

# **Re-imagining the margins: the art of the urban fringe**

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# Declaration of Authorship

Rupert Griffiths

I hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.  
Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Abstract**

Rupert Griffiths

### **Re-Imagining the margins: the art of the urban fringe**

Urban margins have long formed sites of artistic intervention and imagination. This thesis develops three artist case studies to explore how contemporary visual artists are re-imagining these fringe landscapes, attending in particular to the gaps, interstices, wastelands and incidental spaces of the city that elude easy categorisation. Methodologically, my thesis brings together resources from geography and art theory, with my own artistic practice to investigate the imaginaries of two artists, and to create and critically reflect on the imaginaries of subject and landscape that inform my own practice as an artist, here through photography and film.

The theoretical lens through which these geographical imaginaries are analysed is formed from the key coordinates of contemporary landscape theory; namely questions of materiality, practice, mobility and embodiment. I argue that such perspectives offer new material through which to reflect on urban margins as zones of ambiguity, and of distinctions and indistinctions between the creative-subject and the landscape.

The first case study I explore, examines my own photography and film-making practices, discussed as an uncanny landscape imaginary. I then turn to the work of Michael Landy to explore imaginaries of contamination. The final chapter explores the organismic landscapes of Stephen Gill. In each case I focus as much on the practices of the works' production as I do on the finished works, attending to questions of materiality, the embodied experiences of the landscape that these works are based on and the tools and equipment used in the production process. The thesis concludes with three sets of reflections; i) on the re-imagination of the urban margins that exploring these artists' work through landscape theory has enabled; ii) on the benefits of artistic practice for thinking through the ambiguous characteristics of these territories; iii) on the value of creative artistic practice as a geographical research method.

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# Chapter 1

*Re-imagining the margins:  
the art of the urban fringe*

## Chapter 1: Re-imagining the margins: the art of the urban fringe

### Introduction

Urban margins are increasingly inhabited terrains, the subject of myriad creative practices and imaginaries. These spaces are also the subject of much theorising referred to as *terrain vague* (de Solà-Morales, 1995), *drosscape* (Lerup, 1994), *friche*, *edgeland* or *wasteland* (Gandy, 2013). These are regions of the city that are perhaps disused or incidental, the awkward plots around or between infrastructure, or abandoned infrastructures themselves reclaimed by a succession of weeds and trees. This thesis asks how these ambiguous urban areas are approached by artists, and how they understand and re-imagine them through creative practice. In particular I will be looking at the ways in which artists and urban margin become entwined in the processes of their creative practices and movements through these landscapes.

Central to my interests is the urban margin as a site of ambiguity. The key ambiguity that shapes my discussion is that between the artist-subject and the marginal urban landscape. The urban margins are discussed as regions where distinctions between the two are made or become uncertain. The phrases *urban margin* or *marginal urban landscape* also bring with them similarly ambiguous boundaries between ideas of nature and culture, the built environment and nature, the ordered city and the abandoned city, the rural and the urban. Landscape is central to my concerns, as it is through key trajectories in contemporary landscape theory – materiality, embodiment and practice – that I will interrogate this relationship between artist and urban margins. I will argue that these perspectives can contribute to the existing literatures upon urban margins as material terrains, treating them as regions that can also be categorised as a series of distinctions and indistinctions between the artist-subject and the material landscape.

Through the work of three artists I present three different imaginations of urban margins: *uncanny landscapes*, *contaminated landscapes*, and *organismic landscapes*. These each relate in turn to my own work as an artist-geographer and to studies of the work of Michael Landy and Stephen Gill. As my empirical discussions will explore, what underlies each of these is a common concern with an oscillating relationship between subjects and landscapes that, I will argue, characterises these fringe landscapes. Thus, marginality is approached not as a property of the landscape itself but as emerging from the relationship between the artist and that terrain. Key

to this are questions of how distinctions between animate and inanimate, between what is living and what is inert substance are constructed. I will be looking at the ways in which the artists in this study problematise such distinctions. Notions of dirt and contamination, or the boundaries of an organism are used to demonstrate the ambiguities that underlie distinctions between the body and the environment (Castree, 2005; Douglas, 2002; Hawkins and Muecke, 2003; Gandy, 2005). The project thus takes the marginality of the urban margin as co-produced by the landscape and the artist-subject, an entanglement that obscures clear distinctions between them. This understanding of self and landscape appears strongly within the practices I look at, where the distinction between reality and fiction is wilfully blurred or rendered uncertain. These are practices that engage with landscape through a field studies approach, but take this in a direction that questions the nature of the boundaries between the artist-subject and the material landscape.

### **Locating the margins**

A good place to start to think about what urban margins might mean for this thesis is Ignasi de Solà-Morales' short essay *Terrain Vague* (1995). Here he discusses ways of thinking urban margins and the production of urban imaginaries primarily through the medium of photography or photomontage. Importantly, he asks where an enthusiasm for such spaces might come from. He proposes that it is a sense of constant strangeness that pervades late capitalism (see Marquand, 1991) which brings us into some kind of an existential sympathy with these spaces; 'transposed to the urban key, the enthusiasm for these vacant, expectant, imprecise, fluctuating spaces is a response to our strangeness before the world, before our city, before ourselves' (Solà-Morales, 1995: 122). It is an inability to locate oneself, ones identity, in relation to a rapidly and ever changing world, which aligns a material marginality with an existential marginality, a nomadic sense of being. This proposed link between the ambiguity of identity and the ambiguity of material landscape is one that is at the core of this thesis. One of the ways I interpret this is through a sense of uncanniness that I will discuss in the autoethnographic chapter but can also be seen in the work of the two artists that I will discuss in their respective chapters. In each chapter the focus is upon 'those experiences which pass from the physical to the psychical' (Solà-Morales, 1995: 119).

Key to my understanding of these three perspectives is the relationship between subject and landscape, which has long been central to landscape studies as an area

of research in cultural geography (Wylie, 2009a). Early work in this area asked how nature (the material environment) and culture (human civilisations) were related to one another, and gave rise to theories that privileged one over the other. First leaning towards environmental determinism and later in critical response to this, towards something closer to cultural determinism where 'culture development may be viewed as man's growing knowledge of, and control over, forces external to himself' (Sauer, 1954: 139; see also Hoskins, 1955; Jackson, 1984). These approaches were primarily oriented around a field study approach, emphasising the importance of close observation through a deep embodied familiarity with (usually rural) landscapes. These influential early approaches to landscape were critiqued and eclipsed during the latter half of the 20th century, with various Marxist, structural and post-structural approaches emerging and dominating (see Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Duncan, 1980; Duncan D and Duncan J, 1988). Subsequently there has been a turn towards embodied, performative and creative geographies which have further entwined, blurred, erased and challenged essentialist understandings of nature and culture, and proposed subjects and landscapes as variously entangled or enfolded (Butler, 1988; Cloke and Jones, 2001; Cresswell, 2003; Edensor, 2005; Harrison, 2000; Hawkins, 2011; Ingold, 2000; 2010; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000; Thrift, 2003; Wylie, 2002). These approaches would also include hybrid, more-than-human accounts (Haraway, 1991; Latour, 1993; Whatmore, 2002) and the 're-materialisation' of geography (Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Bennett, 2010; Daniels, 2006; Jackson, 2000; Latham and McCormack, 2004; Lees, 2002; Tolia-Kelly, 2013; Whatmore, 2006).

The range of literatures that I will draw on in my thesis, outlined further in chapter two, reflects both the eclectic nature of work done within landscape studies and also the very nature of the landscapes discussed here; their hybridity and the ways in which they are approached by artists. This is further reflected in the thesis through an engagement with literatures that extend beyond this, such as geographies of waste (Campkin, 2007; Hawkins and Muecke, 2003; Hawkins, 2010) and the uncanny (Freud, 2003 [1919]; Royle, 2003; Vidler, 1992). Margins are landscapes that are exceptionally difficult to categorise or draw boundaries around and this has I think been reflected in a difficulty in finding a single disciplinary lens through which to explore them or a disciplinary home in which they sit comfortably.

## Artist-subjects

To limit the scope of the project I chose to focus my autoethnographic work upon the marginal spaces of East London and consider the work of artists in this area. This region comes predominantly within the Borough of Newham, an area of the city run through with waterways and which has, over the past couple of hundred years, been heavily fragmented by industry and infrastructure, leaving many margins and interstices, both physical and economic. This area was chosen early on in the project after widely surveying London for regions that were physically fragmented by infrastructure. This area, as will be seen in the autoethnography chapter, is one of the prime examples of such a landscape in London, with layers of physical fragmentation overlaid on top of one another over long periods of time, from the Thames, the River Lea and Lea Navigation, to the docks and industries and grew up and declined around them and the subsequent road, rail, electricity and sewage infrastructures that overlay, intersect or reappropriate them. This area also contains a high concentration of artists, with the Hackney Wick and Fish Island areas containing the highest concentration of artists in Europe (MUF, 2009). The Borough of Newham became the general site for the London Olympic Games 2012, which has dramatically reconfigured this area.

The work discussed here however concentrates on the pre-Olympic landscape. The ways in which artists have dealt with the appropriation of land for the Olympic Games and resistance to this has been dealt with by Powell and Marrero in their co-edited book *The Art of Dissent* (2012). Some of the artists discussed in Powell and Marrero's book are discussed in the following chapter, which gives examples of artists working with marginal urban landscapes as context for the empirical chapters dealing with Landy and Gill. These artists have both lived and worked in East London and produce work that engages with marginal urban landscapes in a sustained way and have produced significant bodies of work over the past twenty years. Although their work can be interpreted politically, neither makes strong overt political claims for their work or seek to contextualise it politically, but rather offer a certain degree of ambivalence or ambiguity which was a close fit with the aims of the project.

Michael Landy (b. 1962, London, UK) is an artist living and working in London. He first showed work in the *Freeze* exhibition (London, 1988) and came to public prominence in 1997 when he was included in the *Sensation* Exhibition (London, 2007). He is perhaps most well known for his installation project *Breakdown* (2001) in which he systematically destroyed all of his belongings in a former C&A store on

Oxford Street, London. It was after this the completion of this project that he began making *Nourishment* (2002), a series of highly detailed etchings of weeds taken from cracks, verges and brownfield sites in East London. This series of etching of weeds will form the focus of the later empirical chapter. His work is held in numerous public and private collections, including The Tate Collection, London, the Museum of Modern Art, New York and the Government Art Collection (London) (Wiggins and Landy, 2012; Artangel, 2014).

Stephen Gill (b. 1971, Bristol, UK) is a fine art photographer living and working in East London. He has had a sustained creative engagement with Hackney Wick and produced numerous photobooks which interpret this area photographically, such as *Hackney Flowers* (2007), *Hackney Wick* (2005) and *Buried* (2006). He has exhibited widely and his work is held in public and private collections, including amongst others the National Portrait Gallery, London, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, Victoria Miro Gallery, London and the Photographer's gallery, London. Gill also founded his own publishing imprint *Nobody* in 2005 in order to maintain control over the process of making photobooks. He considers these as a central aspect of his photographic practice, treating the book as an artefact rather than simply the container for his photographs. In producing his books he experiments with materials such as mud, paint and old library books and employs techniques from linocut to spray painting (Gill, 2014; Hyman, 2014).

My own practice as an artist (b. 1971, Southport, UK) spans the past fifteen years. Recentl solo exhibitions have been of installation art, architectural models and photographs, such as *Ideal Homes/Artificial Horizons*, MoDA (Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture) in London, 2007 and *Borderlands*, CUBE Gallery (Centre for the Urban Built Environment, Manchester) in 2010. A number of pieces of work, *Spaceprobe* (2004) and *Control* (1999) are also held in the permanent collection of the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. My initial training was in Micro-electronics Systems Engineering (1993) and later a Masters in Architecture and Urbanism (2009) in which I used photography, text and diagrams to interrogate the complex fragmented landscapes that lie along the route of the River Medlock in Manchester. This disciplinary background is reflected in the work I produce and an interest in the material, technical and embodied processes of producing work.

I'd like to stress at this point that in choosing to use my own work as a research method and as one of the empirical chapters I do not intend to make comparisons

or associations between my work and artistic career and those of Landy or Gill. I do not claim for example to be a photographer remotely as accomplished as Gill and my etching skills are at best mediocre. The focus is very much upon foregrounding the processes of making work and the importance I attach to first hand experience of landscape through practice, rather than the creative outcome or artefact.

### **Urban margins**

The landscapes that I will be considering are the incidental spaces of the city, the wastelands, verges, abandoned industrial sites, contaminated ground and informal commons. These urban margins can remain secluded and relatively undisturbed for long periods. They can also rapidly become sites of change, cusps of a breaking wave that forcefully bring to the fore antagonistic social and cultural constructions of stasis and of change. This change might be due to the entropy of neglect or of regeneration / speculation, caught in economic and political cycles of land use and value realisation. Notions of nature, culture and self are caught up in this froth of transition, sometimes appearing momentarily clear, other times seemingly lost and intermingled. The artists I look at have to different degrees and in different ways this dual tendency, finding moments of clarity whilst diving into and losing themselves to the turbulence. I will ask how this dichotomy between clarity and turbulence is played out through the materiality of the urban margin and the creative practices that engage with this marginality.

These are perhaps not the kind of environments that Sauer or Hoskins would have considered to be landscape at all. However, the work and practices of these artists employ techniques similar to these early field study landscape approaches, although in such a way as to problematise rather than resolve distinctions between subject and landscape, nature and culture. Urban margins form a suitable locus for this study as they emphasise such indistinctions, and by their nature attract creative practices that are marked both by transitory movement through landscape and an interest in the transitory nature of landscape itself. These mobilities and mutabilities challenge for example the romantic idiom that relates landscape with sedentary dwelling (Cresswell, 2003; Ingold, 2000) and emphasises the entanglement rather than distinction of subject and landscapes.

The artists discussed in the empirical chapters all choose to work through close engagement with marginal inner urban sites, emphasising mutability and vulnerability

to change. Such mutability and change is somewhat at odds with ideas of landscape such as Sauer's, where more slowly developing natural and cultural processes are considered in their relationship to one another. However, the embodied interrogation and deep first-hand familiarity with the material landscape that is at the heart of Sauer's work, also forms an important current that runs through this thesis. Each of the case studies uses such field study type approaches, employing practices based upon movement and transitory occupation, predominantly walking (or cycling). Mobility has also been a focus for analysis rather than method, as with Jackson's studies of the experience of landscape by the 'hot-rodder' or of vernacular roadside architecture (Jackson, 1958, 1997). His approach to roadside architecture for example could equally be applied to the informal uses that emerge in sites that are delimited by urban infrastructure, again bringing out a lineage that links the urban margin to landscape. Equally, as will be discussed in more depth in the literature review, contemporary landscape studies draws upon understandings of embodiment, materiality and creativity that are central to this study.

## **Structure**

Ahead of the three empirical chapters are two chapters, the first of which deals with a review of the literature and creative practice relevant to this study. The review will introduce the literatures relevant to the later chapters, drawing from the various discourses around urban margins, landscape studies, hybrid geographies and recent discussions of materiality and embodiment. Other literatures will be invoked throughout the thesis (the geographies of waste for example) but these still fall under the general umbrella of those discussed in the literature review that brings out the key theoretical areas around which the thesis is oriented. Following this is a brief survey of a number of artists whose work has addressed the marginal landscapes of East London. This chapter offers something of a background or context for the main empirical chapters, giving examples of how other artists have offered interpretations and understandings of characteristics of the urban margin. The methods chapter then follows, explaining how the research was conducted and also going into some detail about the use and value of an autoethnography as a means of developing and addressing the research questions and delimiting the scope of the project.

This is then followed by the three empirical chapters, the autoethnography chapter, *uncanny landscapes*, and chapters on *organismic landscapes* and *contaminated landscapes*, which respectively consider my own practice and that of Gill and Landy.

The autoethnographic chapter *uncanny landscapes* is a descriptive and interpretive account of my photographic and film making practice over a period of months through a swathe of East London, from Hackney Marshes, along the Lea to the Thames and from here a sweep that follows the north bank of the Thames through Silvertown, Barking and Dagenham.

The autoethnography was used initially to develop and structure the empirical chapters. This was done through a series of rubrics - *uncanny landscapes*, *contaminated landscapes* and *organismic landscapes* - that emerged during my own engagement with the urban margins of East London. These came to have differently nuanced inflections on the relationship between artist-subject and urban margin for each of the artists. The autoethnographic chapter itself is entitled *uncanny landscapes* and it was my own intense and unsettling experience of 'uncanniness' that brought the porous nature of distinctions between artist-subject and the material landscape to the fore. The autoethnography suggested and subsequently interrogated the proposition that the urban margin existed not in the landscape itself but as a particular relationship between artist-subject and material landscape. The autoethnography functioned then as an interrogation of this relationship from a first person perspective, enabling my own understanding of materiality and embodiment as an artist-subject to emerge, and offering a register through which I could gain insight into the practices of other artists who closely align themselves to a marginal urban landscape. This chapter differs from the Landy and Gill case studies in that it is an emphatically subjective first person account and the interpretation is done from the inside out as it were, rather than the more interpretive accounts that are taken with the two case studies.

The chapter which follows, the second of the three empirical chapters, is entitled *contaminated landscapes* and looks at the work of Michael Landy, in particular *Nourishment* (2002), a series of etchings of weeds. Contamination is used here as a rubric for the ambiguous thresholds between the artist-subject and the urban margin brought out through implicit ideas of purity and impurity, acts of purification and a corresponding ordering and disordering of self and landscape. Through discussions of the cultural construction of nature, Landy's experiences of his father as a 'working class' Irish immigrant and the long term health problems caused to him by a mining accident, and Landy's own use and reference to pain in his work, I will bring out the distinctions and indistinctions between identity, personal history and material landscape that emerge through his engagement with the urban margin.

The third empirical chapter, *Organismic landscapes*, discusses the work of photographer Stephen Gill. The term *organism* is used here as a mnemonic for the ambiguity between living and non-living, a contested term which has been used to normalise essentialist ways of thinking cities (Cresswell, 1997) and equally as an ambiguous term for life that appears to lose meaning at both molecular scales and behavioural scales. Gill's work is thus broadly approached in terms of post-human geographies, in particular new materialism and material vitalist discourses (Bennett, 2010) and hybrid geographies (Whatmore, 2002), emphasising material flow, process and movement. Gill's relational understanding is however countered by his tendency to create archives of both images and objects. Like the term *organism* his work has both a tendency to create categories and equally to dismiss these categories as inadequate in the face of the excess of the material world.

### **Research Aims and Questions**

The analysis of these three case studies is carried out with a view to exploring how these creative engagements with urban margins produce decentred, hybrid and more-than-human understandings of subject/landscape and nature/culture. The focus of all three chapters is upon the materiality of the urban margin itself, the artists' approach to the material landscape and the materiality of their work. These are interrogated with a focus upon how together these create entanglements between the artist-subject and the urban margin. The ways in which the artists perform their practice in the landscape and in the process of producing their work are considered. I will look at how they create an embodied engagement with both the material landscape and the material artefacts they produce. Thus the analysis focuses upon the processes through which the work is produced as well as the representational content of the work itself. The research interrogates the artists' finished work as material traces of their practice, read through an understanding of the processes of production. This analysis draws from the work itself, and written and oral accounts of their practices taken from magazine and journal articles, blogs, radio interviews, talks and seminars. The analysis is also informed by my personal understanding and experience of the material and performative practices involved in creating work, drawn both from the autoethnographic study and also from many years spent myself as a practicing artist.

Considered through this context, the thesis has three key aims. The first is to develop an understanding of what constitutes an urban margin for each of the case studies. The second is to understand how creative practice can be used to problematise

distinctions between the artist-subject and the material landscape. The third is to understand more broadly what this tells us about the relationship between the artist-subject and the urban margin, and in particular where that marginality is located.

The nature of the landscapes, work and practices necessarily brings the questions of how the subject/landscape and the nature/culture question has been problematised within geography and other disciplines. Methodologically my work proceeded through three dimensions, firstly working as a geographer-artist, secondly through the analysis of artistic practices, those of Gill and Landy and my own, and thirdly through an analysis of the work itself. These accord, in part to geographers concerns with exploring the production, consumption and circulation of art (Daniels, 1993; Hawkins 2014).

Creative practice will be interrogated and interpreted through a focus upon the ways in which the artist engages with the landscape through embodied occupation and material encounter. I ask how, through practice, the artists' embodied engagement with the landscape creates marginality or hybridity. I will ask what intentional or unintentional creative strategies the artist uses to raise issues of distinction or indistinction between self and the material landscape. I will also ask what roles tools and equipment play in this process. This will be approached through a combination of autoethnography and the interpretation of secondary material gathered through monographs, interviews, press coverage and exhibition catalogues for example. Other work by the artist which may perhaps not be directly related to landscape will also be considered, as this can reveal more autobiographical currents running through the artists' work.

Thirdly, and more in line with how geographers often explore artworks I will closely interrogate and interpret finished pieces of work, asking what material forms do the artworks take and how can these be understood as material traces of the embodied practice of the artist-subject and the urban margin. I will also explore the context of the work. This was accomplished through close readings of the work, visiting exhibitions, archives and collections. Equally, further context will be drawn from secondary critical interpretation of the work in reviews, essays and the artists' own discussions of their work.

Finally, extending this perspective on the artwork is a consideration of its circulation in interpreting the artists' practice and finished artwork, the underlying intentions for distribution of the work and how the distribution and reception of the artwork is

implicated in an understanding of landscape. Again, this will be accomplished through interpretation of archives, published interviews and press coverage, attending book launch events, and exhibition catalogues.

### **Visual art, landscape and the urban margin**

This project looks at the relationship between the artist-subject and urban margins, bringing the nature/culture and subject/landscape problem into an urban context. I will bring key ideas of embodiment, materiality and practice from contemporary landscape literatures and apply them to both to creative practice and marginal urban landscapes. Through the interpretations of artists' work and the autoethnography I aim to bring an embodied and multi-sensory understandings of landscape to the urban margins. Although all the work I discuss here is 'visual art', the approach I take treats the visual product of practice, the etching or photograph, as a brief interlude, a moment of pause in a tactile, haptic, embodied set of practices and processes of production and consumption. Thus, in this thesis I try decentre the visual and draw attention to a visuality that is related to touch and kinaesthesia. This is an active close-up looking, which looks to the ground rather than towards the horizon, at what is underfoot, close to hand and which involves the whole body in movement and gesture. Through this approach to visual art and the practice of visual artists I aim to contribute to geographical discourses around embodiment and landscape and the role played by the visual in terms of wider sensory and embodied registers (see Wylie, 2002; Lorimer and Wylie, 2010; Rose and Wylie 2006; Spinney, 2006).

The literature review in the following chapter will explore work that has been done in landscape theory that develops arguments about autoethnographic approaches to embodiment and landscape (Battista et al, 2005; Lorimer and Wylie, 2010; Wylie, 2002). My work aims to contribute to these autoethnographic and practice based ethnographies, addressing the artist-subject's relationship to urban margins through creative practice as an experienced artist. My aim is to bring my own experience of creative practice to bear upon the practices of other artists, and be more attuned to the small details, accidents and frustrations of practice that can drive various creative decisions or expressions. Through my pre-existing experience, the embodied registers, familiarity with materials, material processes, tools and skills that are used to create works, I aim to bring an insider's understanding as it were to the mundane, seemingly inconsequential and often intentionally hidden aspects of the processes involved in creating bodies of work.

# Chapter 2

*Surveying the margins*

## Chapter 2: **Surveying the margins**

Landscape studies has a tradition of asking how constructs such as nature and culture or subject and material environment intersect (Sauer, 1963; Hoskins, 1955; Jackson, 1984; Rose and Wylie, 2006; Lorimer, 2006). Much of the artists' work and practice that is discussed in this thesis addresses questions that have emerged in landscape studies over the past fifty years, that engage with various distinctions and indistinctions between subject and landscape, nature and culture, relations that have variously been described as enfoldments, entanglements and tensions (Ingold, 2000; Harrison, Pile and Thrift, 2004; Wylie, 2009; Rose and Wylie, 2006).

To first give a brief overview of the structure of this chapter. I will start by surveying the relevant literatures around urban margins. This is a diverse body of literatures from geography, architecture and urban studies that directly address notions of urban marginality, often relevant to ideas of artist-subject and landscape discussed in this thesis. The second section will look at landscape literatures that again address these pairings of subject, landscape, nature and culture and draw trajectories from these discourses into more recent discussions of embodiment, materiality and performance and their relevance for discussions of marginal urban landscapes. Finally, I will discuss some examples of artists whose work addresses the inner peripheries of East London, bringing out how the work of creative practitioners can be aligned with various currents and trajectories discussed earlier in the chapter.

### **Marginal Landscapes**

These are incidental landscapes, undeveloped, abandoned or described by infrastructures, perhaps a motorway flyover or a railway viaduct that cuts through and fragments rather than lending some sense of deliberation and order. They may become populated by traces, the residues of transitory occupations, transgressions, gatherings and accumulations that happen out of sight, an under-consciousness of the city. Yet, despite their relative invisibility, they make their way into the cultural consciousness of the city through the artists, writers, filmmakers and architects who perhaps find these marginal landscapes to be valuable sites from which to re-imagine the city itself.

This section will discuss a number of the ways in which urban margins have been figured within geographical and architectural discourses. There are numerous phrases

which have been used to describe urban margins - *terrain vague* (de Solà-Morales, 1995), *loose space* (Franck and Quentin, 2013); *drosscape* (Lerup, 1994; Berger, 2007), *dead zone*, *wasteland*, *void*, *brownfield site*, *friche* (see Gandy, 2012: 5), *anxious landscapes* (Picon, 2000), *indeterminate*, *no-man's land* and *unplanned space* (see Groth and Corijn, 2005). For the purposes of this thesis, these can perhaps broadly be categorised around discourses of entropy and ruin, enchantment, exploration and transgression (Edensor, 2005; Rendell, 2010b; Doron, 2000; DeSilvey, 2006); urban natures and hybrid geographies (Gandy, 2005, 2013b; Whatmore, 2002); geographies of waste (Hawkins and Muecke, 2003; Campkin and Cox, 2007) and urban studies of the design and use of public space (Gandy, 2013a; Franck and Stevens, 2013; Groth and Corijn, 2005; Jones, 2007).

The intrinsic value of such 'wastelands' and their relationship to discourses within architecture and urbanism around the design and use of public space has been the focus of a number of studies (see Franck and Stevens, 2013; Groth and Corijn, 2005; Jones, 2007). Architects and planners tend to find it difficult to see these spaces as anything but wastelands, spaces that indicate failure or decline and could and should be put to better use. They are often labelled as 'voids', 'wastelands', 'dead-zones' and so on, spaces without intrinsic use or value, which need to be incorporated back into the planned and controlled urban fabric. As Groth and Corijn (2005) note, although we have moved away from the grand masterplan of urbanism inflected by Modernist, Fordist and industrial principles and towards a more ad hoc, flexible, pluralistic and entrepreneurial urban development, this does not necessarily lead to less rigid and overdetermining control of the urban environment and its use. They see these strategies as creating their own set of constraints on the visions and reality of the urban realm, 'entrepreneurial approaches in city planning aiming at increasing mobility, international competition and image marketing, all too often tend to homogenise space on consumerist and aestheticised grounds' (Groth and Corijn, 2005: 505). The existing users of so called waste spaces are often either overlooked or frowned upon, 'the squatters, the prostitutes, the participants in public sex, the ravers, the protesters of 'Reclaim the Streets', the creators of community gardens, the street vendors, nature' (Doron, 2000: 252). Dereliction and apparent abandonment can be used as a strategy of land value realisation, waiting for favourable economic conditions or allowing listed buildings to be stripped and vandalised, to crumble and decay so that they must be demolished, releasing the land for redevelopment. Political and economic framings of margins as wastelands, useless and dangerous spaces which must be put to better use often coincide with economic circumstances where value can be produced and

realised or where there is a political and economic imperative, as was the case with large swathes of Newham and Hackney Wick, areas that were labelled 'wastelands' and compulsorily purchased or otherwise appropriated for the 2012 Olympic Games (See Edensor, 2005: 9-10; Campkin, 2012). This limited, limiting and instrumental view of marginal sites as wastelands is challenged by many (Edensor, 2005; Rendell, 2010b; Doron, 2000; de Solà-Morales, 1995; Groth and Corijn, 2005) and compelling alternative readings offered which demonstrate the value of these marginal spaces as informal commons, spaces of recreation, play and creativity and the production of space, spaces which are 'full of unwritten history, overlooked communities, unseen possibilities, a world with a different order' (Doron, 2000: 252). Equally, as Doron points out, the existing users of apparent 'wastelands' radically transform space in a way which users of sanctioned public space are rarely able to (ibid).

De Solà-Morales's term *terrain vague* is a useful one for bringing together these positive responses to urban margins, particularly as it addresses creative practice concerned with spaces 'in the physical interior' of the city, rather than the imaginaries of the exurbs or boundaries between city and countryside for example (de Solà-Morales, 1995: 122). These *terrain vague* are inner urban margins, spaces that according to de Solà-Morales are 'mentally exterior in the physical interior of the city, appearing as its negative image' (ibid). The kinds of space he is referring to are 'indeterminate, imprecise, blurred, uncertain' (1995: 121), the industrial areas, contaminated land, railways and ports, unsafe neighbourhoods, that form 'interior islands' where the regulated city is no more. These spaces are in a sense the negative image of the architectural imaginary of the coherent city exemplified by modernism, operating in a temporal register more aligned to flows, movement and entropic processes rather than clarity, formalism and the maintenance of the 'external' city. Qualities that he points to are movement, oscillation, instability, fluctuation, freedom, availability. These are voids that offer absence as 'promise, as encounter, as the space of the possible, expectation', the 'uncontaminated magic of the obsolete' (1995: 122).

These counter discourses tend to emphasise the positive qualities of ambiguity, incoherence and uncertainty, drawing attention to their value for play, spontaneity, creative practice and the existence and value of unplanned urban use and transformation by users rather than architects and planners. These are landscapes that offer, above all, imaginative possibilities, where the overdetermined imaginaries of the city can be discarded. This sense of enchantment, possibility, spontaneity, creativity and playful transgressiveness is an important index in the academic register

of marginal urban space (Edensor, 2005; Rendell, 2010a, 2010b; Garrett, 2014; Cresswell, 1996; DeSilvey, 2007, 2006; Doron, 2000; Franck and Stevens, 2013; Cloke and Jones, 2005). All share a sense of the value of urban margins and 'contest the notion that ruins are spaces of waste, that contain nothing of value and that they are saturated with negativity as spaces of danger, delinquency, ugliness and disorder' (Edensor, 2005: 7).

### **Rethinking ruins: embodied engagements**

This embodied ruin imaginary takes us away from the romantic idiom of the sublime often associated with ruin and locates ideas of abandonment within a discourse of the body-subject. The work done by those discussed in this section illustrate a broader shift in focus within landscape studies and cultural geography from representation and iconography (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988) towards non-representational (See Thrift, 2008) and embodied understandings, which embrace performance and practice (Dewsbury et al, 2002; Rose and Wylie, 2006; Lorimer, 2005).

The nineteenth century imaginaries of pre-industrial ruins often emerge through aesthetics of the sublime. The ruin presents us with the certainty that what appears solid and enduring will inevitably crumble and disappear. The ruin becomes an allegory for the mortality of the individual and more profoundly the rise and fall of civilisations (see Hell and Schönle, 2010: 366). The ruin may be materially out there but it also coincides with the ruin of both self and of civilisations. This is accompanied by an experience of pleasure in the face of that which is overwhelmingly inexpressible and beyond experience: 'the petrified remains of what was once an organic culture full of life, shades into a gaze enthralled by decay, expressing a kind of sublime elation' (2010: 179). There may also be a less heroic and more personal sense of loss and melancholia, where the 'detached gaze disintegrates, resonating with the emotions of centuries of ruin gazing: grief, awe, terror' (ibid). Similar ideas can be seen in the twentieth century in what Nye called the 'technological sublime' (Nye, 1996). The scale of the products of human technologies, from Atomic bomb test sites to vast industrial complexes or the skyscrapers of New York (and much else that has surpassed this since) become something of an aesthetic substitute for nature in the rhetoric of the sublime, experienced as immense, beautiful and terrifying. More so, these sites often become ruins within relatively short timescales in accordance with the rise of fall of industries and economies, as seen in the American rustbelt or the recent saturation of 'ruin porn' images of Detroit. The aesthetics of industrial ruin is often haunted by

the romantic sublime, in photographic images for example, that evoke rich painterly patinas of decay and vast vistas of empty and unpopulated industrial wasteland, where 'the crumbling of the monuments that were built to signify the immortality of civilisation becomes proof, rather, of its transiency' (Buck-Morss quoted in Edensor, 2005:101).

Such sublime aesthetics emphasise a certain distance between subject and landscape, that 'it is only through safety and enough distance that we begin to enjoy a scene which would otherwise be simply terrifying' (Hell and Schönle, 2010: 366). Such a distance is closed by geographers who approach ruination in terms of the activities and experiential registers that they afford. This embodied engagement can emerge as the playfulness and transgression often associated with the abandoned spaces and post-industrial ruins of 'shrinking cities' (Oswalt, 2005) or hidden and out of bounds infrastructures – sewers, tube networks and so on.

The underlying material excess of these spaces and the emphasis (or demand) that they put upon embodied engagement offer an important touchstone to the discussion of urban margins within and outside of geography (Edensor, 2005; Edensor and DeSilvey, 2013; Jackson, 1980; Hell and Schönle, 2010; Cowie and Heathcott, 2003). Abandoned and ruined landscapes offer a disordered material excess that keys into childhood memories of exploration, adventure, danger, enchantment and otherness (see Edensor, 2005: 5; Cloke and Jones, 2005: 310). It is this sense of liminality, being beyond the reach of social and state surveillance, which allows one to gleefully engage in behaviours that would perhaps not be tolerated in the more homogenous regions of the city. The disorderliness of un surveilled space allows children to 'transgress spatial and/or temporal boundaries and thereby enter a more liminal, hybrid, in-between world' (Cloke and Jones, 2005: 312). Childhood experiences of such spaces thereby 'represent moral landscapes subject both to romanticism and to the risk of unchecked desire' (ibid).

This relationship between childhood and disordered space often surfaces in discussions of adult exploration of abandoned spaces in the city, resonating both with a sense of transgressive play beyond normative boundaries and the associated sense of risk and excitement (Edensor, 2005; Jones, 2007; Cloke and Jones, 2005). This discourse clearly emerges as an undercurrent within discussions of urban exploration, both in industrial ruins or functioning infrastructures (Edensor, 2005; Garrett, 2014). As Edensor notes 'Ruins offer spaces in which the interpretation and practice of

the city becomes liberated from the everyday constraints which determine what should be done and where' (Edensor, 2005: 4). 'Wastelands' thus emerge as informal recreational spaces where activities range from dog walking to exploration, graffiti, sexual encounter, asset stripping and vandalism, and much more besides.

This freedom and material excess encourage creative encounter and interpretation, where the subject comes into direct encounter with material artefacts, to the traces of its history and to processes of growth and mutability. DeSilvey for example distances the ruin from notions of loss and decay and instead brings forth the liveliness of more-than-human processes. Within the context of the archive she looks at the possibilities of alternative epistemologies that embrace the entropic processes rather than seek to halt them, a form of knowledge production that embraces 'movement rather than stasis [...] drawing connections between past dynamism and future process' (DeSilvey, 2012: 31; see also DeSilvey, 2006; 2007). At the heart of this is the idea of storying landscapes, that 'cultural geographers should extend their investigations beyond the critical examination of 'the work that stories do' to become involved as 'active participants' - telling their own stories, and putting them to work in different contexts' (2006: 34).

### **Human and the non-human in the margins**

Other readings of urban margins also reflect upon the complex material flows, processes and porosities within which human and non-human actors circulate and are entwined (Gandy, 2003; Haraway, 1991; Whatmore, 2002). Urban margins offer up complex entanglements of human and non-human actors. Industry and infrastructure, waste, detritus and pollutants, plants, animals and insects are all co-present and co-mingled. This profusion of intermingling and overlapping categories is purposefully used to (un)structure both Farley and Roberts *Edgelands* (2002) and Harrison, Pile and Thrift's *Patterned Ground* (2004), where dust, pollution, pipes, rivers, bees, viruses, archives and ghost towns amongst many other rubrics jostle together. This peculiar ecology can suggest some kind of urban wilderness that differs from the constructed, controlled and maintained nature of urban parks and green spaces, and brings forth the complexity of the concept of nature itself. Nature in the city's margins forces us to ask questions about the nature of 'wilderness' and hybridity. These are landscapes where nature and culture become visibly porous concepts, entering into an anti-essentialist relationship where the boundaries between organic and inorganic become blurred (see Castree, 2005; Whatmore, 2002; Haraway, 1991).

This is in contrast to early nineteenth century organicist metaphors of the city that furnished a functional understanding of the city, where the city could be thought of as a distinct body with various 'organs' with established circulatory relationships to one another, much like the organs, vascular and arterial system of the human body. These metaphors also brought ideas within political science into sympathy with the city and urbanisation (Gandy, 2004). Gandy notes how this 'emphasis on the city as an integrated body with integrated organs [...] has been increasingly displaced by a hybridised conception of space as a system of technological devices that enhance human productive and imaginative possibilities' (Gandy, 2004: 29). Gandy discusses this understanding as cyborg in nature, a metaphor that 'not only reworks the metabolic preoccupations of the nineteenth century industrial city but also extends to contemporary body of ideas that we can term 'neo-organicist' on account of biophysical metaphors for the interpretation of social and spatial complexity' (ibid). According to Gandy, this is a move away from a conception of space as an 'assemblage of organs' to a neurological understanding which is 'diffuse and interconnected' (ibid).

As Steve Graham reminds us, in the homogenised city we do not notice these networks and connections so much, except perhaps when they go wrong (Graham, 2009). However, urban margins are often precisely the place where you will find it difficult not to notice them. The role that infrastructure plays in both of these two different metaphors of circulatory and diffuse systems is clear and it is infrastructure that is an important source of the production of margins. Physically divisive infrastructures such as elevated highways, railway lines, pipelines, electricity and telecommunication cables and so on, all create swathes of incidental, awkward, leftover spaces in their wake. It is these spaces where the cyborg metaphor of body and technology can easily emerge as a spatial imaginary. Perhaps more importantly it is also in these conditions that real distinctions between human and nature are also challenged. As Gandy notes, the organicist metaphor is 'founded upon a clear separation between mind and body that enabled the city to be conceptualised as a coherent entity to be acted upon, disciplined, regulated and shaped according to human will' whereas the neo-organist city 'in contrast, is founded on the blurring of boundaries rather than their repeated delineation' (Gandy, 2004). These metaphors are often worked through in relation to Deleuze and Guattari's 'rhizome' and 'body without organs' for example, 'non-hierarchical structures of difference' that entwine concrete space with 'imaginary, libidinous and oneiric realms of human experience' (Gandy, 2004: 30). It is, I suggest, in the margins where this conception of the city most

visibly exists, where the materiality of the landscape most clearly emerges as sites of desire, urban imaginaries and an indistinction between materiality and subjectivity.

### **'Waste' lands**

Closely related to urban processes, infrastructures, distinctions and indistinctions between nature and culture are notions of waste (Campkin and Cox, 2007; Douglas, 2002 [1966]; Hawkins and Muecke, 2003). Dirt, waste, pollutants, contaminants and discarded and rotting materials are synonymous with the urban margins, places out of sight where things are dumped, pumped or seep into water and earth or simply abandoned structures left to ruin. Thus we might come across objects and artefacts that have become detached from their intended significations, 'unruly objects' free to create new and unexpected associations (Edensor, 2005: 100). On a visceral level we might respond to certain types of waste with disgust, as something alien and other, 'the retching that thrusts me to the side and turns me away from defilement, sewage, and muck' (Kristeva, 1982: 2). Such responses to purity and impurity are often culturally produced, situations where 'dirt offends against order' and in particular the 'unity of experience' which gives order to the subject, where 'eliminating is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment' (Douglas, 2002 [1966]: 2; See also Hawkins and Muecke, 2003: xiii; Cresswell, 1997; Campkin and Cox, 2007). Thus dirt and waste bring the threat not just of a disordered environment but also a disordered subject, a sense of abjection that comes from an unwanted and unavoidable loss of distinction between self and environment (Kristeva, 1982). For Kristeva this threat is 'what disturbs identity, system, order. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite' (1982: 4). In the margins however, we actively engage with dirt and disorder and abjection is countered by wilful curiosity, where one happens upon 'deposits of ambiguous matter - aptly described by George Bataille as the 'unstable, fetid and lukewarm substances where life ferments ignobly'' (DeSilvey, 2006: 319). The disordering of identity is still present, we find ourselves in a liminal space, in contact with that which at home or on the high street might signify some terrible collapse of control and order. Here however it is a source of fascination as well as repulsion, 'where the 'procreative power of decay' sparks simultaneous - and contradictory - sensations of repugnance and attraction' (2006: 320). Whilst urban ruins might furnish us with objects and artefacts of some aesthetic value, pleasing patinas, 'marks of toil etched onto its surface' (Edensor, 2005: 107), the more viscerally charged, fluid and decaying materials bring a wholly different understanding which is not aesthetic but rather is related to process, flow, mutability and porosity, both of the

material environment and of ourselves. This is also related to the infrastructural flows of drains, sewers and underground passages that urban explorers for example might investigate. As with the earlier discussions of urban nature, metabolic metaphors have also been invoked, attempting for example to make links between the city and the body through fat and sewage systems (Marvin and Medd, 2006).

### **Theorising landscape**

One of the key contributions I am looking to make in this thesis is to bring landscape theorisations from geography, but also cognate disciplines, such as anthropology to bear on thinking about these marginal sites and spaces. The field of landscape literatures is by now far too broad to be comfortably reviewed, indeed entire monographs have been devoted to this subject (Wylie, 2009). Here therefore I confine myself to thinking about literatures that have a bearing upon questions of the relationship between the subject or culture and material landscape. I shall first introduce Sauer, Hoskins and Jackson as early figures who addressed these questions and then look at relevant discourses of landscape phenomenology; performance and embodiment; and materialism.

### **Sauer, Hoskins, Jackson**

Cultural geographers working in the early-mid twentieth century, such as Carl Sauer (1956, 1963) W.G.Hoskins (1955) and J.B.Jackson (1984, 1997) had questions about the relationship between culture and (material) landscape at the core of their work. All three have commonalities and divergences which themselves form important touchstones for the discussion of my own work. When thinking of landscape all three were looking outside of the cities and centres of power, not necessarily at rural landscapes but certainly at landscapes that would not be considered urban, perhaps landscapes where inhabitants are still those directly responsible for its creation or at least its continued reproduction. Each in their own way could perhaps be seen as anti-state or anti-modern, opposed to the domination of spatiality and planning by the rationalist idiom of modernity. What can also be said for all three is that their approach was empiricist and centred upon a physical immersion in landscape and first-hand observation. For them landscape was a 'real' physical thing which must be seen and touched, experienced and observed in its material fullness if one is to attempt to understand it. Equally they were interested in landscape as a cultural entity, the product of human beliefs, values and agency. Perhaps this is also an important

point of divergence, where there are clear differences in their understandings of what culture itself might actually mean and how it manifests in the landscape. It is from this point that I will depart and discuss each of the three individually

For Sauer, landscape was a modification of nature, crafted by humans, in essence a cultural landscape. In his own words, 'the cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a cultural group. Culture is the agent, the natural area the medium, the cultural landscape the result' (Sauer, 1963: 393). Importantly, he was opposed to the prevailing intellectual climate of the time, primarily an environmental determinism where 'the agency is physical nature, man responds or adapts himself' (Sauer, 1963: 349). For him, human beings and their culture were the principle agents, clearly articulated when he says 'what man does in an area because of taboo or totemism or because of his own will involves use of the environment rather than the active agency of the environment' (Sauer, 1963: 349). For him this cultural landscape could be divined through material artefacts, the traces of human activity visible in the landscape. In fact, more than this, for him the cultural landscape is the material trace of humans upon the landscape: 'the cultural landscape is the geographic area in the final meaning [...] its forms are all the works of man that characterize the landscape. Under this definition we are not concerned in geography with the energy, customs or beliefs of man but with man's record upon the landscape' (Sauer, 1963: 342). This is perhaps also the central criticism of Sauer's work - his understanding of culture is both artefactual and 'superorganic' (Duncan, 1980). All that is immaterial in culture will find itself marginalised. Culture in its social or political context will be out of reach as will its symbolic content. The individual is subsumed by a totalising and independent idea of culture. Issues considered of importance in contemporary cultural geography such as difference, inequality and exclusion, remain invisible.

For W.G.Hoskins the prime object of study was the English rural landscape (Hoskins, 1955). His approach to landscape was also cultural, but his primary consideration was time rather than substance. Like Sauer he was deeply immersed in an approach that observed first hand the material dimension of landscape but his aim was a deep historical excavation of landscape through its individual features, its houses, bridges, fields, hedges, lanes, clusters of buildings and churches. One of his aims was to dispel the myth of an English landscape as the product of a Renaissance sensibility and demonstrate the true historical depth of the English landscape, its vertical layers of use and inhabitation. Thus his was an archaeological approach focused very much upon that immediately to hand rather than a distant conceptual horizon. His was an

extreme historical localism at a time when the generality and systems of modernism were prevalent and indeed he was driven by a deep hostility towards the projects of modernity. When he says 'let us turn away and contemplate the past before all is lost to the vandals' (Hoskins, 1955: 299). The vandals he refers to are the scientists, the military men, the post-war planners intent on rolling out a technocratic society with eyes fixed only on the future and an idea of progress that had little regard for the past. His work is often considered as a meditation on loss, a melancholic and nostalgic view which can perhaps be traced to the artistic and literary discourses of the picturesque and romantic landscape of the 18th and early 19th centuries (Johnson, 2006) - in fact the very period whose influence he wanted to throw in to question. Nevertheless, the thrust of this narrative of the decline, loss and destruction of a national nature and culture has become commonplace, whereas the modernist ideas of a progress towards nationally standardised and unified technologically driven utopias have become marginal (Matless, 1998).

Finally, to complete this initial layer of context is J.B.Jackson. He considered American landscapes, generally those distant from urban centres and was founder, publisher, editor and leading contributor to the journal 'Landscape' published from 1951 onwards. His approach focused very much upon the material form taken by vernacular expressions of culture in the landscape. He shows a tension between a deep rootedness in the material aspects of landscape and a strong emphasis upon its symbolic dimension, the value of myth, imagination and meaning in the production of landscape. His was perhaps with the most nuanced understanding of culture and certainly that closest to the everyday life of its inhabitants, believing that 'we are not spectators; the human landscape is not a work of art. It is a temporary product of much sweat and hardship and earnest thought' (Jackson, 1997: 343). This centrality of the inhabitant and his awareness of the contemporary landscape as 'a temporary product' sets him apart from the work of both Sauer and Hoskins. Although he could certainly be considered anti-modern, anti-state and opposed to the abstract rationality of American planning, he did not dismiss that which some might see as the modern impoverishment of landscape, the roads, mobile homes and neon signs. Instead he insisted that they must be seen through the eyes of the ordinary citizen rather than the planner or engineer and thus consider them not as 'a longitudinal slums' but as a 'kind of folk art' (Meinig, 1979: 217). His interest was in the vernacular landscape, the ordinary, unremarkable material world of everyday life, houses, cars, sheds, backyards, pavements and the ways in which ordinary Americans create these material environments as they create and improvise their own worlds away from the

urban centres or the intellectual abstractions of academic discourse. Wylie (2009) notes that in this respect his view of what creates and patterns the organisation of landscape is similar to the anthropologist Mircea Eliade's concept of polarised sacred space, a space which comes out of the act of building and dwelling (Eliade, 1973). As Meinig notes, for Jackson 'the elementary unit in the landscape is the individual dwelling..thus in the study of landscape 'first comes the house'' (Meinig, 1979a: 228). Nevertheless, his understanding of the importance of mobility to the post war American landscape and his interest in for example the moveable dwelling keeps his perspective forward looking: 'The view is no longer static...the traditional way of seeing and experiencing the world is abandoned; in its stead we become active participants, the shifting focus of a moving, abstract world; our nerves and muscles are all of them brought into play' (Jackson, 1997: 205).

These three theorists, and in particular Sauer and Jackson, emphasise a material approach to understanding landscape. For these three this develops out of close fieldwork, an attentive first hand observation and familiarity with the landscape. Here the focus was primarily upon rural landscapes and were regional in character. These approaches are valuable for this study as a similar attentiveness to local material conditions is used in the autoethnography and by my two research subjects, in an urban context. Here however, this material mapping is augmented by an attentiveness to the body and practice within the context of human and non-human processes.

### **Iconography of Landscape**

In distinction to these approaches that mapped and catalogued the material landscape were the 'new cultural geographies' of the 1980s and early 1990s. Here landscape was approached as a 'way of looking', a representation which 'functions symbolically on behalf of an elite' (Wylie, 2009: 67). Representations of landscape are used to hide the true social and material conditions through which they are produced, offering on one hand 'a redemptive, transcendent and aesthetic vision of sensual unity with nature' and on the other operating 'as a smokescreen concealing the underlying truth of material conditions and manipulating our vision such that we become unaware of the distancing which separates us from the natural world' (ibid). The medium through which this is achieved could be paint or a poem, a photograph, a map or park constructed of real earth and trees. Whatever the medium, the landscape was considered as a cultural construction and as such not innocent but driven by the powerful and the dominant. As Cosgrove and Daniels write in the introduction to The

## Iconography of Landscape:

*'A landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings...a landscape park is more palpable but no more real, no less imaginary, than a landscape painting or poem...And of course, every study of a landscape further transforms its meaning, depositing yet another layer of cultural representation' (Cosgrove, 1988).*

Cosgrove and Daniels' work could be described as coming from a Cultural Marxist position, particularly in Cosgrove's evaluation of landscape art and the social, economic relations coded therein, for example in his paper *Prospect, Perspective and the Evolution of the Landscape Idea* (Cosgrove, 1985) and his book *Social Formation of the Symbolic Landscape* (Cosgrove, 1984). Cultural Marxist Interpretations sought to strip back this representational surface in order to reveal the material conditions by which the landscape was produced. They sought to reveal the social and economic relations that stood behind appearances, appearances that had become so familiar, so naturalised, that they appeared to actually be the material reality that they were in fact hiding. When Kenneth Clark talks of Gainsborough's painting 'Mr and Mrs Andrews' he does so in terms of a Rousseauian nature (Clark, 1969). This painting depicts the landowners in an English landscape of enclosed fields, gently rolling hills, a landscape that they also incidentally owned. Berger points out that Clarke's interpretation of a pure nature ignores some central facts. 'Why did the Andrews commission a portrait of themselves with a recognizable landscape of their own as background? They are not a couple in Nature as Rousseau imagined nature. They are landowners and their proprietary attitude towards what surrounds them is visible in their stance and their expressions' (Berger, 1977: 107). A more extended analysis of landscape's ability to deceive was made by Daniels in *Marxism, Culture and the Duplicity of Landscape* (1989). 'Landscape may be seen as a 'dialectical image', an ambiguous synthesis whose redemptive and manipulative aspects cannot finally be disentangled, which can neither be completely reified as an authentic object in the world nor thoroughly dissolved as an ideological mirage' (Daniels, 1990: 206).

## Phenomenology

Often set in contrast to approaches to landscape which privilege the visual are those that are based upon phenomenology. This has been foregrounded in the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold, who is explicitly critical of the dualities of mind/body

and culture/nature that are implicit in notions of landscape as 'ways of seeing' (Ingold, 1993). He critiques Cosgrove and Daniels' definition of landscape as 'a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing or symbolising surroundings' (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988: 1), asserting that 'landscape is not a picture in the imagination, surveyed by the mind's eye, nor however is it an alien and formless substrate awaiting the imposition of human order' (Ingold, 2000: 191). Ingold calls approaches that make distinctions between the material and the lived, the 'building perspective' where 'worlds are made before they are lived in' (Ingold, 2000: 154), and where the material aspect of landscape is reduced to an inert physicality awaiting symbolic meaning.

Ingold instead turns to what he terms a 'dwelling perspective' in his approach to landscape, considering the entanglement of land, people and animals as the source from which cultural knowledge and bodily substance are created (Ingold, 2000: 133). His notion of dwelling is developed from Heidegger's phenomenological work on dwelling (Heidegger, 1971) where the distinctions between dwelling, building and thinking are collapsed into an ontology where dwelling is a way of being in and with the world. For Ingold culture and nature are not distinct but endlessly producing one another through the practical activities of humans and animals and their engagement with the material environment. People, animals and environment are not fixed but in a state of constant interaction by which they ceaselessly produce and elaborate one another (Ingold, 2000: 133). An important aspect here is the primacy he gives to temporality. He discusses the distinction between a Western conception of time, a mechanistic clock time and the idea of lived, social time. Drawing parallels with Cartesian space, he discusses the lived social time, a 'taskscape' of the body engaged in everyday activity, a participatory time as distinct from the spectatorial view of clock time (Ingold 2000: 168).

Ingold's influence can be seen in the Wylie's (post)phenomenological approach to landscape. Here landscape is described as 'precisely the tension through and in which there is set up and conducted different versions of the inside and the outside - self and world - distinctive geographies of inwardness and outwardness. Landscape isn't objective or subjective; it is precisely an entwining, a simultaneous gathering and unfurling, through which versions of self and world emerge as such' (Merriman et al, 2008: 202). Underlying this concise definition are a number of key threads that emerge and re-emerge in his work and will be brought out and discussed in this chapter. Firstly, Wylie approaches landscape primarily in terms of a tension between subject and material world. For him it is this tensioning that differentiates landscape

from place (an over abundance of presence) and space (an absence of presence) (Merriman et al, 2008: 203). Landscape both joins and divides, is proximal and distant, landscape is 'this irresolvable tension between presence and absence' (ibid). Secondly, the entwining of subject and object to which he refers, points towards (or is pointed at from) the decentred, distributed and emergent subjects of post-human and more-than-human, material and performative geographies born out of the turn towards the non-representational in cultural geography. It is this question of the subject that much of his work centres upon, considered broadly speaking theoretically from distinct and different pairings of Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenological works on vision (Merleau-Ponty, 1968) with a Deleuzian understanding of an emergent subject on one hand and with a Derridean subject which is defined by absence and erasure on the other (Wylie, 2010: 107-108).

Merleau-Ponty's later phenomenology takes vision out of a spectatorial, disembodied mode and redefines it in corporeal terms (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). Key to this and to Wylie's arguments is the concept of reversibility. Put simply this refers to the fact that the body is both subject and object, able to touch itself with its own hand for example. At the moment of touch, this relationship is indistinguishable, we both touch and are touched. Equally this can be applied to sight. We both see and are seen. There is thus a reciprocity that dissolves the distinction between subject and object, where both coincide with one another, or are intertwined to use the words of Merleau-Ponty. This is of particular relevance to Wylie's discussions of subject/landscape, whereby landscape is not something out there and seen but is the 'materialities and sensibilities with which we see' (Wylie, 2005: 152). However, there is an inherent problem with this, an internal contradiction. In foregrounding the body, presence and embodied experience there is a danger of re-creating an a-priori individual perceiving subject, precisely the kind of subject which phenomenology purports to challenge. Phenomenology still, at its core, attempts to deal with subjectivity as being located in a distinct perceiving subject, and thus still has an underlying resonance with Western understandings of subjectivity leading back to Descartes.

Wylie's discussion of landscape attempts to deal with this problem by invoking strands of thought born out of Ingold's phenomenology and in particular his 'dwelling perspective' (Ingold, 2000). Ingold's work deals explicitly with the subject-landscape problem, positing the 'dwelling perspective' as a means of dissolving this distinction (Ingold, 2000). For Ingold, dwelling is an intimate entwinement of human (or non-human animals) with their environment. For example, the forms that humans build

arise 'within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of their practical engagement with their surroundings' (Ingold, 2000: 186). Wylie takes from Ingold's work a call to study landscape as 'processual rather than fixed, as a relation of corporeality rather than a mental construct. It reinstates landscape as a sensuous and material milieu' and 'gestures towards landscape as practice and performed, and itself performative, as opposed to represented or scripted' (Wylie, 2003: 144). Here many of Wylie's concerns with (in)distinctions between subject and landscape, relationality, process and materiality emerge, particularly in relation to the broader contexts of performance, materiality and embodiment that came to the fore with non-representational theory.

However, Wylie is also critical of Ingold's position, particularly in relation to an emphasis upon the rural and rhythmic temporalities, which he believes too easily invokes a pre-modern romanticism. He is also critical of a partial rejection of vision in favour of embodied practice and performance, discussing this as potentially creating a binary between the visual and the embodied. He also has methodological reservations, asking how, if we adopt Ingold's perspective, do we go about the 'scripting and interrogation of embodied experiences of landscape?' (Wylie, 2003: 146). Wylie has put considerable theoretical and practical effort into experimenting with auto-ethnographic descriptions of landscape, which he believes appear suited to Ingold's approach. However, Ingold considers these techniques to be problematic as they reintroduce the very notions of distance and spectatorship that he is trying to overcome (Wylie, 2003: 144-146).

Deleuze (1992, 1994) and Derrida (1994) are other key reference points in Wylie's approach to landscape, through which he sets up a tension between subject and landscape which oscillates between a distancing and a folding. The Deleuzian thread of his work sits within a broader context of the turn towards process, performance and affect within cultural geography (Thrift, 2003). The Deleuzian ontology is broadly speaking an anti-subjective, anti-humanist one, strongly opposed to the phenomenological perspective. It posits an emergent subject which cannot be thought of as the source or site of thought or action or as ever achieving a fixed state of stability or coherence, but rather as a possibility that continuously unfolds with the world, a state of processual becoming rather than being, caught and emerging from a world conceived as flow rather than structure. Wylie uses his work to critique and supplement Merleau-Ponty's 'attempts to replace a spectatorial conception of vision with an embodied ontology that accords transcendence to the depth of the visual

world' in order to set out a 'post-phenomenological account of visual self-landscape relations' (Wylie, 2006: 519).

The crucial point for this discussion is that Wylie wishes to keep vision as central to landscape, using Merleau-Ponty's work on vision as a looking-with rather than looking-at landscape. At the same time, he wishes to overcome the problem that, rather than removing Cartesian distinctions between subject and object, Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology still implies a subject that perceives, an 'I' from which these perceptions and experiences are described and analysed (Wylie, 2006: 525). He uses Deleuze's notion of the fold as a way of discussing an eventual emergence of subject that comes to occupy a point of view, a visual gaze. The subject is not a pre-existing knowable capacity to perceive but rather is in fact actualised by the view. By suturing these two theoretical perspectives together Wylie attempts to sketch out a way of thinking landscape through vision that does not fall back into a subject-landscape dualism.

In later work Wylie attempts to achieve this same theoretical movement but from a very different starting point. In *Landscape, Absence and the Geographies of Love* (2009), he takes Derrida's critical reading of Merleau-Ponty as the point of departure, again exploring the limits of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology in order to discuss the role of vision in the relationship between subject and landscape. In this critical account of a walking encounter with memorial benches positioned looking out across the sea at Mullion Cove in South West England, he discusses this relationship through 'motifs of absence, distance, loss and haunting' (Wylie, 2009: 275). He uses Derrida's critique of presence to tension the presence implied in Merleau-Ponty's embodied vision with absence. However, unlike the previous discussion on Deleuze, Wylie's intention here is to set up a tension between 'opening-onto and distancing-from' (ibid). Here Merleau-Ponty's argument for a subject entwined with the world through the body and the gaze (seeing-with the world) is disrupted and displaced by Derrida's argument that it is what is absent from the subject's experience (in this case the emphasis is upon the gaze) that is constitutive of that experience (Wylie, 2009: 284). In this way he addresses the problematic embodied perceiving subject by treating it as co-constituted by (the absent gaze of) absent others.

### **Performativity and embodiment**

Ingold's emphasis on the lived and performative aspects of landscape are also seen

in human and cultural geography, as well as other social science disciplines (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000: 411). As with Ingold, landscapes are not understood as cultural representations projected onto a 'blank' human subject or a 'blank' nature, but rather as something actual, as a set of practices and performances, something material and embodied (Lorimer, 2005). From the perspective of non-representational theory, distinctions between representation and that which is represented are collapsed. Landscape is seen not as masking or as a meaning which needs to be decoded, but as constitutive of lived experience, not to be distinguished from people, activities, landscape, animals or material things, an acknowledgement of our 'more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds' (Lorimer, 2005). In contrast to some of the interpretive and discursive approaches to cultural geography in the 1980s, such approaches encourage embodied, autoethnographic approaches to landscape. The emphasis shifts from representations of landscape to practices of landscape, where the self, body and landscape constantly shape one another through performance and activities such as walking or cycling (Wylie, 2005; Spinney, 2006).

These discourses are a sustained attempt to take emotion, experience, desire, embodiment and sensation seriously within research (and bring them into research practice) in the wake of 'the crisis of representation' (Hinchcliffe, 2000: 575) brought about by post-structuralist theory, feminist theory and the turn towards non-representational theory (Dewsbury, 2000; Harrison 2000; Hinchcliffe 1999; Grosz, 1994; Latham and Conradson, 2003; Rodaway, 1994; Thrift, 2008; Whatmore 2002). This was born out of a fundamental questioning of the value of traditional knowledge production, academic discourses which sought underlying explanatory structures, reifying their objects of study and dismissing or devaluing that which could not be accommodated within their schema (Hinchcliffe, 2000: 576). A growing acknowledgement of the limitations of traditional methods and approaches to social theory, and a recognition that the 'world is more excessive than we can theorise' (Dewsbury et al 2002: 437) were energetically taken up as a turn towards the embodied and performative. Here relationality and the processual underpin questions of subjectivity, the social, embodiment and their relationship to materiality, a focus on becoming over being where 'action and thoughts are inseparable' (Hinchcliffe, 2000: 576). Again, drawing from phenomenology there is an assault on the Cartesian subject/object duality. However, performance and performativity have been approached from an a-subjective and to a large extent (particularly through Deleuze and Guattari) radically anti-humanist understanding of embodiment, where the subject is no longer considered as the source or site of embodiment and experience but rather emerges

through encounter with the world, and where thought, sense, experience arise not in the subject but are co-constructed between the subject and the world (see Latham and Conradson, 2003: 1901).

Performance and performativity problematises the subject, raising fundamental questions about intentionality and where thought resides and where action comes from. In the spontaneity and immediacy of an act, the improvised moment, the unexpected and expressive, the notion of intention or forethought is pushed out. Equally, in the habitual, repetitive movements, actions and gestures of everyday life, there too is no necessity for forethought or intention. It is this non-discursive, pre-cognitive quality that problematises notions of identity and subjectivity, presenting an anti-humanist, anti-subjective perspective on embodiment. Action and meaning do not come from the body under the control of a mind but comes from the situation, from the co-presence of a body (or bodies) and environment (See Dewsbury, 2000: 474). Similar concerns can be seen in Gibson's theory of affordances in his work on ecological psychology, from which Ingold's work on dwelling draws (Gibson, 2013). Here again, the materiality of the world is complicit in agency and perception, blurring boundaries between subject and material environment. 'Humans do not act as subjects in an object world but are constituted as perceiving beings at the interface between subject and object' (Hetherington 2003: 1938). The body becomes the subject of knowledge that becomes apparent through the immediacy of actualisation, through sensation and what happens. Dewsbury notes that such an understanding of the 'body as 'pure event', ostensibly denies us our embodied sense of individuality, as something tangibly on the move' (Dewsbury, 2000: 483), and that this position needs to be modified a little to avoid dissociating the body from the social and thus reifying both terms and recreating dualism. The social emerges from and in embodied encounter and performance, not from a transcendental external force. Despite an ongoing multitude of encounters our sense of self does not dissolve. In fact, as Thrift and Dewsbury note, the unfolding of action with environment can be precisely what maintains a sense of self without recourse to ideas of cognition, as illustrated by those with Alzheimer's disease who can often continue to live reasonably well by highly structuring their material environment (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000: 415). From a Deleuzian perspective this is an unfolding process of subjectification located not in the body or the environment but in a plane of immanence, a gap between what is possible and what is actual. For Crouch, 'through performativities, practice and performance individuals are able to feel; are able to think and rethink' (Crouch 2003: 1948).

In the context of everyday life, performance and performativity can be considered as repetitive, adhering to ritualistic practices, and maintaining and reproducing identity and the social (see Butler, 1997). They can also be considered as open ended, always different in repetition and, more radically, as that which can open up creativity and the transformative in everyday life (see Roach 1995: 46). This tension is explored by Crouch's ethnographies on caravanning and allotment holding (Crouch, 2003), taking the 'apparently mundane, to explore the potential of working ideas of the performative and of embodied practice through the unremarkable, with the possibility of their becoming remarkable for the individual subject' (2003: 1948). He approaches performances of everyday activity as acts of 'holding on' which through repetition invoke a feeling of security and 'going further'. Here, the liminal can be found 'in the cracks of habitual acts' which open up a space 'in which self and world' are transformed: 'my allotment has enabled me to find a side of myself I did not know existed' (Yvonne, 35, Weardale, 1997); 'We learn things from each other. You are very social and are very kind. You make me feel good, things in your garden you always hand me, little fruits, which I value so much' (John, 75, Birmingham, 1994). The transformative power of apparently mundane activity emerges through complex entanglements of the sensory, feeling and inter-subjective experience. Equally, transformation is kept in check by the 'holding on' to the habitual: 'to say 'go where you like when you like' captures the feeling of freedom they discover themselves, but also reiterated the slogan of one of their clubs' (2003: 1956).

## **Materialism**

In the early 2000s a call to 're-materialize' cultural geography started to emerge (Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Bennett, 2010; Daniels, 2006; Jackson, 2000; Latham and McCormack, 2004; Lees, 2002; Tolia-Kelly, 2013; Whatmore, 2006). The trajectory for this can be traced through the 'new cultural geographies' of the 1980s and 1990s. Characterised by an emphasis upon meaning, representations, identities and their politics, some saw these cultural geographies as pushing out more robustly material and social concerns in cultural geography. Although acknowledging this concern of 'evacuating the social' (Jackson, 2000: 9), Peter Jackson was more interested in what a return to 'material culture' might actually mean. As Jackson notes, material culture is certainly nothing new to cultural geography. In landscape studies Sauer and J.B.Jackson were very much located within a descriptive field studies approach to the materiality of landscape. This was to an extent vilified by new cultural geography for

adopting an understanding of materiality as a brute and inert physicality of the world waiting for human hands to animate and enliven.

There is a risk though of over simplifying Sauer and Jackson's positions. As Sauer himself stated in *The Morphology of Landscape* (1963 [1925]), 'geographers should avoid considering the earth as the scene on which the activity of man (sic) unfolds itself, without reflecting that this scene is itself living' (1963: 343). Equally, Jackson's sustained interest in the vernacular landscapes and the improvisation and production of every day practices anticipates some of the concerns of performativity that have emerged (Whatmore 2006: 605). However, the broader point is that a 'realist' understanding of matter, 'in which the material is given a reassuring solidity in opposition to the immaterial, the abstract and the unreal' (Latham and McCormack 2004: 704), reassert those nature/culture, subject/object dualisms which cultural geography had done much to challenge and thus suggests a need to 'develop more complicated configurations of 'the material' and 'the cultural' (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly 2004: 670). This call to address the nature of the relationship between the 'material' and the 'non-material' (or 'real' and 'imagined') in order to articulate a 'rematerialised' human geography is asserted too by Latham and McCormack, stating that 'how human geography is going to define (or erase) this relation is precisely the key theoretical and empirical question driving much of the most culturally inflected work in human geography' (Latham and McCormack, 2004: 703). They argue for a materialism that from the outset acknowledges the importance of the immaterial, 'not as something that is defined in opposition to the material, but as that which gives it an expressive life and liveliness independent of the human subject' (2004: 703).

These discourses have clear implications for understanding landscapes and 'material geographies' that address these issues have become abundant and display exceedingly diverse antecedents and potentials (see Anderson and Wylie, 2009: 318). Jackson points to cultures of consumption, cyberspace and virtual reality, Actor Network Theory and genetic engineering as promising sites where understandings of material culture are being renegotiated (Jackson, 2000: 10). Anderson and Tolia-Kelly identify landscape and objecthood, feminist work on embodiment and the hybrid geographies of the 'more than human' (Anderson and Tolia-Kelly, 2004: 669) and Whatmore cites the geo/bio-philosophies of Deleuze and Guattari, science and technology studies and performance studies as being others (Whatmore, 2006: 601). Although there are a plurality of ideas and approaches rather than anything that could be considered as a clear 'materialist turn', there does appear to be underlying

currents of agreement about the general characteristics of these approaches. Matter is seen as 'processually emergent' (Latham and McCormack, 2004: 701), active and implicated in flows and relations, rather than inert static and discrete entities, in terms of landscape this means they are 'co-fabricated between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth' (Whatmore, 2006: 603). Equally, the human subject is de-centred, treated as co-produced as with other socio-material assemblages and not locatable within the body but as emerging through these assemblages (ibid).

The question of non-human agency is not new to geographical thought, coming from various trajectories ranging from science and technology studies (Latour, 1993), sociology (Appadurai, 1986), anthropology (Ingold, 2007a, b) and philosophy (Bryant et al, 2011; Harman, 2011). Latour's actor network theory (ANT) developed out of an ethnography of science and technology studies, with the explicit aim of challenging the nature/culture divide in academia. He describes an essentially topological view of agency where it is the relations between things and people that constitute agency rather than the agency of individual (human) actants. He challenges a view of the world as constituted from discrete people, things and objects and instead proposes a world constituted of the networked relations between them and that any sense of individuality and agency is in fact itself a relational effect, a weaving together of the cultural, material, human and non-human. The work of Thrift, Pile and Harrison were the first to bring this work explicitly into a geographical and more specifically a landscape frame, arguing that there is a new geography which must 'appreciate how the world is now patterned by both human and non-human processes. It is these entanglements that comprise what we know as landscape' (Harrison, Pile and Thrift, 2004: 9-10).

The work of Sarah Whatmore addresses the question of nature-human relations (Whatmore, 2002) adopting a topological view where the fluid, mobile and heterogeneous take precedence over static and sedentary notions of landscape and dwelling - clearly antithetical to received (topographical) views of space as territory, boundary, area, scale, surface, perspective and so on rendering them obsolete or at best of marginal interest. Notions of fixity are replaced with networks and connections, flows and mobilities, a way of 'thinking space relationally' which furnishes us with ideas of landscape as 'a product of practices, trajectories, interrelations' (Massey, 2004: 5). These works seek to collapse boundaries between nature and culture but equally, by addressing developments in biotechnology and genetic engineering for example, they reinvigorate a new vitalism and start to collapse the boundaries between people

and 'things', bringing the material stuff of life to life. From these perspectives the affective vitality of those apparently lifeless molecules from which we are made and the objects, things and animals with which we are enmeshed require us to turn to post-humanist modes of enquiry where geometries are replaced by topologies, intents by affects and being by becoming. The subject as the axiom of ontology is jettisoned. Equally, these hybrid geographies in many ways reject landscape as a way of addressing the nature/culture question and supplant it with bio-geographies.

As with the preceding discussions on performance and performativity, and strongly related to it, this is accompanied by similar questions about what are valid objects of study and about appropriate theoretical and methodological approaches, with similar responses. Whatmore summarises the responses to this as 'a shift in an analytical focus from discourse to practice', a 'shift from an onus on meaning to an onus on affect', 'a redirection of effort towards more-than-human modes of enquiry and a 'shift from a focus on the politics of identity to the politics of knowledge' (Whatmore, 2006: 603-604). Latham and McCormack emphasise the need to bring immateriality into an understanding of the material, and begin to 'properly grasp the complex realities of apparently stable objects by taking seriously the fact that these realities are always held together and animated by processes excessive of form and position' (Latham and McCormack, 2004: 705). It is the need to incorporate excess into analysis which is crucial in many of the approaches discussed both here and with ideas of performativity and embodiment and makes notions of (pre-personal) creativity and affect important and the multiplicity of 'non-representational forces and practices and processes through which matter is always coming into being' (ibid). Emotions, moods and affects are thus no less material than 'brute matter.' This way of thinking materiality, they argue, requires more rather than less abstraction in order to 'grasp the incorporeality of the concrete' (see Massumi 2002a: 5 in Latham and McCormack 2004: 706). Underlying these new understandings of materiality are not just a decentering of the human subject but a more profound redistributing of the subject as not coincident with an idea of the physical body, but as emerging across and between a milieu of multitudinous objects, molecules, ideas, desires. The idea of affect has been used think about this desubjectified subject - 'Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon' and:

*'Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to those forces - visceral forces beneath, alongside or generally other than conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion - that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward*

*thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability' (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 1).*

Underlying this is a processual understanding of materiality and the body's becoming, where the body is 'pulled beyond its seeming surface-boundedness by way of its relation to, indeed its composition through, the forces of encounter. With affect, a body is as much outside itself as in itself - webbed in its relations - until ultimately such firm distanciations cease to matter (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010: 3). When considering the urban landscape for example, 'the expressive quality of urban materiality is not necessarily a cynical aesthetic veneer that needs to be stripped away to get to reality. The expressiveness of place is a constitutive part of its mix, the event of its moving materiality' (Latham and McCormack 2004: 709). It is not the product of pre-existing relations between subjects and landscapes but something that emerges continuously. It is perhaps also worth noting that not all of those engaging with affect take an entirely anti-humanist position. Anderson and Wylie for example suggest that affective accounts of materiality do not necessarily eject distinct subjects and worlds, but rather see them as potentially precipitating from materialities albeit as thoroughly decentred entities rather than the source of knowledge production (Anderson and Wylie 2009: 323).

### **Creative encounters with urban margins**

In the following section I want to draw together some of these issues about urban margins and questions that focus upon issues of embodiment, performance and materiality, by way of a survey of artworks. This section started initially as an attempt to develop a typology of urban margins, illustrated by the work of creative practitioners. From this initial intent it developed more usefully into a means of situating the practices that form the focus of the subsequent three empirical chapters, and demonstrates the richly variegated nature of artistic practices that are engaged with the urban margins.

As with my chosen case studies, I focus on artists whose work falls roughly within the sweep of East London, from Hackney Wick, along the Lea Navigation to the Thames. This area of London has the highest concentration of artists in Europe (MUF, 2009). The following section will briefly discuss the work of a small number of these artists, although there were many more that could have been used. This is not

intended as a comprehensive survey or as close readings of the work, but rather to give concrete examples of artists working in this region of east London and whose work directly and self-consciously addresses the urban margins. They were chosen after the bulk of the empirical chapters had been written, and are intended to act as an unstable fulcrum between the literatures discussed earlier and the empirical chapters discussed later. Thus, they are intended as rough indices, scratching lines and trajectories both backwards to the landscape literatures and forwards to the empirical chapters.

The artists are grouped to roughly mirror the evolution of my review of landscape scholarship, roughly tracing out an arc from the early field-studies approaches of Sauer and Jackson, through landscape as representation and into landscape phenomenology. From here I discuss work that addresses the turn away from representation towards a rematerialisation of landscape, through phenomenological, affective and performative approaches to landscape. This will be followed by discussions of work that sit comfortably with other recent material concerns, where the hybrid, processual and co-productive nature of landscape is investigated.

Thus, tracing back to the literatures discussed earlier, I discuss artists whose employ Sauerian-like observational fieldwork practices, such as the documentary photography of Chris Dorley-Brown; equally David George, Laura Oldfield Ford and Jim Woodall were chosen to draw a line back to the representational understandings of landscape as veiling power relations, as developed in the Marxist discourses of Cosgrove and Daniels. Their work co-opts familiar representational strategies, such as the picturesque, punkzine and corporate aesthetics, and the visual language of CCTV surveillance to make statements about dominant expressions of power and possible experiences, responses and challenges to it. Discussions of the literatures of phenomenology are reflected in the works of Stephen Cornford and connections with rematerialising the landscape are made to the work of David George. EAT Collectives' work is considered as a rather literal expression of the metabolic understandings of urban landscapes discussed in the literature survey.

Equally the artists were chosen to sketch trajectories forward to the empirical chapters. The work of Powell for example was chosen to flag up a few of the themes that emerge later, such as the fictional reimagining of landscape, but also processes such as gleaning which will be seen later in Stephen Gill's practice. RIBA's Forgotten Spaces and the AA's Unknown Divisions were used to bring attention to extremes of

regeneration narratives, such as the *tabula rasa*, that are also discussed in Gill's work and in the conclusions. MUF's work on Beckton Alp presages some of the themes that arise across the three empirical chapters: contamination, bio-remediation and fieldwork that crosses into wilfully fictional storytelling all index themes that emerge later. There is also some discussion of the politics of regeneration, intervention or non-intervention in MUF's work too, which is relevant to the three empirical chapters.

What I hope becomes clear too across these case studies is the awkwardness in trying to narrow and bring a coherence to the relationships between margin, artist and literature. This is a point which can be seen to emerge more broadly throughout the thesis in the difficulty in finding a theoretical home. The bracketing off of these artists' work into these broad areas of geographical discourse are meant only as guides. They aim to bring out the different approaches to landscape, materiality, embodiment and performance that artists may take when approaching urban margins. As will become clear, the work of these artists spill messily out of the categories I have set out, spreading across others. The literature survey, the survey of artists and the empirical chapters could thus also be usefully read as mutually exclusive, standing alone and giving room for the reader to make their own connections and disconnections, much in the way the uncaptioned photographs are used in the autoethnographic chapter.

It is also important to reiterate that the choice of artists here was made after key decisions about research subjects and after a great deal of that research had been done. In fact, the choice of study area itself was the first major decision made in developing the research project. It was the physical fragmentation of the landscape I was interested in first and foremost, rather than the density (or presence) of artists.

The decision to focus upon East London was made in the early stages of the PhD. Following from my Masters work on the fragmented urban landscapes of Manchester, I carefully surveyed London using aerial photographs, looking for physically fragmented regions of the city to concentrate the research upon. The regions I was looking for were those defined by a confluence of large scale infrastructure. These conditions tend to build up successively over long periods of time (See Griffiths, 2010: 5), often originating in the geological and topological conditions of the pre-urban landscape. A large swathe of east London stands out very clearly as a strong example of a physically fragmented region. The River Lea is a key historical driver for this condition in East London, offering the necessary affordances for the development of the canal system and early industrialisation. Equally this area offered large swathes of

relatively uncontested land for major road building projects (such as the A12) during 20th century de-industrialisation, and for City Airport and the DLR in post industrial London. The docklands developments of the 1980s is a further example of this. The affordances then of such a region are not those of stability or coherence, but of a slow and continuous process of compounding and evolving fragmentation.

The 2012 Olympic Games can be seen as a continuation of this trajectory, driven by the areas apparent lack of a coherent identity. This lack is the very thing that gives this area its force as a site of imaginative possibility. This enabled the ODA to describe large swathes of East London, especially around the River Lea and Hackney Wick, as a wasteland. Thus it was cast as a region that could only benefit from regeneration, an extensive region that could be appropriated and 'cleared' socially and economically. Future land use is then programmed to create economic return for investors and stakeholders. Here there is a *tabula rasa* like approach towards cultural identity, a place that can be notionally swept clean and reappropriated on a large scale. The earlier processes of historical layering of material conditions and the corresponding physical fragmentation and division of the landscape, lay the ground for this approach.

The artists that are discussed in this section are predominantly (but not all) in some respect related to the process of wholesale appropriation of the landscape associated with the Olympic Games. I want to re-iterate however that my rationale for choosing to work with this area of east London, was driven not by the Olympic project, or the artists living there, but by the long term historical fragmentation that has characterised large swathes of this area for centuries. The siting of the Olympic Games here was something that in fact I wished to locate outside of the scope of this project, and thus chose to focus, in the main empirical chapters upon artwork that was produced before the Olympic project really got under way and that did not (in the main) make direct reference to it.

However, it is certain that the Olympic Games did cast a light upon a group of disparate artists producing work in East London, often in critical response to the impending games, or appropriating (or being appropriated by) the Olympic discourse (Marrero-Guillamón, 2012). Much of the work discussed in this chapter has been framed within the discourse of the Olympic Games and in particular as a form of resistance to it (ibid).

The Olympic project thus becomes a useful touchstone for the purposes of this

chapter, providing a context that illustrates connections back to the literatures discussed earlier, especially those dealing with the relationship between landscape and powerful elites. Equally, the Olympic project also simply drew attention to a large number of artists who address the marginal landscapes of East London. The Olympic project and resistance to it then in a sense precipitated creative practices dealing directly with this marginal urban landscape, giving a rich register of motifs some of which emerge with different inflexions in the empirical chapters.

### **Field Studies**

Chris Dorley-Brown has been photographically documenting east London since the early 1980s. His body of work is diverse, ranging from architectural photography, street photography, portraiture and tableaux, from the construction and subsequent destruction of high-rise tower blocks in Hackney, to the declining and derelict industrial areas of East London's Lower Lea Valley. This record spans 30 years and he purposefully revisits areas at a later date to rephotograph them, creating a document of change. The Olympic regeneration of areas of Hackney and Newham has led him to refocus on this area, with the intention of creating a body of work that puts images he took 15 to 25 years ago with contemporary images he is taking now.

He locates his work and practice strongly within the documentary genre - 'For me photography is a recording, and I am just collecting evidence' (The Great Leap Sideways, 2013). He originally worked with film and later, in the early 1990s started to transition to digital photography. His documentary stance is further emphasised by his discussion of the affordances of digital photography, where image making for him becomes 'information gathering, sampling, compositing' (ibid). He now produces composite images, produced by stitching together numerous digital photographs in Photoshop and talks of now working more like a painter or a designer. Nevertheless, he still regards these images as records of an objective reality, 'A single image now takes a week to put together rather than 1/60th of a second, but I am still in the documentary camp. These pictures are not fantasies, they are the truth!' (ibid).

In this discussion of marginal urban landscapes, it is his photographic records of east London's declining industrial areas that are of interest. He discusses his awareness, in the 1980s, of being witness to 'the tail end of an era that had begun

in the 19th century, essentially an industrial and manufacturing revolution.[...] It seemed to be a world that was fragile and vulnerable, something worth preserving if only by making a photograph' (ibid). Although presented as coherent collections documenting Hackney Wick's industrial landscape for example, these images were not taken sequentially, but rather are curated collections that span many years. He has produced a series *Re-shoots* (1999-2011) which juxtapose photographs taken perhaps 5 or 10 years apart, from exactly the same spot, at the same time of day and the same day of the year (figure 1 & 2). This precise doubling strips these images of sentimentality, an effect which is compounded by using pairs of images taken at these relatively short intervals. They are also unpeopled, with muted colours, with the subject centred, but not dominant. There is no sense of an imposed narrative built into the temporal gap between these pairs of image, but rather simple statements of fact. This is reflected in the descriptive titles such as *Kingsland railway bridge Dalston, looking north to Dalston junction from Englefield road, Hackney (left 1997, right 2001) and Pudding Mill Lane 1998-2003, now in Olympic zone (left 1998, right 2003)*. He also presents a series of single photographs around the same area of Hackney Wick, landscapes strewn with rubble and waste from abandoned breakers yards or what became known as the fridge mountain in Hackney Wick, a huge white goods dump. In all these images the focus upon materiality is clear, the traces of human activity, not on the scale of daily life, but as the material traces of culture upon the landscape, the infrastructures, industries abandoned or clinging on, demolitions, building projects, and of course the regeneration of the Olympic project.

### **Landscape as representation**

In this section I'll discuss the work of three artists, David George, Laura Oldfield Ford and Jim Woodall. Although all three artists, to different degrees, engage with landscape in embodied, material and performative ways, I suggest here that their work primarily emphasises the importance of the gaze or visual representation in landscape. I would argue that the works here are produced as representations that code the power relations that produce the landscapes they depict.

David George's series *Enclosures, Badlands and Borders* (2013) is an example of landscape photography and the technological sublime (figure 3). He discusses his work as an exploration of the sublime in post-industrial landscapes (George, 2013) and positions it within the new topographic school in America, through the work of Ed Ruscha, Henry Wessel, Bernd and Hilla Becher, and subsequently Joel Sternfeld



*Figure 1: Chris Dorley-Brown, Kingsland railway bridge Dalston, looking north to Dalston junction from Englefield road, Hackney (left 1997, right 2001)*

*Figure 2: Chris Dorley-Brown, Pudding Mill Lane 1998-2003, now in Olympic zone (left 1998, right 2003)*

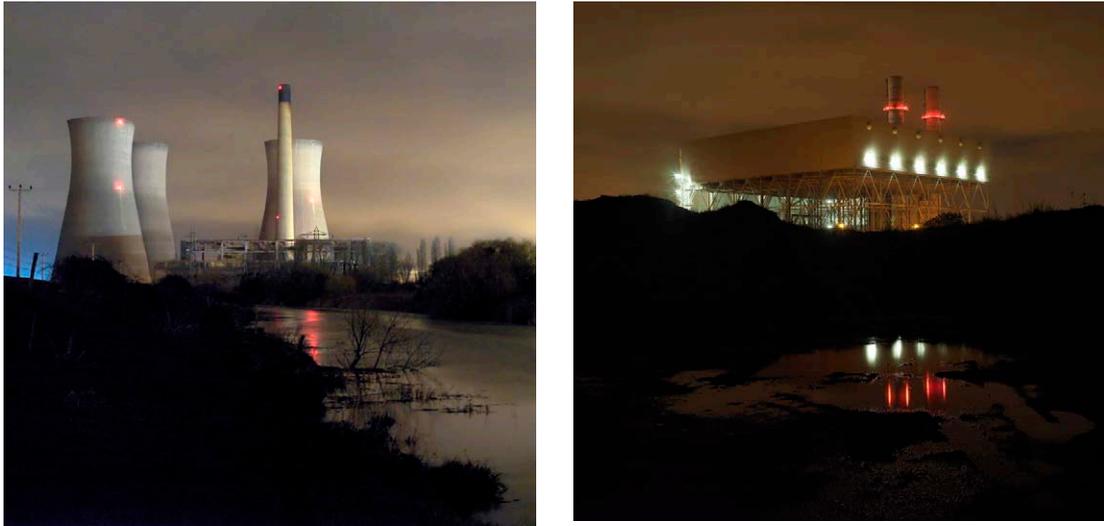


Figure 3: David George, *Enclosures, Badlands and Borders*, 2013

and J.Bennett Fitts. George discusses these images as future ruins, objective, neutral documents of disappearing 'man-altered landscapes', structures whose obsolescence looms in the near future (ibid). There are no human figures in these landscapes, they consist entirely of structure and 'nature', dim silhouettes of foliage, the reflection of lights in a pool of still water. They are shot at night, the skies sodium yellow, areas of black unknowability, muted, almost monochrome images interrupted by piercing red, yellow blue and white lights. These images are animated not by the romantics' confrontation between an overwhelmingly powerful nature and the individual, but between the powerful technologies we have created and a nature that will stealthily, with time, overwhelm them. Technology becomes a cipher for the vulnerability of humanity when confronted with the extensiveness of 'nature'. It is this tension between the 'man altered' and the 'natural' that is often at the heart of the aesthetic of a marginal urban sublime. Here he points to temporal scales ranging from economic and technological cycles to the rise and fall of civilisations, although makes no allusion to the processes that might drive this.

These images have strong resonances with the sublime in landscape painting. The artist's presence is veiled, apparently invisible in the reading of the image, and the viewer positioned as the spectator / observer of an impenetrable otherness, splitting nature and culture into oppositional binaries. These are representations of powerful but hidden forces, where slow but opaque processes of technology are presented and put in tension with slow and equally opaque processes of 'nature', with notions of technological progress and change set against the magnitude of evolutionary time. The body of the authorial subject is underplayed replaced by the gaze of the audience who is located outside of the (mystified) industrial structures depicted. Although

George claims to address material and historical processes, both the viewer and the artist are located 'outside of the picture and outside the relations being depicted' (Thomas, 1994: 21).

Working in a similar vein Laura Oldfield Ford re-imagines existing urban landscape as future ruins, engaging with ideas of dystopian futures and critiques of current urban conditions and the forces that have produced them. Her series of over one hundred ink drawings, *2013 Drifting Through the Ruins* (2009), re-imagines East London's Olympic regeneration as a failed future dystopia (figure 4). She imagines a regenerated Stratford splintered by marauding hordes, reclaiming the streets that they were pushed from: 'The street becomes the territory of the collective, in that instant rubble strewn avenues open and a multitude of futures beckon' (ibid). These works were made in 2009 whilst much of the site was still under development or awaiting development, engaging with still abandoned areas that she remembers from the 1990s as being the sites of free parties. In other works for example she appropriates advertising images, juxtaposing them with drawings of urban decay, emphasising the notion of the image as a facade that needs to be deciphered to reveal the forces that are at work behind it. Similarly, her earlier exhibition at Hales Gallery *Transmissions from a Discarded Future* (2011) reinforces these re-imaginings, buoying itself on the fallout from the London riots of 2011. The device around which the work hinges is again juxtaposition, contextualising the work by putting corporate slogans next to grass roots action:

*'Luck isn't about waiting around, it's about taking chances. This season everything you need to live in the moment and feel the magic is right here'*

*Advert Oxford Street, August 2011*

*'Everyone from all sides of London meet up in the heart of London (central) OXFORD CIRCUS!!, Bare SHOPS are gonna get smashed up so come get some (free stuff!!!) fuck the feds we will send them back with OUR riot! >:O'*

*Blackberry IM August 2011*

*(ibid)*



Figure 4: Laura Oldfield Ford, 2013 *Drifting Through the Ruins*, 2009

Other strands of her work deal with ruins that are not located in the future but in the past, the loss of urban margins that she knew well, perhaps lived or partied in. Like Hoskins' lament of the loss of the English countryside, her work is also imbued with a melancholy of loss. Here it is a loss not of a rural landscape imaginary but of the cultural affordances of inner urban margins and wastelands replaced by the imaginaries of property developers and corporations. Her lament is visceral and angry, toothed with revenge. It is the corporate imaginaries (as built environment and advertising images) that she seeks to displace with her celebrations of a dystopian future, animated by emotional intensities and surges of violent reappropriation to achieve justice and social transformation.

Her work comes out of a very direct lived experience of the urban margins, in foot bound incursions and past experience, demonstrating an embodied, subjective, phenomenological approach to landscape. Although her work is highly autobiographical, she also wilfully blurs and fictionalises herself, her experiences and the places she discusses, aligning it too with the more recent currents in performativity discussed by DeSilvey for example, or the contingent and multiple meanings of post-structuralist texts (Wylie, 2009: 214).

As with George, she produces representations of landscape that are premised upon the idea of what is hidden beneath the image. Her work deals with intersections between dominant and powerless social and economic interests and their failure or inability to fully inscribe themselves upon the landscape. The material landscape appears both as a veil that hides the true nature of the relations that produce it (Daniels, 1989) and as a trace of lived experience. In her *Future Ruins*, she presents an imagined future where the veil has been torn aside to reveal the anger and violence generated by previous inequalities, the untrammelled power of a previously repressed underclass. She sees the city as a palimpsest in a process of continual writing and rewriting by both dominant and subjugated forces (Hales Gallery, 2013).

For his work *Olympic State* (2010) Jim Woodall installed himself on the rooftop of a building overlooking the Olympic Park during the construction phase (figure 5). He built an ad-hoc hide from materials found locally and set up a ring of CCTV cameras overlooking the site and surrounding area, with a corresponding bank of monitors inside. He remained here for two weeks, recording hundreds of hours of CCTV footage. This occupation was later reinstated as an exhibition at See Studio Exhibition Space in Hackney Wick, his hide relocated and the hundreds of hours of footage screened,



Figure 5: Jim Woodall, *Olympic State*, 2010

alongside limited edition screenshots (Moxley, 2012).

Here he is playfully appropriating some of the defensive landscape practices of the Olympic site through a mirroring of material and technical artefacts. Importantly he is inhabiting the landscape, as an observer, but also as a resident, simultaneously locating himself in both discourses of the everyday and of the exercise of power through observation, in particular the idea of the panopticon. The futility of his position is evident, but in deploying this as a tactic of passive subversion his work is resonant with de Certeau's understanding of everyday tactics as subversions of the strategies deployed by powerful interests (de Certeau, 1984). The repositioning of the work into the context of an exhibition takes the solitary, somewhat hermetic nature of the originating practice and repositions it within a discourse of dissent, complicated by the transformation of the work into a series of objects and artefacts to be consumed as cultural objects. This dual landscape practice is common to many creative practices and resonant with Matless's ideas of landscape as both practice and ideological work (Matless, 1998). The work also weaves together a phenomenological understanding of embodied dwelling (Heidegger, 1971) with the objective detachment of the spectatorial gaze (Foucault, 1995), bringing out the problems and tensions between these two perspectives. Thus the mundane and everyday performance of subjectivity is entwined with the mundane performance of surveillance and the inverted relationship to power and control that this suggests. Here culturally normalised landscape practices are inverted, where the surveyed takes the place of the surveyor, questioning how and from where ideas of 'proper conduct' (Matless, 1998) emerge and the roles which various powerful and less powerful actors play in the deployment of power (Foucault, 1995).

## Re-materialising landscape

Here I give an example of an artist, Stephen Cornford, whose work is very much engaged with an embodied material experience of landscape. The work and his discussion of it touch upon the politics of transgression, but first and foremost talk to ideas of the phenomenological body-subject, wrapped into the material world through the intense bodily experience of being in the landscape.

Stephen Cornford's work *Trespassing the Olympic Site* (2006-2008) was the product of a sustained period of trespass between 2006 and 2008. He discusses the work as a response to the compulsory purchase of 500 acres of land that make up the Olympic Park in order to question the realities of public and private space, 'taking literally the notion of it as London's newest park'. The period of his incursions matches that which the blue fence surrounded the site, bracketing the demolition and site readying stage. In the spring of 2008 the blue fence was replaced with an electrified fence, marking the beginning of the construction phase of the development (Cornford, 2012: 35). It also marked the point at which his project came to a natural end.

He describes it as a performance work, which he documented through staged photographs and a retrospective diary of his nighttime incursions. His photographic and textual descriptions of the site are very much rooted in the embodied and material experience of landscape, both in terms of negotiating the physical terrain and the security patrols that monitored the site. His photographs are long exposures of landscapes populated by heavy plant machinery, half demolished buildings, stacks of pipes, scaffolding, piles of rubble and all feature him posing still for the duration of the exposure (figure 6). This is a ruinous landscape, saturated with an atmosphere of adrenalin. His engagement with this landscape exaggerates both its materiality and his own affective response to the dangers this presents - 'It was hard enough just to stand safely in these bundled rods and spikes. I perched awkwardly, hand outstretched for support, and tried to maintain stillness for the full 60 seconds in spite of the horrific images of impaling accidents that ran through my mind' (Powell, 2012: 38). Equally, the intense state of alertness which he maintains so as to avoid being caught, translates into an exhilaration that he sought and which on the last incursion he made he didn't find, 'perhaps on an evening of such easy pickings the adrenalin rush I sought wasn't here; the sprinting for cover, the scaring myself with the sound of a fox's footsteps, the ducking behind pillars' (ibid)



Figure 6: Stephen Cornford, *Trespassing the Olympic Site*, 2006-2008

His landscape performances are active, embodied and affective, in response and sympathy with the landscape he moves through, locating it in a phenomenological landscaping practice. As with many other practitioners who address marginality, his occupation is transitory. There are thirty or sixty second pauses in order to gather light for the long exposure photographs, moments where he attempts to stand motionless, but other than this his performances are defined by movement rather than an arrival at a destination. His visual and textual records of his incursions are kinaesthetic, emphasising a material and embodied process formative of a particular identity as a transgressor, described by intersections between bodily responses of fear and adrenalin, negotiating the physical topography through actions such as climbing, running, jumping and hiding from security patrols, such that 'through living in it, the landscape becomes a part of us, just as we are a part of it' (Ingold, 2000: 191). As the site is demolished and prepared, the site as destination remains resolutely in the future, the Olympic Park. Although his actions attempt to question where the lines are drawn between what is public and private space, it tends more to address the immediate material conditions of transformation rather than casting a light on the politics of that process or its social impacts. This chimes with criticisms that have been made of phenomenology, that in its emphasis upon subjectivity it neglects the effects of power and its material and historical contexts (Wylie, 2009: 180). Equally, as

a demolition site it doesn't lend itself well to questions of the politics of public access that Cornford wishes to address. In this sense OSA's Point of View project for example, which understands landscape as spectatorial gaze, perhaps does more critical work, asking questions more directly about the blue fence as not just a physical boundary to prevent access but also as a visual barrier that wilfully hides the compulsory destruction of a landscape.

The next example is David George's *Dissolution Series* (2009). Whilst his work *Enclosures, Badlands and Borders* (2009) was discussed earlier as marked by its representational nature and its distancing of audience from landscape, here it is discussed in terms of atmosphere and the possibility of bringing the audience into an affective experience of landscape.

David George's *Dissolution Series* (2012) is the product of early morning walks in a misty Lea Valley, East London (figure 7). His relationship to the site as he produces these works is both brief and transitory and imbued with his fondness for this landscape, a way of fictionalising and locating his own experience of it, 'these photographs depict not a real world in any sense, but a place between the real world and a supposed world of photographic imaginations. These images are not a document of Hackney Marshes but rather a document of my affection for this remarkable place' (George,

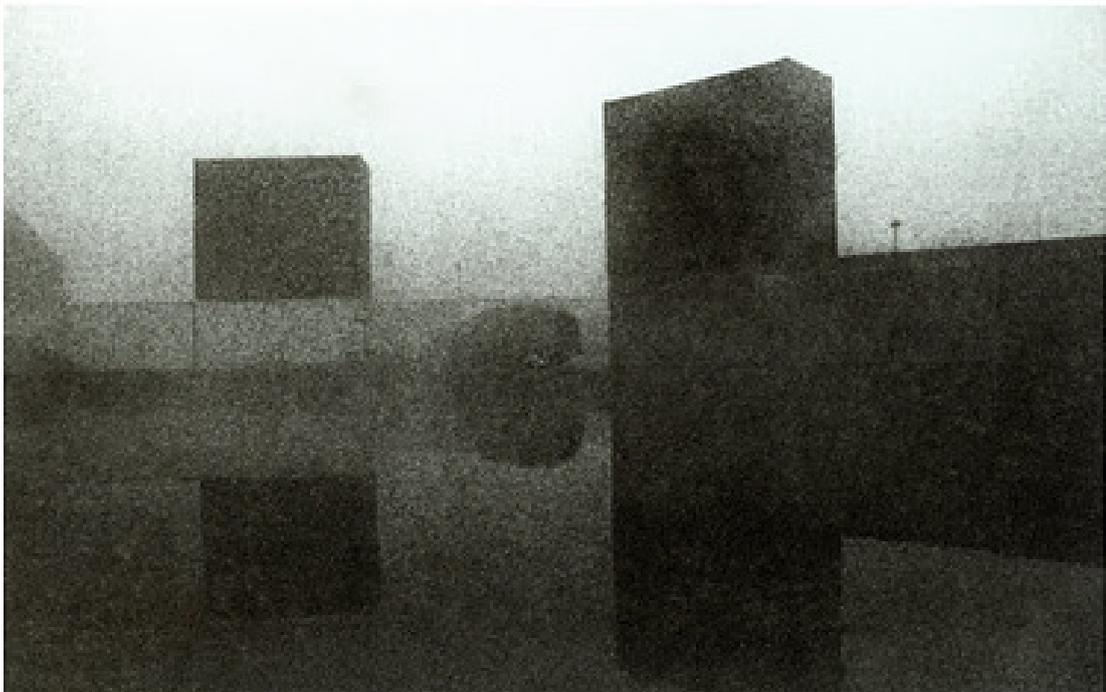


Figure 7: David George, *Dissolution Series*, 2012

2012). The work thus weaves together embodied and affective geographies of landscape (see Anderson, 2009) with a visual form of landscape writing that both archives and fictionalises, although purposefully lacking historical and intellectual context (see Lorimer, 2003).

He shoots onto film and uses platinum printing to produce the final work. Platinum printing is a monochrome process that produces absolutely matt non-reflective prints, with a wide ranging, rich and sensitive tonal range, emphasising depth. They are incredibly resistant to degradation, more so than any other printing process. The photographs are grainy, a field of flecks that pick out the broad outlines of indeterminate architectural forms, pylons, trees, occasionally the lone figures of others he encountered during his walks, dissolving into the air. They are melancholy, spectral images, suggesting narratives, presences and motives that are murky and unknowable. He discusses these photographs in terms of ambiguities between the subjective experience of landscape through memory and the 'objective' cast that tends to accompany photographic images. By producing these ambiguous images as platinum prints their status as archival objects is emphasised, creating non-specific semi-fictional memories which will outlive his own experiences of the landscape.

Here the ambiguity and decontextualisation are used to create photographic images that put an emphasis on the subjective experience of landscape. These images bring the process of photography into the frame and ask questions about the relationship between subject, landscape and the technology of the camera. In one sense they dematerialise the landscape, making what is solid appear vague and misty, but at the same time rematerialise it through an affective register, where it becomes a palpably experienced fiction.

### **Performance and creative engagement/fictionalising/storytelling**

Whilst some practitioners consider their practice as documents and archives of landscapes as they enter periods of transition, others problematise this by wilfully fictionalising or interpreting the 'real' and its material conditions. The relationship between document and fiction has emerged as key to a number of the works discussed here. The work of Hilary Powell discussed here takes this approach, with an emphasis upon the embodied performance of landscape, using video and still photography as a form of narrative re-imagining of what is already materially present.

Hilary Powell's film project *The Games* (2007) is a playful staging of an alternative Olympic games set in the 'wasteland sites' (MacGlip, 2013) that would become the London Olympic Park. The film depicts athletes undertaking sporting events, discus throwing from atop mounds of scrap metal with old hub caps, trampolining on abandoned mattresses in fly-tipped scraps of ground (figure 8). Like the more documentary approaches mentioned earlier her film acts as an archive of a disappearing landscape. However, unlike these approaches, it engages with the material content of the landscape through performance, introducing a strong narrative dimension and offering a critique of the wider social, cultural and political implications of a rapidly and radically changing landscape. Costumes were produced, shorts and vests, and filming was done in February during a window dictated by the availability of funding (from support by Urbis and OSA) and the increasing securitisation of the site. The performances were all guerrilla style incursions into the Olympic sites, no access permissions were sought from the ODA. Through performance the production of this work locates itself in the lived landscapes that she is working with, both in terms of coming into contact with the site as a surveyed and securitised landscape, but also the local social, material and historical context within which it sits, the businesses, cafes and the people who live and work in the area and would soon be relocated (Lorimer, 2003). Temporary changing rooms were set up in the Griddlers Cafe on Carpenter Street, relationships were formed with residents of Clays Lane Housing estate and Manor Park Allotments in the process of asking for permissions to use their locations. Unlike documentary photography, this approach was embedded in the everyday social practices not just of the actors, friends and collaborators involved in producing the work, but also crucially in those of local people.

In relation to her practice Powell describes herself as 'more of a collector or gleaner, gathering and clustering information and materials from diverse sources from local history, myths and conversations to photographic and archival research building and amplifying atmospheres and narratives' (MacGlip, 2013). In this way it engages in a playful and interpretive documenting of landscape through the production of shared narratives and a surreal mythology that is nevertheless engaged with the social, material and historical specificities of local social conditions and circumstance (ibid).

Despite the fictional nature of Powell's work, it is strongly connected to the social and cultural stories of the people who live and work in these landscapes or have been displaced. The work I will discuss next again fictionalises urban margins, but does so without making an attempt to address actual past or present social or cultural



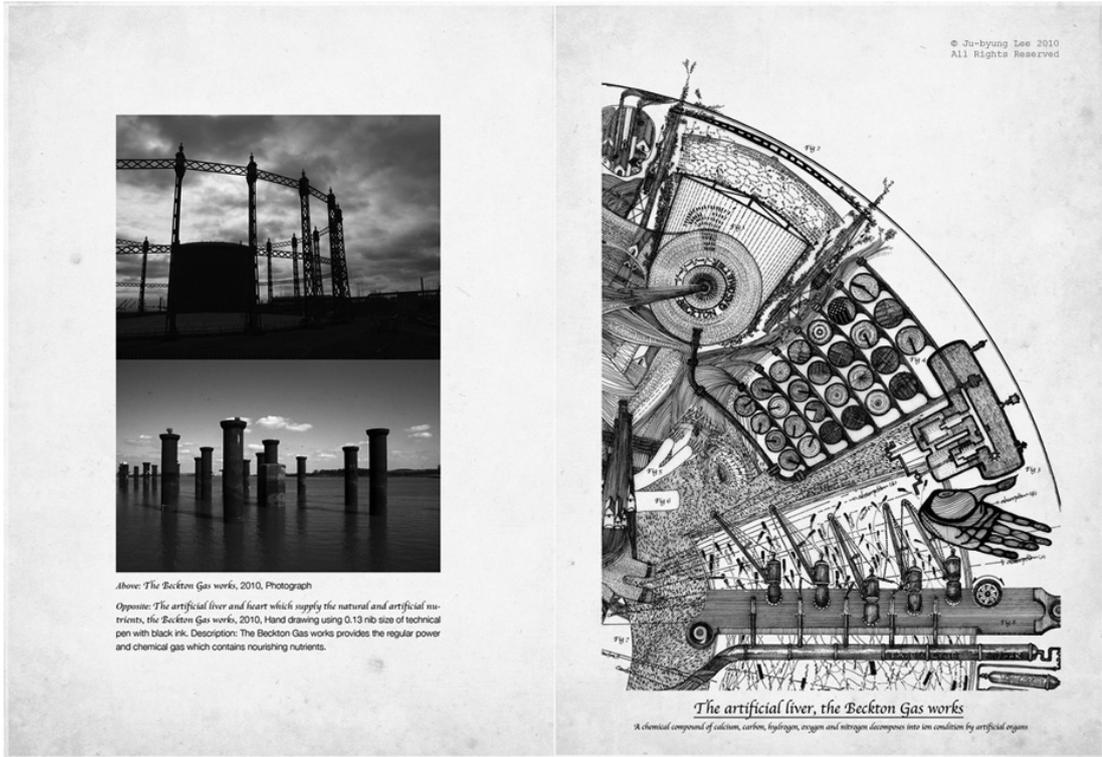
Figure 8: Hilary Powell, *The Games*, 2007

conditions. These offer an entirely different temporal stance towards landscape imaginaries, taking the ambiguity of urban margins as an opportunity to create an imagined future free of the actual past or present of these sites. These are far more speculative landscape imaginaries that emphasise the imaginary over the real. Urban margins and fringe landscapes are often used as sites for architectural investigations in university Architecture departments. For example, the Architectural Association School of Architecture's *Paradise Lost* research cluster 'explores notions of architectural obsolescence', while their past cluster *Urbanism and the Informal City* aimed to 'explore the concept of the 'informal' as a parallel modality that shapes the urban condition' (Architectural Association, 2013a). The morphological complexity of these landscapes creates gaps and islands, a *terrain vague* (de Solà-Morales, 1995) suggestive of a myriad of possibilities, untethered from the usual constraints of site and brief, free if so desired for the exploration of radical imaginaries. This can be seen for example in the responses to RIBA's *Forgotten Spaces* competition (RIBA, 2013), where proposals have ranged from underground bouldering walls in disused tunnels, to mushroom farms, bee houses in small gaps in walls or between buildings.

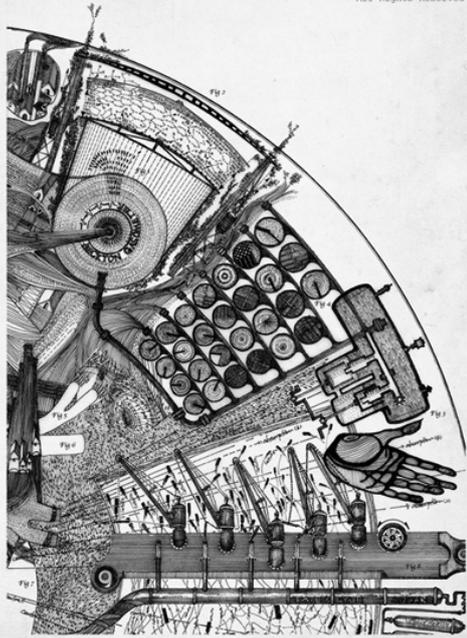
An example from within architecture pedagogy can be found in the Architectural Association's *Unknown Fields Division* summer school (Architectural Association, 2013b). Described as a 'nomadic design studio', these are annual expeditions 'exploring unreal and forgotten landscapes, alien terrains and obsolete ecologies'

(ibid). As with RIBA's *Forgotten Spaces* competition, the landscape is considered as a *tabula rasa* for imaginaries of urban futures, created by the consequences of (in this case) prior technological and environmental conditions. One of the expedition leaders, Liam Young, is founder of the think tank *Tomorrows Thoughts Today* whose self set task is 'exploring the consequences of fantastic, perverse and underrated urbanisms' and developing projects which 'deploy fictional near-future scenarios as critical instruments for instigating debate about the social, architectural and political consequences of emerging biological and technological futures' (*Tomorrows Thoughts Today*, 2013). Thus they visit sites such as the forests of the Chernobyl exclusion zone or the Baikonur Cosmodrome in order to investigate the complex processes of landscape production through technologies and 'nature', the intersections of fringe sites with wider global networks and processes. So, landscape imaginaries attempt to extrapolate the past and present into the future, taking marginal sites as the locus for these creative wanderings but in this case without simply denigrating the current material and cultural conditions to nothing but rather taking them as trajectories into future imaginaries. Rich material and historical terrains are taken for their value as evocations rather than constraints in the development of new marginal landscape imaginaries. Here histories, embodied experience, affective responses and landscape imaginaries are woven together. However, rather than producing landscape through an ongoing material entanglement (Lorimer, 2003), these practices do not seek to disrupt the existing landscape and the relations that it is embedded in, but rather seek to create an imagined coherence through the act of visual and textual storytelling, what Rose described (after Derrida) as 'dreams of presence' (Rose, 2006: 547).

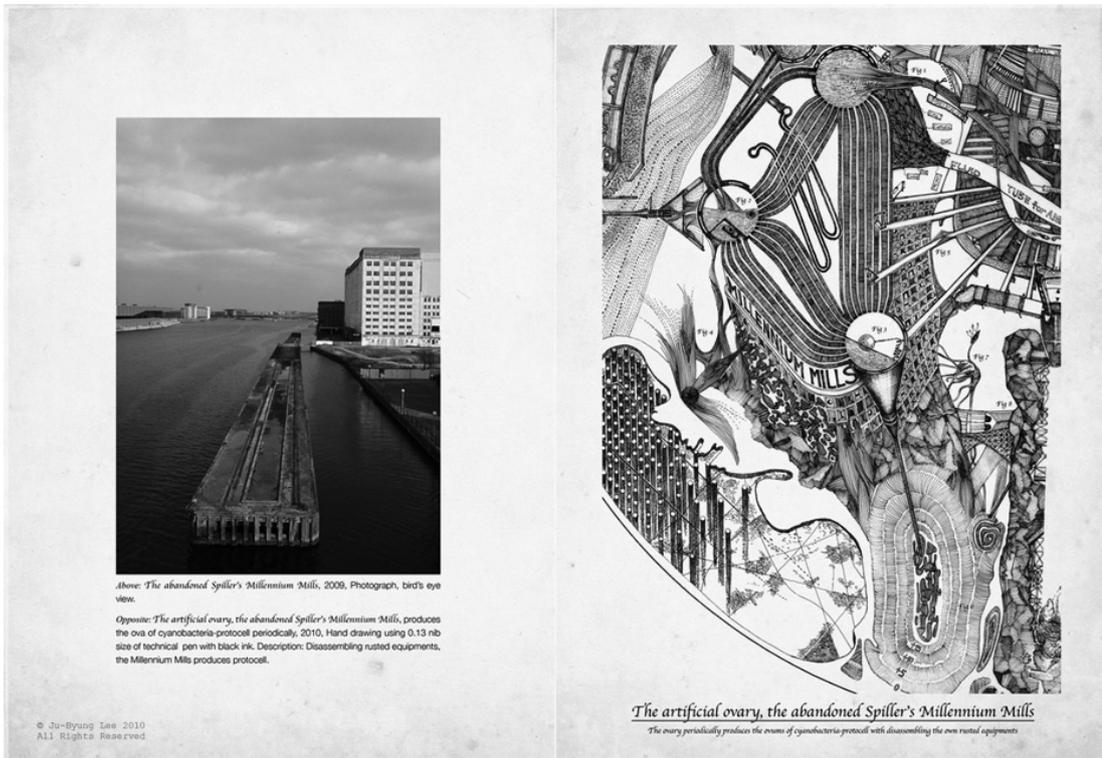
Another example of the fictionalisation of landscape is EAT Collective's *Synthetic Ecology in the East End of London* (2010). This project takes existing material cues as starting points for somewhat surreal imagined trajectories that bring ideas of bioremediation together with somewhat outmoded nineteenth century ideas of the city as a collection of interconnected organs. This project presents a 'fictional documentary of cyanobacteria-protocell's 'synthetic ecology', growing as an architectural first aid kit over 80 years in an abandoned and deteriorated industrial district' (Lee, 2010). It consists of a text and a series of hand rendered drawings that illustrate a process of biotechnological and architectural care and remediation for a future vision of London as a city devastated by flooding wrought by climate change (figure 9). Metaphors of biological metabolism and reproduction are used to knit together ideas of climate change, industrial heritage and biotechnology. The work proposes radical (although entirely fictional) chemical and biological processes



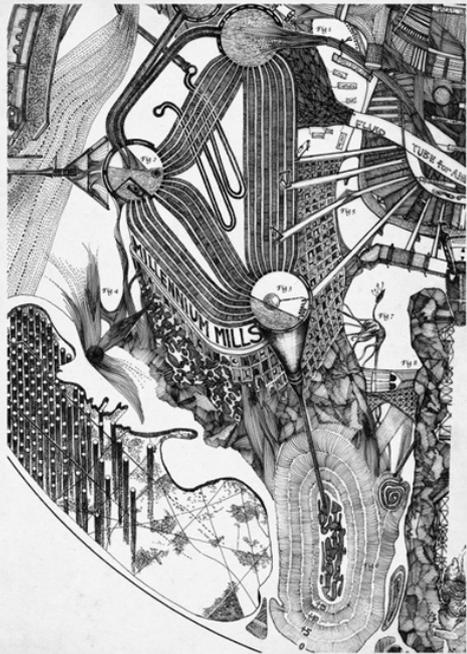
Above: The Beckton Gas works, 2010, Photograph  
 Opposite: The artificial liver and heart which supply the natural and artificial nutrients, the Beckton Gas works, 2010, Hand drawing using 0.13 nib size of technical pen with black ink. Description: The Beckton Gas works provides the regular power and chemical gas which contains nourishing nutrients.



The artificial liver, the Beckton Gas works  
 A chemical compound of calcium, carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and nitrogen decomposes into six conditions by artificial organs



Above: The abandoned Spiller's Millennium Mills, 2009, Photograph, bird's eye view.  
 Opposite: The artificial ovary, the abandoned Spiller's Millennium Mills, produces the ova of cyanobacteria-protocell periodically, 2010, Hand drawing using 0.13 nib size of technical pen with black ink. Description: Disassembling rusted equipments, the Millennium Mills produces protocell.



The artificial ovary, the abandoned Spiller's Millennium Mills  
 The ovary periodically produces the ova of cyanobacteria-protocell with disassembling the own rental equipments

Figure 9: EAT Collective, Ju-Byung Lee, Synthetic Ecology in the East End of London, 2010

to create a balanced ecosystem, disengaged from processes of industrial production and its environmentally damaging by-products. Sited in Silvertown in the Borough of Newham, the project fictionalises a system of interconnected organs, where the Royal Dock acts as uterus, Spillers Mill as ovaries, the Tate and Lyle refinery as the uterus and Beckton Gas works as the lung. The gate of the Royal Docks remains closed until flooding brings cyanobacteria (blue green algae) into the system as sperm. Over an extended period of time this all works together to create a physical architecture, akin to the 'hollow architectural structures of bone marrow', 'regulate the surrounding climatic and biogeochemical conditions as a comfortable state for human life' and to produce 'the nutritional supplement system for human life' (Lee, 2010). Here this inner urban periphery of defunct, derelict (or in the case of the gas works, now demolished) industrial structures is re-imagined as a curative, affording a technological fix to problems created by the types of technologies and industries that once operated there.

These imaginaries reveal the movement of relatively recent developments in biotechnology and their seepage into landscape imaginaries, where the boundaries of the 'organism' become blurred and mutable (Whatmore, 2002: 1). However, although it clearly has affinities with such hybrid geographies, it is nevertheless an anthropocentric view, using the human body as a model for the restorative schema and creating (as one would expect from an architectural discourse) a response to the needs of human habitation, albeit without creating further damage to the environment.

As with many architectural approaches to urban margins, it also points to a discourse of regeneration, but in this case through re-use and recycling. For example he proposes the mature cyanobacteria-protocell (a source of food) as being parasitic on the London brick that was manufactured in this area and of which many of the buildings are constructed. Here, process is engaged with as an imaginary, and doesn't touch the materiality of the landscapes it addresses. Nevertheless, materiality is addressed as a creative mode of thinking/doing landscape imaginaries, through pen and ink drawings and rapid prototyped models. However, these are landscape imaginaries that do not engage with the processes that actually produce the material landscape, but rather, in the vein of the cultural geographies of the 1980s, treat representation and interpretation as the primary site for understanding landscape and the social and cultural relationships that underpin it (Wylie, 2009: 97).

This relationship of urban margins to both remediation and regeneration appears in the work of MUF Architects and a project they worked on at Beckton Alp, East London in 2008. Following the closure of Beckton Gas Works in the late 1960s, a process of land reclamation and remediation was undertaken by the London Docklands Agency, with large stockpiles of waste, earth and rubble being coalesced into two large mounds, which are what is known today as the Beckton Alp. The site contains acids, toxic gases, liquids with low flashpoints and compounds such as cyanide, posing health and environmental risk through physical contact and the leaching of contaminants into the drainage system. To mitigate against this the toxic core was sealed beneath a soil, clay and gravel capping and was then deemed suitable for public use. It was in fact used as a dry ski slope between 1989 and 2001, after which it was fenced off and fell into disuse, although was still used as informal common land by local people, via a breach in the fence.

In 2008 MUF architecture were commissioned by the Channel 4 *Big Art Project* to create a piece of public art for Beckton Alp. MUF's proposal for the site was in fact to do nothing very much to it, but emphasise its already existing role as informal public space through a creative process of research and social engagement. At the core of their project was the social engagement with the local community. For example they occupied a portacabin at the base of the site to facilitate dialogue with the community, organised barbeques for families and a tea party for local scaffolders on the side of the Alp (figure 10). They went on daily expeditions to chat with people, observe occupation and activity on the alp and to collect, catalogue and count various items of rubbish and detritus, tacitly appropriating the role of the objective, rational, Victorian explorer. They would then take these finds and turn them into works of art, hybrid animals and creatures resembling the fetish figures celebrated and collected by Freud and the surrealists. In doing so they bring a psychoanalytical discourse of the repression of sensuality of the material into an understanding of landscape as catalogued material fact, resonating strongly with Gillian Rose's alignment of the landscape gaze with a masculine gaze which celebrates objectivity in order to veil an unacknowledged sensual pleasure in the visual (Rose, 1993). One image they used to promote the project depicts two women stood atop the alp surveying the city beyond. Here, not only is the typically masculine gendered surveying gaze subverted, but also the typical power relation of ownership and domination of landscape. The alp, a site associated with waste, is elevated to one of value, challenging the 'ordered' city beyond. The status of wasteland as 'bad' is shifted into a space of empowerment, emphasising the citizen's power to determine their own relations to the city and their



Figure 10: MUF Architecture, Feral Arcadia, 2008

right to occupy space from a position of strength rather than fear or compliance. These activities all drew attention to the value of this 'wasteland' as a place of enchantment, and an existing and well used public space. Their occupation of this site also questioned gendered understandings of landscape and its relation to public and private space. By occupying and inhabiting this industrial site for an extended period of time they emphasise the right to the city for all genders, challenging normalised assumptions that women cannot expect to feel safe in certain parts of the city, such as these marginal industrial sites (Valentine, 1989). Equally, in overlaying domestic setting, such as cooking and tea parties, upon an industrial setting, again they challenge assumptions about who should feel they have access to these sites and what kind of activities can be expected here and how these activities are gendered.

Again, as discussed earlier, MUF's proposal for the site was in fact to do nothing very much to it. However, one intervention that was proposed was a remediation strategy that they developed through a collaboration with the Plant and Sciences Department at Imperial College, London. They proposed a process of bioremediation, which also acted as a tool for bringing attention to the toxins beneath the surface. They proposed separating surface water run-off from rainfall from leachate by installing a series of rills and pools with reed beds which absorbed toxins from the less toxic run-off and left less water available to penetrate the capping and leaching through the slag heap. Water that does penetrate would be allowed to leach through the heap and would be pumped off at the bottom (using renewable energy sources) and piped back up to the filter beds.

They describe this aspect of the proposal as 'a hybrid landscape of remediation and the sublime, for adventure and the knowledge of risk' (MUF, 2008). They seek to actively engage with end users of the site and bring to their attention both the toxic history of the site and its value as a site of curiosity and play. This aspect of the project is in part motivated by one of the conditions of the commission, which was to provide a remediation strategy for the site. As a realistic remediation strategy this is relatively weak, but its value as an educational tool is clear.

As with EAT collective, although in a more scientifically informed and materially achievable way, they are bringing biotechnologies into an understanding of landscape and its imaginaries. They perhaps are not taking a strong critical position in their understanding of environmental damage or their capacity to address it in any significant way, but are engaging in an educational role and spotlighting environmental

concerns and fixes to a wider public. Thus they engage in a process that aims to produce discourse through material practices that weave together scientific, political and aesthetic concerns (see Matless, 2003).

### **Concluding remarks**

What is clear from this overview of various practices is that there are no easy categorisations. Much of the work discussed overlaps or extends into a multitude of ways of thinking landscape, from the urban margins literature and those of landscape, materiality, performance and embodiment discussed earlier. Many works intersect with multiple discourses, using for example practices reminiscent of Sauer's field studies and combining them with fictional story telling or bio-remediation. Paradigms of the picturesque and the sublime become complicated by concealed political and economic conditions. Essentialising tendencies that split culture and nature or subject and landscape might be countered by bringing more-than-human processes to the fore, such as MUF's bioremediation. Equally, relational art process which challenge binary divisions between landscape and subject are engaged with, again as in MUF's project. Mobility and movement are also a very strong feature of many of these practices and most engage with landscape not as fixed but as mutable and in a process of constant change, aligning these practices more generally with hybrid geographies (Cresswell, 2003).

More broadly however, what emerges is that urban fringes are being considered in landscape terms by artists and architects and that the inherent hybridity of these landscapes creates a multiplicity of responses which, although often intersecting traditional representations of landscape, also brings with it explicit tensions between notions of nature, culture and technology. The autoethnographic and empirical chapters will pick up on these tensions and look at the work and practice of artists who show a sustained and lived commitment to the inner urban fringe landscapes. These chapters will look at the essentialising and anti-essentialising forces that emerge through creative work and practice, both resolving and dissolving distinctions between subject and landscape. The importance of a deep familiarity with the landscape for their practice and the scope of the problematics they address set them apart from many of the artists discussed here.

# Chapter 3

## *Methodologies*

## Chapter 3: Methodologies - interpreting practice

### Geography and creative practice

Geographers have been increasingly engaged with creative practices both as the object of study and as a means of doing research (Hawkins, 2011, 2013; Pinder, 2011; Wylie, 2005). These two approaches have broadly been described by Hawkins as 'dialogues and doings'. Here, dialogues refers to well established practices of interrogating and interpreting artworks themselves and doings to creative methods which give insight into the processes used by creative practitioners in producing work, an embodied, material and performative approach (Hawkins, 2011). The former has a long history, with landscape studies being foundationally connected to the study of landscape art and representations of landscapes (See Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988). The latter, might include using photography or video as research tools, collaborating with artists or actually taking on the role of an artist (see Butler, 2006; Pink, 2001). The recognition of the value and use of creativity in geographic thought has not been limited to doing research but in writing and disseminating academic work (Dewsbury et al, 2002; Wylie, 2002). Journal papers and conference presentations have been considered as themselves 'enactments, neither subjects nor objects, signs or referents, but processual registers of experience' (Dewsbury et al, 2002: 437).

As a practicing artist, these two approaches 'dialogues and doings' are particularly relevant, addressing the challenges and value of bringing ones practice usefully and productively into academic discourse and the research process. It is through this dual lens that the research in the following chapters developed and was conducted. This was the intention of the research project, not right from the outset, but through various experiments and iterations.

I wanted to look closely at the relationship between artist-subject and material landscape in such a way as to balance the speculative, subjective and imaginary experience of self and landscape with observation and analysis. This problem is not a new one, indeed Sauer was grappling with the same issues in the 1920s, as will be discussed later in this chapter. A combination of an autoethnographic study and two empirical chapters is how I chose to address this balance.

The rationale for choosing to use an autoethnography was twofold. Firstly to develop an experiential register, intended to develop a sympathetic relationship

with the artists and landscapes studied in the empirical chapters. Secondly, the autoethnography acted as an organising principle for the subsequent empirical chapters.

The approach that finally emerged brings together an interpretative approach which closely examines artworks and various secondary materials, augmenting this with an embodied, material and experiential register created through my own creative practice and the insights and ways of thinking landscape that this brought about. The following section will further elaborate the reasons I used autoethnography in the research process. This is followed by sections that draw out some of the approaches geographers have taken to interrogate and interpret artworks, including recent use of photography and film and my own use of these media. This is followed by a discussion of writing as creative practice within the academic writing process, and how this informed my autoethnographic study. Finally, the role of photography and film in the autoethnography is discussed.

### **The role and value of autoethnographic practice**

In order to develop a sympathetic experiential register I wanted to use broadly similar practices and landscapes as my research subjects. This entailed working alone, inhabiting or working directly in and with the landscape through tools, in order to produce work that was finished elsewhere (e.g. studio, darkroom, etc) and existed independently of the landscape - work that can be exhibited elsewhere. This approach was born out of my previous experience as an artist, often employing specialist technicians to produce finished pieces of work. For example I produced a series of works that were made with a CNC milling machine and foil faced phenolic foam. Finding someone who could manufacture this work was a slow iterative process, starting with many possibilities and gradually working down to one. In this case, as with others, the basis of this decision is the communication between the technician and myself. It is always quite clear when we are talking the same material and processual language, that we both understand the characteristics, qualities, affordances and limits of both material and manufacturing method. This communication comes about through mutually exclusive experience with materials and processes. They do not necessarily have to be the same materials and processes, more that the underlying understanding of the kinds of questions, problems, solutions, is shared. This notion of a shared material and processual understanding is a key reason for conducting the autoethnography - it gives one access to the embodied practice of others, an

understanding of the kinds of questions, concerns, constraints, problems and solutions that the other is dealing with. Practice and materiality are both a common language and it is through this that I wished to inhabit not just the same landscapes, but the material and process based concerns of the artists I look at in the empirical chapters.

What came out of this process however was not just an experiential register through which to interrogate the work of the case study artists, but also a means of structuring the thesis more broadly. Key trajectories that came out of the autoethnography were porosities between self and landscape, related to scale and temporality. In terms of scale, the imaginaries of the very small came out clearly against the backdrop of these large-scale infrastructural landscapes - the heavy metal pollutants of Beckton Alp or the lead and petroleum of Limmo Peninsula. Similarly, I experienced time as non-linear, jumping around through memory and personal history between childhood and adulthood. The role of autobiographical experiences in the experience of the margin was an important theme that emerged across both case studies. The analysis of the case studies benefited especially from the autoethnographic study, as this brought out forcefully the significance of autobiographical experience in the margin and sensitised me to this in Landy and Gill's work. Another example is the fragmentary and almost imperceptible slice of time I experienced as the black absence of light that the shutter release represents. This brought my attention to the white ground of Landy and the earthy ground of Gill. With Landy, this ground is the white absence of the landscape in his etchings, an absence that is nevertheless implied and present. With Gill, this ground is literally the earth beneath his feet.

Thus important themes emerged that appeared in my work, and became apparent in Landy and Gill's, as will be seen in the empirical chapters. Ways of thinking about the work of Landy and Gill were suggested which may not have otherwise become so readily apparent. The autoethnography played an important role in formulating the kinds of questions I using to interrogate the artists' work.

### **Dialogues - interpreting practice**

The work that this thesis deals with is visual art. Gill's work is photographic, Landy's is paper based and my own autoethnographic practice is photographic and video based. The approach I take to interpreting these works is however focused very firmly upon the practices and processes from which the work emerges, rather than the visual 'meaning' of the work. In this section I'll briefly give some examples of the use of photography and video in geography that have some bearing upon the methods I

use. I will then briefly discuss of Cosgrove and Daniels' visual approach to landscape before moving on to the approaches I use that foreground embodiment and practice.

Looking at photography and film in geography is useful both in terms of its relevance for the interrogation of visual material, and in relation to my own practice with photography and film. In both cases it's important to note that my interrogation of visual material was related not to approaching it as a cultural artefact and situating its content, but rather as a register through which to read the practices which produced it and in particular the relationship between practitioner and material landscape through their practice. Landy's etchings and Gill's photographs are not approached as representations, but as performances of practice. The interpretation of visual material is approached as evidence of the artists' own methods, as a trace, residue or distillate of their embodied, material and imaginative engagements with landscape. So, employing standard visual methods such as compositional analysis, content analysis, semiology, psychoanalysis or discourse analysis for example (Rose, 2001), does not address this kind of qualitative information. The visual in this project is not approached in terms of its visuality, but rather through the movements, gestures and performances of body and the practices from which the image emerged.

The use of photography or video by geographers as a research tool rather than an object of study is thus more relevant to this research project. The embodied register of walking and cycling through a landscape, of using a still or video camera or sound recording equipment was the basis for formulating my approach to the works of Landy and Gill. This embodied register was the means I used, a means of thinking through the body in order to create a interpretive context of materialities of landscapes and tools and the affective atmospheres of landscape practice (see Latham, 2003: 1994). The use of practices such as photography and video as a research tools in geography has become increasingly common (Latham, 2003: 1993; Pink, 2001: 586). However, as Crang notes, much of this work involves the use of photography or film 'to generate data rather than as an aesthetic product' (Crang, 2003: 500). Examples of this are as 'purely illustrative, archival or documentary' (Pink, 2001: 587) or in mixed method ethnographic research as photo-elicitation, walking with video or sound (Pink, 2007; Butler, 2006).

The emphasis for this project is directed at the practice itself rather than its value in eliciting other kinds of data from intersubjective encounter (see Pink, 2001: 587). The film and photographs that I produced can be considered as aesthetic objects,

but this is not the primary focus of analysis, rather it is seen as an integral element of practice. These aesthetic outputs, the photographs and videos, orient intent and it is this orientation and parallel unfolding of practice that is of interest, the performance of practice in time and space (Thrift, 1977). This approach addresses Latham's desire to show 'how reframing research as creative, performative practice allows the researcher to address some novel questions about the cultures of everyday urban experience that more conventional, representationally oriented, methods fail to address adequately' (Latham, 2003: 1994). Although visual approaches to practice based research or research by design are common in the disciplines of art, design or architecture, they are quite rare within geography. There are few examples where photography or video are used to stand on their own rather than as material to be later translated into data and re-presented. One example is Hein, Evans and Jones and Evans creative use of video as a stand-alone means of presenting academic work (Hein et al, 2008).

A second example is Garrett, in his work on urban exploration, using video not just as an ethnographic tool but also as a means of dissemination and engagement (see Garrett, 2011). In the more open-ended context of an experimental workshop, Garrett, Rosa and Prior brought together their skills as videographer, photographer and sound artist to create a short film that excavates 'the material and symbolic remains of Dundee's historic jute industry' (Garrett et al, 2011). This work is a collection of fragments, a visual montage that mirrors the materiality of the dockland area in which it is shot, its wateriness, the industrial ruins and soundscapes that the film depicts. Although they concede that it is a superficial reflection of 'the layers of cultural and industrial death and renewal' (2011: 2), it does mark a shift in focus to practice as the key register and to take the skills of film making, photography and sound recording as primary tools of investigation, seeing through them, rather than with them. This marks a significant difference between using creative practices as a research tool and using creative practice as research. Here photography, video or sound has the potential to become another medium of expression in geography, like the creatively inflected texts of Wylie (Wylie, 2002; 2005). It is an engagement with this mode of enquiry that sits behind my autoethnographic practice, adopting/ returning to the role of an artist and attempting for a time to put aside the real and imagined constraints that disciplinarity can suggest and concentrate on the 'actual processes of learning through our bodies' responses and situations - that is, haptic knowledges' (Crang, 2003: 499). This emphasis upon the practices and embodied experiences involved in image production contrasts with visual approaches that

treat landscape as being first and foremost representations. Cosgrove and Daniels' *Iconography of Landscape* was instrumental in the development of the 'new' cultural geography that emerged in 1980s. This cultural Marxist current in geographic studies of landscape art takes landscape to be both image and symbol, 'a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolising surroundings' (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988: 1). Here, landscape is 'always already a representation' (Wylie, 2009: 68). They do not suggest that landscapes are immaterial but rather that their materialities hide the power relations that produce them. Materialities here can mean those most obviously connected with ideas of representation - the paint on a canvas or the words on a page. Equally however, the earth, stone and vegetation of the built landscape are approached too as representation. All are equally constructed and all equally conceal the true nature of the relations that have produced them. Thus this is a shift from an understanding of materiality as a record of human inscriptions upon the landscape, as with Sauer (1963), to a discursive understanding that interprets landscape as representation in order to reveal its underlying ideological structure. The iconography they refer to in the title refers to 'an iconographic approach' which 'consciously sought to conceptualise pictures as encoded texts to be deciphered by those cognisant of the culture as a whole in which they were produced' (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988: 2).

This is achieved through a close reading of texts, images and material landscapes in order to draw out the underlying social and cultural ideologies, to identify what work these representations are doing in maintaining and reproducing structures of power. These interpretive approaches thus have strong affinities with cultural theories such as semiotics, or the structuralist approaches of Barthes (1993) or Berger (1977). Berger for example interprets a well-known landscape painting by Gainsborough, *Mr and Mrs Andrews* (circa 1750). He first points to a piece Kenneth Clark wrote about this piece, which celebrates Gainsborough's sensitive observation of the landscape, describing it as an 'enchanted work' of 'such love and mastery', evoking a Rousseauian nature. Berger strongly contests this reading, asking questions not only about the content of the image but also the context of its production. He asks 'why did Mr and Mrs Andrews commission a portrait of themselves, with a recognisable landscape of their own land as background?' (Berger, 1977: 107). His answer is that these are landowners who are not enjoying a Rousseauian or naturalistic landscape but who are deriving pleasure from the display of their own 'proprietary attitude towards what surrounds them'. Here, the artist is commissioned for his skill and the 'ability of oil paint to render their land in all its substantiality' (ibid). This brief example illustrates

an approach to interpreting images, which challenges the affect of the artwork on the viewer and seeks rather to explore what wider societal attitudes underlie its production and intent. Thorough examples of this close reading of representations of landscape through a deep understanding of cultural and historical context are found in Cosgrove and Daniels' *The Iconography of Landscape* (1988).

The interpretative work which I undertake in relation to the photographs of Stephen Gill or the etchings of Michael Landy partly reflect this close attention to the artwork, but through a very different context and treatment of the work. I am concerned with interrogating these images not as representations but in order to ask questions about the relationship of the artist-subject to the material landscape through practice. Thus the contextual framing that I apply to close readings of the work is the artists' embodied and material engagement with the landscape, rather than the social and political context within which these works emerge. The artworks are not treated as representations but as material traces of artists' practice. This process was one that looked closely at artworks that were relevant to the study and also, importantly, looked closely at their wider practice, discerning currents that gave context to these. To do this I draw context from secondary sources such as reviews, exhibition brochures, journals, magazines and newspaper articles and interviews, talks and seminars looking at their personal biographies, existing descriptions and interpretations of their work, and how they themselves discuss their work and practice. These helped to develop a framework through which to interpret their kinaesthetic engagement with the landscape, their bodily movements and repetitions and their haptic and visual experience of materiality.

The interpretations I make here do not treat the artworks as a surface of representation that needs to be peeled back in order to reveal the ideological structures that lie beneath. Rather, it is the embodied and experiential movement through the landscape that is used as its point of departure, treating the artworks as material evidence of this movement, and the processes and material practices that accompany it. This then takes some cues from the much earlier field study works of Sauer and Jackson, here treating the artworks as material traces of culture upon landscape but also the more recent post-phenomenologies of Wylie (2005) for example.

So, my interpretation of Gill and Landy's work ask what these traces of the image convey about the artist's praxis. I look closely at what it is they are doing in their practice

and develop arguments about what kind of thinking about self and landscape emerges through this. The artists' work is approached as a trace of material processes of body and landscape, tools and equipment and the bodily experience of these processes. This interrogation draws directly from their artwork, interpreting the physical surfaces, substrates and materials of their work, their use of tools and equipment, how they use the camera or the etching needle for example. The way I approached the artworks was in a sense to reverse engineer them, to reconstruct the processes by which they were made, through information gleaned from archival research and through my own understanding of creative practice. The autoethnographic process played an important role here and kept in mind the importance of small and apparently mundane details. It encouraged an interrogation of the work that comes through the body, that is able to access or acknowledge the role of preconscious actions in producing works, the role of habit or skill, familiarity with equipment and the affective qualities of the materialities of both urban margin and artwork. These are things which can be intentionally covered up by 'finished' works but strongly inform the process by which it is made. My experience of producing artwork is that it is often pre-conscious, where self-reflexivity emerges as the tendency to edit, a hiding, covering up or distracting from the process of making. This is an important aspect of the construction of the work, arriving at a finished artefact, but also something like a covering up of the process of getting there. Thus my approach was to interrogate these processes, and develop an understanding of the ways that they entwine the artist-subject with the urban margin.

Within geography, studies of practices such as walking as creative practice are valuable resources for approaching these questions both as an interpretive framework for the work I am looking at and to contextualise my own autoethnographic practice (see Battista et al, 2005; Butler, 2006; Michael, 2000; Pinder, 2011; Wylie, 2005). Equally, studies of the relationship between the body, landscape and technology are important, for example those relating to cycling, climbing or the mundane technologies of walking boots (Spinney, 2006; Lewis, 2000; Michael, 2000). Looking at practice from this perspective shifts emphasis away from the distancing and objectifying of landscape implicit in the representational account mentioned earlier. This enables geographers to ask questions about the body and everyday practice, bringing a different set of concerns to the interpretation of artworks. Through the work of Francis Alÿs, for example, David Pinder asks questions about the capacity of walking to 'unsettle and bring into question current realities, especially in the context of the regulated, fortified, and surveilled zones of London' (Pinder, 2011:672). Walking

as creative practice gives geographers a different interpretive lens with which to look at landscape, one that can interrogate the artist-subject's first hand relationship to landscape and landscape imaginaries from a 'bottom-up' perspective.

The literatures that were particularly useful in developing my methodological approach were those that moved from 'dialogues' into 'doings', where geographers themselves performed the practice they were researching, whether that be walking, cycling or rock climbing. Walking and cycling are relevant to the artists I study here and as an important part of my autoethnography. Landy walks to find weeds in cracks and verges, Gill walks and cycles his chosen haunts, around Hackney Wick for example, taking photographs. I walked (and mostly cycled) in order to survey and photograph the terrain. This was not only my method for becoming familiar with the fringe landscapes of East London, but also as a means by which to develop an interpretive lens onto the works of Landy and Gill. Walking brings one into a corporeal engagement with an environment where sensations of touch, smell, sight and sound have significant affects upon the walker, their perception of the environment and construction of emotional geographies (Edensor, 2007; Sheller and Urry, 2006: 216). This forms part of a wider recognition in geography of the importance of embodiment and practice in the formation of subjective experience (Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000; Harrison, 2000). This sensory experience and the way in which it colours our perception can also, according to Phillips (2005) be considered in two registers - walking to experience the landscape and walking in order to undertake internal contemplation. The autoethnographic work I undertook, although intending to map the environment on one hand, was also intended as a reflection upon the experience of doing this. These two registers overlap and intermingle. Wylie's account of ascending Glastonbury Tor, offers an example in geography that employs a wilfully subjective experience of landscape in order to address a theoretical argument relating to elevation, ascension and the visible (Wylie, 2002). Similarly, his narration of a single day walking on the south west coast path is subtitled 'narrating self and landscape' (Wylie, 2005). The following section will discuss in more detail close engagement with landscape, starting with field studies and then moving on to walking as an autoethnographic practice. This is followed by a discussion of the relationship between writing and autoethnography in geography.

## Practice as research: field studies

The work of Gill and Landy and my own autoethnographic practice also has some correspondences with the field study and survey methods that were fashionable in geography in the first half of the nineteenth century (Sauer and Jones, 1915; Hoskins, 1975; Jackson, 1984). Indeed Gill has produced a photo-book *A Book of Field Studies* (2005) that catalogues photographs of the rear of billboard signs, and captioned by the marketing copy on the front - *Diamonds are forever* for example. This formulaic repetitive documentation appears as a thread in much of his work. *Off Ground* (2011) for example presents a series of photographs of rocks, brick and concrete missiles picked up off the ground after the London Riots of 2011. *A Series of Disappointments* (2008) shows us a series of screwed up and discarded betting slips picked up from betting shop floor. Landy too has a tendency to use processes of recording and archiving in his work. This is best exemplified in his work *Breakdown* (2001), in which he systematically destroys all of his belongings. The only thing that remains from this process is a written itinerary of everything that was destroyed. This tendency to document is again seen in Landy's *Nourishment*, the work discussed later in the Contaminated Landscapes chapter. This carefully and closely observed series of etchings of weeds are very similar in appearance to botanical drawings. My own work discussed in the autoethnography chapter, is itself structured around a predominantly photographic documentary survey in the field. I spent many hours walking and cycling the fringe landscapes of East London, gaining a familiarity with the topology and material content of this particular landscape and documenting this process through photography but also sound recording and film.

These processes of documenting and surveying share common ground with the field study and surveying methods of Geography. For Sauer 'geographic knowledge rests upon disciplined observation and is a body of inferences drawn from classified and properly correlated observations' (Sauer, 1924: 19). Here, the geographer's role is to both gather close and detailed observation of the landscape and to interpret this. The task of the surveying method was to gather these observations and to do so in a manner that has a 'clearness of purpose, precision of observation, and restricts itself to intensive work' (1924: 20). Elsewhere Sauer gives a comprehensive outline to fieldwork and surveying, providing a list of preparations, field methods and approaches to observation to enable the individual, whether experienced or novice to prepare for fieldwork in almost any region (Sauer and Jones, 1915). Preparations, such as the acquisition of maps, reading the literatures on the area and selecting the best means of transport are solid if prosaic preparations.

I found during my research that these seemingly run of the mill preparations are not just important in setting the scene as it were for creative production, but also are active agents in the creative process. These kinds of preparations are seldom the focus in the discussions of creative practices, yet apparently mundane questions about forms of transport or clothing are significant not just materially in the production of the work but also in the imaginaries which this accompany this (there will be some discussion of this in the empirical chapters).

When discussing the actual methods to be used in the field, Sauer's emphasis is upon close observation through a sustained period of immersion. Much of this observation is related to the materiality of the landscape, and is mainly done visually. Surveying vistas should be sought where 'time should be allowed for reflective observation in the field, especially from lookout points, such as hills or mountain tops' (Sauer and Jones, 1915: 521). He suggests that one should 'carry a camera' and urges one to 'use much care in composition and exposure; views are of as much importance as notes' (1915: 522). Observation should be directed at specific features - land form, drainage, water bodies and their margins, mineral resources, 'natural lines of communication as related to physical barriers and corridors', 'local differentiations of climate' and a 'reconstruction of original vegetative cover' (Sauer, 1924: 26). The scale of observations thus spans the large to the small, from weather systems, topographical features such as 'plain, plateau and mountain' to 'buildings: architecture, materials used, furnishings, condition in which kept' and then down to soils, minerals and native plant life (1924: 524). Although the intent is very different, there is undoubtedly strong use of these kinds of survey methods and systematic interrogation of landscape in the creative practices that I look at, including my own.

There is also a notable divergence from these methods. This is most pronounced in the way in which this familiarity and proximity is interpreted. Sauer was concerned with both the rigour of his results and the value of careful and sensitive subjective interpretation. His systematic approach to field studies is an attempt to create a basis of agreement across the discipline as to what should be observed, what things should be brought into consideration. This will help bring an underlying uniformity to observation such that interpretation counters concerns of excessive subjectivity, asking 'have we not given excessive freedom to temperament, to subjective impression, and in so far have been anti-scientific?' (Sauer, 1924: 21). The approach of the artists I look at is naturally at odds with creating or maintaining such uniformity between different artists' practices. Each works independently of the other, creating very different interpretations of similar landscapes.

Equally, in employing a wilfully subjective autoethnographic account I aim to address this question of subjectivity in academic accounts of landscape. The inclusion of a first person account addresses what Donna Haraway termed the modest witness (Haraway, 1997). The modest witness acknowledges that the researcher, whether conducting qualitative or quantitative research, should always be aware that they cannot adopt the god's eye view that empirical science alludes to, the objectivity that concerned Sauer in the researcher's account of landscape. In Haraway's view, there is no distanced, objective observer, but rather always a human subject observing through human concerns. Similar points have subsequently been made in geography, by Gillian Rose for example, who argued against the myth of geographer explorer, supposedly making objective (visual) observations, a male gaze that hides (and in doing so reveals) its own subjectivity. The subjectivity it hides is one that in fact also experiences the landscape in sensual terms, but hides this behind the apparent a-subjective authority of a supposedly objective gaze (see Wylie, 2009:84). Haraway and Rose argue that the observer that positivist science attempts to posit, a distanced a-subjective emotionless eye, is itself a subjective position aligned to a male gaze.

Subjectivity can be seen in fact to be central to Sauer's work. The context through which interpretations of observations are made is in part founded upon 'getting the view-point of the inhabitants'. One should 'become one of the people; live with them if possible; take part in their activities'. He also guides the field worker to 'interview men (sic) of authority on local affairs, such as county officers, judges' and to 'discount information from real estate agents' (Sauer and Jones, 1915: 521). These activities are largely unimportant in the context of this research project. The work is looking at the production of imaginaries rather than gaining social or economic understanding of a region. I did however regularly meet with an architect, Kevin Logan, who knows this area very well, having a particular interest in what he calls 'fringe urbanism' and also having been involved both in masterplanning projects across the region and walked the area extensively. Logan was collaborating with artist David Cotterrell and involved with various Olympic and Olympic legacy projects in the London Boroughs of Newham and on regeneration and housing schemes at Barking Riverside. He has a personal and professional interest in fringe urbanism, related to infrastructural landscapes, regeneration and an interest in everyday and apparently mundane vernaculars, such as sheds, bins and roadside verges. He has spent much time exploring by foot the urban fringes of East London and has a deep knowledge of those marginal and fragmented environments where major infrastructures, social and industrial decline and future urban imaginaries collide. This was extremely valuable in the early stages

of the research, in sketching out itineraries, places of interest and gaining general background knowledge about the area, its history and the infrastructures that run through it.

A proximity with and close material observation of landscape also forms the basis of J.B.Jackson's work. His work is useful in thinking about the methodologies used here because of the particular emphasis of the observations he makes and their relevance to the work I look at in this thesis. His interest is in the everyday and the vernacular. Like Sauer, he tends to steer away from cities, concentrating on small and often remote American towns, their scrubs and trailer parks, places that tend to be marginalised, out of sight and mind of urban planners and architects. He embraces the material details of daily life in such places, shacks, houses and gardens, roads and signs. His interest is in everyday work and the products of this labour as a valuable form of creative production. He was not looking for aesthetic 'beauty' in landscape, but for an appreciation of the mundane and 'workaday' content that this represents. He writes of the garish roadside 'architecture, shrill signs and insistent lights not as a 'longitudinal slum' but as a kind of 'folk art'' (Meinig, 1979: 217). This interest in everyday creativity also appears to manifest in a desire to apply a creative interpretation to the landscape, with for example 'the use of modern archaeological techniques, the use of aerial photography, above all with the use of more imagination, more speculation we could immensely expand our knowledge of the landscape of the past' (Jackson, 1984: xi). What is interesting and relevant to this project is that much of the observational work is related to the material landscape. For Sauer this was the source material from which one could draw out inferences and understand the landscape, taking these many dissociated fragments of observations and from them revealing the 'interdependence of areal phenomena' (Sauer, 1963: 318). The artists' that I discuss demonstrate many affinities with this style of methodology, particularly the close and in some ways distanced (or distancing) observation of materiality and equally an interest in the vernacular and the mundane. This too forms an important thread in my own practice.

Methodologically, what I am trying to do here then is take elements of Sauer, Jackson's and Hoskins's approach to observing the landscape but orient them towards a very different destination. Whereas these three writers were interested in the relationship between culture and the material landscape, the focus of my study telescopes down to the relationship between the artist-subject and material landscape. Sauer, Hoskins and Jackson's were each professionally invested in balancing rigorous

observational research with their capacity for insightful subjective interpretation. The study I undertake here is concerned precisely with this landscape-subject interaction. Through the lens of this thesis, if I were to study the work of these authors, it would be the relationship of their writing as a form of creative production to the landscape, rather than what it tells us about the nature of the relationship between landscape and culture. It is precisely the idiosyncratic and engaging styles of their writing and interpretation that is of interest here and which forms a strong trajectory between the underlying observational methods described above and recent discussions about the value of open ended expressions of creativity in academia both as method and dissemination. The autoethnographic accounts of Wylie and Lorimer for example are at the contemporary end of this trajectory, interpreting landscape in an openly subjective way. This will be discussed shortly, after I have brought in some of the relevant points along this route which have also have import for the methodologies used in this thesis.

### **Practice as research: walking**

Wylie's accounts of walking are useful contextually when thinking about the methods used in my own autoethnographic practice. Many walking methods focus upon participatory walking and talking with research participants (see Hitching and Jones, 2004; De Leon and Cohen, 2005). Wylie's work here focuses instead upon a solitary walk through the landscape. This is how both my research subjects work and how I too conducted the autoethnography, both in order to align myself to their mode of corporeal experience. This is also a mode of practice, particularly photography, which I am familiar with. Wylie's intentions here are again to explore the value of embodied experience in addressing theoretical questions around 'self-landscape' and 'subject-world relations within cultural geography' (Wylie, 2005: 234). With both these papers there is also a second intention, to explore the value of 'narrative and descriptive writing [...] as creative and critical means of discussing the varied affinities and distanciations of self and landscape' (2005: 234). The paper weaves prose with academic context and theory and does so in the frame of experimentations within geography regarding 'format, narrative and modes of address' (2005: 235). Here Wylie attempts to deploy a 'fragmentary and narrational rather than thematic or schematic structure: the story of a single day's walking' (ibid). I adopted a similar stance with my practice and the writing of the autoethnography, trying to create a collage of the mundane and the revelatory, the prosaic and the surreal, and experiences of both comfort and discomfort. The experience was characterised by fragmentation. As Wylie

points out, there is an existing set of romantic discourses and imaginaries associated with the solitary walking subject, seeking or undergoing 'rhapsodic or epiphanic experiences in the vicinity of a nature explicitly framed by the precepts of sublime aesthetics, a nature at once fearful, awesome and transformative' (2005: 237). Unlike Wylie, the landscapes I am exploring are urban. However, this point still has some force, and there certainly are moments of intensity and perhaps a 'technological sublime' (Nye, 1996). However, the practice I undertook was experienced, as I mentioned above, more commonly as fragmentation and dissolution of distinctions between self and landscape rather than the distinction and distanciations characteristic of the romantic trope.

There are two separate issues here that will be discussed in order. The first issue is related to the character of the originary embodied experience. Wylie's landscape is rural and must to some extent be located within the existing milieu of rural landscape practices and imaginaries. The practices of Landy, Gill and myself are all firmly located in the fringes of the urban landscape and occupy a very different set of imaginaries and accepted or expected behaviours. The second is related to writing style. Like Wylie I adopt a subjective first person account, trying perhaps to push the personal content more intently than Wylie.

For the artist-subjects I study here, their embodied practices are of moving through the margins with and/or through tools and equipment that are used to transform the relationship between landscape and self and the landscape imaginary. As Michael's argues, 'to explore the role of the body in the mediation of relations between humans and the natural environment is, inevitably, to consider the part played by technology' (Michael, 2000: 107). Photographs, drawings, or sound recordings for example, bring one into a conjoined relationship with a camera, a pencil, or as Spinney argues, the bicycle (Spinney, 2004). Spinney argues that the 'embodied rhythms and kinaesthetic sensations of the movement of cycling are constitutive of the character and meanings of particular places' (2004: 709). This was an obtrusive and inescapable focus of my awareness when cycling around east London with a camera. The focus upon exertion, pain, difficulty and frustration, rather than an aesthetic experience is, as I argue later, central to Landy's practice and this was certainly how I experienced my own. Here the bicycle, the bags and equipment were experienced intermittently as 'mechanical technologies that can cause pain, dissolving identity and the relation between human and nature' (Michael, 2000: 115).

This moves well away from a visual understanding of landscape, where tropes of the sublime lie in wait. The focus here rather is to 'uncover the nonreflexive and prerepresentational sensations and experience of doing' (Spinney, 2004: 711), one that 'does not rely on visuality and textuality to impart meaning' (2004: 721). Despite these being artistic practices that produce visual artefacts, the practices involved in their creation are very much concerned with the body's kinaesthetic engagement with both tools and equipment, in the case of Gill and myself, the bicycle and the camera: 'a dialectical relationship emerges where extrasomatic representations are superseded and the immediacy of the sense in the context of achieving a cultural goal comes to the fore to create the meaning of a place' (2004: 712). Spinney's orientation towards the landscape and a methodology of 'careful reflection on one's own movements' was echoed in my own research. Spinney also makes an important point about the cyclist as being not a person but a hybrid subject-object. This entwining between the subject tools and the landscape is considered in the empirical chapters and the autoethnographic experience of being a subject-object was an important reason for choosing this research methodology. In order to access cyclists experience of this Spinney adopted an ethnographic study that involved him cycling Mont Ventoux. It is this creation of a common register of experience through which to understand others that is behind my autoethnography.

### **Practice as research: writing**

The following section will move from this experiential register into what might perhaps be regarded as a more poetic approach to the experience of the imaginary, as seen in Wylie's creative approach to writing for example. Autoethnographies, practice based research and self-reflexive accounts of landscape have become an important touchstone in geographies of art and landscape, particularly where intersections of materiality, embodiment and performance are being considered (Battista et al, 2005; Hawkins, 2011, 2013; Thrift, 2003; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000; Wylie, 2005; Wylie and Lorimer, 2010). The various qualities of a performative approach, such as process, relationality, open-endedness, and event are underpinned by notions of creativity as argued by Deleuze for example (See Thrift 2000: 220). The world is considered as always producing excess, which those working in this vein (around non-representational theory for example) sought to capture (2000: 213). With the turn towards the performative came also questions about appropriate research methods, how to capture this excess, how to present what is outside of presentation. There was a move towards qualitative research as might be expected, but also a call 'to

reframe the research process itself as a kind of performance' (Latham 2003: 1993). As Dewsbury notes the well trodden representational strategies of the social sciences are ill-equipped to deal with 'emotions, passions, and desires, and immaterial matters of spirit, belief, and faith - all forces that move beyond our familiar, (because) denoted world' (Dewsbury, 2003: 1907). Latham and Conradson suggest a 'shift from an empirical mode that is driven by the imperative to denote, to one oriented towards the work of description' (Latham and Conradson 2003: 1903). Key to this is a move away from attempting to 'find explanations that claim to go beyond the event being described' and rather to simply 'present descriptions that are infused with a certain fidelity to what they describe' (ibid). To break away from habits of thought requires 'an ethos of experimentation' and 'an openness in our methods, our ways of thinking, and our ways of writing' (ibid). Discussions of Wylie's work earlier give an example of an attempt to take up this challenge.

One approach which has developed in light of these post-structural and non-representational theories is a critical and simultaneously creative body of landscape writing whose means of dealing with the relationship between self, culture and landscape is at once autobiographical, existential and culturally historical through innovative literary forms. This might be seen also as extending or developing from the much earlier work of Sauer, Hoskins and Jackson, whose work had an important literary dimension and where the way that they wrote about landscape contained an essence of their orientation towards landscape. Equally it can be seen as having threads of landscape-as-text, colonial and travel writings and the performative engagement with landscape talked of earlier. Some of this work sits outside of academia, for example Iain Sinclair's accounts of perambulations in and around London that thread together cultural histories, biographies through an autobiographical encounter with landscape (Sinclair, 2003). Wylie's paper on walking the South West Coast Path is a recent example of this in Cultural Geography (Wylie, 2005). Here he weaves together a post-structural analysis of subject-world, experimentally supplementing landscape with 'texts, bodies, sense and materialities' through the experience of a day's walking along these coastal paths (2005: 246). Less recently, W.G. Sebald's novel *The Rings of Saturn* (1998) is an account of a walking tour of East Anglia which blends documentary and prose fiction, a hybrid text which includes 'travel writing, memoir, photo essay, documentary fiction, magical realism, postmodern pastiche, and cultural-historical fantasy' (Santner, 2006: xiii). Here themes of memory, displacement and the continuity of natural and human histories are considered in an innovative literary form that brings out that tension in landscape between rootedness and movement.

A call for innovation can be seen in the introduction to *Enacting Geographies*, a themed issue of *Geoforum* (Dewsbury et al, 2002). Wylie contributed a creative approach to writing the ascent of Glastonbury Tor (Wylie, 2002). Dewsbury proposes that the collection of papers in this themed issue be treated not just as ‘papers about ‘enacting geographies’, they are themselves enactments’ (Dewsbury, 2002: 437). Again, this is firmly rooted within the context of non-representational theory and the turn towards performativity and embodiment that accompanied it. The stated aims of this collection are to recognise and address the notion that ‘the world is more excessive than we can theorise’ and turn away from a style of academic analysis which seeks to identify underlying structuring principles and instead turn towards ‘a serial logic of the unfinished’ (2002: 438). Thus, there is a call to an intellectual openness and hospitality to new ways of inhabiting academic work as itself performative and expressive, an openness to methodologies and means of dissemination that go beyond traditional approaches to fieldwork, theory and empirical work, to ‘an expanded socio-logic, of mobilising other sources of expression, literature, art, performance, and above all re-articulating what counts as significant. This would be a commitment to a resolute experimentalism’ (2002: 439-440). These concerns run through much of Wylie’s subsequent work on landscape, perhaps most notably in his accounts of ascending Glastonbury Tor and walking the South West Coastal path. For Wylie this expressive performativity comes in the form of an auto-ethnographic creative prose, looking towards authors such as W.G. Sebald or Tim Robinson, woven with landscape theory. These texts attempt to perform their theoretical impetus and perhaps evoke the excess of the world that Wylie and others have pointed to.

My own approach to writing autoethnographic work is perhaps best considered within this context of experimentation, as an attempt to collage theory, narrations of practice and landscape imaginaries. The intention is to create a patchwork of texts, each with a different tone or patina, but where each contextualises and informs the other, a collage which tells a different story when looked at up close than when looked at from a distance. This draws from a number of writers and academics in geography, although perhaps most clearly Wylie who attempts to ‘explore and exemplify the possibilities of deploying a fragmentary narrative rather than thematic or schematic structure’, when narrating the story of a single day’s walking along the South West Coast Path in Cornwall (Wylie, 2005). Other examples are Alphonso Lingis, whom Wylie bases his narrative style upon; Walter Benjamin (1999), W.G. Sebald’s *Rings of Saturn* (1998), a hybrid text that includes ‘travel writing, memoir, photoessay, documentary fiction, magical realism, postmodern pastiche and cultural historical

fantasy' (Satner, 2006: xiii). Other examples might be the artist Robert Smithson, the geographers Sauer, Hoskins and Jackson, and writers such as Iain Sinclair or Nick Papadimitriou. My approach attempts to create a series of episodes of internal clarity that then reconfigure themselves through the contingent relations of each to the other, in sympathy with my own experience of the fragmentary nature of the urban margin.

There have also been criticisms made of the kinds of approach seen in Wylie's work. In reference to the Coastal path walk for example, Mark Blacksell is critical of a focus that 'seems to be overly self-centred and introspective and, thus, omits some crucial elements of what it is that influences the appreciation of such a walk' (Blacksell: 2005, 518). The influences Blacksell refers to are for example the role of memory, literary and historical references, the particular ideologies and ideals (the National Trust) involved in the manufacture and manipulation of these landscapes and the politics of access to the countryside. Wylie defends his position as an intentional attempt to 'sidestep some common interpretive contexts' and emphasise an understanding of landscape which lets us 'dapple between interiority and exteriority, perception and materiality', where writing is a means of 'supplementing and making strange' the landscape contexts which Blacksell refers to (Wylie, 2005). This point is raised by Tim Cresswell (Merriman et al 2008: 195) who admires the poetic prose of those geographers writing in this vein, but asks whether such writing makes it difficult to 'intervene in the text'. Blacksell's concern regarding the a-historical and a-political nature of research within these contexts is also mirrored by Cresswell, who asks how it can engage with the politics of difference and the politics of power. The accusation of a lack of historical and political engagement are common to phenomenologically inflected analysis and those born out of the flatter ontologies of actor network theory and non-representational theories (Merriman et al, 2008: 193). Responses to this have been to ask if perhaps we need to reconsider the political from the ground up, asking 'are our tools for understanding power still appropriate? Or do we have to re-think what politics is now?' (Rose in Merriman et al, 2008: 208). A call to a politics of affect is one response to this (see Thrift 2003). Wylie points to Bennett (2001), Massumi (2002) and Connolly (2002) as theorists who are working this through (see Wylie in Merriman et al 2008: 207).

## **The use of photography and film in the autoethnography**

The approach to writing taken in the autoethnographic chapter is augmented with a series of photographs which are dispersed throughout the text. The photographs that accompany the text are uncaptioned, as will be discussed shortly, and which reflects the way that I experienced these landscapes as a photographer. This experience was characterised particularly through the material qualities of the landscape and through a non-narrative, non-linear understanding of temporality. The latter is dealt with in more detail in the autoethnography chapter.

First and foremost the photographs are presented in this way with the intention of mirroring the way I encountered the landscape, as spontaneously presenting itself, often in surprising ways, always uncaptioned. I wished to avoid applying arbitrary categories and contexts that were not present in the experience of the landscape. I also wished to avoid fitting the photograph (and by implication the audience) into wider historical narratives and narratives of place, leaving them rather as fragments available to the viewer as untethered images. Captions are often used to locate photographs, to explain them and reduce their spatial and temporal ambiguity. The simple addition of place names or descriptions for example, locates the image within existing narratives of history and place, overlaying the authority of an apparently objective description upon the image. An example to illustrate this point is the series of photographs by Chris Dorley-Brown discussed earlier. These are presented as photographic documents, precisely captioned with descriptions of time and place, before and after images showing the same urban landscape from the same position, separated by five, ten, maybe twenty years. It is precisely this objective documentary quality of the photograph that I wish to avoid.

Without the contextualising force of the caption, the material qualities of the landscape are allowed to presence themselves through the still image. Like Gill, I want the landscape to speak for itself as it were and to present a collaboration or co-creation between self, camera and landscape. My intention is to set the text and the images as complementary, such that they do not reference one another directly, but rather create an ambiguous contextual frameworks for one another. In this way the text and images can remain active participants, constantly in interplay with one another through the reader/viewer and never tied to an authorial narrative. The reader/viewer is asked to participate, to make connections between image and text, to find links that were never intentionally present and engage in the production of

a landscape imaginary. On one hand this is intended to be playful, but equally this process corresponds to my experience of traveling through and photographing these landscapes. These are themselves uncaptioned landscapes, they are not labeled and identified for consumption in the same way as the normative city. There are signs here, but generally direct and prosaic. They are often communicated in the more direct language of boundary and the body - razor wire, security fencing, CCTV, directions, warnings against trespass, of possible death hazard and the occasional red neon euphemism appealing directly to unanchored bodies that might be passing by. There is a material language that engages the body, on one hand choreographing its movement whether by channelling or challenging, on the other hand by giving the experience of landscape a constantly changing texture, from cobble stones to dust, dirt and mud. Thus the photographs present the viewer with both signifiers that communicate kinaesthetically to the body and the texture and substance of the material world, the patina and dirt. They are intended then to engage not just the visual sense but also to activate the sense of smell, touch, taste even. This synaesthetic aspect of the photograph will be discussed further in the chapter discussing Stephen Gill's work.

The photographs in the text perform a different function to those in the film. In the text they are allowed to breathe as an index to texture and movement, as negative images of the body. In the film they function as gaps and fragments, ungraspable and point more forcibly towards a non-narrative understanding of time. The film is intended to complement the materiality conjured by the photographs in the text, but also to point towards the experience and perception of moving through the landscape as one of constant interplay between smooth movement and fragmentary, jolting movement. The process of producing the film was also more laboured than the still images, requiring a lot of time collating photographs and video clips and choreographing them together. The myriad of photographs and short video clips was treated almost as a musical composition, a split screen where each of the two frames talk to one another, one a torrent of barely perceptible still images, the other calm fluid or flowing movement.

The soundtrack used in the film is a field recording which was made in the lighthouse at Trinity Buoy Wharf of a one thousand year long piece of music composed by Jem Finer. This is a piece of music was, like the photographs, encountered and taken directly from the landscape I was exploring. Above the resonant harmonics of the Tibetan singing bowls, one can occasionally hear the screech of the DLR or

the drone of an aircraft from city airport taking off. These infrastructures play a key role in the autoethnographic chapter and this was a reason for choosing this as the soundtrack. Its status as a field recording was also important to me.

I had made numerous other field recordings of infrastructure and wildlife, but this one in particular made allusions to timescales that sat outside of direct human experience. From a creative perspective this resonated strongly with the imaginaries of materiality and process that emerged during the autoethnography, the multiple temporalities which became so evident during this process. The singing bowls themselves operate on resonant frequencies measured in Hertz, whereas the piece of music repeats at a frequency of 1000 years. To ensure the piece of music plays to completion, a trust of custodians has been set up to attempt to anticipate, address and maneuver around the potential disruptions of regeneration, natural disaster, war or the collapse of society that such long time scales must deal with. Thus the very processes of fragmentation and economic change that have been formative of the marginal landscapes I am interested in, also offers the most appropriate dwelling place for a project that is intent on persisting for a millennia. This emphasises the temporal qualities of the margins, their dampening of and disconnection from the rhythms of everyday human activity, and the prevalence of non-human biological processes and rhythms and the technical rhythms of infrastructures of transportation and movement of raw materialism gas, electricity, communications and waste.

More generally, both the practice of making the photographs and film were central to the autoethnographic research process and in communicating elements of this to the reader. Thus the practice of making the photographs and film were intended to develop the sensory and subjective register discussed here, whereas their presence in the thesis is intended as a device to communicate my own experiences without trying to close down the possibilities for interpretation by the audience. These issues are discussed in more detail in the following chapter. The presentation of the photographic and film work here has not, at the point of writing, been extended beyond the thesis itself - neither the film nor the photos have been shown publicly. This is on the surface a distinct difference between the Gill's and Landy's and my own work. Gill and Landy produce work that is promoted, reproduced and distributed within the context of gallery systems, and this pulls it along a certain trajectory. The work I produced in the course of creating this thesis does however operate in a similar way - the thesis itself and the work produced for it are similarly destined for a system of distribution and consumption within an academic context. Thus, the work here is

not simply the photographs and the film, but the thesis itself in the context of the production of knowledge within academia. This is the invisible thread that pulls the work along as its being produced.

### **Concluding remarks - blurring the boundary between artist and geographer**

In this final section I will discuss the indistinctions that emerge between researcher and research subject when interpreting artworks through the lens of practice and embodiment and the value of this for the methodological framework. The emphasis upon embodied experience over a masterful and objectifying Cartesian eye has been echoed in interpretations of installation art for example, where the body is used 'as a research instrument' (Hawkins, 2010: 321). Here there is a foregrounding of 'performance, process, sensation and experience' (2010: 323) which contrasts with accounts of the centrality of vision in approaches to landscape art, discussed for example by Cosgrove (1984) and Daniels (1993). This approach, termed by Wylie as 'ways of seeing' (2009) is strongly aligned to art historical readings of landscape art. This emphasis upon the 'scopic regime' (Rose, 2001: 6) is problematised and augmented by immersive accounts 'often focused around poetic unfoldings of subject and landscape' such as those of Wylie in his narration of walking the South West Coast Path (Wylie, 2005). The trajectory here, from Cosgrove and Daniels' interpretation of visual representation to Wylie's phenomenological and post-phenomenological narratives of enfoldings between self and landscape, are mirrored in the discourses that have developed around installation art from the 1960s to the present day, moving from representational understandings which create a distance between audience and artwork to relational understandings which understand there to be a co-productive relationship between artist, audience and artwork (Hawkins, 2010: 324). Vision is understood here as having moved away from the disembodied gaze of the Cartesian subject to an active and immersive looking which is thoroughly entwined with the fullness of bodily experience and equally, is embedded within the cultural and historical frames of reference held by the subject. Thus, this is an embodied looking that is culturally situated, and moves away from the 'primordial state of sensory innocence' (2010: 324) that is risked by a purely sensory account.

# Chapter 4

## *Uncanny Landscapes*

## Chapter 4: **Uncanny Landscapes**

This chapter is the first of the three empirical studies and offers an autoethnographic discussion of marginal urban landscapes from my own perspective as a creative practitioner. Here I will discuss the landscapes and the photographic and video practices which culminated in a short video piece *Point/Vector* (2012), which is included as a DVD with this thesis or can be viewed at <http://vimeo.com/33499419>. Through my practice as a photographer and video maker moving through these urban transects I will draw out a correspondence between material landscape and the creative subject through the body, memory and imagination. I will be asking, from a first person perspective, how the artist-subject and the material landscape together both create and collapse distinctions between one another.

The account developed here brings together a photographic field study, drawing from the work of Sauer and Jackson and a creative interpretation of this embodied encounter, drawing from the post-phenomenologies of Wylie and Lorimer (Jackson, 1997; Lorimer, 2003; Sauer, 1924; Wylie, 2005). As such, it combines descriptive observation and photographic documentation, with narration and perhaps more creative approaches to writing. The final text takes a collage like form, which is intended to resemble the fragmentary nature of the urban margins, which were explored, and the jarring way in which they often unfurled. This text is also interspersed with some of the photographs I took throughout the study. These are captioned only where referred directly to in the text, and are otherwise presented in an open relation to the text.

The focus of the study is particularly upon the embodied registers of photographic practice. I will be looking at the specific qualities of movement in and through the landscape that photographing these urban margins inscribes, and in particular the relation between the experience of movement and gesture as an interplay of fluidity and interruption. Through this I will ask how the notion of an 'urban margin' can be considered as a particular type of encounter between artist-subject and the material landscape where the narrative flow of experience is constantly challenged and fragmented. This encounter is one of ambiguity and collapse between a 'real' and 'imaginary' sense of self and landscape. This ambiguity is discussed through Freud's essay *The Uncanny* (Freud, 2003 [1919]) which itself sits somewhere between document and fiction, an essay which 'is and is not psychoanalytical, is and is not literary criticism, is and is not literary' (Royle, 2003: 14). The Uncanny is where the

capacity to know becomes uncertain, what Royle refers to as ‘a crisis of the proper’, where the real and the fictional come to occupy the same experiential register (Royle, 2003: 1). I also use Freud’s psychoanalytic work relating to trauma and repression, and in particular his concept of the ‘screen memory’ or ‘mnemic memory’. These are banal photograph like memories that spontaneously emerge and act as a cover for an underlying traumatic memory (Freud, 1962 [1899]). I draw too from related ideas on photography and trauma developed by photography theorist Ulrich Baer, in particular how he connects the photographic instant to subjective experience. Here he understands personal histories as experienced not as narrative flow but as a series of apparently unconnected events, more like rainfall: ‘for uncounted numbers of individuals, significant parts of life are not experienced in sequence but as explosive bursts of isolated events’ (Baer, 2005: 6). The experience of moving through these urban margins was one of constant interplay between fluid movement and abrupt interruption. This oscillation between smooth movement and abrupt halt suggested the content and structure of *Point/Vector*. This short video that will be discussed next was produced a few months after the autoethnographic experience of landscape itself took place and is an attempt to communicate some aspects of this experience, particularly in relation to Baer’s discussions of photography.

### **Point / Vector (2012)**

The autoethnography was conducted over a period of four months in 2011 and 2012. I explored and photographically documented a large swathe of East London’s infrastructural landscape running through Hackney, Newham, Barking and Dagenham, drawing out a visual vernacular of incidental space. I travelled by bicycle always starting out from Hackney Marshes and moving south down the Lea Valley, and over time moving further east along the Thames (See figure 11). Using aerial photographs, I had created an itinerary of small islands of land that looked empty, undeveloped or cut off by infrastructure and then attempted to reach them. Each journey had such a goal, to go out into this landscape and try to reach one of these pockets or islands and photographically record what I encountered on the way. Destinations included Beckton Alp, a spoil heap and informal commons left over from the now long gone Beckton gas works; a naked expanse of concrete where the Ford Dagenham plant once stood and an abandoned park in Creekmouth, overgrown with wildflowers and overlooked by flood defences. The journey to these various locations was more the focus of the research than the arrival there, and it was on the journey that most of the photographs were made. These trips were often convoluted and counter-

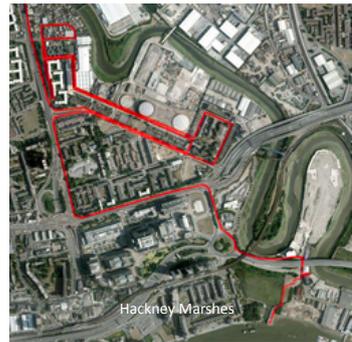
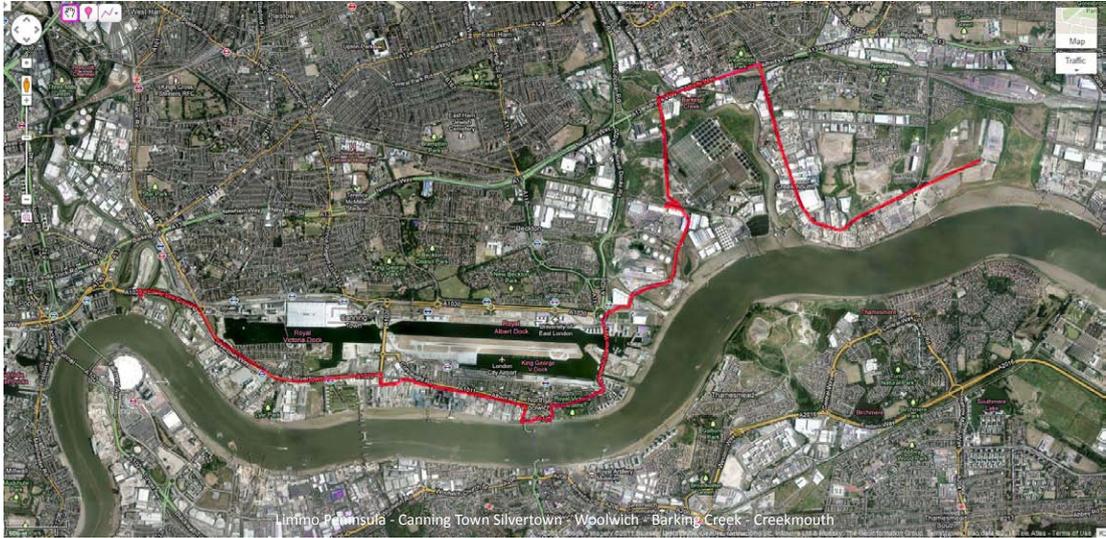


Figure 11: Indication of the routes taken through East London

intuitive, building up over repeated journeys an embodied knowledge of the detailed topography of the landscape, the tunnels, undercuts, gaps in fences and undergrowth and informal paths beaten across overgrown wasteland. These landscapes are forcefully material, constantly asserting themselves as both obstacle and texture, giving a sense of friction, of the body being pushed against the urban fabric.

The early journeys through the Lea Valley were characterised by vivid entwinements of urban nature and infrastructure. Later journeys exploring areas around Canning Town, Silvertown, Woolwich, Barking and Dagenham evoked an entirely different atmosphere, saturated by invisible surveillance and tinged with paranoia and an unsettling sense of a slippage or dissipation of identity. This was accompanied by the spontaneous emergence of early childhood memories, moments in which I could see myself as if watching from elsewhere. These memories were banal still images, almost like memories of photographs, and saturated with a powerful and unsettling uncanniness. This was compounded several months later when I came across Freud's descriptions of mnemonic memories and Baer's theories of trauma and photography. To find experiences that had seemed personal and idiosyncratic described, characterised and theorised elsewhere, drove home an uncertainty about the nature and location of identity.

At the end of this period I had a collection of some 3000 photographs and several hours of video and sound recordings that I used to make a 2 1/2 minute film. My overall experience of this process had been one of both movements that connected together fragments of experience and material landscape. Through this experience I had begun to think of the actual photographs I had taken as gaps in experience and memory, where the body holds still, anticipating the momentary darkness as the shutter releases, where what is perceived is replaced by what is mechanically recorded. The photograph is in fact precisely that which was not visible in that moment. So, the many thousands of photographs I had taken were becoming moments of slippage which took one out of the environment, perhaps only for a brief millisecond, but during that millisecond the nature of subjectivity is transformed. On one hand one stops remembering through the immediacy of the body and starts to remember through the proxy of the photographic image. This is something I will come back to later when discussing the experience of moving through and photographing the landscape. When putting the video together this conception of the photograph led me to think that the way to deal with this image, which functioned as a memory of something that was never perceived, was to disrupt its potential to be perceived. I took all 3,000

images and made them into a stop frame animation, a 25 frames per second torrent of images where no single image can be considered or consciously registered, but each image is nevertheless made present and leaves an echo. This visual fragmentation of the static photographic instant was intended to return the photographic instant back to being precisely that, experienced as a fraction of a moment that cannot be grasped coherently. Equally, this represented 3,000 moments where my movement through the landscape was interrupted and I became static. The stop/start nature of cycling and photographing is echoed in sympathy with the embodied experience of landscape that the photographs themselves do not convey. The photographs as still images in fact rather convey the opposite, a quietness, a moment of pause where the landscape's fictional emptiness can breathe. These many images represent less than a few seconds of exposure time during near on eighty hours spent in the landscape. Yet the image dominates, the gap in experience becomes the memory, the record of the whole experience. I have no memory of these individual moments, yet I am unable to forget them.

This torrent of unintelligibly brief images is displayed as on one half of a split screen. The other half shows video footage spliced together as modulated flows and pauses, intended to be almost musical in its visual composition. Many of the visual motifs and practices that became clear in hindsight had an uncanny character - reflections and physical doubles, telepathy (the doubling of one's thoughts in another), a compulsion to repeat certain actions or movements, an ambiguity between animate and inanimate (See Freud, 2003 [1919]). There are hallucinatory reflections of the city, video footage taken during a day where I found myself compelled to travel backwards and forwards between Stratford and Beckton on the DLR (Docklands Light Railway), from midday and sunset. There was footage of water dancing on concrete, reflected from the Lea Navigation, an aeroplane slowly cutting its way across a bright washed out sky. I had field recordings of a pylon overwhelmed by starlings, a vibrant synergy of flocking birdsong and the hum of electricity. I wanted to again mirror these two faces of the same landscape, the infrastructures that facilitate flows and circuits of movement and the stuttering, fragmented islands of space and time that are left in their wake. The audio track that I finally used is one that I made of a single recording of the sound installation *Longplayer* (Jem Finer, 1999), housed in a lighthouse on Trinity Buoy Wharf. This is a musical composition of Tibetan singing bowls, mechanically produced through a series of simple rules that will repeat once every thousand years. It has been playing since 31 December 1999 and will begin to repeat the cycle starting on the same date in 2999. Its continued survival is overseen by a trust that ensures

there are custodians to maintain it over the coming centuries. Above its resonating harmonics, the occasional aeroplane from city airport can be heard passing overhead and the DLR screeching on its rails as it heads past on its way to Canary Wharf.

This doubling of the split screen also mirrors two distinctly different experiences of the landscape as uncanny, one a vibrant uncanny, the other a more sombre and unsettling one. Royle discusses the multiple shadings of the uncanny, that it is not necessarily related to the gruesome or terrible, but can equally relate to ‘something strangely beautiful, bordering on ecstasy, or eerily reminding us of something, like Déjà vu’ (Royle, 2003: 2). This broadly describes the character of these two different types of experience I had. In the first half of the study, around the Lea Valley, there was a very lively, embodied and material sense of self and landscape. Here the entanglements of urban nature and infrastructure, camera and bicycle had a strong influence upon my real and imaginative experience of the landscape. Here a degree of playful intention, purposefully fictionalising the landscape, creating a photographic archive but one that was selective in its visual and conceptual framing of the landscape. In the second set of journeys around Woolwich and Creekmouth, the atmosphere that developed was darker, marked by a sense of being authored or played by the landscape, of being alien to oneself and experiencing a profound uncertainty between the real and the imaginary.

The remainder of the chapter will discuss the actual practices and movements through landscape from which this piece of work emerged. The focus here is upon the relationship between creative-subject and the urban margins, drawing out the various distinctions and indistinction between self and landscape that I experienced. This will be done through referring the practice back to the uncanny rubrics of doubling and repetition (Freud, 2003 [1919]; Jentsch, 1906; Royle, 2003; Vidler, 1994), Freud’s ‘screen memories’ (Freud, 1962 [1899]; Rendell, 2010; Iverson, 2007; Baer, 2005) and geographies that explore the subject-landscape relationship through embodied movement (Lorimer, 2003; Spinney, 2006; Wylie, 2005; Lewis, 2000; Michael, 2000).

### **Two landscapes: from Limmo Peninsula into Creekmouth**

The area I documented is defined by the flows of physical infrastructure and the splintered moments of land that emerge around them, those fragments, gaps and islands that are left in their wake. I selected a broad swathe of East London, stretching from Hackney Marshes along the Lea Navigation towards the Thames. This then

carries on along the north bank of the Thames from Silvertown and Canning Town, Woolwich, Beckton, across Creekmouth and into Barking and Dagenham. This region of the city is inscribed and cut through with major infrastructures, both contemporary and historical, from arterial road links to electricity, sewerage, flood defences, rail, air, landfill and the legacy of the Beckton gas works and Ford Dagenham. The Northern Outfall Sewer and Greenway, Beckton Alp, the DLR, City Airport, the Lea Navigation, Barking power station, the Royal Albert and Victoria Docks, the Thames, the A12 and A13 all tumble across one another, creating a labyrinth of negative spaces, a topography which is invisible on maps and can only be understood by foot. There are also extremely large areas of undeveloped land, much of it on the cusp of development or in the early stages, such as Barking Riverside. A number of these sites are used regularly as locations by the film and music industry, such as Millennium Mill in Silvertown, which also became temporary Olympic site during the 2012 games. The old site of Beckton Gas Works was used as the set for Full Metal Jacket, for example, Kubrick's celebrated film about the Vietnam War. The first Big Brother house was built nestled amongst tributaries of the River Lea, on a piece of wasteland overlooked by gas towers in Three Mills in Bromley-on-Bow.

These kinds of urban landscapes, fragmented by infrastructure, have formed an important part of my everyday life as an artist for many years. I learnt through experience that the confluences of major infrastructures offer the gaps in the city where cheap studio spaces can be negotiated and where materials and ideas can be found. The linear flows that inscribe them are also linear boundaries, shadowed by hybrid spaces where one can be certain to find the unexpected, ad-hoc and opportunistic, whether human, plant, animal or otherwise. One day one might wander through an abandoned dock, the air coloured by cascading scales as someone practices saxophone beneath a concrete viaduct. Another day one might come across a Hindu shrine cable tied to a railway fence, deep in a cul-de-sac of vine weed, a home made bench, vegetable beds and a barrow seemingly radiating out as offerings from its many blue arms. Weeks later, nearby but somehow very distant in time and space, one might find oneself lost in a labyrinth of muddy gorse, and a sudden multitude of semi-naked men popping up all around from behind bushes. These pockets and islands are disconnected from the circuits of the city that shadow them, moments where time and space are qualitatively different from the homogenising impulses that create the popular imaginaries of the metropolis.

The experience of travelling through these landscapes was one of various movements and disruptions that contributed to what I came to understand as its uncanny nature. I spent perhaps 80 hours spread over 10 excursions in total walking, cycling and documenting. In the following sections I describe this in more detail, dividing the discussion into the two distinctly different experiences of the uncanny. As discussed earlier, one was characterised by a vibrancy and a foregrounding of the relationship of the body to the material landscapes, the other by a much more affective and unsettling experience, where my sense of self was disrupted. These two different experiences are discussed in the following two sections under the rubrics of two sites, *Limmo Peninsula* and *Creekmouth*. These headings refer not only to these specific destinations but also to the wider journeys in the surrounding areas. Limmo Peninsula is in the lower Lea Valley, and refers to journeys from Hackney Marshes to Limmo Peninsula and beyond to Leamouth (see figure 11). Creekmouth is the region where Barking Creek meets the Thames. Here I discuss journeys around a broad swathe of land on the North bank of the Thames, roughly from Millennium Mills in Silvertown to Creekmouth and Barking Riverside (see figure 11).

### **Limmo Peninsula - a vibrant uncanny**

One of my earlier exploratory trips set out from the Lea Navigation where it passes underneath Lea Bridge Road. My intent here was simply to travel south until I hit a double loop in the river in Canning Town, close to the Thames (see figure 12). This loop, already an uncanny doppelganger, once housed canning factories for tinned food, a compact overflowing shanty town of corrugated iron filling all available space on this relatively small tear drop of land. A second teardrop had been the site of an iron foundry, coal wharf and boat yard. At this stage this route was unfamiliar to me and although seemingly fairly straightforward on the map, revealed itself to be very convoluted and difficult to navigate in reality. The Lea Navigation winds and eventually splits at Limehouse, branching off to the Limehouse Cut and continuing on as the Lea.

In order to get to the loop that I was aiming for one has to cross the Lea, navigating around the A12 and various other physical infrastructures that make an easy reading of the land impossible. The route required much backtracking, fruitless dead ends before finding the convoluted route that led to the final 'destination'. The physically fragmented nature of the land revealed to me that there was in fact only one very convoluted route through, which can only be discovered by trial and error on the ground. Having a bicycle was extremely useful in discovering this route, as long detours that had to be retraced were less frustrating and time consuming than they would have been by foot. These detours and dead ends were also the source of many of the photographs I took. Thus the physical terrain presented itself

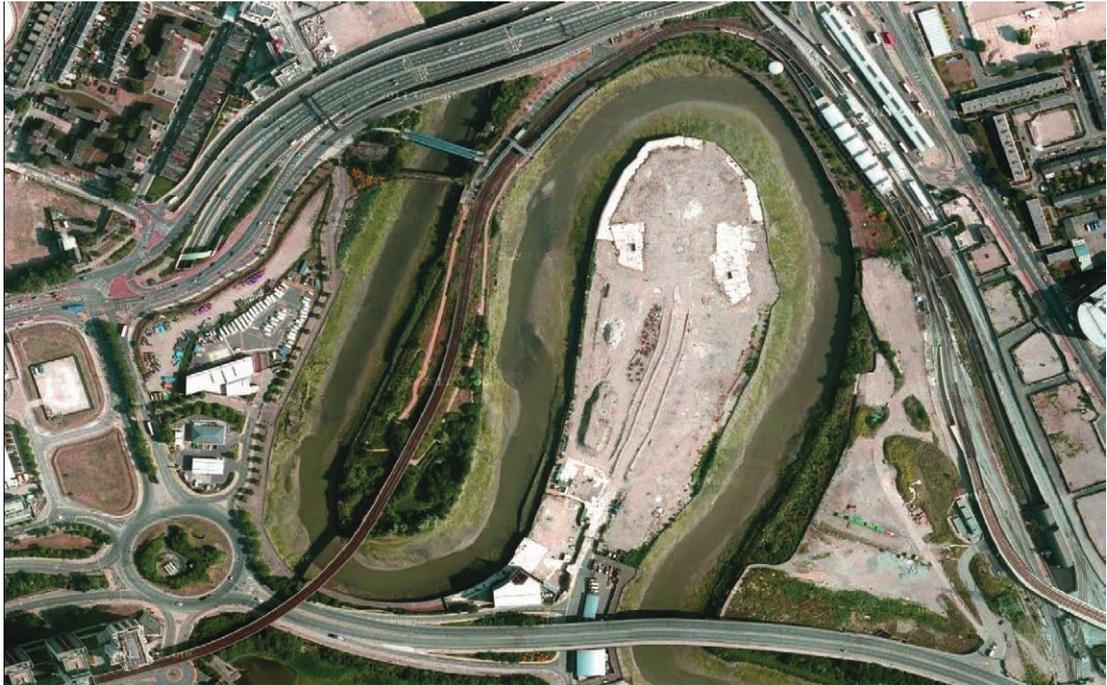
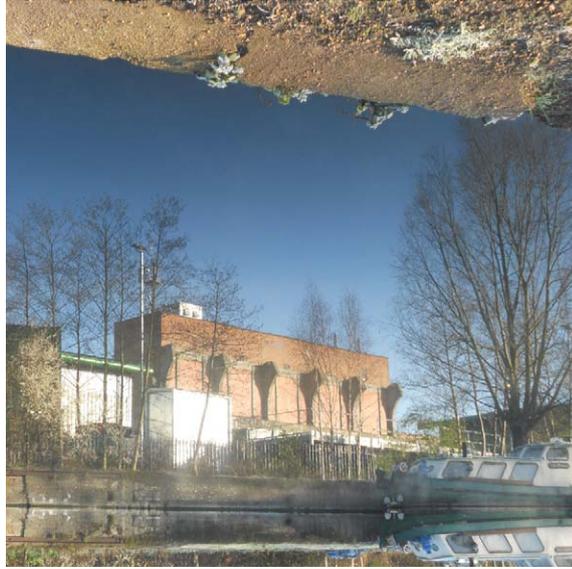


Figure 12: Limmo and Leamouth Peninsula

not as an easy flow, but a choppy experience of stopping and starting, retracing which was further interrupted by the sights and sounds which presented themselves and compelled me to stop and take a photograph or make a short sound recording. The topology of the landscape appears complex, with many routes leading through it and out of it. However, many of these routes are either dead ends or loops leading one back to where one started. There is in fact really only one route along the Lea from Hackney to Limmo Peninsula. This gives the sense that one is constantly making spontaneous decisions to go this way or that and yet always ending up back at the same place.

This involuntary repetition was frustrating and even when one realised the reason for it, it gave the impression that one was being directed against one's will. In his essay, *The Uncanny* Freud notes that 'this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds an uncanny atmosphere...forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable where otherwise we should have spoken of chance only' (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 11). The impression that the landscape is directing one against one's will is of course countered by rational thought. This is precisely the point at which the idea of the uncanny can insert itself, as a slippage between an inert and lifeless material world and a material world with agency and directedness. To inhabit this point however usually requires a certain openness to uncertainty and perhaps fiction, and this was my intent here as photographer. One might believe that the landscape is not a conscious force with intent, but still wish to 'acknowledge that which refuses to dissolve completely into the milieu of human knowledge' (Bennett, 2010: 3).



## Compulsion to repeat

The DLR runs backwards and forwards between Stratford to Beckton, taking a graceful concrete arc over Limmo Peninsula. After having explored the area by bike and on foot I decided to get some video footage from the train. My plan was to join the train at Pudding Lane and travel to Beckton, shooting the movement along the track from the front or rear and across the city from the side. Then I would leave at Beckton and take a walk up to Beckton Alp. When I joined the train though and started shooting, I found that the light was such that the reflections of the city in the windows overlaid the view out of the windows, and it became very difficult to distinguish one from the other. This made quite atmospheric footage, creating a constantly shifting, almost delirious skyline that could be read as both real and fictional. The effect was not so powerful when just looking out of the window, but was much more compelling when recorded through the lens of the video camera. This wilful fictionalisation or making strange that is enabled by technology is a creative strategy that I have often used with both video and photography. As Freud observes, 'there are a great many more means of creating uncanny effects in fiction than there are in real life' (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 17).

This choice of shot was a chance encounter, something found and made into an aesthetic decision, a wilful construction of ambiguity. However, rather than travelling to Beckton and getting off, I found myself staying on the train, which then travels back the way it came to Beckton. I did this journey six or seven times, until the light had faded and no more footage could be shot. This was not intentional, but rather something more like a compulsion driven by a desire to get another shot, and then another, ad infinitum. I often find this when taking photographs, the feeling that the camera and the landscape is choreographing the body as much, if not more, than the body choreographing the camera and landscape.

Here there was a sense of being driven pre-consciously rather than by thought and as such inhabiting rather than occupying the trio of body, landscape and camera. Ingold refers to this as a 'taskscape', where we perceive temporality 'not as spectators but as participants, in the very performance of our tasks' (Ingold, 2000: 196). Here, the familiarity of the camera and the way one positions oneself towards the environment was, not an act of distanced spectatorship but in Ingold's terms, a 'taskscape' which 'exists only so long as people are actually engaged in the activities of dwelling' (2000: 197). This is how I often experience being in the field with a camera, a feeling of

being entwined, attentive to and at ease with the landscape. This sense of being 'at home' in an unfamiliar place seems contradictory and at odds with mobile nature of this kind of work and the apparently empty or banal nature of the subject matter. The act of using the camera to 'make strange' the landscape is however, I would argue, an imaginative act of dwelling, and 'it is within the context of this attentive involvement in the landscape that the human imagination gets to work in fashioning ideas about it' (2000: 207). Though this attentive involvement the unfamiliar (as a material landscape) is made familiar (through a set of landscape practices) even as it is wilfully made strange and re-imagined. Freud's uncanny here presents itself in reverse, the strange becoming familiar, while the familiar (i.e. practice) makes rather than is made strange. There is a continuum here rather than a distancing between myself as creative-subject and the landscape I am moving through, and that porosity is related to dwelling. As Ingold argues, the 'forms people build, whether in the imagination or on the ground, arise within the current of their involved activity, in the specific relational context of their practical engagement with their surroundings' (2000: 186). This applies, I would argue, equally to the activities of building an archive or a film as it does to building a house to shelter in.

### **Interrupting smooth movement**

Now returning to the bicycle and the camera and the Lower Lea Valley. The materiality of the ground itself presented numerous and constantly changing textures, surfaces and obstacles that the bicycle was required to navigate. These were experienced as vibration, sound, visual boundary and physical acts, from cycling along smooth ground to attempting to cycle up a steep cobbled and rutted bridge (designed to force cyclists to dismount), to abandoning cycling altogether and getting off to carry the bike up steps, over walls or fences. Adding to this embodied very physical engagement with the ground through the bicycle was the sound of the wheels over different surfaces. A close engagement was emerging with the landscape through the repetitions and rhythms of the bike and the obstacles and actions that disrupt this, what Ingold calls 'a *taskscape* [...] a pattern of dwelling activities' (Ingold, 2000: 154). Jackson, in the context of hot-rodders, discusses this sense of participation in the landscape, a 'heightened alertness to surrounding conditions .. a responsiveness - almost an intimacy - with a more spacious, a less tangible aspect of nature' (Jackson, 1997: 205).

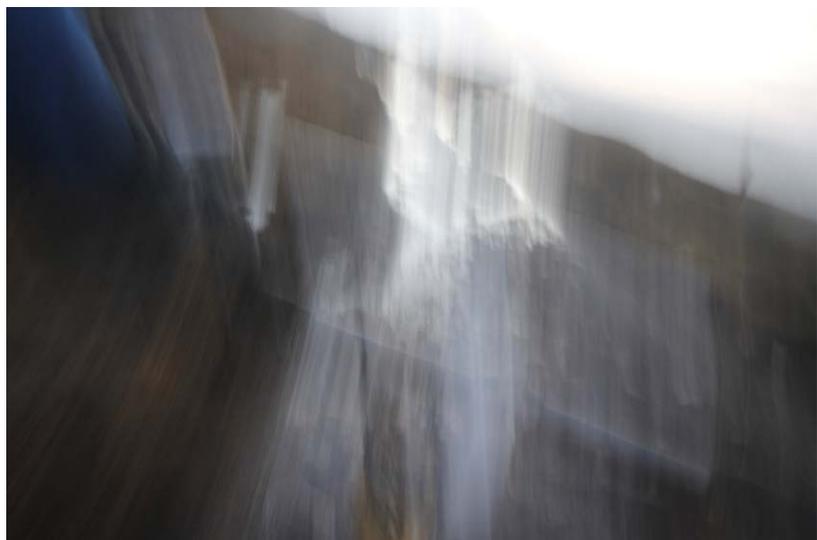
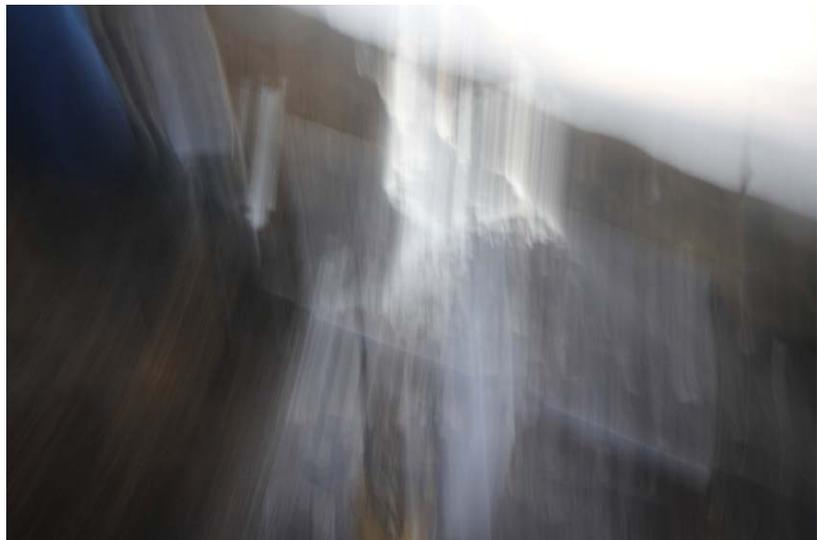
This was a very haptic and aural experience of materiality of the ground, its ruts and texture, an experience not divorced in any way from the visual dimension but



giving this a much closer sense of participation, of not looking at the landscape but inhabiting a body in the landscape. This was more apparent when the surfaces were relatively unobstructive and gave a physical experience of the ground when one was not physically lifting or carrying the bicycle over obstacles. Attempting to cycle up the cobbled bridge and having to jump off and push the bike takes one's focus away from an aural experience, but then upon descending the other side over the cobbles there is a thump thump thump of the wheels over the rutted bumps and then the crisp continuous crunch of gravel as I rejoin the path, followed by a staccato rumble of the wheels as I pass over a planked walkway, then a return to a deeper more interrupted crunch as this gives way to a rougher compacted path. Turning a corner and then exerting oneself to climb a steep concrete ramp, the awareness of sound disappears once more. Thus there is a sense of continuous abrupt change both in focus between the visual, the aural and the physical experience of exertion.

This gamut of frequent change was a source not just of the embodied experience of movement but also the imaginative experience of the landscape. Feeling such direct connection with the materiality of the ground was a source of ideas and ways of thinking the world - maybe attaching the contact microphone to the bicycle frame and mapping movement through vibration or thinking in terms of the various scales of fragmentation which were at work in these landscapes, physical fragmentations which became internalised. This relationship of materiality to the imaginary was not one of the real to a contemplative abstraction of landscape but was rather a further inhabitation of it, where the landscape 'is not so much the object as 'the homeland' of our thoughts' (Ingold, 2000: 207).

In approaching landscape with a camera, a microphone, a bicycle, a waterproof jacket, a tripod, programmable shutter release, one is already anticipating (imagining) a particular perceptual stance and performance towards being in a material landscape, a particular moving through. Take any one of these things away and the imaginary and the performance is different. Each adds its own set of possibilities, its own set of anticipations, imaginary projections of self into landscape, anticipations of the kinds of things, weather, sights, one may encounter, and not least what one might return with. The performance does not thus start and stop with presence of physical self in the physical landscape, but stretches before and after, before as imagined possibility, after as a reflection, a set of afterimages, photographs, sounds, a computer to process, crop, an internet connection to upload to a server and share images online.



These changes in the material qualities of the surfaces I was traversing were interrupted still further by the equipment I was carrying. I'd imagined beforehand a synergy between self, tools and landscape, a smooth uninterrupted flow that might be called skill or technique. I spent a lot of time before starting the autoethnography making careful decisions about equipment that would facilitate such a smooth movement through the landscape gathering images as I went; a camera that was not too cumbersome, a small tripod, a bag that could carry everything easily, a bike that would get me about quickly. These smooth flows of course didn't flow smoothly when put into practice. The disruptions, discomforts and interruptions that the equipment introduces fragment and break up these imaginaries of fluidity, displacing them but in doing so creating new ideas and imaginaries. Thus the disruptive effect of the camera on the fluid movement of cycling went some way to creating the experience of the photograph as gaps in the narrative flow of experience.

Cycling down a cobbled bridge or clambering up steps without this extra equipment is something I would usually experience as a fluid controlled set of gestures, where the established synergy with the bicycle plays out smoothly. However, with a camera swinging around one's neck and a tripod slung across one's shoulder, this introduces a set of discordant physical variables into this relationship, introducing a trepidation and discomfort into the process. The camera swings and bounces painfully against one's chest, one has to be careful that it doesn't strike the handlebars if one leans forward to drop off a concrete slab, the tripod bag swings inadvertently around to one's front, constricting movement and putting one off balance. Slinging it awkwardly back over one's shoulder becomes a regular and annoying routine (which, in later trips, lead me to abandon the tripod bag and attach the tripod to the side of the rucksack). The usual jumps and manoeuvres I would use to negotiate obstacles are restricted for fear of damaging equipment or hurting myself. I found a great deal of frustration in this process, a constant adjusting and readjusting of the loads I was carrying, which although not particularly heavy, were a surprisingly strong impediment to my normal gestural range and freedom of movement. These mundane annoyances and frustrations jolt the landscape out of aesthetic consideration and bring it close to the body.

These apparently mundane observations are often left invisible in discussions of the practice of photography, but as Michael's notes, 'these obvious 'invisible' technologies [...] are pivotal in shaping everyday life, and do so often through the body' (Michael, 2000: 108). In his paper on walking boots Michael argues that on one hand walking boots facilitate a sublime experience of landscape, as they afford

the wearer a smooth, unintrusive walking experience, 'screening out, the little discomforts that arise in the moment-by-moment contact between bodies and local nature, so that the grander connections between human mind and sublime nature can be uninterruptedly accomplished (Michael, 2000: 110). This is in contrast to the experience here, where each technology had its own affordances and associated 'taskscape' but these do not run at all smoothly together. In Michael's words 'the affordances of technologies - their functions - are, like those that inhere in taskscapes, contestable' (Michael, 2000: 112). The camera, the bicycle, the bag, the tripod, work together when the bike is leant against a wall, the camera is on the tripod and the bag is hanging over the handlebars of the bike. They do not work so well when I am on the bike and all these things are on me. This jostling interruption of experience with frustrations and discomforts helps to 'unmake the world' (Scarry, 1985). Any hopes for a smooth narrative flow are disrupted and broken into fragments which replicate, fractal like, the constantly changing texture of the ground I am moving over, the jostling awkwardness of cycling with this equipment and the topologically fragmented and divided landscape I am trying to pick my way through. The possibility of the kind of sublime experience Michael refers to is remote, as the constant jolts puncture any possibility of an uninterrupted flow of experience or detached gaze. One is constantly brought back to participation rather than abstract contemplation.

Finally and importantly, the actual act of taking photographs was itself disruptive to a fluid and flowing embodied experience. I found that I was constantly pulled by views, structures, reflections and material artefacts that compelled me to stop and take a photograph. I find this visual experience of the landscape to be very particular to travelling with a camera. The simple act of carrying the camera puts me in a particular attitude towards the landscape, where I imaginatively see through the lens of the camera, seeing in terms of framing, light and shadow, composition and my previous body of photographic work, a set of experiences and subsequent success or failure of the image. All this informs how and what one photographs. This is not something I choose or set out to do, it is simply what happens. If I am travelling with friends I will often leave the camera at home or take very few photographs to avoid this. This orientation towards the landscape is visual, it is impelled by image making. The capacity of the camera to make images however creates, as with the affordances and disruptions of the bicycle, a particular taskscape. The camera brings with it its own orientations which are not 'vectors of the personal psyche, emotion or intent', but a pre-conscious 'seeing-with, or sensible becoming, in which distinctive articulations of viewer and viewed, for example, precipitate and unfold' (Wylie, 2005: 243). When travelling with a camera I feel that the landscape is framing me as I try to frame it.

Wylie uses Lingis to illustrate a similar point, describing the affect of bringing a red rose into a bedroom:

*'Even as it surfaces as a property inherent in a thing, this red also plays across the room; the red of the roses intensifies the green of the leaves, bleaches the whiteness of the sheets of the bed, rouges the cheeks of our friend in the bed...this red would not be the red it is if it did not mould surfaces with a certain grain and elasticity and quilt depth with a particular spongy density...a colour...sends forth a wave which brings other colours into relief and solicits their approach, lays open a field of possibility and materialises a wave of duration. A tone is not an event localised in time...it extends a specific kind of duration in a space it opens' (Lingis, 1998: 28-29).*

The 'registers of affect and precept' that Lingis is pointing to are palpably sensed and unfold through my experience of making photographs. Here the camera is the rose which 'lays open a field of possibility and materialises a wave of duration' (Lingis, 1998). I experience this as a collapse of distinction between the materiality of the urban margin, my embodied experience and the experience of landscape imaginaries. The very frustrations and interruptions that are brought out by the assemblage of bicycle, camera and so on, do not emphasise distinctions between body, camera, landscape as might be expected but rather create an experience where real and imaginary bump together, collide and coincide in an uncanny fashion. It was precisely these physical, material and embodied disruptions, frustrations and annoyances that became key to the various trips I undertook and informed my thinking about the nature and purpose of photography as a landscape practice.

### **Confusing the animate with the inanimate**

When close to the Limmo Peninsula loop that was the destination, the terrain became particularly complex to navigate. The area is defined by the loop of the river, visually cut off by the elevated expressway of the A13 and cut across by the DLR's smooth concrete viaduct. In trying to navigate my way through this maze of infrastructures I came across a stalled building project, a large office block with a green wall planted across the entire surface of two sides. This stunning wall was already showing signs of deterioration due to lack of maintenance (and when I returned to this site recently, it was entirely dead).

This was indicative of a more general entwinement of nature with technology (here building technology), which is a dominant feature of the Lower Lee Valley. This

thought was compounded when I finally made it through the maze and found myself descending a set of concrete steps and onto a concrete ramp onto the first loop 'island', ensigned 'Bow Creek Eco Park'. Upon entering the first thing that I noticed was a sign on a pole reading 'pollution control valve.' Bow Creek Ecology Park is a heavily polluted piece of land that was once the site of an iron works, shipyard and coal wharf which has been transformed into a 'wildlife haven' (Lee Valley, 2011). The entire Lee Valley is in fact heavily polluted, the Lee itself being one of the most polluted rivers in London (Thames21, 2014). Everywhere there is a real and notional entwinement of the man made and the 'natural', from the scale of infrastructures to the molecular composition of soil or water.

This reinforced the thoughts I had been having about scale and the experience of the landscape through the visual, haptic and aural. My physical and imaginative experience of the landscape was becoming entwined at scales that were both within and beyond the sensory. The nanoscale chemistries of soil and water, petroleum leached into the ground sit next to the infrastructures that span the city and push out pre-urban imaginaries, the circadian rhythms of night and day. The very small in particular was coming into view and had a strong influence on the subsequent direction of the wider research project, particularly in relation to Stephen Gill's work. This was further reinforced by a later trip to Beckton Alp, a spoil heap produced by the now demolished Beckton Gas Works, which has become an informal urban commons, slowly remediating through its repopulation with a succession of bio-remediating plant species. The experience of travelling through the landscape making photographic images was creating an imaginary that burrowed down into scales that it could not record. This was an experience that imagined a molecular entwinement of the self with the landscape, where the 'non-humanity that flows around but also through humans' was foregrounded (Bennett, 2004: 349). At these small scales, the difficulties in making distinctions between living and non-living matter were becoming apparent.

Jentsch locates the uncanny precisely at this point of uncertainty between living and non-living, the 'doubt as to whether an apparently living being is animate and conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may in fact be animate' (Jentsch, 1906: 11). To illustrate this he discusses Hoffmann's uncanny short story *Der Sandmann* (2010 [1816]) in order to develop this argument. *Der Sandmann* tells the story of a young man, Nathaniel, and his fixation upon a childhood story about the Sandman, a creature who stole the eyes of children to feed its young. This intricately woven





story creates ambiguities about Nathaniel's mental well-being, about the distinction between the Sandman and a friend of his fathers, the lawyer Coppelius. Later this ambiguity becomes one between Coppelius and an itinerant optician Giuseppe Coppola, who may perhaps be returning as the Sandman. The ambiguities portrayed in Nathaniel's experience of his world are mirrored by the ambiguity that the reader feels, equally unable to distinguish between the fact or fiction of Nathaniel's world. The layering of ambiguities moves between the rational, irrational and the libidinal, finding its centre upon Nathaniel's falling in love with Olympia, the 'daughter' of his university professor and making him forget his childhood sweetheart to whom he is betrothed. Olympia herself personifies ambiguity and we are left feeling uncertain as to whether she is human or automaton. To Nathaniel however, there is no doubt she is very real. When it is revealed to him (and us) that she is in fact an automaton and that he had been the victim of a wager between Coppola and his professor, he becomes (unambiguously) insane. The story ends with Nathaniel's suicide but leaves the reader with a sense of uncertainty in our sense of self and our ability to distinguish between fact and fiction, animate and inanimate, the familiar and the unknown. It is this uncertainty of the relationship between oneself and one's perception of the environment that underlies the aesthetic of the uncanny and perhaps an experience of uncanniness, if indeed this is indeed an experience we have outside of fiction.



## Into Creekmouth

These initial forays into the Lea Valley just discussed were imbued with an atmosphere of discovery, excitement and the entwinement of the man-made and the natural, of various human and material agents co-creating the landscape. This was in stark contrast to the experiences of travelling through Silvertown, Woolwich and Barking Creek (figure 13). These trips tended to be along long wide and generally empty roads and pavements. The aural dimension receded into the monotonous whirr of the sound of bicycle tyres upon tarmac or concrete. Here the bicycle and equipment became less of a hindrance and took on another aspect. These areas are much more urban than those of the Lea Valley, dominated by buildings (both industrial and residential), infrastructure and vehicles. Vegetation is sparse, rarely growing wild and uncontrolled, perhaps buddleia trees sprouting from buildings, weeds pushing up between gaps in paving slabs or sparse patches of weeds and grasses on scrubby patches of ground. The mood here was profoundly different, one of exposure and desolation, imbued with a degree of fear and attentiveness to who else is in the environment. Here I experienced the camera equipment as a visual sign. On one hand it communicated to others (and myself) my reason for being there. On the other I experienced it as a vulnerability, a desirable object that made me feel nervous and conscious of my solitude and exposure. There was a pervading sense of paranoia that was mitigated by curiosity and a desire to visually document and map. This was further compounded by the interactions I experienced around Silvertown and the area near City Airport. The feeling was in contrast the trips around the Lee, where I had felt 'at home'. Here I felt to be distinctly not at home.

Freud explored the use of the word 'das unheimliche' (very roughly translated as un-homely) to develop his ideas on the uncanny, and went into some detail regarding the etymology of the word. On the face of it *das unheimliche* is simply the opposite of *das heimliche* that can be translated as *homely*. However, *das heimliche* is more complex than it first appears. The shades of its *homely* meaning generally orbit somewhere in the vicinity of this definition which Freud cites: 'intimate, friendly, comfortable; the enjoyment of quiet content, etc., arousing a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within four walls of his house' (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 3). But there are other meanings that are clearly connected to this but very different in tone. To use one of Freud's examples: 'concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others' (ibid). Thus the word *das heimliche* is itself quite ambiguous, having two meanings that are not contradictory but are very



Figure 13: Creekmouth

different. The latter in fact appears to have a very similar meaning to its 'opposite' *das unheimliche* (translated as uncanny). This complex relationship between *das heimliche* and *das unheimliche* is explicitly illuminated by Schelling when he writes 'unheimlich is the name of everything that ought to have remained ... secret and hidden but has come to light' (ibid). Freud goes on to demonstrate that "heimlich" is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite 'unheimlich'" (2003 [1919]: 4).

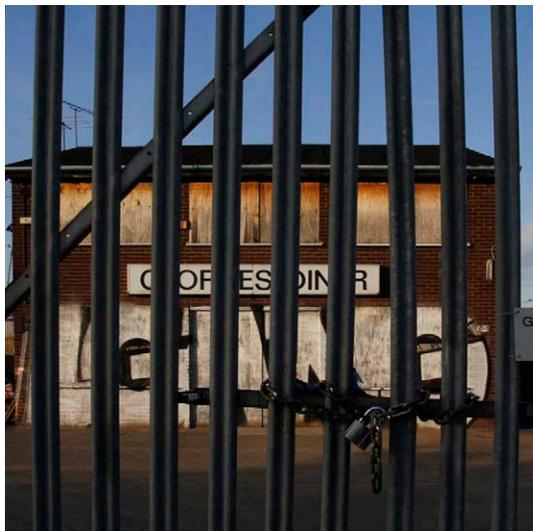
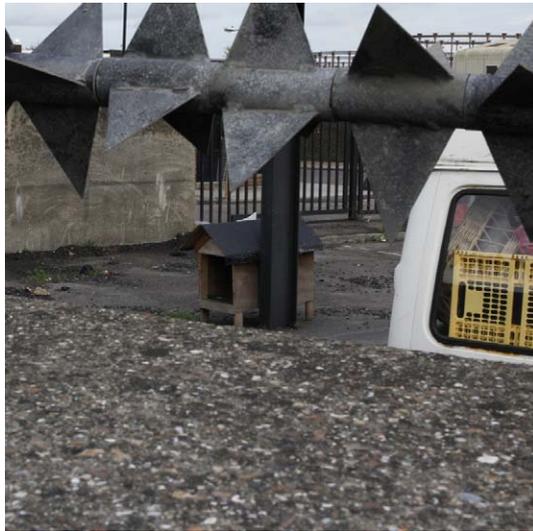
At this stage however, I would have described the experience as being anxious more than uncanny. There was no sense of 'being-at-home' for the experience of 'not-being-at-home' to coincide with. As the discussion above starts to bring out, the uncanny requires a degree of comfort, a familiarity that can be disturbed. It is also, according to Freud, an aesthetic sensibility (often literary or related to the figure of the cyborg) but one that deals quite specifically with the blurring of boundaries between self, identity and memory with the materialities of architectural space and technologies (Freud, 2003 [1919]; Jentsch, 1906; Royle, 2003; Vidler, 1994; Potts and Scheer, 2006). These imaginaries had, as described earlier, emerged quite strongly in the trips around the Lower Lee Valley and Limmo Peninsula. Here the landscape was imbued with an atmosphere of material liveliness and urban nature which when contrasted with areas of wasteland and thoughts of contaminants prompted ideas of the uncanny. Here, the uncanny was emerging precisely because the landscape prompted thoughts and images about the distinction between animate and inanimate, living and non-

living. The experience itself was not particularly uncanny, but the imaginative register was. Similar imaginaries can be seen emerging in *Savage Messiah* (Ford, 2011) or *Marshland* (Rees, 2013) dealing with the same region. The Lea Valley was a landscape that had evoked the idea of the uncanny, it had created an imaginary of enchanted liminality and slippage between self and landscape. The area I was now exploring had a very different aspect that at this early stage was characterised by feelings of exposure and vulnerability. These were barren places, sparse and utilitarian. Unlike the Lee, they were dominated by human structures, and urban nature found little of interest to cling to. The London Olympic Games were also taking place in some sites in this area, Millennium Mills in Silvertown for example, and it also defined by City Airport. The sense of physical exposure, the wide roads, low buildings and profusion of bridges and flyovers, was compounded by a sense that this was likely to be an area which was surveilled at this sensitive time. These general feelings of exposure and surveillance and a series of events and memories, did, unlike my experience of the Lower Lea, develop into a profoundly unsettling and uncanny experience.

### **Conduct and slippage**

One becomes very conscious of one's role as a performer in the landscape, perhaps trying to perform more clearly one's role as artist / photographer in some way so as to deflect the feeling that one might be considered in some way a malign presence and initiate some further, more intrusive invisible surveillance. Matless's ideas relating to proper conduct (Matless, 1992, 1998) propose landscape as a regulating framework of practices and subjectivities. Through these the landscape becomes visible and intelligible, a set of limits and codes of proper conduct. This describes and delimits what can be said and done, labelling some actions, utterances, subjectivities as marginal, deviant, abnormal.

In the urban fringe landscapes I have been exploring, these 'codes of proper conduct' can no longer easily be read. The usual cultural signifiers, cues, the familiar markers that tell us what kind of landscape this is and what kind of role we can perform here are gone or at best they are eroded or confused. These are ambiguous landscapes and our roles here become equally ambiguous. So physically carrying a camera when walking and cycling was a way of visibly adopting a role, a prop which declared a particular set of recognisable behaviours, a way of bringing oneself into a familiar register. As Edensor notes, 'walking is often an unreflexive and habitual practice which unintentionally imparts conventions concerning the 'appropriateness' of bodily



demeanour, but which is not wholly determined by cultural norms' (Edensor, 2000: 82). This is equally applicable to cycling, photography and the foot-bound elements of this practice. I had started to experience these practices, photography and also video, sound recording, as not only as performances, material and embodied, where self, body and landscape were constantly shaping one another (see Lorimer, 2005) but also where the practice itself was visible and potentially scrutinised for signs of intent or mal intent.

Two distinct relations were arising. One was one of exposure and being surveilled, where the camera would put one under suspicion, and draw attention to me as someone themselves surveilling the landscape, with potentially malign intent. The other was that the camera gave me a sense of identity, as 'a photographer' in a landscape, it gave me my 'reason' for being there. This led to uncomfortable questions. What if I put the camera aside, would it be that easy to shed one's sense of self. What reason could I have for being there without the excuse of art or research. Or was I using the camera as an excuse to fool myself, to enable me to inhabit these marginal landscapes, a justification for some unfathomable desire to spend my time in desolate spaces. I was starting to doubt my own motives, starting to ask why I had found myself doing this kind of work, seeking out the gaps and wastelands between flyovers and expressways. I was starting to feel an uncomfortable proximity with this landscape, it felt like it was getting inside me, it was starting to burrow beneath my skin. Photography had become an anchor, more of a performance of identity than a way of making photographs. The audience to this performance was both myself and an invisible other who may be watching my actions with suspicion. I had become aware of a correlation here between panoptical experiences of exposure and uncertainty. I started to wonder if there was perhaps some formative experience that I had no access to that had led me here, becoming convinced that some childhood trauma must be at the heart of it. I had inadvertently found myself wandering into Freudian territory and theories of repression and screen memories, which only later became apparent.

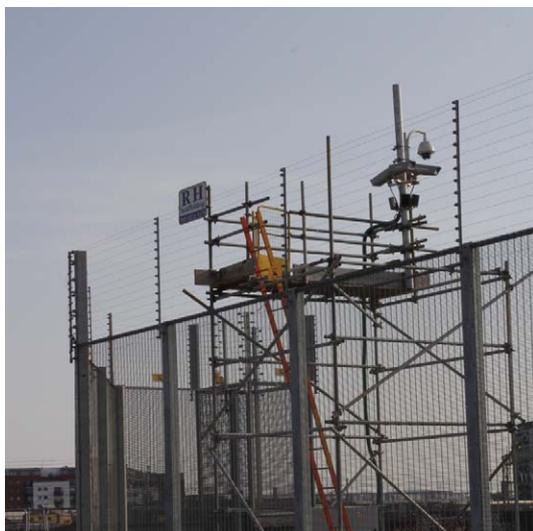
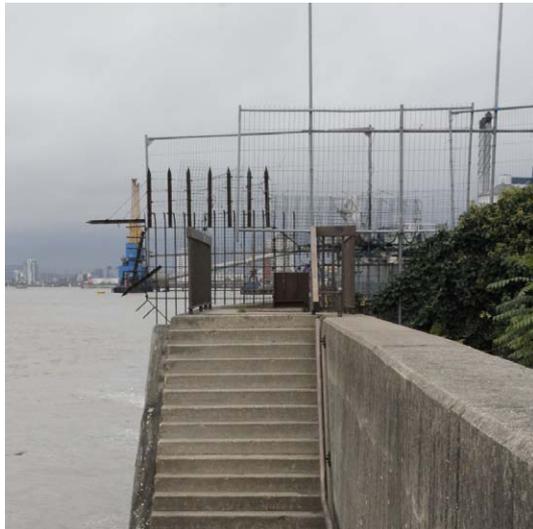
### **Telepathy and paranoia**

Cycling along the road parallel to the Victoria and Albert docks there was a compacted earth embankment topped by a wooden fence that obstructed the view beyond. I had hoped to gain access to this site, which was a very large expanse of derelict unoccupied land with the derelict Millennium Mills at the far side. I had at

one point I noticed a small gap in the fence and climbed up the embankment to get a view of what was beyond. The view that presented itself was one of a large expanse of empty, somewhat overgrown patches of concrete and gravel, with the very large derelict mill building at a considerable distance. I took a photograph and came down from the embankment and carried on cycling along the road that ran alongside, keeping an eye open for possible points of intrusion. I very quickly came across two large wooden gates. Through the hole where a padlock and chain was threaded I could get a view of a rough road leading in, although no obvious way of getting to the other side. I also saw that there was a flatback truck approaching the gates along the road. I had a distinct sense that this had something to do with my presence here. I waited, hoping I could perhaps enter into a discussion or even gain access. The vehicle pulled up to the gate and a distinctly unfriendly guard demanded to know what I was doing here, why I had climbed the embankment not thirty seconds ago and why I was taking photographs. I told him I was a photographer interested in fringe landscapes and was wondering how I might get access. It became clear quite quickly that this was not going to work as this was going to be one of the Olympic sites and was clearly a highly monitored piece of wasteland. After a brief discussion I left.

This encounter left me with a profound sense that I was in a landscape that despite its desolate appearance was being closely monitored. It seemed that the guard had anticipated my actions before I had even had the chance to enact them. I knew my interest in such sites might seem a bit odd, but in the context of the Olympic project and the major infrastructures this area was inscribed by, it now didn't seem unreasonable to assume that first and foremost I would be presumed suspect. The speed of this response suggested imaginaries of paranoiac telepathy, an uncanny sense of exposure where people knew what I was going to do before I did it. There must have been CCTV cameras trained along the fence that I had not seen and they were clearly actually being closely watched. Subsequently I felt scrutinized, that my presence and actions were being monitored by rather powerful forces that were protecting a target. I felt like I had been identified as a potential suspect, a terrorist on reconnaissance, guilty of thought crime.

The lack of visibility of any surveillance equipment exaggerated this panopticon like affect. It also evoked strong feelings that my thoughts may be delusional, just based upon a mere coincidence, that perhaps this had been a chance encounter with a security patrol. This sense of uncertainty was experienced as paranoia and exposure, a feeling that was compounded by being alone in large empty expanses



where for much of the time there were few if any other people. Despite feeling some stability in the role of 'photographer' I also had a sense that this role or identity might be a fiction for an imagined audience brought on by this sense of exposure. When the role was solely about taking photographs it was easier to grasp, but when it was also to deflect unwanted attention it became disorientating. In a landscape dominated by major infrastructures, including an airport and with the Olympic Games on the near horizon, this feeling was amplified both in terms of real surveillance but also in terms of a surveillance imaginary. This sense of being observed and the paranoiac uncertainty of this, the lack of visible evidence of cameras for example, had strong affects upon my sense of self. I began to experience my journeys through these areas from a disembodied anterior perspective, a self disassociated from itself, under the eye of an omniscient invisible other. This was a sense of self experienced as somebody else's fiction.

Similar themes emerge in Freud's essay on the uncanny as he discusses Hoffmann's literary fiction. Here he identifies the double as a significant modality of the uncanny. He cites Hoffmann's 'The Devil's Elixir' as an example in fiction, where two identical looking characters exhibit ambiguous differentiation through telepathy, a doubling of thought, uncertainties of self identity and the repetition of similar traits, vicissitudes, crimes and names through consecutive generations. Otto Rank had first identified the double as a means of surmounting the knowledge of death. He considered a belief in the immortal soul as the first double of the body, an 'energetic denial of the power of death' (Rank in Freud, 2003 [1919]: 9). Freud was in agreement with this, believing that the double was a mechanism of early childhood development, a response to what Freud terms the primary narcissism that dominates the mind of a child, acting as an insurance against the destruction of the ego. According to Freud, when this stage of development is surmounted, the double reverses its aspect and 'from having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death' (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 9). The double does not entirely disappear with the passing of primary narcissism, but rather can be experienced as an observing, critical and censorious mental agent, the conscience. In those with pathological delusions of being watched, the double becomes isolated and disassociated from the ego.

One of Freud's psychoanalytical axioms is that if the origin or cause of a mental affect is repressed then that affect is experienced as an anxiety. So, when the cause is familiar but the experience is anxiety, then an ambiguity exists. There is an unresolved question - why is this familiar experience causing me anxiety? Freud suggests that



the answer to this is that a mundane event or situation can sometimes trigger the unconscious residues of the child's early double, that double that was experienced by the child as having a friendly, comforting aspect and by the adult as being a thing of terror and death. This accounts for the uncanny feeling, two very different experiences held simultaneously or perhaps oscillating one to the other, unable to find a bearing. The kinds of situation that bring forth this feeling are thus those that resonate with those beliefs that the adult discredits but which the early childhood double was based upon - animistic concepts such as a world occupied by spirits of human beings (a child's belief that their doll is alive), a narcissistic over evaluation of one's own mental processes (ability to transcend death), omnipotent thoughts (telepathy) and the attribution of magical powers to external objects. Thus uncanny effects are often produced when these tropes emerge unexpectedly in the familiar and everyday. Examples given by Freud include the sudden unusual clarity of the mundane when something assumed inanimate suddenly appears alive or when we are presented with unexplained repetitions, the same number inexplicably appearing in different settings during the course of a day, or the realisation that one has unconsciously or without deliberation repeated an action over and over. This brings with it a sense of an underlying mechanism, internal or external, which is hidden from us yet imposes itself upon us. The distinction between imagination and reality becomes ambiguous and 'infantile complexes which have been repressed are once more revived by some impression, or when primitive beliefs which have been surmounted seem to be once

more confirmed' (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 17).

The sense of paranoia that I had been experiencing, of being observed by some omniscient but hidden other, was compounded the following week when I returned to this general area and cycled over the bridge between City Airport and Albert Dock. I stopped at the centre of the bridge to take a photograph of the runway as a plane lifted off and flew low overhead. At this point a very expensive looking Land Rover with no markings, odd looking plates and heavily tinted windows pulled up and stopped on the bridge a few meters in front of me. I felt rather nervous at this point, aware that I was being checked out by someone but had no clues as to who or why. I pretended to ignore it and carried on taking photos, staying for a couple of minutes before cycling off. As I started peddling, the car also pulled off keeping a steady distance in front of me. After perhaps thirty seconds it slowly pulled away and then sped off. It was a little reminiscent of stories I had read as a child of people being buzzed by UFOs. I now felt absolutely certain that my movement through this landscape was being watched and this atmosphere of paranoia didn't leave me for my subsequent trips around not just this area, but all the areas that I travelled through by bicycle whilst conducting this study.

In discussing the nature of a paranoid relationship between the real and the imagined art historian and theorist Margaret Iverson, discusses Salvador Dali's use of what he called the paranoid critical method, 'a spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the interpretive-critical association of delirious phenomena' (Dali quoted in Iverson, 2007: 44). Dali's method is essentially to wilfully misinterpret and exaggerate small, apparently inconsequential or banal observations. Here, the speculative and imaginative aspects of interpretation are wilfully magnified, a process that mirrors Freud's psychoanalytic method. Freud himself 'acknowledged an uncomfortable similarity between paranoid thought and the hypothetical constructions of psychoanalytic interpretation' (2007: 41). The relationship between the landscapes which I was exploring, apparently empty of significance and the paranoid sense of being scrutinised led to a similarly charged excess of speculative imagination, where as Freud observed in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, every small detail is of significance to the paranoid (Freud, 1976: 317). It occurred to me that it is not accidental that some of Dali's landscape paintings were reminiscent in their atmosphere of some of the landscapes I was moving through. I had made no conscious effort to engage with a paranoid critical method or Freud's psychoanalysis, but the combined sense of being watched within a sparse and unpopulated infrastructural



landscape created a sense of being distanced from oneself whilst being profoundly aware of the environment. Here was a sense of an urban uncanny characterised by the experience of oneself as a fiction seen through the eyes of others.

These emerging themes in this thinking about the uncanny – the double which one cannot be sure is ‘real’ or simulacra, the invocation of trauma, the entanglement of the uncanny with the visual can be seen threading through various strands of art, psychoanalytical and semiotic thinking throughout the twentieth century. The surrealist Andre Breton made much of the idea of the uncanny and the surrealist understanding of trauma, as seen in ‘Mad Love’ (Breton, 1937). Lacan had strong links with the surrealists and in particular with Dali, with whom he shared a deep interest in paranoia. Lacan’s work on what he calls ‘the mirror stage’ continues the threads of the double, the visual and the traumatic. He considers human reality to exist in three registers, ‘the real’, ‘the imaginary’ and ‘the symbolic’ (see Lacan, 1977). Here, the young child’s sense of self emerges primarily from the visual register. A baby’s body and nervous system is experienced as fragmented and incomplete, lots of uncoordinated parts, beyond the control of the child. Yet the image of other babies and the baby’s own reflection is one of coherence and completeness. The ego’s function is to maintain a sense of coherence and completeness and thus attempts to conceal the disturbing lack of unity by identifying externally in the reassuringly complete image of the other. In this way Lacan places alienation at the centre of the origin of identity. He calls this register where identity is formed ‘the imaginary’. He goes on to argue that paranoia, the adult’s identification of self with external motifs such as mirrored images, telepathic communication, observation and external persecution can thus all be seen to be constituted from the building blocks of the ego. The traumatic ‘real’, the horror of what is left if the ego’s constructed ‘reality’ - in other words the imaginary - is peeled away to reveal the paranoid structure of the ego itself and its attempts to build coherence and completeness upon the shaky ground of fragmentation and uncertainty.

This inability to distinguish one’s sense of self or identity from the material environment, of identifying too strongly with the external environment was accompanied by this sense of alienation from oneself described by Lacan. Finding that my spontaneous experiences of paranoia and myself as other were themselves not my own, but closely followed existing theories of the uncanny, repression and paranoia amplified further this sense of alterity. Freud’s uncanny was a treatise on an aesthetic category, primarily emerging through literary fiction. Experiencing the uncanny as

something emerging between myself and the apparently 'real' world implied to me that by moving these urban margins as a photographer, I had fictionalised both myself and the material landscape and was no longer able to distinguish with certainty where the line between the two was drawn. This slight delirium of uncertainty coloured the lens through which I experienced life for a period of months.

This was in some ways caused by experiencing these landscapes through the practice of photography, but in other ways alleviated by travelling with a camera. Sometimes the camera enabled a welcome distancing through the objectification of the lens and of identity as a 'photographer', which gave one a sense of self to fall back on. The camera could become a foil for the discomfort in experiencing the self not just as in or with landscape, but where landscape becomes a collapse of boundary between people and things. Equally however, the very practice of photographing the landscape was a wilful act of 'making strange' the landscape and one's relation to it. Thus the reason for being there was to imaginatively engage with the landscape, and this was compounded by the sense of surveillance that prompted an exaggerated uncertainty between real and imaginary. Engaging imaginatively with the material landscape opened up a territory through which an experience of the uncanny could emerge. It was necessary to create a fiction in order to confuse it with a material reality: 'it is not surprising, Freud concludes, that the paranoiac is so convinced by his (sic) interpretations: 'There is in fact some truth in them'' (Iverson, 2007: 53).

### **Photographs as (mnemonic) memories: traumatic landscapes**

The discussion now brings me back to Freud's mnemonic or screen memories and their relationship to understandings of trauma. This will then, via Baer's work on trauma and photography, bring me back to *Point/Vector*. What was particularly unexpected was that during the trips around this area and for weeks afterwards, I experienced spontaneous flashbacks to memories of being a small child, perhaps 3 or 4 years old. I was aware that this was for some reason very much related to the atmosphere of the area or the way that I was experiencing it - to feelings of exposure, isolation and the experience of desolate scrublands. These memories were scenic like images and images of material details from early childhood flooded through me with quite overwhelming affect, somehow associated with these landscapes and atmospheres in East London. These images had no context, no stories attached to them, often they were incredibly banal, the shape of a door handle, or the peeling paint on a steel tube. This added a profoundly different experience of these landscapes, one that was

deeply unsettling, something that felt like a partial dissolution of identity, a questioning of my origins and a fear of repressed unknown memories that were lurking behind these cryptic images. I became doubly distanced from myself. This distancing from the self was, I will argue, an imaginary experience of the real condition of not being an individual, distinct from the landscape, but in being materially indistinct from it and becoming aware of the illusion of the self as a unified identity, able to experience itself as distinct. This fragmenting of the apparent clarity of identity is at the centre of Freud's accounts of the uncanny double, as an artefact of childhood 'harking back to particular phases in the evolution of the self regarding feeling, a regression to a time when the ego was not yet sharply differentiated from the external world and from other persons' (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 10).

Upon periods of reflection on these experiences I started to draw out threads that linked my experience of the present to these early childhood memories. I grew up in the seaside town of Southport, and remember it as having a somewhat melancholic atmosphere, cold biting winds coming on off the sea, the mocking cry of gulls, the smell of sea itself, and the vast expanses of inhospitable sinking sands which were more often visible than the sea itself, a sense of openness and exposure. The beach is on a very shallow gradient and the sea rarely comes right in, often a distant glimmer sitting on the horizon. These were redolent of the winds coming across the Thames, large expanses of empty space and the general atmosphere of bleakness I found around Barking Creek for example. We lived a mile or so from the sea itself in a terraced house on a busy main road. Nearby was a playground that we used to visit, a rather scrubby and exposed piece of land on a small hill. This was close to a breakers yard and patchy fields that were home to some rather unhappy looking donkeys. I remember visiting the breakers yard with my father a number of times, as he looked for spare parts to fix his car, always getting rather excited by the prospect of seeing these stacks of rusting husks piled up high.

Again, this was a landscape defined not by any sense of natural beauty, but of a rather scrappy, loveless, utilitarian environment where plants and wildlife were present but clearly not thriving. Images of these places kept flashing back to me. There was a fragment of a memory of being in a wasteland littered with the carcasses of dead cars, the drought summer of 1976, I remember the hard earth being parched and cracked and a view up a hill to the nearby park and the silhouette of its solitary swing. I remember too the cracked and peeling layers of paintwork of the swing's steel frame, black over dark brown with rust showing through in patches, the sound and



the feel of the steel chains that held the seat, the smell of dry dust kicked up, a sense of a neglected and exposed landscape tinged with excitement. I also experienced again and again a view over fields where the donkeys' grazed, always scattered with the yellow flowers of Smooth Hawk's Beard, which seemed to be a signature of these bleak expanses. These memories were also entangled with the silence of a newly built motorway, the smell of warm leather seats in my father's Ford Zephyr and a strangely metallic feeling of immanence, a thing that is utterly still but poised, ready to resonate noisily into the future.

These memories and many more besides, presented themselves to me at an unexpected moments with no apparent trigger and with great clarity and force. They were experienced in a very similar way to photographic images, frozen moments, still, decontextualised and with an atmosphere clinging to them, suggesting a story but giving little detail to fill it in. Freud suggested that the unconscious is structured like a camera, that 'screen memories' (Freud, 1962 [1899]) act as proxies for the 'real' underlying memories that remain hidden (or screened). Screen memories manifest as adult recollections of very mundane, banal childhood memories, which can be recalled in detail for no apparent reason (Iverson, 2007: 35). Freud states that a screen memory is in fact a 'mnemonic image: not of the relevant experience itself, which is resisted, but of another image closely associated with the first' (ibid). Thus there are aspects of repression and substitution, perhaps traumatic experience. For Iverson this can work in reverse, when an everyday banality is presented to us 'too clearly' it takes on the mantle of a mnemonic image, with a lurking sense that it is covering for a traumatic experience. With this in mind, I would argue that the idea of trauma can also then be reached through the paranoiac's attention to detail discussed earlier. The photographs I had been taking, of similarly banal or insignificant views had evoked for me this sense that they could be screening memories I could not access. Thus through the sense of paranoia invoked by surveillance and correlated attention to detail, these material landscapes seemed to evoke what felt like the mnemonic memories described by Freud. I cannot pick apart the connection between the real photographic images I was producing and the screen memories that I was experiencing, but the affect was again, deeply unsettling. The sense that these photograph-like images were covering for a lurking trauma strongly coloured the way in which I experienced these memories, despite knowing that there was no trauma beneath them; 'in spite of our knowledge, the things we see in photographs seem real to us' (Baer, 2005: 3).

Baer's recent work in photography and trauma studies is useful for thinking this

through (Baer, 2005). He suggests that in the case of traumatic events, the photographic image acts not as witness, but as something much closely aligned to the experience of the traumatic event itself, a manifestation of the split between an event and its memory. Photographic images, like the traumatic experiences, are dissociated from context, they 'bring into view a striking gap between what we see and what we know' (Baer, 2005: 2). Trauma challenges the understanding of photography as a moment mechanically cleaved from a continuous sequential flow of time. He argues that just like the photograph, significant events are often experienced without context, irrational and absurd, with an explanatory narrative applied later by others through processes such as testimony and witness. He applies Democritus's understanding of time to photography, where the world is described 'as a vast rainfall, with events occurring when individual drops accidentally touched one another' (2005: 4). Thus the photographic image is not considered within the context of its before or after, but rather in the context of a history understood in terms of 'atoms moving in a void' (2005: 5). This way of conceptualising photographic criticism enabled me to trace links between my experience of mnemonic memories, the banal and insignificant content of the photographs I was taking and the sense of slippage in identity, a loss of personal context, of finding myself suddenly outside of my own story as it were (which is depending upon degree, perhaps the basis of trauma). My experience of these urban landscapes was fragmentary. The materiality of the landscape had physically fragmented any linear, smooth movement through. The act of photographing the landscapes had augmented that fragmentation by constantly bringing me to a halt and taking a shot. The photographs themselves were records of this fragmentation, of chance encounters with the landscape and records of the moments that I didn't see. Baer's understanding of photography as discrete moments that cannot be explained within a wider narrative arc had a strong influence on how I later structured and came to understand the material that I collected during the autoethnography into the video work.

The materialities of the landscapes that were decontextualising me seemed to overlap with memories without context. It seemed that substance of the landscape, the atmosphere of exposure and surveillance brought these long forgotten experiences and sensations back as a series of images. It seemed that this atmosphere was being evoked not simply by single material mnemonics but rather by an assemblage of different conditions, from the materialities of the landscape, the sense of an invisible omniscient watching presence, to the wind, the sound of gulls, the empty expanses and the weeds that clung to these harsh landscapes. The atmospheres produced

seemed to evoke images from my past in the way that a scent can suddenly return one to moments of presence with a moment long passed (see Chu and Downes, 2000).

The role that the camera played in these experiences around Woolwich and Barking was I think much more than a product of its mechanical nature. Its effects were performative and embodied, fragmenting both movement and perception. Taking each photograph was a moment where my perception of the landscape was almost imperceptibly ruptured. The black flash as the shutter closes and opens is an interruption in movement and in vision, punctuated by the sound of the shutter. Yet the whole process of walking / cycling these landscapes is choreographed around these fractional moments. The photograph itself fills in the gap, perhaps much more powerfully than it should. This sequence of 3000 photographs represents 3000 moments of stoppage, 3000 moments of absence, 3000 very specific points in physical space, yet it is between these points that the vectors of movement and experience of this landscape was choreographed. Rather than suggesting the need for meaning to be applied through a sense of narrative, it instead questions the narrative of self that creates some sense of identity. These were 3000 moments that positioned me outside of the landscape, yet this opened a space for being in a sense lost to it too, where multiple autobiographical spatialities and temporalities intersected.

Baer suggests that considering photography as a fragment contextualised in an historical narrative is flawed, that perhaps the dramatic, historical mode of thinking about the event might be countered by an absurd, but equally valid conception of events more as rainfall, a constant downpour of isolated events (Baer, 2005: 6). This atomistic idea of personal biographies as a series of unconnected explosive bursts rather than as historically contextualised events is, he argues, one that photography is well suited to address. Photography has significant potential to capture such experiences without denying their force through the process of contextualisation, a process that was not actually experienced and is only ever constructed after the event (ibid). Here Baer is also bringing out the structural similarities between the experience of trauma and the photographic image: 'the shutter's click allows certain moments to be integrated *for the first time* into a context (of experience, of memory, of meaning). Such images stage not a return of the real but its first appearance: an appearance of meaning that, as the ongoing debates about the causes and manifestations of trauma indicate, continue to defy comprehension and that, although concerns the past, did not exist there' (2005: 12). The photograph aligns with the experience of trauma in that it too blocks routine mental processes from converting an experience



into memory or forgetting. The narrative flow of experience and memory is abruptly halted, turned into a snapshot, both familiar and distant; a dissociation between self and memory; an inability to remember an event other than through a process of reconstruction. This describes the quality of the spontaneous memories quite clearly. They were not memories as such, but still images, much like photographic images, appearing randomly and completely without any sense of their narrative context. They were not stories but singular images imbued with powerful affect.

### **Concluding remarks**

The purpose of this autoethnography was to develop a first hand, first person understanding of what an urban margin might be from the perspective of creative practice. What emerged from this was an understanding of the 'urban margin' as not a type of area in the city, but as a particular type of encounter between the body, the material environment and an urban imaginary where each term becomes coincident with the other. In this particular instance, the imaginary was the uncanny, emerging through the interruption of fluid movement across the landscape and the fragmentation of narrative arcs such as memory or one's sense of self. The margins are those landscapes where we experience ourselves as 'rain' rather than 'river', to use Baer's metaphorical allusions to historical processes. The margin is a condition of becoming discrete, disconnected from narratives of both self and city. Material landscape, movement, memory and identity jostled and weaved together to create an ambiguity.

Definitions of urban margins, *terrain vague*, *drosscape*, *friche* and so on, often emphasise the material landscape, its physical locatability in the city. I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter that the urban margin may be better considered not a physical space, but as co-produced, a dissolution of distinctions between subject and landscape, where materiality, the body and imaginaries of the self and city coincide in unfamiliar registers. The artist-subject does not find existing places that are 'marginal', but rather the margin emerges as a slippage between the subject and the material landscape. The very excess of materiality, the technologies and infrastructures, urban nature, pollutants, dust and ruins, the sense of exposure, strangely encourage a dematerialisation of visceral experience. Through the kinaesthetic and sensory body, the subject imaginatively inhabits both themselves and the landscape. The physical scales of experience collapse with those that can only be experienced imaginatively, such as the very small. The immediacy of the moment equally can find itself collapsed with the distant past.

In many ways this photographic study was conducted as traditional Sauerian inflected fieldwork, spending long periods of time in the landscape making and documenting close material observations. Doing this in the guise of a photographer/artist clearly created a significant difference in intent. Here my intention was very open ended, in a sense simply to explore and record how this unfolded. I did not set out to produce a pre-planned body of work or a documentary archive, but rather to use photography as a practice through which to investigate the relationship between artist, practice and landscape. The actual photographs were in many respects not intended to be considered central to this as visual artefacts, but rather a by-product of the process of the practice, the various mobilities, gestures, movements and technical decisions which made each one. This emphasis upon process over representation is core to this project and has been addressed by few geographers, Hawkins being a notable exception (Hawkins, 2010). The decision to use an autoethnography of practice was intended to enable a reflection upon a process led approach to art production, artist-subject and landscape directly from experience. This augments the subsequent chapters - the interpretations of the practice of other artists - through a particular attunement to the more general mechanisms through which landscapes are experienced and landscape imaginaries produced. Through my own work this emerged, or was interpreted through the lens of the uncanny (or the uncanny lens of the camera). However, there were many points of intersection that emerged when I came to look at the works of Landy and Gill. As a practicing artist, working with tools, materials and urban imaginaries was something with which I was comfortable and familiar. Moving this into the context of academic research, as a methodology, raised question about the nature of cross-disciplinarity, whether I could usefully translate experience as a creative practitioner into critical academic discourse and equally, if it is possible for a geographer, who has not had extensive experience working creatively (rather than approaching critically) with materials, tools and equipment to gain insight into creative practice by performing creative practice.

It is impossible to make a judgement upon this, I suspect it varies greatly upon skill, ability, experience, aptitude and so on and perhaps brings us back to the problems of the value of subjectivity and sensitivity when making objective accounts of landscape which Sauer grappled with (Sauer, 1924). In the context of my autoethnographic practice, I found it important to approach the periods spent in the landscape with the camera as I would normally when working as a photographer, i.e. to very consciously leave academic reflection, field notes, etc aside, at least until I had returned home. I felt that attempting to reflect and analyse whilst also actually 'doing' practice would

simply be the performance of a very different practice, rather than the one I was interested in looking at. I would no longer be reflecting upon my practice as an artist, but would instead be recording my practice as an artist-geographer. To take the latter role would, I feel, undermine the usefulness of the method in thinking about creative practices - certainly when using it to think about other artists (although it would be ideal for researching other artist-geographers). Creative practice is often weighted towards the preconscious, instinctive and habitual. For me distanced reflection and analysis tends to be applied after rather than during material processes of making, and as part of the creative process of sifting, editing and imagining future iterations. This kind of reflection upon practice is extremely difficult to do when thoroughly involved in that practice, and likely to compromise or completely change the qualities of that practice. My analogy would be to ask how one might reflect academically upon a downhill mountain bike slalom, whilst in the process of doing it. This, incidentally, is why I chose not to consider participant observation with my research subjects.

This capacity to immerse oneself completely in the activity and reflect separately can however be seen in geographical accounts of various practices in the landscape. These are not what would (traditionally) be thought of as creative practices, but the practices of walking with walking boots (Michael, 2000), climbing (Lewis, 2000) and cycling (Spinney, 2006). These are accounts that combine autoethnographic and ethnographic research techniques, both doing and looking at how others do, combining the 'dialogues and doings' that Hawkins discusses (2011). What is common between these accounts and what I aimed to achieve with my account of creative practice, is that they foreground the utility of the body in relationship to the material landscape, in achieving a task, often through technology (i.e. bicycle, walking boots). What is also clear and forceful about these accounts is that they are the accounts of people who have considerable experience with the practice they are researching, they already know their 'craft' as it were before researching it. It is clear that Spinney is a cyclist, that Michael is a walker, and that Lewis is a climber. This, I believe, gives these accounts an insight that comes not from simply a period of research, but from a sustained period of practice outside of a research context.

Wylie's account of walking the South West Coast Path (Wylie, 2005) similarly tackles these questions, proposing one means by which such a relationship can be communicated to an academic audience, whilst creatively and imaginatively evoking the landscape. I believe this work falls down slightly though, in that this is Wylie's account of an academic walking the South West Coastal path, not of a walker walking the South West Coastal path. As Blacksell (2005) points out, a walker would probably

more usefully carry a copy of Tarr's *South West Coast: Minehead to Padstow* (1996) whilst on a hike than a copy of Deleuze's *The Fold* (1993), Merleau Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968), Lingis's *The Imperative* (1998) and Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* (1969). This is not a trivial point. In order to discuss an embodied subjective account of a landscape or practice, it is important to be fully immersed in that embodied subjectivity. Quite literally keeping one eye on the theory means there is only one eye left to keep on the ground. The two activities are equally important, but combining them into a single movement is, I would argue, counter to the aim of the researching embodiment and experience from a first person perspective.

As an artist-geographer, I struggled with this problem and my own account is an experiment that does not resolve it. Wylie's account is an important moment around which this problem revolves and a key text in addressing this. However, I found the accounts of Spinney (2006) and Michael (2000), to be more convincing templates for subjective accounts of an autoethnography than the somewhat acrobatic dance between poetic expression and critique that Wylie performs in order to be simultaneously both walker and academic in the landscape. This was related to the ability of Spinney and Michael to experience and reflect upon their bodies in an instrumental fashion, to be aware of their material engagement without feeling it necessary to refract it through theory whilst still 'in motion' as it were. Spinney is not reading Scarry's *The Body in Pain* (1985) in between legs of his hill climbing, Lewis is not reading Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (2003) whilst he hangs off a cliff face. To do so would not illuminate their practices in that moment, it would not rehydrate the exhausted body, take cramp out of tight muscles, or alter the view to the road in front or the rocks below. In short, Scarry or Nietzsche are not recognised as a significant part of the practices or culture of cycling or climbing, but rather would probably be considered distinctly distant from them. In contrast, Edensor's *Industrial Ruins* (2005) or DeSilvey's paper about a hardscrabble homestead abandoned to entropy (2007) are both examples, I believe, of geographers who strike a good balance between geography as an academic and textual discipline and geography's capacity to explore subjectivity and embodiment from a first person perspective. The skills or capacity to be sensitively attentive to landscapes or objects is difficult to teach. However, as cultural geographers increasingly engage with creative practice, it seems imperative that cultural geography as an educational discipline could benefit from bringing creative and visual skills into the lexicon, not as objects as study, but as familiar tools through which to think.

# Chapter 5

## *Contaminated Landscapes*

## Chapter 5: Contaminated Landscapes

This chapter will consider a particular body of work created by Michael Landy, *Nourishment* (2002) (figure 14). *Nourishment* is a series of twelve etchings which depicts weeds that Landy found growing in urban gaps and cracks, obsessively observed and carefully drawn and finally etched over an intense period of activity between March and October of 2002 (Flood, 2008: 219). In this chapter I will use the notion of contamination with respect to the weed, a plant that is unwanted and out of place. I will look at the polarising tendencies of the contaminant, how it reveals tendencies to divide the world into binaries. Landy's use of the weed challenges these dualisms. Here, in a quiet and intentionally mundane way the weed's alterity has a tendency 'to disconcert this binary geographical imagination and entertain forbidden possibilities for being otherwise in the world' (Whatmore, 2002: 436). Whilst contamination, dirt or the weed can refer to a relationship between ideas of purity and impurity, this is a pairing which simultaneously opens up ground for thinking through hybrid and anti-essentialised understandings of nature, culture, subjects and landscapes and the complexity of their relationships to one another. The chapter will draw upon particular aspects of Landy's work in order to discuss this - not only his depiction of weeds in his series *Nourishment*, but also his practice in producing the work and the role that pain plays in his work here and more generally.

The works, such as *Creeping Buttercup* (2002) (figure 15), start off with intense observation in the field, the kind of 'dropping down' that the poet John Clare talked of, a wilfully humble crouching close to nature in an attempt to reduce the ontological distance between human and non-human: 'I used to drop down under a bush and scribble the fresh thoughts on the crown of my hat as I found nature then' (Clare in Felstiner, 2009: 58). Landy's choice of weeds points to a similar quiet respect for that which often goes unnoticed underfoot. Landy repeatedly wandered around East London, looking for appropriate weeds growing in brownfield sites, cracks in a walls or the verges of car parks. Once he had chosen one he returned to it day after day, getting down on the ground next to it, making detailed sketches. Once he had enough detail, he plucked the plant from the ground and took it to his studio. Here he kept it alive for as long as possible while he drew the roots, keeping it watered and with adequate sunlight. These drawings were then used in the much more lengthy process of making painstakingly detailed hand etched copper plates in his studio. The plates were then used to produce a limited edition set of prints and a book. The work was also supplemented by a Tate publication 'Hello Weed' (Reitmaier, 2003). In the final prints one can sometimes see evidence of the wilting of the plants.



Figure 14: Annual Wall Rocket, 2002



*Figure 15: Creeping Buttercup, 2002*

The drawings and prints that Landy is making here are both labour intensive and intensely observed. The plant is rendered as a single, whole object, distinct from its environment. The environment is in fact not depicted at all, simply the white ground of the paper. In the prints there is no variation in line thickness, there is no hatching or shading. They are flat, depthless, almost diagrammatic visual descriptions of his time spent with each of the weeds as he tried to keep it alive for as long as possible. They make no attempt to idealise the plant or hide the process of wilting as the plant fades and dies. The physical pain involved in the long repetitive process of producing the drawings and plates, that ‘eventually you start damaging your eyes and hands’ (Landy cited in Sunspel, 2012) is mentioned by Landy in numerous interviews.

From this brief description of his work and practice the key themes that will be discussed emerge. The role played by embodiment and close field observation; repetitive tasks; the experience of pain and references to Landy’s father’s pain; and the realist nature of these works and their relationship to the archive. The ways in which these both create distinctions and indistinctions between the artist-subject and the material landscape will be discussed. I will look at how Landy takes notions of a humble but feral nature and uses it to celebrate marginality through a quiet stealth, under the cloak of realism. I will discuss how these works pose questions about the

cultural distinction between the human artefact (the city) and nature. Contamination is taken as the key rubric here, a word that splits the world in two, attempting to maintain the distance between purity and impurity. Equally contamination suggests a relational understanding of the world, one of indistinction and co-mingling. Landy's work occupies this margin on a number of levels, from the material landscape of the urban margin to the social context of his upbringing. Here, through a material analysis of his work and practice I also look at how the urban margin contextualises a relationship between the body, memory and identity.

The chapter will start off by introducing Landy through three bodies of work - *Nourishment*, *Breakdown* (2001) and *Semi-detached* (2004). This will develop the key themes that inform my reading of his practice and set the scene for the sections that follow. This is then followed by a discussion of weeds that develops some of the conceptual ideas that the weed brings to readings of Landy's work. I then return to the analysis of Landy's work over three sections. The first, *close observation, repetition and mimesis*, discusses his practices of observation, drawing and etching; the second short section, *entwining materiality and personal history*, makes links between these embodied and material practices and Landy's personal history, especially the role his father plays in his work. This section links the previous section to the one that follows, *pain*. Here I discuss the roles that pain and endurance play in creating both distance and proximity between the artist-subject, the material landscape and memory. The urban margin underlies each of these sections as a site that questions the arbitrary nature of categories and distinctions. The urban margin aligns his work with the unseen or the overlooked, giving a lens through which to view the relationships between people, landscape imaginaries and memory.

### **Michael Landy**

In this section I shall begin by describing Michael Landy's body of work *Nourishment* and practices involved in producing it. The context within which the work was produced will also be explored, in particular the work that he made before and after this, *Breakdown* and *Semi-detached*, and the biographical context of this which revolves around his family, in particular his father. I'll identify the key threads and themes that emerge and that will be discussed in the sections that follow.

The works in the *Nourishment* series are carefully and faithfully produced etchings of common weeds, much like botanical illustrations (figure 16). These renderings

from leaf to root, remove and abstract the plant from the cracks and verges of East London in which they were found. Yet, the landscape, like soil on the roots, still clings to these images. The whole landscapes themselves may not be visible in these works, but they are nevertheless present, implied by the weeds themselves and the way the work is contextualised. The names of plants become proxies for the absent landscape, Shepherd's Purse, Mother's Heart, Smooth Hawk's Beard. These are referred to in the short texts in the catalogue that accompanied the works' first showing: 'Just walk along the street and you will discover Shepherd's purse growing in narrow cracks in the pavement, amongst the sweet wrappers, cigarette stubs and fizzy drinks cans' evoke the landscape from which they came whilst that landscape itself remains implied but not visually apparent in the etchings themselves (Reitmaier, 2003: 68). There is an underlying implication of the urban marginal, a landscape that is damaged perhaps but tenacious.

Although the series is called *Nourishment*, there is a fine line between nourishment and contamination and it is this porous boundary that this chapter will focus upon. There is a relationship here between order and disorder that Landy's *Nourishment* series points to. Where is the nourishment he refers to? He clearly isn't talking about the nutritional value of these weeds, they are not generally plants that find their way into the kitchen. More plausibly it could refer to the nourishment he gave the plants in order to keep them alive as he etched them in his studio, although plucking them in the first place already guaranteed the futility of this and the certainty of their early demise. Perhaps it refers to a more esoteric idea of nourishment, a spiritual one, in response to *Breakdown*, the piece of work that brought him to prominence. In this work he literally breaks down everything that he owns, reducing it to small pieces that were catalogued, bagged up and sent to landfill. This work talks about the insinuation of objects, possessions, of a consumer society, into the self. It could be seen as a ritualistic act of self-purification, a withdrawal of the self from the material, the creation of a *tabula rasa*. After completing this denial of the material self, he didn't show any work for some time. *Nourishment* was his first project after this self-enforced absence.

Both nourishment and contamination imply the absorption of one thing into another, the ingestion of food or the leeching of pesticides into the water table for example. These two examples are likely to effect bodies or ecosystems. How and where the line is drawn however is both cultural and biological. Some things are clearly necessary for life, food and water for example, some things are poisonous



Figure 16: *Polypodium Phegopteris*, pressed nature print, *Ferns of Great Britain and Ireland*, 1855

and will undoubtedly harm us. Others are seen as wholesome or dangerous but are unlikely to cause us either good or harm. Here contamination is related to a sense of order or control, where according to Douglas, 'in chasing dirt, in papering, decorating, tidying, we are not governed by anxiety to escape disease, but are positively re-ordering our environment, making it conform to an idea' (Douglas, 2002: 3). The way in which matter and substance are perceived as having good or bad qualities is not straightforward and the ways in which those qualities are transferred from one material to another is equally complex. This material consideration of contamination or nourishment is related to the functioning of the body but in both real and imaginary dimensions. The contaminant 'slips easily between concept, matter, experience and metaphor' (Campkin, 2007: 1).

Contamination implies an essentialist and culturally constructed idea of 'purity' or a 'pristine' nature. This implied dualism between nature and culture or subject and landscape represents one half of what Castree refers to as an 'ontological schism' in geography, between dualist ontologies and relational ontologies (Castree, 2005: 224). The notion of contamination is particularly useful in looking at Landy's work because both sides of this schism are apparent in his work. Notions of hybridity are brought out through a practice that has documentary, descriptive, categorising and archival tendencies. Thus the idea of the weed pushes against the idea of the city: Thoreau's 'wild nature' (Thoreau, 1897), or Ruskin's 'the pure wild volition and energy of creation' (Ruskin, 1857: 420), untainted by pernicious human technologies. The weed also implies the failure of these dividing constructs of nature and culture to account for the world we find our selves in, with the proliferation of waste products and wastescapes. The notion of the contaminant itself creates this division, representing an essence or an inner kernel that is abhorrent, threatening, dangerous, lurking at the boundaries of other 'pure' forms, ready to taint, infiltrate and debase. It is a thing that can be contained, quarantined, kept whole and separate, buried in landfill or burnt in an incinerator. Equally however, when it becomes mobile and unanchored, insinuated into the movements, networks and substances of 'nature', then neither nature nor contaminant can be seen as retaining the characteristics of a distinct essence. They become hybrid, inseparable, a thing that is no longer clear and known, perhaps something that is not knowable. It thus threatens clarity, control and order but also perhaps reveals the degree to which the threat is imagined. When the contaminant becomes active and contaminates it introduces uncertainty and occupies ambiguous ground between binary and relational concepts of nature. In the case of Landy's weeds, the contaminant is transgressive, a tenacious and mobile wilderness finding

its way into the gaps in the city. According to Whatmore:

*'The idea of the wild 'occupies a special place in the imagined empires of human civilisation, as that which lies outside its historical and geographical reach (however defined); a place without 'us', populated by creatures (including, surreptitiously, 'uncivilised' humans) at once monstrous and wonderful, whose very strangeness gives shape to whatever 'we' are claimed to be' (Whatmore, 2002: 435).*

His concentration on weeds in *Nourishment* emphasises the urban landscape, looking at the cultural construction of good and bad landscapes through ideas of pristine or sullied nature (see Campkin and Cox, 2007; Castree, 2005; Cronon, 1996, Douglas, 2002; Hawkins, 2010; Hawkins and Muecke, 2003; Neville and Villeneuve, 2000; Serres, 2007; Sennett, 1992; Taussig, 1999, 2003; Thomson, 1979). The realist, descriptive nature of this work will also be discussed, and the role played by repetition, reproduction and how this problematises the idea of the archive (see Benjamin, 1999, Derrida, 1998; DeSilvey, 2006). I will also look at his use of the weed as a metaphor for tenacity and migration, particularly in the context of his family history (see Cresswell, 1997; Pile, 1996; Sennett, 1996; Tuan, 1978) and related notions of displacement, presence and absence (see Cresswell, 1997; Wylie, 2009; Edensor, 2013; Frers, 2013).

I will look too at the role pain plays in his practice, at how it both closes and opens up the distance between the body and the landscape, memory and identity. It is stretching things beyond familiar usage to discuss pain as a contaminant, but the underlying intention is to draw attention to the dual role that pain can play. On one hand it can suggest a binary of 'interior' of experience and an outside exterior world. On the other it can entwine this interiority with the material world through the bodies painful encounter. Pain is an intrusive and disruptive affect and also one that may be wilfully experienced and endured, as having a purifying or edifying affect. The use of the notion of contamination in both cases is used to highlight the cultural constructs that assign values of good and bad, pure and impure, natural and unnatural to certain practices, things, objects and materials. Equally, it is also used to draw attention to the breaching of boundaries between such constructs and the production of the hybrid. Landy's weeds function in much the same way as Douglas's dirt, where 'reflection on dirt involves reflection on the relation of order to disorder, being to non-being, form to formlessness, life to death' (Douglas, 2002:7).

To further discuss the *Nourishment* series it is useful to also outline the two projects that Landy undertook before and after it. These are *Breakdown* and *Semi-detached* (figure 17 & 18) both of which are quite clearly autobiographical and address relationships between materiality and identity, memory and loss. In both these works, material artefacts are used to thread together people, places, experience and memory. The reference to his father is clear in *Breakdown* and *Semi-detached* as will be described, but also can be seen in *Nourishment* in a more metaphorical way, the weed as a symbol of the migratory and tenacious, able to survive in difficult conditions. What makes these material artefacts more than simply metaphors however is their relationship to pain and suffering, both physical and emotional. All three works have pain as an important subtext, either in their performance, production or Landy's discussions of them. Sometimes the pieces speak directly of pain, at other times it is the experiences that Landy chooses to put himself through in order to create his work that appear to be emotionally or physically painful. The *Nourishment* series for example started to tighten his tendons and give him a claw hand due to the intensity and extended periods over which he made the work (Steiner in Flood, 2008: 309; Greenstreet, 2002).

### **Breakdown**

The first project, *Breakdown*, is a metonym which refers to a two week public performance in which Landy oversees the physical destruction of all his worldly possessions and the question of if or how this might constitute a more fundamental breakdown, a destruction of identity. All his possessions were ground down into small pieces and sent to landfill, an act of public disintegration that brings to mind Jentsch's discussion of the uncanny affect of mental illness and fits to an early 20th century public, and how it reveals that 'mechanical processes are taking place' in what was previously regarded 'as a unified psyche' (Jentsch, 1906: 14). Equally and closely connected, it could also be read as engaging with Freud's notion of the 'death drive'. Landy has mentioned in interview that 'this is a celebration of a life, but I'm still alive. People come in who I haven't seen for years. It's really nice. I'm happy every day. It's like having my own funeral, but I'm alive to watch it' (Wood, 2001). However, this is a 'funeral' he constructed, a mechanical process that resists and disassembles the very notion of identity. On one hand in gathering all Landy's belongings together it creates the idea of an origin, an essential self. On the other hand it disassembles this identity piece by piece, slowly, meticulously and methodically. This has clear parallels with Freud's compulsion to repeat, the blind repetitive process of the death



Figure 17: Breakdown, 2001

Figure 18: Semi-detached and Landy's parents, 2004

drive (Freud, 2003), where he finds that 'he has created something that continues to work despite him, a monster almost' (Wood, 2001).

The layout of the destruction line is a figure of eight, the symbol for infinity, a fact which may be coincidental but is suggestive of mystical symbolism, vanishing his material life into infinity or perhaps adopting a more hopeful stance than a circular destruction line, O, an empty set or void. This doubling or mirroring of two zeros to suggest both nothing and everything, is an uncanny symbol, graspable yet incomprehensible, oscillating between language and the impossibility of translating it into experience. Over a period of weeks this loop slowly strips Landy of the personal, the intimate and the banal. It is conceived and executed in accordance with a Fordist model of production. From the very outset the process is intensely machine like and bureaucratic, starting with the careful and obsessive cataloguing of each and every item that Landy owns, with a brief description, often detailing where and when it was purchased and a note about its autobiographical history, perhaps who gave it to him or a memory associated with it. The conveyor belt itself, the boxing up of items and the inevitable movement of each and every piece to its destruction at the hands of one of his fifteen 'operatives' suggest something impersonal, vaguely sinister although tinged with an odd humour. Each of his operatives specialise in a different aspect of the process of dismantling and breaking it down into small pieces. Landy recounts that one of his operatives appeared to relish destroying his photographs, furiously scratching the faces off people with a coin before shredding them for landfill (Wood, 2001). Here, again, similar themes emerge, a fastidious attention to detail and mechanically repetitive tasks; pain, in the context of loss and emotional trauma; and an archival cataloguing of the process. Also themes of identity, memory, presence, absence and personal history clearly emerge. The works and their process of production reveal both a deeply personal and an objective, dispassionate treatment of the same subject matter.

### **Semi-detached**

The second project, which he completed after the *Nourishment* series, was *Semi-detached*. This was a full-scale replica of the house he grew up in and the house where his parents still lived. It was constructed off site and exhibited in two halves, its front and rear at the Tate Britain. Landy had meticulously photographed and catalogued his parents house, creating a library of visual references which could then be used by technicians to render with extreme attention to detail, every crack and drip of

paint, the colour differences in mortar where walls have been repointed. The only obvious departure from the original was that the house is split in two and separated, with projection screens stretched over each exposed end. Onto these screens Landy projected video footage of his father struggling to perform everyday tasks such as rolling a cigarette or panning across a shelf of his possessions with a melancholy sounds track of his father whistling the Irish ballad *Danny Boy*. The explicit reference to his father's pain and physical decline perhaps has a certain melancholy air about it, but also again it has a descriptive matter-of-fact realism, an abstraction and detachment that prevents sentimentality from creeping in.

In reproducing his parents house Landy once again engages with repetition as both describing and dissolving identity. Like Landy's *Breakdown*, the house has an element of uncanniness about it. This doppelgänger of his parents slightly shabby suburban semi appears both incongruous and at home in the grand setting of the Tate Britain, nestling comfortably into architectural scale of the North and South Duveen Galleries. There is also a sense of comfort and discomfort with personal nature of the house itself, the house oscillating between a theatrical presentation of his parents home and the sense of the real home and what that means to him and his parents and to which we have no access. Again there is an entwining of the self and identity with the objects and materials of the world and a theatrical display of this in a way that is in no way bombastic. The realism with which these works are presented and their improbable context, blurs distinctions between the public and the personal and between the real and fictional. When considered alongside the depictions of his father's pain and discomfort, we are reminded of the inaccessibility of the pain of others, that it too can appear as a fiction. As Scarry notes:

*'for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty,' while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is to 'have doubt'. Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed'* (Scarry, 1985: 3).

All three works discussed - *Breakdown*, *Nourishment* and *Semi-detached* - have explicit or underlying autobiographical responses to his father. His father was an Irish immigrant, who worked as a miner, digging tunnels. At the age of 37 he was involved in a serious accident, a tunnel collapsed in on him, fracturing his spine and almost

killing him. This catastrophic event put an end to his father's working life and had a profound effect on Landy himself, clearly evidenced by his father as a recurrent frame of reference. This is most clearly seen in *Semi-detached*, but is easily detected in other works. Landy said that the hardest thing to destroy in *Breakdown* was his father's Sheepskin coat, that 'destroying that will feel like disposing of my dad' (Landy in Hawkins, 2010: 28). The coat, which his father had bought just before the accident, was so expensive that he was paying for it in instalments. After the accident it took his mother a year to complete the payments. The coat was also now too heavy for Landy's father to wear, and although too big for Landy at the time, he gave it to him and he eventually grew into it. When discussing *Breakdown* and the impending destruction of his father's coat, Landy said 'to all the people working here to try and do it as lovingly as they possibly can' (Wood, 2001).

### **Nourishment**

The *Nourishment* series appears on the surface to be very different from the two large-scale installation projects that bracket it, and much of Landy's earlier work. However, upon examination common underlying themes and trajectories emerge - detailed observation and mechanical repetition; the role of pain and trauma in biography and identity; the use of a documentary and archival approach to his subject matter, the relationship of objects to presence and absence. Encapsulating this is an overall contextualisation within the mundane and everyday. All three projects can be seen to dissolve apparent distinctions between material objects and people in some ways (Hawkins, 2010: 28) and to reinforce them in others. This is an ambiguity that will be seen across all three research subjects, leaving us with a hybrid sense of the artist-subject as entwined with the materiality of objects, places and landscapes. The following sections will draw out and expand upon the threads from this discussion, and present Landy's *Nourishment* through three interpretations of contamination and its corollary, purification. These represent different ways of thinking through the tendencies in Landy's work to bring out boundaries in order to redraw them as porous relations. The following section entitled *Weeds* will look at the weed as a rubric for drawing out ideas of contamination and purity in understandings of nature and culture.

This acts as context for the main sections that follow. The section entitled *close observation, repetition and mimesis* will look further at the role of repetitive, labour intensive tasks, close observation and realist renderings in creating both distinctions

and indistinctions between artist's body and marginal landscape. Here I will also look at how this work attempts to realistically render and preserve the slowly wilting and dying weed whilst also in fact destroying it. This raises questions about how this work subverts categories of 'good' or 'bad', 'in place' or 'out of place', asking who or what is the contaminant here. Here Landy's work can be understood as raising and challenging such categorisations, where:

*'pollution beliefs can be read as statements about power relations in society. They define, according to the domain of ideology what is 'matter out of place,' and this in turn makes it clear who has control of such social definition' (Laws, 1990: 36).*

The work discussed here closely observes and copies from nature, creating etchings that are very much like scientific drawings of plant specimens, 'studying and classifying them with the accuracy of a botanist' (Flood et al, 2008: 309). This tendency to accurately copy and classify will also be read through DeSilvey's discussions of the archive, where she asks what can be considered as archival material and how the mutability of matter, the actions of non-human actors and processes might also themselves be considered as curating archival matter defined by its instability rather than fixity (DeSilvey, 2006).

This section is, as mentioned earlier, followed by one that makes links between materiality and biography which then leads to the third section, entitled *Pain*, will discuss pain and its role in the relationship of the creative subject to landscape. This will be addressed by considering Landy's material, embodied and metaphorical engagements with the landscape, where pain is considered as both a bodily contaminant and a purifying force. Although Landy does not discuss his work in these terms, I wish to bring out contamination and purification as an antagonistic pair that appears as a recurrent theme in his work. I will discuss how his work oscillates between these binary and relational tropes through various strategies that bring him close to the landscape and distance him from it. This will be discussed through recurrent themes in his work, in particular the experience of and reference to pain as both the subject matter of his work and in his own experience of making the work. This will be used to bring out how ambiguous notions of identity, the autobiographical nature of his work, and the importance of material process in his work. In *Nourishment*, pain is present in the production of the work, but is in no way visible in the work itself. Pain is a wilful, ritualistic experience with a purifying or edifying intent but also as a means by which he comes to inhabit the pain his father suffers, an act of empathy. Equally

however, pain is experienced as something that contaminates one's experience of the world that unsettles the future and creates a turbulence in a sense of self, identity and autobiographical narrative. Underlying this is potential of the body as ruin, a corollary to the material ruin that 'indexes both the hope and hubris of the futures that never came to pass' (Edensor and DeSilvey, 2013: 468).

Contamination in all three cases is discussed as a relationship between the construction and destruction of essences, of the pure versus the sullied, spoilt or discarded that arrives at the ambiguous and hybrid. This hybridity emerges not just through the relationship between nature and culture or self and landscape, but also as a moral ambiguity where the question of intent and its implications becomes blurred. He inverts the normalised understanding of what is 'good', siding with the contaminant, portrayed as the weed, pain or a disordered landscape. Landy is, at the same time, wilfully operating in a gallery system with economic imperatives. The value of work he makes here is determined by the economics of manufactured scarcity, short runs of limited edition prints. This makes any edifying claims for his work themselves seem contaminated by the instrumental economic concerns of creating work that is intended as a commodity, profitably integrated into the marketplace. Thus ambiguity and hybridity emerge through his work at many different levels.

## **Weeds**

The subject matter of Landy's *Nourishment* series - common weeds - themselves act as a material and metaphorical axis around which cultural distinctions between nature and culture are explored. The weed is used as both a positive and negative metaphor for identity, from tenacious and diasporic to out of place. Cresswell discusses the weed as a metaphor primarily for displacement, the 'out-of -placeness; of people and actions' (Cresswell, 2007: 334). *Nourishment* has been read through a similar metaphor of displacement, 'standing in for the urban underclass, similarly mobile, mongrel and diasporic, and also the subject of prolonged neglect and spasmodic measures of control, or weeding' (Stallabrass, 2002). This is perhaps most obviously read in relation to social or cultural inclusion and exclusion, and in particular in relation to his father, who is both an immigrant and a person suffering from disability. These metaphors clinging to the underside of the weed are however also developed further or reworked in *Nourishment*, and are given an affirmative reading, where the marginalised weed becomes an indication of care, sacrifice and value.

The weed is often considered as a contaminant, an unwelcome outsider that, in a similar way to Douglas's discussion of dirt, disrupts the desired order of the city. A weed is clearly a plant but as Mabey states, echoing Douglas, 'plants become weeds when they obstruct our plans, or our tidy maps of the world' (Mabey, 2010: 1). The weed is seen not simply as an annoyance or a problematic intrusion, but also as a symbol of an uncontrolled nature encroaching upon an understanding of nature as controlled and subjugated: 'troublesome weeds are symptoms of an unruly nature in the same way as animal 'pests', who become evident presences as they move out of their ruined refuge through more cultivated domestic and public urban space, transgressing their assigned marginal or rural locations' (Edensor, 2005: 46). From this perspective, weeds also demonstrate the ambiguities and arbitrariness of the lines we draw in our cultural constructions of nature - a plant in the wrong place or perhaps 'a plant whose whole virtues have not been discovered' (Emerson, 1849), but for whom is it in the wrong place and whose virtues are applying value? Weeds are thus both defined by and defining of social and physical contexts. A plant out of place is a sign of marginality, where control or order has slipped.

Many weeds are in fact controlled by law because of their predatory and invasive natures and the effects of this upon agriculture and biodiversity. Giant hogweed, Indian Balsam and Japanese Knotweed are all considered much more than pests. Giant hogweed is included in the Wildlife and Countryside Act of 1981 making it an offence to plant or knowingly tolerate its growth in the wild. Japanese knotweed is classed as a biohazard and is included not only in the Wildlife and Countryside Act but also in the Environmental Protection Act of 1990, where the plant, its cuttings and its excavated roots were classified as controlled waste which must only be disposed of at licensed sites. Such is the ongoing perceived problem that in 2009 the Finance Bill introduced a 150% tax break on costs related to the removal of Japanese knotweed (UK Government, 1981; 1990; 2009). The budget for removing Japanese knotweed found at the London Olympic site was £70 million (Booth, 2007). A whole industry has grown up around their removal. Thus weeds can be materially described through their invasiveness, their tenacity and their capacity to disrupt our attempts to control what grows where. These plants raise questions about how we define some nature as good and some as bad, and what and where the boundaries between 'nature' and human interests lie. The weeds discussed above point to how these lines may be drawn based upon instrumental concerns.

Plants are not always negatively cast as weeds due to their context on derelict or abandoned land. In the case of polluted land for example they might also be seen as a

wild nature attempting to claw back and resuscitate tainted earth. Our post-industrial cities live with the legacy of two centuries of industrial production leached or buried in the soil. Our infrastructural networks and mass consumption continue to produce vast waste, distribute waste, and create landscapes built from waste. These sites are often invisibly hidden beneath the cities out of sight wildernesses, hidden beneath a succession of tolerant species. Here weeds become saviours. The remediation of polluted sites such as spoil heaps from mining or lead works often involves the wilful introduction or natural invasion of plants which elsewhere would be considered undesirable weeds. Hardy pioneer species will grow first, bioaccumulators such as Sandwort, Alpine Penny-cress and Sheep's-fescue, which draw contaminants out of the earth, creating mulch as they shed leaves. This paves the way for other less hardy species that continue the process. Eventually a stable and diverse ecosystem is attained. Thus ironically, contaminated industrial sites often become informal commons or the sites for nature reserves, such as Beckton Alp or Bow Eco Park in East London. MUF Architects for example proposed filter beds of such bioaccumulators on Beckton Alp as part of their proposal to 'return the alp as a fully accessible, social, bioremediated landscape, but one that retains the intrinsic qualities that make it so beguiling' (MUF, 2008).

Weeds point to the problems in defining a 'nature' that is distinct somehow from human culture. Perhaps with the especially virulent and invasive species the line seems like an easy or desirable one to draw. There are however many weeds which are much less problematic, if at all, yet nevertheless are considered as undesirable, especially when uninvited. Buddleia, Ragwort or Rosebay Willowherb are, amongst others, hardy species able to grow in cracks, walls, poor soil. They are often seen in abundance on scraps of wasteland, urban scrubland, brownfield sites awaiting development or the decaying ruins of unused factories. These plants thrive on poor soils and minimal nutrients. They become closely associated with dereliction and waste, even the intense ruination of war. After the bombing of London during the Blitz, weeds rapidly sprung up across the city in bomb craters, the soils natural seedbank churned up and activated:

*'the great pits with their dense forests of bracken and bramble, golden ragwort and coltsfoot, fennel and foxglove and vetch, all the wild rambling shrubs that spring from ruin, the vaults and the cellars and caves, the wrecked guildhalls...'* (Macaulay in Woodward, 2002: 230).

The association of weeds with wasteland or decline is highlighted in Miami by a group of 'weedbombers' who tour the city's empty parcels of land and spray the weeds with bright colours (figure 19). This practice of 'weedbombing' is intended to draw attention to the Downtown Development Authority failure in its duty of care and maintenance of the environment, to shame



*Figure 19: Weed Bombing on NW 5th Street Miami*

them into action: 'a big, bright middle finger to city employees who spend more time power-washing Flagler than cutting back the jungles of undergrowth overtaking downtown' (Miller, 2011). Equally, a weed might benefit from changing tastes and fashions, like the burdock that started to appear adorning the foregrounds of Dutch and English landscape painting in the mid-seventeenth century. Mabey describes Ruskin's aestheticisation of plants, describing burdock as 'an exemplar of the beauty of irregularity' (Mabey, 2011).

Throughout this discussion it is clear that the weed is functioning as both material and metaphor, a plant which is an active agent within the landscape but one that also has its meaning woven into those of ruin, abandonment and displacement. Cresswell argues for an understanding of metaphor not as 'decorative, or marginal, or a way of thinking or perceiving' but as inherently political (Cresswell, 1997: 333). He argues that 'the creation and maintenance of metaphorical understanding is an inherently political process and one that is more likely to be produced by people in power than by people who are relatively powerless. Power, at least in part, involves the ability to impose metaphors on others' (ibid).

The following sections of this chapter will look more closely at Landy's practice, asking what cultural constructions of 'good' and 'bad' nature these works point to and how they challenge them. Contamination implies mobility and porosity, the physical movement of one essence into another, creating something hybrid and unknown, possibly threatening. Fundamentally this implies a set of judgements, an essentialising categorisation that forms the basis for naturalised assumptions that the 'contaminant' is bad, in some way dangerous. Equally it suggests that there is something 'good' that is threatened, often a sense of order and control. As Douglas observes, 'dirt offends

against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to 'organise the environment' (Douglas, 2002: 2). This basis might be related to biological or ecological effects, real or imagined, polluted water, contaminated food, the spread of disease or the fear of disease. Its basis may be entirely culturally constructed.

In the case of weeds, it is their very presence in the urban environment that can be considered as 'contaminating' or unsightly, a cultural indicator of the absence of care or maintenance, an indication of a feral nature spreading and taking over, which needs to be subdued. Landy turns this around through the idea of nourishment, where the weed becomes something to be sustained, celebrated and reified through the practice of his art. His work equally can be read as bringing an understanding of marginality to relationships between people and materiality, the earth and soil and his father's personal history for example, as an immigrant, as the victim of a mining accident and his ongoing experiences of illness and disability. In this way Landy uses the weed to highlight the categories that become visible through ideas of marginalisation whilst also celebrating the hardiness and tenacity of the marginalised. If read through Cresswell's understanding of the metaphor as having a political dimension, these etchings can be seen as a form of resistance by reappropriating the ecological metaphor of the weed as out of place into one of sustenance, optimism and dignity for the powerless and marginalised.

### **Close observation, repetition and mimesis**

Landy's processes of producing *Nourishment* are highly embodied, requiring a close proximity to the material landscape, close observation and the repetitive manual tasks of drawing or etching over extended periods of time. Landy looked for weeds growing in cracks in the pavement, on a verge or piece of wasteland and returned to over a period of days or weeks, making detailed drawings. He sat or lay on the ground next to the weed for long periods in order to make these drawings.

This literal ground appears in the etchings themselves only as an absence, the white paper the weeds are imprinted on. It is only implied in the work itself, an absence that conjures the unnoticed gaps and spaces of neglected land, free from the maintenance regimes of the city. In interview, Landy frequently describes the weeds as *street flowers*, and broadly locates them and the ground from which they came as the area of East London around where he lived and worked at that time. 'I just pick them from around the estate where I live' (Cummings, 2012) he states in one

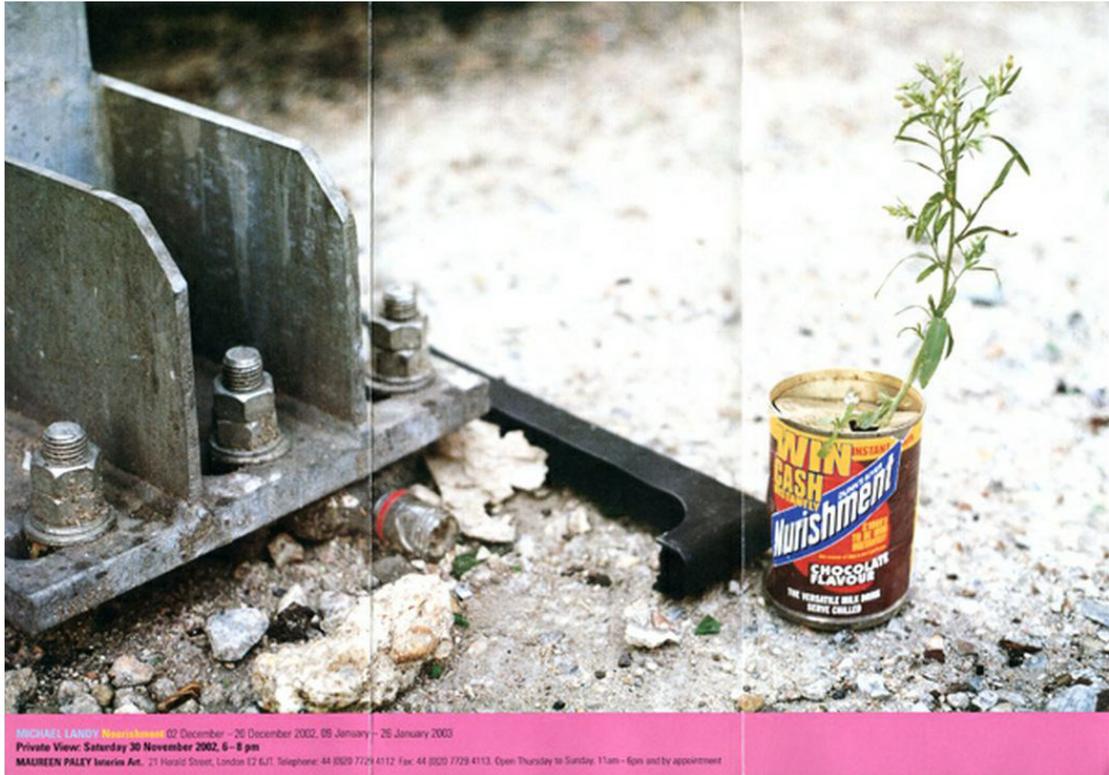


Figure 20: *Nourishment* exhibition flyer, 2002

interview, whilst the National Gallery notes that *Nourishment* represents ‘common weeds found growing near his studio in East London’ (National Gallery, 2009). In another interview he notes that his interest in weeds started with Shepherd’s Purse when he was a child, which ‘grew all over the estate where I grew up and the first plant I became aware of’ (Sunspel, 2012). In other interviews, reviews and articles the literal ground is variously located in the anonymous ‘cracks between pavements, at the corners of car parks, football pitches’, (Wullschlager, 2012) ‘urban brownfields, from cracks in pavements and the corners and verges of car parks’ (Reitmaier, 2003), and ‘inhospitable urban environment’ (V&A, 2015). In the Tate Magazine, the literal landscape is referred to in a hand written text by Landy that accompanies an article about the work:

*‘Just walk along the street and you will discover Shepherd’s Purse growing in narrow cracks in the pavement, amongst the sweet wrappers, cigarette stubs and fizzy drinks cans [...] they can survive the most hostile urban landscape, by being adaptable to their surroundings’ (Nourishment, 2002: 158).*

The literal ground is referred to only through text and interview, never does it appear in the work itself. A visual reference to the literal ground appears only once, a photograph of a weed in a can of Nourishment drink used as the flyer for the original

Artangel exhibition of the work (see figure 20). This close up image of the ground gives no wider context, just an anonymous patch of concrete with a discarded vodka bottle, a piece of stale bread, a plastic handle and various bits of unidentified detritus.

The literal urban landscape is thus given as the immediate context of the weed, a hostile environment populated by dirt and poolings of discarded rubbish: ‘..so I really like them because they’re stoical little things and they grow amongst all the rubbish.’ (Landy in Sunspel, 2012). The drinks can in the photograph, used as a vase, and bearing the title of the work *Nourishment*, is a thick vanilla flavoured energy drink, reinforced with vitamins and minerals. It is popular with people who are themselves on the margins of society, homeless people and intravenous drug users, a cheap, practical meal that fulfils the basic need for nourishment without fuss. Empty cans can often be found discarded in anonymous wastelands and underpasses. Thus the literal ground of his work, like these anonymous wastelands and the white ground of his etchings, is absent, never proposed as a specific location, but rather as a circumstance - characterised by survival in a hostile, loveless, dirty, littered and utilitarian ground: ‘they’re plants that end up on building sites - they love being on wasteland’. (Sunspel, 2012).

It is also worth noting the connection with his previous work, *Breakdown*, where all his belongings, once ground to dust or chopped into small pieces, ended up in landfill sites. The urban sites that *Nourishment* refers to appear to also refer to similar sites of waste and abandonment that are indexed in this earlier work. Other works such as *Scrapheap Services* (1996) and *Scrapheap Challenge* (2010) again also reference sites of waste and rubbish, without actually locating them in a specific place. Similarly, *Nourishment* locates itself, without ever making a precise literal ground visible, in these spaces of informal waste, the scrappy corners and pieces of brownfield land, car parks and so on, which act as pockets where detritus collects, urban maps of detritus which trace the areas where the city goes unacknowledged and unmaintained.

As Stallabras notes, the etchings themselves, with their detail, bring one up close to those scraps of land, where ‘one’s nose is in uncomfortable proximity to a pavement or back lot in Bethnal Green’ (Stallabras, 2002). These are not extensive landscapes, but really a nose to ground encounter, where it is the smell of the dirt, the feeling of damp on ones hands and knees, a general character rather than a specific locale.

This emphasis on proximity and familiarity with the materiality of the landscape and close observation in the field has clear resonances with the field studies of Sauer or Jackson, a focus upon the everyday material landscape. In choosing the weed as his subject matter, there is particular affinity with Jackson's work, an emphasis on the mundane and everyday, an emerging vernacular rather than the programmed space of the city (see Jackson, 1984). Landy is concentrating on the overlooked margins and the maligned landscapes of the city, drawing attention to the small gaps and interstices that emerge and revealing (and celebrating) the gaps in control over the urban landscape. The object of contemplation here is perhaps the thing that the city must be opposed to, the disorder of a wild and untamed nature. These hardy plants eking out a living between cracks in the pavement are small outposts that remind us that there is a forceful nature lurking and ready to overwhelm our feeble architectures and infrastructures, a nature that 'penetrates urban existence, and foreshadows what might happen if is not controlled' (Edensor, 2005: 47).

Unlike Sauer or Jackson, Landy isn't taking a rural or anti-urban perspective, but like Jackson in particular he is giving value to that which is normally devalued, the plants that are seen as unwanted intruders. The urban environment is clearly intended as the context for these works and this can be seen in the images used to promote the work (figure 20). Here, the weed can be seen being placed and taking its place amongst the maligned materialities of waste, rubbish and decay. The weed is aligned with ideas of 'matter unbound', unstable matter which has been stripped of its value and meaning (see Hawkins, 2010: 811). The weed is a motif for the marginalised, cast aside and out of place, is emphasised and reinforced by association with the rubbish and detritus of this scrappy piece of wasteland but also challenged by its placement in a 'vase', the discarded drinks can. In doing so Landy highlights how this understanding of a valueless nature is constructed along cultural lines, the image of waste and the still life fighting for attention. In drawing attention to the weed, in making it the centre of attention, despite (or because of) its outsider status he elevates it.

As Hawkins and Muecke argue, 'redemption shows that negative value can be exchanged into positive value, rubbish can become art [...] or a new source of profit' (Hawkins and Muecke, 2003: xi). Through the attention of his practice, he challenges the essentialising perspective that produces notions of good and bad nature. In placing his close attention on these lowly, unwanted and intrusive plants, he is, like John Clare, commenting upon cultural distinctions between value, distinctions which have little to do with biology and much more to do with cultural constructions of value

and social status, 'an inherently political process that is more likely to be produced by people in power than by people who are relatively powerless' (Cresswell, 2007: 333). When read in the context of *Breakdown* and *Semi-detached*, Landy could be seen to be making metaphorical links between the materialities of landscape and social status, with the weed being used as a proxy for his 'working class' background and his father as an immigrant (see Stallabrass, 2002).

However, Landy's work extends beyond Stallabrass's direct metaphorical substitution. Landy's practice of making the etchings is, as has been described earlier, one which is extremely labour intensive, a drawn out repetitive process of slowly etching in obsessive detail. When the prints are considered in isolation, they appear to treat the weeds almost as scientific specimens. The prints are similar to the kind of botanical illustrations that might be used to record, classify or identify. There is an emphasis on detail and a truth to the plant in its entirety, from leaves to fine hairs and exposed roots. Gesture and expression are flattened into uniformly fine black lines on a white ground. Context is removed, leaving an image which is displaced from its originating landscape, the weed is objectified, an archival trace. However, the choice of common weed which is itself, as Cresswell points out, a metaphor of displacement (Cresswell, 1997: 335), when accompanied by this emphasis upon care and attention points the viewer to a more ambiguous reading that reveals and subverts our cultural understanding of good and bad nature both fixing and unfixing familiar and contrary frames of reference (see DeSilvey, 2006: 324).

The weeds themselves are presented without context, floating unanchored in a white expanse of paper. This absence of a visual landscape context, allows the urban weed to conjure its own landscape imaginary of wastelands, cracks and crevices, an identity that easily evokes these originating landscapes. These images belong to a 'matrix of memory, even if it is a matrix which is remote from human concerns and interests' (Casey quoted in DeSilvey, 2006: 325). The weeds depicted here have been seen many times over as we walk past derelict buildings, patches of brownfield land, crumbling walls, and cracked pavements. These memories are banal, non-specific, they are not tied to events. In this sense they are similar to Freud's mnemonic memories discussed in the previous chapter, conjuring not a specific landscape but a hovering impression of a landscape which is meaningless to us, but also asks whether there is something we may have forgotten or repressed that lurks beneath.

The *Nourishment* series has been compared to *Das große Rasenstück* or *Large Piece of Turf* (1503), an early example of a realist drawing of weeds produced by Dürer in 1503 (Mabey, 2011) (figure 21). The subject matter of Dürer's plants is mundane and unimposing, the visual context is ambiguous, it appears to be the actual environment where they are found, but the background is blank, there is no sky or horizon, the ground seems to end unnaturally. As with Landy's weeds, some of the roots are exposed. Both Landy's and Dürer's work share some commonalities, both ambiguous in their intent, making an apparently realist rather than idealised depiction of nature and yet also emphasising the plants' separation from a wider landscape, making 'nature' into an object of study. This ambiguity may perhaps be a function of the creative process, a trace that has not been entirely obscured by the final image. The intense and obsessively close observation common to these works by Landy and Dürer brings about a confluence of self and landscape, dissolving the distinction between the two through an intense and prolonged relationship between the artist and this material detail of the landscape. Equally, the production of an object, a print, emphasises the distinction between self and landscape. It turns nature into an object and implies an audience who gazes upon and occupies one half of this separation.

Landy's decision to employ copper plate etching and printmaking as the means of reproducing the series contributes to this separation. The positive copper plate has a limited useful lifespan, it can only produce so many prints before it wears down and the quality of reproduction is no longer acceptable. Supply is thus restricted and the value of scarcity conferred. Other decisions such as the choice of fine art print maker, paper stock, presentation are all devices that bring the work into direct relationship with value production and the marketplace. Within the context of the art world within which Landy is operating the imperative for profit is not far away. Landy does not hide his need to generate an income through his work nor is he at all critical of the commercial nature of the art world, stating that 'the art world isn't commercially motivated enough. I have no problem with people making money from art' (Landy cited in Barnett, 2009: 23).

Landy seems comfortable with the ambiguity of his position in the art world as both someone who produces marketable commodities and someone who questions the relationship between materiality and identity. In this way, his etchings emphasise a distinction between both self and landscape and nature and culture. The art object has a distinct existence and circulation in the art world, a world which has a tendency



Figure 21: Albrecht Dürer, *Das große Rasenstück*, 1503

to make an 'identification between the social significance of an artefact and its physical permanence' (DeSilvey, 2006: 324). This is quite separate from the process of creating the work. In taking the weed out of context and representing it as an object without relation to the environment from which it came, this split is further emphasised. Here the weed is fixed, its decline halted and its persistence guaranteed. The imperative of the archive or museum collection is fulfilled, and quite at odds with its subject's transience and mobility.

Separation can also be seen in the process by which these images were produced. After a period of intense observation in the field Landy then uproots the weeds in order to continue to draw them in the studio, where he attempts to keep them alive for as long as possible. This uprooting, the removal from their environment is made clear by the presence of the roots in the etchings and by the visible evidence of wilting. The etchings too are made not from direct observation of the plant but from the finely detailed reference drawings Landy made before the plant had completely wilted. Here there is a double, the copper plate and the print, both of which appear visually as positive images - one through an absence of material (copper) the other through a coincident excess of material (ink). These absences and excesses are both mirror images of one another. This might perhaps seem unimportant, simply a process employed to create a final piece. But why did he not simply produce a series of drawings? There are important differences between drawing and etching (see Ingold, 2007: 120). Etching is the removal of metal, whereas drawing is the deposit of graphite. Etching thus leaves little room for error, as mistakes are difficult to rectify. Etching also creates uniform line width. This lends a sense of static flatness to the resulting print, as there is no trace of gesture in the line, no sense of pressure, no lines that get wider or narrow to a point as they trace the sweep of a wrist movement. As Ingold notes, it is techniques such as etching and engraving 'that broke the link between the gesture and its trace' (Ingold, 2007:139). Etching is an ideal medium for creating a flat, neutral and expressionless image, qualities which are quite evident in Landy's prints.

The process that culminates in the final set of prints therefore demonstrates a series of distanciations and proximities between artist and landscape. The production of these works is both intensely involved in a material urban landscape and intensely involved in a material process that describes these plants. There is sequence of transformations which lead away from the material subject, the weed in its environment, towards a purely imaginative experience of the weed and in particular

the landscape which is its context. The drawings are done in the field and in the studio, in front of the living and then dying plant. The etchings are done when the weed has gone, using the drawings as reference. Finally, the copper plates are finished and the work can be printed and put into circulation as a commodity, quite divorced from the originating landscape. The final process of printing entirely separates the artist from the original material landscape it refers to. The prints become the traces of inscriptions of inscriptions, a mise en abyme of cascading reflections that encode this movement from presence to absence in the very means of their production, archival images that selectively render the unstable wilting weed as fixed and stable and the similarly unstable ground of the marginal landscape, as invisible. These stabilities and absences are themselves never stable though, the flat monochrome and descriptive etching fills up with memory and experience, the invisible landscape keeps returning.

So, in one sense, by choosing to etch in this way, highly detailed and botanically accurate, Landy is producing objectified realist representations of a series of plants. He makes no attempt in the etchings to show the context from which the weed came, reinforcing the weeds distancing from its environment. There is no hint of his journeying out to find his specimens, no mention of location or context, nothing to indicate the weather, the mood or any other myriad of affective signifiers. These are all visually absent and instead, the works are neutral. The marginality of the landscape from where the weeds originated is however never lost. It is already coded into the cultural understanding of the weed and is also referred to in texts that accompany the work, or whenever the work is discussed or displayed in exhibition:

*'Shepherd's Purse takes its name from the distinctive shape of the seedpods, which resemble purses once carried by shepherd's. This annual plant produces tiny white flowers with four petals, which mature into heart-shaped seed pods. When the pods are ripe they break open and release small brown sticky seeds. Just walk along the street and you will discover Shepherd's Purse growing in narrow cracks in the pavement, amongst the sweet wrappers, cigarette stubs and fizzy drinks cans. These street flowers need very little soil or nourishment to prosper, they can survive the most hostile urban landscape, by being adaptable to their surroundings' (Nourishment, 2002).*

These are portraits of the margins and marginality, where the margins are themselves aptly left out and simply alluded to by reference to the weed. The weed is thus presented as both distant and proximal to its originating landscape and with the subject who views the work. The landscape appears as present through its absence.

The prints as artefacts do nevertheless tend to clearly demonstrate a material distance from the originating landscape, replacing this rather with a suggestion of imaginative occupation. This is in contrast with Landy's embodied experience in the process of producing the etchings, the intense observation over long periods both in the margins where the weeds grow and in his studio. Such intense observation brings the external object 'inside', it also insinuates the eye and the hand in the 'external' world, diminishing the distance between the internal and external, and making them in some way coincide. The drawing or etching itself as an artefact might be a realist representation, emphasising the 'out-there-ness' of the plant, emphasising the existence of an external world, but the process does quite the opposite. In order to arrive at this representation, the artist must not just observe but embody the landscape, the repetitive gestures of pencil and paper or scribe and copper plate, the pain and discomfort of prolonged periods of work, bring not just a visual but also a kinaesthetic experience.

In geography, Spinney discusses this entwinement with the landscape through the practice of Alpine cyclists: 'through the production of rhythms, the re-embodiment of the visual, and the intense muscular feeling of a 'kinaesthetic burn', the mountain in many ways becomes internalised as part of achieving a personal and bodily goal' (Spinney, 2006: 712). This re-embodiment of the visual is a corollary with Landy's walks, in which he seeks out not views or vistas but a proximity to the ground of the urban margins where he finds his subject matter. This embodied vision is further emphasised through the discomfort of the rough ground whilst making sketches of the weed and the very long periods of etching, day after day, week after week.

This self-imposed and ritualistic experience of pain is, I suggest, a creative strategy, an endurance that imprints the landscape upon the self and internalises it. Here, 'a dialectical relationship emerges where extra-somatic representations are superseded and the immediacy of the senses in the context of achieving a cultural goal comes to the fore to create the meaning of place' (Spinney, 2006: 712). The process is one where Landy is not only etching his image of the weed onto the copper plate, but equally the material landscape and the weed itself are etching themselves into him through pain. In a similar way Lewis discusses the pain and physical damage of rock upon climber, where 'climber and environment inscribe each other' (Lewis, 2000: 74).

## Entwining materiality and personal history

The prints as artefacts are quite distinct from the process by which they are produced. The process of production appears to be closer to notions of autobiographical witness, entwining Landy with the materiality of the weeds and their urban margins with his own personal history. The prints themselves have a greater tendency to both objectify and commodify, to present us with an archive of 'nature', creating a schism between subject and landscape. How do the embodied materialities of Landy's practice and process of production resonate with ideas of memory and personal history? As the process of producing the work unfolds, so too does the increasing absence of weeds in the originating landscape. This has material resonances with the absence of his father in the mines following his accident. His father too was literally pulled from the earth, the unseen tunnels forever only existing in Landy's imagination, yet having had profound affects on his family life. The nature and connectedness of these absences is suggested and amplified through the process of making these works, the experience of absence being 'stronger when it refers to practices, emotions and corporal attachments that have been deeply ingrained into those who experience the absence' (Frers, 2013: 431). Thus it is not only Landy's father's absence in the mines that these works refer to but rather the absence of life before the accident, the everyday tasks that could no longer be taken for granted, his father's enthusiasm for DIY which he was no longer able to do after the accident.

In the first instance Landy's practice brings him into contact with materiality of urban gaps, brownfield sites, car park verges and cracks in the pavement. These are suggestive of the imaginaries of out of sight spaces, the tunnels that his father once worked in. The roots of the weeds pulled from the earth, drawn in great detail, bring to mind Landy's recollections of the story of his father's accident where he was virtually buried alive, looking up and just seeing tree roots dangling on top of him (Ward, 2004). Landy's attention to detail in his portraits of weeds, the visibility of damage, wilting and decay again echoes his interest in the body in pain, as seen for example in his video portraits and drawings of his father's damaged hands struggling to roll a cigarette or massaging a painful foot (Figure 22). In these ways Landy's work doesn't represent subjects or landscapes but rather weaves identity, memory, performance, landscape and material together, emphasising motifs of dislocation or dissonance between past and present, a discontinuity which plays out through the struggle of the body in pain and decline. There is an underlying motif of death, which is both absent and present in the etchings, visibly hinted at only through the signs of wilting (figure



Figure 22: *Claudication*, 2004

Figure 23: *Fever Few (detail)*, 2002

23). Landy is recording both the existing imperfections and the decay of these weeds, giving them static form. The plant has been physically pulled from its context and thus is dying, adding to the weeds association with transience, where 'Death ruptures that sense of permanence and continuity we strive for through 'survival strategies'' (Bauman in Lewis, 2000: 61).

## **Pain**

The repetition of manual labour and endurance of pain in depicting the weeds of these urban margins acts as Landy's index and register for a wider autobiographical experience woven with his own history and identity. Stallabrass (2002) sees them as a metaphor for the urban underclass, but the work is more nuanced and personal than this. The repetitive manual work of his father beneath the earth, his father's accident and subsequent struggle, and the context of his social 'class' are not simply being represented or encoded into these images as Stallabrass suggests, but are in much more profoundly embodied and enacted through the mundane, repetitive and ultimately painful process of mark making which creates the work. In Landy's working practices, and *Nourishment* in particular, numerous references are made in interview and descriptions, to this intense observation and the painful process of drawing and etching:

*'[Nourishment] was probably at the height of my abilities as an etcher, because your eyes start to give in, and I got a tendon problem in my finger from the etching – because the etching needle makes lovely fine marks that you can't get with pen, but it's so fine that eventually you start damaging your eyes and hands' (Landy in Sunspel, 2012).*

The process by which he makes the work is one of wilful endurance. This could be interpreted as an attempt to gain an understanding of pain, in particular his father's pain, to inhabit a body in pain and the reorientation to the world this entails. This can only be done only through practice rather than contemplation, not 'sense so much as sensuousness, an embodied and somewhat automatic knowledge that functions like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational' (Taussig in Crouch, 2003: 1952). This reading is supported by some of the trajectories that runs through *Breakdown*, *Nourishment* and *Semi-detached*, manifesting in each in different ways. After stripping himself of the material identity of his possessions in *Breakdown*, he is left with the significance of his father's

accident through the difficulty he felt in the destruction of his father's coat (figure 24). He then appears to have materially returned to this formative event and its long-term consequences with *Nourishment*, albeit in a less than obvious manner.

This trajectory then continues and becomes much more clearly and obviously drawn out in *Semi-detached*, with its explicitly stated focus upon his father's struggles and lost aspirations. There is a relation to presence and absence at play here which is materially grounded, mundane and everyday, where 'absence arises in the experience, it is a relational phenomenon that constitutes itself in corporeal perceptions' (Frers, 2013: 434). In this way, through practice and embodiment, Landy's *Nourishment* series addresses an understanding of landscape that emphasises dislocation, rupture and distancing. This sense of a foundational impermanence that underpins our dwelling in the world emphasises how the margins challenge those 'notions of authentic dwelling-in-the-world, of 'proper' placing and belonging' that Wylie warns are too easily the product of 'corporeal, affective and experiential/historical' approaches that 'valorise presence, via tropes of immersion, engagement, coincidence and excavation' in current geographical studies of memory and materiality (Wylie, 2009: 287).

Returning now to *Nourishment* and the repetition of labour, the extremely intricate detail of the drawings and Landy's very intense working process. Weeds are by nature tenacious and it is this very tenacity that enables them to survive long enough for him to draw them in the detail he desires, if he works as long as the light lasts each day. There is a performance at work here between Landy and the weed, a performance where his ability to work repetitively and for long periods of time, the weed's ability to survive out of its 'natural' environment, and its inevitable demise are inseparable. The process of producing the work can perhaps be thought of as an inverse of its title *Nourishment*. Weeds by their nature thrive upon poor soils with little nourishment, their success is tied to their ability to succeed in conditions and environments where other plants cannot survive. Nevertheless, when plucked from the ground and moved to Landy's studio, the weeds quickly decline. This resonates with his father's experience of physical decline since his accident that left him physically damaged and separated from the subterranean landscape in which he had worked and which had given him his sense of identity. Thus there is again an abstracting tendency that both addresses and freezes decline.

As with the work of Gill discussed in the following chapter, there is a strong emphasis upon embodiment and experience as being central to their practice. It is through Landy's embodied practices - protracted periods of crouching, sketching,



*Figure 24: Landy's father's sheepskin coat before destruction*

etching - that the relationship between artist-subject, urban margin and personal history is problematised, creating subjects both distinct and entwined with the landscape. Wylie discusses corporeality and landscape through 'the affinities and distanciations of self and landscape, which emerge in the course of walking,' (Wylie, 2005, 234). Here he talks of this double articulation, where the rugged materiality of walking on 'broken, steeping, muddy ground' brings out a sense of self as distinct from the landscape, whilst also creating an enfoldment of self and landscape (2005: 240). Landy's practice has resonances with this and in particular through reference to the experience of the body in pain, both his own and that of his father. Wylie discusses the walker's pain as a contraction of the subject away from the landscape, as attention becomes focused entirely upon the body, and also a second split, an externalising of the body from the self (2005: 244). However, here I want to argue that pain can be seen in Landy's work to create a sense of dissolution between self and both material landscape and memory, a way by which materiality, memory and personal histories become entwined. Equally I argue that Landy uses pain as a means to access an intersubjectivity, a way of putting himself in his father's shoes as it were, experiencing the pre-subjective non-communicability of pain. Michael suggests that pain creates a distinction between self and landscape, a self-reflexive self that 'can no longer experience the sublime' (Michael in Wylie, 2005: 244). Pain in the production of Landy's work appears to be more a mechanism by which the self dissolves and the pre-conscious subject comes into view. The self-reflexivity that is central in Wylie's narration of his walk (although also precisely what he is arguing against and aware of as problematic) is replaced by Landy's direct visceral bodily experience.

This pre-conscious subject is emphasised through the formulaic and repetitive nature of his practice and the long periods over which the task of making the work happens. This can also be seen in *Breakdown* for example, where Landy's possessions, those material artefacts which are implicated in a sense of identity, that offer anchors and reminders to fix and stabilise the self, are mechanically and systematically destroyed. In *Nourishment*, the repetition is embodied and habitual, his own physical repetitions involved in the long periods of observation and mark making with a tool, pencil on paper or scribe on copper. So, whereas Wylie describes himself as a subject that perceives a landscape and experiences pain whilst grappling with the problem of how this might be thought out relationally, Landy's practice is what the subject does, a performance without reflection, a subject that leaves marks and traces and stops there. Landy doesn't stand back and observe and analyse the process, he does not split himself off as the subject that does the seeing, but rather loses himself

in the materiality of the world through close observation, repetitive gestures and movements and the physical pain that accompanies this.

He occupies a performative and bodily engagement, stopping short of a self-reflexive analytical attempt to make sense of this. Wylie carries on past the embodied experience, writing himself into his account and thus (as he himself points out) problematising his argument for a relational understanding of the subject, adopting a first person narrative that 'presupposes the very epistemological principles [his] paper argues against: a conception of individuals as discrete monadic subjects, an a priori separation of subject and object' (Wylie, 2005: 245). The difference perhaps is the way in which the 'goal' of the activity is understood. For Wylie the 'goal' - an autoethnographic walk - is also the work itself, the source of the content for an academic paper and its anticipated audience. For Landy, the goal - a series of prints - is abstracted from the process of getting there. Getting there is only the embodied processes necessary to get there, and 'meaning is created and identity is formed in the act of doing, away from prefigured representations of the social world' (Spinney, 2005: 712).

For Landy, this co-construction of self and marginal landscape is rooted in the familiar and the mundane. Wylie describes tourist like excursions into an unfamiliar landscape, a landscape that has the capacity for 'exhilarating encounters' (Wylie, 2005: 242). Landy's work is oriented differently, wilfully turned towards the discomfort of repetition and the everyday ordinariness of the weed. Although Wylie engages with the sublime in a critical way, he does nevertheless seek out landscapes and landscape experiences that have the visual affordances from which notions of the sublime can emerge. Although strongly engaged with embodiment and performance, Wylie's approach to landscape is always oriented first and foremost towards the visual and often invokes at some point critical discussions of views from points of elevation, 'acknowledging not only the world's intimacy, vitality, and relatedness, but also its horizon, the view that recedes and precedes the image' (Rose and Wylie, 2006: 479). Landy's landscape is much closer to hand, the uncomfortable ground beneath his body, the plant inches from his nose. There are no impressive sweeping vistas, no crashing waves that could allude to the force of nature (see Wylie, 2005), just simple weeds growing from cracks in the pavement. Landy has no opportunity to gaze, but rather is intent on an interrogative looking and drawing, the haptic and the visual inseparable, a hybrid self which emerges through and between the body, the landscape and the technologies he uses - pencil and paper, copper plate and scribe.

Ingold asks if there 'is some distinction to be made between the observational acuity of eyesight in watching and looking, and the interpretive visuality of seeing' (Ingold, 2010: 15). Like Spinney's discussion of cycling and Wylie's discussion of ascending Glastonbury Tor, there comes a point where pain takes over and the visual apprehension of the landscape 'becomes internalised, as pain and fatigue increasingly foreground 'interoception' (what is within) rather than 'exteroception' (what is without)' (Spinney, 2005: 722). I would suggest that this is the point at which the material landscape, body and tools all become experienced as conjoined, where the visual loses its capacity to abstractly survey and represent and becomes proximal, close up to the landscape. As Hetherington notes 'proximal knowledge is performative rather than representational. It's non-representational quality is also context-specific, fragmentary, and often mundane' (Hetherington, 2003: 1934).

The physical pain of the long periods of drawing perhaps does not distance Landy from that which he draws but rather brings him closer to it. Certainly it would make the translation of the visual form of the plant to mark on paper or copper plate intensely experienced. Landy's practice demonstrates a stance towards landscape that from the start does not seek the sensual or aesthetic pleasure of the gaze, but rather the roughness, difficulty and pain that make self and landscape emphatically 'real' and inseparable from the body. It is an intense embodied experience, where the gaze gives way to a very different way of looking, an interrogative, deep observational looking which has much in common with the proximity of touch. Drawing and etching from life make a kinaesthetic connection between the hand and the eye.

Despite the visual nature of the final works, the embodied process of making them from the outset inherently pushes out the gazing detached subject that Wylie critiques and aligns vision with touch. Touch can be understood 'as a way of knowing that not only ignores the need for representation', but also decentres the subject in 'the process as both a singular coherent representing subject and a subject of representation of the object world' (Hetherington, 2003:1934). As Lewis notes when discussing the hands of the climber, touch is the 'unmediated acquisition of embodied knowledge' and that the hand 'has the capacity to resolve or transcend subject/object dualisms', and is the means by which we 'pull the world into our selves' (Lewis, 2000: 70-71). Again, this is the kind of proximity that John Clare expressed in his phrase 'dropping down' (Clare, 1951), an engagement which seeks to dissolve distance and distinction between the self and the environment in front of us.

In Spinney's paper on cyclists climbing Mont Ventoux he discusses the cyclist's tunnel vision when focused upon and immersed in the pain of a very long, steep ascent (Spinney, 2006). There is a narrowing of the visual experience of landscape, a focus down onto the few feet of road in front of the front wheel. The body, bicycle and landscape are no longer distinct, they are brought together by their struggle with and against each other, a struggle that is characterised by both pain and the ability to endure it. The landscape is the source of the subject in Landy's work, but through close observation in the field and in bringing a small part of it back to his studio and laboriously and painfully rendering it, he is occupying the same kind of tunnel vision. He is narrowing down to what is immediately in front, the ground beneath, creating the same kind of internalisation of landscape through discomfort and endurance. Here the weed becomes a proxy for the larger landscape it came from, the pencil or etching tool, the bicycle and Landy the rider. The urban margin, like Spinney's Mont Ventoux, remains the context, but disappears from view, no longer taken in by a gazing subject. Its presence is implicit and does not need to be visible. The subject's attention is focused much more closely at the immediate material interface between body and landscape. This context is made clear to the viewer of the finished work through interpretation or text whilst the prints themselves display nothing but the plant, unanchored and floating upon the white paper ground.

In Landy's work this tendency is further exaggerated through a practice where obsessive mechanical repetition is important, a performance of embodied action that emphasises the pre-conscious, like Freud's uncanny compulsion to repeat (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 11). The repetitive nature of his work and his wilful endurance of pain, the movement to and from the weeds location, the long uncomfortable hours of observation, drawing, and etching in the studio, has something of a ritualistic element about. This practice of intense drawing and etching both in the urban landscape and in his studio, emphasises proximity, repetition and intensity, bringing him into a porous relationship with the landscape. However, the combination of the mundane and everyday with the experience of pain also keys Landy's practice into memory and personal history. As discussed earlier, in the context of *Breakdown* and *Semi-detached* it is difficult not to read these etchings as also being meditations on Landy's father's tenacity both as an immigrant and in the face of adversity, the marginalising forces of his disability and his father's ongoing struggle with pain. In *Nourishment*, the pain experienced could be seen as a ritual enactment that connects Landy not just to the urban margins in which the weeds grow, but also experiences of pain and suffering which form part of his family background. Houseman discusses how ritually inflicted

pain can perform this function, in the beating of the bounds for example, 'forging an intimate, bodily connection between persons and places in question', and where 'inflicted pain also simultaneously acts to embed this connection within a larger network of interpersonal ties' (Houseman, 1998: 3). Here the pain points to multiple temporalities, an intense experience of the moment and a presencing of memory, to an intimate experience of the landscape and its marginality alongside something more autobiographical, oriented around Landy's father's experience of struggle and pain.

This wilfulness in confronting or enduring pain is a recurring aspect of his work and can be seen in both *Breakdown* and *Semi-detached*. Both these pieces are more obviously autobiographical than *Nourishment*, and his father appears clearly in both. In *Breakdown*, it is his father's sheepskin coat that Landy finds most difficult to destroy. In *Semi-detached*, it is his father's home (and Landy's childhood home) which comes to stand in as a material avatar for his father. This movement between the material and identity recurs often in Landy's work and is not simply metaphorical. These objects are not symbolically standing in for someone, but rather are material traces of a person's embodied practices, repositories of identity and memory. The sheepskin coat and the semi-detached house where Landy grew up, are not standing in for his father or his family and childhood, but have emerged from an unbroken process of becoming, of events and decisions that cannot be unpicked or separated.

They behave as what Hetherington calls 'praesentia', an object that 'does not stand in place of another (as in representation), but through a presence an absence is made real' (Hetherington, 2003, 1942). Even as a work like *Semi-detached* might be seen as creating a simulacra of the 'real' house, it still stands itself as a real fiction, a material product of his own trajectory entangled with that of a myriad of other actors. The *Nourishment* series could also be considered in this light. Stallabrass discusses anamorphic metaphors that may be at work in Landy's work, 'standing for an urban underclass, similarly mobile, mongrel and diasporic, and also subject to prolonged neglect and spasmodic measures of control or weeding' (Stallabrass, 2002). When looked at through the lens of embodied practices, the weeds in *Nourishment* can be thought of as not simply metaphors for members of his family and his family history, but as non-representational traces that entwine materiality with identity. The presence of pain in these works emphasises this by bringing the body very much into the process by which the works are created, making a porous link between his experience of pain and his father's, where the metaphor of the weed emerges

not merely 'a descriptive device' but more importantly as a 'materially grounded, experientialist account' (Cresswell, 1997: 330). This is experienced as both real and imaginary, but importantly the presence of pain means the 'ludic hypothesis of ritual action - 'it's all but a game' - is cast into doubt' (Houseman, 1998: 16).

What I hope has become apparent in this section on pain is that Landy's work is highly personal, autobiographical and often involves the performance of his own suffering or the translation of his own suffering or witness to the suffering of others. This is also where his work comes full circle, appearing again as distant and objectifying. The personal and autobiographical are also his currency, his product. His experiences of struggle or pain become a trace (less obviously visible in *Nourishment* than *Breakdown*) within a spectacle to be consumed. He produces a relationship between self and landscape or place through pain, but there is also a relationship here to a community of curators, collectors, an audience. The presence of pain gives his work an uncertainty, it makes it more difficult to consider his work as commercially motivated or directed to the art market. Yet it is also difficult not to. If there was no personal suffering involved in his work it would be less problematic, but the presence of pain means, as mentioned earlier, that the idea that 'it's all but a game' is cast into doubt (Houseman, 1998: 16). As Houseman argues, ritual enactments 'entail a conventional condensation of nominally contrary modes of relationship, for example, a simultaneous acting out of the infliction and non infliction of pain' (Houseman, 1998: 15). However, Landy's work differs from ritual in that they are repeated performances of practice over relatively short periods, but do not repeat further into the future. They are performances with a duration and an end. In the case of *Breakdown* the end was essentially when he had nothing left to destroy. This is a project that can perhaps only be done meaningfully once. In the case of *Nourishment*, the end was a series of prints, a material artefact. This prevents them from attaining the stability of meaning of ritual, leaving them open to contested meanings and allowing them to transform into new practices with different end points in the future.

This thread between the very personal and the very public gives his work a tension, an uncertainty which is uncomfortable and which can divide people in their response to his work, some being critical of him as a charlatan, 'there are much better sketchers out there if you look. And much better artists, full stop' (Jones, 2009), others being much more interested in the ambiguities of an artist operating within the contemporary art market (Stallabrass, 2002). As Stallabrass notes, Landy makes no secret of needing money after *Breakdown*, and that '*Nourishment* is a title that smartly refers to the weeds' striving for survival along with the artist's' (ibid).

## **Concluding remarks - urban margins: collapsing materiality, embodiment and personal history**

In this chapter I have explored the ambiguous relationship that exists between self and landscape through ideas of contamination (and nourishment). I've approached contamination as a disruption and breaking down of distinctions between essential categories, nature, culture, animate, inanimate, pure and impure, the 'blurred terrain where nature and culture are not so easily (as if they ever were) distinguished and dichotomised' (Harrison et al, 2004: 9). For Landy the weed is used as a material proxy for a marginal landscape and the condition of being marginal. He uses the weed not to contest its cultural ambiguity nor that of the landscapes from which it comes, but to simply state itself and in doing so to bring with it the complexities I have discussed.

In Landy's practice there is a deliberate subversion of familiar representations of nature. He uses the visual language of botanical specimen and realism to address the urban weed, abstracting them from their cultural anchors in order to question those anchors. During this discussion I have used the idea of contamination in perhaps an unconventional or at least unfamiliar way. I have taken the weed itself to be a contaminant, to disrupt or reveal the slippage between the sanctioned and the transgressive. I have also taken Landy himself to be a contaminant, interfering with the ecology of urban margins, pulling plants from the places they had established themselves, transplanted into his studio where they slowly wilt and die as he records them for his art. The third and no doubt least familiar contaminant I've discussed is pain, an unpleasant (if not uninvited) intrusion of the world into the body and into consciousness. These propositions each question the tendency of the contaminant to create a binary understanding of things and substances, insides and outsides and to break this down by introducing a porous, more relational understanding to these distinctions, that entwine bodies, materialities and personal histories.

When looking at Landy's work, the contaminant can be seen to be working in both ways. Nature, the weed, is culturally a contaminant, a sign of disorder and intrusion in the (notionally) ordered city. Equally Landy himself is the contaminant, who digs up and eventually kills the weed in order to make the work. The experience of pain and endurance in making the work is not unrelated to this and is where landscape, material and the artist become insinuated in one another, inseparable. Landy's work explores hybridity and an ambiguous and distributed relationship between self, landscape and materiality. The marginal landscape implies a confluence of self and

landscape through the material, an encounter which can catalyse a transformative moment of reappraisal, a reworking of memory and an experience of self that becomes unfamiliar, disembodied, temporarily alien, dislocated and out of place.

Looking at Landy's work from these perspectives, it seems that he always maintains an ambiguity as to the location and nature of the 'contaminant'. Perhaps Landy is emphasising a nature that cannot be controlled, a feral nature that works its way into the gaps between our idealised landscapes and our idealised selves and lives, introducing or revealing flaws. Much of his work appears to involve some form of self inflicted sacrifice or pain, the ritualistic destruction of all his personal belongings or the obsessive penance like acts of drawing and etching or the mini daily pilgrimage of walking to and from the site where his weeds were found. It is perhaps through pain that an ambiguity between self and landscape most strongly emerges, where 'pain occurs neither 'in me' nor 'in that' – the externalised body – but 'between me and it' (Wylie, 2005: 244). I have argued that this is a strong aspect of Landy's depiction of the urban margins through weeds. His embodied practice of depicting weeds and their marginality entwines various materialities, from the landscape to his use of tools and materials, with personal history and memory.

Landy's close observation and detailed etchings of weeds also again revisit Sauerian fieldwork and both Sauer and Jackson's attentiveness to mundane, vernacular details. His work foregrounds precision and detail in accurately representing a series of common weeds. This apparent alignment with fieldwork and realist representation is, as was discussed in that chapter, clearly countered when his work is approached in terms of practice and when placed in the context of his other work. This is particularly apparent through the role that pain and personal history plays in his work. Landy's practice in producing *Nourishment*, unlike Sauer and Jackson's field study approaches, in a sense 'dematerialise' the marginal landscape that the weeds come from, recording only that which is transient. We are presented with a detached and unanchored weed, roots exposed and visibly wilting. The landscape is itself quite literally absent, a white ground upon which the uprooted plant floats. Landy's work and practice are entwined with these vanished or vanishing materialities of the urban margin. He needs to physically experience them in order to bring out the underlying relationships between their substance, the body and the immateriality of memory.

The urban margin from which the weed originated and the practices which go on to produce the work, all re-iterate in different registers, the original marginal

landscape - his father's accident beneath the earth for example, the inaccessibility of another person's pain, Landy's destruction of all his belongings. This urban margin is visually repressed in the work, completely absent, and only appears when looking at the process. Then it can be seen to emerge strongly through ideas of dirt and roots, the hidden activities of mining and the trauma of a mining accident. This again, brings attention to the imaginaries attached to the materiality of the urban margins, which are available to be re-imagined.

# Chapter 6

## *Organismic Landscapes*

## Chapter 6: Organismic landscapes

In this chapter I will discuss the work and practices of photographer Stephen Gill. Gill has a profound attachment to place, particularly the fringe landscapes of Hackney Wick, East London, close to where he lives. This is a part of the city to which he returns again and again, both physically and imaginatively. The landscapes that Gill haunts are the ragged edges around or between infrastructure, largely invisible or ignored. On the surface they may appear as mundane and unremarkable landscapes of the sort found in the edgelands of any city. Through his practice however, he brings attention to their innate liveliness and the processes that animate them, from the microscopic actions of chemicals or bacteria to the powerful economic forces that can ultimately erase and re-inscribe them.

In this chapter, Gill's urban margins are discussed through his material and embodied processes, what Gill describes as 'collaborations with the landscape' (Gill, 2006). His practice of burying photographs and allowing the earth to react with the photographic emulsion is a key example that will be discussed. His work brings him (and us as the audience) close to the liveliness of the urban margin, to the plants and wildlife, the microscopic scales of chemical reactions, the discarded objects, waste and detritus (figure 25 to 28). The human subject sometimes appears directly in his photographs, but is always brought into coincidence with the materiality of the landscape and the photograph, rather than occupying a privileged place. His photographs suggest that liveliness belongs equally to the animate and the inanimate. As a result, I will argue, Gill collapses the distance between himself, the landscape and the photographs that he creates.

The rubric of the *organismic landscape* is given to this chapter to point to this indistinction between living and non-living that animates Gill's work. The landscapes that interest Gill are hybrid, areas of overlap where industry, infrastructure and fallow land are re-appropriated by humans, flora and fauna and equally populated by all manner of waste materials. These are the kinds of landscape that Edensor refers to when he states that 'derelict space reveals that nature is not separate but will always ignore previous attempts to maintain boundaries between culture and nature' (Edensor, 2005: 71). Gill's work extends this, suggesting that the liveliness of matter ignores the boundaries we draw between living and non-living.



Figure 25: From the photobook *Talking to Ants*, 2014  
Figure 26: From the photobook *Hackney Flowers*, 2007



Figure 27: From the photobook *Talking to Ants*, 2014  
Figure 28: From the photobook *Hackney Flowers*, 2007

The chapter will first introduce the concept of the organism. This is a standalone section that, like the uncaptioned photographs in the autoethnography, acts as a context or frame for the texts that follows, and is not directly referred to in that text. This supplements rather than repeats existing material on urban wilds and hybrid landscapes discussed in chapter two (see Gandy, 2005; Whatmore, 2002). The main body of the chapter is divided into three main sections. The first introduces Gill, giving some context and biographical background. This is followed by two sections, which discuss two examples of his work, *Buried* (2006) and *Hackney Flowers* (2007). These discussions concentrate upon how Gill, through his practice, collapses the distance between himself, the material landscape and the photographic work. It is this collapse that this chapter considers as the margin. I will argue that Gill's practice creates a hybridity or entanglement between artist-subject and material landscape, one that mirrors the hybrid intersections of nature and human culture that the material landscape itself exhibits. These two sections discuss different works, often to make and reinforce similar points and to bring out underlying currents that run through what might seem like quite different bodies of work.

### **Organism**

The organism is invoked here as a term which draws attention to the ambiguous distinction between living and non-living, organic and inorganic matter. The word *organism* is itself ambiguous. It's common sense understanding is synonymous with 'life', something capable of reproduction, metamorphosis, of growth and change, and a thing with self directed agency. Yet over the past 40 years or so, the certainty that 'life' is distinct and easily distinguishable from matter has been significantly eroded. Advances in genetics, molecular biology, artificial intelligence or nanotechnology to give just a couple of examples, have blurred the distinction between living and non-living matter (Coole and Frost, 2010; Haraway, 1991, 1997; Soper, 2003: 100). Computer science has shown how simple algorithms can create self-organising systems that exhibit complex behaviours such as flocking or homeostasis. The idea of the 'organism' can thus evoke two perspectives, one as a category of 'life' that invokes a binary of 'living' and 'non-living'. The other invokes an area of ambiguity and contention, a post-human approach where the 'vitality' and agency of matter comes to matter more than questions of if or where distinctions between living and non-living are located.

The idea of the organism has made its way into the development of the urban imaginary in profound ways. The nineteenth century saw organicist metaphors of the city, where the body was a model of understanding for the functioning of the city (Gandy, 2005: 28). CIAM (Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne) evoked the metaphor of the city as a diseased organ that required a radical cure (Holston, 1989). For Le Corbusier and CIAM, this cure came in the form of another metaphor, the city as machine. Their vision was one of social determinism, where the city was a totalising field, a complete machine whose function was to create a new society, free from drudgery, class, and poverty (see Holston, 1989). This is an understanding of machine and nature (organism) that are highly differentiated, privileging technology over a nature which is cast as either the problem (the diseased city) or recreational (a social cure). CIAM is the exemplar of this dreaming of the modernist city, the evocation of a single organising principle, technology, the material expression of rationality and the basis from which society will naturally develop. Similarly, an urban ecology perspective was adopted by the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1920, in which society is considered as an evolving organism adapting to its environment. Carl Sauer was highly critical of such environmental determinism (Sauer, 1925). Although his interests were decidedly anti-urban, there is nevertheless a common underlying belief that human culture not only adapted to but also shaped the morphology of the landscape, 'a sense that a 'good' landscape would exhibit humanity and nature in balance' (Wylie, 2007: 23). This position has itself been heavily criticised as a 'superorganic' understanding of culture, one that ontologises culture, giving it the status of something that exists in its own right independent of individual people. Thus questions of difference and social and economic inequalities are pushed aside (Duncan, 1980: 198).

The 'organism' understood as something that is discrete contrasts with the organism if conceived in terms of topological and processual relationships (see Latour, 1993; Deleuze, 2008 [1972]; Thrift, 2008). Here, the organism emerges from the relations between things rather than a set of inherent properties that 'belong' to 'it'. Here agency and the capacity to creatively transform are not limited to living matter but emerge from the interrelationship of processes, what Deleuze originally referred to as 'desiring machines' that both interrupt and create flows of matter and energy. In this particular example of a topological and processual understanding, the subject is seen as a residuum, 'a body without organs' emerging at the intersection of these flows and processes, rather than as a stable 'self' (Deleuze, 2008 [1972]). If the term organism was to be used here, it would be one which is polymorphous, not

bounded by an inside or an outside, the emergent property of enmeshed actants operating across multiple scales and in plural temporalities, from the molecular to the mechanical, from picoseconds to millennia. This is an organism that may appear to be self-reflexive but it is in the pre-consciousness of performance where its agency is found, where intentionality is an after thought and where the incidental and accidental are not categories of failure.

Returning this to the urban context, Le Corbusier's Ville Radieuse and its inherent distinctions between human and nature do not appear to sit comfortably alongside this understanding of organism. Such a processual understanding which operates at multiple (non-anthropocentric) scales and temporalities, might perhaps be seen most clearly in the incidental city, the city of infrastructural landscapes, urban wilds, air, water, the nomadic movements of people, plants, animals, materials. This is a vital hybrid city, living and breathing through flows and processes, a city which does not aspire to the crystalline beauty of the Ville Radieuse, but embraces the plurality of time and space that is forced out by the rational city. Gill's work can be seen as dealing with such distinctions and indistinctions, treating matter as lively and animate, decentering his own role as 'author' but also keeping himself present as part of an assemblage, a trace of which is recorded as photography.

### **Stephen Gill**

Gill's initiation into photography came at a young age. His father, an industrial chemist and amateur photographer, encouraged him to experiment with cameras, the microscope and their home darkroom. He taught him to process his own films, even developing their own chemical formulations. His father's favoured photographic subjects were plants and flowers and as a child Gill recalls having a strong interest himself in birds, animals and music (Gill, 2014). His favourite book as a child was the Observer Book of Pond Life (Blanchard, 2010). These early influences repeatedly emerge in later works such as Talking to Ants (2014), A Book of Birds (2010) and Hackney Flowers (2007). By the age of fourteen Gill was producing his own photographic series, processing his own films and printing his own photographs. Whilst still at school he took a job with a local social photographer, sweeping the darkroom, copying old photographs and assisting with family portraits. After leaving school he worked in a colour processing lab for several years before taking a foundation course at Filton College in Bristol. He was subsequently selected for the first one year internship at the London offices of the photographic agency Magnum, where he stayed for five years,

working as an editorial assistant. This trajectory demonstrates the development of an important aspect of his later work, a strong technical expertise in the processes involved in creating a photograph, the developing of films, the printing of the picture. 'I enjoy processing film, imagining what's going on in the tank,' he says in an interview (Gill in Steward, 2012).

However, whilst improving these skills he was also regularly out taking photographs and developing his practice as a photographer. He imagined that he would become a journalistic photographer and through his internship at Magnum he was given a funded assignment to photograph children in Sri Lanka. It was after this trip that he came to realise that his interest was not in photojournalism, but in the possibility of something more. He continued to develop his commercial practice, working to commission for the UK broadsheets, the New York Times and the literary magazine *Granta*, amongst others. He also continued to develop his own practice, gaining recognition for portrait work he produced while visiting friends in Croatia in 1996 for example, pictures which were selected for the Kobal Prize show and won second prize in the Ernst Haas Golden Light Award. His first solo exhibition, *Hackney Wick* (2003), was held at the Photographers' Gallery in London in 2003, a show that he described as 'scooping up a bit of East London and dropping it in Central London' (Gill in Stewart, 2012). It is with this and his subsequent work that this chapter will concern itself.

I have included this brief biography as it contains many strands and trajectories that resurface in the work that I shall discuss here. Amongst these are his relationship to nature; his interest in the microscopic, both organic and chemical; the documentary qualities of his work and their disruption. Also there is a synaesthetic element to his work, which can be seen to surface in the strong material and even aural content of his work, such as *Audio Portraits in A Book of Field Studies* (2005) or *A Book of Birds* that through their very silence evoke the sounds that they conceal. However, before going in to more detail, I will briefly continue this biography into the period this chapter deals with.

After *Hackney Wick* Gill was involved in a group show, *Photography 2005* (2005), at the Victoria Miro Gallery. This exhibition was important for him as it was here that he had the idea of producing books to coincide with exhibitions, books that would be works in themselves rather than merely containers for photographs. He set up his own publishing imprint Nobody soon afterwards, in association with another independent publishers The Archive of Modern Conflict. From this point onwards he

has produced numerous photographic series in book form. For Gill the photobooks are 'a finished body of work, which is quite unusual because lots of people have books to accompany their shows, but at that time it felt like my shows were there to accompany my books' (Gill in Steward, 2012). These books are also often handcrafted and emphasise their material qualities, sometimes stencilled with aerosol paint or coated with mud, prompting a haptic engagement with his works that will be the subject of later discussion. A significant body of his work has been concerned with the Hackney Wick area of East London and he has produced a number of photographic books from his sustained engagement with this area. These include *The Hackney Rag* (2009), *Hackney Wick* (2005), *Hackney Flowers*, *Archaeology in Reverse* (2007), *Buried* (2006) and *Warming Down* (2008).

In the following sections I will discuss *Buried* and *Hackney Flowers*, works that comes out of his engagements with the margins of Hackney Wick. There will also be some reference to other relevant works, the photographs, books and the newspaper prints that also reveal the distinctions and indistinctions that emerge between Gill and the material landscape.

### **Buried**

*Buried* (figure 29 & 30) is a photobook published by Stephen Gill's imprint Nobody. The photographs in this book were taken in Hackney Wick, East London, in what has been described as an unregulated landscape (Weber-Newth, 2012). This same landscape more recently played host to the 2012 Olympic games, and has been transformed from urban periphery to a vast panoptical landscape of regulation and control (see Marrero-Guillamón and Powell, 2012). The urban wilds have been tamed, green algae hoovered up from the Lea Navigation, buddleia cut back, and meadows of carefully selected wild flower seed sown and wild ponds simulated.

The photographs in this book were shot on film using a second hand plastic Coronet camera that Gill had bought from a local market for 50p. He cycled around the Hackney Wick area taking shots with this very basic camera, a simple mechanical point and shoot with no focus or exposure control. The control that he did have over the images produced was through his skill in the dark room. After developing and printing the negatives he returned to the sites around which the photographs were taken and dug holes in order to bury them beneath the earth. He put the photographs in paper sleeves, sometimes singly, sometimes in groups, sometimes face-to-face,

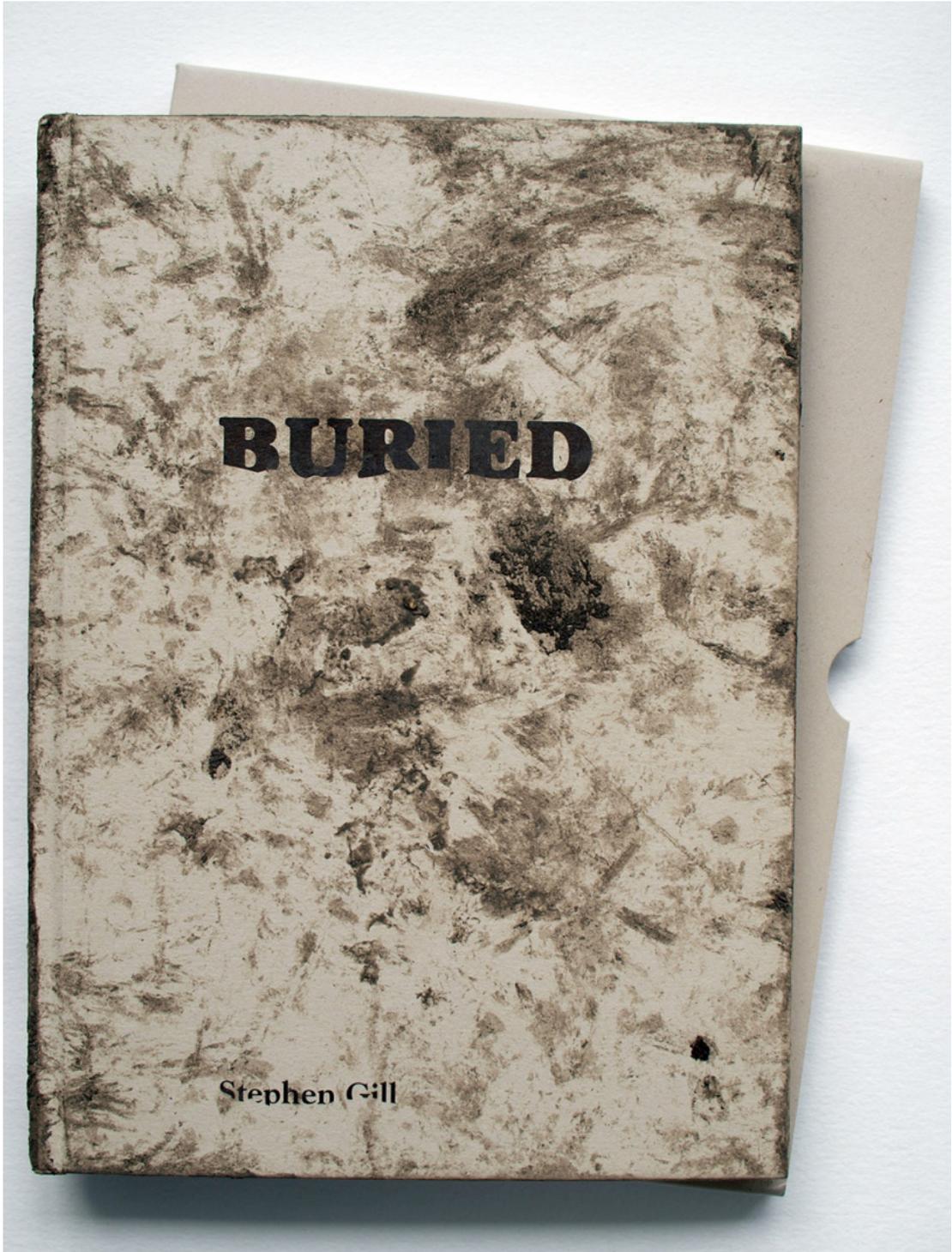
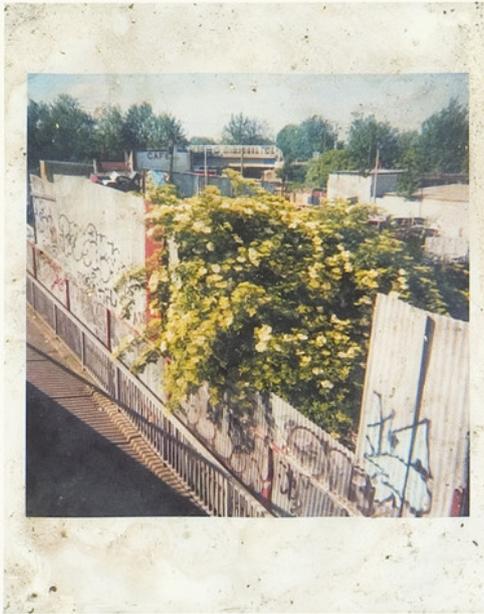


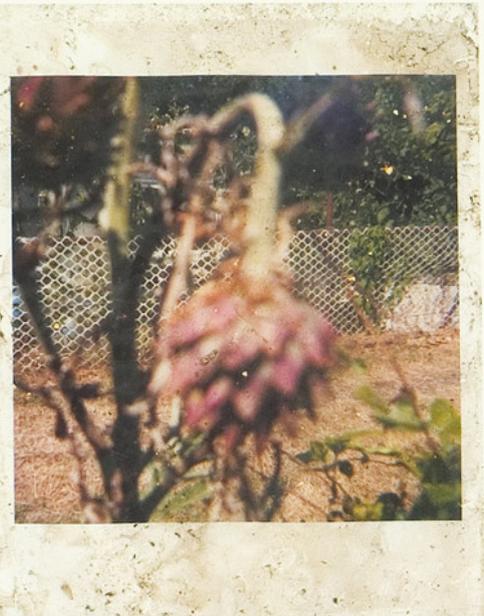
Figure 29: *Buried*, 2006



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Figure 30: Buried, 2006

sometimes back-to-back. He then buried them at varying depths, and left them beneath the earth for different periods of time. The period for which the photographs were buried was loosely based upon the depth at which they were buried and the amount of rainfall, after which he would return and dig them up and take them to his studio where he would select and re-photograph the photographic remains with a professional camera, to create a final print. The final selection of prints were then put together into a photobook which, like all of Gill's photobooks, is unusual in that there is a strong emphasis not just on the photographic content but actually on the book itself as a material artefact, an object which engages the sense of touch as well as sight. This is particularly so with *Buried*, as the material process by which the photographs are arrived at are also very much located in the materiality of the landscapes which its images depict. For the period of their gestation they are quite literally rooted in the earth. Gill produced the book as a limited edition of 750 prints. Each book was then distributed to friends who were asked to temporarily bury them once more around Hackney before they were finally put on sale. The book comes smeared in mud from Hackney Wick with a photograph in a paper sleeve, encouraging the owner to bury their own.

There is a tension in this work between processes that exhibit mutability and change and those that record and fix. Gill's photographs might be thought of as starting out as photographic documents of the unregulated, pre-Olympic landscape. However, they then go on to record something else, the chance encounter with material processes, the chemistry of soil and photographic emulsions. This relationship between the mutability and immutability will be discussed, the relationship of document and archive for example and the role that chance plays in this. Chance is wilfully incorporated into Gill's practice at different stages throughout, starting with a camera found in an illegal market on a piece of wasteland, to the acts of burial and exhumation, and the chemical processes which occur when earth comes pressed up close to emulsion. This element of chance and the agency of material and others carries on throughout the work, even to the point that the audience is asked to participate themselves in the process. This also poses questions about the extent of the photographer's 'authorship' and I will argue that Gill plays out his practice in a way that actively decentres him as author and positions the artist rather as one animating process amongst others.

In order to do this I will now first consider this series through discussions of the documentary and archival nature of his work, from setting out with camera in hand to the production and sale of the book, the artefact which takes this landscape and

attempts to literally and figuratively deposit it elsewhere. *Buried*, like much of Gill's work, is a series, the repetition of a formula, a process and a set of movements that create an archive, in this case the photographic book. This archive of photographic traces eaten into by the landscape it depicts, asks questions of photography and of the impulse to document, to remember and equally to forget. They record and erase, making explicit both the promise and the failure of the photograph as document. The originating event, place or situation is lost, its loss emphasised by its replacement by a simulacra, an act of doubling that preserves for the future but as a double that can only point to the loss of the originary event. The documentary photograph is often discussed in such terms, the photographic instant as a moment of trauma that cleaves subject from context, and the photograph itself as a repressed memory of that moment (see Miles, 2010; Baer, 2005). De Duve talks of two illogical conjunctions at work in every photograph - the snapshot as trauma which tears an event out of time and the time exposure giving a sense of distance (De Duve, 1978), the photo behaving as a melancholic 'work of mourning' (Miles, 2010: 65).

A central motif in this series that keys into and brings together all these concerns is that of burial. The photographs are of course literally buried, later to be dug up, resurrected and brought back into the red light of the dark room and later the light of day. The act of burial also brings with it these notions of loss, memory, mourning and equally corresponding ideas of preservation and forgetting, repression and amnesia. Indeed, his work has been discussed in these terms by a number of commentators (Campkin, 2012; Miles, 2010). These will be discussed and followed by my own reading of Gill's work and practice as extending beyond or outside of these registers into a material vitality aligned to the material vitalism of Jane Bennett (2010).

The first commentary I want to discuss looks at Gill's work in the context of the 2012 Olympic Games, and is proposed by architectural historian and critic Ben Campkin. This commentary applies discourses of urban regeneration to *Buried*, and the rapid and profound changes that occurred in Hackney Wick, East London after London won the bid to host the Olympic Games in 2005 (Campkin, 2012). Here the series is presented almost as a pre-emptive burying of Hackney Wick, allowing us to come into contact with and mourn the impending destruction of its vernacular landscape. Although Gill's intent is often ambiguous, his work, according to Campkin, implicitly suggests and directs us towards readings and questions which are 'beyond the artist's own statement' (Campkin 2012: 121), in particular a political critique of regeneration. The landscape that is made present in Gill's work points us towards its corollary - the



Figure 31: *Buried*, 2006

future loss of urban wilderness and the pushing out of its disempowered inhabitants, the allotment growers, the industries clinging on to a manufacturing landscape in its last throes before entering wholesale into a consumer landscape (figure 31). In this reading, Gill's work can be seen to 'lament what has been or will be lost' (Campkin, 2012: 115).

Closely related to this are discussions of *Buried* through the metaphor of the archaeological archive. *Buried* can be approached as an act that exhumes, records and re-presents a 'polytemporal assemblage' of materials and processes, a challenge to the impending ubiquity of the future Olympic dreams, the photoreal 'CGI smears on the blue fence' that Iain Sinclair refers to in *Ghost Milk* (see Campkin, 2012: 118; Sinclair, 2012: 338). Here Gill's work extends the witness of traditional documentary photography as an objective record, making clear the photographer's presence upon the site. Equally the site's presence is made known not as a visual representation but as a material record of the landscape acting upon the photographic emulsion. Together each photograph is a 'visual fragment' that displays 'interruptions of scratches, specks of dirt, stains, watermarks, fingerprints and other traces, indexing the burial of the original prints' (Campkin, 2012: 116). Campkin draws our attention to this as disrupting readings of the photograph as a document, bringing it into contrast with the photo-realistic depictions of the future site employed by the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA). In bringing attention to his own methods and processes in producing

the final photograph, Gill arrests and problematises a realist gaze, 'communicating the photographer's presence directly, whilst also quoting from the site through the voice of its own materiality' (2012: 114).

This interpretation has both commonalities and differences with Melissa Miles' discussion of Gill's work from the perspective of conceptual documentary photography (Miles, 2010). Conceptual documentary photography is a current in photography characterised by a 'cool, distanced and analytic approach to documentary photography' (2010: 49). Miles identifies a number of characteristics of this approach. One is 'the desire to explore a single, often banal idea', to 'seek out and frame their subjects according to a pre-determined idea or scheme'. Here the photographer employs a process of 'repetition and categorisation' whereby the 'central idea is made evident over a series of photographs and there is less emphasis upon the singular photographic moment' (2010: 250). Thus, the photographer adopts a role that moves away from a spontaneous performance of their practice in the landscape to one that is formulaic and mechanical, almost an automaton. There is a decentring of the photographer and a move away from the first person perspective that the lens encourages. The seriality, the decentring of the photographer through the mechanical repetition of an idea, draws attention to the photograph's artifice. The photograph is described as a flat descriptive document, but one that is equally a fiction, the result of a preconceived, pre-structured practice. The image is clearly the result of a set of arbitrary rules, yet the 'deadpan' appearance of the photograph always suggests realism. Conceptual documentary photography draws attention to this schism. In this genre photography is characterised by a self-reflexive questioning of what the photograph is and what it can and cannot achieve (See Miles, 2010). Those working in this vein tend to focus upon the mundane, tend to employ seriality, often without people and employing a deadpan aesthetic, de-contextualising the image both spatially and temporally, all of which serve to flatten and in a sense dehumanise the photographic image. Gill's work in *Buried* falls within this rubric, employing the serial repetition of a pre-planned formula.

I would argue that through this seriality, Gill points to his own agency as a mechanical enactment of a formula, much in the same way that the earth and photographic emulsion blindly react. In encouraging and making visible increasing entropy as chemical processes disorder the photographic image, Gill emphatically disrupts readings of the photograph as a document with some claim to be visually representing an objective 'reality'. Equally he invokes the photograph as an artefact,

a material document that is a record of material processes as positive traces rather than evidence of decay. Although there are notional associations of burial with loss and decay, his work does not evoke a sense of melancholy, trauma, mourning or repression. The images convey quite a different affective register between audience, landscape and artist, one that reveals traces of lively processes occurring out of sight, processes which are themselves blind to human politics and concerns. Gill's photographs point to scales and temporalities outside of the human body's capacity to experience directly, which cannot be forgotten or remembered, only revealed.

Rather than a sense of forgetting and memorialising, I would argue that Gill's photographs and his practice as photographer, are very actively decentring human concerns, attempting a positive erasure of distinction between artist-subject and material landscape in favour of a more multifarious liveliness. I would argue that the motif of burial does not point to the idea of death for the human subject, nor the destruction of landscape but rather a denial of the centrality of the human subject in the landscape. His stance towards the human subject elsewhere in his work reinforces this analysis. A decentring of the human subject can be seen in much of his work and is perhaps especially well illustrated in the works where he actually depicts people. In the series *Audio Portraits in A Book of Field Studies* (2005) for example, he photographs people he encounters in London listening to music through headphones. He employs the repetition and serialisation discussed by Miles, which emphasises the set as the product of a formula rather than as traces of individuals. This is further emphasised by the lack of information about the individuals, no names, no hint as to location. The titles of the photos are in fact the names of the songs that these people are listening to.

Campkin and Miles show how Gill's work extends and problematises photography as document and archive. Miles discusses the ways in which Gill's work, *A Book of Field Studies* in particular, revels 'in the instability of a photograph's contextual framing' (2010: 59). Campkin brings the photographer's practice and the multiple scales and temporalities into the discussion, making it first and foremost a material artefact, untethered from the very notion of the photograph as substrate for representation. In this case the archive is treated as a complex record of a landscape that is about to disappear, extending beyond traditional documentary photography, bringing the author, material and processual imaginaries into the documentary frame. Microscopic chemical processes are made apparent in the final photographs as vibrant presences, our attention is focused upon interactions between the substrate of the photograph

and the materiality of the environment. These can be understood as themselves representations or metaphors but they are also actual traces of these processes and Gill's implication in them. When approached not as representations but as traces of processes, both human and non-human, the act of burial brings forth a material liveliness, where the photographs, their subjects, the landscape and the photographer become entwined and indistinct, emerging from a multitude of processes.

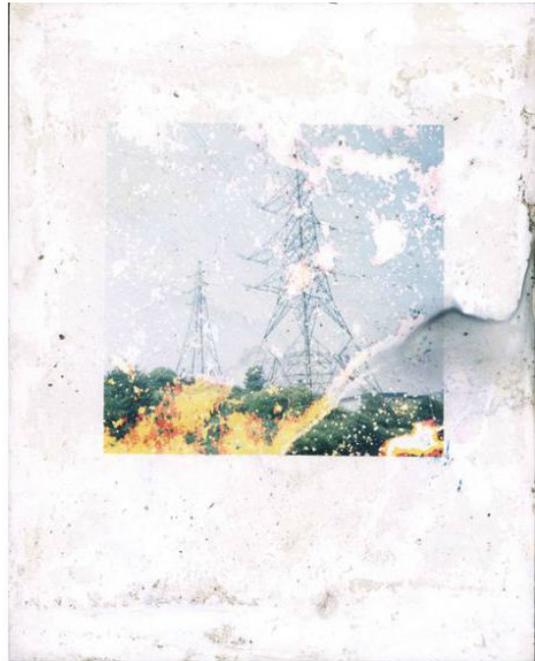


Figure 32: *Buried*, 2006

Picon discusses the overlaying and interweaving of technologies and biologies in the urban environment as 'anxious landscapes', where 'the polluted earth that pushes up between the pipes, tubes and cables when the asphalt is ripped up looks like interstitial tissue or manmade landfill' (Picon, 200: 72). The liveliness of Gill's materiality however suggests nothing anxious about these landscapes but rather an altogether more exuberant and multiple performance of landscape. This performance calls upon disparate material and affective elements and agencies and gives way to 'more complex notions of identity as a mutable and living process' (DeSilvey, 2006: 324). These photographs appear to work most powerfully as a record of liveliness rather than a melancholic reflection upon loss.

The eclectic nature of the things depicted - pylons, trees, people, an abandoned umbrella, wasteland weeds, rubbish scattered across a road (see figure 32) - and the implication of the photographic substrate into chemical and physical processes, suggests that Gill is interested in revealing a vitality or 'thing-power' in the apparently inert and mundane (Bennett, 2010: 2). There is a foregrounding of the photographic film as not a flat representational surface, but an active physical, chemical material object amongst others. The erosion of the initial (representational) photographic image reinforces this point. This has the effect of making plain that the photograph is itself a material artefact amongst others (such as those it depicts) and that the image is secondary to the substrate upon which this inscription is made. This is further emphasised by other works such as *Hackney Flowers* (discussed below) where found

photographs are themselves photographed in situ. Despite their visual nature, these are not visual representations of landscape, but themselves traces of landscape and process presented as material artefacts.

The partial erasure of the original image appears as a mutability born out of a collaboration between photographer, photograph and the material landscape, which allows 'other-than-human agencies to participate in the telling of stories about particular places' (DeSilvey, 2006: 318). Gill talks of these works as being collaborations with the landscape, an invocation or invitation for the 'spirit of place' to leave its trace (Gill cited in Campkin, 2012: 118). The act of burying the image brings a microscopic scale of interaction with site into the frame, and in doing so disrupts the idea of landscape photography as a visual practice and emphasising it as a chemical process that engages with the brute dirt and materiality of the landscape. In this way they perform a distributed understanding of self, an artist-subject whose landscape practice dissolves distinctions between human subject and material landscape. Through the emphasis on the photograph's materiality, Gill's work anonymises, disrupting the kind of melancholy readings that have been assigned to the photographic image more generally (See Barthes, 1993). Gill's images are themselves an active element in the material processes of the landscape. His photographs push out the notion of an irretrievable photographic instant that piques sentiments of loss.

The image may depict landscape and people and things within this, but this depiction is written and overwritten, a layering of multiple temporalities and multiple sites. There is no specific time and location that locates these images. The photograph was taken, it was buried, dug up, rephotographed at the artist's studio. The notion of a photographic instant is disrupted by the introduction of chance, entropic processes, and the introduction of a second instant, the rephotographing of the exhumed photographs. Barthes' *punctum* is sidestepped, the loss of a moment, the impossibility of returning to it is subverted. These processes aren't merely interruptions to the photographic image as witness but they in fact are inseparably entangled with and through it. They coalesce as the photographic artefact, which is a trace of processes that decentre each of its visual components. These processes and components are distributed unevenly through time and space, through performances that rely upon the retreat of identity and create entanglements with material landscape, chemical process and technologies, both in the landscape, such as pylons, and in the process of performing the landscape - his bicycle, his cheap camera, the interplay of the optics of a plastic lens with light and chemical emulsions, the dark room itself.

In Gill's work then, decay, dissolution and erasure take on not the gothic imaginary of ruination and burial as a final resting place, a material reflection of repression, but rather a very different aspect, one of endless becoming, a productive and creative force, 'a response to a by-now banal realisation that the world is not a reflection but a continuous composition.' (Thrift, 2003: 2021). If his practice is considered as an archival memory of landscape, then the very purpose of that archive in Gill's case is to erase the possibility of knowing with certainty. His work addresses ambiguity, presents us with an ambiguous understanding of organism and of organismic boundary. The use of repetition, the serial nature of his work, leaches out the importance of the individual photograph and its content. This seriality evades being pinned to the specificities of time and place, it denies us the ability to locate the thing we are looking at to a Cartesian co-ordinate. This work is placed instead within a set of relations which are woven around movements, actions, artefacts, materials, infrastructures, across disparate times and physical locations, a 'dappled world, a world rich in different things, with different natures, behaving in different ways' (Cartwright, 1999: 1).

However, there are also essentialising currents within this. Gill halts the process of decay, he removes the photograph from the landscape, he halts the collaboration and fixes it through a second photograph, renders it stable and immutable once more. Here the process halts and reorders disorder, recalibrates itself, invokes a moment of conservation, a return to stability. The photobook is an archive which points towards a collaboration with landscape, it points towards the earth, chemicals, organisms but it also forgets these things, leaving them elsewhere at another time, away from the photograph and the book. Clearly this is a necessary step in order to create a photobook or to exhibit the work in any way. Leaving the photograph in the earth might not easily facilitate the creation of a cultural artefact or of a communicable trace of an idea. Without the reproduction of the photograph, the work would exist as a suggestion, a thought experiment perhaps. Gill is working as a photographer and thus the creation of photographic artefacts is fundamental to his process. The halting of the collaboration with the earth, the forgetting of the landscape inherent in fixing it into a stable reproducible form is necessary in order to propagate the work into a wider social and cultural world. He is nevertheless aware of this and as described earlier, in smearing *Buried* in Hackney mud he brings a suggestion of the process as continuing after his practice in the landscape ends.

## Repetition and return

Gill's practice also decentres his presence in other ways. As already discussed, his work is often serial in nature, the production of the work itself an embodied performance played out through a formula. This repetitive documenting of Hackney Wick has taken place over many years, and has something of a compulsive character about it. Gill has been described by Iain Sinclair as a man 'who has learnt to haunt the landscapes that haunt him' (Sinclair in Gill 2007). The photographs in *Buried* enact various repetitions, from the multiple trips between studio and landscape, taking photographs, developing photographs, to the acts of burial and subsequent return to dig up the photograph, the rephotographing of the exhumed photographs. Gill talks of his attempts to break this habitual return to this landscape and his inability to do so. He discusses a later body of work *Warming Down* as an attempt to finally put Hackney Wick to rest, 'an attempt to bring the work to a halt' (Birch, 2009). He then however goes on to produce a further work related to Hackney *The Hackney Rag* which he admits is still 'perhaps not the end of these slightly obsessive series' (Ibid). Ultimately he cannot escape from his obsession with Hackney and he goes on to produce another work, *Hackney Flowers*, There is a sense that Gill does not see himself as a free self-reflexive agent, but rather as one compelled to return by forces unseen and beyond his control, a compulsion to repeat. This compulsion as discussed in earlier chapters was identified by Freud as an uncanny motif (2003 [1919]) where, for example, one finds oneself returning to the same place again and again, with no conscious intent, giving an uncanny sense that one is being directed by forces which one has no awareness of:

*'Once, as I was walking through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was strange to me, on a hot summer afternoon, I found myself in a quarter the character of which could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a while without being directed, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, but only to arrive yet a third time by devious paths in the same place. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to abandon my exploratory walk and get straight back to the piazza I had left a short while before' (Freud, 2003 [1919]: 9-10).*

Campkin too identifies Gill's work as operating in an uncanny register through the evocation of haunting. For Campkin, this is founded in the motifs of repression and exhumation he sees in the material aspect of his work, the 'gothic imaginaries of ruination, burial and exhumation at work in London's contemporary psychogeographic practices' (Campkin 2012: 118). I would argue that Gill's compulsion to repeat can also be thought of as locating his work in an uncanny register. This compulsion to return is what Derrida refers to as the revenant: 'a spectre is always a revenant. One who cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back' (Derrida, 1994: 11). The idea of Gill as a spectre in the landscape is not simply a metaphor, but is central to his performance of self in his photographic practice. Here he is a subject who's self and identity becomes ambiguous, dissolving into the landscape through a pre-conscious compulsion to return. Here the idea of the subject is not as an identity expressed through wilful action, but as one that emerges or is revealed to itself within and through landscape and practice, through movement and repetition. The subject is one thing amongst others, animated by forces that are not apparent or accessible. It is the experience of oneself as an automaton, as operating mechanically, without the ability to stop returning even if one wishes to, that is uncanny, where 'mechanical processes are taking place in that which he (sic) was previously used to regarding as a unified psyche' (Jentsch, 1906: 14).

Here the notion of the organism is useful. I would suggest that the camera is not merely a tool, or even a prosthetic, but rather that Gill, camera and material landscape could be thought of as compound, essentially cyborg in nature. The mechanisms of the camera and materiality of the landscape enact Gill just as Gill enacts them. Together they are an organism whose boundaries are ambiguous, one that like Haraway's discussions of organism, challenges organismic boundaries, revealing them to be cultural constructs: 'one is not born an organism. Organisms are made; they are constructs of a world-changing kind.' (Haraway, 1991: 208). Here, the camera or the bicycle do not mediate between subject and landscape but rather landscape is 'co-fabricated between more-than-human bodies and a lively earth' and equally the human is no less 'a subject of on-going co-fabrication than any other socio-material assemblage.' (Whatmore, 2006: 603). Gill can be understood then not as a distinct presence in the photographic frame but more as a 'porous intertwining of technology, understood not just as an intermediary but as a vital component of understanding life itself' (Thrift, 2005: 464).

## A politics of earth

One interpretive frame for Gill's work is through the politics of regeneration, particularly in light of the changes brought about by the Olympic games. Gill's work has been discussed through this lens, in terms of soil and the processes of burial, which can be seen as representative of the material fabric of landscape itself: 'the soil powerfully brings to mind the physical, political and economic restructuring taking place in a specific place' (Campkin, 2012: 119). Campkin argues for a reading of Gill's work as a mourning for a lost landscape, that his images are implicitly political, although Gill himself appears relatively ambivalent to the narratives of regeneration. Here, the emphasis is put upon loss and a political critique of this. This is framed within discourses of ruination that can challenge dominant narratives of urban development, 'stimulating alternative urban imaginaries, countering a collapse of imagination in urban development' (ibid: 119). Equally, Campkin invokes an archaeological metaphor for memory and the archive that is discussed through Freudian models of the archive (via Derrida). Freud's model of the relationship between the conscious and subconscious closely mirrors understandings of the photograph as a mode of repression. Here however, the repression is not in the image but in the marginal landscape that the photograph has come into direct contact with and bears material traces of. In Gill's work the archaeological metaphor is more material and 'out there' in the landscape, where literally digging into the earth reveals the political intent of the ODA's 'demolish, dig and design' mantra (see Campkin, 2012; Culf, 2007). Here, the destruction of the existing landscape is justified by equating that landscape with dirt, a wasteland that will benefit from regeneration. The creation of this wasteland imaginary has the effect of rendering invisible the existing value and the actors in this extensive site, creating, as Campkin points out, a *tabula rasa* upon which to deposit the Olympic imaginary. Through this material proxy of the soil, Campkin looks at the capacity of Gill's work to address the trauma, repression and forgetting inherent in the ODA's Olympic regeneration policy.

In an alternative reading, the photograph, Gill and the landscape behave differently. Gill brings our attention to an interaction without intent. The photograph behaves as a surface of inscription for a multitude of processes, the trace of an assemblage of actants, of which Gill is one and only one. Here, there is no sense of loss or of response to trauma, but rather that the archive records both the blind repetition of a formula and the blind unfolding of material processes. The detachment and cool distancing that Miles talks of are in Gill's case not limited to the pictorial plane but are

a trace of the vitality of supposedly 'inert' matter. Gill's work can be read as asking a different set of questions of political agency, asking what it is that we understand to be a political act: 'Does an action count as *political* by virtue of its having taken place 'in' a public? Are there nonhuman members of a public? What in sum, are the implications of a (meta)physics of vibrant materiality for a political theory?' (Bennett, 2010: 94). Gill's blurring of boundaries between human and non-human, the inside and the outside, presents us with the situation where 'the frontier between the public and the private is constantly being displaced, remaining less assured than ever, as the limit that would permit one to identify the political' (Derrida, 1994: 63). Gill's apparent ambivalence to the politics of landscape could be read as a presenting us with a challenge to a politics and ethics that privilege human agency.

This is perhaps similar too to the necessary hesitancy of the politics of performance that Thrift talks of, misconstrued as apolitical but in fact making things 'more political, much more political, in that, above all, it [performance] wants to expand the existing pool of alternatives and corresponding forms of dissent' (Thrift, 2003: 2022). Gill's photographs appear as lively traces of multifarious processes, the 'polytemporal assemblages' that Campkin points us towards, but they unapologetically stop there. Gill does not take a position, he presents the unpredictable results of a formula - photograph, bury, exhume, rephotograph. Gill decentres himself, making the point that he is one actant amongst others, collaborating with the landscape, and that those other actants are not human but material, chemical, biological, but apparently non-reflexive agents. Reflexivity is abandoned. The banal nature of his subjects, the lack of a dominant subject in the photographs, the insistence on the landscape itself insinuating itself into the photograph emulsion, these things all acknowledge Gill's presence as an actor in the frame, but make this presence peripheral, one actant amongst many others. As Bennett points out through the example of the earthworm, the action of apparently insignificant actors helps to quite literally 'make history' by inadvertently preserving artefacts dropped upon the soil of the land, burying them beneath their castings (Bennett, 2010: 96). The earthworm contributes significantly to our stories of our past, preserving the artefacts that are excavated and interpreted by archaeologists.

This contrasts with interpretations where Gill is a subject differentiating himself in the landscape, making himself visible in his photographs by the idea of his performance, his digging, burying, revisiting, exhuming (see Campkin, 2012). Thought of this way, Gill's work is making an implicit if not explicit political statement about

the destruction of a vernacular landscape. The photographs, the process of producing them and the materiality of soil (for example) act as metaphors for processes of regeneration, loss, displacement and repression and archaeological (re)discovery. For Miles however (2010), Gill's work is more concerned with the practice and product of photography itself, the problematising of the photograph and its capacity to document an objective reality. Campkin's analysis extends this by considering the materiality of the landscape itself and the photograph as an archaeological artefact, a 'photowork' (see Shank in Campkin, 2012: 120) that can be seen as both a physical trace and a mourning for a landscape. This is a mourning for a landscape which is strategically maligned by the ODA in order to pave the way for its wholesale destruction and reinvention, a process 'through which capitalism organises the destruction and reconfiguration of economic orders to clear the way for the creation of new wealth' (DeSilvey and Edensor, 2012: 468). Campkin applies a narrative to Gill's work which frames it as an archive of ruination which has, or at least can be read as having, a critical function, regardless of Gill's intent.

Gill's work also operates in a register which foregrounds a relational, processual understanding of subject-landscape. This is constituted from the material practice of photography and the materiality of landscape in such a way as to push out an anthropocentric understanding of politics and insert in its place material agency. Although Gill does not jettison himself as a subject in the landscape, he does make himself present almost as an automaton, mechanically repeating a series of actions. The idea of agency and will is flagged up and subsequently detached from the idea of himself as a photographer self-reflexively inhabiting a landscape.

Gill appears to adopt an ambivalent attitude to the politics of landscape. Certainly he is aware of his ambivalence and chooses not to resolve it into a vocal position despite his strong personal attachment to Hackney Wick. This apparent apoliticism has similarly been raised with regards to some of Wylie's work. In his paper about walking the Southwest Coastal path, he uses research methodologies that do not explicitly address historical, economic or political contexts, but concentrate very much upon an autoethnographic, sensory and embodied interpretation of landscape (Wylie, 2005). This account was criticised for its lack of context and would, according to Blacksell, have benefited from being 'rooted more securely in the wider literature on the coastal landscape' and making 'more explicit reference to some of the political realities surrounding access to the countryside' (Blacksell, 2005: 518). Similar criticisms of being apolitical could also be applied to Gill. However unlike Wylie's autoethnographies, Gill

does much to reduce his trace in the work, acknowledging but actively decentring his role and presence, and allowing a multitude of other actants to become present in the making of the work. This could be seen to be bringing to attention the need for a different kind of politics, one which takes seriously the agency of matter and non-human actors, where one might 'live not as a human subject who confronts natural and cultural objects but as one of many conative actants swarming and competing with each other' (Bennett, 2010: 122). As such, Gill's work could be seen as offering a window into a different way of thinking about the politics of landscape, augmenting the political and economic critique of regeneration that Campkin overlays upon Gill's work (2012).

Through Gill's act of exhuming the photograph and re-photographing the images for reproduction, the act of burial is introduced as part of a process rather than a final destination. Burial does not only act as a metaphor for a memorial or an act of remembrance to the impending destruction of a landscape but equally problematises the notion of the photograph as an archival document. In his work there is also a challenge to the idea that the landscape is or should be something that persists in any particular form. Thought of in this way, Gill's work does not behave as an act of mourning, it does not convey a sense of loss, destruction or nostalgia, but rather emerges from, brings into view and wilfully emphasises a complex assemblage of people, things, materials, enmeshed together in a complex processual and constantly emerging set of more-than-human relations. If there is a political call in his work, it is I would argue, closer to Bennett's call for a different type of politics, what she terms a political ecology.

### **Hackney Flowers**

*Hackney Flowers* is a photobook Gill created in 2008. Again, as its name would suggest, it focuses on the area of East London that his work returns to again and again. As he cycled around this area he collected seeds, flowers, berries and various discarded objects, all of which he took back to his studio and dried and pressed or simply catalogued and boxed. Similarly he cycled and photographed this East London landscape, depicting the mundane, the ordinary, things abandoned to chance, and a kind of second hand aesthetic of re-use, an emerging second life. Certainly an indication of the vitality, agency and affect of this entwinement of people, infrastructure, urban wilds, allotments, dried plants, flowers and discarded and apparently inert debris. Examples include a collapsed wall, a tipper truck offloading a cargo of dried petals,

an abandoned shopping trolley, a discarded deck chair stuck in a tree (figure 33). The photographs in this series sometimes have people in them, often they do not. As with the *Buried* series, he sometimes first buried the original photographs, leaving them in secret locations around Hackney, mouldering in the dank earth for periods of time intuitively directed by depth and rainfall. Taking these initial photographs he combined them with the objects he had collected from the landscape, petals, plants, bits of wire and scraps of paper, overlaying them onto the photographic prints, filling the flat space of the photograph, dandelion seeds collecting in corners and cascading over tumbled masonry. He then re-photographed these assemblages in his studio to arrive at the final prints. Where there is a human subject they were often obscured by additions to the photograph.

Again, as with all his photobooks, the process did not end there. His interest in the tactile and in the materiality of the print and the process, extended into its dissemination. Rather than treat the book as a mere container, he approached it as integral to the photographic process. Here and more generally, his work is not simply photography, but also collage, sculpture, conceptual art. It challenges the photograph as a visual description of landscape, drawing the viewer into a kinaesthetic engagement with the work. These photographs operate across multiple senses, evoking a synaesthetic crossover between a haptic, visual and even an aural engagement with the work (which will be discussed later in this section). In the process of making the books he often uses linocut, letterpress printing, mono prints, spray paint and rubber stamps (figure 34).

Whereas *Buried* showed perhaps a molecular proximity between the artist-subject, landscape and photographic artefact, *Hackney Flowers* illustrates Gill's embodied proximity to the landscape. The verbs and actions of making are clearly visible in these images, they are not merely made through the lens, but evoke Gill's active presence, walking, cycling, and like Landy, dropping down, digging, collecting, foraging. As with *Buried*, he places himself in the landscape as one of many actors, living and non-living. The landscape itself, in its material form and content, is such an actor (or multiplicity of actants), which he gives voice to. The human scale of the body performing actions in the landscape is more evident here than in *Buried*, through the accumulations of debris, the chance finds it throws up, the way that he skilfully organises and arranges materials and images. He himself is another, constructed by and constructing a performance between himself, his camera, his bicycle and the landscape, a performance which presents itself as a movement through and



Figure 33: From the photobook *Hackney Flowers*, 2007

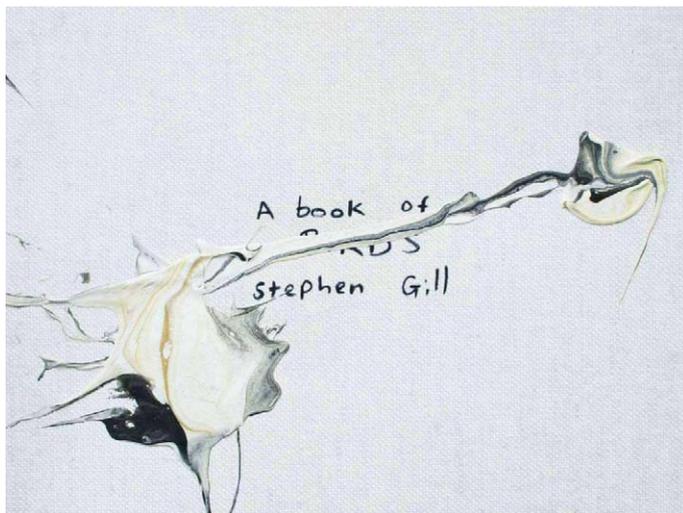
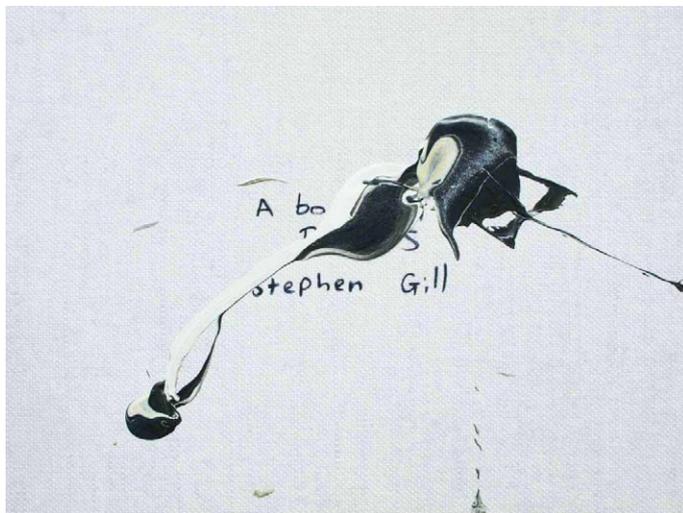


Figure 34: Examples of individually hand finished books, 2007

unfolding with the landscape which can only ever be partially intentional, a 'leitmotif of movement as a desire for presence which escapes a consciousness-centred core of self-reference' (Thrift, 2008: 5). When Gill discusses conscious intent in the context of *Hackney Flowers*, he does so with a desire to destabilise it, to introduce chance and the accidental.

This strategy contrasts but is not inconsistent with some of his earlier work, *A Book of Field Studies* for example, was the product of a predetermined formula, an apparently strict intent (figure 35). Here, he photographed the rears of billboards in mundane and neglected urban landscapes around Hackney and entitled them with the advertising slogan on the front, *Diamonds are forever or Corset £14.99 - H&M* (Gill, 2004). These again are conceptual documentary photographs, repetitive, almost clinical in conception, if not subverted by a wry humour. Parallels can be seen here with Landy's *Nourishment*, themselves the compulsive repetition of a pre-determined formula. Again, the formulaic has the effect of abstracting intent, of removing it from the lived moment and placing it within the framework of a mechanical process, further reinforcing the mechanism of the camera itself. To choose to employ seriality in this way is of course an intention, but it is one that happens before the act. The performance of his practice thus from the outset, before he gets out in to the urban landscape with his camera, pushed out the self-reflexive subject and invited in repetition and chance.

This combination of repetition and chance was also seen in *Buried* and occurs in much of his work. An arbitrary repetitive framework in a sense constructs the series before it happens in practice, but the results are unpredictable, described by what is encountered. A similar example might be John Cage's application of repetitive formula to the words of a lecture he gave on music and process. He cut each sentence into one second intervals of either speech or silence, playing the music to which the lecture referred in these silent gaps: 'The music is not superimposed on the speech but is heard only in the interruptions of the speech - which, like the lengths of the paragraphs themselves, were the result of chance operations' (Cage, 2009: 18). A similar device can be seen in *Hackney Flowers*, as a series of inserts of portraits of local people, which upon closer inspection are shown to be a series determined by the presence of floral prints on clothing or bags, or real flowers in the hair (Figure 36). Chance encounter and serial formula become visibly entwined, the excess of the world appears despite (and because of) these arbitrary constraints. The apparent formalism of classification spills out into its equally arbitrary absurdity, holding 'on



Figure 35: A Book of Field Studies, 2004

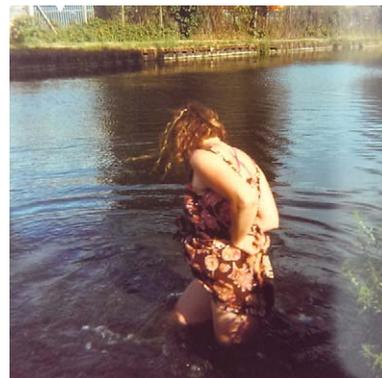
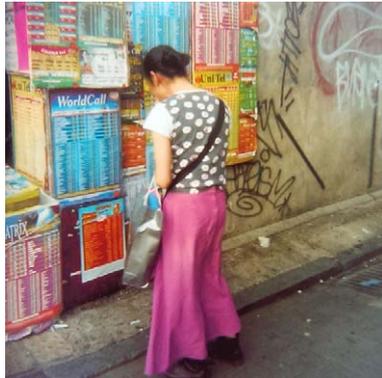


Figure 36: Insets in photobook  
Hackney Flowers, 2007

one hand, the strangeness, and on the other, the necessity of classificatory systems together' (Harrison et al, 2004: 18).

The photographs in *Hackney Flowers* are both material and embodied traces and constructed fictions. They start off as documentary photographs of a marginal landscape, often around Hackney Wick, and through a series of processes Gill strips back the fallacy of the objective lens by both adding to the image, overlaying flowers, bits of wire and by taking away from it, burying it, letting it peel and dissolve and leech into the landscape. As with the *Buried* series, by burying his photos Gill makes direct reference to their status as chemical films, emulsions sitting upon paper, emulsions which react to water, acids, the chemicals in the soil, the air. These erosions are foregrounded in his work, and become not metaphors for decay but rather a demonstration of the movements and flows of matter that ignore human distinctions between objects, things, the earth.

The images in *Hackney Flowers* also strongly emphasise their origin in the materiality of the landscape, emphasising the artifice of the flat photographic plane. They do so in a different way to *Buried*, putting objects onto the photos and then re-photographing them, rather than allowing the photographic emulsion to be eaten away. Through a different means Gill again makes it clear these are constructs, he dispels the possibility of reading these images as straight documents with some claim on reality. In doing so, he deploys the photograph as a trace of multiple processes entwined together as a lived and embodied performance of practice. A thread drawn out from a moment, a path which extends unevenly in time and space, an object found here and there, a photograph taken there and sometime else, a chemical process that happened beneath the wet earth over a period of weeks or months. In his work, time and space are present but they are not a continuum, they are a jumble of fragments, woven together and made coherent, seductive even. These processes are all given voice, the materials, objects, chance encounters, people, animals, plants, chemicals are all visible. All are entwined and inseparable, the tumbling uncertainty of matter and life are captured through a combination of practices and processes, finding an apparent moment of pause as prints bound into a book.

Again, as with *Buried*, the melancholic aspect of the photograph is disrupted, the idea of a moment cleaved from reality is disturbed. In place of the photographic instant are traces of multiple temporalities from those of his embodied movement and lived experience to the lifecycles of insects and plants and those of chemical reactions and

physical processes. By bringing together processes of movement, chance encounters with discarded objects, the husks and remains from the lifecycles of plants and insects and the chemistry of photographic emulsion and soil, Gill blurs the boundaries between living and non-living, giving all a sense of liveliness. As photographic prints these processes are presented visually but in revealing and emphasising the processes involved in their production they challenge the centrality of the visual and the anthropocentricity of the photographer's gaze, working on 'presenting the world, not on representing it, or explaining it' (Dewsbury et al, 2002: 437). These works are located in the actuality of representation, a material artefact that 'does not approach representation as masks, gazes, reflections, veils, dreams, ideologies, as anything in short, that is a covering that is laid over the ontic' (ibid: 438).

These processes are both material and bodily, such that the visuality of the photographic medium is no longer necessarily the dominant register through which to read these works. This decentring of the lens or the photographer's eye has a tendency to decentre the self-reflexivity and authorship associated with or emerging from the Cartesian subject. Performance underscores a pre-conscious thinking through the body, a process that the viewer can engage with through a multi-sensory register. Embodied actions, sensations and experiences are evoked rather than simply looked upon, the presence of one's own body is invoked. As Hetherington points out, 'a western and modern form of subjectivity is premised on the centrality of sight and on a particular cultural understanding of what we do when we see' (Hetherington, 2003: 1934). Despite the obvious visual nature of his work, Gill's work challenges the centrality of vision, and 'the cultural significance and specificities of seeing as knowing in an established and recognisable optical ground' (ibid). In this way Gill's work not only points towards a collapse between the artist-subject and the marginal landscape but also brings the audience into this relationship, at least imaginatively.

### **Ordering disorder**

All of the full page photographs in *Hackney Flowers* are constructed through a process of overlaying (Figure 37). Dried flowers, petals, seeds, husks, leaves, stems, weeds, berries and a dead and slightly tattered butterfly appear carefully arranged upon photographs shot around Hackney. Not all the additions are organic. There is a twig entangled with cassette tape, a pair of wires in a clipped plastic sheath, metal contacts poking from one end, splashes of aluminium, perhaps dripped from the red hot engine of a burning car. There is one photograph with dark green paint poured



Figure 37: From photobook  
Hackney Flowers, 2007

upon it, pollen dusting its surface and the lens of the camera discreet but visible in the reflective surface.

These often somewhat creased, battered or decayed objects are drawn from an archive of collected objects that the artist has amassed at his studio over the course of his numerous trips around Hackney Wick. This is a form of archiving at work in Gill's practice which is different from that discussed earlier in this chapter and in other chapters, closer to an archaeological or botanical field study expedition, collecting and categorising specimens and objects. Gill uses this process of collecting and ordering to create a palette of form and colour. This more traditional archival activity is in contrast to the way his work problematises the photograph as a document or archive of a disappearing landscape.

Here Gill is reifying and instrumentalising the landscape through its fragments and ephemera, much in the way that DeSilvey discusses in relation to the eclectic contents of a homestead that she attempts to order, looking for ways 'as with any other archival collection or practice...to stabilise the homestead's objects and fit them into a system that rendered them legible, and so available for scholarship and instruction' (DeSilvey, 2007: 880). In contrast to Gill's other photographs and photobooks, this aspect of the process is involved with fixing and categorising, of removing things from their context, of taking them out of the flows and processes through which they emerged. There is an intent here that goes against the process of becoming that his work engages with in many other ways. Clear distinctions are made here between subject and landscape, nature and culture. Here Gill is a self who curates things out there and moves them to his collection. Yet, the arbitrary material excess of this collection fights against this essentialising tendency too. Edensor (2005) uses Foucault's notion of *heterotopia* (Foucault, 1986) to demonstrate how ordering principles that draw 'arbitrary distinctions that consign things, places and people to discrete realms' are thwarted by the shifting and ambiguous boundaries between objects in any system of classification (2005: 62). Using Lees (1997) example of the library he points out how these shifting lines of delineation 'simultaneously contains infinite multitudes of difference' (Edensor, 2005: 62). This brings Gill's archive back into a clearer relationship to his photographs, mirroring the multiple spaces and temporalities that emerge through them: 'since the library conjures up and is related to innumerable other spaces and temporalities which it juxtaposes into a single space, the confined space it appears to be explodes into infinitudes' (ibid: 62).

This oscillation between order and disorder is further emphasised in the way Gill uses this palette, very skilfully marrying items with the underlying photographs, creating a visual coherence which sets up resonances and affinities between what would appear to be dissociated elements. However, the final effect is to once again destabilise the distinction between subject and landscape, nature and culture, an affective atmosphere perhaps akin to a delirium, a hallucinogenic otherness born out of the mundane. The underlying shots are of Hackney's urban margins - some show



Figure 38: From photobook *Hackney Flowers*, 2007

infrastructural landscapes - a barren landscape littered with the rubble of an unwanted industrial occupant, land cleared for development perhaps, pylons marching out of frame. Others show a view down the Lea Navigation, a concrete bridge, again a pylon, power lines erased by an overexposed sky, a chainlink fence giving geometry to a low mist. Some show industrial yards or premises, stacks of pallets, fenced and defensive yards, a truck unloading, an abandoned mattress against a spiked wall. Others show hybrid spaces, not quite domestic, not quite industrial - allotments nestled in these urban gaps, slightly wild, woven together with industrial cast offs, welders mesh fences, corrugated iron shacks. Other photographs appear to be family snaps in domestic settings, backyards or lean-too outbuildings perhaps. On closer inspection, it appears that these too are in fact found objects, abandoned photographic images that have somehow managed to cling to landscapes close to home, although not homeliness. The rhythms, resonances and associations set up between found objects and objects that are visible in the actual photograph have the affect of unanchoring them and setting them back in motion, swirling and flowing together.

The effect of combining these photographs and the overlaid objects is to destabilise easy readings. The objects themselves are out of context, a collection of the discarded, dead or abandoned. But they are put back in context, returned to their landscape through an act of bricolage. As with Gill's *Buried* series what comes through is the

liveliness of matter and an embodied reading, a sense of being in the landscape, finding things, more of a thrill of discovery than a preoccupation with neglect. Paint poured onto a photograph (figure 38) implies Gill's presence in the landscape, of finding an abandoned pot of paint, of carrying that weight around and finally back to his studio and pouring it onto a print. It comes alive not only as a material substance but also as an object that had a history, and as a set of movements and actions, as something that is an agent within a field of action that extends backwards spatially and temporally. Through the actions of collecting and cataloguing, Gill is able to bring the viewer into an embodied relationship with the landscape.

### **Anonymising the subject**

The experience of viewing Gill's photographs implicates the viewer's body, suggesting a sense of being in and moving through the landscape. As demonstrated earlier, there is also a serial nature to Gill's photographs of people. This has a tendency to decentre the human subject despite invoking embodied understandings of the urban margins through the materiality present in his work. Again this emphasises the tendency of Gill's work to collapse boundaries between the human subject and the urban margin. They are not static documentary images frozen in time, but rather a coming together of active, lively processes of landscape and artist-subject. They suggest not just textures but the handling of objects, smells, sounds. However, as they evoke the lived body they also put it in its place, as one lively thing amongst many. This is perhaps most evident in the way representations of the human form are treated in *Hackney Flowers*. In the main body of photographs (rather than the insets discussed earlier) there are a handful that have human subjects within them. Sometimes these are found photographs, family portraits, artefacts already (figure 39). Others are photographs taken in an informal market in Hackney Wick, selling electrical cable stripped from derelict buildings, second hand fridges, washing machines, old curtains, unwanted videos to be played on unwanted video players. In all these images, the figures are overlaid, obscured or otherwise augmented with the sediment and detritus of the landscape. Sometimes the photographs have been buried and figures are speckled or peeled, eaten into with the psychedelia of destabilised chemical emulsions. People are not the subject of the photograph, they are an element within it.

Throughout the book there are also, as discussed earlier, intermittent smaller pages (figure 36). These photographs of people are taken around Hackney, often

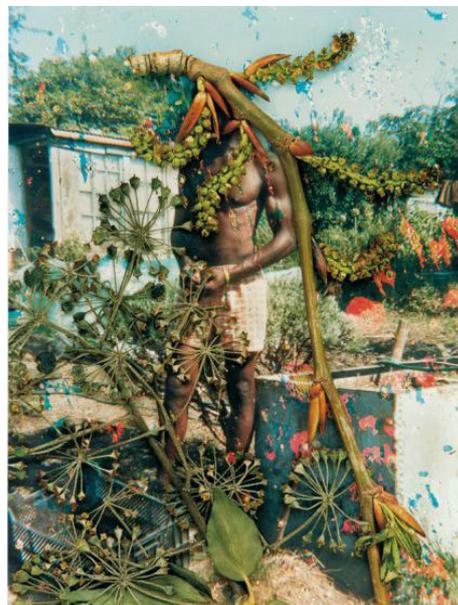


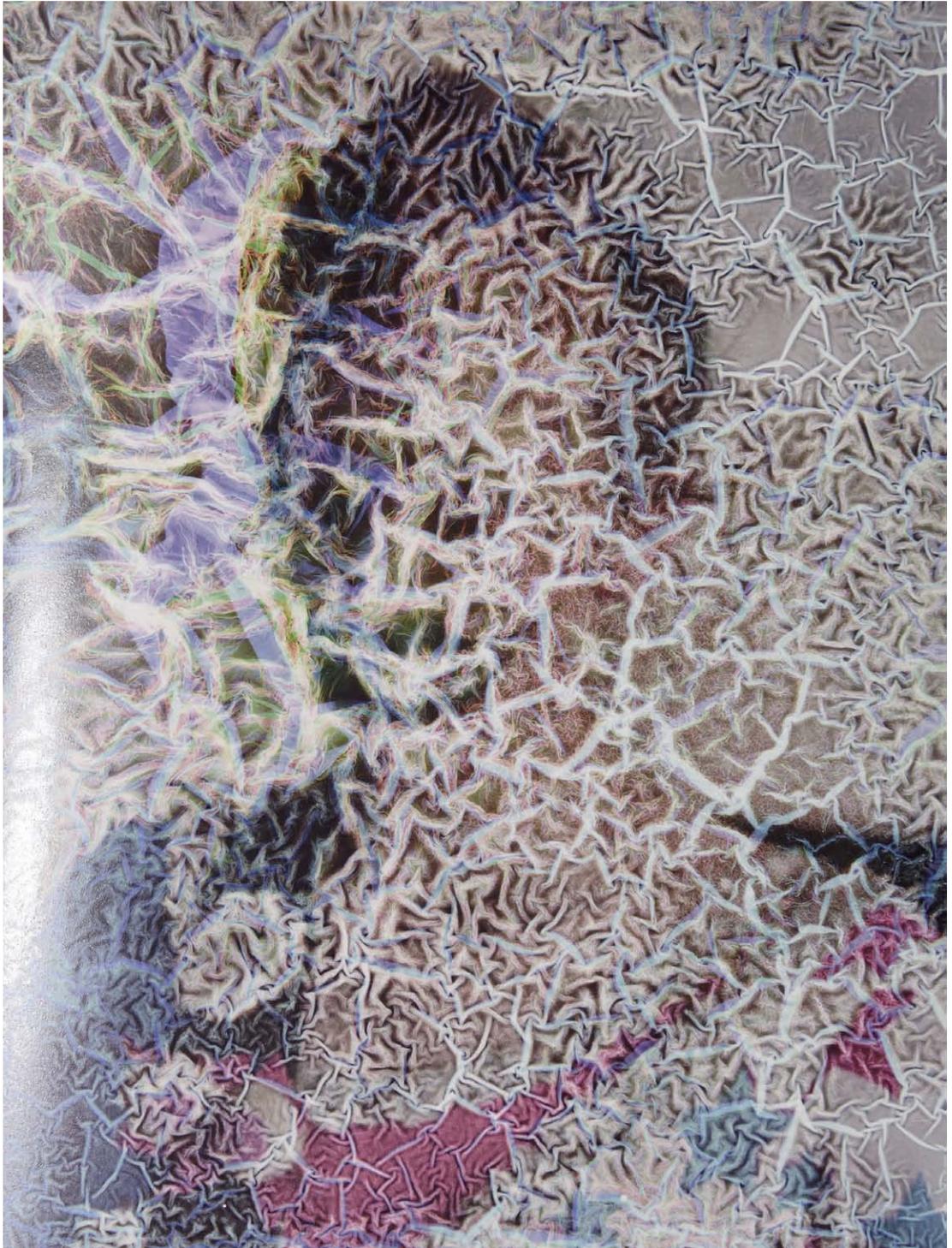
Figure 39: From photobook *Hackney Flowers*, 2007

in quite different settings to the rest of the photos. These are not the marginal or peripheral landscapes of Hackney Wick, but rather urban street photography around Hackney. Here there is also no overlaying, burying or any other process to disturb the viewer from the human subject who is generally located centre frame. It seems that there is something different going on; the human subject is being given centre stage. This focus upon the human subject seems incongruent with the rest of the work. The apparent focus is however deceptive. These photographs are in fact a return to the earlier conceptual seriality of works like *A Book of Field Studies*. If the series is considered as a whole, it becomes clear that these are first and foremost photographs of Hackney flowers - floral dresses, shirts, bags, hats, roses in the hair. The human subject is again decentred, the real subject is the idea, the floral motif. Suddenly all one can see are flowers, the people disappear beneath a diaphanous meshwork of connections between colourful florid points.

Gill's emphasis on the material acts as a device by which he erases traditional ways of thinking about human subject in photography. In its place he foregrounds the subject as a momentary and constantly refigured intersection of agencies rather than a discrete 'self'. The people in his photographs are implicated into a materiality endlessly entwined with other materials through unseen flows and processes. This can be seen even more clearly in his recent work *Best Before* (2014), in which he uses energy drinks as part of the chemical development of the photographs, pointing to the chemistry not just of photographic emulsion, but also the human body (figure 40).

### **The audience - materiality, sensation and kinaesthesia**

Materiality is central to Gill's practice and implied into this is the body as a sensing material, a body/object that can touch, smell, hear, taste as well as see. His photographs implicate the viewer in their production by bringing a kinaesthetic imaginary of the body into the experience of the image. This starts from the very materiality of the plastic lens that records these images. In *Hackney Flowers* Gill used an old plastic Coronet camera he bought at a market in Hackney Wick with which he then photographed the market and its environs. Even the story about the camera has a material dimension, suggesting the jangle of loose change and exchange of money, the feeling of the camera's plastic body, of looking through the distorting lens of a scratched plastic viewfinder. Already the construction of the camera is brought into the picture along with the life of the place where it was bought and which it subsequently documents. This is counter to the usual approach of photographers, where the camera



*Figure 40: Photograph developed in energy drink,  
from photobook Best Before End, 2014*

disappears from the viewer's grasp, into the realm of the professional.

The viewer is not usually invited to imagine holding the camera, standing in the landscape composing the shot, pressing the shutter release. Photography and photographers usually hide the technical construction of the image and draw us away from considering that the image is in fact constructed at all. The photographic image itself, by the very nature of its apparent realism, tends to hide the conditions of its production. The viewer is not encouraged to participate in the photographic process, nor require any understanding of the technical process of making the photograph. However, with Gill's work technique and the technical are quite literally brought into the frame. The camera used for *Hackney Flowers* is cheap, it has no focus, no exposure control, simply a shutter release. Even if one does not have this knowledge to hand, it can be read from the images. The focus is often poor, sometimes the whole image blurred, skies overexposed, bleaching out trees and branches, fences and pylons. There is a disarming amateurish quality, a sense that we could have taken these images, that we just need to place ourselves in that landscape and that our photographic skills (or lack of them) are not as important as just getting out, being there and experiencing it. These images introduce us into the frame as potential participants, right from the start, in the act of making a photograph. They appear to take emphasis away from technical mastery and bring ideas of movement, ambling around, seeing what one encounters to the fore. In short, it implicates the viewer's body into the landscape through the photograph. We know that Gill's technical expertise is actually extremely well honed, that it is his skill, experience and understanding of the processes of making a photograph, from the camera to developing film and printing, that allows him to produce these images.

The seeds, petals, tattered fabric and bits of wire that accumulate on top of the original images further emphasise the body as located and moving through the landscape. Viewing these images makes us proxies, photographic avatars for Gill's practice, the verbs, actions and affects - foraging, collecting, stumbling across, assembling and the surprise, disgust, fear, revelation or more the mundane emotions might accompany this and move us along. By placing these objects on top of the image, they draw attention to the artefactual nature of the photograph, its material nature, they draw us away from the flat spectatorship of the visual and into an embodied experience of the landscape. They tell us about the excess of materiality of these landscapes, they evoke affective responses, tying us into multiple threads and flows, into infrastructure, gardening, the bricolage architecture of shacks, the work

and industry of the area, the life cycles of plants, insects, transitions, discardings, accumulations. Whilst our bodies and their sensory capacities are drawn into the landscape in these ways, so too is their priority questioned. By making visual work that engages with a multi-sensory and kinaesthetic register Gill questions the centrality of vision and the Cartesian subject-landscape binary that emerges from giving vision an elevated role in our capacity to know the world. The human figure is, treated as an element, a material substance amongst others. The process of burying photographs in order to allow the soil and emulsions to interact through the material rather than through the effect of light upon chemical also puts us in the ground, imaginatively experiencing the lively interaction of molecules that could just as easily belong to our own bodies.

In this way Gill's work operates across a register of substrate and chemical reaction. This is related to Gill's use of film rather than digital photography, which I use in my own work. The material process is central to his work, the chemical reactions, the substance of the film, the substance of the photographic paper. He brings attention to these practices and processes through burial, through the visibility of chemical reaction. He also brings attention to the materiality of the camera itself, sometimes putting things inside the camera, modifying it to allow this, or by using a cheap plastic camera. Thus, the brute materiality of Gill's work, the presence of objects, detritus, dirt, directs us towards a visceral response and an imaginative experience of embodied encounter, of poking and prodding the landscape and gleaning objects from it. The role of chance is wilfully present and visible, tensioned against the acts of constructing and composing the photograph. This further emphasises processes both outside the body and between the body and the landscape. The photograph can be seen as operating not simply in a visual or even multi-sensory register, but a kinaesthetic register of movement and sensory experience. This is a mnemonic index that links what one can see, with the imaginative experience of one's embodied memory.

My own photographic practice helped bring attention to this. I attempt to engage the body by presenting a landscape of substance and material without context, a spontaneous encounter without an explanatory framework. I treat the landscape as a flat abstraction, a composition of various materials, concrete, steel, bitumen, dirt under the flat light of cloudy skies and thus without shadow. I under emphasise perspective (in post production) and treat the photograph as a flat composed picture plane, in order to point to the photograph as ground rather than representation. This is not as pronounced as with Gill's work, there is no dirt on the images, no eroded

emulsion. The *film Point/Vector* however attempts to reinforce the photograph as a process rather than a representation, bringing attention to the mechanical production of the image. Attention is drawn to the momentary click of the shutter through a barely perceptible torrent of still images. This was put into the context of movement through the landscape through the second screen displaying moving images. As described in chapter 4, creating this interplay of still and moving image felt much like creating a musical rather than a visual composition.

This perhaps attuned me to a further aspect of Gill's work, a sense of synaesthesia that lurks in his images, a slippage between sound and vision. Sound is not usually associated with the photographic image - If anything photographs tend to be experienced as mute, almost palpably emitting silence, leaving us only with our own thoughts and reflections. Gill's work however has a relationship to sound that appears in a number of his series and in different ways. *A Book of Birds* for example is a series of photographs taken around East London, of apparently unremarkable places, a view down a residential street for example, a dog on a grass verge dwarfed by trees. Each of these photographs has one common thread running through it, each one has a bird in it, never obviously the subject, sometimes almost impossible to find. He talks about his interest in how birds in cities mould themselves around our lives and the spaces we have created and his interest in how scientists have found that birds in towns and cities sing louder or at higher frequencies than those in rural areas. When looking at these photographs there is a tendency to hear rather than see the subject. Similarly, in *A Book of Field Studies* he presents a series of portraits of people encountered on the streets, listening to music on headphones. Each is entitled with the name of the song, *Radiohead, Paranoid Android; Michael Jackson, Bad*. Again, the subject of these photographs is aural. This work finds itself discussed amongst sound artists (Soundescapes, 2014). In *Warming Down* there are fifteen hand C-Type prints stuck onto the pages of an ex-Hackney Library music scorebook. These are all conceptual references to sound and suggest this as part of the register of senses one uses when looking at the work (figures 41 to 43). *Hackney Flowers* does not have any such explicit conceptual cues, but it does, like much of his other work, have a subtle sense of pace and rhythm which is itself musical. Where objects are arranged on underlying photographs, Gill's use of colour and composition might set up resonances between the life cycle of a butterfly and the bustle of a busy market. There is a sense of repetition, circularity, a sense of things never coming to resolution but endlessly being played out, jamming off each other. These photographs are melodic. They point to an aural way of thinking landscape, where rhythms, repetitions, cycles, flows,

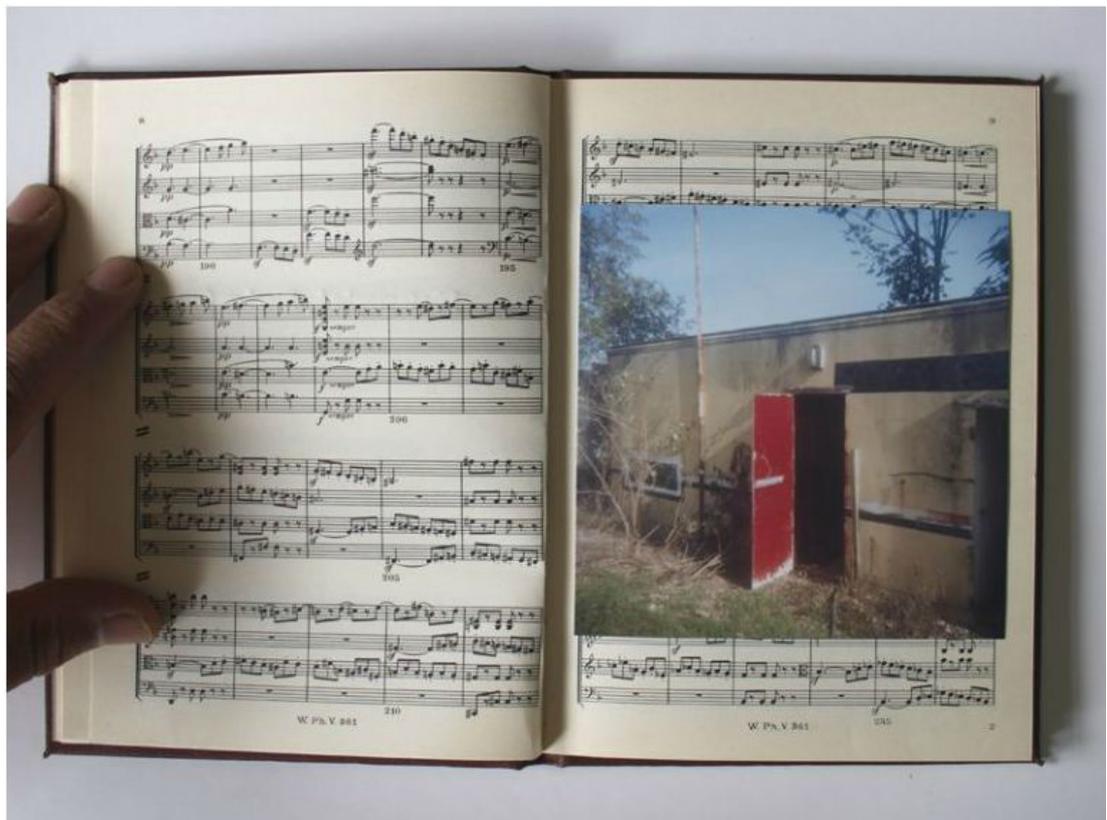


Figure 41: *The Kestrel, A Book of Birds*, 2010  
Figure 42: Radiohead - *Paranoid Android, A Book of Field Studies*, 2004  
Figure 43: *Untitled, Warming Down*, 2008

movements superimpose and interfere with one another, where the momentary arrest of the shutter does not freeze time, but provides us with an image whose elements are still moving through us.

### Concluding remarks

As with all the empirical chapters, Gill's work emerges from a fieldwork like practice, a close embodied and material familiarity with the marginal urban landscape. Again, although the works themselves are visual, photographic prints, the practice clearly brings out a wider sensory and experiential register. A haptic and an aural engagement with the landscape are clearly important registers for Gill. Gill's engagement with the landscape is less autobiographical than Landy's or my own autoethnography. There are still strong autobiographical currents running through it, but there is a stronger emphasis upon non-human actants, such as soil, the camera and the chemical emulsion of film. More than Landy's or my own practice, Gill emphasises the vibrant agency of matter. The unstable metaphor of organism was used here to bring out this ambiguity between living and non-living, emphasising agency over categories of 'life'. Gill is an implied presence in his works, appearing perhaps more as a spectre through the compulsion to repeat, forever returning yet never clearly visible. This compulsion to repeat is an important motif in his work, from the doubling of his photographs through rephotographing, to the serial nature of his work and his own repeated movements through the same landscape. His book imprint is itself called 'Nobody Books', again decentring authorship, emphasising anonymity. This decentring of human agency and the challenge to the representational nature of the photographic image that Gill gives us is a rejection of Cartesian binaries of mind and matter, bringing attention to the material entanglements of the artist-subject and the urban margin. This collapse between subject and landscape is itself ambiguous though and sometimes reversed though. The final product, the photographic book,



*Michael Jackson, Bad (A Book of Field Studies, 2005)*

complicates these readings and re-introduces the concept of identity, authorship, the artist as subject. Equally though Gill produces limited edition books, often signed and with signing events. This has a tendency to assert the artist as originator, as communicating with an audience through marketing and distribution networks established in order to do so. The distinction between artist-subject, audience and landscape is brought back through books signings, a return to notions of authorship. These images are visual and material artefacts, they are rephotographed, they are reproduced and presented upon a durable substrate (i.e. the photobook), as signed and limited edition prints. This is emphasised through the object of the photobook (Miles, 2010).

This ambiguity is an example of the complex problematisation of the photograph as document and artefact that Gill's work develops. His practice denies the photograph's capacity to clarify and order the landscapes he deals with, foregrounding instead ambiguity and uncertainty. He appears to emphasise the entanglements of the human subject and the landscape, demonstrating a post-human way of thinking landscape. The photobook in which these photographs are reproduced goes some way to addressing or at least acknowledging this tension between mutability and immutability. The book itself comes smeared in Hackney Wick mud, the material of the landscape is there, dust and crumbs of dried earth pepper the table as you remove the book from its sleeve. Similarly, there is also a photograph and a paper sleeve, an invitation to bury your own, to continue the collaborative blurring of nature and culture.

More so than Landy's work, Gill makes direct reference to the materiality of the urban margin. He does this not through pictorial representation but by drawing our attention to a palimpsest of material entities, from photographic emulsion, to bits of wire, dead insects and found photographs. There is a strong relationship between the layering, ordering and multiple temporalities of his work and DeSilvey's discussions of the archive and how we might think about the archive if we choose to work with mutable processes rather than static objects (DeSilvey, 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2012). This question of the relationship between mutability and immutability is a key rubric that emerges across all the empirical chapters. This has emerged as an important characteristic of the urban margin, its capacity to create imaginaries that oscillate between process and fixed artefact. Gill's work is on one hand emphatically located in the flow of materials, the movement of himself through a constantly changing landscape, the unpredictable agency of matter itself. On the other hand it is a process

of fixing this flow and these processes into an artefact, of arresting movement and entropy, creating the signed photobook object. His practice also makes use of formulaic repetition, again bringing a sense of order to the turbulent processes that his practice engages with.

This tensioning between order and disorder is fundamental to the imaginary of the urban margin that emerges in Gill's work. These two opposing tendencies are apparent as the relationship between practice as process and practice as an archiving activity. His work perhaps most clearly illustrates the hybridity of the urban margin - the landscape is clearly recognisable as an assemblage of man-made and natural processes, objects, artefacts, plants and insects, dead and alive. Thus, his embodied practice, the gleaning, digging, collecting, assembling, montaging and so on, are easily read off from the images he produces. In this sense his images are not representations of the landscape but are a curated collection of traces - his hand is clearly present but its authorship is partial, with unpredictable processes brought to bear on the processes and images. Like Landy's work, the visual content of the images when read through the process of production, comes to speak more directly of the relationship between the artist and landscape, of the margin as emerging between the material encounters between processes - the drift of discarded objects, the reactions of chemicals, the decay of dead plants or insects, the human activities that find unsurveilled landscapes.

It is perhaps equally important to note, however, that the books are also discrete artefacts that exist outside of the landscape, in galleries and bookshops that require that Gill is identified as the originator of the works in order to operate as commodities. Whilst much of his practice evidences, but decentres, his role in the photographic process, the photobooks tend to reassert Gill's authorial presence. The signature in the front of limited edition prints perhaps exemplifies this fiction of an essentialised self, the idea of self that is invoked through another set of flows and processes that are distant from those that the content emerged from. This aspect of the discussion is outside of the scope of this study. It is important to note however, that Gill tends to disrupt these tendencies in his landscape practice whilst also engaging with them in the practice of disseminating work, through book launch and signing events. Nonetheless he is aware of this contradiction and addressed it explicitly with *Buried* for example, where the book itself is caked in soil from the landscape and the audience is invited to engage directly in the practices employed by Gill, by burying a photograph that comes with the book. This again demonstrates Gill's desire to create a distributed sense of authorship even in the final work.

# Chapter 7

## *Conclusions*

## Chapter 7: **Conclusions - reimagining the urban margins**

This thesis is a detailed analysis of the artist-subject / urban margin dyad conducted through an autoethnographic study and two case studies. My key contributions are in two areas, theoretical and methodological. Theoretically I bring early fieldwork approaches in landscape studies into correspondence with contemporary landscape studies, urban margins literatures and geographical work on art. Here I look closely at the subject and the landscape through the interrelation of subjectivity and materiality. Through this I develop an understanding of the subject as by turns distinct and indistinct from the landscape, an unstable oscillation between subject/landscape and a subjectlandscape as it were. Methodologically, I use the autoethnographic chapter as a device for structuring the thesis, framing the research problems and creating a register for interrogating the research subjects. This develops and extends the work of landscape theorists such as Wylie and Lorimer (Wylie, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2009; Lorimer, 2003, 2005, 2008, 2010) and urban theorists and geographers such as Edensor (2000, 2007, 2013) and Rendell (2010a; 2010b). I do this by bringing my skills as an artist to an autoethnographic study that uses practice and writing not as an end to itself but as a means to develop the analysis and interpretation Landy and Gill's practice. This extends the scope of Wylie's autoethnographic work on walking for example by using autoethnography as a tool to address the practices of others (Wylie, 2005).

The rubrics of the three empirical chapters, uncanny landscapes, contaminated landscapes and organismic landscapes each engaged with the resolution and dissolution of distinctions between subject and landscape in differently nuanced ways. In each, artist-landscape relations have been explored through embodied practice, materiality and subjective experience. Each of these chapters queries how these two terms – artist and landscape – become ambiguous, porous and willfully confused with one another, whilst by turns also becoming visible, distinct and in some sense knowable. In each, subject and landscape are seen to oscillate between binary distinctions where the artist and the landscape appear separate, and a relational understanding where artist and landscape appear entangled. The implications of this for a politics of the margins will be discussed towards the end of this chapter.

Crucially I argue that this oscillation is not merely a theoretical abstraction but is acutely experienced and sought out by Gill, Landy and myself both physically and imaginatively. In the autoethnographic chapter this oscillation between distinction

and indistinction is proposed as uncanny in character, in Stephen Gill's chapter through the term 'organism' and in Landy's chapter through 'contamination'. All three rubrics demonstrate this same instability, exhibiting both means of making distinctions between self and material landscape and of dissolving those distinctions.

Importantly, I interrogate Gill and Landy's urban margins through practice rather than treating the works as representations to be decoded. This was in part achieved through an experimental approach to creative methodologies using my own understanding of creative practice as an artist. Here I bring the skills and insight I have as a practicing artist to bear upon the understanding of the creative subject at work in the landscape. I use the autoethnographic study of my own photographic and film practices to interrogate the performative, material and embodied experience of landscape. This is used as a device that helps to augment and develop close interpretations of the work and practices of Landy and Gill. In this way I am able to address directly the role of subjectivity in the research process, research subjects and researcher. This develops and extends the use of photography and video in geography beyond documentary, participatory research and elicitation techniques (see Rose, 2001; Pink, 2001, 2007). In addition to using photography and filmmaking practice as a primary tool for research, I also use it in conjunction with text to communicate to the reader through imaginaries of the body, tools and material environment. This experimentation with academic writing and presentation styles again develops and extends similar work in geography that has animated geographical texts through affective, emotive and expressive modes of engagement (see Edensor, 2005; Rendell, 2010; Wylie, 2005; Battista et al, 2005; DeSilvey, 2006).

To conclude, the following sections will go into more detail about the issues discussed here. I will bring out common trajectories that emerged between the chapters and further discuss the value of creative methods in the research process. Finally I will reflect upon what the urban margin is and where it can be found and the implications of my understanding for a political understanding of urban margins.

### **Re-imagining the margins: the relationship between artist-subject and landscape**

This section will be used to trace the narrative arc through the project, followed then by a number of key themes and observations that emerged across the empirical chapters, uncanny landscapes, contaminated landscapes and organismic landscapes. These themes come under the headings of fieldwork; repetition; dirt; collapsing

plural temporalities; collapsing the human with the non-human; mutability and immutability. Each covers a number of observations that will then be discussed in more detail.

The narrative arc through the project is perhaps most simply thought of as a trajectory through cultural geography's approach to landscape over the twentieth and twenty first century. For the purposes of this project this folds together the fieldwork approach of Sauer (1915) with the post-phenomenology and more-than-human approaches of Wylie and Lorimer for example, as part of the wider remit of non-representational approaches (Dewsbury et al, 2002; Lorimer, 2006; Thrift, 2008). This trajectory thus starts out from a fieldwork inflected approach which emphasises the direct embodied observation of the material landscape, and then passes over historical materialist understandings of landscape as representation veiling material conditions (Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988), and returns to materiality, with landscape and subject understood as co-produced through and between a complex plural assemblage of objects and actors where 'humans are always in composition with nonhumanity, never outside of a sticky web of connections or an ecology [of matter]' (Bennett quoted in Whatmore, 2006: 603). This trajectory emerged from the various artists and artworks I looked at through the course of the project, where it was clear that 'fieldwork' was a common creative method, where artists closely observed, catalogued and archived the material landscape in the process of making their work. In the work of Landy and Gill I have shown how these methods are used to bring out the hybrid relationship between subject and material landscape. These artists employ methods that also, like cultural geography's early fieldwork approaches, problematise the role of the subject and subjectivity in method.

This is further complicated by subjectivities that appear to presence memory and identity through their practices, often as strong autobiographical currents deeply entangled for example with the materialities of dirt, soil or chemicals. The presence of a self-reflexive subject always remains as a spectre that returns to disrupt an understanding of subject-landscape that is premised on the total collapse of one into the other. Central to these concerns are questions of how we construct distinctions between animate and inanimate, between what is living and what is inert substance. Cultural constructions of self, landscape, nature and culture are pertinent to this and often at odds with material, embodied understandings of subject-landscape, and this incoherence formed an important theoretical thread that ran through the research.

What became clear across the empirical chapters, including the autoethnography, was that what constitutes an urban margin is not located or locatable in the material landscape or in the cultural constructions of landscape that the artists' works present. Rather it is in the processual nature of the relationship between subject and landscape, in a movement that both creates and dissolves essentialist understandings of self and landscape. This is an oscillation between stability and ambiguity that creates distinct subject and landscape entities whilst also folding them together into a single entity. Across all chapters this could be seen in a number of similar ways, and it is to these common themes I will now turn.

### **Fieldwork**

Underlying the work of all three artists studied is an approach to urban margins, which has much in common with the field studies approaches of Sauer or Jackson. These earlier landscape geographers' mobile and transitory occupation and close attention to materiality similarly emerges in the three practices I consider, most obviously Stephen Gill's. Gill's practice revolves very much around walking or cycling, with a sense of a landscape emerging through the repetition of movement and practice rather than the stability of the material landscape. This too is seen with Landy, although here it is also the material landscape itself that becomes mobile, in the form of the weeds plucked and transferred to his studio. Gill too however removes fragments and archives them in his studio to be incorporated later into his photographs. My own practice was underpinned by explorations by bicycle, photographically 'documenting' the landscape as it unfolded.

There are significant differences with Sauer and Jackson too. Whereas they attempt to achieve objectivity through a close embodied immersion in a landscape as professional observers, the artists that I consider here do something quite different. They powerfully entwine their own subjectivities, life histories and sense of identity into the material fabric of the landscape, throwing the notion of an objective observer into disarray. Each blurs distinctions between real and fictional, which also in turn problematises the very categories of nature and culture which early cultural geography grappled with and that become aligned with more recent discussions of subject and landscape. Thus despite some of the documentary, archival tendencies that can be seen in the work of these three artists, this is modified and perhaps is ultimately more in tune with recent performative and narrative understandings of landscape and subjectivity, such as those of Lorimer or Wylie (Lorimer and Wylie, 2013; Lorimer, 2003; Wylie, 2005).

Each artist-subject decentres their presence in the work, but does not jettison it. Their performance in the landscape, their movements and practices, are visible traces in the work, they are not hidden, but neither are they emphasised or privileged over the materiality of the landscape. Thus the artist is visible but uses various stratagems to maintain a certain peripherality. Here identity becomes apparent as constructed around a certain hybridity, an ambiguous and oscillating relationship of resolution and dissolution between self and landscape. A sense of a stable knowable self emerges through embodied repetition, a form of dwelling which is related to the inhabitation of an atmosphere and an embodied immersion in a set of mobilities, processes and materialities, rather than a static, fixed, place based and sedentary notion of dwelling. This is perhaps a sense of comfort, familiarity and connection with ambiguous landscapes outside of hegemonic urban imaginaries. However, there is a second fixed location that is intimately connected with this mobile understanding of landscape, the artist studio. It is here that the work is produced, that a second set of material practices are played out to create the artefact. For Landy, Gill and myself this space is crucial for the production of the work. Again, there is an oscillation between the mutable and ambiguous and the fixed and certain.

### **Repetition**

Repetition is an important aspect of all three of the artistic practices that are considered here. In the first instance, each practice has a tendency to compulsively document, creating something that archives unstable and disappearing landscapes. Through embodied repetition, the embodied actions of practice and the permanence of the record, the artefact they produce, reifies and essentialises, creating a register that refers to something fixed which is in fact in the process of disappearing. These practices create a momentary double of the landscape they consider, and in the manner that they do so reveal a current of realism running through them. For Landy this manifests as his series of detailed etchings, closely observed copies of plants that are similar to botanical studies; for Gill and myself, it is the practice of photography itself that lends a realist undertone. Gill's is a conceptual documentary practice, knowingly adopting and subverting documentary tropes, using formulaic repetition to both locate and decentre his authorial presence.

My own photographic practice documents the swathe of east London I explored, and then through video brings attention to the mechanical repetition of the shutter, the many thousands of moments where what I see, almost imperceptibly briefly, is

the black shutter. Each practice thus creates a permanent record of a landscape in flux, but equally brings attention to its mutability. Landy's weeds are wilting and dying and the landscape from which they originated is entirely absent, simply a blank white ground; Gill's work invites the landscape to materially interact with his photographs, soil and water chemically reacting with photographic emulsion; my own work takes the photographic document and through video makes the landscape it refers to an imperceptibly brief series of fragments, each referring back to a moment when the landscape became briefly obscured, a back ground which is a corollary to Landy's white ground.

In each practice, repetition also emerges as compulsive, which lends an uncanniness to the relationship between artist and urban margin. Landy's choice of laborious, painful and repetitive manual engraving which relocated him in the world (and the art world) after 'Breakdown'; Gill's obsessive almost mechanical formula, his repetition of motifs and his inability to pull himself free of Hackney Wick, returning again and again, despite wanting to move on; my own experience of finding myself inadvertently repeating the same journeys over and over, of having a sense of being directed by the landscape and directed by the camera. These aspects of practice emphasise a pre-conscious dimension, a subjectivity driven by mechanisms rather than self-reflexive consideration. As practice creates a record of landscape, it also records the mechanical repetition of the artist-subject, collapsing distinctions between the two. This is not just in terms of the visible artefact, the creative product of practice. This is an embodied process, where the body and the landscape are materially entwined and indistinct from one another. For Landy this occurs through pain, for Gill through an obsessive return to the same landscapes, for myself through the experience of being framed and directed by the landscape as I try to frame it.

## **Dirt**

The presence of dirt, detritus or the discarded is clearly visible in each of the artists' work. This excess of materiality, untethered and disorderly, that exists in the urban margin forms an important element of the embodied experience and the landscape imaginaries that emerge in each of the artists' work. Dirt forms an axis between essentialising and anti-essentialising tendencies, a border between culturally constructed ideas of order and the visceral responses to things that are culturally understood as threatening to that order.

For the artists dirt is an embodied part of their practice and represents an excess of materiality, where things spill out beyond their origins as objects and things and their original cultural meanings. They all 'get their hands dirty', are physically engaged with the material qualities of the landscape at a haptic, tactile level, things that are touched, the textures that are felt, things that are examined up close. This is evidenced too in the visual qualities of their work, which emphasise the proximal and the close to hand, a multi-sensory register of engagement that the material excess of the urban margin presents the artist with. Landy explores the verges, cracks and gaps of the urban landscape, in order to find the weeds he will draw. He gets down on the ground amongst discarded drinks cans and crisp packets in order to get close to the weed to make his initial sketches. Soil is also present in the imaginary of his work, implied by the exposed roots.

Gill's work makes strong references to dirt and soil in *Buried*, but also across much of his work in Hackney Wick, collecting discarded objects and later arranging them on top of his photographs. My own work often focuses upon empty, derelict or overgrown sites, but also the practice itself is very much experienced through the material texture of the landscape underfoot. These are all very embodied haptic engagements with the world, which give a solid sense of one's body and the physical material nature of the body and the landscape. As artworks and practices that deal with landscape, through their engagement with dirt, detritus and the general excess of disorderly or 'unanchored' material, they bring focus to the ground beneath ones feet rather than a distant horizon. Again, the distance between subject and landscape is collapsed, here through materiality and direct sensory experience.

For the audience the presence of this disorder might be experienced as an aesthetic device, a game that makes dirt in some way beautiful, acceptable or celebrated. I would suggest, however, that the presence of dirt and excessive materiality in the works has the capacity to engage the viewer in a kinaesthetic relationship with the work and landscape, collapsing the distance between audience, landscape and the embodied experience of the artist. Gill's work is perhaps the best example, where the smearing of mud on the actual photobook clearly brings the viewer into a very direct contact with the landscape itself. Equally however, the presence of objects placed upon his photos and rephotographed evokes not only the excess of materiality that can be found in these landscapes, but also the processes that they are caught up in. The actions of foraging or gleaning, placing or arranging are also evoked by the photographs, an imaginary where one is not participating in a visual image but in a whole set of embodied actions and movements.

Landy's work also evokes such materialities and bodily registers, although in a different way. The extremely fine lines of his etchings put one in mind of the physical action of mark making. These fine lines also find their corollary in the fine filaments of roots and evoke a material register, an imaginary of sensation of roots and soil brushing against the hand perhaps. Equally, the absence of the landscape, the white ground, is a space into which one re-imagines, in a sense filling it with one's own experiences of those gaps and wastelands filled with detritus, perhaps the sound of an empty can kicked across rubble or the cracked and buckled tarmac.

My own work evokes these multi-sensory registers too - the photographs depict an excess of materiality and often are composed in such a way as to present the viewer with a flattened image without strong or obvious perspective. This emphasises the image as a flat textured surface. The images themselves also create a distance between self and landscape that was tensioned with the embodied experience of making them.

### **Collapsing plural temporalities**

For Landy, Gill and myself there is a tendency to experience the urban margins as sites of multiple temporalities and to reflect this in the work produced. This might be through the evocation of formative experiences, brought about through the excessive materialities of dirt and proximity to the ground or by bringing entropy into the work. Landy, Gill and myself all make reference to early experiences made present in these marginal landscapes. Gill discusses the importance of his childhood interest in nature and his father's encouragement for him to work in the dark room. In fact this forms virtually all the biographical material available on Gill's website (Gill, 2014). Gill also brings the temporality of entropic processes into his work, making evident the chemical reactions that 'decay' his photographs in *Buried* for example. Equally, his use of found objects, the assortment of metal washers, butterfly pupae, seed pods and found photographs, bring other processes into the frame with their own temporal regimes, from production line processes to the lifecycles of insects and the lives of people.

For Landy, there is great emphasis upon his father's mining accident when he was a teenager, and the long-term consequences of this. This emerges in *Nourishment* as reference to his father's tenacity and hardiness, but more subtly through allusions to the soil, the fragility and decay of the weeds after they are plucked from the ground.

The presence of Landy's personal history are also found in his wilful experience of pain in making these works, his descriptions of developing claw hand whilst etching weeds resonating strongly with etchings he later made of his father's damaged and diseased hands and feet. My own work for this project brought with it an uncanny experience of childhood, an evocation brought about by both by the materiality of the landscape and a paranoiac sense of exposure.

The experience of the materiality of the urban margins, its dirt and excess, is an important thread linking these three case studies. It is through a close embodied material experience that work and practice weave these multiple temporalities and personal narratives into the immediate landscape. Identity and the formation of identity are intimately entangled with the material landscape in a process that resonates with Hetherington's notion of *praesentia* (Hetherington, 2003). The archival tendencies of these works to document or bear witness to the material landscape are also bearing witness to their earlier trajectories through life, not specific memories but early memories of atmospheres and landscape imaginaries. It is the embodied practices perhaps more than the artworks that are operating across these multiple temporalities. Through practice, identity and landscape become not simply reflections of one another, but collapsed into one another. The practices of documenting or recording the landscape create an archive that is baroque and allegorical in character, folding past and present together and bringing multiple processes into view. Creative practices that play with fieldwork like documentation perhaps enable this collapse by blurring distinctions between real and imagined.

### **Collapsing the human with the non-human**

The urban margins have been considered as a hybrid space of urban nature, where distinctions between human technologies and nature are blurred (Gandy, 2005). This hybridity is evident across all three case studies as a blurring of self with landscape and as a blurring of the distinction between inert and lively materiality. Some of these tendencies have been discussed in the previous section, where materiality and material processes become entwined with personal histories. This is particularly true of Landy's work and my own experience of photographing the urban margins. Through his desire to 'collaborate' with the landscape, Gill's work also brings out other ways in which this hybridity emerges. He emphasises the liveliness of material processes, and equally decentres the human subject, applying serial formula to depictions

(concentrating on the subject's clothing in *Hackney Flowers* for example) or obscuring the subject with material objects found in the landscape. In these ways Gill flattens together human and non-human, and does so through images that emphasise a lively and vibrant materiality. Landy also collapses distinctions between human and non-human, but his emphasis is perhaps more aligned to the experience, the relationship between materiality and his own identity and also a presencing of his father through material artefacts (such as his father's sheepskin coat or the house in *Semi-detached*) and the connections that emerge between the human subject, soil and weeds.

My own work again, as noted above, makes strong links between materiality and personal history or experience. The experience of moving through and photographing the Lower Lea Valley also evoked for me a sense of uncanny ambiguity between animate and inanimate, an imaginary where the pulses and rhythms of technologies were entwined with those of humans, plants and animals. An example of this given in the *uncanny landscapes* chapter is that of a pylon teeming with hundreds of starlings, this metal structure startlingly alive both with a cacophony of birdsong and the hum of electricity. Months later I came close to electrocuting myself when a large fire in the industrial estate melted the high voltage cables, which fell across the road as I was taking photographs. The vibrancy of matter that Bennett talks of becomes mixed with a very different animistic material imaginary. The subject is thus aligned with Freud's uncanny, where animistic childhood beliefs resurface despite the knowledge they are unfounded. Again, I would suggest that these ambiguities that emerge between artist-subject and material landscape are enabled to emerge in part because of the creative nature of practice, which seeks to purposefully blur distinctions between real and imagined.

### **Mutability and immutability**

The urban margins emerge as regions of constant process, change and movement. The practices I look at in the case studies all engage with this, developing strategies that freeze or 'fix' this mutability whilst also making this very mutability key to understanding the artists' practice and the artwork. The themes and trajectories described above engage with these broader engagements with mutability and immutability: repetition, dirt, understanding materialities as both inert and lively, collapsing distinctions between human and non-human, between animate and inanimate, between present and past and between different temporal regimes, from human to material.

Each case study has tendencies to on one hand archive and reify and on the other to engage with mutable processes and a dissolution of boundaries between subject and landscape. Landy creates etched copper plates that are in turn used to produce limited edition prints of his weed etchings. These material artefacts are records of weeds that were slowly dying as he was making them. The record however does not attempt to idealise the plant, but rather reveals its imperfections, with wilting leaves apparent in some of the etchings. Equally, the curatorial contextualisation of the prints in the exhibition catalogue or the Tate magazine for example, refer back to landscape of temporality, impermanence and waste. Gill too engages very clearly with the mutability of the material landscape but also places great emphasis upon the production of handmade photobooks, again limited editions and often signed. The decentring of the human subject and authorial authority that is so clear in much of his work appears to be reversed here.

In the cases of both Landy and Gill, it is the point at which the work interfaces with the market place that they re-emerge as distinct identifiable artist-subjects. This may simply be born out the norms and conventions through which artworks can become commodifiable artefacts. It is interesting to note Gill's publishing imprint is called *Nobody Books*, perhaps an attempt to place the decentred self within the conventions of the authorial artist-subject.

My own practice photographically documents the urban margins, creating static records of landscapes that are changing, due to regeneration or the slow decay of abandonment and the development of urban natures. This tendency to reify mutable processes is countered in the video piece, which brings these photographic images together and turns their apparent stasis into a torrent of brief fragments.

Thus all three case studies have this tendency to freeze the urban margin in some way, to bring clarity to it, but also all are dominated by a counter tendency to emphasise mutability and process. The artist as author both emerges and is decentred. The instability of the artist-subject as a clear identity is another key feature that emerges in the urban margin. The margin points not only to a mutable material landscape but also to an understanding of identity and the human subject as mutable.

## Re-imagining the margins: the value of creative methods

There are two distinct but interrelated ways in which this thesis deployed creative methods, alongside the analysis of existing artworks. The first was to use an autoethnography based upon creative practice, to essentially use my own practice as an artist to interrogate both the urban margin and the practice of other artists. Secondly, the autoethnography chapter in particular was written with recent experiments with writing styles in cultural geography in mind. The chapter *uncanny landscapes* is an effort to explore the value in combining these methods and writing styles, a combination that has become quite visible and of interest in cultural geography, particularly in studies relating to landscape and place (Wylie, 2005; Battista et al, 2005; Lorimer, 2003). This is in part related to an increased interest in the performative brought about by non-representational theories amongst other approaches.

In the autoethnographic study I attempted to place a strong emphasis upon subjective experience reflecting upon this particularly in terms of embodiment, memory and materiality. This was a different and somewhat uncomfortable departure from the way I would otherwise write about my own practice and was not intended as an act of self-indulgence, but rather as a method through which to explore the relationship between materiality, embodiment, memory and autobiography that also informed and inflected the work of my research subjects. This was invaluable in formulating my approaches to Landy and Gill, and in particular in gaining insight into the emergence of personal histories through the material excess of the urban margin.

The rubrics of the uncanny, contamination and organism that shaped the three empirical discussions also came from the experiences and imaginaries of my direct engagements with the landscape. These helped to bring to light the underlying themes of distinction and indistinction that emerged across the chapters. Equally, thinking through the body gives one an insight into the practices of others, a common bodily language of movement, gesture and a sensory register that can only be understood by doing. This kinaesthetic and sensory understanding of landscape and practice is an important axis around which this thesis understands the artwork. It was important here to create a piece of work, the video *Point/Vector* (Griffiths, 2013) rather than just document the landscape, as this orients practice towards an aesthetic output (see Crang, 2003: 500). This brings practice from the outset into both a real and an imaginary register, which is important I believe when studying creative practice.

The blurring of real and imaginary that I experienced and that is discussed in the work of Landy and Gill emerges from the relationship between artist-subject and material landscape, oriented towards the act of making a final piece of work. Thus, the 'endpoint' whether that be etchings, photobooks or a video, is thought of here as not only the terminal point of a series of embodied practices but also as an idea, pulling the artist along a material and imaginary trajectory through the landscape.

The *uncanny landscapes* chapter was also an experiment with academic writing styles, of the kind discussed and encouraged by Rose and Wylie for example (Rose and Wylie, 2006). I aimed to balance an analytical perspective of academic writing with a more expressive form of writing is certainly and hope to have convincingly and productively used descriptions of subjective experience in order to further the research project. This approach took some waymarkers from Wylie's similarly autoethnographic discussions of walking. It differed too in important respects. Perhaps the most important of these was that the autoethnography was for me first and foremost a way of thinking directly and exclusively about practice through practice. Unlike Wylie, it was not a way of thinking about theory and practice together in an act of embodied synthesis. Rather, the theories that became relevant to my practice and experiences were brought in at a later date. I did not set out to synthesise the uncanny or work on photography and trauma with my practice. Rather these literatures were selected at a later date because they resonated so strongly (and unexpectedly) with my experiences.

### **A Marginal urban landscape-subject**

I would like to make a couple of observations about the value of bringing the discourses of landscape studies and urban margins together. Firstly, in approaching the urban margin as landscape, this study takes landscape studies away from rural landscapes. In doing so, the visual is brought very firmly into a proximal relationship with landscape and into a broader experiential and sensory register. This is the direction that Wylie for example has been taking his work in landscape studies, although his landscapes are always tensioned with a visual distancing. This emerges through the presence of the horizon, which is ever present when discussing rural landscape (see Wylie, 2002; 2009). Discussing the urban margins through the lens of contemporary landscape studies removes the horizon from its insistent position in the discourse and allows the visual to be more easily treated as being in a close and sympathetic arrangement with the other sensory and embodied registers of experience.

Secondly, using landscape literatures brings the question of subject and landscape relations to studies of urban margins. De Solà-Morales notes that the creative subject is often present in the figure of the margin or *terrain vague* (de Solà-Morales, 1995). This relationship between landscape and subject is familiar territory for landscape studies, with the post-phenomenologies of Wylie and Lorimer. By bringing contemporary landscape discourses to urban margins, the nature of the relationship of the creative subject to the urban landscape that de Solà-Morales pointed to has been further developed.

Exploring this relationship between the creative subject and the material landscape challenges understandings of marginal landscapes as primarily physical territories, the 'wastelands' of urban discourses (see Gandy, 2005). Through this thesis, the urban margins have emerged at an intersection between material excess, practice and the creative subject. Approached in this way, as co-produced and sited *between* rather than *within*, the urban margin is a rich concept for investigating landscape through practice, embodiment and materiality and for employing creative methods and writing styles, concerns that are very much at the forefront of contemporary cultural geography.

At the heart of this relationship is an oscillation between distinction and separation on one hand and porosity and entanglement on the other are. This entanglement is captured by the flat ontologies of new materialism, yet these cannot adequately address the experience of being human, of a self that can amongst other things be experienced as distinct from others and from the environment. Equally however, flat ontologies bring to our attention the underlying alterity of a conception of self. Despite our experience of ourselves as distinct human subjects, selves with will, intention, need, desire and agency, our condition as human subjects is an assemblage co-produced by a myriad of other human and non-human beings and materialities. In effect, we are unable to directly experience in an embodied sense the bacteria in our bodies, the movements of electrons that create this text as I write or the infrastructures of power, water and food that keep us alive. The materialities that produce and reproduce us do not occupy our bodily experience in the same way as the food we ingest or the air we breathe.

Although we are unable to experience these things bodily, we are however able to experience them imaginatively, through attentiveness to materialities in and out of sight, bringing the invisible into sight as it were. Thus Stephen Gill's attentiveness

to the earth and chemical emulsion by burying photographs brings attention to both the human experience of self in and of landscape and of the materialities of landscape that are not visible in photographs. He creates photographs that, as is the nature of photographs, are cultural constructs aimed at a human subjectivity. Yet at the same time, he reminds us that what we are looking at is much more complex and extensive than what we see through our human concerns. This is a material and non-human landscape acting in collaboration with a human subject. The agency and correspondence of a multiplicity of actants is clear.

Underlying this oscillation then is an acknowledgement that even if one takes a radically (new) materialist perspective, it is difficult to jettison the value we place upon human subjectivity, certainly in the context of the politics of human society (See Bennett, 2010: 104). Equally however, it points to an imaginative engagement with materiality that gives us access to an extended and more accurate assessment of what it is to be human, an assessment that is simultaneously more and less anthropomorphic. Here, the sense of being human isn't limited by our capacity to experience but rather by our capacity to imagine, bringing the agency of apparently inert matter into our conception of self. As Bennett points out in defence of an anthropomorphism which looks attentively to the world around it: 'we may at first see a world in our own image, but what appears next is a swarm of 'talented' and vibrant materialities (including a seeing self).' (Bennett, 2010:99). The urban margins are the natural home of such a position and invite such an attentive subjectivity, as they physically and imaginatively bring together a bricolage of the unexpected, of technologies and urban nature, of dirt, pollution and disgust, of electricity and water.

The two artists I look at fully inhabit such a position, both pointing to the earth rather than the horizon. Theirs is a visual art that exposes the limits of vision and the porous boundary between embodied and imaginative experience. For example, Landy's weeds are read by Stallabrass as metaphors for particular human subjects and subjectivities, migrant and tenacious. This reading is a first and perhaps necessary step to reading Landy's weeds as emerging from a much more complex set of relations, from his relationship to his father, to the processual nature of practice, the importance of pain and the porous boundary between the body and the object of contemplation and the landscape from which it came. Landy's weeds point to material and imaginative experiences of self and landscape, to brute (and brutal) encounters with the earth, pointed to but never explicit in the work.

Both Landy and Gill thus point to a politics of the ground, one that lowers its gaze from the skyline of the city and brings attentiveness to the other than human actors. This looking down rather than across brings with it a different way of thinking politically. It is one that acknowledges chance, that de-emphasises the roles of intentionality, rationality and planning and points to the fact that 'any action is always trans-action, embedded in a web of connections.' (Bennett, 2010: 100). This is a politics that emphasises consequence over intent. In *Buried* for example, Gill makes this argument, collaborating with the ground and wilfully introducing chance and the agencies of material processes into his work.

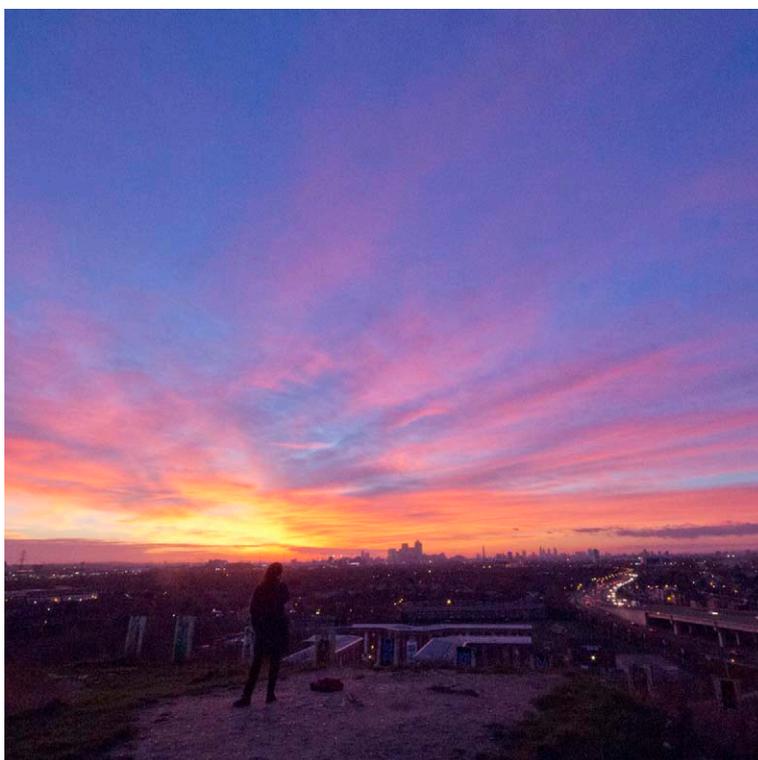
What is interesting in both Landy and Gill's work however is that their politics is ambiguous and ambivalent. This could be read as a weakness in their work, particularly in Gill's case as he is engaged with Hackney Wick and the corresponding politics of large scale regeneration. I would argue however, that his work points towards a way of engaging with the urban landscape and the urban margins in particular, that draws out a fundamental alterity of being. This is perhaps an expression of the uncanniness that Heidegger talks of as being the central axiom of being (Heidegger, 2005 [1962]: 234-235), where our underlying existential condition is as not-at-home in the world and as strangers to ourselves.

This contrasts with the work of Laura Oldfield Ford for example, which was discussed briefly in chapter 2. Her visceral work ontologises and then violently opposes the forces that have over the years regenerated various run down or semi abandoned areas of London. Her work proclaims itself in political terms of conflict, opposition and violence towards a ruling elite and those who conform, but in doing so concentrates only upon human actors as the drivers of these landscapes. Here the materiality of ruin for example becomes a bland aesthetic surface (much like those corporate surfaces she criticises) rather than pointing to more than human processes. In this sense, Gill's quieter work has more political import in that it points towards the extensiveness of the processes which accumulate at the margin and doesn't attempt to celebrate the margin simply as a site but as a condition, a particular relationship between people and the materialities of landscape. Gill's work, as with Landy's is interested in process and movement, whereas Oldfield Ford's is, despite its aesthetic allusions to punk and violent protest, conservatively focused upon stasis, nostalgia and anger at change.

As artists whose work engages with the urban margin as a material and ontological condition, it is then hardly surprising that Landy and Gill adopt ambiguous political positions. To do otherwise would be to propose changing the fragility of the margin, to try and locate and preserve it. This is in fact precisely a move that the Olympic Delivery Authority simulated, creating faux wild flower meadows, ponds and rivers, a reference to the landscape it replaced. I would argue for an attitude that acknowledges that the city is the material accumulation of process spread far and wide. In this view, the wholesale appropriation of the marginal regions of the city is not a destruction of the margin, but rather the margin is already fundamentally defined by its fragility, uncertainty and openness to a multiplicity of possible futures.

The causes and conditions of that uncertainty change, but in the city the margin is always in a state of possibility, the cusp of transition between the material manifestation of political and economic systems, a barometer of change. From this perspective it is difficult to argue for a conservation of the margin, to do so is to go against the understanding of the margin I have developed in this thesis. The margin is a relationship between subjectivity and materiality that tensions between rooted and nomadic, it is always potentially on the move, expectant of change but hopeful of holding out a little longer. The margin undoubtedly has the capacity to enchant and thus become celebrated, but the source of that enchantment is that it is always potentially on the edge of change. It is always already becoming a memory of itself even as it continues to persist.

As such, the margin is always encouraging us to grasp it now, before it is gone. The fact that it will be gone is integral to the subjectivities that occupy or engage the margin. The value of the margin is precisely its impermanence, the constantly unfolding relationship between impermanent landscapes and subjectivities that experience through a material and ontological lens of impermanence.



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