke the topography). I see it as loads of broccoli florets that you want to hold and touch and I'm just trying to find out if other people see the landscape and landscape painting/depiction in the same way. That's what I'm just trying to prove.

PM

No, I don't see it that way. I think I'm very visual and I look at Gilpin and watch him being manipulative as far as his landscape is concerned. Yes, there's a quote somewhere (Possibly by Julian Mitchell) describing the tourists being rowed down the river and are looking for the views that Gilpin has included in his book, and they can't find them and that's because they don't exist; he's created them, he's created the pictures. He's got his foregrounds and his middle grounds and his far and he's moved his trees to get this *universal* picture. And when we've been up to places like Piercefield, to Giants Cave and looked down over the river; of course, he didn't think that was Picturesque because it was too high. And so, I look at those paintings with that point of view. I think it's because that's the way I've always looked at art in general and landscapes in particular so that I would. And the work I have been recently doing on Richard Wilson means that I have to look at the landscape. I got really upset. I looked at two landscape paintings; one is 'Dinâs Bran' (from Llangollen) and the other is 'View from Wynnstay'. Big paintings. Now you look at those paintings and they are supposed to be topographical paintings of the estate of Watkin Williams-Wynn. I went up to Llangollen to take photographs because I wanted to get into his shoes basically; see where he positioned himself to take the pictures and I couldn't recognise these paintings and know you've got two hundred and fifty years of growth over the top but it was nothing like it. The castle of Dinâs Bran, which is on a conical hill, is shown like that (makes the shape of a steep sided hill with his hands) but in fact it's like that (Phil uses his hands to describe a less steep shape). The background hills that are higher than the castle, he has taken away to emphasise

that one point. He's then put trees into the picture to get the distance in. I was shocked you know? I thought this isn't what I wanted. This isn't what I was expecting to see; he's actually changed the landscape. The more I went into it, the more I thought, well maybe he's done it deliberately. There is a reason for why he's changed the painting; he's changed it because he wants there to be a key element to the picture. So for me, I really didn't see a tactile element to it, it was more a construction; the way that he put this picture together.

I was over at Piercefield the other day, I took the machine (Dictaphone) and made some comments. I just recorded what I was seeing and as I was walking around there, I was thinking of your work when we went on that walk some time ago (The WW1 Walk, Piercefield Park Oct 2014). All I was doing was looking at things and looking on to this landscape. Normally I just get a camera and take a picture of that but of course painters at the time wouldn't have done that; they would have taken elements from it and moved things forward. For example they would have taken those trees out there because they would have wanted the view of the castle to be in the picture. They would have changed things that we don't do today; we just take the photograph – that's it – that's done. Well that was in the back of my mind and later on the path there was this huge fungus; a huge puffball and I thought to myself, Greg would like that; I can understand that is tactile; it was like a human skull appearing from the soil and I'd like to explore that more. But you can see it's not a skull but there's something about that; its relationship to the earth around it that is interesting and exciting. So that was the first time I sort looked at something and thought, actually Greg would like that.

GD

I would go over to it and my wife's worse than me in this respect, when it comes to nature, fungus and things, she goes over to it, she's all around it like this. We've been together nearly thirty years so were habitually doing that I suppose. It's interesting; my approach, I have plenty of time to be conscious of it and think about it. You made me well aware of the fact at that last session; the fact that other people might not be conscious of it. And I've had plenty of time to be conscious of it because I've had to work out how I see things and make things.

PM

What struck me on that day and I think that all of us were daunted by the fact we had to do something with either sand or clay.

GD

I actually hadn't been prescriptive about what I wanted people to do; which made it tricky. It's like having the first page of a sketchbook, what do you do?

So that was a little bit unfair of me in a way.

PM

Well everyone I've spoken to had the same sort of feeling. They were not really happy about it (even before arriving there) Not really happy about playing with clay or playing with sand. People were saying, well I don't know what he's expecting from us. But then when some of the people started creating things. For me, the one that I thought was a fantastic piece of work was the lady who did the and I thought that's amazing. The intertwining roots across the paths. I would have loved to have been able to do it, to see it; to recognise that this is something that's good.

GD

But what I hope I go across was (after re-listening to the recording) that there's no right or wrong, there's no right or wrong here. Sand might not be the material for you; it might not suit you. I can't use some materials but I have an affinity with others. I love copper. Copper is so wonderful because it's malleable, pliable, if you make a mistake you can often heat it up and put it back in the right place. So all that's very important to me. So it was slightly unfair of me to do it but at the same time I was really glad that people were brave to get out of their comfort zone. I can imagine if I asked a different group that they wouldn't do it but everybody had a go – it was lovely.

PM

But there is that sort of peer pressure there. You know, they're doing it, I'd better do something. It was just a matter of looking around and lets get something out of this.

GD

I was trying to get at the tacit knowledge. Stuff that you were not necessarily aware of; your body was remembering something from the journey but you might not have been consciously aware of it. The way we moved up the slope, the way that we went down, we had those openings. We went through tunnels. As a thing, as a collection of senses, what was it going to bring back that our training couldn't tell us. My training would produce something different to someone who is untrained. But our bodies are in those situations so we must have some kind of universality.

PM

My experience, my training is to look at pictures and the things that struck me from the whole of that walk were two visions, if you like. The one was where we came through the gates, there was a pasture and we'd come all the way through those tree tunnels. We came to the gate and the gate was open, there was a track across the field, to a house down in the corner of the field. I thought, that's fantastic, it's almost like a nineteen thirties 'Shell Guide' picture waiting for somebody to fill in blocks of colour in order to create that particular vista. And the next one was when we came up over the top and were coming down the bank going back into Redbrook and we crossed a field we saw

the Valley below and thought, that's another visual memory. And there was a third one. The third one was the tree roots overgrowing stones at the top.

It's a matter of terminology, isn't it? You might talk about the Beech tree as being tactile or being something to get your hands on and shape. Whereas I would look it and say I just see that as a really interesting feature and I wish I could draw that.

GD

But it's interesting that with every description your hands accompany every description. You've been doing this (I mimic his hand movements) piecing the landscape together to try and explain to me – unconsciously but to communicate across to me, this appeal that you have.

PM

I think it's because...I accept that. I wasn't aware of it.

GD

No, no. It would be case of let's try sitting on our hands and try and do the same. Its integral. There's something integral in touch with the way we see all art. And representation; because that was very good that you picked me up on that and I think that landscape representation and representational landscape art is a tactile thing.

PM

I think that part of me was intimidated by having seen some of your work

GD

Ah, well that's a shame because...

PM

Because...I don't have a block on all abstract art; I like some of the abstract work, but it's the fact that I can't interpret it. I can't look at something unless I pick something up and make a meaning out of it I have great difficulty looking at abstract work without trying to understand what's going on. It's the same as looking at a Rothko. You go into the Rothko room; I think it's a really wonderful idea and always have done. I think it's the only time it's (art) has brought me to tears. I just found it so intense. But even there, I can feel, I've got to make it logical. So when I'm sitting there looking at it, I'm thinking: this is a window on the mind and actually you are looking in to the window, you're looking further into it. I remember a friend of mine saying "Look, I don't understand why you like it, it's just purple and black. Anybody can do that. Anyone can paint a purple square then paint a black square". Well I would say, go and have a look at it; go and look at the purple, go and look how the purple is made, it isn't purple. It's got other things going on in there. Look at the feathering, look at the edges. Stand in front of it. Watch how the thing moves.

GD

That's extremely perceptive and I'm really glad that you've chosen that place. I went and saw that when it was at the Tate Britain, where it was originally sited. When they moved it, I was slightly fearful that it would change but it had the same affect on me. I took my father in law in there when we lived in London; that's got to be fifteen years ago now and he was new to this area of art as well. I took him in there and he was so shocked; he put his hand on his chest. He was visibly take a back and sat down and really was quite, frightened would be too strong a word, but it just really knocked him about. So your response is...I think he (Rothko) intended for that to happen.

PM

I'm sure he did because mentally, I think, he wasn't in a good place.

GD

And your observation about the paint; I'm not a painter but I look at that and I think: how did he do that? How did he get that effect? Your eyes are going backwards and forwards depending on which one you're looking at and the whole thing is quite discombobulating; it does, it knocks you about. But I think one thing I've learned, especially doing this research, is being relaxed with chaos to some degree. Did I talk about 'Negative Capability' on that day? John Keats wrote a very small passage in a letter to somebody talking about this thing called Negative Capability and people have theorised about what it is but he was basically saying (he was interested in Shakespeare) He said the thing with Shakespeare was interested in the process, he was okay with not knowing, being in the middle of the process and not worrying about the end result. Just being there and the process releasing things that you wouldn't normally see. A designer might design something for an end purpose. I am a great believer in and am okay with play; with just doing something and something coming out of it and I think that's what I was trying to get over that day. Play is okay and something's going to appear out of it. Often, I've said to students (and usually mature students who immediately have something in mind that they want to do). I would say before you try and push idea on this thing (a technique like welding for example) Just have a go with the new technique and see where it leads; it might lead to something new. So, it's not end based. Is that making it any clearer as to where I'm coming from?

PM

I follow your train of thought with it. I'm just trying to work out why I. You see I would be looking out for the end result. And a lot of that is probably to do with when I left school I went straight in to a drawing office – I was a draughtsman and so to a greater extent, I am much more comfortable with straight lines where I can sit down and say I am happy drawing this – it's got depth and perspective. When I started the OU course I would take



the painting and put a sheet of tracing paper on it, draw out the main outlines, then put the perspective lines in, you know, mathematically. How is he doing this? What is he trying to do?

GD

You were trying to construct the pictures then?

PM

And it's still the same today. I still look at a painting and say I want to understand the iconography here and that doesn't matter whether it's a religious painting which is (if you like) where I started or whether it's a pure landscape. But even if it's a pure landscape I want to know how things are overlapping. What's the meaning in that? Why had he included those things? You know, why is it in the picture?

GD

I guess I don't know but I guess a lot of artists are about control, creation and about leaving a mark; Idealising actually. We'll never know and I'm relaxed with not knowing and that's a bit to do with that Negative Capability, not necessarily knowing or finding out just letting that image wash over me. I either go with it or I don't. I've become happier with Abstract Art and I would include that Rothko piece even though it's Abstract Expressionism. I like it when an artist will put something there that has got some room for me and I think Rothko is a master of putting things out there have got room for you. You can contribute to that artwork. The reflection of your experience in it (the artwork) and so on; it's just so subjective. I think it's really powerful. Yes, it can be done in pictures like this ('Transept of Tintern Abbey', 1792 – Ashmolean WWW) of course but then I think about my favourite Turner painting ('Tintern Abbey from the River Wye', c.1828 – Tate WWW). You can't even see Tintern Abbey. That might not be necessarily accurate but there's room for me to fill the gaps, to engage and grip onto it. Whereas the other image doesn't leave anything for me, in fact it intimidates me because it's... Where is the room for me to engage and overlay my vision? I've seen days like that (referring to the 1828 image) I've driven past it looking like that. ("It looks like that today" – Phil). But he must have gone through that process. What a great technician but through all his looking at the world he started to change. I just trust him. His view of the world must have become so educated from looking so hard at everything its nice to see it breaking down really. ("Perhaps his eye sight was fading – when you compare the two paintings" – Phil). But there is something innately touchable about these old pictures you are selecting from this book. They've got foliage on them. But I'd like to back to Rothko and make a comparison with that ('Tintern Abbey from the River Wye') and Turner was doing that two hundred years ago. He was doing some kind of communication allowing us in and would be relaxed with non-representation.

PM

I did something on Llanthony Abbey. One was by Michael "Angelo" Rooker, one was by Turner and the other was by Sandby. And Turner painted in the 1800's and he had put a romantic element on it; it was in the middle of a storm (Painted 1794 – Ref. Tate WWW). The river was raging, yes, it was a very dramatic picture. Rooker approached it, very much as a topographical painting and he put figure into it. Different approaches to it and Turner is right on the cusp of impressionism. He's looking at colour and light effects in what he later paints – that's what's coming through. You look at his early pictures and you're getting this sharpness of detail by the time he came to the end of his life...but he's gone through all these phases.

GD

You made me think about Monet then. He apparently had cataracts removed and then wore coloured lenses as a result and then his painting changed. The colouring in his painting changed after that. I read and I wish I could now remember the quote and those kind of paintings; someone referred to them as 'coloured gasses' which I think... he's made air *tangible* – a thing we're almost swimming in. (And there are lots of examples of that – Phil)

GD

I, on the way here, went to Monmouth and was looking at my phone, at Twitter and I see (I was reminded by the fact) there's a woman in Cardiff (Dawn Mannay) that's done some research using sand. What she's doing though is using a sand box. So, she's actually giving the participants a *frame* of sand, soft sand (like kid's sand) and then placing things in it. So, I am really going to read more by this particular person. It's interesting that we've done something at a similar time. It's no coincidence that people are moving away, and you might not be aware of this, that people are moving away from the visual because we're a generation now that has phones and iPads and T.V. and it's constant, constant bombardment and there's three exhibitions I know of, one at the National, one at the Tate and one in Wolverhampton to do with senses and sensoria. You're allowed to go into there and touch everything that is a really nice idea.

PM

I had a friend, who has been dead many years, he'd been equable to Queen Mary. In the late sixties/early seventies and he had the most amazing collection of antiques – fantastic. I would have been eighteen/nineteen and we'd go along to his house from the pub. And he'd have fantastic pieces of porcelain (and it's the porcelain I would remember in particular); I was brought up you don't touch anything. He would say "touch it, you've got to feel it, you've got to hold it, you've got to touch the glaze". You can tell one piece of pottery from another purely by sense of... is that glaze smooth? Is it rough?

I've always remembered that experience. We've got various bits and pieces now but that business of being able to pick it up and look at it and touch it and feel it, I *do* think is important. But where does it come on the scale of things? When we had that discussion in Redbrook, when it started to be interesting for me was when the conversation turned around to the senses and how do you transmit a *sense* into somebody else? If you say, well I walked through that field... and the smell was absolutely beautiful...I could smell the cut grass and I could hear the wind in the trees. Now if you put that down into a painting there's nothing and I'd like that discussion to have gone on.

GD

It was good and that's why I wanted to meet you and carry on, to continue this discussion because what you really opened up there was...there's a huge conundrum, a huge problem. I went on to write something after that (try to find it in notebook) Yes, this is what I started to think about. I didn't have an answer for you, I did not have an answer, I did not have an answer, I didn't have an answer for that because it's *extremely* subjective. There's a lot in the news about artificial intelligence at the moment and the transmission of memories have been something I've been interested in within Science Fiction stories. How can you possibly transmit? Do you remember 'Joe 90?' There was that moment where Joe 90 would get all the knowledge of an airline pilot or something like that but what went with that (well I had assumed) was the brain intelligence. An airline pilot has got arms and legs and a body just the same, there's a load of memories and feelings and sounds and all the rest of it that are going to make that person – it's not as simple as transferring the *knowledge* of how to... It's so many other things; it's the distance (I outstretch my arm – I'm also reminded of experience of virtual reality) that that person's arm would have to travel to go to switch on something. So that's a convoluted way of saying there is something that is impossible. People like Rothko can tap into feelings and memories and sensation but they are intangible, they're non detailed, they are specific to him but there must be something universal that he's tapped into to make you feel like that; he's using a visual language and a vocabulary of space, I guess for want of a better phrase to manipulate you. What it came down to (and my thoughts on that was) it came down to *privacy*... I thought about privacy. I mean why do we need to communicate that to anybody? What is the desire we have to communicate a feeling to somebody else? Some things cannot be transmitted; some things cannot be communicated and do you know what? That's all right. I think the thing about that day was... some things are very personal to us all and no amount of this (I point to mobile phone) and no amount of sound recording or visual or writing down is going to communicate your *nugget* of experience, nothing, nothing will and in a world of social (I do air quotes with my fingers) social networking, where we sharing every aspect of our

life... I did this, I did that... It felt like this it felt like that, you're still entitled to some privacy if thought and experience

PM

But if you're an artist, isn't your job to communicate through your art form?

Greg

Not if you don't earn a living from it, you can do what you like.

PM

But surely there's an element of communication. If you employ an artist to do a painting, to do a portrait, you're expecting them to be able to communicate something back and not necessarily the likeness, pure and simple; they will want to transfer something more than that. I think it's this old argument about the artist and the role of the artist. If you're an artist who has plenty of money, doesn't need to work, fine you can produce what you like, nobody cares but if its part of your life and you're working with it then it becomes more important and communication is a really important element of that stage.

GD

But this is an argument I have had before about who is it for, is it for you? Is it for them? And what are you communicating and is it being watered down (by your thought) about it being communicated to somebody else. You going to have your own code, your own visual vocabulary (whatever vocabulary) if you're a sound artist you'll do it another way. But thinking about communicating...

PM

It can't be dismissed, it has to be in there somewhere. I think you're looking at it almost from a pure art form and...

GD

You know, I am, I think I'm trying to look at it from a pure experience form.

PM

But you're cutting out a commercial aspect on the one side.

GD

And I have interviewed a landscape artist and his way of looking at the world; I could see what he was doing and I described it and he was chuffed to bits. "You've got it," he said "you've got it" "you can see what I'm doing" and he said "I didn't just come up with that overnight, it took me a few years to actually work that through and see that". And that's great because he wasn't doing it for my benefit. I saw it but then again, I've seen the place that he's painting and I can feel the place that he's painting. Your comment about how can we make something tangible from the intangible? That was key to my self-reflection as to how the afternoon had gone.

PM

For me, it was a different approach because I was looking at this and I was thinking, I got quite excited because for the first time somebody mentioned poetry and because I'd been working on an eighteenth-century painting; you're constantly getting this link across between poetry and landscape painting. That's where it all started to click in my mind and that's really interesting because how else would you translate the senses? What other medium could you use to translate the senses?

GD

I do agree with you about words but that's like the paintings that we've been talking about because that allows you in with your own experience. We have a way of communicating of course, we speak English; it's quite clear; it's less ambivalent – do you think? But then it depends whose writing, doesn't it? Because some people like Ted Hughes for example; a bit more ambivalent than Wordsworth – I don't know.

PM

Probably needs a bit more thinking about it, in terms of...one I remember was the Moon and Little Anna (Actually Full Moon and Little Frieda). It's the moon shining on a puddle and the cows are coming back to be milked and she's standing by the puddle looking into the puddle; seeing the moon reflected. The whole poem was about this feeling of nature and constant going on. I haven't read it for years but I remember it moving me and I remember thinking, I can see the picture. There's the picture, you know there's a little girl standing by the puddle and its dusk – it must be dusk because the moon is out.

GD

And that's just words that have provoked that...

'Full Moon and Little Frieda' - Ted Hughes (1967)

*A cool small evening shrunk to a dog bark and the clank of a bucket -*

*And you listening.*

*A spider's web, tense for the dew's touch.*

*A pail lifted, still and brimming - mirror*

*To tempt a first star to a tremor.*

*Cows are going home in the lane there, looping the hedges with their warm wreaths of breath -*

*A dark river of blood, many boulders,*

*Balancing unspilled milk.*

*'Moon!' you cry suddenly, 'Moon! Moon!'*

*The moon has stepped back like an artist gazing amazed at a work*

*That points at him amazed.*

(Ref. <http://www.jeanettewinterson.com/poem/full-moon-and-little-frieda/>)

***Seminar Transcript (Section)***

***In Visible Nature – a conversation. Sidney Nolan Trust, Presteigne. (16.05.2014)***

**Anita Taylor (AT), Mariele Neudecker (MN) and Hayley Skipper (HS).**

AT - Introduction

“How we explore nature through the things that we make and how we understand our experience”.

“Mapping of place and space and how we understand that experience”

“For me, it’s really important that we think about the impact that we have on the environment and part of that has always been the conversation we have about the landscape – what does it mean? What’s our place in the world? and how do we address that?”

End Conversation

AT MN HS

AT

“There is something, not just about how we do make nature visible? But it’s actually how do we intersect and relate to that constant?”

HS

“You relate to nature in relation to disaster (following previous discussion about floods in England) when it flashes in to your mind quite often... Somerset Levels were on the news every day. It felt like our cultures connection with nature was heightened and it strikes me how much of relationship with nature is mediated by screen and by television and how those moments of disaster are mediated through the news media and so the moments that we connect with nature are often a flash storm or a flooding crisis and so our sense of nature and climate so mediated all the time by technology. This is imaging of nature through Apps and things. We are mediated ion our experience of nature through these technologies all the time. We carry that on some level.”

MN

“Wilderness being inside (us) that even with the limited perception, probably the true wilderness is in your brain sometimes”.

AT

“That’s something to think about, the unexplored deep sea; it’s the *unexplored* it’s like a scary forest, it’s a place you can’t control.”

AUDIENCE

“Is it possible that there is crisis in confidence in us that we have to see what the wilderness is? Something outside us rather than in us? Is there an argument for setting aside landscape for complete non-intervention? Not only by artists but also by mountain

bikers, loggers and humanity completely. So, it is left to its own devices and we will not see what happens. And that's what is maybe more important. Before we were around it was just left to its own devices and we had no idea what happened when the trees fell; what happened then. One thing I did find when the storms hit the south of England in 1987 was that forest re-generated quickest when trees were left to lie on the ground.

Is it possible to have artist's non-intervention whereby they use their imagination to actually detect what is happening inside that piece of terrain? Whether it's in a forest or whether it's in the Antarctic. Whether it's underwater; wherever it is. So there was somewhere, when I was a kid, your imagination was the key to how you viewed the world and it seems from what you've said everything has to be on screen or it has to be on video or on computer. We have lost the ability to try and imagine how things are. It seems to me that artists intervention is another part of man's dominion".

HS

"I think we have both these impulses in us. We have people come to forests because they want to get away from being on the laptop all afternoon and experience the air and the environment and the bluebells and the change of tempo and yet they get frustrated that their SATNAV's don't work and I say "they" but I include me in this. There isn't Wi-Fi and it's lots of wiggly roads to get there. We all have these kinds of pressures on us and I think we all have that sense of desire for something that isn't perhaps there. There is no wilderness in this country...."

AUDIENCE

"The sense of wilderness is really how you are when you walk down a street in a city or in a town or in the countryside because it won't come to you. It is something you have to find within yourself so that wilderness is there; it's one of our primal race memories – that sense of wilderness. It worries me that we want to intervene with everything. We see ourselves as so supreme".

HS

"I think the nature of the interventions that we're enabling artists to make, with these projects, is to try and make a space that enables more than one person at a time to come together to reflect on exactly that. It's that idea of open forest. There's a space there. This is kind of about framing. It's kind of about how you make a space for that reflection to be possible and I think that can be a creative reflection for an artist. That's what artists do. That's their intervention and they're making a space for an audience to come together and have a moment of reflection with sculpture or sound installation that's maybe only there for an hour and is fleeting. That's their jobs as artists"

HS

“There is no place on this earth that commercial interests are not looking to exploit and the expeditions that you’ve done (MN) point to we are all aware of mining and a desire to ‘Frack’ now in the UK. So the ground underneath us is a hot topic. I feel my position as a curator is that artists should be reflecting on that process of management of land, the environment and the world around us as part of the culture that we all exist in and not exclude from that conversation. Now my job as a curator is to open a space and decide whether the nature of that intervention is permanent or temporary and the material and what point it is that they’re trying to make”.

AT

“It’s complicated but I think the idea of artist as witness and bringing back information and holding a lens to the world reveals the artist as a conscience. The ethical and moral lens for society”.

“I suspect there’s not an inch of surface land that’s not managed. But there is also that thing of actually invading other people’s space with those interventions. Though they may actually impose less on the forest they may actually impose more on our imagination than our experience of the thing that we seek – it might be tranquility – it might be isolation – it might be finding something else and not wanting to invade the Raven’s space. I wondered about the politics of that – of seeing the forest as a gallery without walls and how that plays itself out in a way.”

HS

“There is a lot of space. To take Grizedale as one example, we have two hundred and fifty thousand visitors a year but even if go there on a day where it will look really, really busy around the immediate area of the car park; within about ten or fifteen minutes you could be in an area, completely alone in a woodland with an art work, (if you so choose) so it’s a very kind of plural thing. It’s not a wilderness but there is scope to keep quiet spaces and we have forest design plans and we have a zoned area that will be for wildlife where we don’t encourage visitors to go. We’re always subtly managing things and involving the community with a project if they live in the area. It’s absolutely critical because these are public places. One of the conditions that are put upon the artist when they are entering the forest is the same if you enter any public space; managing public expectations.”

AUDIENCE

“Could I ask Mariella, what your definition of a wilderness is?”

MN

“My definition. For me, it’s not a forest; there’s not a lot of space, at least in the way I think of space. There is a lot of space in the Arctic. That’s the first time I really experienced a lot of space; which is kind of ironic. How do you define it? I can probably



tell you a tiny story. When I was back from the ice; back to onto the internet and my mobile worked. While I was out there my brother was at base camp Mount Everest and texted me. I thought how did you text me? You're supposed to be in the wilderness. There is a G3 receptor right on the top of Everest. That's probably the most depressing news I have ever had. And that was one of my wildernesses somehow; up there it's still incredibly wild. I thought, but because of that sort of data interfering everywhere and the fact that they have receptors on Mount Everest really shocked me. At that point, I started really to question if there's a wilderness out there somewhere because obviously the effects loads of (a long list of things affecting the Arctic) really closes down the definition of Wilderness quite quickly. I think Wilderness is probably beyond the realm of everybody's brains. I'm struggling to define it in the outside nature of the landscape."

AUDIENCE

"I think of wilderness as somewhere where you can do what you like. It's an environment in which you can do as you please."

AUDIENCE

"It's in our heads. It's a romantic dream".

AUDIENCE

"Wild is actually when nature wins out. When we're talking about wilderness, it's from a human perspective. Maybe we should think about wilderness from nature's perspective? Sometimes when you see a plant growing from a drain-pipe you feel quite pleased. Nature is making subtle interventions. And maybe that can only be truly wild today."

AUDIENCE

"Suddenly this land that I walked in everyday became dangerous (Snowscape at the Wenlock Edge). It comes back to nature and the events such as flooding."

AT

"You talk a lot Mariella about mapping the Arctic. We understand the world through mapping. Our complete anxiety to map Antarctica, to map the Arctic, to map everything we haven't experienced and want to share that. It's actually a really extraordinary systemisation and it is about suppressing or compressing nature but it maybe also quite a Western thing too. I know that is pervading and it comes out of the systems and the way we used to reflect on the world in all that sense of defining perspective with a framing device. It has suppressed and maybe we are at a tipping point with having suppressed so much there is that anxiety now about how we allow something else to take over (and your plants growing through a drain-pipe are very much that). I think of the wilderness as what we don't know and what we're apprehensive about is we really don't have a system to deal with it and we don't know whether we've got enough."

AUDIENCE

“And I suppose interestingly we’re at a time when we might think we have enough science and technology to own nature; well nature is still flying in the face of that and being very unpredictable”.

MN

“And of course, technology is unpredictable as well. Even though there is such a strong human element with technology. If you look at the more contemporary definitions of the Sublime they always tend to be able to untangle from technology. People get very frightened by technology because it becomes this uber-human, super human thing; even though it started with eh very simple map making....”

MN

“Unknown technology and unknown data is what I would call the modern sublime and that’s part of landscape and nature”. The need to map. The need to identify, locate and share. We are the centres of our experience and that can be wild.

## **AONB Annual Conference Lilleshall, Shropshire (June 2016)**

### **Presentation Notes**

#### *FEELING JAPAN*

##### *Geo-Emotionality (READ ALOUD)*

“In July 2011 I visited the Japanese island of Kyushu and became fascinated with the physical geography I found there. Volcanic forces had dramatically distorted the landscape; sub-surface pressures had contorted its skin into monumental cones and cavernous calderas. Hot sulphurous steam squeezed through rocky fissures and pools of hot bubbling mud. The island’s population appeared to be strangely at ease with their subterranean threat; they were somehow at home with the ever-present peril of potential catastrophe. Indeed, the island’s inhabitants exploited their enemy; they diverted the potentially destructive energy to warm their homes, heat their baths and cook their food. The menace was managed, but the traces of physical violence were there for all to see in the beautiful and expansive scenery; evidence of the fight lay in the black basalt rock formations and the gaping lava gullies. I encountered nothing but calm and polite people on Kyushu. On the surface, nobody seemed concerned with his or her geological predicament at all. This strange set of circumstances set me thinking...”

#### *MAKING IN MINO*

Rhythm of seasons. Rhythm of the body making paper – rocking backwards and forwards. Rhythm and routine of the job. Pressures of performing. Working with hands with naturally sourced materials. Touching, feeling, seeing and being in place. A very PROFOUND and affecting experience. The paper I was making became inseparable from me – the smell, the feel all left its mark upon me.

#### *MEN AND MOUNTAINS*

Acquaintance with material mountains. Conquering the world (Macho and upper class). Non-reciprocal. Physically comparable and meaningful approach. Elitist and non-inclusive.

#### *COLLABORATION IN THE WYE VALLEY*

Professor Richard Coles obtained AHRC funding for project with Wye Valley AONB Team. He and I fitted together due to my interest in haptic interactions and interest in feeling the world through the eyes and his experience in facilitating environmental research.

#### *VIEWFINDERS IN THE WYE VALLEY*

Arguably the Birthplace of British guided tourism. 1770 Reverend William Gilpin went down the Wye in a little boat – Plenty of ‘Visual Roughness’ to appeal to the eye (we have that in common). I imagine the experience to have been quite overwhelming. He

needed to capture and control the experience and take it away. Birth of the Picturesque Movement. The narrowing of the visual field. Reduced to a single plane of experience.

#### *FEELING FOR SPACE*

As an artist, I approached the Wye Valley beyond the Picturesque. Beyond the frame. I suggest we need a bigger picture. Pursue a multi-modal approach to making art. Contemporary society. It's what's outside the picture that counts. Experience over representation. Handling the landscape. Storing somatically what we encounter. Touching topography. Feeling for space. Gripping the geography. Responding to the proximity of things near and far.

#### *IMMERSIVE APPROACH*

My body has been central to the experience. I relate to the body of the landscape. Lung like trees. Vascular *Trunnels*. ('Chlorophyll soaked') Proximity of materials to the body. Wye Valley is well suited to intensity of physical experiences. The body in space and movement through materials and a real sense of materials moving through us (moisture in the air, smells & sounds). Again, the Wye Valley contains magic and 'mystery' and is a place of high visuospatial contrast - a tantalising and *tactile* feast for the eyes.

#### *VIRTUAL COMPETITION*

Sony VR arrives in September, arguably democratising military level simulation technology to a massive global audience – it will be immersive, distracting and seductive escapism but it will be a lot of fun. At present though, only the eyes and ears are attended to – not fully immersive in the way reality is...at the moment.

#### *THE FUTURE FEELS GOOD*

So far my research has so brought me to the understanding that active bodily engagement is intrinsic to a deeper relationship with place. I have experienced magical moments in the Wye Valley (natural and man-made - in the case of the last two river festivals) and being physically present was central (and indeed WAS necessary) to those experiences. They made me **feel** part of a bigger body and corporeally connected to a wider world.

**Summary of what participants might take away from the session:**

- A broader view of contemporary artists aesthetic values – those beyond the Picturesque.
- An introduction to the expression *Geo-Emotional*; what it is and how the Wye Valley exemplifies the term.
- Participants will understand the value of a *multi-modal* (all five senses) approach to landscape encounters.

## **The 2016 AONB Conference: Notes & Reflections**

*Howard Davies – Chief Executive AONB*

“More power as an audience”

**“Whole being greater than the sum of its parts”**

“Value the notion of Landscape”

**“Interaction and interdependency”**

“Building resilience is key”

**“Resilience about change and development”**

“Uphold the notion of landscape”

“The whole is not the sum of its parts”

“Try out your imperfect ideas” (at the conference)

**“You are the guardians of the big picture”**

**“The majority of people are bystanders. We need to ensure they are part of the landscape not bystanders”**

*Ruth Hall (Former Chief Medical Officer for Wales)*

“There are very competitive and less healthy options”

“Can we do more to optimize wellbeing?”

“Internet shopping with home delivery” (adding to problem of obesity and poor mental health).

“No stigma of buying alcohol for example”

“Outdoor activity levels have fallen”

“Over a third of adult’s overweight in the UK”

**“Main concern is loneliness”**

**“Sense of place is essential to people’s identity”**

“Humans need darkness as well as daylight” (Need for sleep and less artificial light)

“Spiritual wellbeing”

“Deep emotional connection”

**“Links between aesthetics and health”**

**“Getting people outside is not just about access”**

“Users who value space”

**“We need to help people make the first step”**

*Dr Caroline Jessel, NHS England*

“Wonderful asset for all of us” (Protected landscapes).

“One that’s available to all”

“There’s something in our biological needs that responds to the environment”

“Health is a vital resource for our country”

“Self-inflicted ill health”

“How can we get children away from the medical model?”

“Enlivening the senses, **building sensory memories**”

“The relationship with animals is important we believe” (Empathy for victim)

**“The hands are key to healing”**

**“People need a kind of brokerage to access the landscape”**

“Engage all the senses actively”

“How can you care about something if you’ve never experienced it”

David Attenborough.

“Nature is absolutely crucial for our health and wellbeing”

*Kate Wood – Activate Arts*

**“A lot of our work now happens outdoors”**

**“We wanted to reach larger audiences so we went outdoors”**

**“Our events are predominantly free”**

**“More sociable, diverse people able to access when outdoors”**

**“The active spectator”**

**“They need to walk out into the landscape and be part of it”**

Kate Mentioned Oerol Festival – Holland

“Very embedded in the community”

“Very rich experience”

“Phenomenal experience”

*Dr Denise Hewlett – University of Winchester – ‘Tranquillity’ project.*

**“How do you quantify something so super, super qualitative?”**

**“Wellbeing is extremely personal”**

“Mediation versus medication”

## **Reflections**

Having never been to an AONB conference before, I was keen to see how other AONB management parties compared to the Wye Valley AONB team and what issues were currently relevant in other parts of the country. Chief Executive of the AONB, Howard Davies delivered a presentation that highlighted the strengths of the organisation, repeatedly referring to the AONB as a “Whole being greater than the sum of its parts”. He also spoke of the members being “resilient to change and development” and that this was a real strongpoint of the organisation. From what I witnessed over the three days of the conference, I would agree with that. I overheard many anecdotal conversations

between AONB “Family members” regarding funding applications and difficulties at procuring money for projects. It appears that individual AONB employees (and indeed volunteers) are unified by a love of natural spaces and go above and beyond their job remit to protect what they believed is important to society as a whole. The tenacity and pro-active approach that I repeatedly encountered was remarkable; the individuals really did appear to be “greater than the sum of its parts”.

As a part of the Landscapes for Life 2016 conference, I delivered a fifteen-minute ‘Briefing’ (With additional time for discussion and questions) to approximately thirty delegates. Under the title: *Tactile Tourism in the Wye Valley*, my aim was to suggest the possibility of removing technological mediation from our contemporary experiences of landscape. I offered the premise that we might reflect upon being present in the moment of experience; “somatically storing” the event in our bodies rather than externally and digitally capturing evidence that we were there. I requested that we might ultimately trust our internal memory storage as opposed to relying upon external hard drives that can potentially de-centre and dis-locate physical experience.

I prefaced the outline of my research residency in the Wye Valley with a succinct review of last five years of my artistic practice; this was intended to enlighten the audience to the approach an artist might take when encountering a landscape for the first time. I described my own particular interest in materials, rhythm, routine and ‘flow’ that had been strengthened on a three-month artists residency in Mino City, Gifu, Japan in 2012. I described feeling connected to the material constituents of the landscape in Japan and finding solace in the agricultural scenery that I had initially dismissed as aesthetically uninviting.

To help clarify my current and personal approach to landscape, I presented images of artworks by Giuseppe Penone, Lucy McRae and Bart Hess. The audience appeared to be unfamiliar with the works; subsequently, quiet nervous laughter could be heard when I confronted the room with some of the slides. The works highlighted an interdependent and multi-modal way into the world; an alliance between natural substances and a sort of somatic exchange between humans and the material world. Physical interaction, and not mere imaginative representation, appeared to be central to the works; re-enforcing my own immersive approach and physically emotive response to the research location.

Part of my research methodology has been to interview living artists that live in and around the Wye Valley AONB. As part of the conference briefing, I briefly described my



two encounters with ceramicist, and Penallt resident of forty years, Walter Keeler. I explained how elements of Keeler's ceramic works appear to mirror those features found in the natural world and their appearance, as he has explained to me, also belongs to an extensive tradition of makers who find inspiration in the natural landscape. His personal process requires him to repeat actions, acquire muscle memories and habitually commit to his chosen craft. It appears to me as if Keeler's physical routine and experiential presence have been somatically stored, haptically imparted through the medium of clay and subsequently sent out into the world as functional pieces of art.

During the latter part of the presentation, I speculated that competition for actual landscape interaction might come from the technology leisure sector. Virtual Reality is set to become more ubiquitous (and I suggested more democratic) with the global release of Sony's VR system in October this year. I explained that Virtual Reality has recently gone through steep technological improvements (screen definition for example has increased) and the result could be a very "seductive" experience, particularly for younger generations and those who want to experience a location without physically travelling. However, I argued that the experience is incomplete; it is a sensorially narrow set of circumstances and largely reliant upon the senses of seeing and hearing. Although apparently immersive, Virtual Reality does not currently incorporate all our senses and I argued that actual reality as opposed to virtual reality would continue to be the more affective and meaningful option.

To close the session, and to offer a positive end to the talk, I offered the observation that the Wye Valley and other protected landscapes contained physical characteristics that fully and meaningfully immerse and affect its inhabitants. I had personally been moved by my sensorial encounters in the area and felt that technology wasn't close to replicating the multi-modal conditions that are currently exclusive to the real world.

**CONSENT FORM (Tintern Walk)**

**Full title of Project:**

*Corporeal Connections in Contemporary Landscapes:  
Negotiating Landscape Identities in the Wye Valley*

**Name and contact address of Researcher:**

Gregory Dunn  
16 Lower Chestnut Street  
Worcester  
WR1 1PB

Please Initial  
Box

- |    |  |                          |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | I agree to take part in the above study.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | I agree to any subsequent interviews being audio recorded.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | I agree to the use of any images (I produce) being published on the Internet and in subsequent publications.                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. | I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. | I consider myself able to walk approximately seven miles over varying ground conditions.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Emergency Contact Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

**CONSENT FORM (Making Moments Walk)**

**Project title:**

*Corporeal Connections in Contemporary Landscapes:  
Negotiating Landscape Identities in the Wye Valley*

**Name and contact address of Researcher:**

Gregory Dunn  
16 Lower Chestnut Street  
Worcester  
WR1 1PB

**Mobile Number:** 07779290623

**Please Tick Box**

- |    |  |                          |
|----|--|--------------------------|
| 1. | I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. | I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. | I agree to take part in the above study.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. | I agree to any subsequent interviews being audio recorded.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. | I agree to the use of any images (I produce) being published on the Internet and in subsequent publications.                       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. | I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. | I consider myself able to walk approximately 4 miles over varying ground conditions.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Emergency Contact Telephone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

# BIAD Research Ethics Form

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Proposer: Gregory Dunn

Staff/Student: Student

Project title:

Corporeal Connections in Contemporary Landscapes:

Negotiating Landscape Identities in the Wye Valley

Funding provider: AHRC CDA Grant

## Ethical Questions

For each question, please write a brief paragraph addressing the issues outlined in the Guidelines. If you have any doubts or concerns, you should consult one of the recommended Ethics Codes. (Note, to avoid introducing numbering into your text, you should use shift + return to create new paragraphs.)

### 1. What is the justification for this research?

To advance understanding of the role of protected landscapes within the broader context of the needs of society.

To explore how modern society experiences the landscape and how historical modes of looking have influenced contemporary experience of place.

To add to our understanding of landscape perception exploring and analysing the corporeal connections in contemporary landscapes –the ways that landscape experience is a positive force in society.

To inform strategies for maintaining protected landscapes for current and future generations and thus help underpin and advance the strategic management objectives and actions of the AONB Management Plan.

### 2. Please indicate your research methods and any associated ethical issues.

- The participants will accompany the researcher on a guided walk.
- The researcher will need to inform the participants to wear appropriate footwear, clothing and bring food and water.
- The researcher will need to assess the route and decide its suitability for all group members.
- The research participants will be asked to use their smart/mobile phones and electronic 'tablets' to take photographs of the landscape for the purposes of photo

elicitation at a later date.

- The researcher will request that no photos of other participants or the general public are submitted to the organiser.
- The researcher will suggest that people are aware of their surroundings (whilst taking photographs) at all times, so as not to place themselves or any other individuals in unnecessary danger.
- The group will also be asked to gather meaningful materials from the site. The organiser will warn the group from removing protected plant species and animal matter.

3. Does your research involve participants? Yes  No

*If yes, go to Question 4. If no, go to Question 6.*

*If your research involves children or vulnerable adults, please provide further details here.*

4. How will you address the process of informed consent?

- Individuals will be invited to join the research and will be provided with a brief but clear summary of the research aims and objectives.
- There will also be the chance for the group to individually (and anonymously) ask any questions regarding concerns they may have (The researcher will provide numerous means of contact (email address and telephone number for example).
- An 'informed consent form' will be given to all participants requesting that they sign to agree to giving various resulting imagery, video and voice recordings to the researcher.
- In response, the researcher will guarantee that all files and materials will be protected.

5. Where appropriate, how will you ensure:

- a. The confidentiality of information?
- b. The anonymity of participants?

6. How will you manage, store and protect the future use of any personal or confidential data?

- The researcher will take sole responsibility for the storage and eventual disposal of the data.

- None of the data will be publically presented (Eg. on the internet, at conferences, or in print) without the express permission of the research participants.

7. Does your research involve any risks?

to your participants

to yourself

no risk

*If so, please indicate the measures you have put in place to deal with these.*

It will be essential to accompany participants (and possibly recruit other supervisors depending on group numbers) whilst they gather data. It will be necessary to ensure that no participant comes to any harm from falling, tripping etc.

8. Are there any other ethical issues associated with this research? Yes  No

*Consult one of the recommended Ethics Codes if you are uncertain.*

9. Have you read the *Birmingham City University Guidelines and Procedures for Good Research Practice*? Yes  No

10. Do you think you need additional training to deal with these ethical issues?

*If so, please give an indication of your training needs.* Yes  No

## Guidelines for Completion of the Research Ethics Form

The questions on this form are intended to address ethical principles as they relate to research in art and design. However, researchers in art and design should have regard to general ethical principles that apply across subject and discipline boundaries. One of the most widely used ethical frameworks involves Four Principles of ethical behaviour:

- **Autonomy** – respecting the decision-making capacities of autonomous persons.
- **Beneficence** – acting in a way that benefits participants.
- **Non maleficence** – avoiding doing harm.
- **Justice** – distributing benefits and costs fairly; treating all participants equally.

### Question 1

All researchers have a responsibility to examine the impact and implications of their research, and should ask themselves why the project is worth doing. The benefits to participants, the identity of beneficiaries of the research, and the possible impact on society of the research outcomes should be considered, as well as any social, cultural or religious implications.

### Question 2

Some research methods carry intrinsic ethical issues and/or have standard protocols to guide ethical practice. It is worth considering these when planning the research methodology.

### Question 3

Participants include interviewees and any others contributing to the outcomes of the research.

### Question 4

Researchers have a duty to respect the autonomy of the individual (see above).

- a. Normal practice is to brief participants at the outset of a project to ensure that they understand the nature and implications of the research, the extent of their participation and the ways in which the data may be used, now and in the future. Participants should be made aware of their right to withdraw from the research. Information may need to be repeated or supplemented when and if the research moves into a new phase. In many, but not all, cases consent is documented, for example using a consent form. It is good practice to debrief participants at the conclusion of the research, and to inform them of the outcomes. Research should not be covert or involve deception unless this is necessary to the nature of the research; in such cases, the researcher should gain the view of colleagues/peers before proceeding.
- b. If participants are not in a position to give consent themselves (for example, children or vulnerable adults), extra care should be taken when obtaining consent from guardians or other responsible adults, and alternative ways of ensuring the voluntary cooperation of the participants should be explored. If your research involves children, please indicate if a Criminal Records Bureau check is required.

### Question 5

- a. Researchers have a duty to protect the confidentiality of any information they acquire in the course of their research. (This may include private or intimate information that participants disclose when it has not been solicited, for example,

during in depth interviews). Where confidential information is likely to be disclosed, the researcher should consider at the outset how to address the issue. In any case, the researcher should discuss with participants how such information will be handled and obtain their consent.

- b. Protecting participants' confidentiality may include preserving their anonymity. Where appropriate researchers should consider the use of pseudonyms or other means of anonymising responses. The researcher should ensure that information is stored securely, and should explain the approach to participants.

#### Question 6

The management of data should be considered at the outset of the research. Researchers need to ensure they act ethically and in compliance with relevant data protection legislation. Considerations should include the secure storage of the data (during the project and once the project is finished), how (and for whom) access to data will be controlled and managed, and what secondary uses there might be, for example, if data could contribute to subsequent projects. Electronic storage is particularly vulnerable, and methods of secure storage should be explored.

#### Question 7

All researchers have a responsibility to protect their participants, and themselves, from any harm or detriment that could occur as a result of the research. They should inform participants of any possible detriment and consider any possible impact on themselves. Protection includes protection from physical harm, and also the safeguarding of psychological and emotional wellbeing. If the research involves sensitive issues, or exposes participants to experiences that they might find traumatic, researchers have a duty to make this known at the outset and consider how they will address any issues that might reasonably be anticipated to arise.

#### Question 8

The ethical issues addressed in this form are those most likely to arise in art and design research. However, it is not possible to cover every eventuality. It is good practice for a researcher to reflect on the ethical dimensions of the proposed research project as it develops. Some questions to consider are:

- Does the relationship between researcher and participant involve a significant imbalance of power (e.g. manager/employee, teacher/student)?
- Is there a possibility that participants could be exploited in the research?
- Are there concerns regarding Intellectual Property Rights (e.g. copyright)?
- Does the research involve visual representation of individuals or groups; if so does this require special consideration?
- Will the researcher receive any material or other benefits from the research, for example an exhibition?
- Is there potential harm to the reputation of participants or other third parties?
- How are the interests of different stakeholders managed?

#### Ethics Codes and Guidelines

Social Research Association: Ethical Guidelines

<http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethical.htm>

Association of Social Anthropologists: Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice

<http://www.theasa.org/ethics/guidelines.htm>