

## Article

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## *Matrix of Movement* and *Haecceity*: Walking in Spatiotemporal Landscapes

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My art practice explores the intersection between our digital and aesthetic worlds, a hybrid space where technological control meets emotion and memory of the human experience. For many years, my research has investigated the dynamic relationship between developing technologies and the traditions of the hand created image, with a specific focus on wetlands and post-industrial landscapes. Wetlands link and connect communities, they mark borders and define modern transport links. Crucially, intact wetland provides a geological and archaeological heritage dating back over 10,000 years. The importance and protection of such landscapes receives little publicity and I seek to challenge the perceptions of what Daniel Defoe described as '*land entirely waste*' in his damning description of Chat Moss (Channoffe) in *Tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain*.<sup>1</sup>

My recent projects *Matrix of Movement* (2016-18) and *Haecceity* (2018) bring together the worlds of fine art, ecology, environmental science and commercial surveying technology. The artworks emerging from this interdisciplinary amalgam seek to challenge our preconceptions of post-industrial landscapes. Such spaces are complex, precarious, transient and unpredictable, reinventing themselves to accommodate the changing economic and urban world which surrounds them, but never completely surrendering to the desire of human occupation. Sadly, it is my perception that these wetland spaces are seen by many as worthless, left vulnerable to industrial and military exploitation and branded as exclusion zones, reinforcing perceptions of them as empty wasteland or terra nullius – land belonging to no one. Thus, commercial interests are free to take profit from what they advocate as the necessary and progressive reclamation of land, and in doing so cause destruction and the subsequent extinction of these living landscapes.



Little Woollen Moss - 2018



Cadishead Moss – 2015

## Matrix of Movement (2016-2018)

*Matrix of Movement* (2016-18) investigated shifts in cultural approaches to wayfaring and navigation, with a specific focus on The River Mersey in the North West of England and The Hunter River in New South Wales, Australia. The two rivers are connected through human exploration and exploitation. They are linked through historical trade connections in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which led to human and material exports that fuelled the industrial revolution on both continents. The cities of Liverpool, UK and Newcastle, Australia are inextricably linked with the rivers and wetlands running through them. For their communities, the rivers and wetlands hold stories and memories of a life in tune with seasonal patterns of wet and dry, inviting tales of imagination, mystery refuge and escape. For example, the discovery of preserved individuals in the mossland landscape, such as the Iron Age 'Druid Prince' who appeared to have been drugged and then ritually sacrificed, have nurtured a 'spiritual dread'.<sup>2</sup>



The River Mersey, UK and The Hunter River, NSW - 2016





Moss identification survey with Lancashire Wildlife Trust – 2015

Wetland locations are challenging environments in which to make artwork. They require sensitivity to environmental factors as well as an understanding of the physical geography of the land. The identification and selection of locations for my projects are done in close consultation with local trusts and agencies. Four sites were identified for this project, each having played an important role historically in the development of the local community, as well as having been significantly altered over the last sixty years in the name of progress, before finally being recognised as a valuable component linking communities to their cultural history and sense of place.

During walking journeys I collected Lidar mapping data, which was reinterpreted through drawing and printmaking to explore how our actions and perceptions contribute to the story of the land. Multiple visits to locations were necessary before decisions about scanning or planned work was made. My methods for collecting and processing data have developed over the last few years. Portable Lidar scanners are now commonly used for mapping and investigation of archaeological, architectural and forensic sites and have the capability to accurately record and minutely measure the environments around them.

FARO, the company making the scanner I use in the UK, views the capturing of data as being more akin to modelling or sensing.<sup>3</sup> Ethereal qualities such as tonal values and colour are scientifically replaced by the technology of precision mapping, surpassing what our human perception can achieve, or so these companies would have us believe. Precision mapping and measuring equipment is calibrated and combined with specialist software to translate and collate data where facts are essential. In this instance, the SCENE software is designed for use with the FARO scanner and allows the user to move and navigate through collected data files as 3-dimensional virtual space. SCENE allows a user to revisit, walk through, fly over and compare moments in time within a landscape in minutes. This virtual landscape is designed to remain within the computer, locations stored as data, collated and remapped files to evidence investigative research. This unique view provides a highly accurate recording of locations that are transient or susceptible to damage by human presence.

For me there is an exciting challenge when taking precision equipment and finding alternative uses of its capabilities. Technical collaboration between myself, FARO and science technicians at the University of Central Lancashire has been essential in the development of my projects. Different working methodologies challenged and expanded the possibilities of the equipment and software. Individual skills, curiosity and an enthusiasm to explore new possibilities led to new knowledge. Through this collaborative process came an understanding of how an artist's traditional preoccupation with ethereal qualities and interactions of tonal values could be captured and then translated using digital instruments.



FARO focus scanner on Little Woolden Moss 2018

My project required me to break the rules of the software, removing all physical measures of a location to enable the creation of images I felt I could respond to and work with. The resulting images took the form of either large scale wall drawings or prints. They are a re-imagined vision; one which looks to resonate with subtle, rhythmic and immersive experiences. I deliberately de-construct, manipulate and reconfigure the collected data before exporting it out of the digital world, giving me the opportunity to create my images.

A more sensory visualisation of my experience is created based on aesthetic decisions as an artist and my understanding as a walker. In scientific and mapping terms this renders the scanner data useless, but the resulting images, I feel, offer value beyond the captured physical information and mapping of the location. My works are not a description of what lies before us, but the possibility to explore and visualise my re-imagining and memory of place. They attempt to go beyond the static measured moment and create an opportunity for participation and rediscovery.

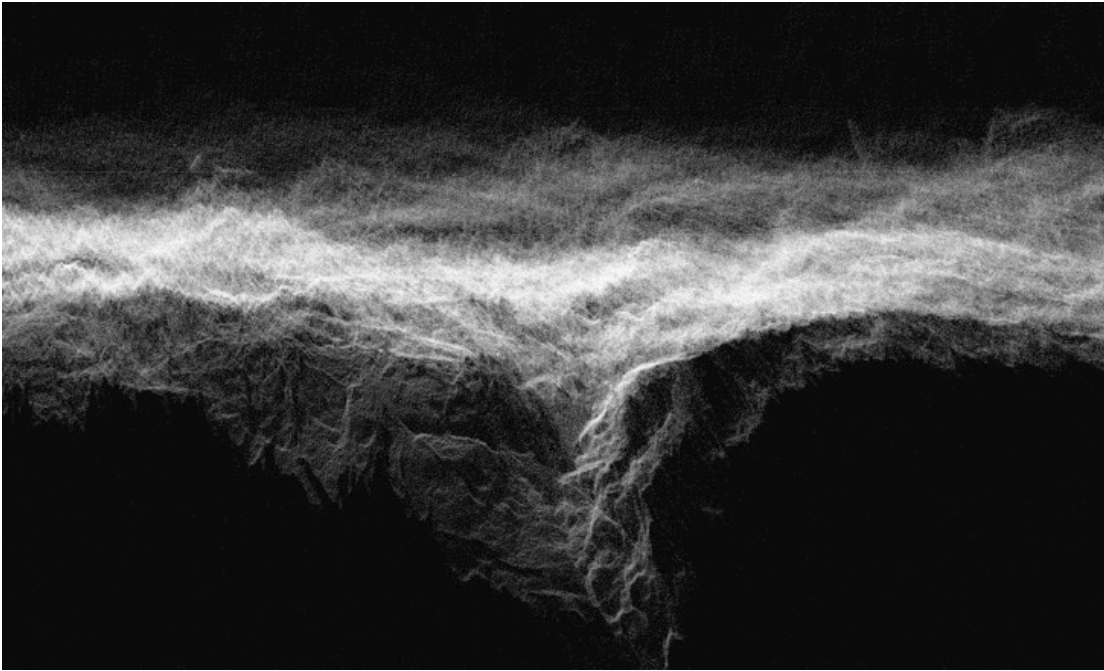


Matrix of Movement – Site specific charcoal wall drawing, The Brindley 2015

Intaglio etching plates are created using acrylic based processes and photopolymer films. These photo-reactive films have been an important development in the printmaking world in the last twenty years. Developed for the circuit board industry, they carry the ability to record and transfer huge amounts of data. For artists the development of these films have enabled the photographic transfer of images onto metal plates without the need for chemical etching, creating surfaces akin to traditional intaglio etchings. The prints are large scale, with single plates often nearly a meter long and extremely labour intensive to print. They are rich in ink and require a constant balancing between depth of saturation of ink on paper with a sense of movement and light.

Many of my images appear to be floating above an invisible horizon line, a decision made to connect with the uncertainty felt when walking across the ground. By altering perspectives, I am able to draw attention to seasonal and transitory elements of the landscape, which, when understood, help us to navigate. Understanding our sense of touch is crucial to connect to seasonal geological and hydrological changes experienced whilst walking.





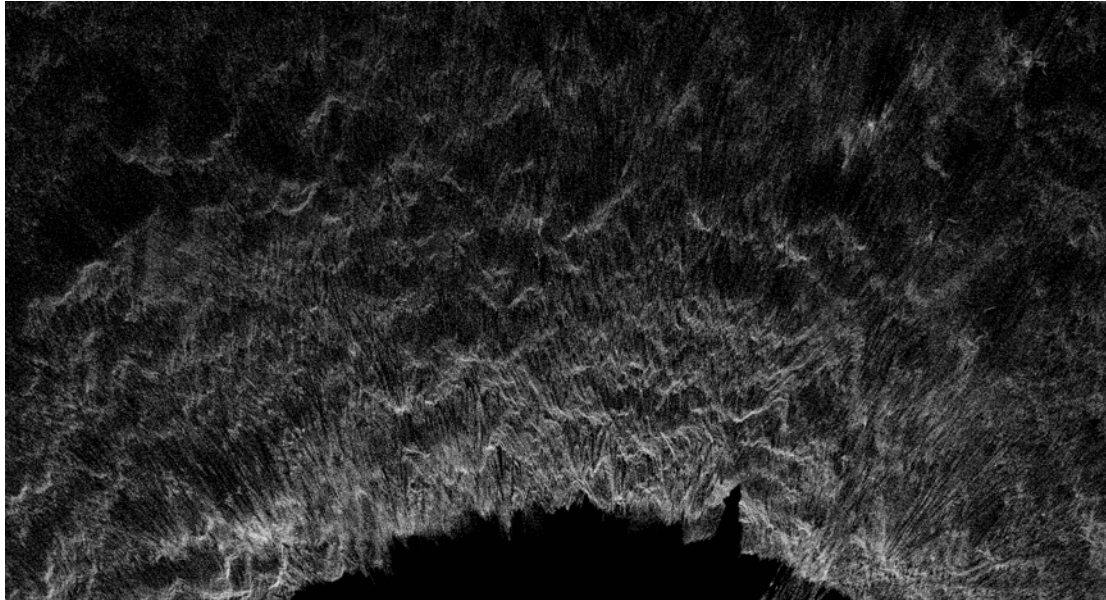
Temporal Wandering – Intaglio-type Etching, 2015



Standing Ash - Intaglio-type Etching 2017

The process of taking the scan data out of the computer and recreating an etching or drawing is key to the works. Captured digital data combines with traditional printing and drawing, resulting in a re-imagined vision linking digital and aesthetic. More widely, I am considering whether we should unconditionally accept and trust digital information presented to us. My images begin as data files, moments in time collected from real locations, the resulting artworks however, are my memory of sensory experiences and personal knowledge as experienced during walking. They are a form of waymarker and not designed to map locations or guide audiences to specific destinations; instead, the viewer is required to bring their own memories to enable a personal journey and complete the story. *Matrix of*

*Movement* explores personal connection to *Place*. Multi-sensory stories and memories intertwined with constantly shifting landscapes and vanishing pathways. This project creates an opportunity to explore the point where one thing becomes another, the edge between the physical world and how we feel to be part of it.



Black Waters – laser woodcut 2017

## Haecceity (2018)

In March 2018, I was commissioned to be artist in residence at the Warrington Museum and Art gallery as part of their Contemporary Arts Festival exploring the theme *History of the Future*. The resulting body of work, *Haecceity*, comprised two large gallery specific wall drawings and four interactive screen prints. The term *haecceity* was first proposed by John Duns Scotus (1266–1308). It is a non-qualitative property: that property or quality of a thing by virtue of which it is unique or describable as ‘this (one)’.<sup>4</sup> It is an elusive principle and one which many have sought to capture. As Deleuze and Guattari reflect, ‘A season, a winter, a summer, an hour, a date have a perfect individuality lacking nothing... They are haecceities ... capacities to affect and be affected’.<sup>5</sup>

The six-month residency enabled me to revisit wetland sites I had visited several years before on a previous project. What remains of a once great mossland is a collection of fragmented, smaller wetland sites surrounded by the urban sprawl of Greater Manchester and Liverpool. They are a glimpse into a unique and ancient Northern landscape which, once plundered of peat, has alternately been abandoned and left desolate or drained and reclaimed for agricultural use, leaving the land contaminated, peatlands extinct and fields susceptible to flooding and collapse.

In *Haecceity*, landscapes which appear as featureless with no obvious beauty, are revealed as sites of action; the marks drawn are the beginning of seeing and experiencing a memory or reimagined space. As we walk we move within what Tim Ingold calls the ‘permeable



interface',<sup>6</sup> the point at which surface and weather combines to immerse us through multiple senses, informing knowledge and instilling memory.



Haecceity – Site Specific wall drawings (detail) - 2018 Warrington Museum and Art Gallery.

The wall drawings slowly evolve over days and weeks, allowing the gallery to become a performance space. I refer to these drawings as a form of *cognitive surveillance* — a personal survey of a memory and inner map. They start a conversation: visitors to the gallery witness the unfolding drawing and bring their own interpretations and narratives, creating a dialogue which goes beyond the drawn image.

These are not fixed drawings. Created from limestone the loose powder constantly falls from the wall and is easily disturbed if touched. The vulnerability of the drawing stands as a metaphor for the threatened, fragile environments the work strives to represent. The viewer is reminded that the view before them is temporary and will disappear, only existing for the duration of the exhibition before being wiped from the wall.



Haecceity – Site Specific wall drawings 2018 Warrington Museum and Art Gallery.

I also created 4 interactive screenprints. The images were printed through silkscreens in a traditional manner, but instead of using normal inks I used conductive ink. This commercially available ink contains fragments of conductive material, which, when dried, allow the conductivity of electricity. The images printed with this ink respond to human touch by conducting the electricity from the hand. When touched, the images triggered sounds recorded while walking on location, transforming the visual into a sonic experience. The recorded sounds were activated through direct contact with the artworks; were necessary in order to gain the experience as captured sounds were played from various points around the gallery – not necessarily from a point closest to the trigger – requiring participation and movement in order to fully engage with the pieces.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the viewer's normal line of vision and behaviour in the gallery was challenged, through a combination of senses, experience and memory.

As a means of communicating the forgotten possibility of a deeper and more intuitive understanding of the earth beneath our feet, my artworks offer a personal, sensory response to places encountered through walking. Karen O'Rourke, believes that '*we begin by making sense of our surroundings so that we can go somewhere.*'<sup>8</sup> For me walking is the constant. It enables a connection to place, a complete immersion leading to a deeper understanding. Walking not to escape, but to enable thinking and seeing. Tim Ingold observes walking is a way of feeling, being and knowing. He goes on to suggest that *Wayfinding* is a movement in time akin to playing music or storytelling, that our world is one of experiences, which are suspended in movement. Through our own movements we contribute to its formations and connections '*along paths of action and perception*'<sup>9</sup> Through walking I make sense of landscapes around me; through my artwork I communicate the precarious existence we as humans share with our environment.



Haeceity – touch responsive screenprints. 2018

Photo: Ben Whaley

Incredible developments in digital mapping technologies have opened up possibilities to see the world beyond our own human capabilities; however, I am interested to explore whether these same technologies also discourage our intuitive understanding on a more local level. Do digital navigation tools encourage abstracted observations of landscape, actively encouraging us to undertake journeys which get us to our destinations in the quickest most convenient manner? As artists, our rapidly changing world of new media and technological advances have not, as some predicted, caused the death of the traditional; rather, they have extended the options and choice of materials and platforms available. By further exploring the relationship between the aesthetic, handmade surface and the capabilities of the developing digital era, it is possible to explore a wider relationship between artist and new technology and how in turn that can affect, reimagine and challenge preconceptions of a wider social understanding of our place in the world. In an era of digital mapping and data control my work offers a reconnection to what is unique: the experience and understanding of what it is to know *Place*.

Apparently featureless ancient Northern landscapes have long been represented as places of darkness and disease within Western culture. Despite an increasing acknowledgment for the need to readjust our perceptions of these spaces and to acknowledge their environmental importance as living landscapes there is, as of yet, little to promote a new consideration. The historical perceptions of 'The Waste' are still present in our psyche, but they can be challenged through cross-disciplinary approaches to artistic practice. My aim is to question our interpretation of the digital navigational aids on which we are increasingly reliant and show the beauty in walking and reconnecting with these post-industrial wetland spaces. *Matrix of Movement* revealed to me the importance of memory and personal connection to *Place*, how these elements intersect and how this influences my experience of the world around me. *Haeceity* specifically explores the change between states. Seasons and time are constantly reoccurring measures and events within our lives but are states, which differ from what went before in a constant process of change. The places I seek to portray in my drawings and prints are the beginning of seeing and experiencing a memory.



Both projects invite personal encounters with familiar landscapes, whilst promoting the need for a greater shift in global cultural approaches in order to preserve knowledge and bestow value. It is only through valuing these landscapes that their guardianship will be preserved.

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  - 9 Ingold, Tim, *The Perception of the Environment, Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), p. 242.