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**UNIVERSITY OF  
PLYMOUTH**

**WAYS OF MAKING:  
PRODUCING ARTWORKS IN THE STUDIO  
IN RESPONSE TO EXPERIENTIAL WALKING**

by

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**Ways of making: producing artworks in the studio in response to experiential walking.**

**Abstract**

This thesis includes a body of paintings, drawings and assembled objects that have been made in response to the *Crossing England* walks (2014 - 2018). This body of work is entitled *The English Diagrams* (2018).

The research draws upon the varied perspectives of Fine Art, Performance Studies and Cultural Geographies, to examine the relationship between the activities of walking as art, and making in the studio. Drawing from experiential phenomenology, I set out a model for rigorous, reflexive, creative practice and map the looping affiliations between the embodied world of the walked landscape, the subjective terrain of the practitioner, and the fabrication of paintings, drawings and assemblage within the studio. This interdisciplinary study takes a neo-vitalist approach, tracking a series of walks on a single route across England. Artist and terrain are explored as integrated, the boundaries between them fluid or porous,

Autobiographical story, personal mythology, and sediments of collective memory interred within the earth are drawn out by the sensory, somatic rhythms of walking, and through selection of specific materials found along the way. Through studying bodily, psychological and material fluxes and flows within the studio, the thesis considers optimal conditions for flow in practice, and scrutinizes interrelations between the space of the studio and the body/mind of the practitioner, during the production of drawings, paintings and assemblage. It explores how the fields, gaps, lines and folds of the landscape can be translated into a bricolage of visual and painterly languages that is as heterogeneous as the terrain it refers to.

The research shows how a sustained and looping threefold process of walking, reflective writing and making can lead not just to new ways of fabricating, but of surveying and plotting human experience. This renewed, unified sensibility, is subsequently conveyed back outside to the landscape during new walks, offering altered perceptions and new readings of the landscape. This is a study with potential to be of interest for creative practitioners from a variety of disciplines, and to theorists and scholars of artistic process.



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In memory of my father, Tony, who showed me the way.

To my mother, Jeannine, with gratitude for her unfailing love and support.

To my son, Murray.

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## **Author's Declaration**

At no time during the registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy has the author been registered for any other University award without prior agreement of the Doctoral College Quality Sub-Committee. Work submitted for this research degree at the University of Plymouth has not formed part of any other degree either at the University of Plymouth or at another establishment. A programme of advanced study was undertaken, which included taught modules taken:

## **Public presentation of creative research outputs:**

*Crossing England* exhibition, Ariel Centre, Totnes, April 2016.

*Crossing England Drawings*, Embodied Cartographies exhibition, Walcot Chapel, Bath Fringe Festival, Bath, May 2017.

Commissioned documentary photographs and artworks published in *GeoHumanities* article 'Wild performatives: experiments in rewilding at the Knepp Wildland Project', by David Overend & Jamie Lorimer, June 2018.

Workshop presentation: 'Joining the dots: diagramatics on Dartmoor (walking as drawing as storytelling)'. Performance, Experience, Presence postgraduate conference, Harford, Devon, 2017.

## **Presentations at conferences:**

'Moving, methods and materials: translating the walking experience through studio practice to exhibition'. Theatre, Dance & Performing Arts research seminar, University of Plymouth, May 2014.

'Crossing England'. Performance. Experience. Presence. seminar, University of Plymouth, March 2015.

'Fluxes within the studio space: exploring the rhythms and cycles of art-making and domesticity', Performance. Experience. Presence. seminar, University of Plymouth, March 2016.

'How to navigate unstable signs, shifting meanings and fluid landscapes', Traffic: Movement/ Flow/Mobility, Land2 symposium, Plymouth College of Art and University of Plymouth, April, 2016.

'Making paintings in response to walking'. Pecha-kucha presentation, Walking Women weekend of events, Somerset House, London, July 2016.

‘Crossing the Gap; examining the boundary between art practice and everyday life during illness, bereavement, and immobility’. Performance. Experience. Presence. seminar, University of Plymouth, March 2017.

‘A bestiary for the Anthropocene’. Cross, Multi, Inter, Trans. Land2/ASLE UKI conference, Sheffield Hallam University, 2017.

‘A Cabinet of English Medicine’. Performed paper, PEP seminar, University of Plymouth, March 2018.

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Signed.....

Date.....

## PREFACE

### ENGLISH DAGRAMS: A SUMMATIVE EXHIBITION

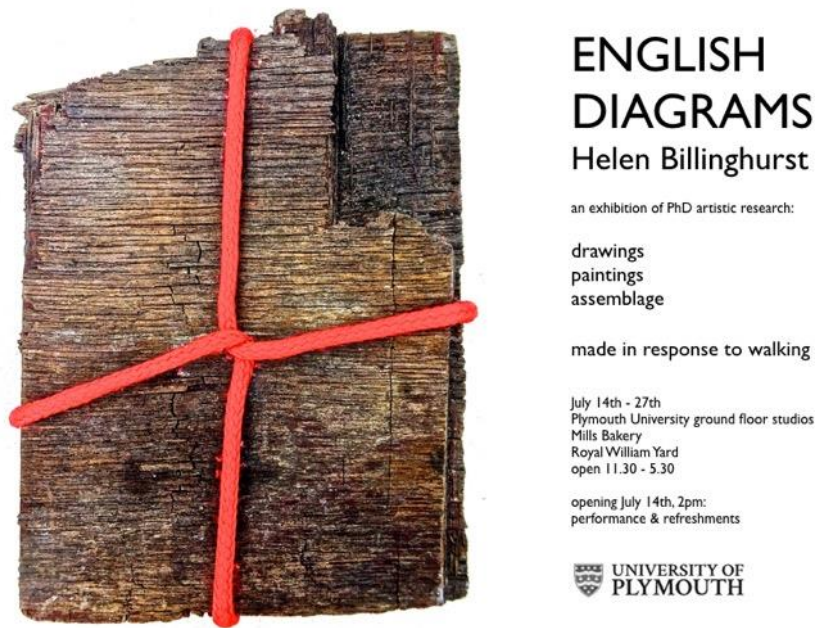


Figure 8.1: Poster for final exhibition of artist research, Royal William Yard, Plymouth 2018.

During the summer of 2018 I held an exhibition of drawings, paintings and assemblage for examination as the practical culmination of this doctoral research. The exhibition was held in the ground floor project space of the Fine Art studios, in the Mills Bakery building, Royal William Yard, University of Plymouth. The exhibition was intended to express my research findings in material form, and to present them in a coherent way to a third-party audience.

When curating the exhibition, I used the notion of ‘one big painting’ that had been so active within my studio making process (discussed in Chapter Four), utilizing the ‘conversations’ and ‘sparks’ that strike up between objects, paintings and stacks of drawings, throughout the room, thinking of the walls of this rectangular space as the frame of a huge, flat-bed painting. As ever, the challenge was to bring together the cacophony of visual and painterly languages that had emerged throughout this research project within this space. All the elements that I had explored in the landscape would need to be referenced within this frame: they needed to be balanced and resolved within this space in just the same way that I would try to balance and resolve the elements of a single, framed painting<sup>1</sup>.

Thinking about my discussion of the flatbed picture plane, I used the floor of the gallery as well as the walls. After placing the *Cabinet of English Medicine* (2016) into the centre of the space, I set up an alignment of objects, including the cabinet, across the floor in the genuine direction of Cambridge (from Plymouth). I drew a large, chalk circle around this alignment (see figure 9.2), partly to demark the objects on the floor for visitors, but also because it seemed appropriate for the ‘low key ritual’; a shared reading that I planned for the opening event. As this chalk circle was in the centre of the room it encouraged people to circulate around the exhibition space, in similar fashion to my own mode of moving around the studio space while making much of the work<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter Four for discussion of the flatbed picture plane and the vertical visual field in painting, see Chapter Four of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> See Chapter Four for discussion of embodied circulation around the studio space during the activities of making.

To maintain a sense of space in the gallery, I restricted the volume of work exhibited, while at the same time ensuring that all the themes that I had explored during my many walks across England were present in the space. I also took care to ensure that one theme or ‘voice’ did not drown out another, and that, despite the variety of visual languages that were present, each work was in some way ‘in conversation’ with other works in the gallery; a democratic assemblage.

This idea was emphasized during a collaborative reading, the *Cabinet Meeting* (2018)<sup>3</sup>, to celebrate the opening of the exhibition. For this occasion, it was human bodies that were assembled amongst the paintings and art objects. Standing around the chalk circle in the centre of the room (see figure 9.3), participants read short passages of a fragmented narrative (see Appendix III), that nevertheless cohered due to their repeating motifs. For example, the text referred to red earth and white chalk, red and white water, bones (animal and human), and the unfolding journey.

While by no means the only colours in the gallery, I employed this repeating red and white palette to achieve a sense of visual cohesion within the space. In particular, meandering red and white lines drove a sense of winding journey or unravelling story around the space. Other repeating motifs included stacking, folding and the use of gaps between paintings. A bricolage of haptic affect and visual and painterly languages was brought together in this single, simple space.

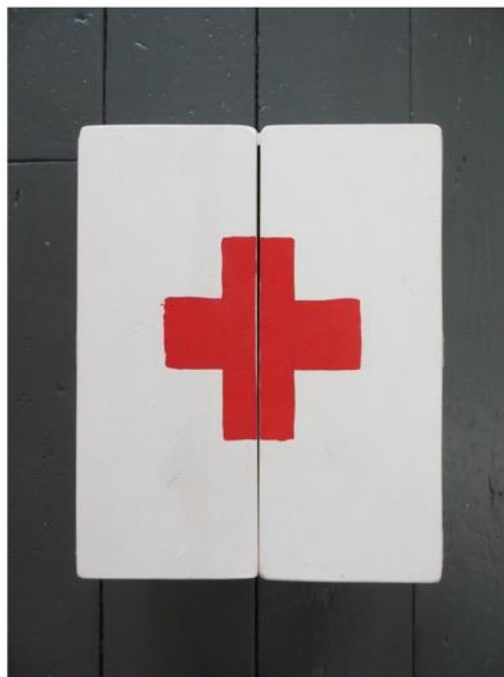
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<sup>3</sup> This text was first performed collaboratively by members of P.E.P. research group and is discussed fully in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

For images of the *English Diagrams* exhibition, please refer to Appendix IV of this thesis.

To see a digital video documentary of the *English Diagrams* exhibition please go now to this

link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JINRnTYLfGk&t=13s> .



#### **CABINET MEETING**

You are invited to attend the opening of *English Diagrams*, an exhibition of PhD artistic research by **Helen Billingham**. To celebrate, we plan to activate an artwork, the **Cabinet of English Medicine**, during a shared reading event.

The **Cabinet of English Medicine** is both reliquary and medicine cabinet. It is a box that concerns itself with intersecting stories, preserving the relics of the past, but is also a repository for healing, transformation and change.

The **Cabinet of English Medicine** is a potential tool for the *détournement* of the George Cross. Rather than a bounded, fortified nation, England is redefined as an open system, a 'crossing' (Bennett, 2001), or an enchanted space, to be traversed and experienced. The word 'cabinet' refers to a box or cupboard, but can also mean a private room for council, or a meeting place for advisors. A place to assemble, or draw together a range of 'voices' or 'elements'.

**July 14th, 2pm.**

**Ground floor studio, Mills Bakery Studios, Royal William Yard, Plymouth.**

Figure 8.2 Flyer for the *Cabinet Meeting* (2018) a shared reading to open *English Diagrams* (2018).

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the relationship between walking in the landscape, and making artworks in the artist's studio. It studies how ideas, materials and memories can be drawn from the world to drive studio activity, and conversely, how studio pursuits can inform perception of the landscape. While concerned with the production of drawings, paintings and assemblage, rather than focusing solely on studio outcomes, this study interrogates studio activity through the lens of performance, by scrutinizing a looping, threefold procedure of walking, reflective writing, and making in the studio.

Following the development of a single project over five years, this study presents unusually detailed discussion of artistic process from the perspective of a practitioner. Consequently, it holds potential insights for artists, theorists and scholars of creative innovation and production in a range of fields. This interdisciplinary research draws upon a variety of critical discourses and theoretical frameworks, taking particular note of the influences of experiential phenomenology and neo-vitalism, in the disciplines of Fine Art, Performance Studies and Cultural Geographies. As well as walking artists, studio-based practitioners, painters and writers, the thesis aims to be a resource for those engaged in all kinds of creative practice, and those that draw upon lived experience, memory, place and the mythopoeic in particular.

The source of this research can be traced back to 2012, when I became aware that I was increasingly drawing upon my daily practice of walking to and from my studio, to inform the paintings I was making when I got there. It should be said that initially this was a tacit process; I made the paintings with little insight into my own motivations or operational processes.

Before I began to marry the activities of the studio with walking, I had long aligned my process of perambulation with those I read about in ‘psychogeographic’ writings, such as *Lud Heat* (2003) and *London Orbital* (2002) by Iain Sinclair, and *London: the Biography* (2001) by Peter Ackroyd. Although I drew from the strategies of the situationist *dérive* (Débord, 1955), for a long time I considered this form of walking to be a secret, eccentric and solitary pleasure that had little to do with my art practice. During this time, I took an interest in the online activities of the London Psychogeographical Society (n.d.: online), and Julian Cope’s online resource *Modern Antiquarian* (n.d.:online), I also followed John Rogers and Nick Papdimitiou’s podcasts *Ventures and Adventures in Topography* for Resonance FM.

Originally trained in film-making, my studio process had shifted and expanded to include the practices of painting and drawing. Then, in 2012, ideas germinated through walking began to re-emerge during the activities of the studio. When I walked, and again, when I worked in my studio I was aware of narratives unravelling; as though faint ‘voices’ were whispering over my shoulder, and informing my processes as I was ‘going along’ (Ingold, 2008: 1). The more I scrutinised my own processes, the louder and more distinct these ‘voices’ became, and I became progressively conscious that these narratives and stories were driving the operations in the studio. At this time, I did not align the works I was making in the studio with figurative works of ‘psychogeographic’ art, like that of Laura Oldfield Ford, or painter of the urban/rural interface George Shaw. Although, like them, I was particularly interested in the spaces at the peripheries of the cities; the ‘edgelands’ (Shoard, 2002) or the ‘voids’ (Careri 2002). Rather than making static images of places, my output was about the experience of moving through places. I did make figurative drawings in the field, but thought of this as a preliminary, immersive research process and my studio process was more extractive and



convoluted. Nor was mine a straightforward practice of documentation and data-display in the manner of Hamish Fulton, or an engagement solely with found natural materials, as in the exhibition modes of Richard Long.

Since the last century, painters such as Peter Lanyon and Antoni Tapies have abstracted from the shifting perspectives and phenomenological experience of moving through and over the landscape; landscape entrenched with personal memory, myth and folklore. Artists that use walking as part of their process are often also motivated to collect primary source material for their studio processes. However, despite the fact that contemporary artists as diverse as Mark Bradford, Carol Robertson, Terri Brooks, Lin O'Carroll and Mark Surridge currently profess to walking to inform multiple and varied studio practices, my research has exposed a scarcity of critical writing that specifically explores the interface between the processes of walking and studio practice from the perspective of the practitioner.

With the intention of addressing this gap, this thesis will explore modes of working that bring experiential walking and studio practice together, thus presenting a model for reflection and critical analysis, with potential for employment in creative production in a variety of disciplines. To achieve this, I refer to my own artistic processes, drawing together notions of corporeal and subjective journey, at play both in the landscape and within the studio. The *Crossing England* project is an investigation into the changing twenty-first century English landscape; increasingly fragmented, sub/urbanised and spectacularised, yet accessible as a repository of historical strata and story. During this process, I negotiate the heterogenous and textured terrain of my own history and mem through these combined processes. Additionally, I demonstrate how the processes of fabrication can, in turn, provoke new subjectivities and

fresh and unexpected perspectives on the landscape, that can also be harnessed to inform creative activity.

As this research is inter-disciplinary and multi-modal, I do not align my practice with a single genre of work (such as land art or walking art) but rather I situate my work in relation to specific artists and respond to ranges of work across different genres according to the process I discuss. Artists such as Mark Bradford, William Kentridge, Joseph Beuys, Robert Rauschenberg have been useful to refer to as orchestrators of complex practices that weave together a variety of modes of working in response to personal mythology and other narratives, as part of a world-building process.

The overarching research questions that drive this study are as follows:

- i. How can the process of walking inform a studio making practice?
- ii. How can the theme of ‘journey’ be used, within the context of painting, to draw together the terrain of the mind with the external landscape?
- iii. How can a personal mythology, and the use of signature materials be used to mediate between the practices of walking and painting?
- iv. How does the artist’s studio operate as a space to ‘perform’ painting?

This thesis sets out to examine the relationship between the walked landscape and the artist’s studio. The first half of the thesis tracks a complex and occasionally ‘messy’ or perplexing process, negotiating a variety of creative ‘voices’ that emerge from the landscape, and re-emerge in the studio as a response to working with material gathered during the *Crossing England* walks. In Chapter Five, I describe the first attempts to cohesively assemble these voices in the mid-research exhibition *Crossing England* (2016), after two years of walking and making.

From Chapter Six onwards, the research opens up additional lines of inquiry and fresh insights regarding these combined artistic activities. This additional analysis occasionally demanded methodological adjustments that are discussed in the conclusion of the thesis.

These fresh research avenues include:

- i. Consideration of what studio process has to offer the walked experience, particularly in terms of innovative ways of thinking about the landscape.
- ii. New ways of making in the studio that emerged during a period of physical incapacity, illness and bereavement.
- iii. Exploration of how these multi-modal ways of making can be harnessed for the making of performance.

### **Theories of Practice as Research**

My Practice as Research methodology follows the model created by Robin Nelson (2010) for mixed mode research. Nelson suggests that we may organise knowledge into three types to create a robust framework for this kind of enquiry. These types of knowledge are (i) practitioner knowledge; embodied knowing, or skill, (ii) an awareness of the practitioners' own practice within the context of the work and processes of other relevant practitioners, and (iii) a familiarity with appropriate critical frameworks and theoretical discourses. Each mode of inquiry entails different methods that work together toward a whole thesis that includes both writing and creative practice.

In 2016, art theorist Simon O'Sullivan published a series of papers describing a Deleuze-inflected model for art production, that he refers to as Myth-Science. Rejecting the 'curatorial turn' that refers only to the world-as-it-is, this model seeks instead to address new futures that are spliced and mixed and shuffled with an arcane past. O'Sullivan refers to his own Practice collaboration *Plastique Fantastique* to show how this model works, but suggests Derek Jarman's film *Journey to Avebury* (1971), Russell Hoban's book *Riddley Walker* (1980), and

Bruce Lacey's film *Castelrigg* (1881) as other examples of artworks that use this such a model.

While O'Sullivan's mode of practice with *Plastique Fantastique* is at first glance very different to my own mode of working, in 2016, I found that O'Sullivan's model could be applied to various aspects of my own, looping practices, nesting fictions within fictions until elements of the practice appear to take on their own agency, independent from their creator. Consequently, I refer to O'Sullivan's model throughout the second half of this thesis, and in Chapter Eight I give specific examples of how O'Sullivan's discussion of the 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' (2016d) nature of image production was directly applicable to my own experience of art production.

### **New Vitalism**

Throughout this work I refer to the writings of the late twentieth century French philosopher and cultural commentator Giles Deleuze, and to Deleuze-influenced, new-vitalist theorists, such as Jane Bennett, Tim Ingold and Doreen Massey, and Simon O'Sullivan. Deleuze influenced a variety of disciplines, including literary theory, post-structuralism and post-modernism. In particular I use the notion of the Body without Organs as discussed in *A thousand plateaus* (1988), co-authored with psychoanalyst Felix Guattari. The Body without Organs is a term borrowed from Antonin Artaud, and expanded by Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988), who suggest that it 'concretely ties together disparate elements' (1988: 577). In this thesis I use this term to refer to human body/mind as open systems, assemblages, haecceities or flows, that operate as part of, and in relation to, wider contexts of physical and imaginal, or imminent space.

While not a strictly Deleuzian thesis, I have found aspects of his terminology useful to explore the porous boundaries between walker and landscape, and the integrated nature of subjectivity and world that are at play during these combined creative processes. I use his discussion of the fold as a ‘zone of subjectivation’ (1988), to explore matters of interiorities and exteriorities with regard to experience, perception and thought. Like Simon O’Sullivan, I use Deleuze’s concept of the diagram to explore the spatial and temporal nature of a variety of interrelated practices, examining the landscape, the processes of painting and drawing and even the spatial and diagrammatic nature of thinking itself.

### **Cthulucene**

Another concept that winds its tentacles throughout this work is Donna Haraway’s Cthulucene (2016). Haraway proposes this term over ‘Anthropocene’, suggesting that it is the forces of Capitalism, rather than human presence per se, that is driving the sixth mass extinction. Haraway uses the term Cthulucene to describe a raft of ‘other stories storying now’ (2016: online), and practical, pragmatic measures for tentacular, collaborative resistance to the terminal narratives of the Anthropocene (her term: ‘Capitalocene’). This thesis particularly draws from Haraway’s use of ‘string figuration’ as a metaphor for embodied thinking, making, and knowledge-sharing between disciplines and species. It also draws from Haraway’s argument for the use of ‘Speculative Fabulation’ as a means to manifest new futures (Haraway: 2016).

### **Performance**

The thesis sets out to examine a number of interrelated processes through the lens of performance studies. In this study I use the term ‘performance’ to refer to three key areas of activity (see below). None of these areas rely on traditional, performer/audience dichotomy.

i. Scholar and expert in performance Richard Schechner suggests that one meaning of the term ‘performance’ is to ‘get things done according to a particular plan or scenario’ (2006: 42). I set about planning the *Crossing England* walks as a series of perambulations to taken

on a single route between Cambridge and Plymouth in 2013, and made the first of my many walks according to schedule in the summer of 2014. I continued to perform the *Crossing England* walks periodically until I began the writing-up phase of this research in September 2017.

ii. This thesis explores the performance of making in the studio. In this context, I am studying the rhythms of making, seeking ways of achieving optimal flow while working, observing the fluxes and flows of the materials, objects and artworks in a studio that is also a domestic space, and studying my own embodied movement around the space during the processes of fabrication.

iii. Towards the end of the thesis, I discuss how diagrammatic schema, discovered while walking the landscape and later employed in the making of paintings and drawings in the studio, became useful once more during the making of a performance. This performance, a low-key collaborative reading ritual, the *Cabinet Meeting*, opened my culminative exhibition of artistic research, *English Diagrams*, at the end of my doctoral study in 2018.

## **1. JOURNEY**

This thesis will interrogate how the theme of ‘journey’ can be used, within the context of studio practice, to draw the terrain of the mind together with the external landscape. Another aim is to critically explore the relationship of affect and effect between the walking body and the landscape. My walking practice is underpinned by an appreciation of place as a gathering of ‘stories so far’, or ‘spatio-temporal events’ (Massey, 2005: 130), and the body as entwined with the world and the locus of human experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2014). Taking an approach that considers journey as site (Overend, 2014), the practice-research walks were undertaken not as a series of leisurely strolls, but rather as a purposeful strategy of

immersive, or ‘hypersensitised’ walking (Smith, 2014a). The aim of this kind of walking is to achieve a shift from the ‘usual’ experiential state to one of heightened perceptual awareness; a state I find can provoke valuable insights. I align my walking practice with the ‘Deep Topography’ of author Nick Papdimitriou (2011), who uses walking as part of a process which approaches the landscape ‘as an agent of consciousness expansion’, with ‘perception altering power’ (2012:7), also with Iain Biggs’s ‘Deep Mapping’ as a polyvocal ‘essaying of Place’ (2013), and I recognise many walking strategies described in Phil Smith’s *Mythogeography* (2010), as comparable to my own, and I will discuss these authors and artists further in Chapter One, in relation to my own walking practice.

To help me to interrogate walker and landscape as interpolated, open systems, I take the advice of Jane Bennett who proposes we should ‘twist and tweak usual habits’, in order to extend our bodily awareness ‘as a deliberate, carefully contrived experiment’ (2001: 24-25). Bennett’s experiment aligns with the ‘programme’ advocated by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari to build the ‘Body without Organs’ (1988), ‘opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and territories and deterritorialization measured with the craft of a surveyor’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 177).

For the walking element of this research I refer primarily to the *Crossing England* project, a series of walks undertaken on a specific route between my home (and studio) in Plymouth, and my parents’ house (my childhood home) in Cambridge. For this project I walked in Devon, Somerset, Wiltshire, Essex, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire. While each individual walk was made on this specified route between Plymouth and Cambridge, I tried to avoid planning the walks in advance; usually walking without a map, picking my way North East

(or South West) on instinct. However, I would often refer to maps after the event, to locate the end of the last walk (and beginning of the next) by car. While ensuring that I did not get catastrophically lost, my strategy was to always allow myself to be diverted on a whim, or to stop at will.

In Chapter One, I address first stage of walks made for the Crossing England project, during the summer of 2014. The walks discussed in this chapter were all completed within one day. Much of the walking was solitary, but occasionally I would walk with a friend, and we would place a vehicle strategically at either end of the walk. In between phases of working in the studio, and of critical writing, I continued to make walks on my chosen route until the end of this project. Later, I found different ways to walk uninterrupted for a week or more at a time, camping on route. In August 2015 I walked for ten days across Dartmoor with twelve companions. In April 2016 I participated in a Buddhafield<sup>4</sup> Community Yatra (walk) for ten days, with forty companions; walking carried out in silence, in single file. We walked sixty-five miles over the Blackdown Hills and across the Somerset levels, from South Devon to Glastonbury.

I documented my walks using a combination of photography and note-taking, and a selection of this material was transferred onto a blog, with detailed descriptive text written as soon as possible after the event. This text recorded not just sensory experience, but tried to also capture the subjective experience that the walking provoked. Occasionally, I returned to specific, memorable sites to make drawings, and some of these are also published on the blog. The drawings were a way of gathering further information about sites that had

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<sup>4</sup> Buddhafield are an offshoot of the Triratna Sangha that run a programme of camping activities in the South West of England, focused around the teaching and practise of Buddhism and Buddhist meditation.



interested me. The blog helped me, from a research perspective, to tease out and interrogate subjective and embodied experiences of walking that I was to use as source material later in the studio. Excerpts from this blog are inserted into the text of the thesis, written in red, in a different font, inside a box. The ‘Walking’ Blog can be viewed here:

<https://www.tumblr.com/blog/helenbwalking>

Please also go to the link below to view a short digital video, *Foot* (2014), by Siobhan Mckeown. In this film, I describe my approach to my twofold process of walking and making in the studio, and some of the initial motivations behind this research project, as I saw them in 2014:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WomMgVO66eECONCLUSION>

## **2. MATERIALS & MYTHOLOGIES**

This thesis will examine how the use of signature materials and a personal mythology can be employed as a theoretically-informed process which operates as a bridge between the practices of walking and painting.

In 1923, T.S. Eliot, responding to the writings of James Joyce and James George Frazer, proposed the ‘mythical method’ as a ‘reading of the contemporary through myth of the ancient world’ (Causey, 2006: 6). This approach was subsequently explored the by mid-century British landscape painters (and de-commissioned World War II artists) such as Paul Nash, John Piper, and Graham Sutherland. During the latter half 20th century, studio practitioners such as Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Beuys, and Louise Bourgeois continued to explore the mythic in the modern, in ways that were as self-reflexive as they were responsive to the world around them. They achieved this by spinning unique and particular creative ‘worlds’, drawing together lived experience, personal mythologies and signature materials in

the space of the studio. This mode of working can be explicitly observed in the work of current contemporary practitioners that include Mark Bradford and Grayson Perry.

In Chapter Two I discuss a way of working that combines found materials with emergent, interweaving threads of story as a way to combine the outside space of the landscape with the inside activities of the studio. This chapter is in two sections: the first discusses how elements collected in the field are combined with interweaving local and personal mythologies, to form a ‘lexicon’ as a loose framework to work with in the studio. The second section describes the lexicon as a force at work in the studio.

Scrutiny of my own practices has brought my lexicon to light; in this thesis, I show how the use of signature materials and a personal mythology can be employed as a theoretically-informed process which operates as a bridge between the practices of walking and painting. I refer to my own walking and studio practices to interrogate how subjectivity and experience of the world are brought together. As this way of working was previously a private part of my process - something that even I was barely conscious of - I have at times found myself resistant to writing about it. This is because the lexicon is rhizomatic in nature; as Deleuze and Guattari tell us, ‘the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction “and ...and...and...”’ (1988: 27). The fixity of the symbolic order of language means that there is real danger when attempting to verbalise such a fluid system. As this is a mutable complex of associative implication, rather than a symbolic system of fixed meanings, I ask the reader to regard it as an organisational ecology in constant flux; a process that continues when an observer engages with the artworks. I am relating how the work was made, rather than instructing how it should be read.

Despite the scarcity of Western discourses regarding the relationships between myth-making, walking, painting and other kinds of Western Art-making, early on in this research it became clear that this apparently incongruous range of practices are more compatible through the lens of other cultures. For example, in Chapter One, and again in Chapter Seven, I discuss Alice Legat's description of how the Tchcho people of Northern Canada use stories to simultaneously map their territories and recount their histories (Legat, 2008: 35-6). In Chapter Two I refer to Howard Morphy's description of how the Yolungu of Arnhem Land see the land as a sign system, and how 'Aboriginal paintings are maps of the land' (1998: 103). While I am aware that I do not have the space to fully describe and consider the contextual specificities of all these practices within this thesis, in order to interrogate the events, images and ideas that I assemble in this thesis, I occasionally draw upon practices and perspectives from very different cultural contexts. I refer to these practices not to validate any particular confluences of ideas and aware of the danger of appropriation, but rather to circumambulate and explore certain resonances that have become part of my thinking process in attempts to illuminate my own, subjective experiences. I do this in the spirit of Donna Haraway's 'String Figuration'; of 'relaying connections' and of 'giving and receiving patterns' (2016: 10).

### **3. STUDIO PROCESS & EXHIBITION**

In Chapter Three I explore how the studio operates as a space to 'perform' painting and other kinds of making. I also study the corporeal, material and psychological fluxes and flows of the operational processes within the studio. Approaching the studio as a 'forum for thinking and a mode of thinking', I test 'what kind of knowledge one can gain in the activity of the studio' (Kentridge, 2016: online). By examining how the space of the studio influences the work that is made within it, I consider ways of creating the optimal conditions for making

work. I also examine the relationship between embodied movement, the somatic rhythms of the tasks of the studio, and the processes of re-membering that are performed when making in the studio space. As well as referring to painters and makers that use materials, such as William Kentridge, Mark Rothko, Phillip Guston and Louise Bourgeois, I also refer to makers of performance Bruce Nauman, Walter de Maria to scrutinise studio activity.

The Practice as Research studio element of this study refers primarily to two studios:

**i.** The first studio is in High Cross House, where I had a six month artist's residency, from August to the end of December 2013. This modernist house is part of the Dartington Estate in Devon; at that time it was open to the public as a gallery/studio/cafe under the management of the National Trust. During this residency I made work in response to walks taken around the Dartington Estate. This was work subsequently used to create a 'stand-alone' project as part of my preliminary research, at the foundational stage of my doctoral research. A range of material, including photography, short films, drawings, paintings and outside installations were presented in the form of a blog. This blog, *Mapping Dartington*, can be viewed here: <http://helenbillinghamstresidencies.blogspot.co.uk>

**ii.** The second studio is in my own home, situated in the west of Plymouth; I began to work in this location in January 2014. My 'home' studio is situated at one the end of the route I walked for the Crossing England project and all work made in this studio was informed by walks taken on this route. It was originally my intention to document and publish my progress in the studio, in similar fashion to my *Walking* blog. However, for

reasons discussed in detail in Chapter Two, I found that the blogging process was disruptive to the processes of making in the studio. Consequently, progress in this studio was documented by digital stills and video, and through keeping regular notes in my private sketchbooks.

### **Painting, drawing, making**

In Chapter Four I explore approaches to the space of a painting, referring in particular to works that were made during the first phase of the *Crossing England* project, in response to the walks addressed in Chapter One, and in advance of my mid-research exhibition in April, 2016. I examine correlations between the painted space and the walked space of the landscape, and show how these correlations can be used to marry the process of walking with the activities of the studio. I discuss ‘awkward’ painting while referring to painters Katy Moran and Amy Silman, and refer to Philip Guston when discussing the painting ‘departure’. I consider Leo Steinberg’s discussion of Robert Rauschenberg, the ‘vertical visual field’ and the ‘flatbed picture plane’, while alluding to certain cultures that have historically eschewed the vertical visual field for the flatbed picture plane in their art-making traditions.

### **Exhibiting as a research method**

In April 2016, as part of this research process, I held an exhibition in the Ariel Centre, Totnes, which I called *Crossing England*. This show was a research strategy; partly to gather audience response about the early work I had made, and partly to monitor my own response to seeing the work in this context. Chapter Five divided into two sections. The first section is a photo-documentation of this exhibition. In the second section, I reflect on the response generated throughout this show, which ran for three weeks.

During the *Crossing England* exhibition a written feedback form was distributed to visitors to the gallery. I also invited people who preferred to ignore the form and to feed back in other ways: verbally, or via email or social media. I received over forty written responses, and a great many more verbal responses. In general, I found the verbal responses more illuminating as people were more inclined to tell me their own experiences and share the stories provoked by the work; perhaps a better glimpse into the subjective space of the audience. Written responses were more formal, and usually provided less detail but offered insights, nonetheless. During the final week of this exhibition I gave three artist talks, and also spent time in the studio painting. This was also an opportunity to gather feedback to be used to methodologically move the project forward. This information was consequently used as part of a methodological process, to develop work made later in the studio.

#### **4. RETURNING, REVISING AND REVIEWING**

As well as exploring how walking can inform studio process, this thesis will demonstrate how a sustained and looping practice of walking, writing and making has the potential to alter perception and understanding of the landscape. I will show how such shifting perceptions have potential to add further complexity, and new depth, to work created in response to walking, by tracking the progression of the *Crossing England* project from after my mid-research exhibition, until completion of the project and the final exhibition *English Diagrams* in 2018.

I begin discussion of these revised approaches to walking and making in Chapter Six. In the first section I address a new phase of walking, two years into this research after a long period of making in the studio, that commenced after the Ariel Centre exhibition. I describe how

returning to revisit and further research several important sites exposed new insights into my own perception of the landscape. The second section of Chapter Six is entitled ‘A bestiary for the Anthropocene’. Prompted by the proliferation of animal images as part of ‘the Spectacle’ (Debord, 1995)<sup>5</sup>, and the simultaneous decline of the ecologies of the English landscape, I explore ways of making less anthropocentric and non-figurative work about the non-human animal. I discuss my own practical experiments and examine a range of approaches by other practitioners to make work that is appropriate for the Age of the Anthropocene (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online).

### **New ways of making**

In the first section of Chapter Seven, I interrogate a late phase of working in the studio, after a long summer of walking in the field. I discuss the conceptual thinking behind the construction of a new work, the *Cabinet of English Medicine* (2016). I also show how a period of illness, debility and bereavement induced completely new ways of working in the studio. During this period, I made three new works, which I came to collectively call *The Crossing England Drawings* (2016-17).

In the second section of Chapter Seven, I reflect on the experience of the making of these drawings, interrogating creative process in relation to shifting subjectivities and embodiment, in a variety of cultural and historical contexts. I refer to Jorella Andrews’ discussion of ‘intercorporeality’ and the ‘affective turn’ (2013: 51), and Diane Taylor’s discussion of the ‘Archive and the Repertoire’ (2003: 16), to explore the relationship between specific materials, the hand-made object and the human body.

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<sup>5</sup> Originally defined by Guy Debord in *The Society of the Spectacle* 1967, the ‘Spectacle’ refers to the substitution of lived experience by the images of mass media.

In the third section of Chapter Seven, I discuss ‘the Diagram’ as defined by Deleuze (1988: 1-23) and argue that a narrative, a journey, a drawing and painting can all be defined as diagrammatic; simultaneously retrospective and anticipatory in nature. I explore the potential that this insight holds for relaying knowledge between disciplines, and for acts of re-drawing the way we imagine the world.

Building on my discussion of the diagram in the previous chapter, in Chapter Eight I discuss Time, in relation to art practice and how we think about the landscape. I refer to Simon O’Sullivan’s model of the diachronic and synchronic nature of art-making within the context of specific events within my own practice. Widening this discussion, I show how the popular culture of my own 1970’s childhood resonates with current cultural discussions of the imaginal, such as Hauntology and the ‘English eerie’ (MacFarlane, 2015b), that speculate on past and future visions of the land. Finally, I refer to Anselm Franke, Simon O’Sullivan, and Donna Haraway’s advocacy of art practice to envision new futures and effect change.



## **Research trajectory**

### **2013**

#### **August**

Began artist residency at High Cross House, Dartington Estate, Totnes, Devon.

#### **September**

Began doctoral research at School of Humanities and Performing Arts, Plymouth University.

### **2014**

#### **January**

Completed artist residency at High Cross House, Dartington Estate, Totnes, Devon.

#### **May**

Completed 'Mapping Dartington' website as part of preliminary doctoral practice research.

#### **June**

Began *Crossing England* walks (intensive walking throughout summer, but walks continued in all seasons until the completion of research).

Began 'Walking' Blog.

#### **September**

Began working in 'Home' studio in response to *Crossing England* walks. Made series of awkward paintings, *Chalky Landscapes*, *Walking Stories*.

### **2015**

#### **April.**

Walking: Ickneild Way, East Anglia.

#### **June - July**

Walking.

#### **August**

Ten day group walk across Dartmoor.

#### **September**

Began second phase of making in the studio.

## **November**

First Smooth Space peer review.

## **2016**

### **January**

Peer artist visits to home studio.

### **April**

*Crossing England* exhibition at Ariel Centre, Totnes.

### **June – July**

Brexit referendum.

Walking: returned to many sites of interest.

### **October**

Studio: made the *Cabinet of English Medicine*.

### **November**

Studio: began to make the *Crossing England Drawings*.

## **2017**

### **March**

Completed the *Crossing England Drawings*.

### **April**

Buddhafield Yatra walk: 65 miles across Devon and Somerset.

### **May-September**

Studio: made *Red and White Stack* and *Jacob's Ladder*.

### **October**

Second Smooth Space peer review: collaborative reading.

## **2018**

*English Diagrams* examination exhibition in the ground-floor studios, Mills Bakery Building, Royal William Yard, Plymouth.



# CHAPTER ONE

## WALKING AS A GROUNDING FOR CREATIVE PROCESS

Deambulation is the achievement of a state of hypnosis by walking, a disorienting loss of control. It is a medium through which to enter into contact with the unconscious part of the territory. (Careri, 2002: 82)

The purpose of this chapter is to show how immersive walking has potential as a grounding for a long-term creative process, by discussing the first walks made for the *Crossing England* project during the summer of 2014. Beginning by explaining the personal circumstances that stimulated a desire to make a series of walks across England, I will chart the different kinds of space that I explored in the landscape during these journeys. Referring to excerpts from my *Walking* blog, I discuss my own embodied, sensory reactions and subjective responses to different types of terrain, such as the edgeland spaces of sprawling city perimeters, and the corporate spaces of new developments. Through this process, I show how certain ideas, narratives and motifs began to emerge during these preliminary walks. I will subsequently track the development of these narratives and motifs showing how they were employed within a complex and looping creative process, within the following chapters of this thesis

### 1.1 WALKING

#### **Background to the *Crossing England* project**

Two years before the start of my doctoral studies, my father – a kind, intelligent man who loved to walk – had a stroke. This stroke heralded the onset of dementia, and my father’s protracted physical and mental demise, a traumatic and painful period for my mother, myself and the rest of our family. In response to these events, I found myself making the long and

tedious motorway journey backwards and forwards across England, again and again. During these repeated journeys - between my home for the last twenty years in Plymouth, and my parents' house in Cambridge where I was born and brought up - I had plenty of time to ruminate. I began to draw parallels between the increasingly fragmented landscape I drove through, and the fracturing of the human mind afflicted with dementia. I also found myself longing to leave the motorway and walk in the landscape I viewed from the car.

One spring Saturday morning in 2012, on a whim, I walked out of my front door, across the local park, and kept walking. I had no money, no phone, no food, nothing to drink and no plan. That day I walked in a continuous line across the city of Plymouth, west to east. I was walking in the direction of Cambridge. I walked until I reached the intersection of the River Plym, the railway line and the A38, when I turned right and walked along the Embankment Road back into town. I walked about ten miles that day. Although I did not know it at the time, that walk was to be the first walk of the Crossing England project. The intersection that I had walked to was starting point for the second walk, setting a pattern that was to continue, walk after walk, forming a line across the English landscape. Whenever I was in Cambridge, I followed a similar pattern; walking south from my parents' house, past the chalk pits near my old school and out onto the hills beyond where I picked up the Ickneild Way (an ancient drovers' track which crosses the country east to west), walking west; walk, after walk. As the project developed, I also took the opportunities to make walks in between the two ends of the walk, by breaking my many driven journeys between Plymouth and Cambridge.

Thus, attuning proprioceptively to a state of being in movement, attending to all my senses, I unwittingly began a creative project that was eventually to become the primary practice element of my doctoral research. Two years later, in the summer of 2014, I began my

*Crossing England* walks as a doctoral research project; almost exactly two years before the Brexit referendum<sup>6</sup>. Although I had no idea of what was coming, the symptoms of a politically and socially fractured society and an ecologically fragmented landscape were tangible as I walked. I had a sense of a country at unease with itself, and at the beginning of the project I also felt a sense of psychological disturbance in response to the landscape I walked through.



Figure 1.1: Using my father's compass in Plympton, 2014.

As well as a notebook and a camera, there were two other objects that I carried on these walks: my father's penknife, and his compass, each with a red cord attached. My father left our family home to live in a care home during the summer that I began my walks. My mother handed these items on to me, as he would no longer need them. While they were both useful,

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<sup>6</sup> A referendum was held in the U.K. on June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016, to address the question: 'Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?', a question that was later criticised as ambiguous as it did not address what 'leaving' actually involved. The referendum was called by British prime minister David Cameron in fulfilment of his 2015 manifesto pledge. 51.9% of the participating British electorate voted to leave, starting a process of British withdrawal from the EU. Cameron resigned, and was replaced by Theresa May. Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union was invoked by the British government on March 29<sup>th</sup> 2017, and the European Union (Withdrawal) act 2018 declared 'exit day' to be March 29<sup>th</sup> 2019.

functional items to have in my backpack, I carried them in a talismanic way; a constant reminder of my father's spatial and temporal disorientation, and how I was seeking to gather up and preserve his unravelling memories (and my memories of him). This was always the quiet motor humming in the background of this project.

### **(Re)enchantment**

A thread that emerges in the work of many current ambulatory practitioners is one of re/enchantment. Alastair Bonnett describes how

The practice of walking by psychogeographical artists and writers, its steps, paths, choices and actions, is often narrated as a kind of rite or ceremony, a transforming enchantment of the ordinary world. (Bonnett, 2017: 2)

This is not to suggest that these walkers are seeking escape from phenomenological experience, but rather to plunge further in. Carl Lavery, for example, reiterates that 'enchantment is not a method for turning away from the world; on the contrary, it seeks to immerse the walker in the strangeness of the other world' (2009: 54). Jane Bennett describes how to seek enchantment is to explore 'dangerous but exciting and exhilarating migrations' (Bennett, 2001:17), and Deleuze and Guattari galvanise us similarly: 'this is not a phantasy, it is a program' (1988: 165). Indeed, philosopher Ian Buchanan (2016) draws our attention to the first three lines of the fifteenth chapter of *A thousand plateaus*: 'The strata are phenomena...' (1988: 553). Buchanan suggests that these three lines are often overlooked, and warns that though it is often assumed that Deleuze and Guattari attempt to transcend phenomenology, their approach to the 'Body without Organs' (1988) is firmly rooted in sensory perception; albeit a 're-engineered phenomenology' which involves 'changing perception', and also 'making the imperceptible perceptible' (Buchanan, 2016: online).

## **The sensorium**

I began my walks with an intention to attend to the effects and affects of the materials that I encountered, taking Bennett's advice to 'hone sensory receptivity to the marvellous specificity of things' (2001: 4). David Abram writes, 'the sensing body is not a programmed machine, but an active and open form, continually improvising its relation to things and to the world' (1996: 49). Happily for me, my initial research walks were conducted during the longest and warmest summer I could remember. When possible, I walked as light as I possibly could; I wore flip-flops, rarely took a coat, and left my phone behind. This way, I felt unencumbered, and closest to sensory information accumulated from the world around me; temperature, smells, atmosphere came directly to the locus of my sensory self.

Writer Robert Macfarlane declares, 'footfall as a way of seeing the landscape, touch as sight- these are notions to which I subscribe' (2013: 29). The feet acknowledge the monotony of the pavement compared to the variable bounce of turf, the nose compares the smell of damp woodland with the fumes of the high street, and the ears catch a blackbird singing over the rush of traffic. Tim Ingold describes how 'knowing is a process of active following, of going along' (2013: 1). I noted subtle bodily affect: how crackling air from pylons made the hair on my arms stand on end, how I was overcome with fatigue when trapped in the hot concrete maze of housing estate on a scorching day. On one occasion, I felt an inexplicable fear when I walked up a hill on the South of Dartmoor (so much so that I tried to explain it to myself by inventing memories of being chased by a dog), followed by wobbly legs and palpitations when I reached the top and found the hilltop gone; the landscape had been re-arranged beyond recognition, excavated for tungsten.



Each walk had its own rhythm and pace. Carl Lavery proposes walking as ‘a bodily rhythm to tease out the strange song of self’ (2009b); I marked my own breath, footstep and heartbeat, and other punctuating patterns; pylons, wheelie bins, fence posts. It is often the unexpected interruption to the ambulatory cadence that draws such rhythms to attention: the loose rock that causes us to break pace and stumble, the beckoning hole in the diamond repetitions of the chainlink fence; this is what Bennett refers to as ‘a singular point of transition, a point of no return’ (2001: 103). At these points, corresponding arrhythmic corporeal affect is provoked; the catch of the breath, the skip of the heartbeat. Bennett sees these ‘bifurcation points’ (2001: 103), not just as chance interruptions, but as marking the transition to a new state of order. Frequently described in sonorous terms, the patterns explored in Deleuze and Guattari’s discussion of the refrain: ‘one launches forth: hazards an improvisation’ (1988: 343), can be equally applied to the somatic rhythms of a journey, or the gestural strokes and marks of a painting or drawing. Bennett writes, ‘the refrain tosses a note or two into the uncharted territory beyond the wall that it has just built’ (2001: 167), in a way that is comparable to the ‘touch of disorder’ that is described by Dewey as an aesthetic spice that jolts us from monotony: ‘piquancy is introduced by arrhythmic change’ (1933: 173).

Occasionally, I noticed that my pace reverberated with the way itself. While walking the long, straight Roman Road, my sister and I marched like Roman soldiers (our English word ‘mile’ comes from latin *mille* meaning a ‘thousand’: a thousand Roman paces). On this walk, prompted by my sister’s smartphone satellite navigation system, we obsessed with empirical time, and regulated distance; how far was it, how long would it take? On one occasion my walking companion recounted a ‘circular story’, at the end of which we were surprised to find that, despite believing we had been travelling continuously in one direction, we had been walking in an enormous circle.

The 'sense of direction' is another aspect of the sensorium. Linda Cracknell writes: 'Paths pull at me. They course through my early memories' (2014: 53), and so it was for me; I was tugged by currents of space, took unexpected detours, veered off the path on a sudden impulse. I noted how north near my mother's house pulled at me like the west near my own. Climbing to the top of a hill, my focus was on the panorama: from the top of Therfield Heath, and also the Ridgeway, I could clearly make out where I had come from, and where I would go. When I descended into the valleys, my attention would shift to the details. The landscape surprised me with unexpected dips, folds and undulations; twists and turns that expanded and contracted both time and space in unpredicted ways.

I observed the temporal fluxes of the landscape as well as the spatial by noting geology, land-works and place names. This process was particularly intense in places that I had known all my life; with each step, the environment rendered a memory. I was bombarded with recollected events: falling off my bike onto a particular pavement when I was seven, or throwing a tantrum in the street when I was three. The sequence of memories was chronologically chaotic as I walked, and consequently I had the curious sensation of a simultaneous 'layering' of time. I noted and re-acknowledged a demolished shed, the growth of a tree I remembered as a sapling, a re-surfaced road; constantly re-adjusting my internal map. These memories would bring to mind erased pencil marks; overlaid traces, barely visible, but still present.

A study by Alice Legat describes how the Thcho people of northwestern Canada use 'stories to think with' (Ingold and Vergunst, 2010: 35). As well as being used to entertain, their tales have a practical and pragmatic purpose, mapping both time and space, for Tchho children

begin to learn about a place, by way of story, long before visiting it. Thus physically walking these trails are a way of validating the past and renewing the stories in the present (Ingold and Vergunst, 2010: 36-37). My childhood stories had come out of books, but walking around my neighbourhood as an adult caused me to tell myself stories of my childhood; stories of actual events, but also of the games and stories of imagination that I had once played in this suburban setting.

My desire to walk along the Ickneild Way, was informed initially by my father, who had walked it on various occasions in the second half of the twentieth century. My father suggested I read Edward Thomas's account of walking the Ickneild Way, written in 1911, and later I read Robert Macfarlane's account of the same track in 2012 (2013: 37-55). Consequently, when I came to walk this old road I was already informed by different accounts of the same journey, made in different centuries, in different seasons. As I moved out of the city, on route to the Ickneild Way, and up onto the Gog Magog Hills that lie south of my childhood home, I had a sense I was following a chalky path backwards through time; tracing threads of my own life, my father's life, and other lives. As I walked further from my own childhood haunts, I became less concerned with the hauntings of my own life and more preoccupied with the lives of other wayfarers, further back. It was, as Robert Macfarlane describes it, like catching 'glimpses of afterglow, retinal ghosts, psychic gossamer' (2013: 326).

### **Mapping the ground: walking through the edges**

Inclosure thou art a wretch upon the land, and tasteless was the wretch who thy existence planned. (John Clare, in Hoskins, 1988: 144)

A narrative that I confronted in every English county that I walked (and the one I found most difficult), is the one of human industry. The political, economic, social and ecological background to such developments are complex; as I walked I became increasingly sensitised to the palimpsests of thousands of years of human activity within the landscape. Evidence of quarrying, draining, dredging, road building and enclosure is everywhere. W.G. Hoskins writes:

Of open fields that form our familiar world today, and the reclamation of the wild lands, had been going on intermittently and at varying pace every century. But after the Restoration the government ceased to interfere with the enclosure of open fields by private landlords, and the pace of change quickened sharply. (Hoskins, 1988: 144)

The Enclosure Acts combined with the Industrial Revolution caused mass movements of the population:

Mills arose in the remote valleys below the moors, and hamlets and villages quickly clustered around them. But established towns too were advancing over the fields. (Hoskins, 1988: 182)

Changes to the landscape were not confined to the cities: ‘for between them stretched miles of torn and poisoned countryside’ writes Hoskins (1988: 187).

The pace of change quickened during the 20th century: ‘It was the century of total war, environmental crisis, democracy; of mass transport, the world economy, the electronic revolution’, writes Peter Wakelin (2000: online). The rising British population needed to be housed, and to be fed by means of increasingly industrial farming methods: ‘Look at almost any British town on the map or from the air, and you can see the characteristic patterns of the 20th century dwarfing all that went before’, Wakelin declares, ‘almost everywhere there has been a landscape revolution’ (Wakelin, 2002: online).

During my first walks I was meandering out of, and away from, two cities; South West out of Cambridge, and North East out of Plymouth. I quickly became aware that there is no a defined 'edge' to a city. It took me a good morning to walk from my house on the western side, across Plymouth to the Sainsbury's carpark under the flyover of the A38 that intersects with the railway and the river Plym. As a car driver, I used to consider this intersection as marking the Eastern edge of the city. However, from a walker's perspective it is a different story; a path under the flyover does indeed, lead to the green of parklands of Saltram House, but immediately on the other side of that is the city landfill, retail parks, and (somewhat dreary) suburbs of Plympton. On the other side of Plympton are more retail parks, scraps of woodland along a ridge of hills, fields of bungalows. A little further, and heavy lorries thunder down narrow lanes; these are the first signs of industrial mining (china clay, tungsten, tin, aggregate) of southern Dartmoor. Here, there are fields of animals, but also stacks of tyres, polluted streams, disused quarries piled high with wrecked cars. There is a sense of mournful melancholy, glimpses of something green and older, but this is not picturesque Devon. The landscape continues in this vein until the edges of Dartmoor.

I was to encounter such peripheral spaces with rhythmic regularity as I walked across the country. These are the 'peculiar spaces' proposed by Marion Shoard in her celebrated essay 'Edgelands' (2002), to which Francesco Careri refers as 'voids'(2002). Graced with pylons and peeling billboards, they are weed-filled cracks; gaps where sparrows nest amongst the buddleia, broken glass and graffiti. They may be brownfield sites; once-developed places, waiting to be demolished, or to be re-built, but increasingly such spaces are to be found between retail parks, housing estates and supermarkets, they run along railway cuttings, or are tucked under motorway slip roads.

## Edges as muse

M thinks that it is like being in Doctor Who; I laugh, he's right. Everyone is gone, driven away by an engineered plague, or eaten by giant maggots. This is the apocalypse. We walk along by the stream, I see the stag again...thirty dragon flies are flitting around in the grass on the side of the road. We pass what looks like an old quarry, a gouge in the rock, maybe twenty metres wide, ten deep. M is describing the space to me as though it is part of the story; 'random things lying around... an old enamel bucket on hanging on a tree... a plastic bag of rusty tins, gun cartridges on the ground...' I relax about whether this is an okay walk for M. He is in his element, he gets it.

Walking Blog, 2016: Sparkwell to Drakelands, Wolf Minerals Designated Zone.

Lettrist and member of the Situationist International Guy Debord first defined Psychogeography in 1955 as 'the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals' (Debord, 1955). The rise in Walking as Art, psycho/mythogeographic<sup>7</sup> writing, and an expanding array of related practices since the beginning of the twenty-first century, clearly demonstrate that since Marion Shoard first used the term 'Edgelands' in 2002, these spaces have become less overlooked; their powers to affect and provoke have become an important resource for the contemporary creative. The lure of the urban entropic for the painter is not new; Prunella Clough, Antoni Tapies, George Shaw, Laura Oldfield-Ford, Mark Bradford, Day Bowman, Terri Brooks are examples of painters that have looked to, and continue to refer to the edgelands as a resource for making artworks when in the studio.

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<sup>7</sup> Mythogeography draws on and adds to psychogeography. Mythogeography arose from the work of Wrights & Sites (site-specific performance makers) early in the twenty-first century. The book, *Mythogeography* (Smith, 2010) is a tool-kit of tactics and strategies for immersive and disruptive walking.

For a number of years I too have regarded the edges as interesting places to source material for making paintings. There are haptic and visual qualities to the edges that translate to paintings; the palimpsests, accidental in decaying signs, incidental marks. Anselm Franke proposes:

That inanimate objects and things act, that they have designs on us, and that we are interpellated by them, is a quotidian reality that we all implicitly accept—just as we accept, and indeed are animated by, the very milieus and contexts in which we operate. (Franke, 2012b)



Figure 1.2: 'Void' space in Stoke Village, Plymouth, 2014.

In the voids, I found my mind would start to free-flow in new ways: established thoughts would weather and corrode, like the materials littering the zones I walked through, and new kinds of thinking would emerge and entangle, like the brambles. This altered perspective eroded the boundaries I drew between myself and the space I moved through. I also found that when I chose my companions well, this change of perception would be altered into together.

Jane Bennett questions why we are so keen to distinguish the human self from the field (2010: 110), and suggests we should also consider the human being as an assemblage within this milieu: 'human agency is always an assemblage of animals, plants, metals, chemicals, word-sounds' (2010: 109). When in the edges, I would find myself asking: where is the line between the experiencing and the experienced? Nick Papdimitriou describes a similar sense of integration, as if the landscape 'was flooding into the front of my mind. I was in ecstatic union with the Middlesex-Hertfordshire borderlands' (2012: 10). Curator Anselm Franke proposes the frontiers of modernity as

Where common sense categories are suspended and a different reality and temporality emerges. A borderland of life and death, dream and wakefulness in between the visible world and invisible forces and spiritualities that shape the different registers of our experiences. (Franke, 2017: online)

In the voids, I felt as though the thoughts inside my head seeped out into a porous world around me. But more than this, the landscape seeped back into me; the landscape became my mind. The world seemed alive, communicating and full of meaning. Signalling through sparkling, shimmering, shivering, waving. Or silently watching me, stalking me as I stepped through it.

I walk for a long time through the strip of woodland at the back of the enclosed business park. Another old woodland trimmed and squeezed by the demands of humans. There is an uncanny atmosphere, for the first time that day I feel unsafe; thoughts of rapists and headless bodies wrapped in plastic spring into my mind...

Walking Blog, 2014: 'Plymouth to Langage Business Park'.

When entering an unknown object space, a space that is not easily defined as inside or outside, a space that is tumbling down or falling apart, there is a sense of daring myself; I feel



repulsed, but at the same time a sense of compulsion to continue into the zone. I feel my heart quicken, my stomach tighten, my toes curl. Exposed within the gaps - so close to home, but so perplexing - is evidence of the transgressive and the strange; syringes, used condoms, broken bottles, pornography. As Marion Shoard declares: '...the interface shows us its broiling depths' (2002:16), but she also suggests they are 'the only theatre in which the real desires of real people can be expressed' (Shoard, 2002:15). Julia Kristeva writes:

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from that which threatens it—on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. (Kristeva, 1982: 9-10)

The strange territory that lies between familiarity and unfamiliarity, intrigue and horror, desire and repulsion is one that Freud (1919) referred to as the *unheimlich* (uncanny), and which he defined as: 'that class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar' (1919:1-2). Freud identified the uncanny as a tension between the familiar and the horrifying by examining dual meanings of the word 'heimlich' (homely): 'heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, "unheimlich"' (1919: 4).

This tension is discussed by Linda Cracknell when she describes early forays, as a child, to the unruly peripheries of the family garden where she would spend her time engaged in 'play of sorts, I suppose, but serious-feeling play, and solitary' (2014: 13). She describes how this private patch of home was not always benign, of moments of sudden panic and horror when playing there: 'This exhilarating place could always turn on me. There were brambles, stinging nettles and poisonous berries' (2014: 13).

Walking out from my parent's house at the start of this project, I was reminded that I have enjoyed seeking out pockets of neglected space on the urban periphery since I was a small child. The Spinney, for example, near my childhood home was a scruffy scrap of woodland next to a disused chalk pit. It was prohibited, terrifying and thrilling. We were told not to play in the chalk pit with its sheer edges, and soft, white, luna terrain - but of course we did. When I was older, the Spinney, which backed onto my secondary school playing field, was the place for skiving, smoking and sex. I thought about the Spinney and the chalk pits every time I entered a derelict zone on my walks; whenever I felt that familiar sense of unease, I would return to memories of that place.

For all the eeriness, the weird and abject space is a space of emergence. An abandoned shopping trolley rusts and erodes, it begins to be absorbed by the ground; brambles grow over it, birds nest in it; new assemblages form. Rather than as abject or uncanny, Jane Bennett (2001) describes such open systems as 'crossings'; where enchantment is located within modernity, and where new things are brought into being (2001: 31). 'To be enchanted is to be both charmed and disturbed' (2001: 34), she writes. In the weird and enchanted space, Tim Ingold's definition of life as 'not a network of connections but a meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement' (2008: 3), can be visibly evidenced, or as described by Bennett 'A materialism in which matter is figured as a vitality at work both inside and outside of selves' (2010: 62).

As our populations grow, property prices rise, and our cities sprawl, the *terrains vagues* are increasingly being developed. The voids are shrinking, encroached upon by urban expansion. Theorist Marc Augé (1995) has charted the de-centralisation of our cities, and Careri

describes how the voids have also shifted from the urban periphery to a more even distribution throughout the landscape:

If we get lost ... it would be hard to recognise, in this strange magma, a city with a centre and a periphery. We are faced with a sort of leopard skin with empty spots in the constructed city, and full spots in the countryside. (Careri, 2002: 186)

As Phil Smith suggests: 'The edges have sunk deeper into the tissues of town and country, becoming essential inserts in their major organs' (2014b). Compressed and squeezed, I found their strange potency to be increasingly concentrated.

### **Mapping the ground: Hypermodernity**

A security man wearing Morrisons green comes out to greet me. I flash my biggest smile at him and explain that I am an artist that is intrigued by this landscape: does he know how I can get near to the willow man? The security man is enthusiastic and tells me, 'yes, it's back that way along the road, then into the new housing estate, and just by those flats you can jump over a fence (no problem)'. He tells me the sculpture has a small moat running around it, 'and a stream with fish that you can feed if you take them some bread'. It is me that is disarmed by the charm of the security man. He tells me he has recently moved from Bristol to the new houses; how he no longer has to drive the 90 mile round trip each day to work. 'Now all I have to do is walk across the fields to work, and get some fresh air in me', he shouts, as the traffic of the M5 rushes past.

Walking Blog, 2014: 'Around Morrisons Distribution Centre, next to the M5, to see the Willow Man by Serena del la Hay, Sedgemoor'.

A conversation that I had with a security man at the new Morrisons distribution centre (located in Sedgemoor, Somerset, in what had been a water meadow only a year before) revealed that he believed that this sprawling expansion had allowed him to move from the city to the countryside; despite the vast scale of the complex he worked in, its new and

sprawling supporting infrastructure and its close proximity to the M5. This was quite a revelation to me; from my perspective, the development appeared to have dragged the city up the motorway with it.

As well as the Edgelands I wanted to explore some of the new spaces that are the consequence of an explosion of new programmes of residential and commercial building and development across the south of England. The tone of this development was set by government ‘reforms’ such as the National Planning Policy Framework (2014), which ‘relaxed’ laws that previously protected the environment and the greenbelt. Austerity cuts to local services have resulted in a rise in ‘pseudo-public spaces’, which *Guardian* writer Jack Shekner describes as ‘large squares, parks and thoroughfares that appear to be public but are actually owned and controlled by developers and their private backers’ (Shekner, 2017). Giles Lipovetsky (2005) proposes that we are now confronted with a more vigorous version of modernity, which he refers to as ‘hypermodernity’. This new vigour, suggests Lipovetsky, is stripped of collective plan or political ideal, but driven by capitalist consumerism: ‘Everywhere the emphasis has been placed on the need to keep moving, on hyperchange, unburdened of utopian aims, dictated by the demands of efficacy and the need to survive’ (2005: 34).

The new spaces that I walked through were in stark contrast to the voids; sanitised, cleansed of their layers, entangled textures and multiplicitous meanings: vacuous vacuums, in which at times I felt traumatised by so much sudden change. Particularly notable, were the acres of new luxury flats, in what had been green fields that I had played in around Cambridge, all with commutable access to the M11 to London. I was struck by the uniformity of the new developments in different parts of the country; so similar were new housing estates in

Somerset, Cambridge and Plymouth that at times I actually forgot where I was, for my only reference points were those supplied by the developer.



Figure 1.3: Morrison's distribution centre in Somerset, next to Serena de la Hey's giant *Willow Man* (2000).

### **Reading the landscape**

To liken the landscape to the written text - to say the landscape is like a book - is to open up a series of interpretive avenues. For example it invites questions regarding authorship and interpretation - writing and reading. Who is it that has written the landscape? Which individuals or groups are its principal authors? What is the narrative of the landscape, what story does it tell? (Wylie, 2007: 70)

Increasingly, I found myself gripped by the notion of the landscape as text, and towards synchronicity and co-incidence as double underlinings within that text. The route between Cambridge and Plymouth felt like a book, dipped into, put down, and picked up again on each walk; sometimes it was necessary to revisit passages to 'pick up the thread' again. Narratives, plot-lines, motifs and sub-plots wove through each walk I took, and I looked to find trajectories and motifs that might translate into a painterly language. These usually

present themselves in the form of recurring ‘signs’, noted along the way, as points of departure, or ways into the stories. Some of these ‘signs’ become absorbed later into my studio practice, in ways discussed in the second chapter of this thesis. Walking mapless, day after day, causes the observational and navigating powers to increase; one notices subtler signs, and more varieties of them, and also patterns and sequences of signs.

I would often use a car to access the starts of my walks, and I was struck by the languages of different types of terrains. The motorway signs are bold and simple, designed to be absorbed at high speeds: flashing orange speed signs, city names in blue and white, traffic information signs in circles, warnings in red triangles and so on. Leaving the motorway, the directional road signs change colour, the tempo slows. It slows again as we hit the small town High Street where, trying to navigate while still moving at some speed, we are bombarded with corporate logos, shop signs, pub signs, advertising photographs. Leaving the car and walking, the signs become different again. They can become be very intimate at this point, working the other senses; touch and smell come into play. Obscene felt-tip scrawlings, scratched names, even crisp packets, neatly folded and poked into a wall are signs of people marking their presence. I walked along a chalk road flanked by fields near Avebury, and saw signs of people walking and having fun; the heel of a shoe on the side of a path, a collection of chalk pebbles neatly arranged on a post, a smiley face on a faded way-marker. Finally, walking in mud, we find ourselves tracking and reading in its original form; noting the tracks of birds, beasts and humans that have passed that way.



Figure 1.4: 'Unstable' no-parking sign in Plymouth, 2014.

### **Tracking and tricking**

In his critique of the contemporary landscape, Marc Augé (1995) notes that human social activity increasingly takes place in spaces designed to service corridors of transit, such as supermarkets, petrol stations, and airports. He refers to such space as the 'non-place' and notes that signposts and markers in these spaces tend to have less to do with geographic locality, orientating us instead within a commercial landscape through brand identity. Augé observes that even signs supposedly intended to help us to locate ourselves within the landscape can end up replacing the embodied experience.

It is the texts planted along the wayside that tell us about the landscape and make its secret beauties explicit. Main roads no longer pass through towns, but lists of their

notable features - and indeed a whole commentary - appear on big signboards nearby. In a sense the traveller is absolved of the need to stop or even look. (Augé, 1995: 78)

As I walked, I marked the consignment of ‘natural’ or ‘historical’ things to the realm of the sign and the logo. Augé notes: ‘The link between individuals and their surroundings in the space of non-place is established through the mediation of words, or even texts’ (1995: 76).



Figure 1.5: Saltram ‘Meadow’, Plymouth, 2014.

Housing estates built on greenfield sites are still referred to as ‘meadows’, despite being covered in concrete and tarmac; Saltram Meadow in Plymouth, and Trumpington Meadows in Cambridge are two examples that I walked around shortly while they were being transformed from green fields to housing developments. It is as if, as Guy Debord asserts: ‘All that was once directly lived has become representation’ (1995: 12). The commercial development at Sedgemoor in Somerset, was full of sentimental references to willow – ‘Willow Green’, ‘Willow Down’, ‘The Willows’ – with no acknowledgement that the willows are no longer there because of that development. The streets of the modest, new homes built for the Morrisons workers had aspirational names; ‘Royal Drive’, ‘Balmoral Drive’, ‘Mayfair Close’. Names that draw on nostalgia and notions of class and nationhood.



We may also observe that the first thing that many developers do is to plant lines of trees in front of their development sites. Again, I suspect that this is to soften the visual trauma of a fast-changing landscape. To be seen, initially, to be planting trees rather than charging straight in with the bulldozers is psychologically comforting to the public. Once the trees have grown, they will effectively screen the new business park/retail development/housing estate. When the trees are mature, we can whizz past in our cars, never suspecting that those trees are not, in fact, the edge of a gentle woodland.

At times, I felt traumatised by the rate and the scale of so much sudden change. I saw entire eco-systems expunged, ripped out within a day and replaced with re-constructed sentimental images of themselves. In Chapter Two I explore further how this process can be seen at work in relation to the non-human animal and their representations within the landscape. It occurred to me that maybe the hypermodern spaces are the true voids. For they were not full of fluid meanings like the abject spaces referred as voids to by Careri (2001), but vacuous vacuums, in which I felt desolate, cut off from the source at every turn. In the hypermodern spaces Debord's words rang in my ears:

Though separated from his own world, man is more and more, and ever more powerfully, the producer of every detail of his world. The closer his life comes to being his own creation, the more drastically he is cut off from that life. (Debord, 1995: 24)

I consoled myself with the thought that, in time, the edges would soften, weeds would creep through the cracks, pristine buildings weather and decay, the signs and stories would return. In some small but resounding way, I considered my act of walking to be an act of resistance. As Carl Lavery reflects:

Like his/her poetic predecessors, the contemporary walker is seeking ways to re-enchant existence and to find meaning in the world. In an age of impending ecological catastrophe, the enchanted sensibility of the walker is both ethical and political. It points to an alternative way of being in, and caring for, the world. (Lavery, 2009: 49)

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has mapped a complexity of incidents, encounters, situations and environments experienced and recorded during the first walks made for the *Crossing England* project throughout the summer of 2014. I began by explaining the personal circumstantial motivation for making these walks, and we have seen how, through walking variety of terrains, I explored the affects of my own sensory system, such as embodied rhythms of ambulation, in response to the spaces I moved through. We have examined how the entropic and eerie voids of the edgelands provoked a sense of ludic freedom and abandon, that was in complete contrast to the highly branded and regulated corporate zones of hypermodern development. I have begun to tease out a tangle of place-related phantasm, autobiographical experience, and recollected childhood games and stories, provoked through walking. I have charted how, by treading specific paths, the spectres of travellers from the past can be conjured as walking companions, how the signs and logos of the high street entreat us to follow the desire-lines of Spectacular, (as opposed to lived) experience and Capital, and how specific types of peripheral spaces summon memories of particular childhood haunts. Deirdre Heddon, describing how autobiography enriches the process of performance-making, writes, ‘lived experience matters’ (2009: 155). When Rauschenberg was asked how much of his artwork was autobiographical, he declared, ‘All of it!’ (2008: online). This chapter demonstrates how, in the earliest stages of this research the walking process was an examination of subjective terrain as much as an enquiry into the 21<sup>st</sup> century English landscape. The continuum of walking had exposed exteriorities, interiorities, perception and memory, body, mind and world are as inextricably entangled, and enfolded into each other.

Robert Macfarlane's walks brought him to the understanding that 'the mind was a landscape of a kind, and walking a means of crossing it' (2013: 326). David Abram takes this notion a step further, but also inverts it: 'For the precise amalgam of elements that structures each region exists nowhere else. Each place, that is to say, is a unique state of mind' (1996: 133). I had an inkling that approaching mindscape and landscape as common ground might be the way for me to begin in the studio. I needed to build on the tenuous links I was forging between the world I had been walking through and my own subjectivity; the fields, sedimentary layers, complicated textures, gaps and edges, pathways and junctions of exterior and interior space. Expanding on Wylie's notion of landscape as text (2007: 70), in the next chapter I discuss how such re/collected material can be collated as a 'lexicon', with translatable potential for the haptic and visual languages of the studio.

## CHAPTER TWO

### WAYS TO CONNECT LANDSCAPE AND STUDIO

A schizophrenic out for a walk is a better model than a neurotic lying on the analyst's couch. A breath of fresh air, a relationship with the outside world. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1984: 2)

In this chapter I examine ways that the experience of walking, referred to in Chapter One, can begin to be relayed to the studio and harnessed for the making of artworks. Within this context, in order to explore some links and similarities between the early creative processes of performance-making and those of the visual artist making in the studio, I refer to writings about movement and theatre-making by Chris Crickmay and Miranda Tufnell (2004), and Greg Whelan (2011), while referring to the processes and works of studio artists Robert Rauschenberg, Joseph Beuys and Mark Bradford. I discuss how the use of specific materials combined with a personal mythology can be employed as a theoretically-informed process to create a model of practice which operates as a bridge between the practices of walking and painting. I refer to my own practice in order to demonstrate how percepts and concepts, are identified and developed in the field while walking, and subsequently further advanced and refined within the studio during the processes of fabrication. We track how found materials are selected and assembled with interweaving narratives, leitmotifs and images, to form what I have termed a 'lexicon': a loose framework of elements to work with in the studio. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section One of this chapter explores how the raw material, gathered while walking, begins a process of synthesis that moves it towards an artistic language that can be applied to the process of making. In Section Two of this chapter we examine how this system is transferred to the context of making, as we examine the lexicon at work in the studio. In the final section, I discuss various modes of drawing, and

show how these modes can also be used to draw out the subjective impressions of a practitioner, and to bridge the ‘outside’ world with the interiority of the studio.

## **2.1 THE WALKED LEXICON**

### **Compiling a lexicon**

Sculptor and installation artist Chris Crickmay and dance artist Miranda Tufnell suggest that when the practicing artist starts to work, or to attend to material they have collected, a world of images and ideas opens up:

As we work we may feel we are on the edge of some story that we do not know, or moving in and out of different stories whose shapes we cannot quite see. (Crickmay & Tufnell, 2004: 175)

In Chapter One I described how each walk I made was a fragment of the route between Cambridge (where I was born) and Plymouth (where I now live). The more I walked, the clearer the image of this Great Route became in my mind; an ‘erewhon’, imminent or imagined space of interweaving routes and narratives. Crickmay and Tufnell allude to such a development as the beginning of creative process: ‘These are not necessarily stories in words, nor are they generally the conventional type of story with a narrative line, a beginning or an end’ (Crickmay & Tufnell, 2004: 175).

The physical journey back to my birth place is plaited with an autobiographical narrative backwards in time to my birth, but also with writhing strands of historical and mythological story that permeate the landscape. There is no directional flow to these strands, but rather

they act like currents alternating between here and there, now and then. Consequently, I found myself accessing not just my own origins, but also, as Papadimitriou suggests, ‘something larger, something older’ (2012: 7).

Due to the fragmented nature of my walks I found myself looking for threads of continuity that connected them. Each walk was different, but the walks together were (and continue to be) one great journey, with recurring points of reference, themes and motifs threading through the different walks. In response to this I started to ‘collect’ elements (for example, materials and colours), that I could use to create a ‘lexicon’ that would be transferable from landscape to painting. Crickmay & Tuffnell describe creative process in similar terms: ‘as we work we begin to get a sense of an emergent world with its own elements, its own way of coming together’ (Crickmay & Tuffnell, 2004: 175).

Many artists have used comparable processes; for example, Joseph Beuys used felt and fat as elements of a lexicon of elements that was structured around his personal (invented) mythology. Other parts of his ‘lexicon’ included honey, the symbol of the red/brown cross, and the walking stick (Borer, 1996: 14 -20). Contemporary artist Mark Bradford’s chosen material is paper; collected and gathered from billboards and signs in the Los Angeles streets that he maps, but he also uses personally significant material, such as the papers used for hair dyeing from his mother’s hairdressing business (Bradford, 2009: online).

My own lexicon is complex, rhizomatic and rambling by nature; experience and memory combine with personal mythology and the properties and effects of materials, to give rise to a rich, inner world; a web of verbal and sensory associations. The elements of my lexicon do

not function in isolation, but work in constellation with other elements, acting as way-markers to help me to navigate between and around this fluid system. When I am painting they help to introduce meaning, and also set parameters. Together they form a dynamic system which allows me to map and to navigate immanent and actual spaces.

### **Found on the ground**

I continue West along the milky ridge. It is a dry day and I can feel chalk dust everywhere; it is on my hands, in my hair, in my mouth.

Walking Blog, 2014: 'West, through Royston along the Ickneild Way'

One of the materials I return to work with again and again is soil. No matter where we walk, the 'ground' is always under our feet. I collected soil with the intention of mixing it into the paint; it may be worth noting that, in painting terms, the 'ground' refers to the base layer on a painting: the 'background'. The qualities of the earth vary according to locale; during the summer of 2014 I collected pocketfuls of red and white soil.

When I first moved to Devon I was amazed by how red the soil can be there: a vivid red due to the iron oxides within the local sandstone particulates (Devon County Council, n.d.: online). Over the years, the Devon red soil I have collected when walking has prompted me to learn about the history of red ochre, how to grind it, and mix it with egg or linseed oil to make a gritty paste; a simple paint. I ran workshops teaching others how to do this and found considerable interest in the process. I learnt that it was this kind of paint, usually quarried from Brixham in the South Hams, that was used to paint the sails of the local fishing trawlers. Like blood, the paste dries into a dark sanguine colour; in my own paintings I would

sometimes add oil paint to the paste (I am not a purist) to return the colour to its original hues, but I never took the red earth out of the paint.



Figure 2.1: Red soil in the West, 2015.

When I returned to walk in Cambridge, it occurred to me that the white chalk paths in that locality were as striking as the red ones of Devon, and that my engagement with the Devon soil was a process rooted in my own childhood behaviour. Raised, as I was, on the chalky earth of southern Cambridge, chalk has significant childhood associations for me, it was in the water we drank; it furred up the kettle and broke the washing machine. It made our bones strong, but our skin sore and dry in the winter. Writer Robert Macfarlane observes: ‘Chalk is a substance that marks, and is easily marked’ (2013: 52), and as children we would grab white handfuls of chalk from the flower beds to scribble on the walls, and mark out hopscotch games on the pavement.



So, on my walks I collected chalk as I had done when I was a child; from the chalk pits by the Spinney at the back of my old playing fields, on the slopes of the Gog Magog Hills, from the Roman Road and, as time went on and the walks drew out over England, the Ickneild Way, and the Ridgeway in Wiltshire.

In the distance I can see Lime Kiln Hill, with its hidden, forbidden, moon-like chalk quarry and The Spinney, where we played as kids. There were stories that someone had found a dead cat there with a rope round its neck and its eyes coming out. I was scared to go there, but continued nevertheless. Later, it was to a place to hide when skiving off from school, or to go with boyfriends.

Walking Blog, 2014: 'Gog Magog Hills, Cambridge'

The majority of East Anglian chalk lies in South Cambridgeshire (English Nature, 1997: 4) and the chalk underneath the surface soil is Upper Cretaceous Chalk, 'a very pure type of limestone, deposited in clear, tropical sea conditions ...between 97 and 74 million years ago' (English Nature, 1997: 13). Before the arrival of the Romans, the ridges of chalk that run east to west along the south of the county had become:

...a communication route, running between fenland on one side and thickly wooded country on the other, connecting the people of the Iceni with the Southern and midland districts. The route became known as the Ickneild Way and was a collection of paths and tracks, the course of which varied according to ground conditions through the seasons. (English Nature, 1997: 5)



Figure 2.2: Walking on chalk, Ickneild Way, near Royston, Hertfordshire, 2014.

As I walked, I began to envisage a mental map or diagrammatic scheme that could potentially be used within the studio. Chalk came to be specifically associated with the east and the first half of my life, and red Devon soil for the west and the latter half of my life, since I made my home in Devon. This system drew together autobiographical time, cardinal direction, material elements and colour. Consequently, when I came to work in the studio later on, white and chalky paint referred me to the East and to my childhood origins, Devon soil with red paint pointed me to more recent memories in the West.

When Robert Rauschenberg was asked about the way he selected materials found on the streets he replied, 'I'm looking for information, and I just pick 'em up in my hands, and it's where the thoughts are...' (quoted in Diamondstein-Spielvogel, 2008 :online). Found objects that feel good in the hand, that look like something else, or that tell a story, all have potential to be useful in the studio. So, honouring my childhood habit of collecting, that is what I did as I walked; I collected blocks of wood and some board suitable to paint on. I collected tiny animal bones, pieces of clay pipe, pieces of flint (maybe an arrowhead?) and pottery, and rusty metal flattened by cars on the roads. As I collected, like Rauschenberg, I began to get

‘information’ through my hands; a sense of the lives of these objects, and the stories of the places I walked through.

### **Colourful stories, mythical beasts**

As well as noting the colours of soils, others presented themselves in the changing colours of the sky, vegetation, and surrounding landscape. On the tarmac road I marked, for the first time that double yellow lines are painted, and re-painted, in subtle shades of different yellows. I noted the greens of Morrison’s and the reds and yellows of the McDonald’s and KFC packaging that I saw in hedgerows everywhere I walked. I noted the repeating reds of phone boxes and letter boxes (see figure 2.3).



Figure 2.3: Red emergency first aid ‘phone box’, Dartmoor, 2015.

The sense of ‘something larger, something older’ (Papadimitriou, 2012: 7) was woven in counterpoint with these external observations. I had a notion that colours in pub signs were

drawing me into a kind of vivid, medieval tapestry – White Hart, Green Man, Red Lion, Black Horse – a mythological storyscape, interpolated with the twentieth century landscape.

The use of colour as a ‘way in’ to storyscape, is succinctly expressed by writer AS Byatt when she refers to the work of Lewis Carroll:

I store books in my head with half-visualised mnemonics. The Alice books sit apart as a kind of cubic cat's-cradle of brightly coloured threads – red, white, black, grass-green. (Byatt, 2010: online)

This vibrant tapestry – the green wood (holly, ivy, oak, yew, willow), and the scarlet blood of the creatures coursing through it – was woven from the colourful threads of the same mythological material as some of my favourite childhood stories. ‘You can understand a lot about yourself by working out which fairytale you use to present your world to yourself in’, says Byatt (Gooderstone, 2005). As I travelled, I frequently felt myself to be the protagonist of familiar tales. The landscape provided the setting and the other characters: *Hansel and Gretel* (the trail of breadcrumbs), *Red Riding Hood* (alone in the forest in a red coat, stalked by notions of wolves), *The Snow Queen*, (walking to resist a fractured and distorted vision of the world, assisted by non-human allies), *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (landscape as a chess board to be manoeuvred around, the red queen and the white queen). I had a sense that these stories are running through me much of the time, but that it was the walking that brought them to the surface and made me attend to them.

Why these tales began to tell themselves to me when I walked I am not sure, but I can suppose that it had something to do with the story being one of my earliest ways of learning about the world around me when I was very small. Early impressions of the world (and consequently my own inner map) were seeded by fairytales and storybook illustrations, and through the process of walking, the paths to this colourful inner world were exposed.

John Dewey, in his book *Art as Experience* (1933), suggests that we should not underestimate the power of stories and storytelling to impart information, and to create vivid, meaningful experience:

The Grandma telling stories of ‘once upon a time’ to children at her knee passes on and colours the past. She prepares material for literature and may herself be an artist. The capacity of sounds to preserve and report the values of all the varied experiences of the past, and to follow with accuracy every changing shade of feeling and idea, confers upon their combinations and permutations the power to create a new experience, oftentimes an experience more poignantly felt than that which comes from things themselves. (Dewey,1933: 250)

Bruno Bettelheim, in his book *The uses of enchantment: the meanings and importance of fairytales* (1979) adds to this perspective:

In their re-telling, fairy tales became ever more refined, they came to convey overt and covert meanings – came to speak simultaneously to all levels of the human personality, communicating in a manner which reaches the uneducated mind of the child as well as that of the sophisticated adult. (1979: 5-6)

Bettelheim, who examines the fairytale through the lens of Freudian analysis, suggests that, until taught other ways of viewing the world, a child’s thinking ‘is animistic’ (1978: 45). He suggests that the fairytale, rich with motifs, continues to reverberate through the life of an adult because of its ambiguous or multiplicitous nature. For Bettelheim it is the slippery and unstable meaning of the fairytale that accounts for its endurance, for it will present new meanings at different stages of the child’s life, and continue to do so into adulthood (Bettelheim, 1979: 12).

### **Bestiary: signs of the Other**

Walking across England, navigating on my instincts, I often thought about the traverses and navigational abilities of the creatures around me. I noted configurations of creatures at several

‘human’ landmarks: crows, ever present (leading the way), and during summer swifts swoop and shriek around the park next to my house, which is on top of the highest hill in Plymouth. During the warmest months, the air around Avebury stone circle is full of flitting martins and swallows. One hot June day I found the roofless church that crowns Burrow Mump in Somerset festooned with thousands of harlequin ladybirds. In autumn, I was aware of migrations of geese passing over, and of murmurations of starlings swooping like dragons in the sky. Also, the corpses of many creatures on the side of the motorway.

I was stalked by ‘sideways’ glimpses of mythological creatures. Giants followed me across England; from the ancient folklore giants of the Gog Magog chalk hills near Cambridge, to Serena Del la Hay’s contemporary wicker giant sculpture next to the M5 in Somerset. Wolves in various guises followed me around one particular hilltop in Devon, and I pursued a White Hart as I trod the Ickneild Way.

We are in Hertfordshire and the sign of the stag is everywhere; prancing across the county council logo and splashing through a rotary club plaque. I read that the hooded crow, *corvus cornix* was once so abundant on Royston Heath that it was known as the Royston Crow. This animal, too, is imprisoned in various insignia; I follow a trail of them up the High Street; brass plaques set into the pavement.

Walking Blog, 2014: ‘West, through Royston along the Ickneild Way’)

When I was walking I was obviously not carrying a spear with the intention to hunt animals but, nevertheless, I did find myself following the trails of animals. Occasionally these were physical tracks through a woodland, sometimes in stories, but more frequently they were animals incarcerated in images and corporate logos along the High Street, and the trails were laid by humans.

In many ways, animals were present by their absence. As John Berger declares:

The cultural marginalization of animals is, of course, a more complex process than their physical marginalization. The animals of the mind cannot be so easily dispersed. Sayings, dreams, superstitions, the language itself, recall them. The animals of the mind, instead of being dispersed, have been co-opted into other categories so that the category animal has lost its central importance. Mostly they have been co-opted into the family and into the spectacle. (Berger 2009: 25)

Ingold asks ‘could it be that images do not stand for things but rather help you to find them?’ (2010:16). When walking in Cambridgeshire it was apparent that the complexity and profusion of animal and insect-life had dwindled since my childhood. At school I was taught that our suburban neighbourhood had once been chalky pasture surrounded by fen, with an abundance of fish, wildfowl and deer. This throws up a perplexing conundrum: how do you paint the absence of an animal? How does a visual artist refer to a creature without making an image of it? I had moved away from making figurative paintings and am suspicious of the consequences of making images of animals. John Berger suggests:

Zoos, realistic animal toys and the widespread commercial diffusion of animal imagery all began as animals started to be withdrawn from daily life. One could suppose that such innovations were compensatory. Yet in reality the innovations themselves belong to the same remorseless movement that was dispersing the animals. (2009: 27)



Figure 2.4: The sign of the stag is everywhere in Hertfordshire, 2014.

### **Shifting meanings: the unstable sign and the fixed point of reference**

Standing here, at these crossroads, at this moment, I feel that I am reading this landscape in a way I never could from a book or a map. A deluge of red and white images floods my mind.

Walking Blog, 2014: 'West, through Royston along the Ickneild Way'.

Occasionally, with particularly pernicious signs and logos, we can re-appropriate them, re-assign new meanings. I dislike nationalism in all its forms; when I started my walks, the World Cup (2014) had just begun, and there was a concurrent political swell towards the nationalist right. I was troubled by the implications of the English flag I saw everywhere flying from cars, in windows and from rooves. As I walked, I found I had a desire to destabilise this symbol and interpret it in another way; perhaps, like Beuys, to draw upon the red cross's associations with healing and emergency. After weeks of walking on the red earth of Devon, and the chalky white paths of East Anglia, new meanings bubbled up. This culminated in Royston, when I stood at the crossroads of an ancient drover's route (the Ickneild Way) and a Roman road (Ermine Street), and over a cave, carved in the chalk below by the Knights' Templar - of the 'rosy cross'.

Both benign and malign readings of the red cross flow from the varied reputations of these monastic knights; from holy hospitaller to religio-imperialist crusader. The Royston junction is known locally as 'the Cross', and is marked by an ancient stone called the 'Roysia' - or 'Rosy'- stone. Standing at this intersection, I realised that I was comprehending this



landscape in a way I never could from a book or a map. Here, in the centre of an apparently lacklustre and unremarkable small town, was a way-marker, an indicator of the cardinal directions which drilled down through the bedrock of the earth, physically underpinning and simultaneously connecting strata of history and mythology; a point of fixidity for fluxes of migrating wayfarers over many generations.

This was a crux of arterial circulation beating to the step of foot and hoof, past and present, and functioning like Deleuze and Guattari's plane of consistency, which 'concretely ties together heterogenous, disparate elements' (1998: 558). I had a sudden comprehension of England, not as an isolated fortress, but as a fluid, shifting terrain to be moved through and encountered; historic streams of different peoples, plants, creatures and stories pulsing over, through, and across red and white soil. Doreen Massey (2005) suggests that it is the fluxes, flows and the returns of human and non-human movement that make a place, and that when we consider space in these nomadic terms, political meaning shifts; borders and national boundaries cease to have meaning: 'there can be no given assumption of pre-given coherence, or of community, or collective identity' (2005: 140).



Figure 2.5: Proliferation of English flags in 2014.

## **Fluid England**

After my flash of insight at the crossroads in Royston, whenever I saw the English flag draped in windows I found that I had attached to it a new, fluid meaning: that of a continuum of human and non-human mobility pulsing through the landscape. Both Doreen Massey (2005) and Tim Ingold (2008) ask us to re-consider space as networks of unfolding and entangling lines, or trajectories, rather than inert, open ground. Massey describes 'here' as 'where special narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities' (2005: 139).

I am not the only walker to experience such an abrupt readjustment of their subjective understanding of the landscape; to view it anew as system of paths and thoroughfares, rather than as a patchwork of enclosed spaces. Robert Macfarlane writes of a similar epiphany when he was sleeping out on the Ickneild Way: 'the image rose in my mind of white path meeting white path, a web of tracks that ran to the shores of the land and beyond' (2013: 55). Bruce Chatwin's account of his sudden appreciation of an Australian aboriginal way of thinking about 'country', in his book *The songlines* (1988) he refers to a comparable understanding of 'country':

White men ... made the common mistake of assuming that, because the Aboriginals were wanderers they could have no system of land tenure. This was nonsense. Aboriginals, it was true, could not imagine territory as a block of land hemmed in by frontiers: but rather as an interlocking network of lines or 'ways through'. (1998: 56)

Moving further into Fortean<sup>8</sup> territory, John Michell, writing in the preface of Alfred Watkin's *The Old Straight Track* (1974), describes how Watkins' notion of the 'Ley System' came to him in a sudden moment, as a 'network of lines, standing out like glowing wires all over the country' (1974: xv). Watkins was so affected by this incident that he embarked on a lifetime's study to try to gather a body of respectable evidence to support his revelation - for which he was largely ridiculed by the antiquarian establishment from whom he sought endorsement.

Jill Smith (previously Jill Bruce) worked as a performance artist alongside husband Bruce Lacey. During the 1980's, she and Lacey began to visit ancient sites, and to make spontaneous, audience-free performances in response to these places:

We visited lots of sites. We'd take our van of stuff, all our props. And we wouldn't pre-plan it, but think "right, what does this place want us to do?". Then we'd evolve something we wanted to do. We'd do it for real then we'd reenact it with a camera taking photos. (White, online: n.d.)

This, says Smith, is when she 'began the concept of "journey"' (White, online: n.d.):

I'd anoint the stones, or I'd take one thing from one site and carry it to another, as a way of linking them; feeling that they'd once been part of a whole web or network that in the modern world had been lost. (Smith, in White, online: n.d.)

The effect on Smith was profound; she left husband Lacey, and took to sleeping outside, and wandering the countryside. Her exuberant and theatrically costumed performances, once made for audiences, transmuted into private and personal rituals; 'smaller and more powerful' (Smith, in White, online: n.d.), and Smith's sense of herself, and of the landscape was transformed:

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<sup>8</sup> Fortean: relating to strange, scientifically unexplained, or paranormal phenomena, after Charles Fort who was a researcher of such anomalies during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

So I was doing this practice in the feet of Britain, [Cornwall] and I did it all the way up the country. It was like I was becoming the land. I was becoming Britain. These places were coming into me, like an internal map.

Reading these experiential accounts of other walkers (alongside my own flash of insight) caused me to consider again the migratory powers of birds and animals; what kind of maps, or stories do they carry in their heads? I also thought of the tugs and pulls of space that I had sensed when walking. Recent research into bird navigation bridges the disciplines of chemistry, biology, and quantum theory, by testing the hypothesis that robins rely on ‘radical pair’ reactions in the retina to detect the direction of the Earth’s magnetic field as a compass for use during migration. It is suggested that the European robin navigates through a chemical process using cryptochrome, a photo-sensitive protean in the robin’s eye, which responds to quantum entanglement and enables the robin to ‘see’ the earth’s magnetic field (Hore, n.d.: online). I wondered if the sudden vivid mental image I experienced at the crossroads in Royston that day was a consequence of some kind of dormant navigational sense, reawakened by weeks of walking every day without a map; ‘the memory of a half familiar truth’ (xvi), as Michell describes it.

In this section we have explored how, when we pay close attention as we move through the world, experience and encounter can generate further narratives and further images. As Crickmay and Tufnell suggest, we find ourselves ‘moving in and out of different stories whose shapes we cannot quite see’ (Crickmay & Tufnell, 2004: 175). Like Crickmay and Tufnell, I suggest that it is this slippery material – this immanence, these affects - that the canny practitioner aims to firstly tap, then to transfer: from world, to studio, to artwork, and eventually back to the world through the experiencer of the artwork. Jean-Francois Lyotard

asks us to remember that an artwork is not simply a cultural object, but that, ‘It harbours within it an excess, a rapture, a potential of associations that overflows all the determinations of its “reception and production”’ (Lyotard, 1991: 92-93). In the next section we will examine how this process of transference continues in the studio.

## **2.2 THE LEXICON IN THE STUDIO**

### **Landscape and studio: common ground**

As I revisited childhood memories while walking through my childhood haunts, so I revisited, or re-remembered those walks, as I worked with materials in the studio.

Greg Whelan describes how he views ‘repetition as a compositional tool’ (Gardner 2011: 102). While Whelan is describing the process of creating performance as one half of Lone Twin, the process he describes can equally be applied to my own performance in the studio: ‘we look for logics and motifs that begin to offer some support’, and these logics and motifs can be built, through repetition, to form a greater whole: ‘bits of material that can be repeated, moved around, changed a bit and then re-used’ (Whelan, quoted in Gardner, 2011: 102). This repeating of motifs is used to form a loose scaffold on which to anchor the emerging ideas:

Those bits become a framework of sorts that we can hang other material on that doesn’t repeat. In a way it might be the bits that don’t repeat that we’re most interested in, but they’d be too free-floating, too unframed for us to use if we didn’t have an internal shape and structure to place them on. So the repeating material is

what starts to hold the piece up, it's what gives it some shape. (Whelan, in Gardner, 2011: 102)

Like my lexicon, Whelan's 'framework' is not fixed, but fluid, and appears to take on its own autonomy; 'it feels organic...it feels like the piece has started to reveal its own logic and we should attend to that' (Whelan, in Gardner, 2011: 102).

After the first phase of walks made for this research I approached the studio with some trepidation; my fear was not that I had no material, but that I had too much. Writing the first draft of the previous chapter of this thesis had helped me to identify, and consequently research, a number of interconnected subjects that had confronted me on my walks. These subjects can be crudely sorted into the following categories:

- i. The Voids,
- ii. Hypermodernity
- iii. Childhood Memory (games and stories)
- iv. The History of Fluid England
- v. The Bestiary

I had no idea, when I initially went into the studio, how I would make paintings on such varied themes, and I strongly suspected that some of them would need to be dropped from the project, or put on hold for further investigation at a later date.

Before I began to paint, I placed some significant objects on the shelves of my studio: white chalk and red earth, my father's compass and penknife. I also brought in four irregular pieces

of painted wood - a group I had found on the pavement by a roundabout when walking. Placed in a line, this group of blocks of wood had a sense of procession, and I was very pleased with the way they sat on the shelf, with their jaunty angles. I called this group of found paintings *Procession* (2014) (figure 2.6). This selection of objects was to strike an aesthetic tone that was to reverberate through all the phases of making that were to follow, for I continued to be fascinated with found pieces of wood and their sequential arrangement.



Figure 2.6: *Procession* (2014) Assembled, found blocks of wood in the studio.

### **Voices of materials**

‘Sub’ means ‘under’, ‘stance’ means ‘stand’; ‘substance’ equates with ‘understanding’.

Louise Bourgeois declares: ‘to talk about the sleep of the material is a wonderful image...

you have to wake it, to wake the material up!’ (Finch, 1994: online). I have learnt to not try to

anticipate the work I will make, but instead, to start with the materials I have collected on my

journeys. I usually begin with a very low key approach; circling around it, eyeing it up for a while, and then a gentle tinkering, an investigative process, more like conversation than taking charge. Brushing, sanding, scraping; an excavation. Experimentation in this way with found materials will remind me, naturally, of my own journeys, but also that the materials themselves have their own story; a piney fragrance released when sanding a block of wood, for example, reminds me that this piece of wood was once part of a tree. This is what Tim Ingold calls '*going along*' or 'a process of active following' (2013: 1), that happens when working creatively with materials. This approach draws from 'the idea that you know as you go; not that you know by means of movement, but that knowing *is* movement' (Ingold, 2013: 1).

The properties of the materials, combined with stories and ideas that arise when working with them, suggest ways for the work to develop, for elements to combine, for meaning to develop. A block of oak painted green, for example, could refer to the greenwood. As Tufnell and Crickmay suggest:

A web of connection grows out from what we know of the physical qualities and behaviour of any material - a network of stories, instances and applications that enlarge our sense of what material is or means to us. Materials are also widely reflected in our language, in sayings and everyday expressions, each substance giving rise to its own cluster of associations and metaphors... Thus materials are not only physically part of our world, but also exist as an 'image' in the way we think and communicate. (2004: 166).

Each board, or block of wood, has a story; slabs of oak from the woodland where a family of white deer had recently lived, old signs and discarded blackboards from different places.

Chalk in particular was full of meaning and memory for me.



Pounding the dusty white chalk that I collected to mix with my white paint, I am transported back to the rhythm of walks made the previous summer along the chalky paths on the tops of the green ridges of Wiltshire. In my mind's eye I travel in giant hops and leaps, further east, and back in time; crossing Hertfordshire, to the Gog Magog Hills of Southern Cambridgeshire, passing early memories of the chalk pits near the Spinney, the small stream in nearby Cherry Hinton called Giant's Grave, and arriving at last at an early memory of a game of hopscotch marked out in chalk on the pavement, played with my sister outside my childhood home in Cambridge. Two small giants, hopping and leaping through time and space. It is as Tufnell and Crickmay have described; out of these embodied memories, prompted by physical interaction with the materials I have collected, new work is formed in the studio. The eventual outcome of this particular interaction can be seen in the painting I made two years after my first walks, *Hopscotch/Giant's Leap* (2016) (see figure 5.21).

### **Story and colour**

During the making of the first sets of paintings, I thought a great deal about the stories from favourite childhood books, with beginnings and endings that had presented themselves to me in certain spaces in the landscape. As my time in the studio progressed, however, it was other stories that rose to the surface; not traditional tales that I had read or been told, but rather stories I began to trace across the landscape.

My stories had appeared to have no beginnings, nor endings, but to continue endlessly telling themselves, encoding and recoding themselves into the landscape; through place-names, local folklore, signs, symbols and even the corporate logo. The deeds of their characters were vague, but nevertheless, I had tracked their tales across the landscape and into my studio.

A synaesthetic story-web was consequently spun around the studio through my interaction with materials, and also colour. I had collected the red and white soil and identified these colours respectively with the west and the east. I made a decision, at least initially, to limit my palette, and in retrospect this was a good idea, for it helped me to maintain some kind of continuum between the different painterly voices that were emerging.

Garrick Mallery reminds us that ‘it has often been asserted that there was and is an intrinsic significance in the several colours’ (n.d. b: 622), and he goes on to demonstrate that the meanings attributed to certain colours vary considerably according to culture, and locality (n.d. b: 622 -637). He describes how systems vary; from the Babylonians, to medieval christian art, and modern folklore. Garrick also describes how different Native American peoples ascribe varying colours to the four cardinal points (n.d. b: 623); and some tribes to a quinternity of colours that includes the central point of the compass (n.d. b: 625). Victoria Finlay tells us how for the people of the Tiwi islands in Darwin, four specific colours are used as part of a kinship system. Each person is assigned to one of four moieties when they are born, and there are rules and taboos that govern how each moiety interacts with the others. Each moiety has a specific colour:

The Tiwi world is made up of four symbolic ochre colours- and each moiety is represented by one of them: sun is red, stone is black, pandanus is white and mullet is yellow. Red and black marry only white and yellow: the strong colours marry only the gentle ones. (Finlay, 2002: 44)

When choosing my colours I felt it was important not to tumble, by default or accident, into some kind of pre-existing colour system. However, I did understand that my own system is inevitably tainted by my own cultural heritage. It crossed my mind that if west and east were red and white, then maybe I should find colours for north and south; particularly as the notion of the crossroads had become so crucial to me during my walks, and also to allude to my

father's compass, that I had been carrying on my walks. No obvious correlations were apparent, however, and so I chose not to force this, but to remain open to the idea maybe this would change over time.

Initially, a commitment to the use of red caused me a certain amount of anxiety, as I had previously found red to be a challenging colour to use in profusion on a painting. Indeed, the first paintings, the 'awkward' batch (discussed in Chapter Five) were almost all white, with only the odd fleck of red here and there; tiny wounds in a chalk-white skin of paint. During the making of these white paintings, which took many layers, I found myself excavating many latent memories of my own childhood.

It took me a long time to work out how to use red comfortably, but I needed to do it; for red just kept on giving; past and present, mythological and mundane. Emblematic details of a totemic England fused with my own English 1970's childhood, and with phenomena noted in my recent walks: blood— my own, human blood (emergency, first aid), and the blood of animals, the crimson-clad fox hunt, old telephone boxes, letter boxes, scarlet strawberry Opal Fruits, routemaster buses, Red Lion Hotel, KFC packaging in the hedgerows – red, red, red... At length, I found myself comfortable using the colour in all its hues, from dark sanguine to bright vermillion.

My father's compass and penknife both had thick, red cord attached. With them in my pocket, I had been following my father's footsteps. In the studio, I used a red line or a red

thread in my paintings to help me to lay/follow a trail through the work; a hotline to the ancestors. Thread and line can interweave, tangle, tie, bind, wind, suspend, stitch, knot. Over time, like the limited palette, the meandering line helped to draw different areas of studio enquiry together.

Some of my colour choices undoubtedly grew out of linguistic associations; the word 'green' originates from the germanic root word 'grün', which is also the root word for 'grown'; and grow it did, all over my paintings. If red was blood, then green was sap. Again, a jumbled profusion of myth and mundane memory: the greenwood, green hill, the Green Giant Public House, Jolly Green Giant peas (ho ho ho), 'green and pleasant', and the willow green of Morrisons distribution centre and the vanishing water meadows at Sedgmoor that I had explored and drawn the previous summer. Green and red together were the unseen animals in the mythical greenwood. For some inexplicable reason, when choosing her wardrobe, my grandmother used to say to me 'Red and Green should never be seen', fusing the two together, forever, in my mind. Rules are made to be broken.



Figure 2.7: *East & West* detail (2015). Oil paint, red earth and chalk on oak panel

## **Unstable England**

As I discussed in Section One of this chapter, my sense of unease due to a profusion of waving english flags during the World Cup 2014 (and as it turned out, a Pandora's Box of political toxicity soon to be unleashed by the Brexit referendum) had provoked me, somewhat reluctantly, to consider England and her symbols while I was walking. This issue, along with my sense of unease, continued in the studio. During this time, I had very complicated feelings about the whole subject of 'England' and 'Englishness'. Retrospectively probing my own childhood for the *Crossing England* project had provoked some festering memories. Despite being born and raised in the middle-class suburbs of Cambridge, all my life people have asked me where I was 'originally' from. As a child, I had black hair, brown eyes and browner skin than my classmates. In this respect, my sister and I looked like my father. At my comprehensive school, I was routinely called 'Froggy', 'Frenchy', 'Darky', 'Paki', 'Jew', 'Wop'. My headmaster told me that I was untidy and looked 'like a gypsy'. I was always aware of untold stories regarding my ancestry; sometimes I felt obliged to make up stories to explain how I looked.

In retrospect, it is easy to see why a preoccupation with 'Englishness' erupted alongside these memories, as I walked amongst the waving red and white flags of the St George Cross during the two years preceding the Brexit referendum. In 2014 the political atmosphere was becoming increasingly ugly and inflamed; I had sensed this as I walked, and I carried this anxiety into the studio. While being repulsed by a culture of 'Englishness' I was paradoxically uncovering a deep personal connection to the English landscape, as half-forgotten folk memories and untold stories.

Music artist P.J. Harvey expresses a similar ‘attraction and repulsion’ (Harvey, 2011: online), towards the matter of England in her albums *White Chalk* (2007) and *Let England Shake* (2014). While her work is specifically about Harvey’s own relationship with England, Harvey underlines that it also more generally addresses human experience everywhere: specificity, she feels, can be ‘a way in’ to ‘what is more universally felt’. She says ‘no matter where you are, people suffer great disappointments in what their governments are doing, what wars are being waged in their name’ (Harvey, 2011: online).

There have been attempts to wrestle the idea of England out of the hands of haters and extremists, and to stem the insidious creep of corporate uniformity that is the consequence of late Capitalism. Paul Kingsnorth’s book *Real England: the battle against the bland* (2008) laments a particular cultural sanitisation that he suggests was emergent at the time of New Labour a consequence of globalism, the union of government and big business. Kingsnorth’s book consequently informed Jez Butterworth’s hit play *Jerusalem* (2009), with a performance by Mark Rylance who described this play as ‘satisfying a hunger in audiences for wildness and defiance’ (Butterworth and Rylance, 2011: online). In similar vein are a set of earthy mystery plays, written by poet John Constable and performed by local community at Southwark Cathedral on St George’s day in the year 2000. Their writing was provoked by a chance uncovering of the skeletons of ‘working girls’ under tarmac, on land owned by the London Underground in Red Cross Way, Southwark. This site, known as the Crossbones, was once an unconsecrated paupers’ cemetery and has been transformed by the community into a garden to honour the outcast, where artists, poets and local community hold vigils on St George’s day, to remember the marginalised and the dispossessed. The mythos of England is similarly explored in several film collaborations by Andrew Köttling, Alan Moore, and Iain

Sinclair. Journey is at the heart of all these films: a ridiculous but epic voyage in a swan-shaped pedalo from Hastings to London in *Swan Down* (2012), a re-enactment of poet John Clare's walk from Epping to Northampton in 1841 in *By Ourselves* (2015), and a re-tracing of the steps of Queen Edith Swanneck, who travelled to collect the body of her handfast husband Harold, to take it for burial in Waltham Abbey shortly after the Battle of Hastings in *Edith Walks* (2017).

I have given a few examples of a groundswell of writers, poets, artists and performers with whom I share a certain psychogeographic sensitivity to an excess that oozes through English city sewers (once rivers, now entombed and full of shit), and exudes through the cracks of English carparks. Although raw, grubby and gritty, this is an idea of England that is more inclusive, and values the commons, diversity, eccentricity, and hospitality. An occulted, but apparently irrepressible England that was never written as history, but is accessible in a deep, experiential – maybe even mystical – connection to place.

The George Cross has been commandeered by bullies on the right wing of the political spectrum, and this has made it a difficult and perplexing area for artists to tread. However, walking artist Phil Smith reminds us that, 'the purloined symbols of the city are all still available for us to steal back' (2012: 5). Rather than a fortress, I prefer the notion of England as a 'crossing'; a space to be traversed and experienced rather than owned and guarded. England untethered; as a verb rather than a noun. My walks had helped to identify an emergent England that aligns with Jane Bennett's definition of 'crossing' as a chimeric space, 'sprinkled with natural and cultural sites that have the power to "enchant"' (2001: 3). A fluid

repository of stories, songs, journeys, roads and paths that do not mind borders, but lead on to other places. I wondered if I could help to cultivate such a meaning through working with this symbol.

Joseph Beuys used the red cross - or rather a rust red, or red/brown version - as a motif in his work, from 1961 (Temkin & Rose, 1993: 37). By referring to it as the *Braunkreutz*, suggests Temkin, Beuys was able to deliberately attach and maintain multiple meanings to this symbol. The word *Braunkreuz* indicates 'Beuys's keen sensitivity to language and his penchant for word-play. A cross in itself, the word is an intersection of two independent elements that creates a third whole' (Temkin & Rose, 1993: 38). Temkin explains:

*Braunkreuz* then, is a term loaded with powerful references not only to Christianity, the occult and war or disaster relief, but equally to German military and Nazism. This complex constellation of terms - circulating around the concepts of the spirit, the wound, and war - removes both the word and the medium *Braunkreuz* from any fixed interpretation. (Temkin and Rose, 1993: 38)

Simon O'Sullivan describes how art practice can be 'a strategy of experimentation that scrambles narrative, figuration – the givens – and allows something else, at last, to step forward' (O'Sullivan, 2016: 17). Temkin suggests that Beuys's *Braunkrauz* floats in intentionally ambiguous allusion, through which Beuys sought to 'heal' a wound in the German psyche. By isolating and extracting a little of the poison that had originally induced the pernicious mindset of German Fascism, Beuys sought to re-apply it, but in diluted form, through the use of the unstable sign in his artwork; a homeopathic approach (healing like with like).



In my own studio I realised almost immediately that, in order to feel comfortable using the red cross, I could not simply assign it a new meaning and stick it on a painting; I needed some time to convince myself on a more fundamental level. To use it successfully, I would need to reset my own default attitude to the George Cross, and this was going to be a process rather than a sudden switch. While walking I had identified two apparently contradictory strands of meaning that are given to the red cross:

i. a symbol for hospitality, aid in emergency.

ii. a sign of religio-imperialist crusade and right-wing nationalism.

The symbol needed a period of quarantine to detoxify it from its previous malignant deployment, and a playful approach to extract its venom. I would riff around it, unravel, and reassemble it through a transformative process in the studio.

### **Finding place for the Bestiary**

Over the years, I have made paintings and drawings about the tracks of animals: the swoop of a seagull, the trajectory of a rabbit through a hedge. During my 2013 residency at High Cross House I had thought a lot about the lives and fates of the animals in the surrounding fields of Dartington. I came to think of the domestic animals in terms of thwarted trajectories; thwarted spatially by their enclosures, and temporally when sent off to slaughter. One day, walking in Devon, I had found the furry leg of a deer hanging on a barbed wire fence; the rest of its bones picked clean on the grass below. The image of that hanging leg, and the story of the thwarted leap, followed by the slow death that is implicated in that image, horrifies and haunts me to this day.

In his 'So Below: a comic about land' (2016), Sam Wallander asks us to consider the city landscape and ask, 'How come our narratives never afford dead animals' or plants' ghosts?' The trails of invisible animals that had been so present in the logos and signs on the High Street, and that had so troubled me during my walks, continued to be problematic in the studio. I knew even before I picked up a paintbrush that these were not the kind of animals I would be able to paint. The animals in my head were untameable, fleeting presences. I thought about using the stuff of the animals themselves: bones or feathers. I tried scratching written words about them into my paint. I wondered if I could find motifs or patterns for them; maybe from prints I had seen in the mud? Tim Ingold draws from Howard Morphy's description of how the crocodile dreaming can equally reveal itself to the people of Arnhem Land in the world around them as in their paintings:

...painting is only one of many ways in which ancestral beings can reveal themselves, or make their presence felt. Consider, for example, the crocodile ancestor, who was burned when his bark hut caught fire and dived into the sea to quench the flames. Still burning beneath the waves, the fire scarred the crocodile's back with scales. In painting, he is revealed in the patterns of diamonds distinctive to the designs of the clans that have sprung from him. He may reveal himself in similar patterns of ripples on the surface of the water. But he – that is, his story – may just as well show up in the scaly pattern on the back of the living crocodile. (Ingold: 2010: 20).

Victoria Finlay tells a similar story while researching ochre pigments in Arnhem Land. She describes how she assumed that diagonal lines around a turtle painting were simply decorative, until one night on a desert beach not far from Darwin, when she saw a real turtle laying her eggs. Finlay realised that the painting was 'an uncannily accurate picture of the tracks she made with her flippers' (Finlay, 2002: 38).

To my irritation, I found images of some of these animals emerging out of the paint without my intention. Their painted presence made me feel queasy; and as fast as an image emerged

in the painting, I painted it out. I became engaged in a furious battle with the image of a white deer that I painted away a hundred times, but the image kept returning.

Both Rauschenberg and Beuys had ‘bestiaries’; by this I mean a cannon of significant creatures employed as recurring motifs in their own lexicons. Animals course through their work. The goat in *Monogram* (1955-59), the eagle in *Canyon* (1959), Beuys’s hare in *How to explain pictures to a dead hare* (1965), the coyote in *I like America and America likes me* (1974). Both artists moved away from using images of animals, and towards the very substances of the animals themselves; fat, fur, feathers, bones, beaks and claws, and even, in *I like America and America likes me* (Beuys, 1974), a living Coyote. Rauschenberg, rather than making painting *of* animals, made paintings *on* animals, or stuck animals on paintings. Is it possible that they, like Berger, came to understand how the representational image plays a role in the demise of the visceral creature?

Anne Temkin demonstrates a human-centric interpretation of Beuys’s work when she suggests that Beuys consciously used animals to enhance his own power as an artist: ‘Just as animals provide shamans with their attributes, so they serve an artist who casts himself as such a mediator’ (1993: 33). I would argue that Beuys highlighted the precarity of the non-human animal, and in this way ‘serves’, or speaks for the animals. It seems to me to be a two-way exchange or symbiotic relationship, not a question of domination, or mastery. Temkin also suggests that Beuys ‘elaborated a specific menagerie of swans, stags, elk and bees, all symbolic in meaning’ (1993: 33). Again, I take slightly different stance, for while Beuys would undoubtedly have been aware of the historical use of animals to represent human qualities, he was a member of the Fluxus movement which sought to leave representational

art behind. We might suggest that Beuys used the fur and fat of an animal to acknowledge the idea of an animal, or the ‘spirit’ of a species, but I do not read Beuys’s creatures as representational of human traits. The fact that Beuys was a founder member of the German Green party suggests that not only was he concerned about the impact of human behaviour on ecological systems, but that he recognised that the human condition is impoverished when separated from living creatures.

We see another way of referring to animals in jeopardy taken by artist Mark Bradford in response to Hurricane Katrina in 2008. After the flooding of Ninth Ward in New Orleans, text was sprayed on houses by FEMA<sup>9</sup>, that referred to abandoned pets. Bradford used text in this way to allude to the absence of an animal. He explains:

This sign was ‘1 cat seen’, and I started thinking about one cat instead of two, about Noah’s Ark, about where the other cat would be, and about isolation and wandering, so that is one element of the project: ‘1 Cat Outside’, ‘Beagle Taken’, ‘Both canines rescued’, ‘Shepherd seen’. (Bradford Art21, 2014: online)

This text triggered a new project for Mark Bradford; he built a large ark from materials salvaged from the disaster in *Mithra* (2008). The sixty-four foot sculpture was assembled in an empty lot in the Ninth Ward as ‘a monument to futility or a symbolic cry for salvage’ (Bradford Art21, 2014).

I tried for over a year to understand how I could bring the animals of my acquired lexicon into the work, with little success. Occasionally, the odd reference sneaked in; maybe a hoof-

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<sup>9</sup> FEMA is an acronym for Federal Emergency Management Agency, an agency of the United States Homeland Security.

print that only I could see, or a scribbled word, but even that made me feel uncomfortable. In one painting, a crow appeared in the bottom right hand corner (see figure 2.8), and I let that one remain; an uneasy truce. Eventually, I resigned myself to it being an insoluble problem, and stopped thinking about it. The paintings were working in other ways; maybe I just had to let the animals go.



Figure 2.8: *Walking Story: Crow* (2014). Early painting, showing animal figuration. Oil paint, red soil, chalk, beeswax and graphite on found board.

Shortly before I set up my Ariel Centre show in 2016 (discussed in depth in Chapter Five), I was walking in the woods, my pockets full of red soil. As I walked, a rhythmic verse emerged to the rhythm of my steps. The imagery was familiar, but the form was new. I typed it up on my typewriter when I returned to the studio.

### **Walking Rhyme**

white chalk

red earth

red deer  
white hart  
deer heart  
dear heart  
white hart  
red deer  
red earth  
white chalk

It could, like my walked journeys and the elements lined up on the shelves, be read backwards or forwards. I found a place for the ‘rhyme’ on a shelf of red and white paintings. The ‘rhyme’ did not just refer to deer, but demonstrated relations between other elements of the work. About a week later, another ‘rhyme’ emerged out of the walking:

### **Rhyme for Seven League Walking**

green giant  
Gogmagog  
chalky line  
hopscotch!  
Gogmagog  
giant’s grave  
Giant’s Leap  
Hopscotch!

Again, this verse alluded to my journey, this time geographically; Giant’s Grave is a small, now urbanised, chalk spring at the beginning of the Gogmagog Hills, very near the Chalk Pits and the Spinney at the Cambridge end of my journey. In Plymouth, Giant’s Leap is on the Hoe, where the Giant Gogmagog, or Goemagot is said to have fallen into the sea; I had

tracked these giants from one side of the country to the other. I found a place for this rhyme on a shelf of green and white paintings in my studio, and later, in the exhibition at the Ariel Centre. The word ‘legend’ can mean a key or table of explanation on a map, or a traditional tale. Both these meanings originate from the Latin, *legere*, meaning ‘things to be read’. The poems seem to act like a legend in both these meanings of the word; a key to illuminate the paintings around them, and the stories that underlined, or connected them. It was an exciting discovery.

I had one other progression towards understanding how I could deal with the ‘animal problem’ around this time. I had shot two minutes of video, when walking, of a black plastic bag caught in a hedge and buffeted by the wind. Animated by the wind, the plastic bag took on the form of a preening crow. I started to see how, by placing this video in a space near the crow paintings, new relationships revealed themselves between the pieces of work. This video clip, that I subsequently named *Monstrous Crow* or *Crow for the Anthropocene* (2015) can be viewed here:

<https://vimeo.com/218810822>.

## **2.3 ON DRAWING**

### **Drawing outside**

The way to form, to be dictated by some inner or outer necessity, is more important than the goal itself, the end of the road. (Klee, 1973)

Figure 2.9, and the series of drawings shown in figure 2.10, are all drawings made from life, outside in a variety of locations on *Crossing England* walks, during the first two years of this

research. To draw from life is to create illusion; to take a three-dimensional vista, and map it onto a two dimensional plane. A technique taught to ensure accurate proportion is to select a series of points (the top of the steeple, the end of the telegraph pole, edge of a patch of shade) and plot them on the page as a series of relational points; tiny, lightly drawn crosses which can be adjusted as the drawing builds up. When the artist is sure that the tiny crosses are accurately marked, they are joined with appropriate lines.

During a symposium on drawing that I attended in 2014, Iain Biggs suggested that when we refer to drawing we should re-examine the word, and return to its meaning as a movement, a flow, or connecting impulse: ‘an inclusive verb that always awaits a further dynamic; as indicating a relational cutting across of discrete categories – as transversal’ (2014). This is a way of thinking about drawing that I immediately recognised in my own practice, in particular when I am drawing outside; drawing what I see, from life. In some respects, I use this kind of drawing in a similar way to sensitised walking; as a tool to get under the skin of a place, get to know it better, go deeper, further in. Both walking and drawing provoke corporeal encounter with place; if walking is an embodied ‘moving through’, then drawing is an embodied ‘staying with’. This is not to suggest that drawing is a static, or inert process; far from it, for the practice of drawing is to enter a durational relationship with a subject, it is, in this sense, performative. Biggs suggests that the drawing process can help us to change our relationship with the world, bringing us to an understanding of it as alive; ‘to engage in drawing as a verb from an animist perspective is to place oneself in a dynamic relationship’ (Biggs, 2014: online).

By staying with a place and closely attending, we encounter its motion, and while we draw we engage in an intense study of this movement. As well as the obvious benefit of producing



drawings, the process of drawing can, like sensitised walking, help to bring about a deeper engagement with place. This is brought about by the intense periods of looking that drawing requires, combined with embodied, empathetic response to the subject-matter; a mirroring, or at least a relaying, which is brought about by the physical gestures of mark-making. The landscape is in constant flux; light shifts, objects move, temperatures change. Suzi Gablik describes a heightened awareness brought about by prolonged periods of observing and moving in response to a changing subject: 'Drawing becomes a process, fluid energy patterns evolving over time. You don't control the subject - it's more like a dance than a product, more like a living activity' (1991: 89). Time drops away, and for a while there unfolds a union between the drawn subject, the eye, the hand and the paper.

Norma Bryson writes:

The drawn line in a sense always exists of the present tense, in a time of its own unfolding, the ongoing time of a present that constantly presses forward...the drawn line presents Becoming. Line gives you the image together with the whole history of its becoming-image. (Bryson, 2003: 150)

When drawing outside, engagement with place is not just visual, but can stir up all the senses; for example, the time I suddenly realised that I had been sitting on an ants' nest while making a drawing. On another drawing I have written: 'Hemmerdon from Harford Moor, unfinished. Horse flies: two bites'. Drawing can be standing in a snowy field with numb fingers and toes, as dogs snap around your ankles. Drawing outside can be a struggle against the rain that washes the drawing away, turning page to pulp, a battle with the wind that flaps and billows the paper, or a race against the dying light. Drawing builds a relationship with a subject; the eye studies form, the hand repeats it. Afferent and empathetic connections are formed in the ongoing now.



Figure 2.9: *Field* (2014). Graphite and pen on paper.



Figure 2.10: *Field Drawings* (2014 -15). Graphite and gouache on cotton rag paper.



Figure 2.10 (continued).



## **Drawing Inside**

We now move inside, to contemplate some different ways of drawing. In my studio I practice a very different kind of drawing (see figure 2.11). This is drawing not made in response to what I see, but rather what I remember, a form of ‘automatic’ mark-making which involves a ‘drawing out’ of embodied memory onto the paper. Biggs suggests a similar approach: ‘I see drawing (the process) as a performative, temporal art in itself, rather than as subordinate to producing a “finished” work of art’ (2014: online). My studio drawings are made through a re-membering of walking; their arrangement is informed by the re-living, or reviving of these events. Phil Smith’s advice is to ‘follow instincts, not maps’ (2014a: 53); I suggest additionally and retrospectively mapping the instincts after a walk.

Tim Ingold states that ‘drawing is not the visible shadow of the mental event; *it is a process of thinking, not the projection of thought*’ (Ingold, 2013: 182). He describes how the ‘hand that tells is also one that feels and draws’ (2013: 125), asking us to note that the word ‘tell’ has two subtly different meanings; it means both to ‘find out’, and ‘to communicate’ (2013: 109-110). Drawing in this way helped me to identify some of the tropes and themes from the repeated patterns in the landscape. I drew maps of the walks, and some of these mapped meandering lines, fields and spaces also re-emerged in later paintings. Some of my studio drawings had notes, or accompanying text. These drawings were made very quickly; I would spend a day making maybe twenty drawings and then not work in this way for a while. Always referring to my walks, the subject matter of these drawings was varied but would often refer to repetition; the pattern of repeated gateposts, marks made to the rhythm of footstep, heartbeat and breath, or a recurring view, such as curling hedges either side of the track ahead, or a green hill on the horizon.



Figure 2.11: *Studio Drawings* (2014). Pen, graphite and Tipp-Ex on cotton rag paper. These drawing combine the vertical gaze with the 'view from above'.

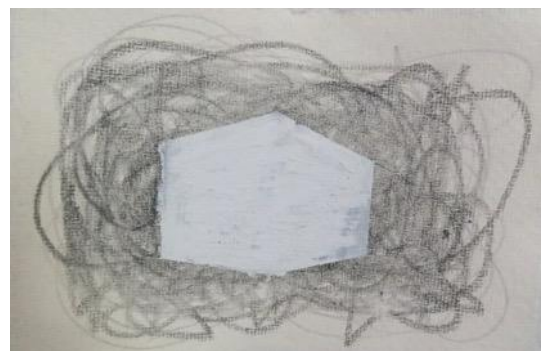
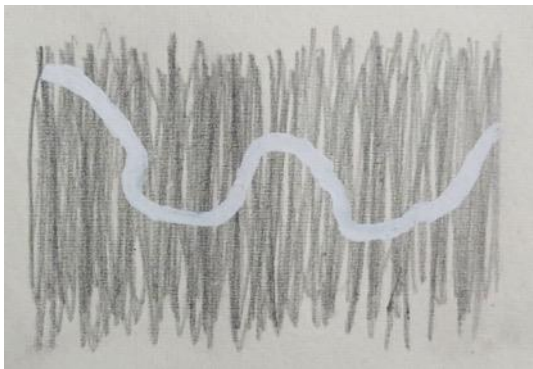
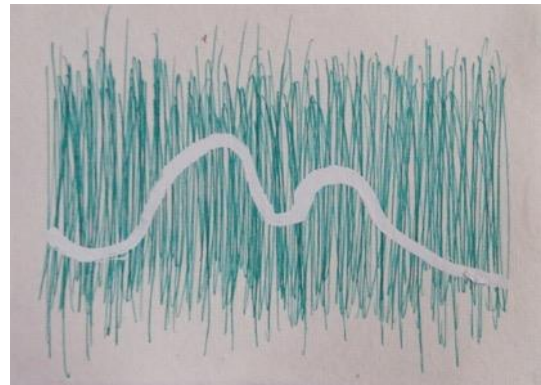
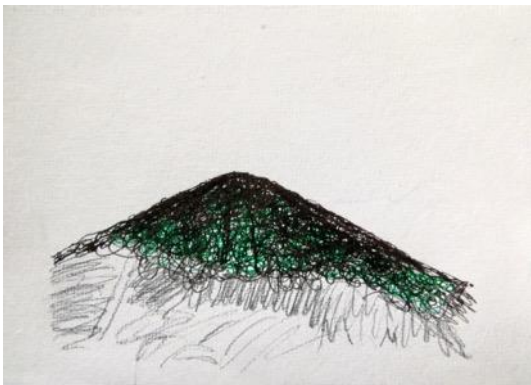
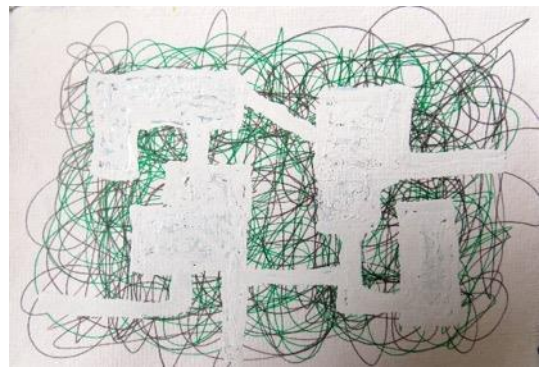
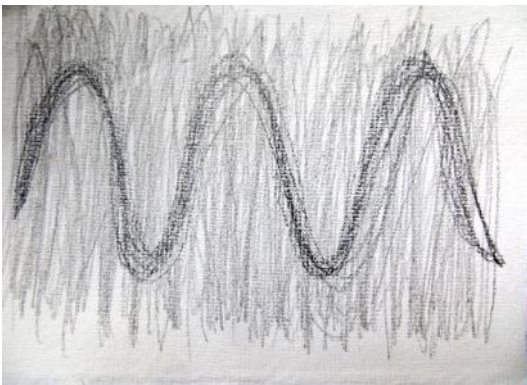
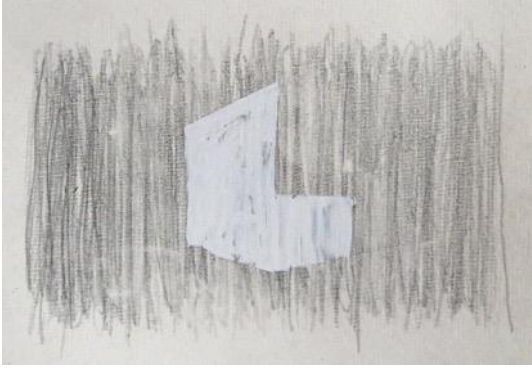




Figure 2.11 (cont)



Sometimes I kept the drawings tacked to a wall for a while in the studio. At other times the drawings were put straight into a box, but the process of quickly giving form to an idea/image/idea/pattern/motif was enough for it to re-emerge in later work. The extensive range of subject matter explored (objects, vistas, schemes and signs) could be initially baffling, but the process was a way to unravel the seething mass of information accumulated through the senses when walking. Biggs describes his own, similar process as a ‘polyvocal drawing that helps me explore ideas – often about landscape or landscape related issues – through combining different media and/or categories of sign...’ (2014: online).

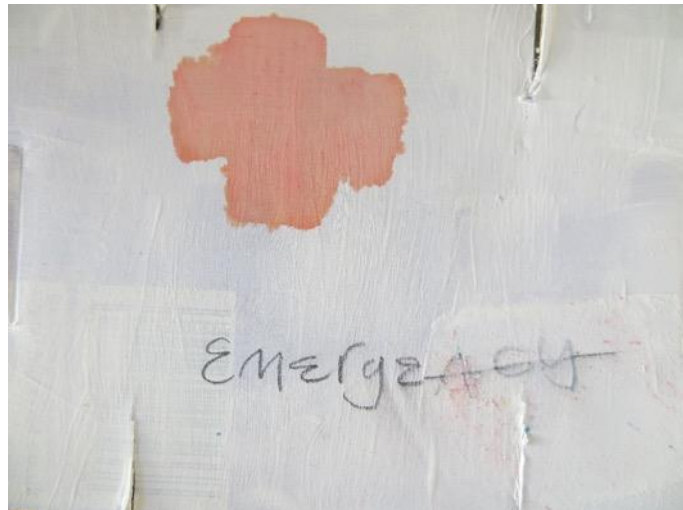


Figure 2.12: Image or idea emerging through the drawing process.

Occasionally, working on found packaging, I would have a pot of white paint to help me to develop ideas that arose through drawing (see figure 2.12 & 2.13). This kind of drawing also engages with writing, or rather, an exploration of words, their sources, and their associations I found myself exploring my own neurolinguistic associations and thinking processes; words and images appear, disappear, then reappear, or morph into other words and images. This is a performative process. The drawings are made as traces of embodied response to an unfolding



thinking progression. Noting, painting out and drawing back in, addition and subtraction. Palimpsests accrete in these drawings that help me to trace how the ideas developed.

When I look at the paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat, I often think that this must be how his process worked. Despite the painting and canvas, I see his works as drawings; with his lists and maps of changing cultural, historical and personal references, a process of ‘figuring out’ is evident. Adrian Muoio agrees, recommending that to truly appreciate Basquiat’s work we need to view it through a ‘critical, receptive lens rather than one obscured either by conjecture of the artist’s intention or emphasis on his celebrity’ (2014: 1). This demands engagement with the work, rather than stories about the work or about the artist. When we do this, we find that a Basquiat painting demonstrates ‘multiple phases’ of duration within its layers (2014: 14). ‘Each painting’, says Muoio, ‘stands as a kind of self-portrait - or more precisely as the act of self-portraiture, constantly in a dynamic state of becoming and never fixed’ (2014: 7). Muoio equates this way of working with Debord’s *dérive*, ‘a drift from one lived experience to the next’ (2014: 38). He also sees Debord’s *détournement* as an active force within Basquiat’s work; ‘appropriating images, words, and ideas from culture and using them in such a way that alters or abandons their meaning’ (2014: 37). The unfolding moment is displayed through repetition, as well as series of crossings out and adjustments: ‘the initial form (that is, the form that exists prior to being reworked) is literally *deformed* – in that its original form recedes – and is *reformed*’ (2014: 28), so that, ‘the sensation of the work takes on a temporal quality’ (2014: 16). What results is a fluid and emergent experience for the viewer; progression of thought as it unfolds, is mapped and rendered visible as a multiplicity of co-existence. In short, Basquiat’s work is diagrammatic in the Deleuzian sense (Muoio, 201: 28).

Simon O’Sullivan, drawing from Deleuze, suggests that ‘diagramming concepts might allow for the forcing of encounters and conjunctions and the production of surprising compatibilities’ (2016 a: 17). In their varying forms, the drawings I make in the studio are also ways of attempting to figure and map subjective and intersubjective flows and processes; they, too, are diagrammatic. Arguably, the process of drawing is but a first step of rendering tangible, of giving form, within a greater scheme of diagrammatics that can be applied to all the work I have made for this project. Consequently, I return to explore the notion of the diagram in greater depth, in Chapter Seven of this thesis.



Figure 2.13: ‘Animals of the mind’ emerge during the process of drawing in the studio, a figurative approach subsequently rejected. White gouache and pen on black paper.

### **Walking as Drawing**

When we consider the traces of the human journey across the landscape so elegantly and simply exposed by Richard Long in *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) we begin to comprehend how walking can be considered to be a form of drawing. Silvery lines on the green grass were made by my own footsteps through playing fields and pastures. White chalk tracks were eroded by cumulative travellers along ridgeways from Cambridge to Wiltshire, and similarly, feet and hooves etched out the long, red, winding lines of the paths of Devon. Points on the

landscape, once only accessed by car, became connected through the multiple lines I drew between them by walking; ‘figuring out’ on a grand scale.

The notion of walking as drawing can be expanded; as I walked, connections were drawn between place-names and the people, animals and plants and even the earth and stone that had once belonged to, or moved through, these places. I came to compare the process of plotting relational points to be connected by the drawn line on a page, with activities that marked the places I visited connected by the walked line, such as lighting candles in a church, placing a pebble on a gate-post, or tying a scrap of cloth to a tree.

Figure 2.14 shows a group of artists walking in a meandering line, during a workshop that I facilitated for a postgraduate conference on Dartmoor in 2017. Figure 2.15 shows a ‘drawing’, created in response to this meandering walk, by a satellite application on the phone of artist, and participant Rob Irving. There is a connection, a line of flight as Deleuze and Guattari would describe it, between walking and drawing: This is to explore Drawing in its most expanded sense; a process that involves,

attending to our being drawn into the matter of the world, placed by all the forces at play there; drawn out of ourselves into new meanings or as a resource in larger assemblages; drawn together into new constellations, despite and with our differences; or drawn into otherness as a result of following threads of intuition, argument, analysis, and so on. And all these events should, in turn, inform our expanded acts of drawing. (Biggs, 2014: online)

Walking drew me to understandings of how the sites, games and stories of my childhood still reverberate through my understanding of the world, as an adult and as an artist. Walking helped me draw together time and space; the line of an embodied journey through a material landscape intersecting and interweaving with the journey of my own remembered life.



Figure 2.14: 'Joining the dots: diagrammatics on Dartmoor (walking as drawing as storytelling)'. Workshop led by Helen Billingham, Performance, Experience, Presence postgraduate conference, Harford, Devon, 2017. Photograph by Rob Irving. Reproduced with the permission of Rob Irving.

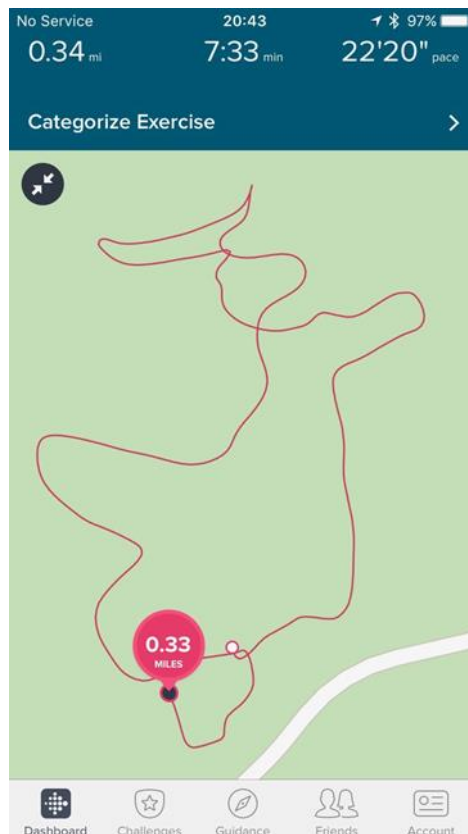


Figure 2.14: Satellite image of walk during workshop led by Helen Billingham, at P.E.P. postgraduate conference, Harford, Devon, 2017. Image courtesy of Rob Irving. Reproduced with permission of Rob Irving.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored ways that materials, images and narratives, gathered while moving through the world, can be re-assembled in the studio to inform the activity of making. I have shown how the process of collection while walking the landscape can subsequently stimulate recollection in the studio, giving access to an ecology of ideas to drive creative pursuit. I have discussed how ideas are informed and sustained by the effects of materials and the subjective narratives that they provoke for the practitioner.

I have demonstrated how different kinds of drawing can be employed to relay the experience of spatial orientation and walking over the land, to studio processes such as drawing and painting. I have discussed how making connections or ‘joining the dots’, following lines of thought or threads of intuition, are activities that can be thought of as expanded forms of drawing. Consequently, I have explored how as such these expanded forms of drawing have potential to be transferred and harnessed to drive activities of making within the studio.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **MAPPING THE DYNAMICS OF STUDIO SPACE**

This chapter examines the corporeal, material and psychological fluxes and flows of the operational processes within the maker's studio. Through scrutinising my own experience of different studios, and those of other practitioners, I examine how the art studio operates as a space to 'perform' making. By critical examination of studio activity through the lens of Performance Studies, taking particular account of movement of a practitioner's body within this space, I unpack the relationship between a range of studio models and the work that is made within them. Within this context, I refer to the processes of a range of artists that include William Kentridge, Mark Rothko, Bruce Nauman, Walter de Maria, Louise Bourgeois and Phillip Guston. I explore how the rhythms of fabrication are related to the state of 'Flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1992), and discuss my own experience to study the practical logistics of working in a studio that is also a domestic space. I argue for regular periods of privacy in the studio, while underlining how important it is that this space operates as an open system, with flows that come in, and flows that go out.

### **3.1 THE SPACE OF THE STUDIO**

#### **Different studios, different work**

Every time I've moved, my work has changed radically. (Rauschenberg, 2010: online)

It was very strange to be cast into a space where I couldn't make a mess. I was used to working in a studio littered with materials. I was so terrified of spilling something that it was months before I allowed myself even to open a bottle of ink. Mapping Dartington Blog , 2014.

Much as I would like to believe that I am in sole charge of the direction and content of the art I make, when I examine my processes retrospectively I have to admit that the space in which the work is made influences and sets parameters for the work on every occasion. I am still learning the (sometimes painful) lesson that the work I make will always be a negotiation or compromise between my own desires and impulses, the materials employed, and the space of the studio itself.



Figure 3.1 Studio at High Cross House, Dartington (2013-4).

In 2013 I left an enormous studio (an old van warehouse where I could make enormous paintings and a lot of mess), to take up studio residence as an artist at High Cross House; a

listed, modernist house in the grounds of the Dartington Estate. My new studio at High Cross House (see figure 3.1) was sophisticated and civilised; more like a professor's study than a painter's studio, with vintage 1930's chairs, a leather-topped desk, and thick, blue woollen carpets. The window looked out over an English garden with a small apple tree, framed by tall sweet chestnut trees. This idyllic setting, however, was to throw up a succession of challenges. I wrote in my journal at shortly after I had left High Cross:

As well as finding myself in a studio in which I could not paint, there were other disruptions to my established practice; the urban environment (peeling paint, obscene graffiti, weeds growing in the cracks), that had previously so informed my painting practice, was no longer outside my door. I was now surrounded by fields, hedges and woods, the River Dart, and a complexity of wild and domestic animals, plants and insects.

Mapping Dartington Blog, 2013.

Another challenge at High Cross was the 'open studio' policy; a steady stream of National Trust visitors trooped daily through my studio. I was a spectacle, to be gazed upon. I felt exposed. I felt inhibited, scared to experiment, worried about failing in public. In my smart studio, because of my new audience, I found it hard to begin making. When I did start, I couldn't tell what I thought about the work I had made. The unsolicited presence of other people somehow interrupted my ability to critique my own work. I wrote in my *Mapping Dartington* blog about some paintings I had made there:

They absolutely reeked of turpentine while they were drying, so I hid them in the pear-wood cupboards of the studio to dry, like a guilty secret.

Mapping Dartington Blog, 2014.

In retrospect, I hid the paintings furtively in the cupboard because I could not tell if they were any good, or even if they were finished. It was not until months after I left that studio that I was able to tell what I really thought of the High Cross paintings.



The lack of privacy in the studio interfered with my own critical processes. Jenny Sjöholm sees the contemporary studio as ‘an imagination and knowledge chamber where artists engage in practice based on privacy or reclusion...’ (2013: 4), suggesting that solitude plays an important part in sharpening the critical faculties of the artist. The stream of visitors and cleanness of the High Cross space meant that in some respects the space functioned as a gallery rather than a studio. So I went out, into the estate, and walked and walked. As winter drew on, there were fewer visitors, and I found it much easier to make work in my studio. I also found that I had material to develop, informed by the mass of information I had gathered during my walks around the Dartington Estate. Jenny Sjöholm writes:

Experimentation and creativity in the studio is seen to rely on a productive and ambiguous tension based on the knowledge practices of contemplation and elaboration, critical thinking and bodily engagement, instruction and improvisation: the studio is a personal laboratory. (Sjöholm, 2013: 2)

I did have some success in High Cross; I was watching falling leaves through the window of my studio, when I saw a rabbit run across the garden and through the hedge. On a whim, I borrowed a rake, and marked out the rabbit’s trajectory across the lawn with the freshly fallen leaves. The process became a performance; while applauded from the windows and the roof of High Cross House by staff and visitors, I raked for over an hour. The sweeping curve of orange leaves looked striking on the green lawn as I photographed it from my studio window. At the time, I thought of it as a temporary and rather whimsical piece of work that would soon blow away. However, the following night there was heavy rain but no wind; the soaking leaves adhered to the grass, and there they stayed for months. The visitors loved it. As it was visible from the roof and a great many windows of the house, it encouraged them out into the garden; to trample in the leaves, pick apples off the tree and pick up chestnuts. I photographed ‘Rabbit Run’ (see figure 3.2) over a period of months from the roof of the

building; charting, incidentally, the changes in the garden brought by the progression of winter. Consequently, a piece of work about space became a piece of work about space and time.



Figure 3.2 *Rabbit Run* (2013) Raked leaves on grass, photographed from studio window, High Cross House.

I took this experience to be a lesson in adaptability; by attending to, and working with the space of this studio, I had inadvertently made work that was appropriate to that particular space; a ‘painting’ outside that could be viewed from inside. After I left High Cross, I used the material I had produced (digital films, photographs, animations, and photographs of drawings and paintings) to create a blog about my time there: *Mapping Dartington* (2013) and this can be viewed here: <http://helenbillinghamhurstresidencies.blogspot.co.uk>.

### **An error of scheduling**

A state of ‘necessary stupidity’ (Kentridge, 2012), at the beginning of the studio phase of my *Crossing England* project was compounded by what appeared at the time to be an error of scheduling, for I started to paint in my studio during the same week that I began to write the first chapter of this thesis: ‘Walking’. For a month I was in partial-paralysis, locked in a chicken/egg scenario; what - out of all the complex detail I had gathered while walking - should I write about, when I did not know the work I would make? And how could I begin to make work when confronted with the complexity of the material? Happily, this uncomfortable impasse eventually shifted into a more productive scheme, with the writing informing the making, and the making informing the writing. Writing about my own ‘lexicon’ unveiled the mechanics of a previously shrouded system of working, and helped me to select materials, threads, themes and motifs to drive the studio process.

### **Studio as insanity**

I chose to move my art-making practice to my house (see figure 3.3) in 2014 for a variety of reasons, all of them practical. It is a warm room that I could work in at odd times of the day and night and still be available (albeit in a preoccupied and neglectful way) to my family.

When I told my son that I was going to start working in the house, his face fell; he had seen the chaotic state of some of my previous studios, so I should not have been surprised. I felt very guilty. Feminist writer Andrea Liss reminds us how the contemporary female artist struggles to abandon the myth of the all-sacrificing mother. She writes, ‘She still loves, forgives and sacrifices for her child(ren), but not at the expense of losing herself’ (Liss, 2009: xvii). I resolved to be organised and disciplined; that the chaos of the studio would be contained and never allowed to contaminate the rest of the house. For I knew that while it may be important that the studio is a place of solitude that allows the artist to work in privacy, I also knew that this is scenario is not without its dangers. Family life, I felt at that time, must, at all costs, be protected from the insanity of the studio.

James Elkins (1999) understands this perspective; in a chapter of his book *What painting is* (1999) entitled ‘The Psychosis of the Studio’, he describes a corrupting and neurotic space. Elkins writes: ‘Working in a studio means leaving the clean world of normal life and moving into a shadowy domain where everything bears the marks of the singular obsession’ (Elkins, 1999: 149). For Elkins the activity of painting is ‘at home in depression, uncertainty and melancholy, and the pathos of solitary labor and wasted time’ (1999: 155). Contemporary painter Katy Moran agrees, she says,

I often feel quite disillusioned when I am painting. I feel like it is worthless, pointless, especially if I spend the whole day painting and then I am left with this mess on the canvas. I just think, that was a complete waste of time! (quoted in Blazwick, 2012: 160).

Elkins warns of the potential irreversibility of such introversion: ‘Solipsism and self-indulgence are always close at hand, and once the cat is out of the box it is hard to put back’ (1999: 155). For Elkins this is a creeping malaise that affects both artist and their environment: ‘paint is like a rash’ (1999: 48), he declares, and describes, with a mixture of

horror and glee, how the painter's life, hands, clothes, shoes and eventually their home is inevitably contaminated by their own materials. He describes the various strategies of hapless artists to combat the contagion: 'some artists keep fighting it'... others become 'funny mottled creatures' (1999:148), flecked by their own paint. Finally, says Elkins, the contagion is complete: 'The last object to be stained is often the living room couch, the one place where it is possible to relax in comfort and forget the studio' (1999: 148).

Iwona Blazwick also views the studio as a space of neurosis; 'a space in which to see what boredom can unleash' (2012: 19). Blazwick sees the studio as a kind of sealed vacuum that draws a range of symptoms out of the artist. She understands creative activity as emerging out of a state of stasis, or ennui, in which there is 'a hyperawareness of time, slowed to the state of weariness'. This is not the 'boredom of the alienated worker' (2012:19), but one that is deliberately induced by the artist:

It is rather the absence of activity that sets the stage for a range of mental symptoms which might include a heightened awareness of the body and its ailments, the emergence of repressed anxieties and erotic fantasies, and the sudden apprehension of the absurd'. (Blazwick, 2012: 19)

### **Studio as a frame, or closed system**

Brian O'Doherty (2007) describes how the 'closed aesthetic systems of late modernism' drew the artist into a 'self-referential circulation' (2007: 6) between artist, studio, and gallery, and effectively eliminated the 'outside world' from the equation. O'Doherty traces the origins of such self-referential looping back to Jan van Eyck's *Arnolfini Wedding* (1434), and tracks a subsequent trajectory: *Velásquez's Las Meninas* (1656), Vermeer's *The Art of Painting*

(1666–73) (commonly referred to as *The Artist in His Studio*), to Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* (1855). O'Doherty argues that this trajectory, combined with the rise of the 'white cube' gallery in the late twentieth century, resulted in a 'displacement of attention in late modernism from the artwork to the artist' (2007: 7). Here we see a model of a system in which the only outside influence on studio and artist is that of the gallery, with the celebrity of the artist and monetary value as its motor.

Similarly, Morgan Thomas views the modernist studio as a closed world, 'a frame, a division of the world from outside' (2009: 7). Thomas describes how Rothko's studio process, like others from the New York school of painting in the latter half of the twentieth century, involved a 'turning away from the world' (2009: 28). Thomas evokes the image of Rothko's suicide - bleeding to death in the enclosure of his studio - and aligns this image with the framing and staining of Rothko's most celebrated paintings. He uses these integrated images to argue that the painting emerging from modernist studios during the latter half of the twentieth century was locked into annihilatingly 'inward forms of signification' (2009: 28) representing a 'pathology of the modern' (2009: 28); a pathology which Thomas suggests is tied to 'that of framing' (2009: 28).

Painter Michael Simpson says:

You suddenly find yourself in a room, on your own, and it's essentially hermetic, this activity, you're suddenly involved in nothing more than a monologue with yourself, and it's dangerous, and it's really, really difficult. (Simpson, 2016: online)

## **Rhythm**

Sooner or later, an artist will have to confront the frightening realisation that just having a studio is not enough; the artist has to be in it, and they have to perform. This predicament was explored in depth, and with ironic humour, by artist Bruce Nauman. *Failing to Levitate in the Studio* (1966) is a black and white double exposed photograph. The first exposure shows Nauman in his studio literally attempting to levitate; his head and feet supported by two chairs, his body unsupported but rigid in-between. The second exposure, overlaid on the first image, is the failure; Naumann's head remains on its chair, but the rest of his body is slumped on to the floor. The image is ridiculous; Nauman has quite literally attempted, and failed, to levitate within his studio. Yet I read this work as having expanded meaning that addresses failure within the studio more generally. 'Failing to levitate' is a play on words, referring to the creative project that does not 'take off' or live up to lofty aspirations. By choosing to frame this 'failure', Nauman creates a witty paradox; the 'failure' becomes a successful artwork. It is a neat trick.

In a subsequent series of films shot in his studio, Nauman interrogates (and inverts) 'failure' through intensive study of apparently meaningless and often repetitive activities. *Walking in an Exaggerated Manner around the Perimeter of a Square* (1967-8), *Bouncing two Balls between the Floor and Ceiling with changing rhythms* (1967-8), *Wall-Floor positions* (1968), *Manipulating a Fluorescent Tube* (1969) – the list of works in this mode is extensive – all show Nauman in his studio engaged in apparently pointless pursuits. Asked about the motivation to make this work, Nauman explains that after leaving art school he had hired a studio, but ceased to paint or draw because he could no longer see any point in these activities. 'That left me alone in the studio', he says, 'this, in turn, raised the fundamental question of what an artist does when left alone in the studio' (1979: online). Nauman's

conclusion was that if he was an artist, and he was in the studio, then whatever it was he was doing in the studio must be art, ‘and what I was in fact doing was drinking coffee and pacing the floor’, he admits (1979: online). Nauman made these films as a way to structure these activities into ‘being art, or some kind of cohesive unit that could be made available to people’ (1979: online). It was at this point that he came to think about art as ‘more of an activity and less of a product’ (1979: online). Nauman appears to have taken the tasks he set himself seriously; ‘when I did the things, they made me tired and I felt good when I finished, but they were not relaxing; they took a lot of energy and concentration and paying attention...’ (quoted in Lang: 2005).

Christie Lang sees Nauman’s studio exploration as part of a movement in the 1960s towards ‘a radical rethinking of the art object’ (2005), in which emphasis shifted away from the static artwork to an artwork that engaged more directly with the viewer. Another artist, Walter de Maria, explored comparable themes to Nauman in *Boxes for Meaningless Work* (1961). The work is constructed simply of two wooden boxes which on is inscribed:

Boxes for Meaningless Work. Transfer things from one box to the next box, back and forth, back and forth, etc. Be aware that what you are doing is meaningless.

Like Nauman, de Maria has framed a state of being in the studio that I suspect most artists will recognise, if they are honest. Artists spend a great deal of time and energy organising their lives so that they have a space to work in, and setting time aside in which to work in this space, and so it is unsettling when, having reached this moment, they find themselves asking, ‘why am I doing this?’ and ‘what *am* I doing?’. Like Nauman’s studio pieces, *Boxes for Meaningless Work* (1961) frames the embodied rhythms that emerge at such moments. Lang writes:



The noise becomes a rhythm as the user shuttles the item from one box to the other, over and over again, knowing that the process will serve no purpose other than to exhaust the person performing it. He will eventually have to stop, and therefore fail to complete his task. (2005: online)

Failure to begin to work within the studio can provoke a great deal of physical activity; drumming the fingers, sighing, puffing, and pacing about are some examples. When I do settle in to some work I usually start with practical tasks such as sanding, scraping, sawing, or even sweeping the floor; again, rhythmic activities that help me to get into the right frame of mind to make something. And then, a sudden impulse: one moment I have no idea what I want to do, and the next I am doing it. It is this gateway between not doing and doing, not knowing and knowing that I will explore next.

William Kentridge who does paint and draw, reassures us by suggesting that rhythmic activities are part of a prelude to the act of making. He suggests that ‘the construction of meaning... is a product of the activity, the physical activities that happen in the studio’ (2012: online). He sees the studio as:

A protected space where one can not know how the different fragments add up, what is the meaning of different elements. It’s a place for reconsidering old formulations and rediscovering new ways of understanding. It’s a place where one can entertain two contradictions: when two contradictory impulses, understandings and ways of seeing the world rest together and find an accommodation in the space. (Kentridge, 2012)

Kentridge refers to: ‘a necessary stupidity’, which is ‘about making a space for uncertainty, for giving an impulse, an object, a material the benefit of the doubt’ (2012). Biggs similarly describes ‘an informed “playing around” that aims to keep different elements “talking” to each other, rather than to arrive at an aesthetic solution’ (Biggs, 2013: online). Kentridge advocates ‘following the impulse, the stupid feeling, without a destination’ (note here

similarities to Debord's walking *derive*). There is a necessary and deliberate 'suppression of evaluation' which allows 'ridiculous things...to take their time' (2012).

Kentridge interrogates his own processes within the studio by using a camera to record himself at work, and by scrutinising the footage to analyse his own behaviour. He concludes that pacing the studio is a good thing; walking away from an image enables him to 'step outside' of himself as an artist, and to take on another role; that of the critic. Physical space and time is opened up between these two modes of operating. 'The walk is part of the structure of the making of the drawing', he declares (2012).

When I am painting I also, repeatedly walk away from my work 'to see it', then back to the easel to paint. When teaching, I frequently ask my students to 'step away' from their work so that they may see better what they are doing. Kentridge describes how he came to realise that time spent 'circling the studio' - time that he had previously considered to be periods of 'procrastination, of avoiding the issue' (2012: online) - were actually a necessary part of the process. 'Now I understand', he says, 'that it is always a productive procrastination' (2012: online).

So we may ask, why the rhythmic pacing about, humming, drumming, fidgeting and finger tapping? What is happening with this 'meaningless' movement which can displace or divide one's sense of self, and appears to both defer and to prepare us for the serious business of making work? How does it figure as part of a necessary ritual that helps us to find a way to begin to work?

## **Flow**

One answer may be found by examining the flow state experienced when the artist begins, and succeeds, to work. This term was first used by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmialyi, who defines flow as the common optimal state for all kinds of creative, training and performance activities. Flow is identified as a state which is unimpeded by self-consciousness, ‘in flow there is no room for self-scrutiny’ (1992: 64). When in flow, a practitioner is in total control, and completely absorbed by their activity. Time is experienced differently. Csikszentmialyi writes:

The orderly progression of the clocks is rendered irrelevant by the rhythms of the activity. Often hours seem to pass by in minutes; in general people report that time seems to pass much faster. (Csikszentmialyi, 1992: 66)

According to Csikszentmialyi, a defining attribute of the flow state is that it is accompanied by a heightened awareness, a sense of extreme well-being, or ecstasy. Practitioners often report that they feel transformed, and that it was a meaningful experience. He says:

‘Afterwards, when the activity is over and self-consciousness has a chance to resume, the self that the person reflects upon is not the same self that existed before the flow experience’ (1992: 66).

Musician Andrew Lawrence-King argues that flow is actually a state of light trance, and suggests that an examination of flow from this perspective could offer insights to help practitioners improve their performance. He writes,

The idea I’m putting forward here, that Flow might simply be a phenomenon of Self-Hypnosis, seems to be a new contribution to the field. The implication is that

techniques for entering Flow would resemble hypnotic inductions. (Lawrence-King, n.d: online.)

Lawrence-King's suggestion may offer us a key to what is happening in the artist's studio?

Are these apparently meaningless, spontaneous rhythmic and pacing activities in fact helping the artist to bring about a state of light trance which is conducive to work?

Csikszentmihalyi (1992) tells us that practitioners of all kinds report flow as an ecstatic experience. The Oxford dictionary tells us that the word 'ecstasy' means 'to stand outside oneself', of Greek origin, and deriving from two words *ek*, meaning 'out' + *histanai*, meaning 'to place'. With this in mind, let us consider once more the notion of the artist pacing back and forth within the studio to separate the practicing, performing self from the observing critical self. The other rhythmic actions may also be explained in this way. Mircea Eliade has written on 'archaic techniques of ecstasy' in his extensive study of shamanism (1989). His book is full of accounts of rhythmic activities that are used to induce trance, which include: drumming (168-176), dancing (175) humming, shaking rattles (177) and bells (91), and tapping sticks (1989: 178). Eliade describes a shamanic "going out of the self" that very often found expression in an ecstatic experience' (1989: 459). Anna Fenemore states that 'the ecstatic body does not only perceive, it modulates the senses of the body by simultaneously fore-grounding and filtering the stimuli surrounding it' (2011: 26).

I am not trying to infer that every painter procrastinating in their studio is a shaman, but I am trying to draw attention to technical similarities that may be worth exploring for practitioners that wish to understand the optimal conditions in which to make work. Louise Bourgeois, for example, is shown in the documentary, *No Trespassing* (Finch, 1994: online), using a metronome to find a rhythm to work to in her studio. The rhythm is variable, according to

time of day, and her physical energetic state; faster in the morning, slower towards the end of the day. 'It allows me some self- knowledge', says Bourgeois.

Tim Ingold suggests:

...the process of making is not so much an *assembly* as a *procession*, not a building up but a carrying *on* - a passage along a path in which every step grows from the one before on an itinerary that always overshoots its destinations. (2013: 45, emphasis in original)

And he adds:

This is not the *iteration* of steps but an *itineration*: making is a journey, the maker a journeyman. And the essential characteristic of his activity is not that it is concatenated but that it *flows*. (2013: 45, emphasis in original)

In my own studio, I start with an intention, but - like my walking process - the direction a painting takes once I have started to work is really out of my hands. The intention operates as starting point, but when in flow I do not work by design, but instead as a response to whatever is happening in front of me with the materials. At this point there is no walking away to see what I have done, I am not playing the critic; I am doing, not thinking about doing. Painter Philip Guston recognises this state:

The worst thing in the world is to make judgments. What I always try to do is to eliminate, as much as possible, the time span between thinking and doing. The ideal is to think and to do at the same second, the same split second. (Guston, 2012)

I frequently only 'understand' a painting I have made in retrospect: Kentridge suggests that 'meaning is a product of the physical activity within the studio' (2012). There are occasions when I look at a piece of work I have not seen for a while, I will see new things and think how clever I am, even though I know when I made it I felt as though I was completely in the dark as to what I was trying to do. Philip Guston explains:

I come into the studio very fearfully, I creep in to see what happened the night before. And the feeling is one of, 'My God, did I do that? That is about the only measure I have. (2009: online)

One day in autumn I finished a long engagement with a particular painting. Throughout that session, my mind had been full of the walks I had been making during the previous year. However, as I laid down my paintbrush, I looked out of the window, and was immediately struck by the colours I saw in the garden; unconsciously, I had chosen the very same palette for that painting! The precise blue of the gate, the exact red of the brick wall, the same green hues of the leaves outside; and that delicate dusky pink was precisely the same as the single, late rose bloom nodding by the washing-line. I was stunned by this realisation, and also perturbed; despite my conscious intentions to make work about event(s) past, the 'now' had infiltrated my actions. Elkins writes, 'what matters in painting is the necessity of self-reference, its forbidden nature, and the many strange marks it leaves on the work' (1999: 156). To this day, when I look at that painting, I 'read' my journey across England, but also that moment in September that I looked through the studio window and into my garden.



Figure 3.3: 'Home' studio, Plymouth, in 2016

### **Studio as Crossing: fluxes and cycles of art making and domesticity**

My studio is officially one of two rooms which, like so many Victorian terraced houses, can be closed off from each other by means of large screen doors (see figure 3.3). Surprisingly, and contrary to my initial intentions, I very rarely close those doors. This is due to a number of reasons: closing the doors restricts light from the southern window to the north-facing sitting room. Sometimes I want to work at a table rather than an easel, and the table is in the sitting room end of the space. Another reason to keep the doors open is that I can get a fresh perspective on a piece of work by placing it at one end of the space and standing at the other to look at it.

Brian O'Doherty suggests, 'we can "read" studios as texts that are as revelatory in their way as artworks themselves' (O'Doherty, 2007: 7). Jenny Sjöholm (2013) agrees with him:

Studio milieus are observational assets in building an understanding of the history and practice of artists' art projects. The objects, and the stories around them, help to situate, contextualize artists' knowledge practice as well as they allow multiple readings and stories to be constructed from them. (Sjöholm, 2013: 12)

The 'two rooms, one space' approach has led to a tidal flux between studio and living room. An ebb and flow between the flotsam of artistic practice and domesticity, perpetually propelled back and forth by the daily demands on the space. A strand line appears on the table between the two zones. Interesting jetsam – jam jars and paintbrushes, a pot of mustard, ketchup, stray forks, type-written notes, pencils, rubbers and tubes of oil paint – have to be regularly sifted and sorted before mealtimes. Sometimes it is a gentle rhythm, but at other times tsunamis of wet washing invade the studio zone, followed by a backwash of paintings that flood across the living room floor. It is a hybrid space, what Jane Bennett would refer to as a 'crossing' (2001: 31): an amalgam, an assembled zone with the power to enchant. A pile of folded washing reminds me that I want to make a folded painting, or that paintings do not have to be hung on the wall, but can be stacked in flat piles. The domestic demands of the space mean that the artworks are regularly edited, a process that happened far less often in my other studios, and has turned out to be a useful exercise in 'seeing the wood for the trees'. Unexpectedly, domestic rhythms have infiltrated and enlivened the processes of the studio.

### **The Pulsing Studio**

Sjöholm describes the studio as 'a space of material engagement and enchantment', she sees it as a place where artists, 'persistently practice their craft until practical knowledge becomes embodied skill and the physical act of making becomes second-nature' (2013: 2).

Sjöholm maintains that 'artists' studio-based learning is dependent on an individual dialogue between their studio practice and their past and documented experience', and she sees the



studio as a space where ‘the materialities and traces of finished work and work in progress are placed in a close, intimate and personal space’ (2013: 9).

Two years into working at home, there was a new force active within the studio: a slow, seismic pressure produced by the volume of work I had made. The paintings, finished and unfinished, were shunting from the studio zone into the living space, creeping along the walls, shuffling along ledges, shelves and radiators. They struck up conversations with each other. They fired off each other like the neurons of my brain, forming new networks of relations, spawning new pieces of work.

Sequences of paintings and found objects were in constant motion, negotiating new rhythms, new permutations, new sequences. Similarly, Catherine de Zegher describes how painter Avis Newman’s working process is neither ‘construction’ nor ‘composition’ but is rather, ‘a configuration allowing for the work not to have an absolute fixidity’. This creates, as de Zegher suggests, ‘an ambivalent body of relations with the potential for reconfigurations’ (de Zegher, 2014: 237).

My studio became a zone in which, as Deleuze puts it, ‘either the frame disappears totally or else it remains, but [...] it does not suffice to contain the mass that spills over and passes up above’ (1993: 123). Despite its corners and straight walls, the studio had become a circle. The pacing to and fro had developed into a rotational, or spiralling movement, as I moved between works in progress. Like Kentridge, I prowled around, circling the studio. Elkins was right; although almost imperceptible, the takeover was inevitable, and now it was complete. I was enfolded, surrounded by my own work. The studio had become emblematic of the world

outside, the objects, drawings and paintings, the video loops I had created like fragments of that outside world; by moving between them, I was putting it all together. The space transitioned from one of ‘not knowing’ to one of making meaning.

Morgan Thomas asserts that ‘the studio is taken to be - is framed as - a frame, a division of inside from outside, an enclosure’ (2009: 25). Conversely, Julia Gelshorn suggests that the studio ‘can be read as the artist’s mental state of mind turned inside out’ (2009: 156).

Kentridge, however, suggests that the studio is both of these, and describes the studio as an ‘expansion of his [the artist’s] own mind’ and ‘an enlargement of what happens in our heads’ (Ho-jung, 2015: online), but sees it is an emergent process which is invigorated by the outside: ‘different ideas connecting, different images in our heads, ideas being sent through our eyes, our ears, our memories, our dreams’ (Ho-jung, 2015: online). From Kentridge’s perspective, the mind (and as a consequence, the studio) is not divided from the world, but constantly in-formed, and re-formed by it, in an on-going process akin to that described by Deleuze, when he suggests that the processes of perception are a ‘folding’ of the outside world into the self; ‘the affect of self on self’ (1988: 107).

The studio, then, can be viewed as an intermediate space, one that is both an unfolding of the mind of the artist, and an enfolding of the world outside. Kentridge says, ‘You can think of the studio as a place where the world is invited in ... and it is rearranged in the studio, edited, things taken, other things left out and sent out into the world’ (quoted Ho-jung, 2015: online). Consequently, we see a different model, or diagram, of studio operational flow to the closed systems of the modernist studio that are proposed by Thomas (2009), and O’Doherty (2010).

The chambers of this studio are like the chambers of a beating heart. As we have seen, at regular intervals it is necessary for the studio to be hermetically sealed and private. Yet this model of the studio also has pulsing flows that come in and flows that go back out into the world. This is the model I recognise when my own studio is functioning well.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **EXPLORING LANDSCAPE THROUGH MAKING**

This chapter examines the space of the painting. I begin by showing how qualities of the abject spaces that I walked through in the landscape, were relayed to a series of ‘awkward’ paintings, in the first work that I made in the studio in response to my *Crossing England* walks. I interrogate the vertical and horizontal gaze in the context of Steinberg’s discussion of Rauschenberg and the flatbed picture plane (1972), and other cultures that have used this device to map and to organise data within the context of painting. I explain how a new painterly ‘voice’ subsequently emerged in the studio, in response to the sanitised, corporate hypermodern spaces of the landscape. I show how strategies such as the fold, the field, the cut and the stack, can be deployed to interrogate the processes of perception, and the spatial and temporal properties of the walked landscape. Finally, I discuss how I came to employ the notion of ‘one big painting’ as a strategy to assemble a bricolage of visual and painterly languages that would echo the heterogeneous and complex nature of the landscape I had walked through.

#### **4.1 THE PAINTED SPACE**

##### **Subject space and the awkward oil painting**

When asked about how her paintings are made, painter Katy Moran replies: ‘Like words in a sentence. Cross-pollination between works. Things tend to happen in a batch or a sequence’ (Moran, n.d.: online). This is a way of working that I recognise in my own studio practice; I

Figure 4.1: 'Awkward' paintings from the *Chalky Landscapes, Walking Stories* (2014) series. Chalk, beeswax, china clay, graphite and oil paint on found board.





rarely make a single painting; they arrive in packs. The first batch of paintings I made for this project began as two large paintings. I subsequently cut both of them up, and worked on them as two sequences of smaller paintings. Eventually these two batches, *Chalky Landscapes* and *Walking Stories* (2014) became amalgamated into a single ‘pack’: *Chalky Landscapes, Walking Stories* (see figure 4.1). These paintings had all sorts of things in them; stories, maps, schemes, layers of paint and wax, meandering lines, scribbling out, drips, scrapes, frantic marks, redacted writing; all kinds of things, in fact, that you might find in the derelict, decrepit or abject space. In retrospect, when making this batch of paintings, I was continuing with a mode of painting that had emerged before the beginning of this project; a painterly voice that had erupted a few years previously, when I first began to make paintings in response to the ‘voids’ (Careri, 2002), or the edgelands (Shoard, 2002). As I discussed in Chapter One, there is something about the abject space that is uncomfortable and challenging, but also emergent. When painting in response to the voids, I am searching for something similar; something dirty and gawky, something in-between, incomplete. Something awkward.



Figure 4.2: *Crossing England* (2014)

Felicity Lunn describes the paintings of Vada Caivano as ‘seductive and impossible to grasp, awkward and sensuous’ (2005: 5). For Caivano this awkwardness is attained by pursuit of the ‘wrong gesture that works in spite of itself’ (Lunn, 2006, 6-7). Katy Moran describes how she will frequently find herself intrigued by, for example, a poster from across the road, but will lose interest in the image as she moves closer and is able to determine its figurative elements. She says, ‘It is the thing that I saw for that split second from the other side of the road that I am trying to capture in my paintings’ (Moran, 2011: online). This is very similar to my mode of working at the beginning of this project; I was as likely to be influenced by the palimpsest of a subway wall (posters, peeling stickers, graffiti), as a wide vista, or glimpse down an alleyway. I would build up layers of such impressions, on a single surface.

When I work in this mode, I am always fighting the compulsion to ‘finish’ an image; there is a sense of stopping short, of resisting the urge to ‘tidy’ or ‘tweak’ a painting, and this can make the difference between a ‘live’ painting and a ‘dead’ one. This can be a difficult thing to assess in the moment, and working, like Moran, on several paintings at the same time means that I can remain in a state of flow but increase my chances of viewing a painting from a ‘fresh’ perspective, by moving between paintings. I find the process of painting in this way physically gruelling and emotionally challenging; finishing when something is incomplete is a hard task, and there is no sense of satisfaction; often just a feeling of unease at the end of a session. Later, I may be impressed by how I ‘stopped short’ of ‘finishing’, (which means, perversely, that the painting may well be finished), or I may feel that ‘I went too far’, (in which case it will be scraped off, painted over or cut up). American Painter Amy Silman addresses the contradictions of this process in her essay ‘Shit Happens’:

we are no longer making things for the Beaux Arts, for truth, beauty, elevation or virtuosity. Yet the familiar forms of what could be called ‘negative aesthetics’ also

fail to adequately describe what a lot of artists are doing in their studios. Dada, the readymade, 'bad painting', the Dandy, 'provisional' painting, deskilling, etc. – none of these ring quite right in accounting for something I would call negativity-at-work, the arduous search for form, the feelings of dissatisfaction, the endless decisions and changes that constitute the work of various artists. (Silman, 2015: 76)

For Silman, the quest for awkwardness in a painting is not a matter of 'de-skilling', but involves a certain 'diligence' and 'nerdiness' in the studio; these are 'painters' paintings'. It takes another painter to appreciate how hard it is to paint in this way, to 'get' the painting. Silman is 'searching rather earnestly for something I don't quite know already, a kind of questioning machine, endlessly discontent' (2015: 76), and she defines it thus: 'Awkwardness is the name I would give this quality, this thing that is both familiar and unfamiliar'. We may note that Silman's definition of awkwardness is precisely the same as the 'uncanniness' of the 'voids' that I discussed in Chapter One. Silman suggests that 'awkwardness' is tied to embodiment; 'ankles swell, farts are emitted, rolls of fat jut out, the penis does its own thing. Shit happens and then you die' (2015: 78). Does not something similar happen to the materials of the abject space? Rooves blow off, glass cracks, walls crumble, brambles move in; everything failing, or in the wrong place. It is a kind of awkwardness that I try to access in myself when making paintings that refer to walking through the abject space. As Silman puts it, 'a moment of tension between the ideal and the real, where what is supposed to be happening goes awry' (2015: 78-79). She suggests this 'ambivalent state' is 'precisely the state of mind for making a painting' (2015: 79), and for Silman, this is bound up with the material qualities of oil paint itself:

Oil painters work with a substance that's low anyway: putty, shit, dirt, mud that is scraped, pushed, smeared, scumbled into form. After a while, your body is the partner to the materials, you are the medium as well as the tool, the boundaries between you and your object become unclear, mirroring or antagonizing each other. (Silman, 2015: 79)



This ‘awkwardness’ was what I was seeking in the first paintings that I made for the *Crossing England* project. In retrospect I can see that during the making of these paintings I was writing about the qualities of edgelands, and this was reflected in the paintings I was making.

### **The departure**

A different painterly language arose in the studio when I began to research and write about the new, corporate spaces of ‘hypermodernity’ that I had walked through at the start of this doctoral project. This new ‘voice’ emerged one day, when, on a whim, I sat down in my studio with a piece of found cardboard packaging and some gouache paint (figure 4.2).

Switching the focus of my reading and research to a very different kind of landscape space, and simultaneously switching my materials, drew out a new, graphic quality to my painting. This new work, like the zones of hypermodernity, was clean and precise. Crisp lines on fields of flat, opaque colour; no translucent layering, no texture, no ambiguity. The palette was limited to two, maximum three, colours, put together in combinations that burnt, like a corporate logo, into the back of the retina.

At the time I was perplexed by this new development; I was enjoying making these paintings, and I liked the sharp, jaunty result, but it went against all my training as a painter to make such a sudden and apparently disconnected leap from the layered, ambiguous ‘emergent’ paintings I had been making. Rather than the usual canon of contemporary ‘awkward’ painters that I identified with, this new work appeared to have more in common with twentieth century modernist artists; the dark red/oranges of the Dada poster, hints of abstract

paintings by Victor Pasmore, the drawings and prints of of sculptor Eduardo Chillida<sup>10</sup>. I could not see how I could possibly show these paintings next to the oil paintings I had made. It was a radical leap.

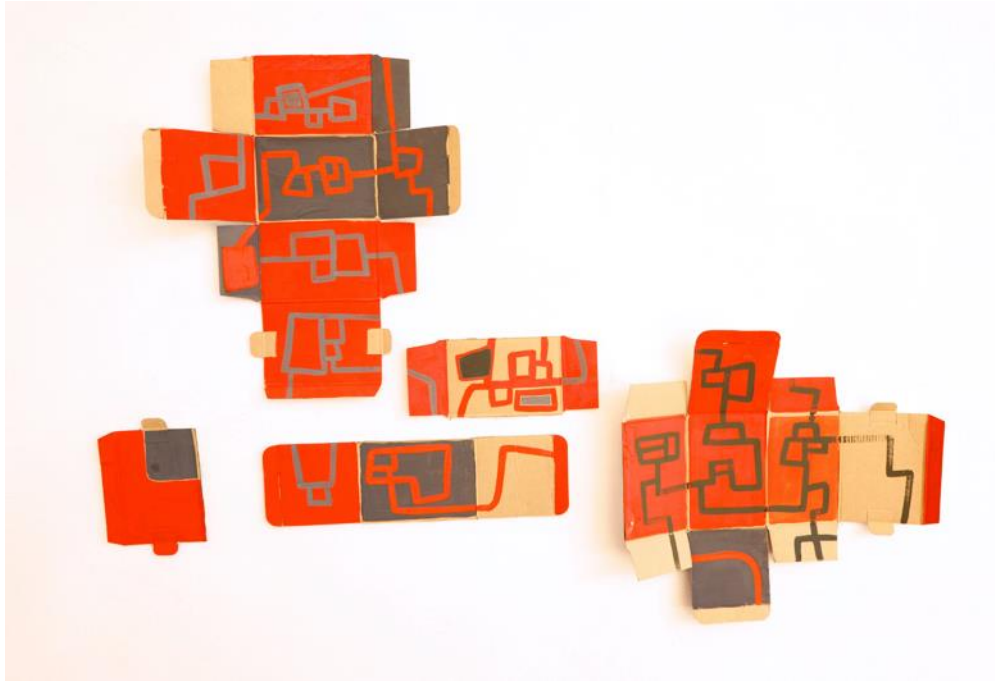


Figure 4.3: The first of the *Hypermodernity* (2015) series. Gouache on found packaging.

When an artist changes their mode of working so apparently abruptly, on closer scrutiny it is often possible to discern themes and threads that carry through the work, from one ‘voice’ to another. In 1969 Phillip Guston made a radical departure, from abstract expressionism to a subversive, cartoonish figuration when he made a painting he called ‘The Studio’; of a hooded figure, painting at an easel. The departure was beyond the comprehension of most of the American art establishment at the time; Richard Storr writes, ‘When this altogether unexpected body of work was first shown at the Marlborough Gallery in 1970, there was a general uproar of the sort that rarely attends the exhibition of an established master’s current production’ (Storr, 2015). Guston was a well reputed and respected abstract artist and his

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<sup>10</sup> See Kurt Schwitters’ cover of *Anna Blume* (1919) & *Kleine Dada Soirée* (1922), Pasmore’s *Linear Development* series (1970-1) & Chillida’s *Pantheon* 1975.

sudden profound shift in approach was met not just with incomprehension, but a sense of betrayal.

However as Roberta Smith notes, despite the sudden jump in his mode of working, there is a clear and traceable trajectory and continuum in throughout Guston's work; in actuality his 'encounter with relatively pure abstraction was brief, not even a decade long' (Smith, 2016).

There are traceable portents of the cartoonish departure to come in much of his abstract work; *The Mirror* (1957), and *The Clock* (1946/7) are two examples. Smith writes:

As soon as his brush strokes began to clump into shapes, fidgeting, incipiently comical suggestions of people, places, things, relationships and feelings began to infiltrate his pictures. Intimations of motifs from the late paintings abound, especially in the human heads, whether alone or in groups or pairs, loving or confrontational. They would simply become more specific. (Roberta Smith 2016)

Guston's 'hooded figure' motif was tied to his lifelong horror of bigotry, and can be traced back further still to work Guston made even before he came to abstraction when he was twenty, in *Drawing for Conspirators* (1930) and *Conspirators* (1930) - a title Guston was to use again in 1970 with his return to different kind of figuration. Dore Ashton writes,

Had his critics in 1970 considered his entire oeuvre, they would have been obliged to recognize that Guston, far from willing to be a maverick, as one newspaper headline had it, was, in fact, resuming preoccupations that had been roused in him in his early youth. (Ashton, 1990: 7)

In retrospect I can see that, despite this unexpected and profound shift in own my mode of working, there was continuum in my work; for it all referred to the landscape. This sudden switch in my operative mode was a response that mirrored the heterogeneity of the landscape; for the private, corporate spaces are always juxtaposed to, never merged with, other less tidy spaces. At the time, however, I had none of this insight and was baffled by this unexpected

turn of events. During this phase in the studio, my process felt incoherent, messy, out of control, and I felt depressed by my lack of consistency. For a long time I tried to consolidate these voices, to marry the ways of working within a single painting, but found myself unable to do so. Nor was this a smooth transition, from one painterly technique to another; depending on materials and subject matter, I would oscillate between the different ways of working from one day to the next.



Figure 4.4: *English History* (2017) Oil paint and red Devon earth on found wooden panel.

Rather than a marriage of the two ‘voices’, other voices emerged, depending on the materials I was using and what particular ‘theme’ from my walked journeys was on my mind in the studio that day. For example, I made some paintings with beeswax, ground red earth and chalk added to my oil paint, and thick, sticky homemade damar varnish on old, oak panels. These paintings drew me into a ‘historical’ zone, where I felt I was referencing simultaneously the history of the landscape (Templars, Saxons, Romans, Iceni), but also touching on a history of painting, due to the effects of the traditional materials I had used.

This family of paintings reminded me of votive objects, with their references to the past, their portability, and their aging materials, and I polished and buffed them with reverence accordingly.

### **Verticals and horizontals**

Painting in my studio is an extremely physical affair. I often begin a painting standing at my easel in one corner of the room. Working in oil paint means that usually a week needs to pass to allow the paint to dry, so that another layer of paint may be added, although this does vary according to the thickness, viscosity and types of paint extenders used. Consequently, I work on many paintings at any one time. When I begin a painting I usually start by considering one journey, mapping it out as one might draw a map for somebody that is lost on the back of an envelope. Having rotated the painting, I will frequently make another version of the same map, which means that the painting is 'readable' from various different angles. Once I have eliminated a definite 'up' or 'down', then I can just keep working on the painting, turning it around and laying it flat with each application, until it 'feels right' (this may take one more session, a week, or a year). At this point, the easel is usually abandoned, the painting laid on the floor, so that I can walk around it to see to from all perspectives. The painting will undergo many metamorphoses, layers added, layers scraped or sanded off; the original 'map' will be disregarded or lost, re-applied, re-excavated, often many times. Other journeys and spaces, other moments will appear and disappear as the painting is built up. In this way the painting is constructed far more like a film than a snapshot, with its accretions of time and varied perspectives. This way of painting is particularly visible in the earliest paintings I made for this research, *Chalky Landscapes, Walking Stories* (2014) (see figure 4.1).

The gaze of the walking human is met by a shifting vertical visual field. However I suggest that there is always another vantage point that is part of the perception of the walker, and that is the perspective we carry in our head. Unless we walk perpetually in a straight line in a single direction, for navigational purposes we very often we need to convert the information received from the vertical visual into a mind-map of how the walked space looks from above. In short, we use our imaginations to shift the picture plane.

In 1972 Leo Steinberg first published a seminal and celebrated article ‘The Flatbed Picture Plane’, in which he suggested that there had been a radical shift in approaches to painting during the 1950’s. Steinberg argues that before this shift, Western Art - even progressive movements such as Cubism or Expressionism - had shared a single axiom, a tacit understanding that the space contained within the frame of a painting referenced the visual field of a vertical human:

...a world, some sort of workspace which reads on the picture plane in correspondence with the erect human posture. The top of the picture corresponds to where we hold our heads aloft; while its over edge gravitates to where we place our feet. (Steinberg, 1972: online).

Steinberg suggested that even the innovative painting movements of the time, such as Abstract Expressionism and Cubism, had failed to challenge the convention that a painting ‘harks back to the natural world...’ to evoke ‘sense data which are experienced in the normal, erect posture’ (Steinberg, 1972: online).

Steinberg argues that it is most notably by examining the work of Robert Rauschenberg through the 1950's that one can chart a seismic change in attitude, marked by the shifting of the picture plane. This new approach, argues Steinberg,

...makes its symbolic allusion to hard surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards—any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information may be received, printed, impressed. (1972: online)

For Steinberg, the shifting of the flatbed picture plane indicated an important, pivotal moment; when the painting no longer referred to nature, but to culture: 'the consciousness immersed in the brain of the city'(1972: online).

Steinberg's incisive insights were made half way through the last century, a time of limited global perspective, when little attention was paid, (or significance attributed) to the art practices of non-Western cultures within the somewhat closed and elitist world of Western-centric American Art criticism at the time. We can perhaps forgive Steinberg then, for failing to acknowledge that, while there is no doubt that Western traditions had for several hundred years referred solely to the vertical picture plane, while this was happening people from non-western cultures all over the world had been making paintings that referred to the horizontal, flatbed picture plane. And many of these peoples did not live in cities at all. For example, Janet Catherine Berlo writes:

Around the time Leon Battista Alberti was codifying the rules of linear perspective that revolutionized European ways of representing the visual world, Navajo ritual specialists in the American Southwest were beginning to formulate their own ideas about the structure of their world and ways to represent it pictorially. (Berlow, 2011:10)

Far from being symptomatic of a separation or withdrawal from nature in to culture, the Navajo use the flatbed picture plane (whether sand -painting, drawing, or weaving) to draw

things together; ‘a reminder of a multidimensional universe in which there is no viewer per se, only participants’. Berlo emphasises that Navajo epistemologies are formed of ‘premises that differ markedly from those of the Eurocentric world’ (Berlo: 10), citing two areas in particular that demonstrate a world-view that underpins ‘how their visual practices locate the viewer in relation to the image’ (Berlo: 10). The first premise is that ‘humans are simply one part in a complex web of interrelationships of supernaturals, animate landscapes, and animals’. The second premise is that Navajo systems of thought, language, and art refer to ‘dynamic motion’... ‘in language, the verb “to go” rather than the verb “to be”’; in art, a propensity for dynamic symmetry and motion, rather than a captured moment of stasis’ (Berlo, 2011:10-11). To put it into contemporary, neo-vitalist<sup>11</sup> terms, ‘emergence’ and ‘becoming’ have long been at the heart of the Navajo world view, and consequently, their art. And they are not alone.

The art of Aboriginal Australia is the last great tradition of art to be appreciated by the world at large. Despite being one of the longest continuous traditions of art in the world, dating back fifty millennia. (Caruana, 2003: online)

Howard Morphy asserts that paintings of the aboriginal people of Arnhem land are maps of land, but warns against the assumption that they function in the same way as a Western topographical map. Morphy states that, while these maps do frequently refer to geographical elements of the landscape, their meanings are often more complicated and multifarious, because from the aboriginal perspective the land itself is a sign system, and features of the landscape are represented in relation to their mythological significance, embedded with the song and story of the ancestors. According to Morphy the paintings have no sense of geographical scale. Nor do they use a fixed cardinal orientation on their paintings; different aspects of the landscape, and shifts of perspective may be layered over each other within a

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<sup>11</sup>*Neo-vitalism* emerged in the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century from the philosophical tradition of *vitalism*. A philosophy of ‘becoming’ that draws in particular from the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.



single painting, with an emphasis on mythological rather than geographic relations (1988: 103). Similarly, Kelli Johnson describes the painted maps of many Native American traditions:

Rather than representing the earth to a standard scale—the goal of nearly all European mapmaking—Indigenous North American mapmakers focused on the cultural significance of the topographical features. A lake with cultural significance, for example, may be rendered larger than other bodies of water on the map in order to emphasize its importance; a creek that plays no part in the reason for the creation of a map may be omitted completely. (2000: 207)

In this way the painting becomes a deep map or what Deleuze would define as a diagram; ‘a map, or rather several imposed maps’ (1988: 44). This kind of mapping can draw together not only different systems of thought, but also geographic and temporal space. Indeed, Simon O’Sullivan suggests that this diagrammatic approach is one which is absolutely fundamental to contemporary art-making. The ‘magical’ diagram, argues O’Sullivan, presents ‘a radically different mode of existence from the techno-scientific: a pre-modern understanding that also gestures towards a future aesthetic mode yet-to-come’ (O’Sullivan 2016a: 23). He elaborates:

the magical mode of existence itself involves a diagrammatic structuring of the landscape in terms of lines, tracks, and privileged points. This grid in space is doubled by a similar reticulation in time (the foregrounding of certain moments when it is auspicious to act). In our own moribund and increasingly restricted neoliberal present (with its domination of nature) this kind of diagrammatics becomes politically charged. (O’Sullivan, 2016a: 23)

When considered within this wider context we begin to understand that the Western convention of painting from the perspective of a framed, singular and stationary point of view, is in fact the anomaly. Consequently, we need to consider whether Rauschenberg’s innovations signalled a ‘return’ to a more fluid and dynamic approach to image-making, one

that refers to unfolding experience, and that alludes to the interconnecting spaces of interiorities, and exteriorities. Jerry Saltz appears to think so, for he writes, 'Rauschenberg obliterated illusionist Cartesian space and, as he put it, ennobled the ordinary' (2005: online).

Steinberg's assertion that a shift in approaches to painting was heralded by Rauschenberg's *Monogram* (1955-59) cannot be disputed. However, in retrospect, I would suggest that Steinberg's arguments as to the nature of this shift do not go far enough. Far from being limited to making work about 'the consciousness immersed in the brain of the city' (Steinberg, 1973), Rauschenberg's world view appears have been remarkably more expansive; closer to that of the Navajo as described by Berlow, in which 'humans are simply one part in a complex web of interrelationships' (2011: 10 -11), and by the people of Arnham Land as described by Morphy, in which 'multiple perspectives are superimposed upon one another and that there are differences of scale across the painting' (1998: 106). Of course, Rauschenberg did reference city culture; he lived in New York, and made his work out of everyday materials found on the sidewalk. But Rauschenberg's work was far more complex and probing to be reduced to such a statement, for he resisted singular meanings;

I'm never sure of what the impulse is psychologically. I don't mess around with my subconscious. I mean I try to keep wide awake. And if I see in the superficial subconscious relationships that I'm familiar with, clichés of association, I change the picture. I always have a good reason for taking something out but I never have one for putting something in. (Rauschenberg, 1965)

Rauschenberg understood the tripartite dynamics between maker, artwork and viewer. He also understood the importance of ambiguity and hazards of the enclosing action of the frame: 'One of my painter friends says I'm awfully good at the edges. It was intended as a joke but I think that that may be true' (Rauschenberg, 1965). He considered every area of a painting with equal regard: 'I try, whether I only have half an inch more before I hit the wall,

or whether it's dead center, to not treat any one area with a kind of dramatic preference'  
(Rauschenberg,1965).

Rauschenberg's *Combines* (1954-64) assembled found sculpture and painting to venture into terrain that Deleuze and Guattari were to explore nearly thirty years later, examining 'connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and territories and deterritorialisation' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 177). Through his *Combines*, and the use of the flatbed picture plane, Rauschenberg engages in a form of deep mapping, interrogating the intersections and junctures that connect culture with nature, the mythological with the mundane, and past with present, creating something akin to Bennett's enchanted, hybrid 'crossings' (2001). And no hybrid could be stranger than *Monogram*; a goat/tyre fusion that is painting, found object and sculpture. *Monogram* has been interpreted in so many ways, by so many people; it is pristine landscape bisected by the freeways of modernity, it is a horny cock in an arsehole, it the sacrificial scapegoat banished to the wilderness. To Jerry Salz it is 'a love letter, a death threat, and a ransom note', a 'sort of gargoyle or ravaging scavenger guarding over and also destroying art' and a 'shamanic manifestation' of the artist himself (2005: online). Rauschenberg demonstrated how sculpture, painting and found object, vertical and flatbed picture plane have potential be assembled in a way that stimulates multiple interpretation and opens up areas of slippage, perhaps similar to what I wanted to achieve in the studio.

## **The stack (or pack)**

Eva Hesse, referring to a body of work still in progress, wrote, ‘piece is in many parts. Each in itself is a complete statement, together I am not sure how it will be’ (Swenson, 2009: 133).

This was very much how I felt about the different batches of work that were cluttering my studio during the autumn of 2015.

In an attempt to create order, I made stacks of different kinds of paintings and drawings.

Although this was done with the intention to contain the growing volume of work within the studio, organising the material in this way gave me two new insights:

i. The first insight was that a stack of paintings, leant against a wall or piled high, is an attractive item. Soon, rather than thinking of batches of individual paintings and singular artworks, I came to think of it as a monad, defined by Deleuze thus:

As an individual unit each monad includes the whole series; hence it conveys the entire world, but does not express it without expressing more clearly a small region of the world, a “subdivision,” a borough of the city, a finite sequence. (Deleuze, 1993: 25)

Stacking adds depth to a two-dimensional space, compressing, condensing complex information behind (or below) the front (or top) painting. As the two dimensions of a drawing could relate to geographic space, the introduction of the third dimension, the verticality of the stack, added a temporal quality to the equation. The stacks brought to mind sedimented history, moments of time, or slices of walked journey; I thought of pages that collectively make a book, or playing cards that make a pack.

ii. My second insight – which came when I had accumulated quite a few stacks – was that the process of stacking or folding, opened up visual space around each stack, and this space allowed me to consider the relationships between batches of work. I began to see that, amongst all the different modes of working, there were certain threads and motifs that connected the separate piles; the jaunty angles, the limited palette, the meandering lines, the journey, the found materials, the colour palette. I began to understand that, with thoughtful placing, the piles of work could strike up relations between each other. The collection of stacks functioned, as Deleuze says, to ‘identify variation and trajectory, and overtake monadology with nomadology’ (1993: 137). Like beads on an abacus, the stack behind/underneath a drawing helped to ‘carry-over’ more information than was rendered in a single, visible image. It also helped to identify relations with other stacks.

Through stacking - and later, through folding - I found a way to allude to both implicit and explicit journey. While the stack began as a way to keep order in the studio, it evolved into a subject for interrogation in the studio; the stacks, as objects, became artworks themselves (see figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: *Red & White Stack* (2017). Oil paint on oak panels.

## The fold

Through experimentation in the studio it became apparent that I could mobilise the ‘fold’ to explore and describe several processes that occur during the walking/painting process. For my own clarity of mind, in order to explain why I made the folding works, I have described below three categories to help me to discuss these processes. Naturally, each of these categories has the potential to fold into the other, and, indeed, into other categories; such is the fractal nature of the fold. Additionally, the works that I made to explore this convoluted theme remain ambiguous, open to multiple interpretation, even to myself. Bringing this folding dynamic into my painting process helped me to analyse and to articulate these ideas in physical form.



Figure 4.6: *Field as fold* (2016). Oil & graphite on oak.

Three areas that I consistently returned to in order to explore the fold within the dynamic of walking/painting/writing were:

- i. The fold as membrane, or an agent of enclosure; fold as ‘field’.
- ii. The relationship between the subjective self and the ‘outside’.

iii. The unfolding/enfolding, or emergent nature of the spatio/temporal journey.

i. The words ‘fold’ and ‘field’ share common origins - from the old English ‘felt’ or ‘falt’ - and the word ‘fold’ is still used to describe an enclosed space. Originally the word would have referred to the fold of wall, hedge or fence, functioning, along with a gate, to keep livestock, or humans, in, and predators out. In time, however, the term came to be used describe the space inside the boundary, and to differentiate that space from the other spaces around it.

One walk with a friend on the Ickneild Way turned into a meditation on the term ‘field’. After writing about this walk in my walking blog, I made these notes:

Walking North along a straight lane from a small town in Hertfordshire, and using an outdated map, I noted how the boundaries around what had once been fields of arable pasture now contained other endeavours. I was with an old friend, an academic at Cambridge University, his ‘field’ is anthropology. Through chainlink fences we observed warehouses and a mysterious chemical factory. The lane carried on unwaveringly; a terrifying dash across the A505, through a gap in the hedge, and it now continued as path between two open fields. The field to the left of us held rows of green cabbages, the field to the right, however, had rows of brand new solar panels. There appeared to be swarms of insects buzzing around large black boxes at the end of each row of panels in the solar field. On closer inspection, we realised it was not insects vibrating in the air, but a visible electro-magnetic field surrounding each box.

(2016, personal notebook).

‘Field’ in painting terms refers to areas or regions of the space of the painting. ‘Colour field’ painting, for example, emerged as a movement out of abstract expressionism during the middle part of the twentieth century. This movement, championed by critic Clement Greenberg, sought to leave behind representation and to rely solely on regions of colour, and combinations of colour, to provoke affect within the body of the viewer. Mark Rothko summed up this approach when he said, ‘a painting is not a picture of an experience; it is an experience’ (Seiberling: 1959: 82).

I am not exclusively a colour field painter, but I still use the term to describe zones of one particular colour or texture within a painting. The areas around a field, or between two fields of paint are of particular interest to me; do two fields touch each other, or is there a line between them? and if so is it a painted or drawn line, or a line formed by a tiny gap between fields? What about palimpsests? How many layers of paint lie in these gaps? Are there traces of smaller fields, under the skin of a larger one? Painters will obsess over such details with the forensic scrutiny of an archaeologist; the under-layers of a painting tell its story. This studio process informs, in turn, the ability to read the landscape when walking; a sensitivity to the processes that create palimpsests, marks and scars, on grand and minute scale.

ii. During my walks, I had become particularly conscious of the looping or interweaving nature of my own attention; the shifting interplay between the embodied, sensual world, with memory and the imaginal. Writing my blog shortly after the walks had underlined this dynamic, I wondered if I could continue to explore these insights in the studio. Deleuze describes memory as a ‘folding or doubling’ of the outside world into the self; ‘memory is the real name of the relation to oneself, or the affect on self by self’ (1988:107). O’Sullivan develops this theme: ‘We might go further and say that thought itself, enigmatically, is a kind of fold - the folding inside of what Deleuze calls the “forces of the outside”’ (O’Sullivan, n.d.). This folding inside of the outside world is echoed in the writings of physicist David Bohm, who suggests that there is a further dynamic between matters of interiority and exteriority: ‘I thought nature and consciousness were not only reflecting each other but participating in each other’ (Bohm, 2013: online).





Figure 4.7 *Implicit Journey* (2015). Oil paint and gesso on canvas.

Abigail Reynolds is an example of an artist who explores these dynamics through the use of the fold. In her series of work *Universal Now* (2009), Reynolds splices and pleats found photographs and book illustrations; scenes from the past rupture the present, reality and imagined worlds collide and fragment into each other. She explains the work thus:

In cutting and folding these images, I'm not privileging one moment over another because they're both simultaneously present, and though as a viewer you can't actually fold down the flaps, you can move in relation to the image and see what's there, so in a way you are in two moments – your present moment of looking contains these two photographic moments. (Reynolds, n.d.: online)

Tina Richardson (2010) and Jim Colquhoun (2004) have both used the folded paper fortune teller, or ‘cootie catcher’ as tools for the *dérive*. Colquhoun published his ‘patented peripatetic randomiser’, and used it specifically for bringing a fresh perspective to the city, declaring,

The idea for the Randomiser grew out of frustration with the robotic way I was engaging with my city. Habit and circumstance quickly compel a monocular reading of space; we simply cease to see it as having manifold potentiality. (Colquhoun, 2003: online)

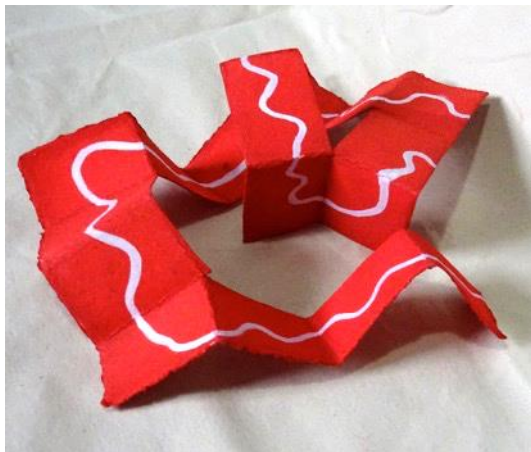
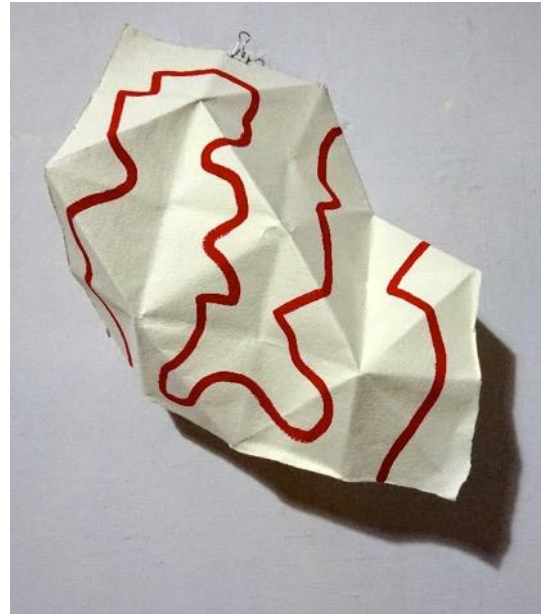
Richardson’s cootie catcher is a rather more impromptu, hand-made affair. She writes in her blog:

My own paper fortune teller has numbers on the outside, then small symbols representing urban phenomena on the next face (motorway, trains, etc.), and inside, various instructions such as: head towards the nearest blue object, or look for the nearest railings. (2010: online)

I considered, like Richardson, using elements of my lexicon, as a method to make participatory choices, in folded ‘fortune teller’ paintings: in a show? a walk? (choose a colour, choose an animal, choose a direction to walk....) However, on making one, I quickly saw that it was the unfolding nature of the fortune teller that interested me, not the system imposed on it. For the folded shape was immediately loaded with ambiguous and fluid meaning; there were the obvious associations with childhood play, and I was reminded of my encounter at the crossroads of Royston by the four-way cross which is visible on the top of the fortune teller (figure 2.7). Its diamond-shaped facets made me think of Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘planes of immanence’ waiting to unfold around the now. I made some red fortune tellers, and some whites ones, which, when placed upside down, made me think of the crowns of the red queen and the white queen in *Alice Through the Looking Glass* (1865). A

Figure 4.8: *Folded Drawings* (2015-18).

Gouache and ink on cotton rag paper.



few of my folded fortune telling paintings had meandering lines, but that was as complicated as I felt they needed to be.

**iii.** One of the most profound effects of my many walks was that it changed my perception of landscape; from fragmented blocks of land randomly accessed by car, I increasingly experienced the landscape as a psychogeographic continuum, and was radically more conscious of how each experience unfolded out of another. Bohm declares: ‘If we are not aware that our theories are ever-changing forms of insight, giving shape and form to experience in general, our vision will be limited’ (1995: 6). The way around this, suggests Bohm, is to remain vigilant; constantly aware that every thought or theory has other thoughts and theories enfolded within it.

It could be a day, or a year between leaving a place at the end of a walk, and returning to the same spot (usually by road) to pick it up again. Yet when I did pick up the walk again, it was as though I had never left the way, despite variations of weather and season. During the winter of 2015 I made several *Unfolding Journey* paintings (see figure 4.9), sequences of hinged, painted rectangular blocks of wood which I had found in a bag on a street in Plymouth. Some of the paintings had a single, lateral painted line that bridge across the hinged gaps. Another had a chessboard pattern of red and white paint that hopped across the gaps. When making them I thought of the hinged gaps as the spaces of time between my separate walks (which were frequently started and finished on roads that were perpendicular to, and cut across, my path). The hinge – bolted-on, tenuous – as a point of articulation. However, like so much of my work, after I had made them I saw other meanings in the hinged articulation.

Tina Richardson (2015) defines the ‘Perambulatory Hinge’ as ‘predominantly a postmodern event, occurrence or manifestation’, which is produced through ‘their affects’ and is a ‘turning response’ to the ‘call’ of a ‘particular piece of urban phenomenon’ by the psychogeographer – or rather, a series of psychogeographers. She suggests that the ‘palimpsest aspect of postmodern space’ increases the chances of a ‘calling’.

...a particular person is responding aesthetically/affectively to the object – it is subjective (therefore individual) in that regard. However, as well as having our own personal responses to urban objects, we very often share our reaction with others. This is the cultural aspect of the hinge. So, when a particular object ‘calls’ to a number of people in a similar way over time, a perambulatory hinge develops. (Richardson, 2015)

Shortly before my mid-research exhibition at the Ariel Centre, Totnes (UK), I sawed a painting into two pieces. The painting, which had been knocking around the studio for over a year, was rich in texture but I had never quite managed to resolve it. In two pieces, it was improved, but still not finished. On a whim, I bolted the two pieces together with small hinges, ensuring that a tiny gap remained between the two halves. The painting now appeared to me as a landscape (one that I had walked through), and the dissection like the cutting of a motorway; the hinges, fragile and awkwardly functional, like footbridges over the laceration, bolted on at regular intervals, tenuously connecting the irreversibly separated terrains. Satisfyingly, my hinged painting could now be opened and closed like a storybook. It could stand on its own as an independent object, and when folded it had a portability; a painting that could come for a walk. Later, when I did take this painting for a walk, it functioned like a contemporary votive object; placed in suitable niches in the city, it turned these nooks into temporary wayside shrines. There was something eminently portable about the folding paintings. They were nomadic objects (Figure 4.9).

Figure 4.9: Folding, portable, 'nomadic' paintings.

*Unfolding England* (2016),

*Votive Diptych* (2016) in the studio and a street niche.

Oil paint, ground chalk, red earth and hinges on found wood.



## **The cut**

Early in my residency at High Cross House, I placed a group of four paintings in a row on a shelf. They were very simple; one gesture, a single, flowing, curving brush mark across the four white surfaces. The paintings were placed maybe an inch apart. That morning I was visited in my studio by an octogenarian, a woman who had been a professional musician for most of her adult life. On seeing the paintings on the shelf in a row like that, she declared: ‘Oh I like that. It is like a musical score, and the gaps are like rests’.

This statement intrigued me. I had, for some time, been experimenting by arranging groups of paintings in linear sequences, or in grids, and this had led me to think about how the edges of, and gaps between, paintings can be viewed in similar terms to the edges and gaps in the landscape. What interested me was how the eye (or the brain) tries to ‘join up’ gestural lines across the ‘gaps’ (see exhibition image, figure 5.18). But I had never before thought of them in musical terms. Just as the gaps and spaces of the landscape had revealed themselves to be beguiling, so the spaces between paintings began to demand more of my attention, and took on new significance. I became fascinated by the process of partnering paintings: on a couple of occasions I had placed random ‘incomplete’ paintings next to each other, and had found to my surprise that each painting (without my intention) were two halves of a whole; the two completed each other.

Subsequently, on reading Ian Marshall’s paper ‘Stalking the gaps: the Biopoetics of Haiku’ (2013), I noted some similarities between the structural dynamics of this literary art form and the dynamic considerations of making – and grouping – paintings. Once again, the key to this epiphany lay in Marshall’s description of a ‘gap’ or ‘cut’ (japanese *kire*) which lies at the

heart of the traditional form of haiku. Marshall explains how this compact poetic form uses the juxtaposition (or disjunction) of two images: ‘the reader is called upon to piece together the two sections and two images of the poem’ (2013: 100). It struck me how very similar this process is to the partnering of two paintings, and with similar effect on the reader. It is what Marshall calls ‘the artful deployment of gaps’: ‘haiku gives us fragments of things brought together’ (2013: 100), and he likens the process to a reaction occurring between two spark plugs; ‘when the gap is set just right, then the reader is inspired to connect the two images, and to fill the gap by supplying meaning – and there is the spark’. Marshall continues:

One thing that the principle of juxtaposition suggests is that all meanings are relational. That is, we understand the meaning of an object or image only in context, and the context changes depending on the nature of the juxtaposition being formed in an individual haiku. (Marshall, 2013: 100)

As Marshall points out, in haiku – and the premise may equally be applied to the triptych painting – it is within the space between images that meaning is made; ‘a gap in a text calls for mental exercise in order to fill in those gaps’ (2013: 102). It is a pattern at work not just in how we think, but in the very physicality of our brain activity; as described by Deleuze and Guattari, ‘the discontinuity between cells, the existence of synaptic microfissures, the leap each message makes across these fissures, make the brain a multiplicity’ (1987: 17). The gap is the void that provokes the observer/reader to do some work, a hook that demands the imaginative construction/reconstruction of some form of narrative. A third party is necessary to create a movement between two images which are at rest. Like Ingold, who draws our attention to the similarities in the processes of ‘reading’ a path, a text and a painting (2010), Marshall suggests that, while this way of looking is a skill, it is rooted in a fundamental human behaviour that can be traced to our ancestral need to follow, and to track, to survive. (2013: 102).



## **Pieces of a puzzle**

A sense of fragmented self, or psychological dismemberment, is a common response to the meaningful, or epic journey. There are many myths that combine dismemberment with odyssey; for example, Isis quested through Egypt for the fourteen dismembered parts of Osiris. Orpheus, who descended to the underworld to retrieve Eurydice, was shredded by the maenads.

Simon O’Sullivan (2014) talks of Art Practice (practice, as distinct from the production of commodities) as having a ‘magical function’, as a ‘summoning forth something that was hitherto unknown, unseen’, and suggests that ‘collaboration, or, more specifically connectivity of some kind is crucial for this operation’, but he stresses that as humans we are always ‘more than one’ and that ‘we are already a swarm of voices’ (O’Sullivan, 2014). On my own journey I had not just experienced a fragmented landscape, but also discovered my childhood ‘selves’ and ‘voices’ located within it. What I had not anticipated, however, was that this would continue to unfold within the studio. As Kentridge (2012) suggests, meaning had emerged through the physical activities of the studio; unintentionally, I had created pieces of a puzzle, that could be put together to form a bigger picture.

There were periods in the studio when, rather than making work, I was shuffling it about, placing object next to painting, trying out sequences, trying out stacks, making books out of stacks, propping them against walls, laying them flat. It was an exciting time. I began to combine paintings with found objects; the *Chalky Landscapes, Walking Stories* (2015) series was partnered with a child’s chair, one of two I had pulled from a skip. I brought home a dislodged granite kerbstone from a Plymouth street. Enjoying the process of privileging

previously discarded objects, I polished it till it glittered, and placed it upright, like a standing stone, next to some of the ‘historical paintings’. I partnered a fragile piece of wood that I had picked out of a puddle, with a red bootlace (see figure 4.10).



Figure 4.10: *English Memories* (2015) found wood & red bootlace.

### **Blazing a trail**

William Kentridge (2011) believes that the artist’s drive to create is born of a desire to mark the moment and to leave something behind. Kentridge sees artists as damaged people, and suggests that at the root of this compulsion is a somewhat unhealthy fear – of being lost? of being forgotten? or of forgetting? – and he likens it to the story of Hansel and Gretel, who leave behind a trail of breadcrumbs, or little white stones, when wandering in the forest. Initially, I felt that I was following a trail, during my walks, when writing my blog and making the first works. As the time drew nearer to making a show, and I began to think more about how an audience would read the work, I felt more that I was marking out a route for

others to follow, in ways similar to those described in the previous section on haiku and ‘the cut’.

As I worked with this idea, I became less concerned about trying to consolidate a single ‘voice’, or rather, to realise that there was perhaps a single voice but one with a broader range, or vocabulary, than I had thought possible. I began to think about the work as ‘one, big, painting’; it was the dynamics between the paintings that were important. In response to this, the work changed: pieces became simpler, less cluttered, but more specific; a painting about unfolding and enfolding; a painting about a crossroads; a painting about being lost in a housing estate. I was laying a trail; or rather, several interwoven ones. However, although I could follow my own clues and markers around the studio, I had no idea if others would be able to do the same. To help me to get a feel for this before I took the work to exhibition, I arranged for other artists to feedback on the work through visits to the studio, and through peer review sessions with artist-led collective Smooth Space. The outcomes of these sessions are discussed in depth in the conclusion of this thesis.

## **Conclusion**

Simon O’Sullivan (2016a), discussing ‘World Building’ as part of art praxis, describes a process of ‘nesting of fictions within fictions’ in which old artworks are recycled and placed into new constellations with other artworks and objects. He writes, ‘practice in this sense builds its own worlds and suggests the terms by which they could be approached’ (2016a: 23). This mode of operation, suggests O’Sullivan, can render tangible unexplored approaches to time and space; a diagrammatics that re-maps and scrambles previous notions of past, present and future:

This is the “drawing” of lines between different times, the building of circuits and the following of feedback loops; it is to understand time as specific to any given system (or practice) and not as neutral background. (O’Sullivan 2016a: 24).

In the first four chapters of this thesis, a common theme has been emerging; that of the frame: the frame of the field, the frame of the studio, and the frame of the painting. Referring back to Chapter Three, Morgan Thomas talks of a ‘pathology of the modern’ (2009: 28), which he suggests is tied to ‘that of framing’ (2007: 28). Examining satellite images to observe the creeping effects of (hyper)modernity as a repeated frame, or a grid transcribed on the face of the planet, we may be inclined to expand Morgan’s notion to the meta-narrative; the frame as a clear display of the age of the Anthropocene; a diagram of the human mind locked into its cartesian jail.

This, however, is not the whole story. Scaling back to the frame of my own studio, we have witnessed other forces. While it is vital that the studio is regularly and rhythmically sealed for privacy and solitude, we discovered the ebb and flow of the detritus of the studio, and the revolving rhythms of its operations. I considered the flows that come in, and the flows go out. Some of these flows are obvious and immediately visible; the collections of materials, narratives and images that are deliberately gathered and brought to the studio, and the artworks that leave it. Some flows are less apparent, such as the unconscious influence, on a painting, of a brief glance at the garden through my studio window, or a subtle shift in perception when I step back out into the world after working in my studio.

In this chapter I have considered the frame of the painting. I have seen how here, too, are less explicit forces, flows and movements into and out of the frame which, through thoughtful

curation, may be rendered tangible. I have examined the potential for painting to be assemblage, deep map, poem, sentence, score, and diagram. As the date approached for my mid-research show in April 2016, I began to ponder how these lessons learnt about flux and fluidity could be applied in a curatorial context, to exhibition. The next Chapter documents this exhibition and discusses what I learnt from my own reaction and others' feedback response, to this event.



'I discovered that the walked journey back to my birth place is plaited with my own autobiographical narrative, and with writhing strands of history, myth and story that permeate the landscape. There is no single directional flow to these strands, but rather they act like currents, alternating between here and there, now and then.'



The Gallery at the Ariel Centre  
King Edward VI Community College  
Ashburton Road, Totnes, TQ9 5JX  
01803 869 200  
[www.kingedwardvi.devon.sch.uk](http://www.kingedwardvi.devon.sch.uk)  
Monday to Friday 9.30am - 4.00pm  
Saturday 9.30 am -12.00

Figure 5.1: poster for *Crossing England* exhibition at the Ariel Centre, Totnes, 2016.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MID-RESEARCH EXHIBITION: *CROSSING ENGLAND*, 2016

This chapter addresses the mid-term exhibition that I held, as part of my practice-as-research trajectory, in April 2016. The exhibition was held in the Gallery in the Ariel Centre, Totnes (see figure 5.1). The chapter has two sections: the first section is a photo-documentation of the show. The images in this section are organised in sequence, to demonstrate progression through the gallery, beginning with the downstairs space and proceeding to the mezzanine space upstairs. I have shown wider shots of the and the second section discusses what I found out through the exhibition process; through curating and hanging the show, and from the written and spoken feedback I received in response to the exhibition.

#### 5.1 EXHIBITION IMAGES: *CROSSING ENGLAND*, 2016

##### Downstairs space



Figure 5.2: Downstairs space, showing South and South-West wall, chalk and red soil.

Figure 5.3: Shelves in the downstairs gallery; 'green' shelf (South wall) and 'red' shelf (South-West wall).





Figure 5.4: Green shelf, detail.



Figure 5.5 Red shelf, detail.



Figure 5.6: Group of *Chalky Landscapes*, *Walking Stories* paintings (2014), on wall, and stack with child's chair, South wall.



Figure 5.7: *Diptych* (2015). West wall.



Figure 5.8: Red earth & white chalk in the downstairs space.



Figure 5.9: Stack of small field drawings.





## Mezzanine space

Figure 5.10: Mezzanine, general view, showing West wall & a group of visiting students offering feedback.



Figure 5.11: Mezzanine, East wall and folding paintings on plinths.



Figure 5.12: Folding paintings in situ, mezzanine.

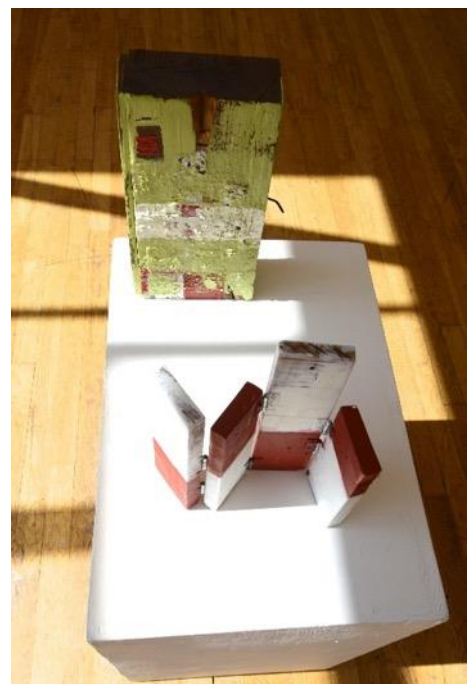


Figure 5.13: Configurations of *Hypermodernity paintings* (2015). Mezzanine West wall.

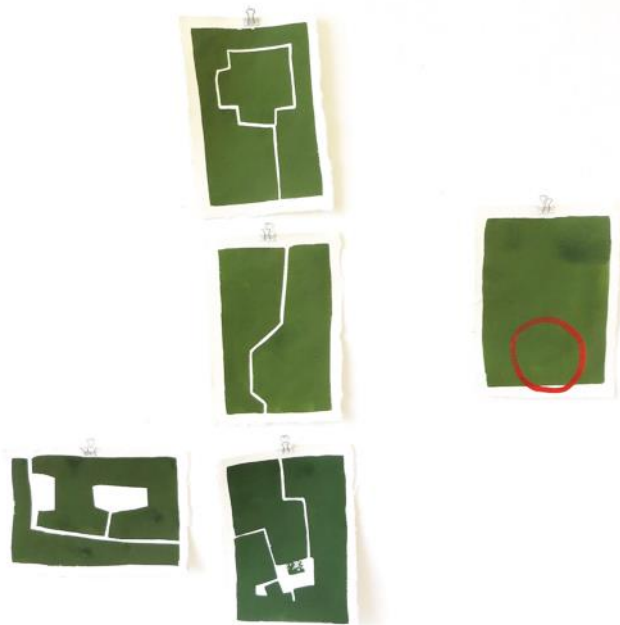
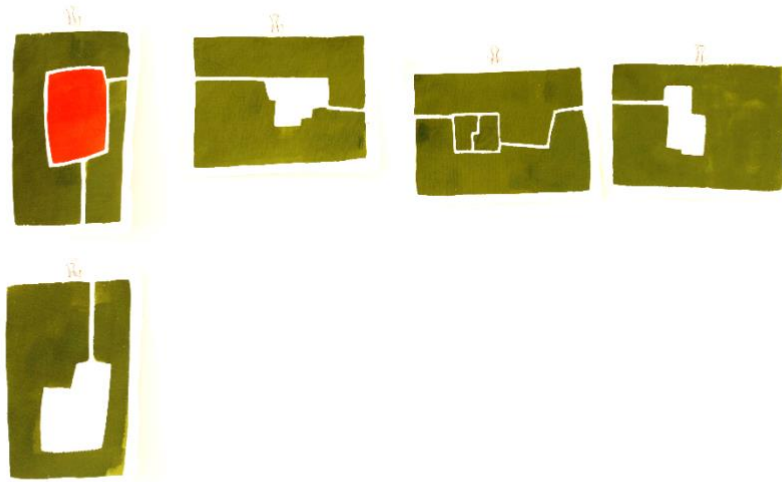


Figure 1.14 (continued): Configurations of *Hypermodernity paintings* (2015), West wall.

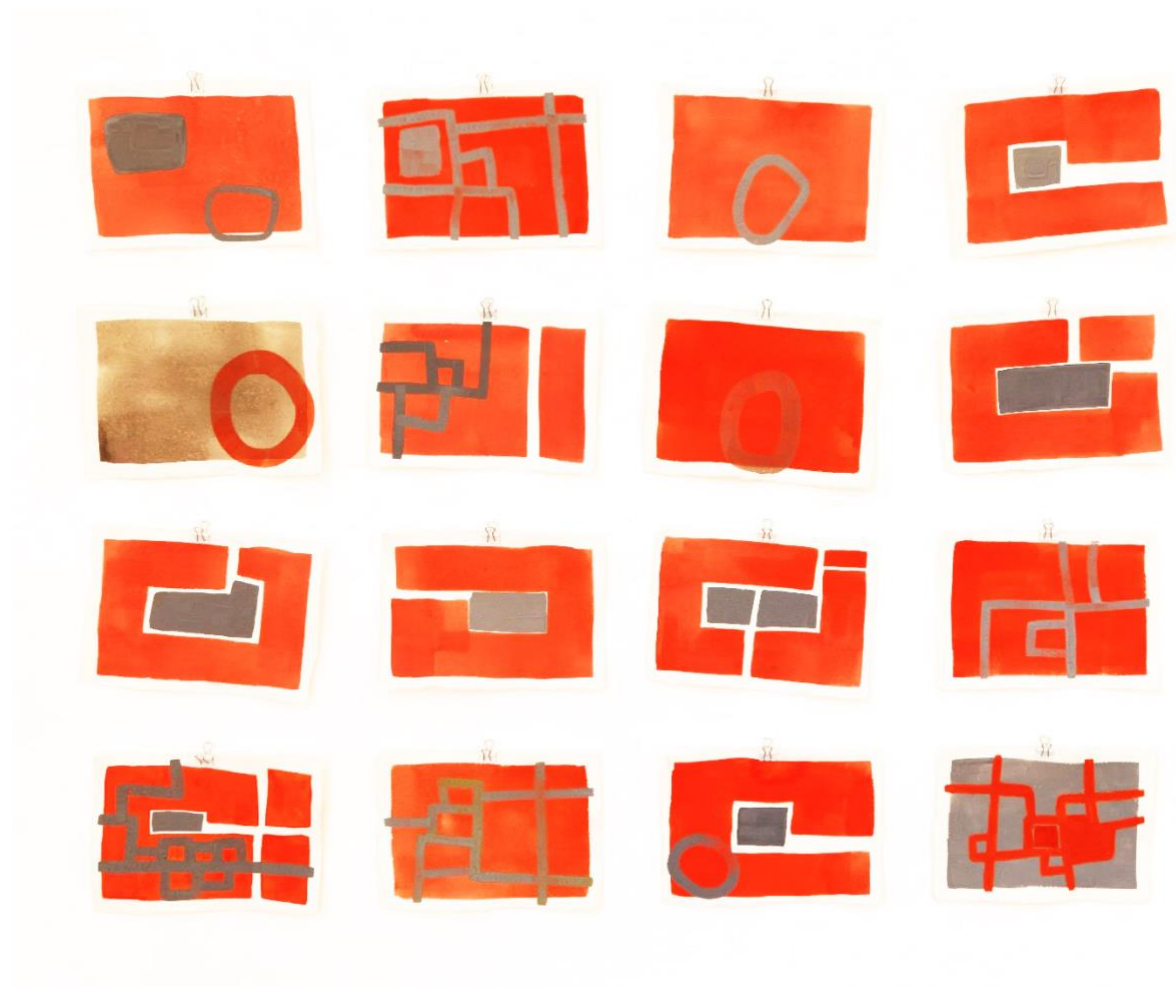




Figure 5.15: Group of oil paintings on oak panels and detail, East wall.

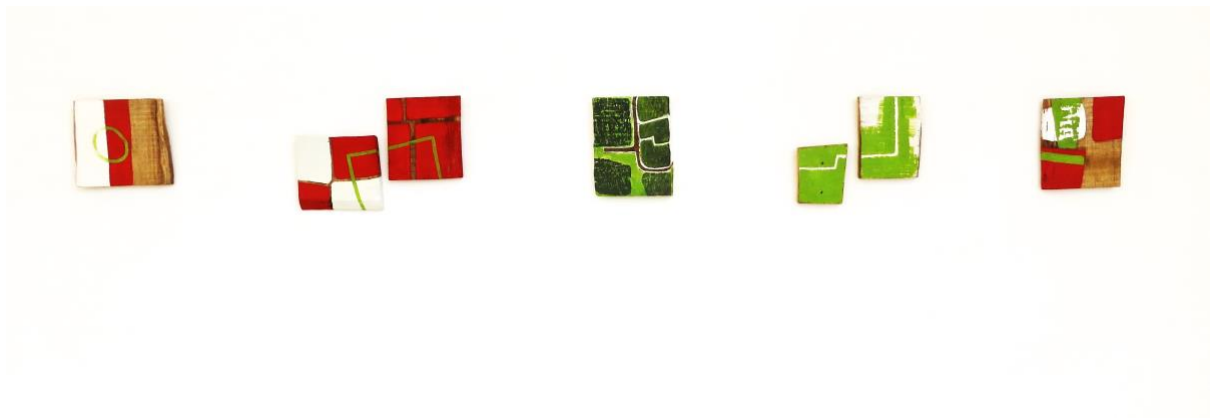


Figure 5.16: *Circular Walk* (2016). Oil paint, gesso, chalk and red earth on oak panel.



Figure 5.17: *Massey Ferguson* (2016). Oil paint on oak panel.



Figure 5.18: *English Walk* (2015) Oil paint and chalk on oak panel.



Figure 5.19: *Greenfields* (2016) . Oil paint, gesso, red earth and chalk on oak panel.



Figure 5.20: *Two Fields and a Gap* (2015). Diptych: Chalk, gesso and oil paint on wooden panels.



Figure 5.21: *Hopscotch/Giants Leap* (2016). Gesso, found chalk and oil paint on oak panel.



## Stairwell

Figure 5.22: *Unstable Signs* (2015). Diptych.

Oil & pencil on found wooden panel, gouache on cardboard packing.



## 5.2 EXHIBITION REFLECTION AND FINDINGS

A few of my anxieties about the show were put to rest simply by the process of hanging it. On completion, it was immediately apparent to me that any concerns as to whether the different ‘voices’ and collections of work would cohere, had been unnecessary; the two large spaces of the gallery gave the work plenty of room to ‘breathe’, and helped to create a coherent flow around the gallery. Some drawing work was not used, because I could not find a place to accommodate it in the gallery; it felt like ‘one voice too many’ wherever we tried it. The strategy of stacking, that I had developed to help me cope with visual clutter of the studio, also helped to consolidate different kinds of work within the gallery.

Having completed the installation, I was struck by a couple of things that, by chance, drew the work in the show into ‘conversation’ with the view through the large windows upstairs. A set of small green paintings in the *Hypermodernity* (2015) series ‘echoed’ the lines marked out on the playing fields visible through the mezzanine windows of the upstairs gallery. I also noted that there were many crows living in the trees around the playing field, and these resonated with the crow theme in the gallery, for in the gallery I had my *Monstrous Crow* video playing on a loop and also the only piece of animal figuration in the painting *Crow*. This was also the only framed painting, and was leant against the downstairs wall, next to the green child’s chair. Both of these observations were remarked upon by several visitors during the course of the show, and in the written feedback many commented on the contrasting space and light of the upstairs gallery, and how the marked playing fields outside worked with the green and white gouache paintings on the wall inside.

A game of hopscotch that children were playing outside the gallery<sup>12</sup> on the day of the private view were also commented on; several people thought that it was a fortuitous chance occurrence, and did not realise that I had drawn the squares on the ground outside the gallery.

The use of a shelf at hip, rather than eye height, was also commented on (most notably by other painters) as a break with gallery convention. I had been working with shelves at this height in my studio and made the decision to hang the shelves in this way as I wanted to preserve the sense of fluid ensemble that had emerged in the studio. Having one low shelf, and another higher, with the child's chair, gave me a sense of 'growing up' as I moved around the gallery. Using stacks of drawings that needed to be picked up to be looked at, offered observers license to touch the items on the shelves. I was interested to see whether the audience would subsequently engage with these shelves as I had done in the studio; by shuffling things about to find new constellations of objects and artworks. I cluttered the shelves up in a deliberately ad hoc manner as they had been in my studio, mixing paintings (folded and flat) with objects and text. I was also interested to test my own responses to these interventions; to see how I felt about people touching work that had taken a long time to make, some of which was quite fragile. My one concession to 'security' was for the irreplaceable objects of personal meaning: my father's compass, penknife and whistle. These I attached to the shelves by the ends of their red cords with drawing pins.

Visitors to the gallery did touch the work on the shelves. They thumbed through the drawings, and I watched them re-arrange the objects on the shelf like the words of a sentence; they played with the paper fortune tellers and felt the weight of the oak paintings and the

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<sup>12</sup> This game of hopscotch is further discussed in the 'Methodological Shifts and Innovations' section of the conclusion of this thesis.

texture of the paint; I saw a couple of people sniffing the beeswax paintings. ‘The shelves each felt like an unpacked sketchbook and the contents of your rucksack’, wrote someone, on their feedback form. My anxieties about people handling the work were unfounded, for everyone was respectful and careful; even, apparently when there had been no invigilator. The drawings came back clean, but a little creased; it was evident that paper works would not last long if repeatedly displayed in this manner. In the feedback I received, some were disturbed by the sense of clutter on the shelves; from them there was a sense that the work should have been edited further. However, many liked the clutter, enjoyed permission to touch and even to play with the objects and artworks, and a few of these people said that it reminded them of ‘home’; their current homes, but also a nostalgic sense of childhood home.

Before this solo show, my biggest concern was whether any of my walking experience would actually transfer through the work to the viewer. Earlier feedback, from studio visits and a peer review session<sup>13</sup> suggested that other artists and practitioners were able to get a sense of the interweaving themes of the journey, but I had no idea whether this would remain true in a gallery setting with a more varied audience. The feedback demonstrated clearly that most of these themes - The Voids, Hypermodernity, Childhood Memory (Games and Stories), The History of Fluid England - were accessible. ‘It was clearly laid out, almost like a detective novel or a whodunnit’, wrote one. ‘Mapping, charting, moving through, connections and networks, mobile gaze, system, iteration, psychogeography maybe’, wrote another.

In retrospect, I felt that the category I had struggled most with in the studio, ‘The Bestiary’, was the least represented. The deer was present in the textual form of the Walking Rhyme on the red shelf, the crow in a corner of one of the ‘awkward’ oil paintings, and the video of the

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<sup>13</sup> These feedback sessions are referred to on page 151, and discussed in depth in the methodological shifts and innovations section in the conclusion of this thesis.

black 'plastic crow' that was playing in the gallery. However, I personally felt that the 'Bestiary' theme was the least thoroughly addressed, and I resolved to keep working on this issue.

While most seemed to grasp the interweaving themes of the show ('It was readable in a variety of different ways'), it is possible that not all themes were grasped, or engaged with by all people. When discussing this later with supervisors, I was asked whether I wanted to ensure that all themes were accessible to everyone. After some consideration I decided this is really not my role. Cryptic or enigmatic, artworks can provoke the audience to work harder, dig deeper, engage more imaginatively and bring their own meaning to the space opened by the ambiguous allusion, gesture or nuance. Moreover, I suspect that it was those that responded to the show by engaging in this way that provided the most interesting feedback. There were some surprises relayed by viewers; aspects of my own work that I had missed. Some of this feedback referred me back to my walking journeys with the most unexpected details; some of the found objects were farmyard scrap, rusting machinery, hinged paintings were field gates ('Can I go here?', 'Is this danger?', wrote one). Some were startlingly specific; 'I like the Massey Ferguson "red" used in the wooden pieces'. On reading this I immediately remembered watching an enormous, shiny, green and red Massey Ferguson combine harvester in a flat field in Hertfordshire, and thinking at the time, 'those are my colours'. The painting referred to was not figurative in any way; just coloured paint on a block of wood. I had not gone home to make a painting of a combine harvester in a field, and yet through the precise combination of these two colours, something of that moment had been transferred to the viewer. One perspicacious person discussed the 'red' themed shelf, that had a number of works bound by red thread in the style of the George Cross. They wrote:

Those shelves bothered me: they were too tight... and I wondered if these were crowded streets of houses bearing flags, whether this claustrophobia was an overload of the senses as you started this project.



Another wrote ‘a feeling of anxiety was triggered around the red cross symbol’.

The experiences described back to me in the feedback were certainly astute. I had my own anxieties about playing with this symbol; in particular, a fear of being misunderstood. The sense of claustrophobia was also appropriate; I had noticed the English flags on my first walks as I picked through the city, ensnared in the cul-de-sacs of seeming endless housing estates. And the ‘overload of the senses’ perfectly described my struggle at the beginning of my research.

The show, and in particular the shelves, made many think of home; appropriately, as my journey lies between two homes, and the work was made at home, but surprising to me as I had been focusing on the journey when I made the work. People thought of children's storybooks and also childhood bedrooms, with their shifts of scale (counterpanes, rugs, mats as landscapes). One thought of computer game ‘levels’.

One person picked up on the ‘home’ theme, but was irritated by it; why home, when they knew the show was about walking? Another chose to take other routes around the show, preferring ‘co-existence of town and country, tarmac and green spaces,’ and ‘changing weather, heat and dust, spring green, grey horizon’, because ‘childhood games didn’t work for me’. Quite a few remarked on the shift of scale, perspective and light between the downstairs and upstairs space. While people felt comfortable touching the ‘clutter’ of the shelves downstairs, some were not sure if they were allowed to touch the folding paintings in the sparser mezzanine: ‘I wasn’t sure about whether these could be handled or not, but I would have wanted to play with them’, wrote one visitor. One questioned the height of the plinths on which the folding paintings were placed, suggesting: ‘Perhaps sets of tables where I could see individual pieces but also a comparative, whole view of all of them’.

Questioned via the feedback forms on what they thought were the themes of the show, one wrote,

signs: one encounters along the path  
lines: one follows across the land  
boundaries: to be followed or ignored  
found things, on a journey  
substrate: the ground under our feet.

Some were unsure about the presence of the penknife (none questioned the compass which was part of that group), but others responded to the red cords attached to them, as part of journey or narrative that interwove throughout the show. Several people commented on the small scale of the works: 'It all felt so transportable, so pocket and backpack'.

Quite a few mentioned historical time ('romans', 'the dark ages' and 'the bronze age'), but also a sense of time collapsing, non-linear time, even a calling to the future: '...archaic tramping over green fields to unknown destinations weaving in and out of the past and future...' wrote one, when asked in the feedback form what they considered were the themes of the show. One of the most intriguing pieces of feedback I received was from a conversation I had in the gallery. I asked them to tell me what they thought the themes of the show were. They embarked on a story, speaking in a hushed voice:

It is the Bronze Age. In the Future. After the fall of civilization. People have found objects from the past (road signs, packaging) but they have new meanings, spiritual ones, and are worshipped as holy relics...

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have discussed how the exhibition process, and the feedback that I was able to gather through this process, gave valuable insights in to my own processes in a number of ways. It gave me confidence that the work was 'speaking', in what were often subtle ways. It showed me that it was possible to bring together different ways of working, different 'voices', and yet retain a sense of coherence within a gallery space. I also saw, more generally, that it was

necessary at times to resist my controlling impulse to direct the attention of the onlooker, and allow a sense of openness, or ambiguity in the work. I was surprised by how some events and experiences from my walks had been relayed to viewer (the sense of claustrophobia from the English flags in housing estates, the colours of the Massey Ferguson tractor) when I had had little, if any, conscious intention to weave these themes into the work during its construction in the studio.

While I was surprised and encouraged by the insights that the work had given others, I felt that I still needed to find ways to integrate the ‘animal presences’ that I had spent a lot of time thinking about on my walks, but clearer that I did not want to represent them in images. I was also aware that I had used the two levels of the gallery to separate different studio ‘voices’ or modes of working. I was not sure that, had it been a single or smaller space, this proliferation of work would have sat so easily together. After the exhibition I felt that I needed to persist in finding a way to assemble these voices in a single space without them competing; in the same way that I would work to resolve the elements of a painting within its frame, it seemed to me to be necessary to find a way to bring together all the elements of the work within the frame of the gallery.

To help me achieve this, and in order to get a fresh perspective on the studio practice, I decided to resume walking on the *Crossing England* route, during the summer following my exhibition at the Ariel Centre in April 2016. In the next chapter I will discuss the findings of these walks.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REVISED APPROACHES TO WALKING & LANDSCAPE**

In Chapter Six, I discuss a period of new walks, made as part of my practice-as-research during the summer of 2016. These walks were made as in response to findings from, and reflection on, my solo exhibition in the Ariel Centre (see Chapter Five). In the first part of the chapter I explain how, after the exhibition, I found that my perception of the landscape had altered, as a result of continuously walking a single route for two years, and making work in the studio in response. I describe how I revisited a series of key sites in the landscape; sites that had grown in importance and significance to my practice during phases of making in the studio. From these visits I discovered new layers of information about these sites. This complexity of information subsequently came to add further depth to the artistic processes of the studio.

In the second part of this chapter I discuss my developing approach to making non-figurative work about the ‘absent presences’ of animals in the landscape, as a quest for a ‘Bestiary for the Anthropocene’. As part of this enquiry, I discuss some other practitioner responses to this issue. These responses include the poetry of Ted Hughes, the writing of Nick Papadimitriou and Barry Lopez, paintings by Cecily Brown and performance work by Marcus Coates. I explore ways to mourn and remember lost and disappearing animal species, and ways to explore the ‘Hybrid I’ (Franck, 2016: i), or animal becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 32), through a form of fabulation, that was brought about by walking.

## 6.1

### RETURNING, REVIEWING, REVISING

#### **Walking after the *Crossing England* Exhibition: a more focused approach**

After my *Crossing England* (2016) show, I resumed walking to find that, rather than the walks informing the studio activities, this had now become a two-way process, with the new walks equally informed by previous activities within studio. Throughout the summer of 2016, I made more walks on my route between Cambridge and Plymouth. As this was the third summer of walking for this project, I anticipated that the walks would continue to unfold in a similar vein to previous summers, noting and absorbing a mass of information in different kinds of landscape, followed by a period of retrospectively ‘sorting the wheat from the chaff’. It did not turn out this way. There was more wheat, less chaff. As a result, there were minor shifts in my walking methodology. While I continued to keep my walking blog, I found myself less concerned with recording the minutiae of each walk, for a lot of detail seemed irrelevant, now that I had identified the themes I wanted to use for my making-practice. It was the interweaving storylines that I now tracked across the landscape. Tropes and motifs that I had developed, from studio to exhibition, were now jumping out at me with every step I took. After phases of writing, and of making work in the studio, my exploration of the landscape felt more focused; I never knew what I was seeking, but I was much better at recognising it when I found it. I collected more red and white soil, and some rusty hinges that brought to mind my folding paintings.

Instead of edgeland, I more often found myself walking from village to village on paths between open fields and woodland. I noted new rhythms. Rather than wheelie bins and fence posts, I noted trees; Ash (often by a spring), Beech, Holly, Oak, Yew (always in a graveyard),

Ivy (everywhere). Diedre Heddon reports how, when she worked with director and dramaturge Dorinda Hulton, Hulton found:

Leaving the spinney was like a semi-colon, crossing a ditch like a comma, standing around the little tree at the end of the piece was like a dot dot dot... (Hulton in Heddon)

During the sentences of my walks, I started to understand the logic of Robert Graves' theory of how trees once formed an alphabet: the Ogham. Graves' elaboration of the Ogham as a 'genuine relic of Druidism orally transmitted down the centuries' (Graves, 1961: 165) is now largely discredited as poetic whimsy. However, as I strolled through those woods, I began to understand how his intuitive invention could have come about.

When walking between villages it is the spire or tower of the local church that reassures that we have taken the right path. Guided across the terrain by these landmarks, the village church became my primary destination in each new village. I noted that many churches by water were dedicated to Mary (Virgin or Magdalene). Some church doors were locked, some were open. I lit a candle in every church that was open; I am not a Christian, and had never previously felt at license, nor any inclination, to do this, but now I did. The candles I lit were to illuminate the passages and paths between spaces and times, and had nothing to do with god or religion.

During this period I continued to revisit significant sites, widening my geographic knowledge of the areas around terrain already explored, and also reaffirming, as Roberta Mock describes it, 'the bonding of thickly laid temporal dimensions through embodiment' (2010: 8). Several sites played particularly in my mind; two of these were sites of excavation, for different minerals, on an industrial scale.

## **Return to the Spinney and the Chalk Pits**

I returned several times to Lime Kiln Hill, the site of the Spinney and the chalk pits, a quarter of a mile from my parents' house, at the back of my old school playing fields, on the threshold of Cherry Hinton, now a Cambridge suburb. My research had exposed this site to be a repository of some of my most intense childhood and teenage memories. Once a brooding, menacing, enclosed space, it has now been cleaned up and made accessible as a nature reserve. In 1910 Edward Conybeare wrote of this site:

The great quarry [...] is a conspicuous object on the hill-side above the village; and above that again, equally conspicuous is the reservoir of the Cambridge water-works, looking like a redoubt, on the summit of the slope. At the foot clear springs break out from the chalk, which are also utilised to supply the town. (Conybeare, 1910: 208)

I visited this spring, over the busy main road from the Spinney entrance, five minutes walk from my old school gates; we had played there as children and I remember it being full of rubbish. The spring is called Giant's Grave, a strange name for a spring.

I read more about the chalk pits including Alexandra Pickstone and Richard Mortimer's account of their 2009 archaeological survey of Lime Kilne Hill, (which is, in fact, no longer a hill, but the chalk spine of an ascending road, quarried away to sharp cliffs on either side).

Reading the survey, I discovered that before it had become a quarry, it was a site of notable archaeological interest:

War Ditches is a large enclosure, lying on a spur of the Gog Magog hills to the south of Cambridge. Much of this originally circular monument was destroyed by chalk quarrying in the late 19th to mid 20th centuries, during which time a series of excavations was conducted, largely under the auspices of Cambridge Antiquarian Society. Had the monument survived intact, it would undoubtedly have acquired scheduled status as one of the county's key prehistoric monuments. (Pickstone & Mortimer, n.d.)

I was amazed that I had never known this before. The survey contained other fascinating information:

During the summer of 2008 children playing within the East Pit, Cherry Hinton (Fig. 1, TL 484 555) discovered the legs and feet of a human burial, along with animal

bones and Romano-British pottery, high up in the south-eastern corner of the quarry. (Pickstone & Mortimer, n.d.)

This reminded me of my time playing in this forbidden place, and how terrifying I had found it, but I had never found human bones.

I read more about War Ditches (I had never known it by that name) in Conybeare's *Highways and Byways in Cambridgeshire and Ely* (1910). He describes a fortified, pre-Roman earthwork next to the reservoir on top of Lime Kiln Hill, that was excavated by a Professor Hughes. Conybeare writes of Hughes' excavation:

At the bottom of the fosse he discovered rough British pottery along with the bones of domestic animals, and above these a layer of disjointed human skeletons of both sexes and all ages, apparently due to a general massacre, in some pre-historic struggle, of men, women and children, whose corpses were hurled over the parapet. (Conybeare, 1910)

Pickstone and Mortimer report one more intriguing detail about early excavation of the site in 1854, a detail that was originally published in the *Cambridge Chronicle* at the time:

They reported the discovery of up to nine skeletons and noted that "several of them were of large size, and were evidently the remains of men who reached to a greater height than ordinary men in the present day". (Pickstone and Mortimer, 2009)

### **Return to the Wolfram Tungsten Mine, Sparkwell**

In Devon I returned to the Wolfram Tungsten mine near Sparkwell on the edge of Dartmoor. I saw a wild stag running away from the place I had found the hind leg of a deer hanging on a barbed wire fence three years before; the rest of its bones picked clean on the floor below. This time, I scabbled around in the undergrowth, trying to find the bones, thinking that maybe I could integrate them into my artwork, but with no luck; they had either returned



to the earth, or been carried away by animals. So I spent the afternoon picking sheep's wool and horse hair off the barbed wire fences to take back to my studio.

I discovered a previously unexplored area, Drakelands, to the East of the established tungsten mine, which had been earmarked by the mining company Wolfram for expansion. This zone was a Devon valley with a small stream, mature oaks, rowan and apple trees and more wild stags. There were several recently abandoned, boarded up houses with overgrowing gardens and private security signs on the gates. With the constant hum of the active tungsten mine in the background, the doomed valley had a strange and mournful ambiance. It was here that I caught my own knee while climbing a barbed wire fence, and watched the bright blood run down my leg like a red, painted road in one of my paintings. I promised to return to the site with a camera; to document it before everything was gone forever, and this I did, six months later.



Figure 6.1: Wolf Minerals sign in the abandoned village of Drakelands, near Plymouth (2016).

### **Return to Rouses Wood, near Royston**

Another place I returned to was a friend's woodland not far from the Ickneild Way called Rouses Wood at Shingay cum Wendy near Royston; this land that once belonged to the Knights Templar. It was here that family of white deer had lived, before being shot, one by one, by the neighbouring landowner. I never saw the white deer, but my friend and his family had had several encounters with them, and it was after hearing their stories that I had stalked images of the White Hart up Royston High Street in the form of street signs. This time, my friend handed me a carrier bag of large, white bones. They were bones (he said) from a white stag that had lived in Rouses Wood. He had had them for a number of years, and now they were mine. They were not only beautiful and enigmatic, but felt good in the hand, and made a musical sound when knocked together. The fact that I had never seen the white deer did not bother me, for that made it the stuff of myth. The fact that I had no proof the bones were actually from a white hart was also irrelevant, for such is the way with all relics.

### **The vehicular drift**

Fiona Wilkie (2014) notes the complicated and paradoxical relationships that many artists have with their cars when she describes it as 'caught in the contradiction between the promises and pleasures of automobility and the unsustainable, environmentally offensive machine of the automobile' (2014: 89). I now had to drive at least an hour and a half from my home in Plymouth, or from my childhood home in Cambridge, to access previously unwalked stretches of the route. A project that was born from a desire to escape the tyranny of the car had become increasingly reliant on it. This left me feeling curiously untethered from either end of the route. Time and money always a pressure, I tried to use trips that I needed to make anyway – such as visiting friends or family, in Somerset and Wiltshire – to explore new parts of my journey. The way I used the car changed; I took the motorway less, exploring minor

roads so that I could reconnoitre for future walks. I noted that the intuitive navigational skills that had been activated through walking were now at play during these car explorations. My car journeys were longer, but more engaged, I lost my anxiety about getting lost, and would deliberately veer off the road, enjoying winding slowly around empty lanes on hot days, noting place names and landmarks, finding places to walk, until finally I would be spat out onto a major artery to join the rush of traffic once more. The car *dérive* had become an important part of my process.

Simon O’Sullivan suggests that

...digital imaging and editing technology means that there is now the possibility of a more accelerated mixing of different temporal and spatial worlds and, as such, of increasing this density – and, with it, producing ever stranger spatialities and temporalities. (O’Sullivan, 2015:6)

Rather than (or as well as) digital technology, the use of the car as a tool for the *dérive* achieved the same purpose. Instead of tethering me to the Newtonian grid, the car now functioned as a machine to collapse time and space, giving me the ability to pop up anywhere on my route at any time, walking in different directions, picking up, dropping, crossing, splicing and accelerating separate storylines. The effect was the same as that described by O’Sullivan, allowing: ‘the introduction of a different character (or a different speed) into a different scene that has its own duration, or, indeed, the insertion of one scene into another’(2015: 6).

### **Red and White water**

In a small town in Somerset I was excited to discover, quite by chance, water gushing from walls either side of a narrow lane. The water issued from two distinct sources; a red spring on

the left of the path, and a white spring on the right. The two waters are visibly different from each other. Each water has its own taste and the waters of the two springs are celebrated locally with a knotted tangle of Christian and Pagan tales. They are collected at source for their libatious and their ablutive qualities. Not only did I feel compelled to immerse myself in the waters at the site (it was a hot day), but in the same way that I had collected the red and white soil, I collected the red and white water, took it home and drank it, a sip from each bottle every day. The duality of red and white now not only flowed as a theme through my walking and studio practices, but took on an embodied nature, as water flowing over and through my own body.

## 6.2

### **A BESTIARY FOR THE ANTHROPOCENE**

Story is the beast of burden; the bearer of imaginative energy. (Tim Winton, 2017: - online)

On the southern edge of Dartmoor, where three roads meet, there is a tiny church dedicated to St Petroc, who was a tamer of wolves. Three miles walk downhill towards Plymouth, a pack of captive wolves live, enclosed in a wildlife park. Their collective howling can be heard a mile further on, where Wolf Minerals is tearing down the hills for tungsten, in the largest open-cast mine in Europe. Tungsten, a chemical element, symbol W and atomic number 74, is also known as Wolfram. This seam of a-causal connection that runs from the edgelands of Plymouth up to the southern edges of Dartmoor is one among several embodied creature and place-related journey-lines that I noted on my walks. The walking drew forth these seams of fabulation; a fusion of my own subjectivity and the specificities of place.

In Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) there is another Wolf Line; a photograph of a line of holes in the snow, captioned, 'Field of Tracks or Wolf Line'. A short chapter follows this image; a scathing attack on Freud's 'myopic' approach to the analysis (and supposed 'cure') of his long-term patient and celebrated case study, known as the Wolfman (1988: 33). Deleuze and Guattari describe Freud's 'reductive glee', as he

"castrates" and tames a childhood dream of seven white, watching wolves in a tree; for Freud's analysis only allows for interpretation of such a dream in terms of human events and oedipal desires. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 31)

Deleuze and Guattari reject Freud's diagnosis:

who is Freud trying to fool? The wolves never had a chance to get away and save their pack: it was already decided from the very beginning that the animals could serve only to represent coitus between parents. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 32)

Instead, they offer a much more straight-forward interpretation: 'Freud obviously knows nothing about the fascination exerted by wolves and the meaning of their silent call, the call to become-wolf' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 32).

A paper by literary academic Sam George examines the modern phenomena of 'Old Stinker', a series of present-day were-wolf sightings north of Hull, which have been picked up and perpetuated by local and national press. George draws on the notion of 'what is missing rather than what is present' to critique this phenomenon. She writes: "'Old Stinker" inhabits a landscape which is thought to have accommodated some of the last wolves in England. These sightings coincide with a phase of severe environmental damage.' (2017: 1) George welcomes this modern myth of lycanthropy as an opportunity to atone for 'what humans did to wolves' and to 'initiate re-wilding debates' (2017: 14).

Similar to the terrain of Old Stinker sightings, my own ‘fabulous wolf’ manifestations are confined to a locality of historic, ongoing and accelerating ecological devastation on the Southern limits of Dartmoor; from china clay, tin, and now tungsten mining. During a process of walking through, and returning to, this area, I documented this devastation over the last four years. Place names often carry cultural memory, and I noted a Wolverwood Farm and Wolverwood Road on my route from Plympton on the edgelands of Plymouth, on the way to Harford on the edge of the moor. Dartmoor was also a last bastion for wild British wolves. Eric Hemery in his comprehensive study *High Dartmoor: land and people* (1983), describes how the last wolves in Devon are said to have been killed in the woods of Drewsteignton and Brimpts in the early 1780’s (1983: 42), and how ‘Creber Pound’, a stone sheep fold on Dartmoor, ‘was made to keep the wolves out’ (1983: 803).

Kaja Franck, scholar of the werewolf’s changing role as a figure in literature, tracks a shift in approaches to the lycanthropic as a response to ‘the growing awareness of environmentalism during the late twentieth century’:

As humanity questions our relationship with nature, clear divides between the animal and the human seem arbitrary, and the werewolf no longer remains the monstrous object within the text. (Franck, 2016: i)

Central to Franck’s thesis is the exposing of the ‘hybrid I’ as a ‘way of experiencing and representing, non-human, as well as human voice’ (Franck, 2016: i).

My preoccupation with the non-human animal is not new. In my blog about my artist’s residency in High Cross House, Dartington, I wrote a post entitled ‘Enclosure and Unease’. I describe how ‘I became interested in the domestic animals around me’ (Mapping Dartington Blog, 2014: online). I was haunted by the bellowing of the dairy cows and their calves that

were removed within hours of their birth, in the field opposite my studio. I spent hours drawing the five piglets of the community farm in their tiny, electrified pen, celebrated with them on the day they escaped into the orchard, and mourned for them when they were taken to be slaughtered. It was not just the domestic animals, ‘the tiny little lives of gnats and ants in the woodlands grew enormous and significant’ (Mapping Dartington Blog, 2014: online). I filmed caterpillars and the flight paths of birds, and mapped out the trajectory of a rabbit across the lawn outside my studio.

The stories of the phantasmagoric bestiary that hopped, flapped and ran at speed through my walks across England, however, were something different. Out of all the things I collected on my walks across England, these absent presences (always ‘behind the hedge’) were the anomaly. They were, as Berger describes it ‘the animals of the mind’ (2009: 25); closer to Ted Hughes’ *Thought Fox* (1957), a presence which manifests fully in the printed form of a poem, accompanied by ‘a sudden sharp hot stink of fox’<sup>14</sup> (Hughes, 1957). There is a paradoxical element here; I first noted these animals in logos, billboards and pub signs, and they emerged scratchily through the paint of the first paintings I made, yet the visual image was never appropriate. I could not represent them because they were unrepresentable.

Deleuze and Guattari say, ‘not only do animals have colours and sounds, but they do not wait for the painter or musician to use those colours or sounds in a painting or in music’ (1988:337). The frame of the painting or drawing is an enclosure that seals the fate of the animal as much as pen, pound, fold or field.

It was in the gaps between paintings, and the spaces between fields that I found myself on the edge of my usual praxis, forming alliances with absent presences of animals. Although this

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<sup>14</sup> note it is the sense of smell, rather than the image, that announces the fox’s arrival in Hughes’ poem.

process of performative fabulation felt familiar; rooted in my childhood modes of play, and drawn out through the somatic process of walking, this was new territory for me as artist and I was always resistant. I did not know how to respond to it, nor even what I should call it: Performance? Storytelling? Deleuze and Guattari would call it Demonology and Sorcery.

They say:

Sorcerers have always held the anomalous position, at the edge of the field or the woods. They haunt the fringes. They are at the borderline of the village or *between* villages. The important thing is their affinity with alliance, with the pact... (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 271).

Deleuze and Guattari describe how the ‘anomalous’ is found at the edge, or the head of the pack. This is a borderline where affects are passed between packs, through contagion. Here is the zone of becoming-animal; where anomalies, on the edges of their packs, assemble with anomalies of other packs, to form pacts. Moby-Dick, for example, is the anomalous white whale that forms a pact with Ahab, as a becoming-whale. (Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 286-274). It was an anomalous white deer that h(a)unted me along the Icknield Way, to the edges of my practice as an artist. Scholar and activist Patricia MacCormack describes this zone as an ‘ecosophy’, a ‘closing of the gap’ (MacCormack, 2014: online). She suggests that ‘between the two there is threshold and fibre; symbiosis or passage between heterogeneities’, where there is opportunity for a ‘demonological activism’ and for ‘the philosopher to put their body where their pen is’ (MacCormack, 2014: online).

Another creature that emerged in my early paintings, and accompanied me across England was the crow; ‘flying the black flag of himself’, as Ted Hughes tells us in his poem *Crow Blacker Than Ever* (1970). There are other crow alliances within contemporary ambulatory-related British literature: Nick Papdimitriou’s roaming narrative inhabits the voice of a crow to bear witness to centuries of change as a mouthpiece for the ‘county consciousness’ of Middlesex, in one chapter of his autobiographical odyssey *Scarp* (2013). *The Southwark*



*Mysteries* (2011), first performed at the Shakespeare's Globe, and in Southwark Cathedral in 2003, were 'revealed' to 'trickster familiar' and 'shamanic double' of poet and performer John Constable in the form of a character named John Crow (Constable, 2011: 12). It was the crow that first led me to imagine a Bestiary for the Anthropocene (and what that might be), when, for two minutes I filmed a ripped black plastic bag caught in a hedge and blown by the wind, with the uncanny appearance (in form and movement) of the preening black and ragged bird<sup>15</sup>; a demonological hybrid, assembled from remnants (black plastic waste) of anthropocentric human activity, and the memory of a crow in a hedgerow. What better material to refer to the Age of the Anthropocene than black plastic.

In discussion with artist Marcus Coates, Una Chaudhuri explains a current shift within theatre and performance towards new ways of talking and thinking about animals, exploring 'the literal animal as opposed to the figurative animal' (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online). Rather than (or as well as) using the animal as a metaphor (or mirror) for human nature, this approach involves shifting the focus of attention to the animal body, its geography and history, as well as its different capacities. This does not mean, says Chaudhuri, that we need actual animals in the work: 'it does not need to be a circus' she says, we can 'be thinking about animals, but through this other lens, the non-symbolic lens'.

A literal, but not figurative animal that does not need to be an actual animal. This is much closer to the 'animals behind the hedge' that were continually conjured up through walking, and through text and video in my 2016 show. Coates describes how, as children, he and his brother once physically paced out the size of an enormous tiger that they had read about.

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<sup>15</sup> This 2 minute video clip, *Monstrous Crow* or *Crow for the Anthropocene* (2015) is initially discussed in Chapter 2 & 5 of this thesis.

Through this embodied process, he says, they found themselves engaged with this tiger much more than when they visited it in the zoo. He says, ‘the thing existed, we had brought it to life... and I had feelings for that animal, I wanted to protect it and I was worried about its endangered state in the wild’.

With Haraway’s tentacular thinking in mind, I now cast my net wide, to explore what kind of fabulations we might find in a ‘Bestiary for the Anthropocene<sup>16</sup>’ (or I should say the ‘Chthulucene<sup>17</sup>’). To do this I examine a range of creative practitioners and their differing approaches to making work about the relationships between human, non-human and the shared environment.

Marcus Coates’s work, usually about his own, imagined ‘animal becomings’, have included moving his body, singing or speaking like an animal, and wearing animal hides. The performances are often ludicrous, hilarious, and yet Coates’s geeky charm and utter sincerity opens up an unusual space to confront issues of human and non-human ontology, and our collective environment. Chaudhuri suggests that out of this work a ‘wisdom of movement’ or a ‘certain kind of new knowledge’ is made available (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online). Coates suggests that his work challenges the ‘drive and the pressure we feel to be autonomous’, and he contests ‘the sense that we need to be closed, we need to be individuals, we need to know ourselves and we need to be bounded by that’ (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online). Through his extraordinary experiments Coates says he has discovered the

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Anthropocene’ in this context refers to the current geological age, viewed as the period during which human activity, in particular activity related to Capitalism, has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment.

<sup>17</sup> ‘Chthulucene’ is suggested by Haraway as an alternative narrative to that of the Anthropocene, that considers the ‘tentacular’ powers of the earth. This is discussed further in the final chapter of this thesis.

‘amorphousness of self’, and that ‘there is no one self, there are many selves’, and that one can ‘inhabit, almost simultaneously, different positions’ (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online). ‘Serious play’, suggests Coates, helps us to ‘pursue that imaginative space’ that opens up the ‘bounded self’, and helps us to enter into ‘a new subjectivity’ (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online). In this state, unbounded by language and by the rational self, says Coates, ‘something else’ takes charge: ‘this being, this physicality, this movement knowledge’ (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online). The play is serious, because, like Simon O’Sullivan, Coates believes that techniques that open us to ‘new subjectivities’ have potential to be ‘a pragmatic tool, and even a political tool’ (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online). Indeed, Coates has used his practice to mediate between developers, councillors and the residents of the condemned Heygate estate in *A Ritual for the Elephant and Castle* (2012), and to advise the mayor of Holon in Israel in *The Plover’s Wing* (2009).

### **Speaking for the dead**

While I found the creatures of my own bestiary were unpaintable, Cecily Brown’s recent paintings are on the theme of animals and paradise, and draw from Jacob Hoefnagal’s painting, *Orpheus Charming the Animals* (1613). When Brown began to make studies from Hoefnagal’s painting, it struck her that ‘even in fifty years there might be people who have never seen some of these animals in the flesh’ (Brown, 2016: online). In Brown’s version of the painting things are different; the animal bodies disintegrate and morph, and fall apart. Nothing is defined, all is in flux. ‘Everything is in peril, everything is disintegrating, nothing lasts’, she says, ‘they are quite sad paintings I think [...] we are suffering what we have done to the world’ (Brown, 2016: online).

Donna Haraway advocates telling all kinds of stories – scientific, factual, speculative and fabulous – about dogs, apes, butterflies, sheep, jellyfish octopi and spiders and humans. She proposes art and storytelling to ‘cultivate response-ability’, to explore ‘the blasted landscapes’, ‘the ruins that have become our collective home’ (2016: 36) and to combat the ‘common-place thoughtlessness’ (2016: 36) of the human that is ‘unable to make present [...] what is absent’ (2016: 32). Haraway’s tales remind us that humans and non-human are not separate entities but our companions; open systems interpolating and interpolated actants in yet wider, sympoietic life systems. Haraway’s are complexities of ongoing, interwoven stories, without beginnings and endings. Driven by ‘love and rage’ (2016: 137) they are also tales of mourning and remembering, for she underlines the importance of becoming a Speaker for the Dead, ‘to bring into ongoing and alive presence, through active memory, the lost life ways’ (2016: 166). The work of the Speakers of the Dead, says Haraway, is to ‘keen and mourn for the dismembering of the world’ as part of a practice of ‘healing and ongoingness in the cyclones of continuing damage and partial resurgence’ (2016: 166).

Nature columnist John Burnside (2012) describes how writer Barry Lopez developed a ritual of removing dead animals from the road and placing them with care on the verge: ‘To each dead creature he encountered, Lopez offered a few words of apology, something akin to a prayer’ (Burnside, 2012: online). Burnside finds real pertinence in such an action:

To handle another animal in this way is to reassert one’s own, usually concealed bond with the creaturely. Because such handling demands tact and real tenderness, it becomes a highly charged event, an assumption of responsibility and a declaration not of guilt, which is something else, but penitence. (Burnside, 2012: online)

Burnside dismisses temptations to shrug off Lopez’s roadkill rituals as sentimentality, and points, in contrast, to the North American pursuit of the ‘Roadside Bingo Game’; ‘players

score by spotting dead animals on the road and ticking them off on a bingo card, the winner being the first to get five different animals in one row or column' (Burnside, 2012: online). In contrast to Lopez's approach, Caroline Goldstein (2017), writing for *Artnet* magazine, estimates that 'nearly one million' animals have died 'for Damien Hirst's art to live'. She suggests that this is a 'conservative estimate', given that the total includes the flies zapped by a bug-zapper in *One Thousand Years* 'a vitrine featuring a rotting cow skull that breeds maggots that become flies' and the '1, 629 butterflies' that were 'affixed across 62 canvases. Goldstein adds that this estimate does not include the '9,000 that were killed over the course of Hirst's 23-week retrospective at Tate Modern, which featured the live-butterfly spectacle *In and Out of Love*' (Goldstein, 2017: online). Hirst presents these works as a Memento Mori; a mirror to our collective human fear of death. However, the volume of Hirst's work in this mode suggests to me an approach that is closer to the game 'Roadside Bingo', described by Burnside. An approach that does not challenge, but maintains and repeats an old formula, and that desensitises to the point of cruelty. Perhaps, rather than death, it is actually systematic desensitisation and gratuitous human cruelty that is contemplated when confronted with Hirst's works.

Feral Theatre demonstrate a different approach to the non-human animal: they were one of the co-founders of the International Remembrance Day for Lost Species, which has been held annually on 30th November since 2011. There have been several ceremonies for the Great Auk (d.1844), including a burial at sea and funeral pyres in coastal Wales and Scotland. In Belgium, families lit candles for disappeared indigenous butterflies. In Brighton, paper flags were waved in a procession for the Caribbean Monk Seal (d.1952). In 2014 there were a number of centenary memorials to the Passenger Pigeon (d.1914).

In this section, out of a desire not to use the representative image of animals in ways comparable to those presented by the Spectacle (Débord, 1995), I have explored a range of alternative approaches to thinking about, and making artwork in response to the non-human. In this context, will now recount an experience that shows how particular kinds of walking practice has also helped me to further consider these issues,

### **Yatra: the pack**

In April 2016, I walked sixty-five miles with a group of forty Triratna Buddhists across the Blackdown Hills and over the Somerset Levels. When I agreed to walk with the Buddhists I knew that the walking was to be silent, but I did not know that we would also always walk in a line. As a solitary walker who likes to set my own pace, stop at will, or veer spontaneously off course on a whim, I struggled for the first hour with having lost this autonomy. However, I very quickly began to appreciate the pleasure of walking silently through the landscape in this way. The line took on its own autonomy. I became two legs of an eighty-legged caterpillar, marauding through the South West. We became a single organism, always aware of head, tail, and body in between. I took delight in the flowing shapes we made across the landscape, the coiling and uncoiling. I enjoyed the process of walking without need to know where I was. Despite our silence, it was never silent; there was always the companionable trudging, the panting up hill, the squeaking of leather boots. As the week wore on, we became finely attuned to operating in this manner; a language of subtle gestures, eye movements, and nods rippling along the line. With no spoken language amongst my human companions, I felt closer than I ever have to knowing what it is to move as a pack of animals. Domestic animals in the fields were astounded to see us; herds of cattle, sheep and horses would mobilise excitedly, to pack up with us, to join the journey. Something timeless and nomadic was

stirred within them, and within ourselves. They would walk with us, *en masse*, to the very edges of their enclosures, where they would stand, behind their fences, calling after us as we walked on our way. It was a wrench to leave them behind.

Figure 6.2: Yatra: 65 miles across the Blackdown Hills and over the Somerset Levels with Buddhafield, 2016.

## Conclusion

My collected, imaginary menagerie remains the anomaly; the straggling hair that is part of, but escapes the tighter weave of this thesis. The fabulous beasts caused me to put down my paintbrush (only ever temporarily), and to explore these non-human voices by new ways of fabrication; assembling text, videos of rubbish in hedgerows, and relics of embodied animals alongside my paintings and drawings. They also provoked me to interrogate further the concepts of the ‘hybrid I’ (Franck, 2016: i), and the ‘unbounded self’ (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online). I felt compelled to find a way to express these non-human voices, and show how my embodied journeys entwined with tales of human and creaturely nature. Collectively, they are attempts to tell of ‘the side-winding, snaky shape of becoming with’ (Harway, 2016: 40).



In this chapter we have seen how returning to specific sites helped me to access deeper and stranger layers of relationship with the landscape. I have shown how, after two years of working in the studio in response to crossing England, my perception and experience of the landscape was altered, and the processes of the studio came to inform my walking practice, as much as the other way around. I have explored non-representational ways of making Art in response to the non-human animal, and in relation to my own experimentation, I have examined a range of approaches taken by other practitioners while imagining a Bestiary for the Anthropocene. In the next chapter I will develop this theme by showing how working with the five bones of a white deer in my studio, served to strengthen a sense of shared fragility, of alignment and companionship with the non-human, and more-than-human that I encountered on my walks.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **REVISED APPROACHES TO MAKING & LANDSCAPE**

In this chapter, I focus on a period of studio activity that began in October 2016, after a summer of new walks and of re-visiting certain significant sites (discussed in Chapter Six). This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section I track the making of four artworks: the *Cabinet of English Medicine* (2016), and the three *Crossing England Drawings* (2016), recounting how this phase of studio making was interrupted by an intense period of personal bereavement, illness and injury that prompted new ways of working. In an attempt to shed light my working processes during this time of great personal change, in the second section of this chapter I unpick this experience by circumambulating various discourses on shifting subjectivities in relation to creativity and embodiment. In the final section I discuss the Deleuzian diagram in relation to narrative, journeying, philosophical thinking and my own work. I show how the diagram can be applied in different contexts as a tool to relay patterns and structures from one mode of activity to the other.

#### **7.1 BACK TO THE STUDIO**

##### **Return to making**

In October 2016, seven months after the *Crossing England* exhibition, I began a new phase of working in the studio. I began to work with materials that I had gathered from walks and re-visits to several sites made in the summer of 2016, described in Chapter Six. These materials included the Red and White spring water from Somerset, more slabs of oak to paint on, and quite a few found, rusty hinges. I had also collected traces of animals on my walks; wool and

horsehair plucked from barbed wire fences, various kinds of feathers, a fossilised tooth, an assortment of small bones, and of course the bones of the white stag, from Hertfordshire.

### **A cabinet of English Medicine**

Thinking about the bones I had collected, and picking up on themes that had emerged in my paintings, I had a notion to create a reliquary; a shrine, or container for holy relics. This seemed like a natural progression from my ‘folding’ paintings, and their relation to votive objects (discussed in Chapter Four). I felt that something portable would chime with the nomadic, walking aspects of my practice. To further scrutinise ideas that I had already explored during the making of the folding paintings, I wanted to make something that could be either opened and exposed (made explicit), or enclosed and secreted (made implicit).

Initially, I thought I might make an ornate box that referenced the reliquaries of medieval England. Experimentation soon took me to a different approach, however, for while drawing in the studio I realised that a box with a red cross on the front immediately becomes a medicine cabinet. I wondered if, rather than reliquary, which concerns itself with preserving the relics of the past, this box should be a repository for healing, transformation and change; maybe it could be both. A cabinet of English Medicine. I wondered what such a thing would hold...maybe red and white bandages, winding and unwinding like the red and white paths I had walked on, and the red and white themes of my own mythology. Certainly, I thought, the red and white water...

Another artist that has been drawn to collect water is Amy Sharrocks. Her Museum of Water is an ‘invitation to ponder our precious liquid and how we use it’ (Sharrocks, online: n.d.).

This portable collection been exhibited worldwide, and currently holds over 1,000 bottles in

the collection. The collection includes a melted snowman, a baby's bath water, Norwegian spit, urine, and 'water from a bedside table said to be infused with dreams' (Sharrocks, online: n.d.).

Since 1969 artist Susan Hiller has been collecting small bottles of holy water from springs and wells all over the world. This ongoing and expanding project has been exhibited in a variety of old, felt-lined medicine cabinets under the umbrella title of *A Homage to Joseph Beuys* (1969-present); Hiller draws on Beuys's practice of using available gallery and museum display cases to place combinations of significant found objects and small sculptures to create what he referred to as *Vitrines*. One version of Hiller's work, exhibited in a Tate retrospective in 2011, was titled *The Tao of Water: A Homage to Joseph Beuys* (1969-2010). It consisted of a glass-fronted cabinet, labelled bottles of water, and black and white squares of felt (Tate Etc, 2011: online). Another version, exhibited at the Lisson Gallery, New York in 2017, is entitled *Homage to Joseph Beuys: First Aid*, (1969-2016), and described thus:

13 vintage wooden first aid boxes, felt-lined, with 86 vintage bottles containing water from holy wells, sacred streams, etc., collected by the artist from around the world; some boxes contain vintage medical supplies. (Freize, 2017: online)

In March 2016, unknown to me, but shortly before my own serendipitous discovery of the Red and White springs, Hiller made a call out to museums and galleries to help her to 'realise a participatory art project'. In her call out Hiller was quoted as saying 'I would like to suggest trying the experience of being a pilgrim, instead of a tourist, by journeying somewhere to collect a special water sample', and she continued 'these focused actions in unfamiliar circumstances, through visiting any of the numerous holy wells in Britain, may bring about an unusual shift in perspective' (Quoted in *Culture 24*, 2016: online). In response to Hiller's call out, artist film-makers Web-Ellis, in association with twenty-two others from Bow Arts, made a 7.5 mile pilgrimage, on the autumn equinox 2016, to Jacob's Well in Valentines Park,

Illford, to collect the water. Shortly after this, Web-Ellis made another pilgrimage near their home town of Whitby in North Yorkshire, journeying 7.5 miles with 12 other people to an ancient holy spring, St Hilda's, in the village of Hackness.

Meanwhile, in my studio, I took a battered wooden wine box that I had found on my walks. I made some doors for it out of a piece of pinewood, attaching them with the same hinges I had used for the folding paintings. I painted the box white, inside and out, and by painting a red cross on the front, it was transformed into a medicine cabinet. While I was making it, I imagined the cabinet would stand vertically with the doors opening to the front of the box. However, when it was finished, for practical storage reasons, I laid it flat, like a casket, and I placed the white deer bones into the box on a bed of white chalk from the chalk pits in Cambridge. At the time, this felt like a temporary action, but the bones and the chalk remained in the box, and as time went on I began to feel that I had put that particular combination of objects into the box in that way at that time with some kind of intention, even if it was obscured to me then. However, this box and its contents were now grouped in my mind with the red and white water and red and white bandages (and potentially some other objects, for this was work in progress), under a broad title *Cabinet of English Medicine*.

The word 'cabinet' refers to a box or cupboard, but can also mean a private room for council, or a meeting place for advisors. With my polyvocal approach to the landscape, I liked the idea of a place to assemble, or draw together, a range of 'voices' or 'elements'. Nevertheless, I was perplexed by this object I had made. Despite its affiliation, in structure, to the folded paintings, it was not a painting, and it did not even really seem like an artwork in the same sense as a painting. The art was in the 'drawing together' of elements or stories, the 'assembling', rather than the object itself. The *Cabinet of English Medicine* was a constellation of ideas and materials that had come together during the process of putting the

box together, and it was this constellation, rather than the box itself, that was of interest to me.

### **The still point**

Shortly after I had made the *Cabinet of English Medicine*, my mother called me to say that my father, in his care home, had stopped eating. I developed a toothache. It came on very suddenly over the weekend. During the next three days I was unable to eat anything but antibiotics, paracetamol, ibuprofen and codeine, none of which touched the pain. Between phone calls to the dentist (they could do nothing for me), and horrified visits to the mirror to inspect my rapidly swelling face, I made a tiny, unfolding book in an attempt to distract myself from the most terrible toothache I have ever experienced.



Figure 7.1: *The Toothache Drawing* (2016), unfolded.

Constructed from a single, cut and folded A4 piece of cotton rag paper, the book could be unfolded to form a flat map of a single, meandering journey that wound into itself, and on the other side, out again. As a technique to distract myself from pain this activity was effective, and so for three days this was all I did, sitting at the table in my studio. Anna Fenemore

describes the ‘double quality’ of the ‘ecstatic body’, and how ‘large sections of one’s body [that] disappear from one’s awareness’ through sustained focus ‘in the execution of the action’ (2011: 26). My drawing became smaller and unusually fastidious, a rhythm of tiny lines across the paper. After days of drawing, fuelled by the cocktail of painkillers and antibiotics, when I closed my eyes I continued to see the lines. Now the lines were inside me, and I found myself following the repeating marks, disembodied, tracking traces and way-markers across the landscape of my chosen route. I wrote in my sketchbook:

The drawing is a map.  
The drawing is a bandage.  
When I close my eyes I see the lines.  
The lines are threads of a woven story, a journey.  
There, and back again.  
Now and then.

The toothache, repressed (but not cured) by antibiotics, rumbled on. I made an appointment to have the tooth pulled. I thought of the infection in my body; like England, a territory diseased. I thought of the red and white cells of my blood. I called the tiny, folded artwork *The Toothache Drawing* (2016).



Figure 7.2: *The Toothache Drawing* (2016) folded into stack and bound with red thread.

More phone calls came from my mother; my father’s breathing had changed. I began a new drawing, to the same design, but this time bigger; constructed from A3 cotton rag paper. A

remote vigil. I prepared myself to make the physical journey, to speed East to West across England's motorways at a moment's notice.

A week before Christmas Eve, I stepped awkwardly down from my kitchen, and broke the fifth metatarsal of my foot. The next morning, in the minor injuries unit, they bound my foot with a white, cotton bandage, and set it with plaster of Paris. I was given strict instructions; no weight bearing, no walking, no driving. With an appointment to have the bone set on Tuesday, and a tooth extraction on Thursday I was going nowhere. I was immobilised.

More painkillers, more toothache, more drawing. Line by line, I marked the time. Again, I found myself drawn, drifting in numinous form, across the landscape I had come to know through walking. Step by step, breath by heartbeat, mark after mark, I drew in my studio. It was the week of the shortest day, the longest night; a winter crossing when even the sun seems to be stopped in its tracks. Low in the sky, the sunlight flooded the studio. A sense of stillness.

Barbara O'Brien (n.d: online) describes how the publication referred to in the West as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in Tibet takes the form of a stack of printed writings known as the *Bardo Thodol*, and is used to guide a person between the states of death and rebirth; a state comparable to the 'limbo' of Western Christian traditions. She explains that '*bardo* means "gap", or interval of suspension' (n.d.), and that the term is also used to refer to other intermediate states experienced during life, such as periods of illness, rest, or retreat.

Similarly, dancer and choreographer Emilyn Claid sees stillness as ‘a necessary space between the end and the beginning of each cycle of experience’. She writes, ‘a still body blows open the ambiguity of *Once Upon a Time*, zooming in on the empty “O”, with its fullness of the past and scenes about to be introduced’ (2010: 133). Claid adds, ‘still here, still there, still also suggests on-goingness, process and duration. The still point resides within the constancy and continuity of movement’ (2010: 134).

Painter Maggie Hambling, who drew her father continuously during the last two weeks of his life, says, ‘artists are very lucky, in that...when someone dies we have this positive way of grieving. So you are doing something positive, when inside there’s a great hole’ (2017: online). Playwright Alan Bennett (2015) suggests that it is not us that mark time, but rather, time that marks us; and he may have a point. For at the end of that fateful week, as Christmas drew upon us, I had not just a broken bone in my foot, but I had a gap in my mouth where my tooth had once been, and a gap in my life where my father had been.

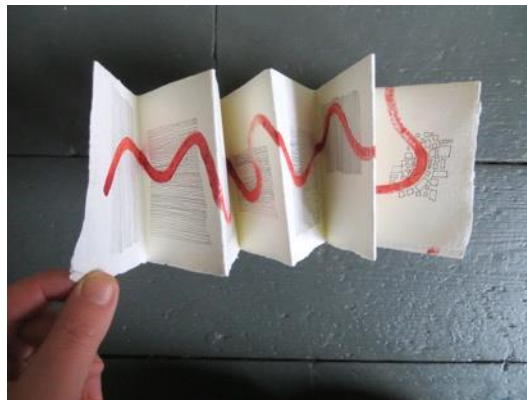


Figure 7.3: *A Map to my Father* (2016-17).

I completed the second drawing during the following weeks of my own afflicted, involuntary *bardo*. As well as operating as a bridge between here and there, now and then, the drawing



had evolved new functions: archiving a path from life to death, and from sickness to wellness. I called the drawing *A Map to my Father* (2016-17).

During the six weeks that followed, as I prepared with my family for my father's funeral, my mobility was very limited as my body healed. Naturally, I read up on bone repair and even here, on a range of googled medical sites, I recognised the stories and images of my art practice; Blood (red, iron) pours into the gap between the fractured parts of the bone, forming soft fibres which weave together to connect the two broken ends of the bone. After time, this bridge becomes calcified (white, chalk).

Robert Rauschenberg talked of working in the 'gap between Art and Life' (online: 2008); never before have events conspired so dramatically, so violently, to align the themes and tropes of my art practice with those of my life, from the dis-ease of the body politic, to the fragile workings of my own body. And never before have I been so immobilised, an experience that forced me to stop and examine the alignment. There is a fractal component to what I am trying to describe here. This is a 'turtles all the way down' approach, akin to what Northrop Frye, in his discussion of mythology and poesis, refers to, as 'symbol as monad' (1990:115), 'anagogy', or 'universal meaning' (1990: 116). The mythological structure, suggests Frye, is held in place through the repetition or recurrence of the image - the image within the image - which brings about 'the imaginative conception of the whole of nature as the content of an infinite and eternal living body which, if not human, is closer to being human than being inanimate' (1990:119). Frye, writing in the middle of the last century, places the human at the centre of the 'infinite and eternal living body'. I suggest, however, that there is an opportunity here for something far wilder, more exploratory, tentacular and

probing; for human subjectivities to explore what it is to be suspended within a web of ‘otherness’, and to entangle with non-human systems.

I was left with much to consider as I worked on a third drawing, of similar design, but this time a longer journey of smaller parts. This one I called *Marking Time until Spring* (2017). I called the trio of drawings *The Crossing England Drawings* (2016-17), but thought of them as new objects for the *Cabinet of English Medicine*, along with the red and white water, and the bandage cast that had bound my broken foot.



Figure 7.4: *Marking Time until Spring* (2017))

### **Embodied Cartographies**

Shortly after I had completed the final drawing, *The Crossing England Drawings* were accepted for exhibition as part of a group show, with the theme of *Embodied Cartographies*, and part of the Bath Fringe Festival in May 2017, curated by Fay Stevens. The exhibition was held in Walcott Chapel, a small and simple former mortuary chapel, set in former burial ground. Considering the origins of my drawings, the setting and theme of *Embodied Cartographies* felt very appropriate, and the show, loosely themed around ‘walking’, drew

together a variety of other artists that were working on similar themes to those of *The Crossing England Drawings*: memory, dementia, the ancestors, illness and mortality. The exhibition lasted for three weeks, and during this time a series of performances and book readings were held in the space. A video of the exhibition and its setting can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/222174901>.

## 7.2 SHIFTING SUBJECTIVITIES

The strata are phenomena of thickening on the body of the earth, simultaneously molecular and molar: accumulations, coagulations, sedimentations and foldings. They are Belts, Pincers, or Articulations. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 553)

In an attempt to interrogate further the events, images and ideas I have assembled in this chapter so far, in this section I draw from a variety of sources from very different cultural contexts. While I am aware that there is not the space to fully describe and consider the contextual specificities of all of these practices, I refer to them not to objectively validate specific confluences of ideas, but rather to circumambulate certain concepts in order to interrogate my own subjective experiences.

Studies by linguistic ethnographers Elinor Ochs, Sally Jacoby, and Patrick Gonzales demonstrate that, in a way comparable to my own experience, when creatively problem solving, physicists frequently identify their own subjectivities and bodies with the things they are studying by switching to the pronouns 'I', 'you' or 'he' when referring to the physical processes and states under investigation (1996: 328). They say:

In the physics laboratory, members are trying to understand physical worlds that are not directly accessible by any of their perceptual abilities. To bridge this gap, it seems, they take embodied interpretive journeys across and through seeable, touchable two-dimensional artefacts that conventionally symbolize those worlds. (Ochs et al 1994:163)

Alex K. Gearin draws parallels between this phenomenon and the processes of renaissance alchemy:

...there is a certain kind of laboratory *visionary mixing* that happens between the human body, human temperaments and ‘entities’ or processes of the natural world. This is condensed in the hermetic dictum “As above, so below” where the signatures of nature (“above”) may be found in the human body (“below”). (Gearin, 2017: online, emphasis in original text)

Gearin points to ‘certain similarities’ (2017: online) that align the activities of contemporary physicists and medieval alchemists with those of the Amazonian Yaminahua practice of ayahuasca shamanism: ‘particularly in terms of the way in which “natural entities” and the subjectivity of the practitioner may merge or swap positions’ (2017: online). However, he notes that while the physicists ‘tend to embody secular principles’ and use their shifting subjectivities in a ‘purely figurative or metaphorical sense’, Renaissance alchemists and Amazonian shamans consider their mutable vantage points as having real potential to affect change from these other perspectives (2017: online).

Graham Townsley (1993) describes how the Yaminahua shaman uses healing songs called ‘wai’ (which also means ‘path’, ‘myth’ or ‘abodes of the spirits’). These songs make very little specific reference to the illness in which they are aimed to heal; rather, these songs embody intricate analogies and metaphors, using what the Yaminahua refer to as ‘twisted language’. A shaman states:

twisted language brings me close but not too close [to the meanings of the metaphors]—with normal words I would crash into things—with twisted ones I circle around them—I can see them clearly. (Townsley, 1993: 460)

Like the physicists studied by Ochs, Jacoby and Gonzales (1994), I found myself increasingly identifying my own body and subjectivity with the journey that was the focus of my walking/painting practice; the journey East/West across England. I also found that, motifs that I had been developing in this practice, appeared to ‘bleed’ into other areas of my life as a repeating pattern on microscopic and macroscopic scales, in ways comparable to the alchemists discussed by Gearin (2016). Like the ‘signatures of nature’ explored by the alchemists, these motifs had ‘stepped forward’ during the practice of art-production after working with specific substances and colours. This subjective phenomenon was intensified during a period of personal shock and stress, and in ways comparable to the ‘twisted language’ of the songs of the shaman of Townsely’s study (1993: 460), *The Crossing England Drawings* functioned as pathways to navigate through a period of embodied and emotional trauma, through the process of making them.

### **Intercorporeality and the intending object**



Figure 7.5: Plaster of Paris cast for broken foot, in the studio (2016).

The months in the studio that I spent making the three *Crossing England* drawings were a complete departure from the way of working described in Chapters Two, Three and Four. Rather than pacing backwards and forward, or circling the studio, I had been immobilised by pain and a broken bone in my feet, which had brought me to a completely different way of working in the studio. It only was after I had made the three drawings that I realised that both these types of movements (pacing back and forth, and circling around) were now folded into the piece itself.

It was not until after I had finished the three *Crossing England* drawings that, restored to full mobility, I began to circulate once more around the studio, which had largely reverted to a domestic space during the months of incapacity. I found myself trying to re-imagine intentions that had been cut short half a year before. The shelves on the peripheries of my studio now supported a bewildering array of objects. Rusty hinges, animal bones, wool, feathers and horsehair. I had painted the edges of three of a stack of six oak square panels white, and the other three red. There was one new, red and white hinged folding painting. There were bottles of red and white water. Rolls of red and white bandages and the white cast that had encased my broken foot. And in the middle of the studio was the ‘medicine cabinet’ (or ‘reliquary’) that I had made in the previous autumn: a red cross on the front, full of chalk from the East of England, and the five white bones of the White Hart. This object was an enigma even to me, the maker; I did not know what it required, or what I required from it.

Jorella Andrews suggests that some (art) objects operate, or are activated, through the ‘dynamics and possibilities of intercorporeality’, rather than through semantic interpretation.

Andrews, drawing from Kaja Silverman lists three modes of function for such artworks; the ‘intending object’, the use of ‘signs which have no meaning’, and ‘the “communication”, or correspondence of forms’ (2013: 49-50). I would suggest I have utilised all of these modes within the variety of work that I have made for this thesis.



Figure 7.6: Sheeps' wool, horse hair & red thread in the studio, 2016.

The idea of inter-bodily affect, or exchange between human and non-human, is one I have mused upon since I joined a Performance department, as a doctoral researcher and Fine Artist that makes things. Materials affect, no doubt, but there is another layer to this; affects can also be relayed from other human bodies through materials. Personal experience, and some of the feedback in response to my *Crossing England* exhibition, suggests that tacit or implicit knowledge can be passed, not just between human bodies, but between human and *material* bodies. Granted, this knowledge is mediated, but not in the form of codes, waiting for

interpretation. They provoke immediate, ephemeral and visceral response, within the body of the viewer; a ‘gut knowing’. In short, certain artworks *perform*.

### **Intercorporeality, the archive and the repertoire**

To say that objects perform is a contentious issue, particularly within the discourses of Performance Studies, and one of the reasons for this is Diana Taylor’s definition of ‘the Archive and the Repertoire’. Taylor writes that ‘embodied expression has participated and will probably continue to participate in the transmission of social knowledge, memory, and identity’ (2003: 16). It is generally accepted that the ‘repertoire’ is transmitted exclusively from (human) body to (human) body, and that western cultures have historically valued ‘archival’ forms of transmission over the ‘repertoire’ (Taylor, 2003: 19). Taylor suggests that “‘Archival’ memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archeological remains, bones, videos, films, all items supposedly resistant to change’ (2003: 19), and is available to be interpreted, deciphered, or decoded. My proposal is that artworks that function through the three modes outlined by Jorella Andrews are intentionally impossible to decode, and function via effects and affects. Therefore they do not easily sit within the definition of ‘archive’. However, Taylor acknowledges that ideally we should be referring equally to both archive and repertoire as repositories of knowledge; ‘they usually work in tandem’ she says, and ‘nor is it a binary’ (2003: 22). In light of this, and bearing in mind Andrews’ discussion of ‘intercorporeality’ (2013: 51), I suggest we are required, in certain circumstances to expand our definition of ‘body’ from the human-centric, to include the bodies of materials. This opens a ‘grey area’ between archive and repertoire, in which we can situate certain kinds of art object. Andrews writes:

By focusing attention on the lifeworlds of objects, and on *intercorporeality* instead of *intersubjectivity*, a powerful sense of agency is opened up that does not appear to be immediately directed to, or in service of, purely human concerns. (Andrews, 2013: 39-40, emphasis in original)



There are two occasions that for me are memorable in illustrating this intercorporeality, because I witnessed the effects of my own work on another human body. On one occasion I handed one of my oak panels, still swathed in bubble wrap, to a (particularly sensitive) artist so that she could see what I had been making. This occasion was memorable because, on unwrapping the small parcel, she burst into tears. It was also mildly perplexing because it was the back, not the front of the object she was holding that moved her to tears. As a hanging system, I had screwed two small rings into the back of either side of the panel, and slung upholsterer's twine between the rings. What was surprising for this artist was that the two rings were not the same; one was made of copper, the other of steel. She told me that it was this surprise, the irregularity, and the 'handmadeness' of the object that had moved her. The other memorable occasion was when I placed the longest *Crossing England* drawing into the hands of a curator who had previously only seen the work in a photograph. The curator gasped, and her face lit up. Perhaps it should be noted that on both of these occasions the object was being handled; the experience was haptic and not just visual.

All of the twists and turns of the above discussion were on my mind when I started to think about how to draw the work together for exhibition to complete the practical aspect of this thesis. As well as considering the performative aspects of the paintings and assemblages I had been making, I was also increasingly conscious that, in my both my walking practice and during the operations of the studio, Performance, in the form of very low-key, solitary ritual, had become increasingly important. Simon O'Sullivan suggests that ritual in contemporary art practice 'is not really ritual in the proper sense, but, in fact a kind of restaging of it'. This is not to say that it is ironic, but that it is 'somehow knowing and self-reflexive' (Andrews and O'Sullivan, 2013: 80). The immersion in and imbibing of red and white water, and the lighting of candles in churches, are examples that may be applied to my own processes of this

kind of practice when I was walking. In the studio, I was aware when making the *Cabinet of English Medicine*, that it was the drawing together of certain elements that was important. The ‘object’ was an intersection of stories, and was produced through the process of assembling. The process of actively reflecting on my practice during a prolonged period had made me conscious of actions that I had previously not given a second thought; this is the ‘knowing’ described by Simon O’Sullivan (Andrews and O’Sullivan, 2013: 80).

It occurred to me that, as well as a potential tool for the detournment of the George Cross, I had begun to think of this box in similar terms to the studio itself; as a chamber that is sometimes sealed, but with flows that come in, and flows that go out. A chamber to assemble different voices and elements. A space that functioned as an expansion of my own mind, and a collapsing of the outside world. It crossed my mind, that, in the same way that I had come to make portable paintings, maybe the *Cabinet of English Medicine* was a compressed and portable studio. As time went on, and new meanings of the *Cabinet of English Medicine* revealed themselves to me, it became increasingly apparent that, more than any of the objects I had made, this one required human intervention; it needed to be activated.

### **7. 3 ON DIAGRAMMATICS**

#### **A walk through a text**

In 2013, at the very beginnings of my doctoral study, I read the (then) recently published book by nature writer Robert MacFarlane *The Old Ways: a Journey on Foot* (2013). The book begins with a description of an impromptu stroll on a snowy night, from the author’s home on the edge of the city. It is a short passage, hardly a chapter, and the author makes no

mention of the name of the city, nor does he mention any street or place names. Maybe due to this vagueness on the part of MacFarlane, as I began to read, I imagined that the route described was my own route, starting from my parent's house, which lies at the edge of the city of Cambridge. To be more specific, I transposed onto the passage in the book the memory of one particular and snowy night, shortly after my father's major stroke two years before. On this night I had walked out to the Gog Magog Golf Course, south of the city to clear my head. Naturally, as I read I fully expected my own, remembered route to diverge from that of the written description that I was reading. However, the way-markers described by MacFarlane appeared to correlate with my own; the street-light by the last house at the edge of the city, the gap in the hedge, the path that ran along by the side of the road. When I reached a description of a beechwood, followed by a golf course on the top of a low ridge of hills, it dawned on me that the author was genuinely describing the same route as the one I had known since early childhood. At this point I stopped reading, and began to scour the back of the book for information about the author.

I now know that the author of the passage I describe lives around the corner from my mother's house; our two routes were the same. To this day, I wonder if Robert MacFarlane was the one person I passed on the track at the side of the road, that strange snowy night when I walked out of the city. Our starting places were within metres of each other; both for the walked journey up to the Gog Magog Hills (and later, for both of us, far beyond), and for our separate projects; his a very popular book, mine a Practice as Research PhD. When I read this passage, it was the first time I had ever recognised a route from the inside of a written narrative; there was a sense of familiarity, rather than 'conjuring up', through the descriptive text. It was an unusual and perplexing experience, with the quality of a lucid dream; almost as

though I was moving through an actual, rather than a described space, and it led me to think about the diagrammatic nature of narrative.

### **Diagrammatics and crossing England**

Writing about the walk through text described above, led me to consider again the embodied maps and schemas that are accessible to us that help us to navigate time and space. In Chapter One, I discussed the maps that are held in the minds of navigating animals and humans, and in Chapter Four, I discussed how my twofold practice, of walking and making, helped me to identify (and to interrogate) particular perpetuities which can be applied to landscape, and to the painted space. These perpetuities included the fold, the field, the gap, the enclosure and the line. During this phase of research, I also engaged in regular periods of reflective critical writing, and as a result of these combined and looping practices I came increasingly to consider the spatial nature of thinking itself; how the very process of thinking can be compared to landscape and to the painted space. I was being drawn into the territory of the Deleuzian diagram, described by Georges Teysot (2012) as a ‘graphic inscription of abstraction in space’ and an ‘architecture of ideas’ (2012: 1).

Thinking about thinking in spatial terms is not new. As Jakub Zdebik writes, ‘Deleuze and Guattari present their own philosophy in geographic terms. Consequently, the single embrace of the earth is also internalised into thought: the geographic is the image of thought’ (2012: 117). Zdebik suggests that a diagram can be observed in three forms: ‘a plan, a map, and a graph (or schema)’ (2012: 1). The Deleuzian diagram however, is not simply a representation of a state of stasis. Zdebik writes:

A plan represents a building that is not yet built. A map represents terrains on which we have not yet travelled. A graph displays relations between variable quantities. (Zdebik, 2012: 1)

The Deleuzian diagram is exploratory in nature; it anticipates, creates, generates, assembles, and re-assembles. Deleuze describes the diagram as a ‘cartography that is co-extensive with the whole social field’; it is ‘an abstract machine’ that makes ‘no distinction between content and expression’, a ‘machine that is almost blind and mute, even though it makes others see and speak’ (Deleuze, 1988: 30). Zdebik suggests that the diagram is a ‘new dimension’ that ‘lies between the visible and the inarticulable’ (2012: 1), a zone ‘of abstraction in which concrete systems shed their specificity and interact on the level of pure function’ (2012: 23).

As this project progressed, it was interesting to note how the way I thought about my route developed. What had started as a list of the road numbers of a motorway journey (A38, M5, M4, M25, A1(M), A505, A10), morphed into a single, wiggling route when I began to walk. As time went on, with all the driving back and forth, the revisiting, the car *dérives*, the circular routes, the stories and memories, I mapped the territory more fully, and I came to think of the route as a tapestry of interwoven paths, or stories. The added detail of my selected lexicon (see Chapter Two), embellished these woven routes with colour and texture. Additionally, during the course of the project I had many conversations with other people that knew particular parts of this route. Sometimes these were conversations with people that I met whilst I was walking, sometimes with people that had visited these places in the past. They may have accessed a place from a different approach, or know about local history or folklore, and all of this information helped to build the complexity and layers of my diagram. The walk had become an ‘erewhon’ space, a time out of time. Within my own mind, I could manoeuvre around it spatially. I could zoom in for minute detail, or pull out to see the complete picture, and even access ‘layers’ of geological, geographical, historical and mythological information that overlaid (or underpinned) the structure of the diagram. Very occasionally I would meet other walkers that had been walking parts of the same route in the

same 'sensitised' way as me. On these occasions, when we compared notes I had a sense that we shared, or at least partially shared, the same diagram; that we had not only walked the same geographic route, but that as a result of the walking we now shared a subjective space that mapped the subtlest nuances and particularities of that route.

### **Storytelling as a spatial tool**

I want to return to anthropologist Alice Legat's 2008 study of the oral tradition of the Tsho people of North West Canada, referred to in Chapter One of this thesis, and to reconsider the study in terms of the Deleuzian diagram. The Tsho people use 'stories to think with'. They talk about their trails in terms of stories; walking these trails are a way of validating the past and renewing the stories in the present. The Tsho refer to this as 'following their predecessors' footprints', and use the stories to map both time and space, and to teach their children the history of specific sites and how to survive in them long before they walk these routes and visit these places (Legat, 2008: 37-8). The children of the Tsho can begin to learn about a place long before they visit it by way of story; a place is considered to be an embodiment of its story and important components of the story will refer to the human and non-human activity that takes place there. Stories are told and re-told so that the children can grow from home and begin to travel trails and experience the places for themselves, validating the stories through experience. Having travelled to a place, the Tsho will retell the stories and embed their own experience into it, thus leaving their own footprints for the future (Legat, 2008: 37-8). Tsho Children are taught to walk slowly, and to walk with all their senses alert to their surroundings (including that which is behind them) and to remember what they have experienced (Legat, 2008: 39-40). Legat describes how the Tsho will often recount the tales as they walk the trail, and as they witness evidence of the story (for example

finding a certain type of useful stone along the way, which is described in the narrative) they would exclaim ‘it’s true!’(Legat, 2008: 45-7).

I would suggest that this is one example of how story and myth can be considered diagrammatic in the Deleuzian sense. This because the stories not only map the territory, they trace its origins, and chart its flows and movements (of people, animals, water, plants, rock-falls, etc). We see a templexity; a device that utilises past experience to assist spatial navigation, and that helps the Thcho, as stewards of their land, to track ecological variance, and adapt and plan for the future accordingly. The trail stories of the Thcho have an anticipatory nature; available as a tool for the next journey, the next walk. In the same way that Frye suggests that poems and myths are a mixture of ‘latent and manifest content’, Zdebek suggests that ‘Deleuze shows us how thought comes from the outside’(2016: 22); the Thcho’s diagrammatic stories are constantly up-dated and refreshed, through the re-walking of the trails, the revisiting of specific sites, and the re-telling of the tales. As were my own stories, through my returning to and revisiting specific meaningful sites.

### **The diagram and the *Crossing England Drawings***

Zdebek states that ‘the diagrammatic process could be imagined as a physical state or system being atomised into incorporeal abstract traits and then reconfigured into another state or system’ (2012: 1). The diagram has simmered in the background of my practice since the start of this research. I have discussed it in relation to navigating and drawing in Chapter Two, to the dynamics of the studio in Chapter Three and in terms of painting in response to the organisation of the landscape in Chapter Four. However, it really bubbled up to my attention during the process of making the *Crossing England Drawings*, when I noted that

what I was making could be applied to describe, point to, or assemble a variety of apparently disconnected phenomena that were on my mind, or active in my life, at the time. The work that had begun as a two-dimensional drawing was exploratory in nature; drawn out physically into new planes through cutting and folding. Jakub Zdebik describes the diagram as a ‘dynamic, fluctuating process between static structures’; he says ‘as a concept, it describes the flexible, elastic, incorporeal functions before they settle into a definitive form’ (2012: 1). Zdebik also suggests that the diagram ‘displays relations of forces and translates them from one system to another’ (2012: 24), and that it is ‘the dimension in which abstracted functions intermingle between two heterogenous systems’ (2012: 97). The *Crossing England Drawings* co-figured a number of systems: the great route that I had been continuously walking between Cambridge and Plymouth, the workings of my own body, a deep attachment to my father, a bridge that connected me to my ancestors, and the implicit/explicit and unfolding nature of thought and memory.

Northrop Frye suggests that narratives are schematic (1990: 335-337), and proposes myth in particular as an ‘organising structural pattern’ or diagram (1990: 353). Pointing to Roger Penrose’s assertion that ‘mathematics are out there’ (Cartwright, Hawking, Penrose and Shimony: 200), Phil Smith suggests that myth-like accounts are capable of representing patterns ‘of power, of physical forces, of cultural paradigms’ (2011: 268), and certainly, during this phase of making I had a sense of gleaning repeating mythological and material configurations, from the somatic systems of the human embodied, to the ecologies of the material landscape.



The *Crossing England Drawings* fold out from the middle of a spiral, forming an axis from the ‘still point’ of the centre. Artist Robert Smithson describes how artworks or as he terms them the ‘new monuments’, can collapse our ordinary perceptions of time:

Both past and future are placed into an objective present. This kind of time has little or no space; it is stationary and without movement, it is going nowhere, it is anti-Newtonian, as well as being instant, and is against the wheels of the time-clock. (Smithson, 1966: online)

O’Sullivan refers to this as an ‘image of time’ (n.d.b: 10) in which ‘the latter is no longer determined by movement’. It is ‘a stationary time, the time of Cronos’ (n.d.b: 2011). Due to their folded structure, when in a stack, *The Crossing England Drawings* draw every frame, every field or moment into this central, still point. However, because of their articulated nature, rather than a stationary column or pillar, the sense of a fluid journey remains; the frames can be endlessly manipulated to wind around, coil through, and touch each other in infinite variations.

As for the anticipatory nature of the work, six months after I made the first mark on the *Crossing England Drawings*, I found myself walking for a week in a line of forty Triratna Buddhists, sixty-five miles over the Blackdown hills and across the Somerset levels, from Feniton to Glastonbury. Throughout the experience, I thought about the three *Crossing England Drawings* that I had made half a year before. As we moved across the land I felt a sense of recognition; that I was walking through a territory I had already charted in the *Crossing England Drawings*; the winding line of humans, our unfolding progress, field by field, day by day. Zdebik writes, ‘the diagram does not represent, but rather maps out possibilities prior to their appearance, their representation’ (2012: 1). On the final two days of the walk we found ourselves spiralling around a particular landmark, a ‘still point’ - a hill that

was our intended final destination - in the same way that the meandering lines spiral into the centres of the *Crossing England Drawings* when they are unfolded and laid completely flat.

### **The diagram and philosophy**

Deleuze uses the idea of the diagram, combined with the fold, to discuss not just the relationship between individual subjectivity and the world, but also the transmission of thought, or philosophy. To do this he traces the thinking of previous philosophers (Leibniz, Heidegger, Kant, Pierce, and most importantly, Foucault) and he folds them into his own philosophy. Simon O'Sullivan folds all of the above into his own work in his writings on Art production and subjectivity, then pushes the idea of the diagram into new fields, and opens up new planes:

The diagram, although it can be an index of Philosophy's arrogant and autocratic functioning, also operates to dethrone the king and open thought up to other adventures. The diagram, in this sense, might be thought of as a speculative fiction. (O'Sullivan, 2016a: 21)

O'Sullivan argues that such a process – one that manipulates concepts 'as if on a tabletop' – has potential to allow for "illegal" connections and syntheses to be made' (2016a: 21). Donna Haraway's ideas about 'String Figuration' are similarly diagrammatic and transmissive.

Commonly known in Britain as 'Cat's Cradle', string figures are a playground game in which skeins of thread wound around the hands are passed back and forth between collaborators to make different combinations of complex and intricate patterns. Haraway uses this image to propose ways of passing and developing knowledge: 'String figures are like stories; they propose and enact patterns for participants to inhabit' (2016: 10), she says. Haraway sees string figuration as an allegory for collaborative thinking, not just between philosophers, but

artists, politicians, indigenous peoples, scientist, geographers, anthropologists and non-human creatures. She says,

Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful that wasn't there before, of relaying connections that matter. (Haraway, 2016: 10)

The process Haraway describes is comparable to O'Sullivan's notion of 'manipulating concepts as if on a table top' (2016a: 21) to explore (and create) new relationalities. For both O'Sullivan and Haraway these processes engage some kind of speculative fictioning, or to use Haraway's own term, 'speculative fabulation', which she suggests can be '*thinking* as well as *making* practices, pedagogical practices and cosmological performances' (2016: 14, emphasis in original). I will return to the subject of speculative fiction in the final chapter of this thesis.

I want to draw these ideas back to my own practical experience, in relation to the perception of the landscape. During the Buddhist walk that I participated in in April 2016, we trod silently during the day over the visibly eroding and sick-looking soil of intensively farmed land. At night we slept in a variety of permaculture and forest gardens. Each garden or woodland was managed in a different way, and every evening (it was only the walking that was silent) there was a great deal of knowledge-sharing with regard to different approaches to small-scale, bio-inclusive land management. Some of these ideas drew from the past, and some from recent scientific understandings of biodiversity. During this discourse, new patterns and exchanges of thinking were woven back and forth by this assembled group of people. As our journeys continued, in response to the collective expertise that I was subject to that week, rather than my usual sense of walking through the ruins, I found myself imaging

new ways of cultivating the landscape, and cultivating new ways of imaging the landscape.

Simon O'Sullivan writes:

Might this diagrammatics also involve a different take on relations among the past, present, and future? This is the “drawing” of lines between different times, the building of circuits and the following of feedback loops; it is to understand time as specific to any given system (or practice) and not as neutral background. (O'Sullivan, 2016a: 24)

O'Sullivan suggests that this could involve charting ‘the way a different kind of future can work back on the present’ (2016a: 24), hence determining ‘how we act or make in the here and now’ (24). It could also mean plotting how ‘the present itself can involve a re-engineering of the past (understood as resource and living archive)’ allowing ‘a different kind of future to emerge’ (O'Sullivan, 2016a: 24).

Zdebik defines the diagram as ‘a whole topology between the inside and the outside of thought [that] connects these two dimensions and creates a new dimension’ (2016: 22).

Similarly, O'Sullivan describes it as ‘not a tracing - reliant on a predetermined given - but a map that is always open to revision’ (2016a: 20). It is in all these ways, I suggest, that the physicist imagining themselves inside their experiments, the healing songs of the Yaminahua (referred to in the second section of this chapter), my emergent artworks and even the landscape itself can be considered diagrammatic in the Deleuzian sense.

### **Shared reading: a 'low key' ritual**

In September 2017 I saw Iain Biggs and artist Erin Kavanagh presented a ‘performed paper’ entitled *The Crow Road* at a Land2/ASLE UKI conference in Sheffield. Biggs and Kavanagh,

as is usual, stood in front of the audience to read. However, parts of the paper were delivered by a selection of other audience members seated amongst the rest of us. Biggs often refers to a ‘polyvocal’ approach to making work about the landscape and, as various voices issued from different parts of the space we sat in, it struck me at the time that this method of shared presentation was an effective way to communicate this notion. Perhaps this could be the ‘low key ritual’ required to ‘activate’ the *Cabinet of English Medicine*.

In October 2017 I took the opportunity of a peer group session with artist-led initiative Smooth Space to try out this idea. Rather than writing a paper with a linear narrative, I took fragments of my thesis with interconnecting themes, and asked the group to sit around the box, and share the reading. This gave me the opportunity to take items out of the box during the reading; chalk, red earth, bones, bandages, water and drawings. After reading the paper, the group took time to physically examining the objects that had come out of the box. We passed around some of the ‘cootie catcher’ paintings and, while discussing Haraway’s ideas about String Figuration (2016), a game of Cat’s Cradle. The feedback from participants was generally positive; the reading had allowed them to ‘inhabit’ some of the events described in a more embodied way than allowed by the passive listening afforded by a conventional paper.

Later the same year, March 2018 I was asked to deliver a paper at a PEP research seminar to the Plymouth University Theatre and Performance Department at Plymouth University.

Encouraged by the success of the Smooth Space trial, I opted again to take an experimental approach once more, using a shared delivery (see figure 7.7). While still using fragments of my thesis, by selecting some different passages, I was able to shift the content of this paper into other areas. I brought in Simon O’Sullivan’s discussion of the diachronic and

synchronic nature of the emergent motif, and also underlined the potential for this artwork as a tool for the *détournement* of the George Cross. This shift in emphasis was of interest to me as it showed that the box had fluid, rather than fixed significance, shifting the subject of its focus in the same way that the focus of a practitioner may shift when working in the studio.

Before beginning this collaborative reading, I asked the participants (again, seated around the box) not to try to find a linear narrative, but to listen for connections between the fragments of text, to try to think of each passage as being like ‘points on a drawing, waiting to be joined by a line’, or ‘places waiting to be connected by walking’. I also asked the collaborators to try to visualise these lines within the space. Again, I took objects from the box (water, earth, drawings). By opening the doors of the cabinet, England was re-defined; from an enclosed and fortified nation to an ‘open system’ (see figure 7.8). The text of this paper can be viewed in Appendix III.



Figure 7.7: PEP research collaborative reading presentation, University of Plymouth, 2018.  
Photograph by Roberta Mock.

During the discussion after the presentation, there was a consensus that a similar event would add to, rather than detract from a gallery exhibition. It was agreed that the ‘low key’ nature of this event (informal reading rather than theatrical performance, objects delivered from the box in plastic bags and jam jars) was key to its effectiveness. Once more, objects from the box were explored, touched, sniffed, tapped together and passed around.

Shortly after this event I received feedback from one of the participant artists in an email:

It felt like mapping, indexing, but also in a state of flux. Fixed in the past but mobile and fluid with the present and the anticipation of the future.

Another participant, a performance studies academic, wrote:

I’ve thought of your presentation much in the last month... there was something of object and words that stayed with me.

As a result of these two collaborative experiments I felt less mystified by the *Cabinet of English Medicine*, and how it related to my other paintings and drawings. I could see potential to draw different modes of practice together, and the way to proceed was clearer.



Figure 7.8: The *Cabinet of English Medicine* (2016).

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter we have seen how a phase of emotional and embodied trauma and injury induced new ways of working in the studio. This new mode of operation, brought about through limited physical mobility and a need to navigate a period of pain and bereavement, produced works that were diagrammatic in their nature. I have shown how these works collapsed several scales of schema; simultaneously referring to my walks across, England, my connection to my father, and even the workings of my own body. By referring to a variety of contemporary and historical practitioners from a range of cultures, we have examined the part that expanded, re-located, and re-situated subjectivity can play in creative and curative practice, through re-imagining embodiment. I have discussed different strands of my practice in relation to the Deleuzian diagram and, drawing from O’Sullivan and Haraway, I have demonstrated how such diagrammatic and relational art practices have the potential to draw from the past, as a ‘resource and living archive’ (O’Sullivan, 2016a: 24), as anticipatory and exploratory creative processes, with potential to inform and reform ways of thinking about the future. In the following and final chapter of this thesis I will build further upon these arguments to consider Art as production of the New.

Referring to Jorella Andrews and Diana Taylor, I have argued that certain artworks function through intercorporeality and intention, rather than intersubjectivity and signification, and that tacit or implicit knowledge can be passed, not just between human bodies, but between human and material bodies. Within this context, I have explored the notion of the ‘low key ritual’ and reflected upon ways that the art object can be activated by performance.





## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **ABOUT TIME & ARTISTIC PROCESS**

This chapter discusses Art practice in relation to time, subjectivity, and production of the new. I begin by chronicling a sequence of events that led to the emergence of a new motif within my own practice. Referring to a framework proposed by Simon O’Sullivan, concerning the diachronic and synchronic nature of the production of new subjectivities, I show how this motif emerged through a looping combination of studio activity and walking.

In order to unpack my own perception of the landscape, I discuss a vogue within 1970’s popular culture and children’s television, for referring to a weird and occulted, ‘folksy’ English past, frequently presented as erupting in the present, or even the future. Referring to the ‘English eerie’ as an attempt to ‘account for the turbulence of England in the era of late capitalism’ (MacFarlane, 2015b), I argue that the latent influences of this culture continue to reverberate in contemporary art practice, particularly in relation to the landscape. Exploring further the potential for childhood memory to implicitly or explicitly influence the production of art, I propose the playground as a repository of ‘the repertoire’ (Taylor, 2003: 16). I discuss how walking brought forth embodied memory of childhood games and rhymes, which have subsequently informed work made in the studio. Finally, building upon wider discussions in Chapter Seven, I explore art as resistance and examine strategies and tactics for re-imagining and re-diagramming new models of the future.

#### **8.1 PAST & FUTURE PRESENT**

Time present and time past  
Are both perhaps present in time future  
And time future contained in time past. (T.S. Eliot, 1943)

### **The diachronic & synchronic**

Simon O’Sullivan (2016d) suggests that a consequence of spatial and temporal ‘scrambling’ is that it can ‘throw up’ images or forms that appear to the practicing artist to come from ‘somewhere else’, but that ‘also have some kind of strange relevance to the world as-it-is’. Such an image may appear to take on its own ‘autopoietic functioning’ and ‘begin to recycle and re-use its own motifs’, starting a process of ‘nesting one set of fictions within another’, to produce ‘a certain complexity – a density even’. O’Sullivan even suggests that this process could ‘involve moves in a game for which one does not know the exact rules’ (O’Sullivan, 2016d: 3-4).

This could be an astute description of my own practices: the elements of my lexicon, and how they appeared to transmute and interweave with each other, and take on their own autonomy. In order to scrutinise these phenomena more closely, I now discuss certain events, noted within my own sustained practice, in relation to what O’Sullivan terms the ‘diachronic’ and ‘synchronic’ aspects of Art production in his paper, ‘Mythopoesis and the Fictioning of Reality’ (2016d). At the time, these occurrences were, to me, genuinely surprising and unexpected.

#### **i. Synchronic**

During the winter of 2015, after a particularly productive few months of painting, I shot several videos that circled my studio, as a way to record my way of working. One of these videos was shot during the Christmas period; a time when the studio was not only packed with rows of paintings, folded paper, lines of typed text, scribbles, found objects, lumps of chalk, and red Devon soil, but also lots of drying laundry, Christmas decorations, a Christmas tree, and the odd gift that had not yet been consumed or put away. One such gift, from my nephew, consisted of two small bottles: one bottle of elderberry and one of elderflower liqueur. I had thought very little about them when I placed them on the shelf in my studio, and had not been aware of them at all when I shot the video. However, when I played back the video, these two bottles sung out to me as part of the taxonomy of the rest of the work of the shelves; two bottles, one containing red liquid, one white, working in relation to all the paintings, the text, the red and white soil. This is an example of what O’Sullivan terms the ‘synchronic’ (2016d: 84) when conditions allow for ‘this image to step forth from its dark background’ (2016d: 4). In this sense, suggests O’Sullivan, ‘art speaks back’:

there is something about this fictioning – this production of something non-subject – that is specifically object-orientated, to use the current valence. It is as if the goal here is to extract a certain objectness (something non-human) from an all-too-human subject. (O’Sullivan, 2016d: 84)

## **ii. Diachronic**

After I had noted the red and white liquids in the video I had shot that Christmas, I drank the elderberry and elderflower liqueurs, and, preoccupied with preparations for my *Crossing England* show, I promptly forgot about the whole business. I did not even remember it when I came across the red and white water in the small town in Somerset six months later. It was the following autumn, when I was picking through my image and video archive, that I re-

watched the video clip, that this time it seemed eerily prophetic, for now I had two small bottles, not of elderberry and elderflower liqueur, but of red and white water, sitting on the studio shelf.



Figure 8.1: *Red & White water* (2016).

This is an example of what O’Sullivan terms the ‘diachronic’ (2016d: 84) he suggests that art practice is a process that creates a kind of ‘temporal density’(016d: 85), and that any image produced by this process is ‘an extraction from a process’(2016d: 84) that ‘goes from the depth of the work towards a future that the work itself helps to bring about’(2016d: 84). In this sense, says O’Sullivan, ‘a practice can be a backward hurled fragment of a future world’n(2016d: 84):

The elements of an art practice can travel in this sense. Fragments of previous codes (and characters) make a re-entry, spliced with other more recent experiments. Such work is a palimpsest even when it looks relatively simple. (O’Sullivan, 2015: 5)

I recount these events not as an attempt to demonstrate my prophetic talents. Rather I suggest that this phenomenon (one example amongst many I could have cited) is a matter of forgetting and remembering, or of implicit knowledge made explicit.

### **Back to the future**

In Chapter Five, I described how one of the most intriguing pieces of feedback that I received in response to the *Crossing England* show was during a conversation I had in the gallery with another painter. I asked them to tell me what they thought the themes of the show were. They embarked on a story, speaking in a hushed voice:

It is the Bronze Age. In the future. After the fall of civilization. People have found objects from the past (road signs, packaging) but they have new meanings, spiritual ones, and are worshipped as relics...

I was quite struck by the story this person had constructed around the show. I had been aware, when putting the show together, that I was drawing heavily on my own embodied past, and the historical past of the corporeal landscape, but I had never really considered how this related to future. The more I thought about it, the more I thought that this person, who offered me feedback in the form of a story, had hit on something. There was something active in my process that was not simply mirroring, or framing, the past and present. I realised that, though I had not been conscious of it before, my practice not only drew upon, but scrambled and fictionalised past and present, presenting it in a manner that was about connecting to the future.

The 'story' of the 'Bronze age. In the future', reminded me of Cornish artist David Kemp's work, in particular his show *The Tribe that held the Sky Up* (2013) at Tate, St Ives. Kemp assembles Cornish twentieth and twenty-first century found objects with post-industrial farm machinery and mining scrap, to create the relics of an imaginary post-apocalyptic future that simultaneously draws upon the mythology of the Bronze Age.

I was also reminded me of some of my favourite childhood television programmes. 1970's Britain produced a plethora of children's television drama and film with, from today's perspective, somewhat eyebrow-raising themes that drew from the past to examine a (frequently dystopian) future. There is *The Changes* (1975) based on a trilogy of novels by Peter Dickinson, a 'disturbing but compelling sci-fi tale' in which 'a strange noise repeatedly fills the air over Britain, compelling everyone who hears it to destroy any piece of machinery more complex than a scythe or a horsedrawn cart' (O'Neil, 2014). In addition, *The Children of the Stones* (1977) described by Stewart Lee as 'a tale of archaeology, occult ritual and chopper bikes' (2013: online), and *The Survivors* (1975) which told the story of post-plague apocalypse survival. I am harking back to my own favourite popular fictions of an English 1970's childhood, but there are many more, and one does not have to scratch far beneath the surface of these stories to expose the latent cultural anxieties during a time of cold war, and an ecology evidently out of balance. Simon O'Sullivan cites films such as Derek Jarman's *Journey to Avebury* (1971), Bruce Lacey's *Castelrigg* (1981) and Robin Hardy's *The Wicker Man* (1973) as 'modern works' on 'pre-modern' themes. It is this fusion, which he terms 'Myth-Science', that O'Sullivan suggests combined in the counter-culture of this period to

produce ‘a time in which new and alternative subjectivities were being produced and experimented with’ (2016b: 18). ‘Immanence’, says O’ Sullivan, was ‘being activated’:

Indeed, the power of the film comes from this nesting of different times, a co-existence of different modes of existence – and, especially, the affirmation of something, well, different (including a different form of consciousness). This temporal syncretism that is never less than convincing means the film itself offers up a different world (it is not simply about a return to the past). (O’Sullivan, 2016b: 18)

It was fictions such as these, perhaps, that coloured the lenses through which the British landscape was subsequently viewed by a generation of geographers, walking artists, psychogeographical writers, artists and activists who were accustomed, like myself, to British suburbia and exposed to British popular culture during the latter part of the twentieth century. Whatever the reason, it is apparent that contemporary academic discourse is increasingly comfortable with discussing the past as phenomena accessible alongside, or perhaps nested within, the present, and not just in an archival sense. As Alastair Bonnett observes, ‘a wide range of extra-ordinary phenomena, including haunting, “occulture” and “enchantment”, have been shown to be a resilient part of modern cities and societies’, and he notes how, ‘parallel debate has emerged on how the “ghostly” and “errant” pathways found in contemporary walking-based artworks are woven into and against the rhythms of the metropolis’ (Bonnett, 2016: 1). Bonnett goes as far as to suggest that the exclusion of the topic of magic, so long ‘outside the permitted realm of the “learned and respectable”, has itself become anachronistic’ (2016: 2). Philosopher Ian Buchanan echoes this approach, proposing that one of the key ideas of Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus* (1988) is that artists ‘...create ruptures in space-time; they create ruptures in the way that we see things’, making the ‘imperceptible perceptible’ and that ‘by changing how we see the world, they effectively change the world’ (2016: online).



## **The English eerie**

Sam George highlights ‘a tension between what is recorded by historians and what subsists within a culture’s collective memory’ (2016:14), and draws our attention to the rise of the ‘English eerie’. Mark Fisher used the term ‘eerie’ to refer to the English landscape as one that ‘demanded to be engaged with on its own terms’, aspects of which are ‘desolate, atmospheric and solitary’ (2016: 76). In an article in *The Guardian*, Robert MacFarlane defined the English eerie as a ‘cultural and political response to contemporary crises and fears’ (2015b). The English eerie, as ‘the skull beneath the skin of the countryside’ (MacFarlane, 2015b), is muse for an increasing and varied body of artists who share an understanding of landscape as constituted by ‘uncanny forces, part-buried memories and contested knowledge’ (MacFarlane, 2015b). For MacFarlane it is the repressed and untold that drives this movement: ‘What is under way, across a broad spectrum of culture, is an attempt to account for the turbulence of England in the era of late capitalism’ (2015b).

This unsettled, and unsettling landscape – what George terms ‘a spectred rather than a “sceptred isle”’ (2017: 10) – I recognise as the same ‘gritty and occulted England’ I have described in the earlier pages of the thesis. MacFarlane writes:

We have entered into a mutated cultural terrain that includes the weird and the punk. Among the shared landmarks of this terrain are ruins, fields, pits, drains, fringes, relics, buried objects, hilltops, demons, and deep pasts. In much of this work,

suppressed forces (capital, violence, state power) pulse and flicker beneath the ground and within the air or water, waiting to erupt or to condense. (MacFarlane, 2017: 12)

George is under pains to stress that ‘engaging with the eerie emphatically doesn’t mean believing in ghosts or spectres’ (2017:11). Rather, like MacFarlane, she sees the rise of the eerie as a response to the ‘era of late capitalism and a phase of severe environmental damage’ (2017: 12). As a result of ‘a slow grinding away of species’, this is a landscape ‘constituted more actively by what is missing than by what is present’ (George, 2017: 12). George suggests that events such as recent werewolf sightings near Barnston Drain, in the North of England, are ‘contemporary anxieties and dissents that are ‘reassembled and re-presented as hauntings, shadows or phantoms’ (2017: 11). She also suggests that such events are not only opportunities to lament the absent, and to atone for our collective human guilt for creating such a landscape, but also to open discussions about re-wilding, re-generation, reminding us that ‘it is often humans, not wolves or the supernatural, that we should fear’ (2017: 14).

In similar vein, Michael Newton (2017) in *The Guardian* discusses a ‘new wave’ of ‘folk horror’ in British cinematic culture, celebrated in the Barbican Cinema’s *Into the Woods* (2017) season. The Barbican programme presented, suggests Newton, ‘the dark dreams of Britain itself’. He infers by the title of this article – ‘Cults, human sacrifice and pagan sex: how folk horror is flowering again in Brexit Britain’ – that these ‘darks dreams’ are tied to Britain’s movement toward isolationism. Paradoxically, he also suggests that ‘in the discontinuous age of modernity’, where ‘relationships are casual and work comes and goes’, that such ‘dark dreams’ are provoked by a suspicion of belonging and ‘rootedness becomes uncanny’. Newton points to ‘a three-way philosophical debate’ that is enacted in the new films, ‘between enlightened rationalism, orthodox Christianity and renewed paganism’, he notes that ‘in the folk horror revival, the mystery no longer draws on fecundity and rebirth.

Now the secret is violence' (Newton, 2017). Perhaps this shift in attitude is a response to our collective growing awareness of the fragility of our failing ecosystem; from the perspective of current hypermodernity, with factory farming and urban expansion the norm, the vital forces of fecundity and rebirth appear less rampageous, less overwhelming and threatening, than in the past. Now it is humans, not nature, that are evidently red in tooth and claw. Newton notes one more shift in tone, from the folk horror of the 1970's to the current resurgence: 'what's different, and striking, here is that it is almost a rule in folk horror that the supernatural is banned'. Like George in her discussion of the English eerie, Newton suggests, 'there is no conjuration, just bleakly absurd acts of extreme aggression, suicidal and murderous all at once'. 'The evil', writes Newton, 'is entirely human' (2017).

### **Playground as repository of the 'repertoire'**

I have been surprised by how this artistic research has continually re-visited playful activity rooted in my own childhood, and I suspect that there is far more to be explored along this avenue of enquiry. The rhythms, rhymes and gestures of the playground have erupted spontaneously out of my own body in response to the rhythms of both walking and making. It strikes me that the playground, an enclosure consistently replenished by children of a certain age, is a rich repository for the 'repertoire', as defined by Taylor (2003: 16). In the playground, 'vital acts of transfer' can be undertaken from seven-year-old body to seven-year-old body, 'transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated [...] behaviour' (Taylor, 2003: 2). In retrospect I can see that there is something of the toy, or puzzle, in many of the artworks I have made: clackety, articulated brightly coloured blocks of wood, stacks of 'cards', fortune tellers. Even the performance of

pretending to be an animal, of following and laying a trail, are rooted in the activities of the playground.

I have discussed an area of slippage, between ‘knowing or self-reflexive’ ritual (Andrews & O’Sullivan, 2013: 82) and transmissive play. *The Cabinet of English Medicine* (2016) functioned as repository of stories, a reliquary, and a tool for détournement. I am inclined to suspect that the games, stories and diagrammatic dances of the playground, and the embodied rhythms and rituals of the overlapping areas of English folklore have much more to reveal in this respect. This thesis has shown that these overlapping terrains are not simply repositories of repressed and forgotten information, but hold potential for a re-drawing of the future. Somewhere, in the mining and disseminating of this information, the process of walking and the handmade artwork play a part.

### **Art as resistance**

Two days into my buddhist *yatra* across the Somerset Levels, our winding line of forty people was picked up by helicopters in the sky. From that day, our progression was tracked; we were buzzed regularly by military and civilian helicopters, and police drones. On our final day of walking, we were never alone as we approached our final destination, but persistently monitored from above. From our perspective, as walkers on the ground, it was impossible to tell whether this considerable interest was because we were perceived as a potential threat, or whether it was a response to the aesthetic qualities of the sinuous shapes we made as we snaked across the English landscape. I suspect it was both. Either way, it demonstrates the power of such an act to disrupt and to enchant, and it shows that there are audiences in unexpected places.

In his book *Capitalist Realism* (2009) Mark Fisher laments neo-liberalism's ability to devour and absorb into itself all art and culture; including even that which originates as the countercultural. He writes:

The power of capitalist realism derives in part from the way that capitalism subsumes and consumes all of previous history: one effect of its 'system of equivalence' which can assign all cultural objects, whether they are religious iconography, pornography, or Das Kapital, a monetary value. (Fisher, 2009: 8)

A trip around the British Museum, he suggests, will reveal 'objects torn from their lifeworlds and assembled as if on the deck of some Predator spacecraft' (2009: 8). Fisher sees this as indicative of the power of Capital to convert 'practices and rituals into merely aesthetic objects' (2009: 8).

Fisher's essay, written shortly after the 2008 economic crash, frames and searches for a way out of an apparently stagnant impasse, originally posited by Slavoj Žižek; 'that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism' (Fisher, 2009: 1). Fisher suggests a need for an alternative narrative to 'the widespread sense that not only is capitalism the only viable political and economic system, but also that it is now impossible even to imagine a coherent alternative to it' (Fisher, 2009: 6), or indeed, to imagine its benign reform.

Simon O'Sullivan, writing seven years later, appears to be seeking to address this issue, particularly in respect to art, its transformative potential, and its relationship to capital.

O'Sullivan discusses how the 'so called archival turn' (2016d: 1) within contemporary art risks becoming simply 'an archiving gesture, a framing and presenting of a subset of the world' (2016d: 1). O'Sullivan argues that the archival art practice, by default 'surrenders some of its power', because it has to engage with, 'more or less recognizable forms, languages, narratives' (2016d: 2), as an endless recycling of the 'world-as-it-is' (2016d: 2). Critically engaged art, argues O'Sullivan, runs the risk of functioning as 'a kind of melancholic echo chamber' (2016d: 2) where there is nothing transformative, because 'the more engaged it is, the more it must mirror, however critically (or negatively), its object' (2016d: 2).

O'Sullivan advocates a mode of creating Art that refers to the past, not out of sentiment, but as a resource with potential for resistance, as a strategy for survival in a disenchanted and neoliberal present, and even as a means to bring forth a different future. To see the past as an archive entwined with the present, says O'Sullivan, 'might well provide alternative points of subjectification today', particularly when they are 'mobilised in contemporary aesthetic productions' (2016d: 1). As Fisher declares:

The tiniest event can tear a hole in the grey curtain of reaction which has marked the horizons of possibility under capitalist realism. From a situation in which nothing can happen, suddenly anything is possible again. (Fisher, 2009: 85)

O'Sullivan suggests that if we aspire for a practice that 'presents something more germinal than parasitic' (2016d: 3) we need to appreciate, 'the important idea that something might be of the world but not of the (dominant) code of that world (might, in this sense, be occult)' (2016d: 3). He sees potential to generate the new through 'the scrambling of already-existing

code or the importing of more alien code from elsewhere' (2016d: 3): a temporal and spatial mixing that produces work that is not quite meaningless, but not yet meaningful.

The aim of this process, suggests O'Sullivan, is to produce, 'an art practice that can then take off from this hybridity and begin to work on its own terms, producing its own (autonomous) coding' (2016d: 3).

I want to refer back to Chapter Two, where I examined Joseph Beuys and his scrambling of Nazi, and pre-Nazi German iconography to 'cure' the German psyche, and to Chapter Seven to recall Jorella Andrew's discussion of the 'intending object' and the 'meaningless sign' (2013). We should remember my painterly disruption of the road sign in *Unstable Signs* (2016)<sup>18</sup>, my compulsion to unpick the corporate logo and, most crucially, to *détourn* the George Cross by splicing it with the Red Cross. O'Sullivan suggests that capital has 'increasingly co-opted even our dream worlds – that repository of images that give us a life beyond the plane of matter' (2016d: 8) Where better, then, to run to hide our private interior lives, than in plain sight; nesting them within the bosom of the Spectacle.

In an increasingly homogenized and homogenizing neoliberal present that offers only more of the same – a present that overcodes all options – these points of difference can themselves become politically charged. (O'Sullivan, 2016d: 3)

Walking artist Phil Smith suggests a similar approach with regard to the signs of the High Street: 're-encode these signs and shapes and things entirely according to your own

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Five, Figure 5.20.

associations, giving them whatever meanings you wish' (Smith, 2016b: 15). The result of such activities can radically transform the experience of the High Street; for me it is a dazzling, living, illustrated text, with the possibility of side-tracks, sub-plots, and twists and turns. For Smith the High Street is transformed into theatre:

Once you have memorised your re-encodings, you now have your own geographical theatre, inscribed with your own meanings rather than the Spectacle's. Permanently ready to be re-walked, savoured and refined. And yet there is no physical evidence to alert the authorities to the fact that their meanings have been vandalised and *détourned* (Smith, 2016b: 15).

### **About time**

Donna Haraway also suggests that it is our responsibility to actively imagine a better future, and that in order to do this we need to reject the anthropocentric model of the world; 'the order is re-knitted: human-beings are with and of the earth, and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story' (2016: 55). Challenging the terminal narrative of the Anthropocene (or her term: 'Capitalocene'), she reminds us of the importance of 'staying with the troubles', that there are 'other stories that are storying now' (2016: online). Like Fisher, O'Sullivan and Franke, Haraway sees art as a way to tell, and to mobilise these other stories. Haraway, too, presents a different diagram, one of 'lateral and tentacular' spatialities and temporalities that she terms the 'Chthulucene'.

The unfinished Chthulucene must collect up the trash of the Anthropocene, the exterminism of the Capitalocene, and chipping and shredding like a mad gardener, make a much hotter compost pile for still possible pasts, presents and futures. (Haraway, 2016: 57).



Anselm Franke, speaking in 2017, charts a ‘veritable wave’ of artworks that ‘confront colonialism and state violence’ through dealing with ‘the lived experiences and haunted existences in relation to modernity’s frontiers’ (2017: online). Like Fisher, O’Sullivan and Haraway, Franke sees a way to the future through a re-diagramming of the past, a ‘breaking through the disillusioned present by re-conceiving the relation of the past to the present’. Franke sees the frontier not just as a ‘remote limit’, a geographical ‘disorderly borderland’, but suggests that ‘it structures the imaginary and the symbolic within the present order’:

Every picture and every linguistic argument we make, beneath the surface partakes in its logic. In a fundamental sense, then, the frontier is also the limit of common sense. (Franke, 2017: online)

We see here a connection to my discussion, in the previous chapter of this thesis, on the common properties of the territories of landscape, painting and thinking. The artworks Franke describes are all reaching for ‘a common form of collectivity, for a subterranean shared memory and common imaginary’, that ‘resists the boundary making practices, the divisions inflicted by colonial and imperial schemas and the nation-state in their wake’ (Franke, 2017: online). This ‘shared dimension’, he suggests, is to be unearthed in the gaps, and borders and frontiers:

The frontier [...] activates the senses. It is the place of extreme sensation, and generally of deranged categories and unruly mediations. (2017: online)

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have shown how my aspects of own combined processes of walking and painting correlate with O’Sullivan’s proposed model of the diachronic and synchronic aspects of Art production. Building on this diagram of looping and repeating temporalities, we have

explored how certain retrospective memes, such as the deployment of the English eerie as muse within popular the culture of the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, can be seen as still active, resonating within current themes and trends in contemporary Art practice. More specifically, O’Sullivan’s framework sheds light on my own processes and how specific tropes arose through a combination of walking and studio practice. Personal memories of exploring an eerie English landscape as a child (informed by programs such as *The Changes* (1975) and *Doctor Who*) emerged during my early research walks. These memories re-emerged during phases of studio activity, as preoccupations with games and stories and the forgotten myths and histories of the land and the rhythms and rhymes of the playground. Consolidated through further cycles of walking and making, these preoccupations informed artworks such as the folded paper fortune-teller paintings, the *Cabinet of English Medicine*, and prompted me to put a game of hopscotch in the gallery.

I have also discussed the potential for art that engages with landscape to enchant. To disrupt and to alter our perception of and response to the apparently unalterable; as practitioners and as audience. Within the wider context art production in relation to history, I have explored how theorists that include Fisher, O’Sullivan, Haraway and Franke indicate that art that re-frames a collective colonial and capitalist past could be offer ways to shift approaches to, and explore alternatives to the ‘terminal narrative of the Anthropocene’ (Haraway, 2016: online) and to imagining other futures. I have shown that not only do these theorists galvanise us, as creative practioners, to do this, but they point to a ‘veritable wave of artists’ (Franke, 2017: online), that are already engaged in such a praxis.



## CONCLUSION

This conclusion discusses the fresh insights into interdisciplinary creative practice that are the outcome of the doctoral research described in the previous chapters of this thesis. Section One discusses methodological shifts and innovations that evolved in response to the research process, and that have potential to be useful for other practitioners. In the second section I discuss my key research outcomes, by dividing these findings into four key areas:

1. The 'journey' as a theoretically informed motif that is instrumental in connecting walking practice with making practice.
2. The employment of personal mythology in combination with specific materials, as a model for reflective, creative production that bridges landscape and studio.
3. The study of the studio as a space to 'perform' making (painting, drawing and assemblage), taking account of the practitioners' body, and the fluxes and flows within the space, for optimal production.
4. Achieving auto-emergent and self-sustaining praxis with production of artwork that is increasingly deep-layered and complex, through ongoing, integrated and looping practice of walking/writing/making.

It is perhaps worth stating that all these areas of inquiry have in actuality been interrelated and overlapped throughout this research process. I have used this structure for clarity, in order to organise discussion of my research findings.

## 9.1 METHODOLOGICAL SHIFTS AND INNOVATIONS

### **Blogging as a research tool**

My decision to use an online blog as a means to capture the embodied and subjective experiences of walking, came out of the usefulness of my *Mapping Dartington* blog, created in response to my artist's residency at High Cross House in 2014. This had proved to be an effective tool for reflection on my practice, and so with this in mind, I began the *Crossing England* project with an intention to use two online journals to document and reflect upon my progress: a Walking blog, and a Studio blog.

#### **i. Walking blog**

The Walking blog functioned as a strategic link between walked experience and creative studio practice. Written as soon as possible after each walk, the journal functioned as a tool to capture and to reflect on the phenomenological experiences and subjective impressions, as a journey has unfolded. Visual documentation, such as photographs, drawings and video played an important part in stimulating and supporting this process, acting as memory prompts as this online walking journal was written. Two years into this research, I had identified and indexed the important themes and motifs of my ongoing journey, and the work took on its own momentum. After this point, I continued to keep the blog, but it was no longer necessary to write with such forensic detail to sustain my process.

Perhaps surprisingly, more than the visual aspects of the journal it was the information that unfolded in the form of written descriptions, narratives and stories that became the predominant resource to draw from in the studio. Any anxiety I may have had initially about shining a light onto my own interior world was soon dispelled, for far from halting

the creative process, the more I dug into my own story, the greater the resource I had to draw upon for my practice. Consequently, I suggest that this mode of walking/blogging holds potential for other creative practitioners that wish to make creative work from autobiographical or lived experience (irrespective of whether they wish to refer to walking or not) and offers a ‘way in’ for a practitioner attempting to make site-specific work.

## **ii. Studio blog**

While the Walking blog functioned as intended, it very quickly became apparent that the Studio blog served to only interrupt, and even to halt processes of making. Because of this, I stopped publishing the Studio Blog early in the research, but continued to use it, alongside private journals and sketchbooks, as private photographic record of my process. The Studio blog was disruptive because the process of writing interrupted the flow of making by eating into the time set aside for working in the studio. This impediment drew into focus aspects of studio practice for further interrogation and set the course for exploration into how to achieve conditions for optimal ‘flow’, and I have addressed the outcomes of this inquiry in Chapter Three of this thesis. The Studio Blog was also disruptive because of its public nature; I found myself resistant to releasing work-in-progress out into the world as a necessary rhythm of my process and the Studio Blog worked against that. Again, having acknowledged this impediment I found it had opened up a new area for research, and investigate the need for practitioner privacy in the studio, which is also addressed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

### **The car *dérive* as methodological tool**

As this research had begun with a clear intention to leave the car behind, and experience the landscape through the senses, my eventual use of the car as a tool for *dérive* was unanticipated and surprising. Contrary to expectations, this research has shown that the car has potential to be far more than just a means to access the research field.

In Chapter Six, I described how this shift in methodology came about during the summer of 2016, when it became necessary to drive for longer than an hour from either end of the journey to access new parts of the route. Similar to the walked *dérive*, the car *dérive* involves following the sudden impulse to veer off course, accessing the quietest roads that allowed for the slowest speeds, and stopping on a whim. This demonstrates that the car has potential as a tool to map geographic zones of interest, and to pick up on, and wind into, states of hypersensitivity one might assume are accessible only through walking. Granted, in my own case I had been walking on a single route for a number of years before I recognized this potential, but it shows that, given the right circumstances, a car can be a tool for the psychogeographic ‘drift’, and that the car *dérive* could also be a skill to be developed with practice. This could be of interest for other practitioners, perhaps for those who find it difficult to walk because of physical, psychological or geographic restrictions.

### **Peer practitioner feedback**

From the beginning of my research, it was my intention to solicit feedback from a range of invited practitioners in response to work that I exhibited. However, as the research grew, I came to appreciate that the work I had been making had much more of a multifaceted back-

story than anything I had made in the studio before. Because of this, it became very difficult for me to see the ‘wood for trees’; I knew what particular artworks and drawings referred to but as the collective work grew more complex, I had no idea how the work would come across to an audience. To find this out, I used two new methods to generate data in the form of feedback from other practitioners before the work went to exhibition. These methods were the peer review, and the studio visit.

### **i. Peer Review**

I found that the process of selecting work for a peer review outside of the studio, kickstarted an editorial and curatorial process for me that was to continue up to my impending exhibition at the Ariel Centre in November 2016. The peer review was also an opportunity to receive feedback from other practitioners, with a range of skills from different disciplines, in a safe space. My first session with artist-led initiative Smooth Space took place during November 2015, six months before my solo exhibition *Crossing England* (2016). None of the five practitioners present had ever had seen my work before. From this session I learnt that handling the paintings *Chalky Landscapes* and *Walking Stories* had been ‘really pleasurable’, that looking through a stack of paintings and piles of papers was a ‘different way of viewing’ the work, which had made one member of the group think of ‘books, maps and walking’. Another said that the combined work brought to mind *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), with changes of perception and a shifting sense of scale. Several people suggested that the collection of work was like the ‘fragments of a puzzle’ and that the found objects I had brought to the review were not incongruous, but worked with the paintings. Some members thought of ‘different voices of the landscape’, one did not see the different modes of work presented as ‘different



voices’, but aspects of my voice. We also discussed aspects of laying and following trails. These insights gave me the confidence to pursue certain strategies in the *Crossing England* Exhibition. These strategies included: presenting stacks of work to be looked through, combining various modes of working, and showing objects and paintings together. I also considered aspects of ‘trail blazing’ in the curation of the show.

The group environment can also be a chance to experiment with new ways of showing work. For example, I tried my first ‘polyvocal’ reading to accompany the *Cabinet of English Medicine* at a Smooth Space peer review in September 2017. The enthusiastic reception of this reading prompted me to try the technique again, with a revised paper, for a seminar presentation to the University of Plymouth’s Performance. Experience. Presence. (PEP) Research group.

## **ii. Studio visit**

Throughout the course of this research, I invited a variety of practitioners to my studio as another way to solicit feedback, and to ‘test’ the work. Using a ‘blind test’, in February 2016 I asked artist Bill Wroath to examine a selection of work that he had never seen before, and asked him to ‘read it back to me’. Bill immediately saw the collected work as ‘a puzzle’ to be ‘solved.’ He saw the chalk and red earth as a ‘key’ to a ‘journey’ that could be seen in some of the paintings, which showed ‘white in the East and red in the West’. He saw the red cords on my father’s penknife and compass as relating to ‘family or blood ties’, or ‘umbilical cords’, and thought that some of the wax paintings were like ‘some kind of medieval, votive object’. The gouache *Hypermodernity* paintings made him think of ‘modern housing estates and school playing fields’, and he saw the stack of paintings on a chair as being ‘about childhood, school, and story-books’. Bill’s ability to

grasp and follow these themes in the work reassured me that the strategies I had continued to follow in response to my first Smooth Space peer review – such as ‘laying a trail’ and treating the work collectively as fragments of a puzzle – were working. As this meeting was just two months before my solo show at the Ariel Centre, this was extremely reassuring, and persuaded me to continue to pursue these strategies.

The studio visit can be a way to solicit technical advice; from painting techniques and carpentry skills, to ways of hanging and curatorial considerations. The conversational process can be of value to both artist and visitor, and it opens up opportunities for reciprocal visits and a continuing process of critique and support. I found that this process helped to establish and consolidate a community of creatives in close proximity to my studio, an unfailing resource to call on for the maker that is ‘a bit stuck’.

### **Playful spontaneity**

A sense of puckish innovation, and sanction to follow the ‘sideways’ impulse have long been parts of the psycho/mythogeographer’s toolkit<sup>19</sup>, and this research has shown that these qualities can be relayed to both studio and gallery, to invigorate and enliven a research practice. As an example of how this playful spontaneity can work, I would like to refer back to the private view of my *Crossing England* exhibition in 2016. On a whim, I took some chalk from the exhibition, marked out a game of hopscotch on the ground in front of the gallery entrance, and invited a group of passing children to play a game. As guests arrived to see the show, they passed this ongoing, children’s game to access the gallery. Inside, looking at the work, the guests saw the motifs of stories and games of my own childhood: folded

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<sup>19</sup> See footnote in Chapter One, ‘Edges as Muse’.

paper fortunetellers, a Jacob's Ladder artwork *There and Back Again* (2018) and 'hopscotch' paintings. Several guests remarked that the game outside the gallery functioned to connect the 'outside with the inside'. This event opened up research into the nature of playful activity and its relation to the art object in general, an avenue of inquiry that has played on throughout the rest of this doctoral research.

## 9.2 KEY OUTCOMES

### 1. Journey

#### i.

The first aim of this research was to find out how the theme of 'journey' could be used to make work in the studio, to explore the notion of journey as site, and force for creative practice. I wanted to use painting, drawing and assemblage as a response to the phenomenological experience and subjective impressions of walking the landscape.

The journey has been an active force in connecting all the processes explored in this thesis: from walking the landscape, reflective and critical writing, making in the studio, to curation in the gallery. I found that the *Crossing England* project, turned out not confined to the literal walk between Plymouth and Cambridge but, as with the writing of Lavery (2009a), Smith (2010), Papadimitriou (2012), Cracknell (2014), and Bayfield (2016), other strands of meandering, mental, emotional and creative journey have been interwoven into the fabric of this thesis. Walking draws out and unravels the embodied memory in an autobiographical journey (returning to landscapes of early life). These strands of personal history may become interwoven with other narratives encountered in the landscape, such as folkloric tales, historical narratives, and the accounts of travellers encountered on the route, and all these interweaving strands can, in turn, be harnessed to inform studio activity.

The rhizomatic journey, that ‘ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisation of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 8), is a broad concept that I have utilised to cut across scales of space and time. It can be applied not only to examine the organisation of the contemporary landscape and a practitioner’s unstable situation within it, but also to scrutinise the restlessness of conscious attention when walking. Throughout this thesis, expanding ideas put forward by Newman (2003), Ingold (2008), and Biggs (2014: online), I have compared the journey of the walked line with that of the drawn line. What began as an apparently simple journey, one that I initially considered to be a straight line between ‘here and there’, ‘now and then’, evolved into a winding, enfolding and entangling meander; a series of looping returns and repetitions; new perceptions of the landscape were cultivated by repeatedly visiting important sites, encountering new strands of history and myth on each visit.

During this doctoral research, the maker’s studio itself has been revealed as a crossing, a space to be traversed and circled by the body of the practitioner. Another journey, a ‘disembodied’ voyage, brought about by continuously drawing through a period of minor illness, immobility and bereavement, provoked new ways of making in the studio.

I have described how the relationships between the places of the landscape, viewed from the perspective of the walker, increasingly came to inform the relationships between the artworks on the shelves of the studio, as developed from the perspective of the maker. I have shown potential for this constellating process to be subsequently harnessed in the gallery, informing the curation of an exhibition.

Sustained, sensitised walking fosters a deeper understanding of the integrated and layered nature of subjectivity, memory, and the landscape; I developed a keener ‘psychogeographic’ sensitivity to the past. Walking also appears to ‘draw out’ — or to render explicit — tacit knowledge and memory from the body of the walker. We encounter other ‘selves’ (‘me, then’; ‘me, over there’) particularly when returning to familiar terrain; exploring childhood ‘haunts’ can help a practitioner to tap into a reservoir of forgotten experiences. I found that forgotten memories unravel out of the action of walking, like silk from the body of a spider; an instinctive rather than reflective recollection.

**ii.**

Key to the development of my own practice, was a new appreciation of a ‘sense’ of direction; for me this ‘sense’ was particularly active when way-finding with no map, and of more significance than the efficiency of getting from A to B. This ‘sense’ may be experienced as intuition, embodied tugs or pulls in the gut of the walker, in response to space around them. The ‘sense’ of direction also helps to cultivate increased perception of space as the tangled ‘simultaneity of stories-so-far’ (Massey, 2005: 54), that I discussed early in the introduction of this thesis. I described a way of seeing ‘in the mind’ (Ingold, 2010: 17) that is an imaginal, diagrammatic mapping that places the walker amongst the spatially and temporally interweaving life-paths of other people, plants, creatures and things. From a theoretical notion, this vision is something that is corporeally inhabited during the twists and turns of a journey to develop an embodied knowing of space as a generative and intermingling circulation of substances and materials, as described by Ingold (2008: 5-7).

The significance of this embodied knowledge, and acknowledgement of the enormous part it came to play in my creative output, was brought to my attention largely as a result of being a doctoral research student embedded in a performance department. My research group Performance. Experience. Presence. (PEP) champions ‘the value of rigorous reflexive practice and embodied knowledges’ (Performance. Experience. Presence, online: n.d.). As a consequence I was subject to a level of dialogic inquiry and discourse around corporeal process that would be unusual in Fine Art departments where discussion is more usually centred on product, rather than embodied processes of production. Consequently, this thesis has potential to offer unusual perspectives into art production, that are useful to practitioners and theorists.

I have discussed comparisons between this mode of perceiving space, and perceptions mapped and expressed in oral, mnemonic and painting activities of certain indigenous peoples. I have suggested that it has potential to be harnessed in all kinds of creative practice, citing Haraway’s argument for ‘string figuration’ (2016) as a comparable diagrammatic mode of sharing knowledge between disciplines. These diagrammatic and tentacular modes of seeing ‘in the mind’ (Ingold, 2010: 17) can open new avenues for the studio artist. The ability to visualise and express these life-ways on paper or canvas introduces us to ways of painting or drawing not confined to making representational images of ‘things’, but of becomings and trajectories. This mode of mark-making does not rely on the ‘expressive gesture’ (although it does not exclude this), nor is it a kind of abstraction that aspires to or extracts ‘pure forms’ or ‘ideals’ that are divorced from corporeal experience, but rather takes an approach in which space is mapped and coded as fluid and emergent, rather than empirically charted.

**iii.**

In Chapter Four I demonstrated how the ‘field’, the ‘fold’, the ‘line’ and the ‘gap’ are all concepts that can be used to explore the common ground between the walked space of the landscape and the space of the drawing or painting. For example, there is correspondence between the drawn and painted line, and the walked journey and its unfolding narrative. The gaps in the landscape that interrupt the walked journey (motorways, rivers, canals, train tracks) are comparable to the gaps between paintings. The field can be considered as an enclosed area of land, or a zone on a painted surface.

The mental gymnastics required for thinking about such shifts of scale resulted in surprising outcomes in the studio. A line would ‘jump’ across the gap between two paintings, the paint would leave the centre frame to explore the edges of the painting and while interrogating the unfolding and enfolding journey, a surface would take off from its flat plane and fold into new dimensions. Consequently, the drawings and paintings became more object-like and agentive as the work progressed.

Having interrogated the enclosure of the land through walking, I found myself re-interrogating enclosure by exploring the frame of a painting. Subsequently, I found that I was able to apply aspects of what I had learnt to other closed systems encountered in the research, such as the dynamics of the studio, or even the isolationist attitudes of a nation. While it is important to guard against over-generalising when considering complex systems, I suggest that there can be advantages to such diagrammatic promiscuity, in perceiving and exploiting the repeating, fractal nature of organisational patterns, fluxes and flows. For at some scales, certain trends may be lost to us because of the human situation within them; we may not ‘see the wood for trees’. This research has shown that the processes of fabrication as described

above are generative. Walking informs the process of making, and this, in turn, informs the practitioners' thinking.

iv.

Building on Iain Biggs' discussion of the benefits of a 'polyvocal' (Biggs, 2018) approach to creativity in response to the landscape (see Chapter Two & Chapter Seven), this research has shown how complex and heterogeneous qualities of the landscape can be relayed to the studio, through a complexity of emergent painterly 'voices', with different modes of making emerging in the studio, in relation to specific subjects explored in the landscape. Narratives and memories accessed by walking are re-accessed and re-enacted during the studio processes of making; the painting appears to become a historical landscape. Stories, secrets and codes initially detected in the corporeal landscape, are buried, excavated, and re-interred under skins of paint; evolving into traces that are tangible but never explicit.

In retrospect, it is clear that these different 'voices' or themes emerged, not as arbitrary creative expression, but in relation to the subjects I was exploring while writing. For example, while writing about the abject space of the 'edgelands' (Shoard, 2002) or 'voids' in the landscape (Careri 2002), I made 'awkward' (Silman, 2016) paintings; using paint in ways that were consistent with the qualities of abject space (see Chapter Four). Later, when I began to research and write about the newly built developments that I had walked through (housing estates, corporate industrial zones and industrial agriculture), my mode of painting switched abruptly to what I have termed my *Hypermodernity* paintings. These paintings were simpler and sharper. They had no layers, and their graphic quality referred simultaneously to the corporate logo and the organisation of the corporate landscape.



In this way I (initially unwittingly) broadened my artistic vocabulary, to be able to respond to the broad variety of textures in the landscape. For new creative and painterly ‘voices’ emerged in response to each space or narrative that had captured my attention in the landscape. This long-term strategy was only possible due to the five-year period that I worked on this research project. Had the time been shorter, I would have found it impossible to find ways for this cacophony of voices to harmonise in a single space. This shows how, while short-term deadlines can mobilise a creative practitioner, good things can also come to those prepared and able to wait.

## **2. Materials and Mythology**

### **i.**

During the course of this research, I came to understand that a personal compulsion to pick up white chalk and carry it back to my studio was connected to memories of my childhood in the chalky landscape in East Anglia. Equally, that the red earth of Devon has associations with my later life in the West of England. These materials are usually selected because they are points of departure for interweaving stories that can be set to work during studio production. Such a system draws together colour, materials and even spatial direction and temporal indication, to inform the processes of painting, drawing and assemblage. Echoing Crickmay and Tufnell’s discussions of creative practice and world-building (2004), I have shown how a personal lexicon, drawn from journeying through the world, forms the essential elements of an artist’s creative language, and also set parameters for the work made in the studio; like the rules of a game that only unfold as it is played.

### **ii.**

Materials found while walking (wood, white chalk and red earth, spring water and animal bones) grounded and tethered work made in the studio to the experience of the haptic, embodied encounter within the landscape. To bridge the outside world with the studio, I learned that it is important for a so-called ‘visual artist’ to continue to draw on other senses (touch, smell, sight, and even the ‘sense’ of direction) when working in the studio, just as they have done in the landscape. This means allowing the materials to ‘breathe’ and ‘speak’ in a work, and not being in too much of a hurry to interfere with them during the process of fabrication. Through the attentiveness and sensitivity of the practitioner, materials can guide and inform the course of studio activity. Echoing Jorella Andrews’ discussion of the ‘affective turn’ (Andrews & O’Sullivan, 2013: 61-83), the aim is to work with the effects (rather than ‘meanings’) of materials. Thus, where I have gathered information on reception, I have found affects are provoked within the body of the viewer by the artwork, rather than (or as well as) demanding intellectual interpretation.

### **iii.**

An emergent personal mythology can be employed as a playful strategy to resist the dominant codes of the landscape (those of the Spectacle, late Capitalism and vestiges of imperialist colonialism), and to generate fresh readings of the landscape, by assigning new meanings to the signs and symbols encountered while walking. This disruptive strategy, initially devised by myself and my Director of Studies Phil Smith during a walk around Torquay in 2015, is adapted from the Lettrist International and Situationist *detournement*, and requires no physical intervention, nor obvious flouting of the law, for it is the meaning of the image that is re-appropriated and altered at source, rather than the image itself.

Ingold asks whether ‘images do not stand for things’ but rather ‘help you to find them’ (2010:16). During the course of this research, I mentally diverted and re-purposed high street signs and corporate logos, detaching them from their intended function as indicators for brand or corporate identity. Instead, they became my markers for an emergent personal mythology that unfolded, and grew more complex as I walked. The image of the wolf on the logo of Wolf Minerals tungsten mine, Southern Dartmoor, came to signify the last wolves that were killed on Dartmoor, at the end of the eighteenth century. The pub sign of the ‘White Hart’ was re-appropriated to newly signify a real white stag in a woodland in Hertfordshire. A decaying ‘No parking’ sign became a solar motif (used later in the diptych *Unstable Signs* [2016]). These *détournements* can subsequently be harnessed in the studio in the making of artworks.

#### iv.

The strategy described above to resist the dominant codes of the landscape, can be advanced in the studio through further experimentation with the scrambling of codes. This aims to disorientate, by subverting or splicing familiar references (the corporate logo, national flag, or traffic sign) with other signifiers, creating areas of ‘slippage’. An example of this practice in my own studio was the splicing of the Saint George Cross (and its acquired associations as a symbol for English nationalism), with the sign of the Red Cross (and its associations with emergency assistance and medicine), in the *Cabinet of English Medicine*. This work was made as a response to the outcome of the 2014 Brexit referendum, which started the process of Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union. By merging these symbols on a box that can be opened, the notion of England is ritually transformed from a closed system preoccupied with its borders, to an open system that concerns itself with freedom of movement and hospitality. Consequently, the ground is prepared to germinate new meanings and new subjective responses to these signs for both practitioner and audience.

v.

This research has illuminated a correlation between the proliferation of images of animals and the increasing absence of the embodied animal itself in the English environment. Since the Lettrist International made their first *dérives* in Paris during the 1950's, the psychogeographic walk has been employed as a strategy to resist and unravel the hypnotic seduction of the Spectacle. As described by Debord (1955) and Augé (1995), there is an abundance of beguiling images proliferating the landscape, and in Chapter One I showed examples of such spectacular images, inflected by romanticised notions of the countryside (trees, meadows and animals), that I had encountered while walking. I also showed how these images are frequently used to 'front' large-scale building developments that are destructive to the habitat and eco-systems of the English landscape they aspire to represent.

These images may function to reduce human anxiety about the drastically degraded landscape, like small, grubby, sticking-plasters on large, open wounds, but as indicated by John Berger, in reality these images, 'belong to the same remorseless movement' — that of commerce — that is driving bio-diversity from our landscapes' (2009: 27). Because of this, while wishing to refer to animal absences in my studio practice, I became resistant to the notion of making figurative images of the animals.

vi.

The drive to make work about non-human animals without resorting to figuration raises interesting challenges within the studio. In the second section of Chapter Six I proposed 'a bestiary for the Anthropocene'— a collection of artworks that do not use images to refer to the non-human animal —highlighting a shift, particularly within the discourses of

performance, to create work about the ‘literal’ rather than the ‘figurative’ animal (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online).

While considering ways to re-align human and non-human relationship within the context of art-making, I have experimented by assembling video, text and eventually found fur, feathers and animal bones alongside my drawings and paintings. I have discussed a variety of ways to memorialise lost species, including ritual and performance, and examined the non-human in relation to the ‘expanded self’ (Coates and Chaudhuri, 2017: online) and ‘becoming animal’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). Rather than using traditional anthropocentric tropes that use representations of creatures to describe human traits, these inquiries have helped me to navigate ways to make work that explores human/nonhuman entanglement, and to highlight and to mourn the ecological degradation of the landscape, culminating in the use of the five white bones of the White Hart in the *Cabinet of English Medicine*. In this way the ‘phantasmogoric’ presences (or absences) of certain animals that had stalked me across the landscape became integrated into the body of work made in the studio.

### **3. Fluxes of the studio**

#### **i.**

In Chapter Three of this thesis, I discussed how difficult I had found it to make work in my ‘open’ studio at High Cross House. I showed that periods of privacy are desirable for a practitioner to function well in the studio. However, through my own experience and accounts of practitioners such as Mark Rothko (Thomas, 2009: 28), James Elkins (Elkins, 1999), Katy Moran (Iwona Blazwick 2012: 160), and Michael Simpson (Simpson, 2016: online) I also concluded that a studio that is a closed system, devoid of outside influence, risks becoming a solipsistic and stagnant environment. I found that it is necessary and

advantageous to take regular breaks from phases of privacy, and to allow for flows into and out of the studio. For the practical aspect of my own research project, these flows were facilitated by peer review and the studio visit (discussed in Section One of this conclusion), and by regular phases of walking on my chosen route, which brought influxes of fresh ideas and new materials to the studio.

**ii.**

In Chapter Three I showed how, contrary to my initial expectations, there are practical and creative benefits to be gained from working in a ‘home’ studio. The ‘home’ studio is particularly beneficial for the artist who is a (single) parent, for it enables them to work at any time but still be on hand for their family if required.

As the theme of the *Crossing England* project was the journey between my childhood home in Cambridge and my current home in Plymouth, I discovered other benefits in working in a ‘home’ studio. I found the personal possessions and detritus of everyday life that surrounded me helped me to access themes of a personal or autobiographical nature. Later, this connection was apparently relayed to the audience of my mid-research show; in Chapter Five, I describe how in much of the written feedback I received, the audience thought that ‘home’ and ‘childhood’, were themes of the exhibition.

Working in a domestic setting was also helpful for the organisation of the studio. For the area to continue to function as a living space, it needed to be regularly sorted, and this helped me to ‘see the wood for trees’, and to organize the practice of making. Some of the daily tasks of organising a family home (such as stacking and folding) became integrated into the work that was produced in this studio.

### iii.

Through tracking my own performance in the studio, I came to understand that the rhythms of the preliminary tasks of making (such as sawing, sanding, scraping, polishing), and even ‘pointlessly’ pacing the studio, are conducive to a state of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmialyi 1992).

While such tasks are not necessarily valued as ‘art-making’, an appreciation of the part they play in initiating creative spontaneity offers useful insights to practitioner process, particularly for an artist struggling with their own apparent procrastination. Building on artist Bruce Nauman’s framing of hypnotic, rhythmic studio activity in his *Mapping the Studio* films, in Chapter Three, I suggested that such ‘pointless’ activity can be a useful prelude to making. I have shown how gentle tinkering can initiate a process of exploring and finding out, through embodied encounter and interaction with materials; a process that Tim Ingold describes as ‘going along’ (Ingold, 2013: 1).

### iv.

In the studio, I noted a shift in my performed role from that of ‘maker’ to that of the ‘critic’ when I stood back to see the work, in a way that was comparable to how I encountered different ‘selves’ in the landscape (me then, me over there). Building on ideas articulated by Kentridge (2012: online), in Chapter Three I explored this short walk across this space. I detected how this simple action, of ‘standing back to see’, assists a practitioner to move from a state of flow, to a state of critical engagement. While this may be behaviour that is implicit in a practitioner’s process, conscious acknowledgement of the significance of this action could result in a useful and explicit strategy to improve performance in the studio.

I found that the rhythms of walking are transferrable to the rhythms of making in the studio, and proposed that these rhythms can play a part in achieving the state of ‘flow’. I also tracked

a tidal movement, a strandline between the flotsam and jetsam of both art-making and daily life in the domestic studio.

I also showed how the embodied ‘to and fro’ of my performance in the studio later became a circling action, as the volume of work increased and filled all four walls of my studio, and I moved between artworks. Later, still, when I was physically unable to move due to a broken foot, these configurations were unconsciously transferred to the artwork itself through the making of the folded *Crossing England Drawings* (2016).

v.

In Chapter Four, I described how I found that a simple strategy of ‘stacking’ and ‘folding’ can reduce the clutter caused by a proliferation of visual and painterly languages. This practice initially came out of the necessity for order when working in a studio in a domestic context. However, the practice turned out to be so useful as a way to manage large volumes of visual data that it was not long before I began to explore stacking and folding as part of the fabrication process. In the same way that an abacus is used as a manual tool to ‘carry over’ complex information, during their making these ‘stacks’ can help to identify previously un-noted links and connections between one body of work and another.

Through this mode of manipulation, a drawing or painting erupts from the flat plane into other dimensions, driven and sustained by interconnected fields and surfaces. In this way, the artwork becomes an instrument to interrogate the ‘circuits, conjunctions, levels and thresholds, passages and territories’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 177) between different modes of working, (and simultaneously, different aspects of a journey). I had discovered



ways of materially expressing and exploring different qualities of Deleuze and Guattari's 'Body without Organs'.

vi.

As a response to the growing volume of work in my studio, I became less concerned with separate artworks, and began to think more in terms of 'bricolage' and 'constellation'.

Individual artworks ceased to concern me, and I became more concerned with achieving a *Gesamkuntswerk*, or total artwork. The use of shelves in the studio facilitated this purpose as paintings, objects and stacks of drawings could be endlessly shuffled about, like words in a sentence, to explore the dynamics between them.

In such an 'inclusive' studio strategy, the focus of the artist shifts from centre-frame to outside the frame of the painting; it is the links between different pieces of work that become important. In Chapter Four I showed similarities between the process of the 'partnering' of paintings, and the structural dynamics of the literary art-form of haiku: a 'spark', facilitated by the observer, jumps across the 'gap' (Japanese *kire*) between juxtaposed images (Marshall, 2013:100). The same dynamics can be employed for the partnering of paintings, for pairing paintings with objects, and even to explore relations between whole groups, or constellations, of paintings, found objects, and text. The work collectively becomes 'one big painting'. This does not mean that the work is not edited at all, but that its objects and paintings are considered in relation to the rest of the work as they are constructed, and not as a curatorial addendum.

This inclusive studio strategy is tied to a shift in thinking about landscape. Just as the focus in the studio shifts from 'things' (paintings, objects) to 'relations between things', so in the

landscape an interest in isolated and reified places is adjusted to increasingly consider ‘the journey’, or the relations between its places. These combined considerations build on Biggs’ discussion of ‘expanded drawing’ as ‘an act animating particular, multiple, forms of *relationality*’ (2014). They also support Haraway’s approach to ‘string figuration’ (2016), in which emergent patterns and relational configurations are passed between disciplines as modes of sharing and building on knowledge.

### **Returning, revising, revisioning**

#### **i.**

In Chapter Six of this thesis I described how, after a long period of making in my studio, I resumed my journeying, to find a shift in the way that I was perceiving the landscape. Themes and motifs from the earliest walks, teased out through blog-writing and then developed in the studio, appeared to ‘take off’ and take on their own autonomy. The resumed journey now appeared to be saturated with meaning. As the original aim of this research was to explore how walking informs studio activity, to find that making conversely informs the activity of walking was unexpected and surprising, and demonstrates the potential for each of these modes of activity to become a critical tool to consider the other.

In Chapter Seven I further discussed this relationship between interior self, world, and the emergent motif. I described how Simon O’Sullivan’s theoretical framework for the production of new subjectivities in art practice (2015), was supported by my experience as a practitioner during my research. By interrogating the ‘synchronic’ and the ‘diachronic’ nature of how Red and White water became part of my ‘lexicon’ of materials, I discovered how O’Sullivan’s model could be applied to the threefold practices of walking, writing and making. O’Sullivan’s model describes a looping and reflexive process, in which images and

motifs appear to take on their own autonomy, revealing themselves to the practitioner through sustained practice. Consequently, I have continued to refer to this model in the latter chapters of this thesis.

**ii.**

Expanding on the work of theorists that include Mark Fisher, Donna Haraway, Anselm Franke and Simon O’Sullivan, I have discussed contemporary tendency towards the speculative in art practice. I have added to this discourse by showing that, as with my own practice, a recurring aspect of this trend is an emphasis on the Past. This is not a romantic or nostalgic past, but rather an approach to antiquity as a living, archival resource to be ‘redrawn’, as part of a process of imagining new futures.

In Chapter Five I related how a chance remark from an observer, that my work was about the ‘Bronze Age. In the Future’ helped me to understand that my work was simultaneously historical and speculative in nature. Through practice as research I have also built upon arguments posited by Sam George (2016), that early twenty-first century cultural preoccupations with the ‘English eerie’ (Macfarlane, 2015b) (such as Psychogeography, Hauntology and Folk Horror) are symptomatic responses to anxiety about the future in times of great political, ecological and economic uncertainty. For these are themes in the English landscape that were revealed by my walking, and consequently looped back as artistic concerns into work made in the studio.

**iii.**

In Chapter Seven, I described how I unintentionally explored a new angle on the ‘expanded self’ of the Body without Organs (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988), when working in the studio

during a phase of personal illness, debility and bereavement. During this time, because of physical restrictions, I was obliged to find new ways of making; a drawing process that proved, incidentally, to be a hypnotic remedy for intense pain. In this context, rather than heightened sensory awareness, there was a sense of displacement, or disembodiment, and I found myself re-mapping an imaginal journey across England, accessed through the activity of drawing.

Despite the pain-relieving qualities of this intense period of making, the effects were not of a sedative nature, but apparently a way of entering into the experience more fully. During the making of the *Crossing England Drawings* (made over a period of four months), I found myself integrating several themes within a single artwork. Each drawing referred simultaneously to the physical journey I had made across England, interwoven with my autobiographical history, stories of the landscape and even the processes of my own body through trauma and subsequent healing.

In Chapter Seven, I argued that these insights add new perspectives to Alex K. Gearin's discussion of re-situated, imagined embodiment in creative process, in a variety of historical and cultural contexts (2017: online). It shows that even in times of severe pain and immobility, embodied or tacit knowledge of the landscape can still be harnessed in the making of artworks. It also shows that the practice of working in the studio through such extreme conditions can produce new insights into the organizational patterns that are found in that landscape, and into the nature of the human body's integration within these patterns.

### **Further research avenues**

Throughout this thesis I have discussed artistic attempts to address the idea of England and Englishness through the re-telling of forgotten myths and histories that are less about battles, borders, kings and queens, but celebrate the specificities of place nevertheless. Works that include P.J. Harvey's albums *White Chalk* (2007) and *Let England Shake* (2014), Jez Butterworth's play *Jerusalem* (2009), and Andrew Köttling's films *Swan Down* (2012), *By Ourselves* (2015), all sought to do something of this nature before the Brexit referendum in 2016. Since then, issues of English (and British) identity have slid more sharply in to focus; a consequence of the treacherous journey towards divorce from the European Union. Perhaps another area for future inquiry could be the expressions of artistic concern towards Brexit that will no doubt unfold in response to this situation.

## **Summary**

This thesis has, to my knowledge, shown unprecedented insights into the relationship between walking through the landscape, and making artworks in the studio. This has been achieved by paying particular attention to the perspective of the practitioner through rigorous, reflexive analysis of a complexity of processes. By examining interweaving modes of operation from the perspective of Performance Studies, I have shown how the 'journey' can be a force to cut across scales to draw together the space of the landscape with the space of the studio, in the construction of handmade artworks.

Through this doctoral research, I have fashioned a model for creative practice, and produced new understandings of particular artistic processes, taking detailed account of how a personal mythology can be employed alongside selection of specific materials, to bridge the outside world with the world of the studio. I have contributed to discourse on the production of painting, drawing and assemblage, through discussion on the dynamics of these artforms in

relation to the walked journey and interrogation of the landscape. By close analysis of the fluxes and flows of studio process, I have indicated strategies for optimal practitioner performance that consider privacy, domesticity and preliminary making activities within the studio space.

My inquiry has also shown that, contrary to initial expectations, this is not a terminal journey that begins with walking and ends in the studio. Rather, these can be integrated processes of a looping or rhizomatic nature, and the pursuits of the studio have as much potential to inform and even to alter perception of the landscape, as the other way round. This study has shown how sustained and repeated practice introduces new depth and density to a praxis, opening avenues to disrupt and enchant, providing fresh perspectives on walking, writing, using materials in the studio and performance-making, for creative practitioners, theorists and scholars of artistic process.

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## **Exhibitions**

Allain Prillard (2015) 'Atelier-galerie', pop-up exhibition, Monpazier, France visited 2/7/2015.

'Ancient Scent: Ireland' (2018) group exhibition, St Saviour's Hall, Plymouth. Visited 22/3/2018.

Basquiat, Jean-Michel (2017) 'Boom for Real', Barbican Art Gallery, London. Visited 5/1/2018.

Bell, Trevor (2018) 'Transform', Peninsula Art Gallery, Plymouth.

Burri, Alberto (2015) 'Collezione Burri' (1979 -1993) Palazzo Albizzini and Essiccatoi del Tabacco, Citta di Castillo, Italy. Visited 21/5/2015.

Chapman, Sarah and Roulstone, Karen (2015) 'Present Tense', The Alamo Project, Plymouth. Visited 26/9/2015.

Dalton, Gordon (2016) 'Searching for Genius' Peninsula Art gallery, Plymouth University, Plymouth. Visited 24/9/2016.

'In the Open' (2017) exhibition curated by Judy Tucker, Sheffield Institute of Arts Gallery, Sheffield. Visted 6/9/2017.

Mcintyre, Connor (2015) 'New Co-ordinates', The Alamo Project, Plymouth. Visited 1/5/15.

Perry, Grayson (2017) 'The most popular Art exhibition ever!', Arnolfini, Bristol. Visited 24/12/2017.

Plymouth Contemporary Open (2015) Peninsula Arts, Plymouth. Visited 14/7/2015.

Poulson, Kit (2015) 'The Guests'. Plymouth College of Art Gallery, Plymouth. Visited 2/2/2015.

Whitread, Rachel (2018) Tate Britain, London. Visited 5/1/2018.

Sander, Katya (2016) 'Publicness', Plymouth Art Centre, Plymouth. Visited 22/2/2016.

Shaw, George (2016) 'My Back to Nature', The National Gallery, London. Visited 6/6/2016.

'Soil Culture: Deep Roots' (2016) Peninsula Art Gallery, Plymouth University. Visited 18/1/2016

'The Land We Live in - the Land We Left Behind' (2018) exhibition curated by Adam Sutherland, Hauser and Wirth, Bruton, Sutherland. Visited 3/4/2018

Timson, Bruce (2014) 'Paintings', Aerial Centre, Kevicc, Totnes. Visited 4/11/2014.

'Walk On' (2014) exhibition, Karst, Peninsula Arts, Plymouth Art Centre, Plymouth City Museum, Plymouth. Visited 10/2014.

Wylie, Rose (2018) 'History Painting', The Gallery at Plymouth College of Art, Plymouth. Visited 8/5/2018.

Basquiat, Jean-Michel (2017) 'Boom for Real', Barbican Art Gallery, London. Visited 5/1/2017.

### **Workshops Attended**

Hall, Sally and Hirons, Jason (2014) 'Textually Active: Beating the Bounds', Walk On Exhibiton, Plymouth, 23/10/2014.

Kloetzel, Melanie and Smith, Phil (2014) 'Research into/as movement & space', Plymouth University, 13/11/2014.

Milford, Adam (2014) 'Walking and Drawing', Walk On Exhibiton, Plymouth, 2015, 23/9/2014.

Vason, Manuel (2014) 'Becoming an Image', Plymouth University, 20/2/2014.

## APPENDIX I

Poster for *Crossing England* exhibition, 2016.



'I discovered that the walked journey back to my birth place is plaited with my own autobiographical narrative, and with writhing strands of history, myth and story that permeate the landscape. There is no single directional flow to these strands, but rather they act like currents, alternating between here and there, now and then.'



The Gallery at the Ariel Centre  
King Edward VI Community College  
Ashburton Road, Totnes, TQ9 5JX  
01803 869 200  
[www.kingedwardvi.devon.sch.uk](http://www.kingedwardvi.devon.sch.uk)  
Monday to Friday 9.30am - 4.00pm  
Saturday 9.30 am -12.00



4) Was there anything you found hard to understand about the show?

5) What would you say were the themes of the show?

6) Did you think the show was curated cohesively?

7) Would you have liked to have seen any of the work displayed differently?

8) Was there anything in the show that you particularly responded to?

9) Was there anything in the show that you thought should not be there?

Many thanks for your help

Helen Billingham

helenbeee@hotmail.com

## APPENDIX III

Text of shared reading performed paper, first presented to P.E.P, Plymouth University in March, 2018, and subsequently at the *Cabinet Meeting* (2018), as the opening event for *English Diagrams*, the final exhibition of work presented as part of this thesis.

### **About time: exploring the nature of the emergent motif in the making of the Cabinet of English Medicine**

**By Helen Billingham**

#### **Helen**

Spoken Introduction: welcome etc.

The Cabinet of English Medicine is an artwork, an object that can be activated, that is at once reliquary and medicine cabinet. It is a box that concerns itself with intersecting stories, preserving the relics of the past, but that is also a repository for healing, transformation and change. The Cabinet of English Medicine is a potential tool for the detournement of the George Cross. Rather than a bounded a fortified nation, England is redefined as an open system, a 'crossing' (Bennett, 2001) or an enchanted space, to be traversed and experienced. The word 'cabinet' refers to a box or cupboard, but can also mean a private room for council, or a meeting place for advisors. A place to assemble, or draw together a range of 'voices' or 'elements'.

#### **One**

When I first moved to Devon I was amazed by how red the soil can be there; a vivid red due to the iron oxides within the local sandstone particulates. Over the years, the red Devon soil I have collected on my walks has prompted me to learn about the history of red ochre, how to grind it, and mix it with egg or linseed oil to make a gritty paste; a simple paint. I ran workshops teaching others how to do this, and found considerable interest in the process.

#### **Two**

When I returned to walk in Cambridge, it occurred to me that the white chalk paths in that locality were as striking as the red ones of Devon, and that my engagement with the Devon soil was a process rooted in my own childhood behaviour. Raised, as I was, on the chalky land of southern Cambridge, chalk has significant childhood associations for me; it was in the water we drank; it furred up the kettle and broke the washing machine. It made our bones strong, but our skin sore and dry in the winter. Writer Robert Macfarlane observes: 'Chalk is a substance that marks, and is easily marked' (2013: 52), and as children we would grab white handfuls of chalk from the flower beds to scribble on the walls, and mark out hopscotch games on the pavement.

#### **Helen**

We are in Hertfordshire and the sign of the stag is everywhere; prancing across the county council logo and splashing through a rotary club plaque. I read that the hooded crow, *corvus cornix* was once so abundant on Royston Heath that it was known as the Royston Crow. This animal, too, is imprisoned in various insignia; I follow a trail of them up the High Street; brass plaques set into the pavement.

#### **Three**

After weeks of walking on the red earth of Devon, and the chalky white paths of East Anglia, I developed new perceptions of the terrain I had been crossing. Rather than a series of reified and separate places, I saw it as a multiplicity of points on the landscape, interconnected by ongoing and interweaving lifepaths.

This culminated in Royston, when I stood at the crossroads of an ancient drover's route (the Ickneild Way) and a Roman road (Ermine Street), and over a cave, carved in the chalk below by the Knights' Templar. The Royston junction is known locally as 'the Cross', and is marked by an ancient stone called the 'Roysia' - or 'Rosy' - stone. Standing at this intersection, I realised that I was comprehending this landscape in a way I never could from a book or a map.

### **Helen**

Simon O'Sullivan (2016d) proposes that a consequence of spatial and temporal 'scrambling' is that it can 'throw up' images or forms that appear to the practicing artist to come from 'somewhere else', but that 'also have some kind of strange relevance to the world as-it-is'. This what O'Sullivan refers to as the 'synchronic' nature of the motif (O'Sullivan, 2016: 3-4).

Such an image may appear to take on its own 'autopoietic functioning' 'begin to recycle and re-use its own motifs', starting a process of 'nesting one set of fictions within another', to produce 'a certain complexity – a density even'. This is what O' Sullivan refers to as the diachronic nature of the motif (O'Sullivan, 2016: 3-4).

O'Sullivan suggests that this process could 'involve moves in a game for which one does not know the exact rules'

### **Four**

In Somerset I was excited to discover, quite by chance, water gushing from walls either side of a narrow lane. The water issued from two distinct sources; a red spring on one side of the path, and a white spring on the other. The two waters are visibly different from each other. Each water has its own taste and the waters of the two springs are celebrated locally with a web of tangling Christian and Pagan tales. They are collected at source for their libatious and their ablutive qualities. Not only did I feel compelled to immerse myself in the waters at the site (it was a hot day), but in the same way that I had collected the red and white soil, I collected the red and white water, took it home and drank it, a sip from each bottle every day. The duality of red and white now not only flowed as a theme through my walking and studio practices, but took on an embodied nature, as water flowing over and through my own body.

### **Five**

A week before Christmas Eve, I stepped awkwardly down from my kitchen, and broke the fifth metatarsal of my foot. The next morning, in the minor injuries unit, they bound my foot with a white, cotton bandage, and set it with plaster of paris. I was given strict instructions; no weight-bearing, no walking, no driving. With an appointment to have the bone set on Tuesday, and a tooth extraction on Thursday I was going nowhere. I was immobilised. Step by step, breath by heartbeat, mark after mark, I drew in my studio, on white cotton rag paper. It was the week of the shortest day, the longest night; a winter crossing when even the sun is seen to be stopped in its tracks. Low in the sky, the sunlight flooded the studio. A sense of stillness.

I wrote in my journal at the time:

The drawing is a map. The drawing is a bandage. When I close my eyes I see the lines. The lines are threads of a woven story, a journey. There, and Back Again. Now and then.



As well operating as a bridge between here and there, now and then, the drawings evolved new functions, archiving a path from life to death, and from sickness to wellness.

### **Helen**

When a bone is broken it bleeds into the gap. The red blood cells collect into string-like ‘fibroblasts’ that weave together as soft tissue in the space between the ends of the bone. After two weeks, the soft tissue begins to calcify, beginning a transformation into woven bone that can take between three to nine years.

### **One**

Return to the Spinney and the Chalk Pits.

I returned several times to Lime Kiln Hill, the site of the Spinney and the chalk pits at, a quarter of a mile from my parent’s house, at the back of my old school playing fields, on the threshold of Cherry Hinton, now a Cambridge suburb. My research had exposed this site to be a repository of some of my most intense childhood and teenage memories; once a brooding, menacing, enclosed space, it has now been cleaned up and made accessible as a nature reserve.

I read more about the chalk pits; an archaeological survey of Lime Kiln Hill, (which is, in fact, no longer a hill, but the chalk spine of an ascending road, quarried away to sharp cliffs on either side). Reading the survey, I discovered that before it had become a quarry, it was a site of notable interest:

War Ditches is a large enclosure, lying on a spur of the Gog Magog hills to the south of Cambridge. Much of this originally circular monument was destroyed by chalk quarrying in the late 19th to mid 20th centuries, during which time a series of excavations was conducted, largely under the auspices of Cambridge Antiquarian Society. Had the monument survived intact, it would undoubtedly have acquired scheduled status as one of the county’s key prehistoric monuments. (Pickstone & Mortimer, n.d.)

I was amazed that I had never known this before. The survey contained other fascinating information:

During the summer of 2008 children playing within the East Pit, Cherry Hinton (Fig. 1, TL 484 555) discovered the legs and feet of a human burial, along with animal bones and Romano-British pottery, high up in the south-eastern corner of the quarry. (Pickstone & Mortimer, n.d.)

### **Two**

Return to the Wofram Tungsten Mine, Sparkwell.

In Devon I returned to the Wolfram Tungsten mine near Sparkwell on the edge of Dartmoor. I saw a wild stag running away from the place I had found the hind leg of a deer hanging on a barbed wire fence three years before, the rest of its bones picked clean on the floor below. This time, I scabbled around in the undergrowth, trying to find the bones, thinking that maybe I could integrate them into my artwork, but with no luck; they had either returned to the earth, or been carried away by animals. So I spent the afternoon picking sheep’s wool and horse hair off the barbed wire fences to take back to my studio.

### **Three**

Return to Rouses Wood, near Royston.

Another place I returned to was my friend’s woodland, Rouses Wood in Hertfordshire; land that once belonged to the Knights Templar. It was here that family of white deer had lived, before being shot, one by one, by the neighbouring landowner. I never saw the white deer,

but my friend and his family had had several encounters with them, and it was after hearing their stories that I had stalked images of the White Hart up Royston High Street in the form of street signs. This time, my friend handed me a carrier bag of large, white bones. They were bones (he said) from a white stag that had lived in Rouses wood. He had had them for a number of years, and now they were mine. They were not only beautiful and enigmatic, but felt good in the hand, and made a musical sound when knocked together. The fact that I had never seen the white deer did not bother me, for that made it the stuff of myth. The fact that I had no proof the bones were actually from a white hart was also irrelevant, for such is the way with all relics.

### **Helen**

Donna Haraway's ideas about 'string figuration' are diagrammatic and transmissive. Commonly known in Britain as 'Cat's Cradle', string figures are a playground game in which skeins of thread wound around the hands are passed back and forth between collaborators to make different combinations of complex and intricate patterns. Haraway uses this image to propose ways of passing and developing knowledge; 'String figures are like stories; they propose and enact patterns for participants to inhabit' (2016: 10), she says.

Playing games of string figures is about giving and receiving patterns, dropping threads and failing but sometimes finding something that works, something consequential and maybe even beautiful that wasn't there before, of relaying connections.

### **Four**

The Cabinet of English Medicine is an artwork, an object that can be activated, that is at once reliquary and medicine cabinet. It is a box that concerns itself with intersecting stories, preserving the relics of the past, but that is also a repository for healing, transformation and change. The Cabinet of English Medicine is a potential tool for the detournement of the George Cross. Rather than a bounded a fortified nation, England is redefined as an open system, a 'crossing' (Bennett, 2001) or an enchanted space, to be traversed and experienced. The word 'cabinet' refers to a box or cupboard, but can also mean a private room for council, or a meeting place for advisors. A place to assemble, or draw together a range of 'voices' or 'elements'.

## APPENDIX IV

Selection of images from the *English Diagrams* (2018) summative examination exhibition.



Figure IV.1: alignment of objects, looking South West.



Figure IV.2: chalk circle, with alignment of objects.



Figure IV.3: participants assembled to read at the *Cabinet Meeting*, to open the *English Diagrams* exhibiton, Plymouth, 2018



Figure IV.4: south wall shelf,  
showing *English History* (2017), stack of hinged paintings, two folding fortune-teller drawings, *Procession* (2014) and the *Toothache Drawing* (2016).



Figure IV.5: west wall,  
showing set of three panels, oil paint on oak.

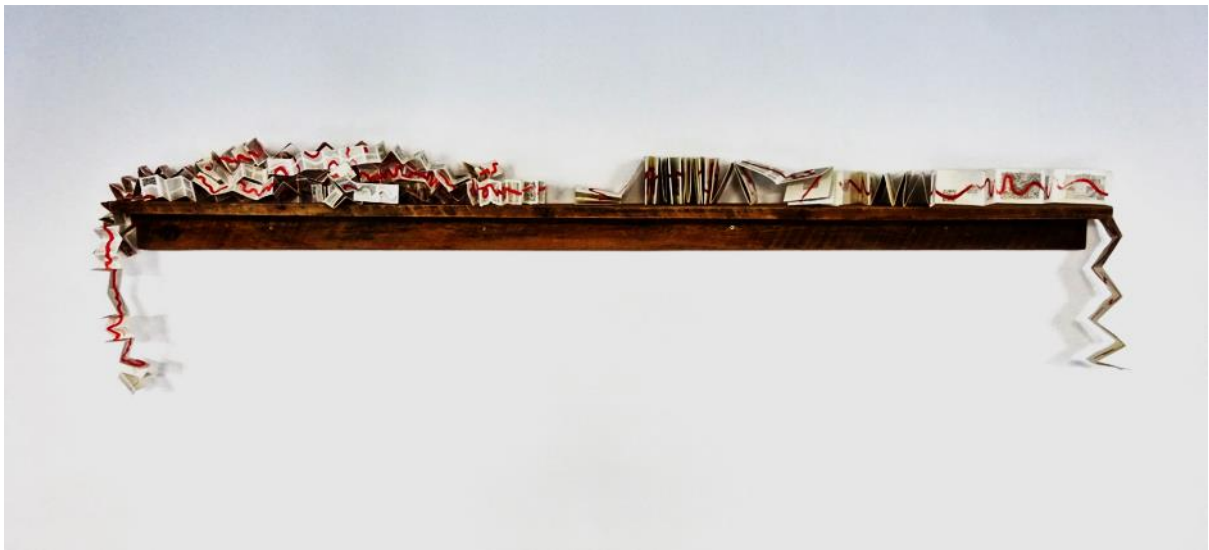


Figure IV.6: west wall shelf,  
showing two *Crossing England Drawings*: *Marking Time till Spring* (2017) and *Map to my Father* (2016-17).



Figure IV.7: north wall shelf,  
showing *English Memories* (2015) pile of feathers and four *Chalky Landscape, Walking Stories* (2015).



Figure 9.8: middle window.



Figure 9.9: middle widow,  
showing stack of diagrams, found pebble and foot cast.



Figure 9.10: right-hand window.





Figure 9.11: right-hand window,  
showing group of small animal bones.



Figure 9.12: right-hand window,  
showing compass & penknife.





Figure 9.13: left-hand window.



Figure 9.14: left-hand window,  
showing stack of studio drawings, Jacobs ladder artwork *There & Back Again* (2018)  
& folded fortuneteller drawing.



Figure 9.15: hopscotch game, available for visitors to play throughout *English Diagrams* exhibition.