ABNEY RAMBLES:
PERFORMING HERITAGE AS AN
AUDIO WALKING PRACTICE
IN ABNEY PARK CEMETERY

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Romany Reagan, hereby declare that this thesis, *Abney Rambles: Performing Heritage as an Audio Walking Practice in Abney Park Cemetery*, and the work presented in it, is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of other, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: ____________________________________________

Date: _______________________________________________
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract 9
Acknowledgements 11
How to Read This Thesis 13

## Chapter One

**Thesis Introduction**

Introduction 14
Documentation of Practice 19
Abney Park as Community Space 22
‘Doors of Perception into ‘Borderland Worlds’ 25
Structure of Thesis 30

## Chapter Two

**Space and Place: Layers of Symbolism and Memory, the Buried Hackney Brook River, and Abney Park as Community Space**

Introduction 39
Stones and Flowers: Symbolisation, Layers of Memory, and Placing of Grief 41
Space and Time: Anachronistic Space and Multiple Becomings 50
Buried Rivers: The Subterranean Hackney Brook River in Stoke Newington 63
Abney Park as Community Space 73
Dark Tourism and Thanatourism: Methods and Motivations for Engaging with Cemetery Space
  • Thanatourism in Cemeteries 94
Conclusion 105

## Chapter Three

**Literary Occult Heritage and Psychogeography in Stoke Newington**

Introduction 108
Psychogeography 111
Literary Occult Psychogeography: Defining the Genre 125
Chapter Four

Woodland Networks and Woodland Magick Audio Walks: Explorations of Minded Agency of Nonhuman Actants in Abney Park Cemetery

Introduction 169
Horticultural History of Abney Park Cemetery 172
Nonhuman Actants: Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Jane Bennett’s ‘Vital Materialism’
The Agency of Plants: Fungal Root Networks 186
Arnos Vale Cemetery Study in Bristol 190
Process of Crafting Woodland Networks 195
Animism 206
Process of Crafting Woodland Magick 212
Conclusion 220

Chapter Five

Love, Wrath, Death, Lions—A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock Audio Walk and Historiography in the Archive

Introduction 223
Historiography: Creative Histories in the Archive 225
Historiography: Crafting the History of Frank and Susannah Bostock 231
Historiography: The Archive As a Contentious Source 238
Process of Crafting Love, Wrath, Death, Lions—A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock 245
Conclusion 259
Chapter Six

*Thoughts on Mourning* Audio Walk Exploring Mourning Heritage and Temporality in a Victorian Garden Cemetery

Introduction 262

Walking in a Garden Cemetery: The Aesthetics of Mourning 265

Walking Practice in the Context of a Death-Denying Culture: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives 272

Difficult Discussions: Death Awareness, Death Positivity, and What Death Means Now 284

- ‘Death Awareness’ Versus ‘Death Positivity’ 285
- Death Cafes 296

Walking, Memorial, Temporality, and Pause 302

- Carl Lavery’s Mourning Walk 303
- John Wylie’s Memorial Benches and Landscapes of Loss 309

Process of Crafting *Thoughts on Mourning* 315

Working with the Music 319

Transferring the Script into the Space 323

Conclusion 326

Chapter Seven

*Thesis* Conclusions 329

Theoretical Implications 330

Heritage Engagement Applications 346

Critical Reflection 354

Audio Walk Transcripts and Photographic Journeys

- Hackney Brook River 366
- *Woodland Networks* 368
- *Woodland Magick* 400
- *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions: A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock* 412
- *Thoughts on Mourning* 423
Publications, Keynote Lectures, and Conference Papers

Bibliography
ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of my practice-based research project, Abney Rambles, which is comprised of four audio walks that I researched, wrote, and recorded from 2014 to 2017 within the space of Abney Park cemetery, which is situated in the north London community of Stoke Newington. These four audio walks were created with the aim of engaging the local community of Stoke Newington, the wider community of Hackney, and all visitors to Abney Park cemetery, with the space and to offer different perspectives on what a cemetery can represent within its local community.

This thesis interrogates theories of walking as an embodied practice in place and as a methodology for exploring layers of meaning within the cemetery. Borrowing a conceptual framework from Arthur Machen, each layer of heritage that I discovered through my research into Abney Park I conceived of as a ‘borderland world’, with each audio walk that I created positioned as a ‘door of perception’ to access these various borderland worlds. Through the course of my time spent in Abney Park cemetery, I discovered four layers of heritage that coexist within the space: nature reserve, ‘earth mystery’, outdoor archive, and mourning heritage.

My first two audio walks, Woodland Networks and Woodland Magick, aim to inspire a process of acknowledging the agency of nonhumans and to engage the community who uses the cemetery with the fascinating nonhuman history of Abney Park. By breaking down binaries that may be assumed to be static: life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic, these two audio walks also pose larger questions about our human position in a world that is both human and nonhuman. My third audio walk, Love, Wrath, Death, Lions – A Performed History of Frank
and Susannah Bostock, brings one stone monument to ‘life’ within the cemetery: the Bostock lion. This audio walk aims to show, through an actor portrayal of the lives represented by one gravemarker, that Abney Park cemetery is a three-dimensional, walk-through archive that is filled with stories of love and loss housed in each gravemarker within Abney Park’s thirty-two acres. My fourth audio walk, Thoughts on Mourning, offers an invitation to see Victorian garden cemeteries and Victorian mourning practices in a way other than that of the often fetishised ‘cult of the dead’ perspective, and uses the mode of walking, and intimate interaction with the space, to present views of death positivity. Each of these four audio walks aims to open up to visitors the tapestry of perceptual possibilities within a cemetery space.

I created my Abney Rambles series of audio walks with the aim of facilitating community engagement with Abney Park cemetery. My audio walking practice sits within the context of wider Abney Park Trust community engagement initiatives. Members of the wider community who are not familiar with Abney Park, the complex heritage that it holds, or the year-round community engagement initiatives organised by the Abney Park Trust, might not think of the cemetery as their local nature reserve park and heritage site—my work aims to widen public perception of this important community space.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey that I have been on through the course of crafting my Abney Rambles research project and writing this thesis was greatly supported by many people I would like to thank.

The Abney Park Cemetery Trust has been instrumental in facilitating my research. They have been patient with my myriad questions over the years and always on hand with answers. They have given me books and granted open access to their Hackney Council research findings, supported my audio walks through their newsletters and website links to my work, and invited me to serve on the Abney Park Trust Events Committee to become part of the process of community engagement within the cemetery. Being part of the Events Committee has given me invaluable insight into the inner workings of the relationships between the Abney Park Trust, Hackney Council, and the community. It has been an honour to lend my voice to these community outreach discussions.

Although the museum space sadly closed in 2016, I would like to thank the Morbid Anatomy Museum in New York City for their support by offering me a platform to share my research at numerous keynote speaking engagements and opportunities to network with an international community of academics who share my passion for our rather esoteric research area. The Morbid Anatomy community lives on through social media, pop-up lecture series, and collaborations with existing museums, such as the Mütter Museum in Philadelphia. I am honoured to be a member of the Morbid Anatomy collective, and thankful for the feedback and support I have received from this community.
I would like to thank the company that I have worked for during the entirety of my PhD research, ExchangeWire. When I began this research, they let me make my own schedule to work around my studies and have allowed me to take as much time off as I need when it has been required. By allowing me to continue to work in such a flexible capacity they have alleviated at least one source of stress during the doctoral research process by giving me the ability to pay my bills.

I send a heartfelt thank you to Matt Maudling, who used his home music studio to capture a perfect recording of my mom’s Hungarian Rhapsody music box for my Woodland Magick audio walk.

‘Thank you’ seems hardly enough to express the gratitude I owe my mom, Rochelle Reagan, who has suffered through countless long-winded emails and innumerable Skype sessions on the daily status of this research. She has celebrated my successes and helped me through my moments of ‘imposter syndrome’. She is my rock and one-woman marching band support system. Knowing she has been behind me on this journey has helped me look ahead.

And last, but most assuredly not least, I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my PhD supervisor, Professor Helen Nicholson. Helen has stayed the course through the years and many evolutions of this research and given me insightful, detailed feedback and guidance, steering my process through the many setbacks and personal dark forests I have encountered through the process of crafting this thesis. Her wisdom and guiding hand through my research journey has been invaluable.
HOW TO READ THIS THESIS

This thesis is comprised of two elements: a written component and a
documentation of practice A3 sketchbook, which has been scanned
and digitised, and which is included at the end of this thesis in the
‘Audio Walk Transcripts and Photographic Journeys’ section. Each
audio walk has a corresponding section that contains transcripts of
the audio and photographic journeys documenting the paths taken
for each of the four audio walks through Abney Park cemetery that
comprise the Abney Rambles project. This documentation of practice
is an effort to bring the cemetery to the reader, when taking the
audio walks in Abney Park cemetery is not possible. There are two
ways to listen to the Abney Rambles audio walks: they are available
to stream online on my website www.AbneyRambles.com; and also
on the steaming links there is the option to download each of the
audio tracks to listen to offline.

Readers would benefit from listening to each audio walk and
following along with its corresponding photographic journey before
proceeding to the audio walk’s corresponding chapter analysis here
in this written thesis.
CHAPTER ONE

Thesis Introduction

London has a meaning beyond words and it is our task to find words to express it. Identify the right pub, the right corner of an obscure suburb, and the paragraphs dictate themselves. Walker as writer as medium. The act of tramping will call up presences, earlier authors with uncompleted projects, loose sheets to be collated into new combinations. Figures like Robert Louis Stevenson, Coleridge, De Quincey. And Machen. (Sinclair, 2016, 171)

My Abney Rambles research project arises from a personal trajectory that began with interacting with Abney Park cemetery\(^1\) as a visitor, to working in Abney Park cemetery as a researcher, to finally becoming embedded within the events and community outreach initiatives of the Abney Park Trust. The journey that this research has taken me on has been very personal. It is personal not only in relation to my emotional engagement with my research subject, Abney Park cemetery, but also that throughout this trajectory I have been able to explore my long-standing preoccupations with cemetery space, imagined histories, walking, storytelling, and crafting experiences for audiences. This thesis is a study of my practice-based research project, Abney Rambles, which is comprised of four audio walks that I researched, wrote, and recorded from 2014 to 2017 within the space of Abney Park cemetery, which is situated in the north London community of Stoke Newington. These four audio walks were created with an aim to engage visitors to Abney Park cemetery, and the local community of Stoke Newington, with the

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\(^1\) Abney Park removed ‘cemetery’ from their legal name in 2010, when the name of their managing body changed from ‘Abney Park Cemetery Trust’ to ‘Abney Park Trust’. As such, all references to Abney Park as a cemetery
space and interrogate different perspectives on what a cemetery can represent within its local community.

As a native of San Diego in southern California, I grew up in an environment with very little built heritage. When I was seventeen years old, I crossed the Atlantic for the first time when my high school drama department took our production of Museum by Tina Howe to the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 1997. I fell in love with the old cemeteries of Edinburgh, and ever since those early insatiable explorations the first place I go when I travel to a new place is to find their local cemetery. I began walking in Abney Park cemetery when I first moved to London from New York City in 2008. Abney Park was the closest cemetery to my home, located just a mile from where I lived off Newington Green in north London. I would often go to Abney Park to walk or sit and write, enjoying its overgrown quiet atmosphere as a place to process the major life upheaval that I had undergone. With benches tucked away off small winding paths, Abney Park presented a secret-garden-like atmosphere that mixed the thrill of exploration with the comfort of finding someplace hidden, and the privacy for personal reflection that a thickly wooded landscape allows. In the first few tumultuous years I spent adjusting to my new life in the UK, Abney Park was my sanctuary.

I moved to London from New York to pursue a Masters degree in international journalism, specialising in arts and culture. My love of cemeteries at first seemed to have no bearing on my MA studies; however, I found while exploring cemeteries in my spare time that many Victorian garden cemeteries in London have endeavoured to generate revenue and stay relevant to their local communities by repurposing their funerary chapels into community spaces. Kensal Green Cemetery has two chapels, one Anglican and one Dissenter, which they use for art exhibitions, film screenings, book fairs, and
lecture series. In 2009, I went to Kensal Green Cemetery to write an article on an art exhibition they were hosting for our MA programme magazine *The London File*. While there, the cemetery manager invited me to come back another day for a private tour of the cemetery and catacombs. I came back the following week, when the manager gave me a tour of the grounds, the two chapels, and the renovations works that were ongoing at that time to clear out much of the overgrowth obscuring the graves. He explained to me that having their chapels available for community use space was equally important to the cemetery as their works towards grave maintenance. I also learned the history of Kensal Green Cemetery in relation to six other Victorian garden cemeteries that form an unofficial partnership called the ‘Magnificent Seven’, and that my local cemetery, Abney Park, was the fourth member of this group. The Magnificent Seven cemeteries are: Kensal Green Cemetery, founded in 1832; West Norwood Cemetery, founded in 1836; Highgate Cemetery, founded in 1839; Abney Park, Nunhead Cemetery, Brompton Cemetery, all founded in 1840; and Tower Hamlets Cemetery, founded in 1841.

During my time as Arts and Culture Editor for *The London File*, I searched the events calendars of the Magnificent Seven, covering the art exhibition at Kensal Green Cemetery and a chamber music concert at Brompton Cemetery for our magazine. My fellow journalists jokingly called me the ‘cemetery correspondent’, so fixated I had become on the paradoxical dualities embraced by these cemeteries as places for sombre reflection alongside arts, entertainment, and community engagement. I was also fascinated by the unseen connection and camaraderie between these seven cemeteries that make up the Magnificent Seven and marvelled at the difference between the open and bustling aspect of the community-focused Kensal Green Cemetery, and the fame and aloof prestige of
Highgate Cemetery with its gated privacy and strictly guided daily tours—both in stark contrast to their secretive sibling, Abney Park.

In the intervening years between completing my MA and embarking on my PhD research, I did not engage with the management of Abney Park, much preferring to keep to myself as a visitor and outsider. In fact, it was not until one year into my Abney Rambles project that I engaged with the Abney Park Trust in any capacity other than via emailed research questions. The private and secluded aspect of Abney Park cemetery that had drawn me to it in the first place lent that same private aspect to the process of crafting my audio walking practice. While I created my audio walks to be taken by others and shared with the community, I worked in isolation to create them and the process was not collaborative. As such, my relationship with the cemetery meant that my early research and explorations within Abney Park were quite self-reflexive. This is evidenced through the development of my walking practice methodology, which began from highly personal perspectives written and recorded at home for my first audio walk that I created, *Thoughts on Mourning*, to the other end of the methodological arc, where I reacted in real time to walking through Abney Park for my audio walk *Woodland Networks* recording the audio walk in situ.

The relaxed tone of *Woodland Networks* conveys a sense of freedom within Abney Park that reflects the ease with which I now move through the cemetery. When I began my audio walking practice, I consciously avoided engaging with cemetery management for fear of either artistic rejection of my work, or actual rejection in the form of them not approving of my working there. However, through the course of my research and attending events in the cemetery, I began to get to know the members of the Abney Park Trust, and they to know me, and once my Abney Rambles website was online and my
audio walks became available for the public to download, I received very positive feedback from the Abney Park Trust. So much so, that they sent out an announcement in their community newsletter that my audio walks were available online for visitors to take and they set up links to my walks on the Abney Park website. In 2016, the Abney Park Trust asked me to join the Events Committee. I have been working with the Abney Park Trust since then, and our collaborative efforts to engage the community with events in Abney Park have enjoyed sold-out success.

Looking back on the progression of my audio walking practice, I wish that I had not been intimidated and became involved with the Abney Park Trust sooner. However, my journey of getting to know Abney Park in stages of intimacy has allowed me to find my own way of knowing the space and my voice within it. It has also been through my demonstrative dedication to the cemetery, and my thorough research into Abney Park, that my relationship with the Trust has flourished. The Abney Rambles project that is presented in this thesis is the beginning of what looks to be a fruitful long-term collaboration between the Abney Park Trust and myself, as we work together to engage the local community with this unique cemetery and nature reserve.

By the very nature of this research, and the types of events and conferences that I attend, most of my friends and colleagues are involved somehow in the death community, either by working in palliative care, mortuary work, pathology museum curation, medical history authors, or fellow taphophiles. As such, no one in my particular community sphere would consider it odd to attend an event or take a walk in a cemetery. However, people in the wider community who are not familiar with Abney Park, the complex heritage that it holds, or the year-round community engagement
initiatives organised by the Abney Park Trust, might not think of the cemetery as their local nature reserve park and heritage site—my work aims to widen public perception of this important community space.

Documentation of Practice

I created my Abney Rambles research project with an aim to engage the local community of Stoke Newington with Abney Park cemetery and offer perspectives on what a cemetery can represent within its local community. The four audio walks offer insights into four various worlds I have discovered through my research that coexist in Abney Park cemetery: nature reserve, ‘earth mystery’², outdoor archive, and mourning heritage. Each audio walk is an invitation to explore one of these worlds. The audio walks are positioned as doors of perception across various borderland landscapes within Abney Park cemetery. Psychogeographer and walking writer Iain Sinclair termed his walks with friend, filmmaker, and collaborator Andrew Kötting as “escapades having a Machenesque quality: walks through landscapes with a borderland feel and mysterious characters emerging from the mist to launch unprompted into tall tales” and described Arthur Machen’s work as “magical borderland art”. (Sinclair, 2016, 166-167) After reading Machen’s short story N, I began to investigate the space of Abney Park as a series of borderlands, with each layer of meaning within the cemetery sitting right on top of and next to each other, identifiable with a simple shift in perception, opening a “door of perception” as John Gray terms it, to these other layers of meaning.

My methodology for exploring these different layers of meaning is through an audio walking practice, offering four distinct invitations

² The ‘earth mystery’ subset of psychogeography, and its application to my walking practice, is analysed in Chapter Three.
to visitors to Abney Park cemetery. These audio walks invite visitors to trace and retrace the same space, enabling different perceptions of Abney Park cemetery by sliding between the borderlands that I introduce within the space. Throughout this thesis, I refer to my four audio walks as offering ‘doors of perception’ and the different subject matters and areas studied within each audio walk as ‘borderlands’.

Upon beginning crafting my practice, I first needed to define what my completed audio walks would be. Abney Park cemetery offers many guided walking tours throughout the year, and I wanted my practice to differentiate itself from this established model. My audio practice is that of ‘walks’, not ‘tours’. The difference in terminology is key here, as when I refer to a ‘tour’ I mean an historical, fact-based, informational tour, which in Abney Park is led in-person; whereas a ‘walk’ allows for a wider definition, which for the purposes of my project means an artistic experience for the listening walker as they are guided through different doors of perception.

The starting point for crafting my walking practice began with walking through the cemetery and noting what different aspects were important definitions of the space—what differentiated Abney Park cemetery from its surrounding streets or other nearby parks? Three distinct aspects of the cemetery were initially apparent: the diverse ecosystem of the woodland makes up its nature reserve; the information on the gravestones creates an outdoor archive; and the existence of buried bodies, gravestones, and centre chapel provide evidence of a heritage of mourning. With these three distinct aspects of Abney Park in mind, I began my research, which then revealed other aspects of Abney that could not be uncovered by a casual visit to the cemetery: that of its literary heritage through its location in Stoke Newington, and the fact the northern boundary of the
cemetery follows the course of a buried river, the Hackney Brook. Its literary heritage, specifically Arthur Machen’s story *N*, helped form the structure of how I would approach framing my walks, as a series of doors of perception. Stoke Newington’s earth mystery/occult description by Iain Sinclair and Geoff Nicholson (themselves referencing Machen and Edgar Allan Poe) also informed the tone of how I would structure these walks—as borderland landscapes—and, lastly, the discovery of the buried Hackney Brook river along with the ‘earth mystery’ study of Iain Sinclair, formed my fourth audio walk, *Woodland Magick*, which is a walk exploring earth mystery through the crafting of a story of modern folklore. The aim of my *Woodland Magick* audio walk is to capture the intangible fourth element of Abney Park cemetery: an uncanny feeling of things unseen.

After completion of these four audio walks, I uploaded them onto my website [www.AbneyRambles.com](http://www.AbneyRambles.com), where they are available to be downloaded for free. Links to my walks are also hosted on the Abney Park Trust website, where they take their place alongside announcements of upcoming guided historical walks that are available to take through the cemetery. The Abney Park Trust have been supportive of my audio walking practice. They have invited me to give two keynote lectures in the cemetery chapel as a representative of the Trust discussing the HLF-funded ‘Abney Unearthed’ mapping project, have engaged me to write further audio walks within Abney Park, and invited me to serve on the Events Committee where, since February 2016, I have been working with the Trust in our continuing efforts to engage the community of Stoke Newington with Abney Park cemetery.
Abney Park as Community Space

Visitors who come to Abney Park cemetery will come to the experience with their own expectations of what it means to visit a cemetery space. They will perhaps bring with them memories of previous cemetery visits that will inform these expectations. There is a large public park just down the road from Abney Park cemetery, half over again as large as Abney Park. Clissold Park has wide grassy open spaces, bike paths, a heritage house converted into a café, and a small zoo. Neighbours who merely want to ‘have a jog’ or ‘walk their dog’ have another option in Stoke Newington—but something has brought them instead to Abney Park. These visitors may have come to Abney Park because it is the closest park to them, or because they prefer a woodland park to grassy open space. Whatever their initial reasons for the visit, once inside the gates of Abney Park, there is a quietness, a change in atmosphere, and even though Abney Park is a nature reserve and community park—it is also, unavoidably, a cemetery.

As the twentieth-century progressed, Abney Park fell into increasing disrepair, culminating in almost complete ruin due to rampant vandalism in the 1970s. Abney Park has since been sensitively restored back to a stabilised heritage site. The Abney Park Trust is now working to celebrate Abney Park’s important history, while opening up the park to contemporary uses. Abney Park cemetery was created on the grounds of what was once Abney House and Fleetwood House, which stood on the premises from the early eighteenth century until their demolition to create Abney Park cemetery in the 1830s. Lady Abney, of Abney House, was an active member in the Dissenter³ community of Stoke Newington and invited the renowned non-conformist hymn-writer Isaac Watts to

³ ‘Dissenters’ are people whose religious beliefs or practices do not conform to the Church of England.
live in the Abney household. Another prominent Stoke Newington Dissenter and contemporary to Isaac Watts, Daniel Defoe, lived down the road from Abney House on Stoke Newington Church Street; and London’s oldest nonconformist place of worship, the Newington Green Unitarian Church (which is still open for worship today) was founded on Newington Green in 1708. As the grounds on which Abney Park cemetery now stand, as well as the surrounding community of Stoke Newington, were firmly established as Dissenter, Abney Park cemetery was created as non-conformist and non-denominational in keeping with the community who it would serve. Abney Park is the only cemetery in the Magnificent Seven family of Victorian garden cemeteries to be unconsecrated and non-denominational. The centre chapel in Abney Park is Grade II listed as the oldest non-denominational chapel in Europe. There are no demarcated regions for different faiths; therefore the interred are buried in and amongst each other with no separation. While the vast majority of graves in Abney Park are those of non-Anglican Protestants, there are also Jewish, Catholic, Unitarian, and atheist burials all housed within the cemetery. Due to the Dissenter history of the original grounds, the surrounding community, and Abney Park cemetery itself, the burials within Abney Park reflect this diversity and inclusivity, and the Abney Park Trust’s community outreach efforts further this inclusive feel and ambition. Taking into account Abney Park’s Dissenter ethos, I crafted my audio walks with a secular focus and avoidance of religious explorations.

Abney Park cemetery does still occasionally receive burials, but today the dead can only be interred in plots that were purchased, or inherited, long ago. The records for Abney Park cemetery are incomplete and there are inconsistencies not only between nineteenth century and twentieth century maps, but also between what either of these maps show and the graves as they are actually
laid out within the cemetery. In the 1970s, the Cemetery Company that founded Abney Park went into administration. Abney Park then fell into disrepair and was abandoned, entering a ten-year period of time when the landscaping disappeared under reforestation, the cemetery was wide open to vandalism, and fires were rampant, causing damage to the arboretum and burning the centre chapel to a ruin. The London Borough of Hackney took over ownership of the cemetery in the early 1980s and began to manage it in partnership with the Abney Park Cemetery Trust as lessee.

Although Abney Park still receives occasional new burials, it is not ‘officially’ a working cemetery, having closed for new burial in 1974. Due to lack of management during the period between the Cemetery Company and Hackney Council taking over, what is left of the records on Abney Park are incomplete, difficult to decipher, and riddled with inconsistencies. All documentation for 1975 through 1978 has been lost. The last plot sold in Abney Park on official record was sold by the Cemetery Company in 1974. The Abney Park Trust concedes that there could have been further sales during the four years for which there are no records, however there is no way to know if this was the case. The records continue again in 1979, during which time and afterwards there were no new plots sold. However, even though the last recorded plot was sold in 1974, internments continue up to the present day. There are many unclaimed plots, and the Abney Park Trust continue to have plot-holders come to them on occasion with paperwork for a plot that they own. As the records that the Abney Park Trust have are not complete, and it is difficult to navigate even the parts that are, plot paperwork is accepted without the ability to corroborate with cemetery records, and so is accepted without contest. The ‘Abney Unearthed’ mapping project began in 2016 and is a two-year, Heritage Lottery Funded project to take the various Victorian and twentieth-century maps and written records
and correlate them to actual graves and plot numbers on the site of Abney Park. This painstaking process, which takes volunteers through the dense underbrush to each grave plot with notebooks and trowels, will marry the various inconsistent maps and written records with the actual gravestones and plots as they are physically in the space. This collected information will then be uploaded into a digital searchable online map that anyone can access anywhere in the world to search the graves of Abney Park cemetery. When this project is finished, accurate records of everyone buried in Abney Park and a complete picture of its importance as a heritage site will be available to the community for the first time in over half a century.

‘Doors of Perception’ into ‘Borderland Worlds’

This thesis interrogates theories of walking as an embodied practice in place and as a methodology for exploring layers of meaning within the cemetery. My audio walks were created as an invitation to expand perceptions of what a Victorian garden cemetery can mean to visitors on a personal level, and to the community as a use-space. As a method for showing visitors to Abney Park cemetery the various worlds that exist simultaneously, layered and alongside one another within its thirty-two acres, I chose an audio walking format. The disembodied voice in the listening walker’s ear creates a relationship of intimacy between my, or my actors’, guiding voices and the walker, while at the same time offering privacy for the listening walker as they walk alone through the audio worlds I have created. Visitors can take these audio walks independently in their own time, which allows for a more private experience and space for personal reflection than a guided walk usually could allow.
Borrowing a conceptual framework from Arthur Machen, each layer of heritage that I discovered through my research into Abney Park I conceived of as a ‘borderland world’, with each audio walk I created positioned as a ‘door of perception’ to access these various borderland worlds. Through the course of my time spent in Abney Park cemetery, I discovered four layers of heritage that coexist within the space: nature reserve, ‘earth mystery’, outdoor archive, and mourning heritage. I created the series of Abney Rambles audio walks with the aim of facilitating community engagement with the cemetery by offering audio walking journeys presented as four different perspectives on how to view the space. I found a method of framing these disparate layers in Abney Park cemetery through my research into the literary heritage of Stoke Newington. Through this research, I discovered the work of Arthur Machen, whose short story N most informed the method by which I frame my discoveries of layered meanings in Abney Park and conceive of these layers as operating within the same ‘space’ as one another, but not the same ‘place’. It is through this structural framing that the Abney Rambles project took shape and became the conceptual toolkit I used to craft my audio walks through the cemetery.

Through Machen’s novels, and in his nonfiction works comprised of stream of consciousness notes on walking within London intermixed with autobiography, Machen writes of a hidden world behind the commonplace world we walk through day-to-day. The very accessibility of wonder behind and within the commonplace was his recurring area of philosophical study:

If we are to see the vision of the Grail, however dimly, it must no longer be in some vaulted chamber in a high tower of Carbonnek, over dreadful rocks and the foam of a faery sea. For us, the odour of the rarest spiceries must be blown in through the Venetian blinds in some
Machen wrote the above in *The London Adventure or the Art of Wandering* in 1924—eleven years later he would further develop the concept of a hidden ‘magical’ world in the ordinary suburb of Stoke Newington in his story *N*. Further research and analysis of how Arthur Machen’s story *N* has informed my practice is explored in Chapter Three. The research questions that have driven my enquiry are: What are the layers of meaning that coexist within Abney Park cemetery? If I conceive of these layers of meaning as ‘borderland worlds’ within the cemetery space, how can an audio walking practice open ‘doors of perception’ into these various borderland worlds? And, by opening these doors of perception to the disparate borderland worlds within the cemetery, how can an audio walking practice illustrate the diversity of layered meanings housed with Abney Park to the community that it serves?

I have created my audio walking practice to be an embodied experience of a selection of layered meanings within Abney Park, which are reflective of the tapestry-like nature of interwoven spatial and temporal layers within the cemetery space. My audio walks are not put forward as ‘heritage walks’, in that they are provocations towards thinking about possible multiple layers of meaning and ‘borderland worlds’ within in Abney Park as creative interpretations, not as a recorded history. My audio walking practice is the method of exploring these ‘borderland worlds’—not the end in and of itself. The starting point for selecting which ‘borderland worlds’ I wished to interrogate in my walking practice began with walking through the cemetery and noting what different aspects were important definitions of the space—what differentiated Abney Park cemetery from its surrounding streets or other nearby parks. Three distinct aspects of the cemetery were initially apparent: the diverse
ecosystem of the woodland makes up its nature reserve; the information on the gravestones creates an outdoor archive; and the existence of buried bodies, gravestones, and centre chapel provide evidence of a heritage of mourning. With these three distinct aspects of Abney Park in mind, I began my research, which then revealed other aspects of Abney Park that could not be uncovered by a casual visit to the cemetery: that of its literary heritage through its location in Stoke Newington, and that the northern boundary of the cemetery follows the course of a buried river, the Hackney Brook. Stoke Newington’s earth mystery/occult description by Iain Sinclair and Geoff Nicholson (themselves referencing Arthur Machen and Edgar Allan Poe) informed how I would structure these walks—as ‘borderland worlds’—and the discovery of the buried Hackney Brook river along with the ‘earth mystery’ study of Iain Sinclair, formed my fourth audio walk, *Woodland Magick*[^4], which is a walk exploring earth mystery through the crafting of a story of animistic folklore. The aim of this audio walk is to capture the intangible fourth element of Abney Park cemetery: an otherworldly feeling of things unseen. Researching the buried Hackney Brook created a conceptual link between this otherworldly feeling of things unseen in Stoke Newington that Arthur Machen wrote about, with the literal nature of an unseen (buried) river forming the northern boundary of Abney Park cemetery. Abney Park is a space of the unseen: buried river and buried bodies—both ever-present, yet unseen. Underfoot but not understood. Exploring conceptual layers within the cemetery space began with exploring the literal layers of water under the earth. Researching the complexity of layered meanings within Abney Park began with researching its buried river: Hackney Brook.

For my audio walking practice, I use the idea of a crack in perception as the portal to create various audio-walking journeys through

[^4]: Magick spelled with a ‘k’ is a term used to differentiate occult concepts from performance magic.
Abney Park cemetery. In approaching the layered meanings of Abney Park, I separated three simultaneous heritage layers that coexist in the space: nonhuman, mourning, and archive heritages. From there, I created the audio walks themselves as doors of perception between each layer to these disparate borderland worlds. For my first nonhuman heritage walk, *Woodland Networks*, I explore the hidden underground fungal root networks, veteran trees, and diverse ecosystem of Abney Park’s nature reserve. For my second nonhuman heritage walk, *Woodland Magick*, I explore an imagined emotional life of the Hackney Brook river as a character, River Spirit, and the world of magick and animistic folklore that such a character would inhabit. For my mourning heritage walk, *Thoughts on Mourning*, I created a meditative experience, layering poetry, stories, quotes, and music over different areas the walker traverses through Abney Park cemetery to create moods and reveries, a thirdspace of thought that changes with the embodied movement through paths and sitting on various benches. For my archive heritage walk, *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions – A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock*, I sought to infuse Abney Park’s gravestones with stories and personalise the outdoor archive, by breathing life into the complex love story of one famous couple buried in Abney Park, Frank and Susannah Bostock, ending the audio walk at their sleeping lion headstone. The last invitation I leave the listening walker with at the end of *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* is to ask the walker to look around, to see the hundreds of headstones surrounding them in all directions and use that opened door of perception to craft a vision, to appreciate each of those lives, and continue the journey by breathing life into the gravestones they pass on their way out of the cemetery with their own acts of imagination.
Structure of the Thesis

The written thesis and the documentation of practice work together to present and analyse my Abney Rambles research project. My audio walks are available to be streamed or downloaded on my website www.AbneyRambles.com, under the ‘Audio Walks’ tab on the homepage. Also on www.AbneyRambles.com are an additional audio walk commissioned by the LIFT festival in 2016 written for Tower Hamlets Cemetery, events updates for Abney Park cemetery, blog posts I have written on cemeteries, a live feed of my dedicated cemetery news Twitter account @abneyrambles, and a selection of my cemetery photography.

The best way to approach this thesis would be to listen to each audio walk while following the corresponding transcript and photographic journey for each walk presented in the ‘Audio Walks Transcripts and Photographic Journeys’ section at the end of this thesis.

After reading Chapter One: Thesis Introduction, it is intended that the reader proceed to Chapter Two: Space and Place: Layers of Symbolism and Memory, the Buried Hackney Brook River, and Abney Park as Community Space. Chapter Two is comprised of four sections, the first section introduces the meaning of symbol within the cemetery space and how the placing of grief marks a cemetery as different from the surrounding area. The moments of pause spent while in a cemetery space during mourning infuse the space with meaning, the moments of pause built into my audio walks are there to tap into the meanings created by others infusing emotional layers by their own moments of pause and slowness. The second section builds on these concepts of layers of meaning created by pause to study the space itself as it inhabits anachronistic space and how the layers of meaning that build up over time manifest Doreen Massey’s multiple becomings.
Studies of conceptual layering within the space of the cemetery lead to investigations of the literal layering within the ground of Abney Park by way of exploring the history and symbolic meaning of the buried Hackney Brook river that forms the northern boundary of Abney park cemetery. Chapter Two continues with an analysis of the 2017 Abney Park Trust Community User Survey, which offers insights into the demographics and opinions of visitors to Abney Park cemetery. From an analysis of this site-specific data, I open up the inquiry to developments in public engagement in across the heritage industry, which focuses on a more interpretive and interactive way of engaging with the past than simply a didactic single narrative of history. Jackson and Kidd’s (2011) study of movements away from the focus on ‘objects’ to a focus on ‘experience’—wherein for my practice I position myself as a ‘heritage interpreter’—follows on from Copeland’s (2006) findings that heritage engagement efforts have moved during recent decades from a ‘positivist’ to a ‘constructivist’ approach to heritage interpretation, which suggests that we construct our own understandings of the world in which we live. I conclude this section with an analysis of Baz Kershaw’s (2011) case study ‘The Iron Ship’, regarding the ephemerality of site-based heritage. The following section introduces theories of ‘dark tourism’ and ‘thanatourism’ as tools for analysis of methods and motivations for engaging with cemetery space, and how my audio walking practice aims to add to the current body of cemetery research work within thanatourism. Chapter Two concludes with analysis of community responses to my audio walking practice and conversations with visitors, as well as the projected aims of the combined efforts of myself and the Abney Park Trust for the future of Abney Park cemetery.

*Chapter Three: Psychogeography and Literary Occult Heritage in Stoke Newington* situates my walking practice within the wider field of
literary walking heritage and psychogeography and explores the aspects of walking heritage that have informed my audio walking practice within Abney Park cemetery. Chapter Three is comprised of eight sections, wherein I situate my walking practice within the wider field of psychogeography.

The first section offers historical background into how the concept for psychogeography was borne out of the politically motivated interventions in social space enacted by the Situationists. I follow the development of psychogeography from its beginnings as a method of enacting a revolutionary politics aimed at overturning capitalism, to its later fracturing into subgenres, such as occult psychogeography, which shared an ideology more akin to the automatisms of the surrealists that the Situationist International sought to break away from.

The next section delves into the literary heritage of occult psychogeography, beginning with the walking and writing of William Blake, dubbed the ‘Godfather of Psychogeography’ by Iain Sinclair. I explore how Blake’s ideas of North London/South London duality that fuelled his physical upsets when he visited North London, and his ‘visions’ when he visited South London, set up an atmosphere of mystery and something ‘not quite right’ about North London.

I then bring my investigation into occult psychogeography into the twentieth century with the otherworldliness explored by Arthur Machen in his story about the worlds hidden behind our ‘everyday’ world that his character Arnold explores in N, as he investigates where to find ‘doors of perception’ into the ‘borderland worlds’ he has heard tell of in Stoke Newington.
From this literary occult background that introduces my specific site of practice, Stoke Newington, I then bring these investigations into contemporary Stoke Newington by way of Iain Sinclair and Geoff Nicholson’s walks through the neighbourhood and specifically Abney Park cemetery. I conclude with how the occult literary heritage of Stoke Newington informed my audio walking practice by lending a rich otherworldly atmosphere on which to draw for my audio walks—an atmosphere set up by William Blake, Edgar Allan Poe, and Arthur Machen—and how Machen’s ideas of ‘doors of perception’ into ‘borderland worlds’ specifically informed my methodology, becoming the conceptual framework of my audio walking practice.

Before proceeding to Chapter Four: Woodland Networks and Woodland Magick Audio Walks: Explorations of Minded Agency of Nonhuman Actants in Abney Park Cemetery, it is intended that the reader first listen to these two audio walks, following along with their corresponding transcripts and photographic journeys.

This thesis is not structured in chronological order of when my audio walks were recorded, but instead according to the layers meaning as they are uncovered by a closer reading of the space. The wildness of the nature reserve, the wooded grounds that predate the cemetery by over two hundred years (and wild scrubland even before that) are the bedrock meaning of Abney Park. Abney Park was originally the grounds of Abney Manor House, with the Hackney Brook river running through the property. The Hackney Brook flowed above ground until 1861, when it was covered over as part of the Victorian sewer system engineering works. As the wooded nature reserve of Abney Park is both its most ancient aspect and one of its most striking defining features, the first audio walk I address here is
Woodland Networks, which analyses nonhuman relationships, ancient veteran trees, and unseen networks of the nature reserve.

Chapter Four investigates the nonhuman heritage and agency of plants, animals, and stones in Abney Park cemetery throughout five sections. Each actant within Abney Park cemetery is living a hidden life that, through closer human observation, flowers into view. Through the medium of my Woodland Networks audio walk, I guide the listening walker through a door of perception to see this ‘hidden’ borderland world. Although, I posit, the agency of the natural world is not hidden at all, to those who would but see. By way of visiting selected veteran trees mapped throughout the cemetery, I introduce underground mycorrhizal fungal networks, deadwood habitats, a history of fires, and various interactions between trees, stones, and humans in Abney Park as an invitation to reconceive mindfulness and agency within nature. I aim to illustrate with my Woodland Networks audio walk that, while the multilayered interactions between actants within Abney Park can be explained by science, they are no less magical.

Through the medium of my Woodland Magick audio walk, I explore the other nonhuman theories presented in Chapter Four to create an animistic folktale about the subterranean Hackney Brook that flows underground along the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery. I use this allegorical tale to tell a dark animistic folktale of a tormented River Spirit (the spirit of Hackney Brook), her interactions with trees and stones, and her love war with Fire Spirit. The addition of a bit of imagination opens up new possibilities for vital materialism in every actant within the cemetery: buried river, trees, birds, deadwood, gravestones, chapel, fire, and fungi. I play with possible relationships and stories between actants to reactivate a pre-modern view of the
world as filled with the magic of animism: an enchanted forest of secret lives.

At its core, Woodland Magick is about the Hackney Brook river. Discovering that a buried river forms the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery, and reading Iain Sinclair’s earth mystery provocations that this subverted waterway could be infusing the neighbourhood of Stoke Newington with thwarted energies, inspired me to write an audio walk that would take a visitor to Abney Park through a door of perception into this Machenesque borderland world of unseen forces creating a sense of unease; and to that end, Arthur Machen’s story *N* was a key source of inspiration for crafting this otherworldly feel. Building upon the themes presented in Machen’s *N*, of a magical hidden world behind the ‘everyday’ world, formed the foundation of my ‘earth mystery’ audio walk *Woodland Magick*.

Together, Woodland Networks and Woodland Magick offer visitors to Abney Park two different ways to approach and appreciate the intricate nonhuman ecosystem that is Abney Park as a nature reserve.

I begin Chapter Four with a horticultural history of Abney Park cemetery. The next section analyses the diverse nonhuman networks at play within the cemetery, by way of Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Jane Bennett’s concepts of ‘vital materialism’ and ‘enchantment’. Sections three and four continue the analysis of nonhuman actants with the agency of plants and stones, by way of my Woodland Networks audio walk, exploring lab studies of fungal root networks and an Arnos Vale Cemetery case study in Bristol. Section five introduces theories of modern animism and the agency of nonhumans, how concepts of animism have informed my
Woodland Magick audio walk. I conclude with how my audio walking practice aims to illustrate for visitors to Abney Park that the ecosystem of the cemetery has many actants, whose motives and works have separate drives of their own that are unrelated to human agency.

Before proceeding to Chapter Five: Love, Wrath, Death, Lions—A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock Audio Walk and Historiography in the Archive, I invite readers to listen to the Love, Wrath, Death, Lions audio walk while following along with the transcript and photographic journey. Explorations of human and nonhuman relationships led me to the interactions between the stone grave monuments and the nature reserve of Abney Park. Through research in archives and actor portrayal, my audio walk Love, Wrath, Death, Lions tells the story of Frank and Susannah Bostock—who themselves represent another form of human and nonhuman relationships, Frank’s relationships with his lions seeming to take primacy over his relationship with his wife Susannah.

Chapter Five is comprised of three sections that explore the historiography of archive use and how I endeavoured to represent and breathe life into historical documents by use of artistic interpretation to fill in the gaps in information available to create my audio walk of the story of the Bostocks. To help with my interpretations of the somewhat disjointed source material that I gathered through my research into the lives of the Bostocks, I have turned to the research of archivists who have also used archives for creative purposes. I illustrate the pitfalls of the ‘seduction’ of the archive, and on what basis I have founded my artistic reimaginings of the life and character of the Bostocks. Throughout my research, I found conflicting and contentious reports of the character of Frank Bostock, and the facts of his marriage to Susannah on record create
contradictions in what could be interpreted from these accounts of their personal lives.

The choices I made in crafting their narrative have raised some pertinent questions regarding fidelity to the archive and my reading of what I found there. Throughout Chapter Five, I analyse my choices with a critical reflection on the basis behind these narrative choices and possible other outcomes of interpretation, as well as look at the relationship dynamics between Frank and his animals versus Frank and his wife—and how my audio walk seeks to address both of these sides of a complex archival history. Chapter Five concludes with what Love, Wrath, Death, Lions aims to offer visitors to Abney Park cemetery in terms of animating the outdoor archive of the space, and what a visit to their lion gravestone illustrates in terms of human and nonhuman relationships and networks.

Before proceeding to Chapter Six: Thoughts on Mourning Audio Walk Exploring Mourning Heritage and Temporality in a Victorian Garden Cemetery, readers would benefit from listening to the Thoughts on Mourning audio walk while following along with the transcript and photographic journey. This thesis concludes with analysis of my Abney Rambles audio walking project with which I began: Thoughts on Mourning. Chapter Six address the space of Abney Park most directly as a cemetery. This audio walk focuses on Anglo-American mourning and death heritage, and Chapter Six addresses the coalescence of the actants described in Chapter Four as a unified system: the Victorian Garden Cemetery.

Chapter Six is comprised of four main sections, the first section explores what the creation of garden cemeteries offered the Victorians in mourning, and how my walking practice engages with these themes within the space. Along with garden cemeteries, the
second section of Chapter Six also looks at the changing developments of Anglo-American mourning practices from the Victorian era, through the twentieth century, to today. Throughout my *Thoughts on Mourning* audio walk, I interweave Victorian attitudes into my narrative along with the contemporary turn, in certain circles, towards a more accepting view of death, termed the ‘death positive’ movement. Section three explores the ‘death positive’ and ‘death awareness’ movements, and what death means now. Chapter Six concludes by drawing connections between memorial and walking through Carl Lavery’s *Mourning Walk*, exploring how they are linked through the embodiment of thoughts and movement through space as a retracing of memories and shifting temporal connections. Finally, I build on concepts of walking and memorial to present pause and memorial, with John Wylie’s study of memorial benches, pause, and dichotomies of presence/absence, remembering/forgetting, and love/loss.

In *Thesis Conclusions*, I revisit my research questions and address how my thesis aims illuminate the interplay of the layers of meaning within Abney Park cemetery by way of an audio walking practice that investigates various borderland worlds and, hopefully, opened new ‘doors of perception’ to the community that Abney Park cemetery serves. I have sought to craft an audio walking practice that offers visitors to the cemetery a mode of access into these borderland worlds simultaneously at play within the space. The multiplicity of literary influences and variety of written walking explorations described above have all been drawn upon in forming the my audio walk interactions with Abney Park cemetery, and which I will explore further through this thesis.
CHAPTER TWO

Space and Place: Layers of Symbolism and Memory, the Buried Hackney Brook River, and Abney Park as Community Space

Every village graveyard is a little history. In its moss-grown tombstones, worn and furrowed by the storms of a hundred winters, in its half-obliterated inscriptions testifying to departed worth and proclaiming the regrets of those who have gone themselves to, ‘The undiscover’d country from whose bourne no traveller returns’, we may find the clue to many a real romance and the inspiration for many a solemn reverie. (William Justyne, 1865, 1)

In this chapter, I shall explore four key theoretical considerations regarding space and place, as they relate to Abney Park cemetery. I initially became interested in exploring Abney Park as a place that combines a shared community history and mourning practices, and how symbolism and layers of memory that are found within the material objects in the cemetery become layered with meanings over time. I aim to illustrate how this layered complexity can be experienced and explored by a visitor to Abney Park cemetery by way of taking audio walks. Abney Park is not a typical cemetery—it is both a site housing grief monuments and a community space. Abney Park exists between and within these two definitions. With my audio walks, I guide the listening walker through the various aspects that comprise the whole of Abney Park cemetery through an exploration of the many temporal and spatial layers that make up its unique diversity. Researching multiple meanings within space, I became interested in Tim Cresswell’s (2004) theories of layers of memory, and how this might be applied to the ways in which life and death are sedimented in Abney Park cemetery and can be explored through moments of pause. Yi-Fu Tuan’s (1974, 1977) theories on space and symbolisation offer an analysis of the symbolic
complexities that illuminate the ways in which Abney Park carries symbolic meanings for mourners and community groups alike. Doreen Massey’s (2005) concept of ‘contemporaneous multiple becomings’, anachronistic space, along with concepts of temporal layering, mourning practice, and the unique nature reserve aspect of Abney Park cemetery, have all informed the themes of my audio walking practice.

This chapter is comprised of four sections, the first section, *Stones and Flowers*, introduces the meaning of symbol within the cemetery space, and how the placing of grief marks a cemetery as different from the surrounding area. The moments of pause spent while in a cemetery space during mourning infuse the space with meaning, the moments of pause built into my audio walks are there to tap into the meanings created by others infusing emotional layers by their own moments of pause and slowness. The following section, *Space and Time*, builds on these concepts of layers of meaning created by pause to study the space itself as it inhabits anachronistic space and how the layers of meaning that build up over time manifest Massey’s multiple becomings. Studies of conceptual layering within the space of the cemetery lead to investigations of the literal layering within the ground of Abney Park by way of exploring the history and symbolic meaning of the buried Hackney Brook that forms the northern boundary of Abney park cemetery. In *Buried Rivers*, I present how rivers and time are combined in metaphor: the ‘flow’ of time, the timeless river, the idea of London’s rivers flowing in the open air are of a time long past. These rivers today flow in darkness, and are as hidden from our view as the past is. In this way, the river becomes a conceptual access point to conceive of the temporal shifts within the hidden layers of a place. The next section presents an analysis of the 2017 Abney Park Trust Community Use Survey, which offers insights into the demographics and opinions of visitors.
to Abney Park cemetery, my own research into responses to my audio walking practice and conversations with visitors, as well as the projected aims of the combined efforts of myself and the Abney Park Trust for the future of Abney Park cemetery. This chapter concludes with an analysis of ‘dark tourism’ and ‘thanatourism’, putting forth definitions of both the theories that have informed my audio walking practice, and how research into these areas illustrates the way in which community relationships with cemeteries are evolving.

**Stones and Flowers: Symbolisation, Layers of Memory, and Placing of Grief**

Past presence and present absence are condensed into the spatially located object. […] Its materiality feeds memory, to construct a sense of the absent person.
(Hallam and Hockey, 2001, 85)

Personal mementos, monuments, and flowers offer a physical form in which to house memories of deceased loved ones. The act of infusing memory into a material object offers mourners a tangible focus for feelings of grief. Gravestones mark the place of the interred body, and they become a lasting representation of the dead person. It is in this way that gravestones acquire a symbolic quality, particularly for mourners. Gravestones, and the cemetery space in which they are housed, offer a physical place for a mourner to channel their private grief. Yet their symbolic value is not confined to personal grief; they also give society a recognised place for communal grief and an established construct in which to view the dead. A cemetery is a place where fellow mourners, though perhaps strangers to each other, are bonded by a commonality of ritual, symbol, and continuity of customs that create a recognisable community for grief. Housing memories in space gives an outlet for emotion and a place for grief. Memorialising grief gives grief ‘place’.
Through their research on what cemetery spaces mean to the living, Doris Francis, Leonie Kellaher, and Georgina Neophytou observe:

In public settings such as cemeteries, the bereaved are educated in the public expression of private emotions. And it is through the language of stones and flowers that burial and the first year’s bereavement become marked on the landscape. Each new grave transforms, reshapes and reaffirms the cemetery as a place of memory. (Francis et al., 2005, 55)

While the housing of memories is key to a cemetery’s function, the ongoing creation of new memories and ‘upkeep’ of the old is also part of its purpose. After interviewing a cross-section of the bereaved in their first year of mourning, Francis et al. found that this period established trust with the cemetery managers and set patterns of personal ritual or interaction with the cemetery. These dynamic relationships help mourners navigate procedures and regulations that are a key feature of the first year of mourning. Mourners during this period are actively engaged with crafting their mourning experience and their contribution to the cemetery community. These interactions negotiate ways to inter the remains of the recently deceased, with respect for the existing space and custom of the cemetery, creating a continuously evolving tapestry of place. A cemetery is both a place and a process. The process of being a cemetery takes the space within its borders and transforms it into ‘place’. For memories, both old and new, to take root, there must be a ‘pause’. In defining what differentiates a ‘space’ from a ‘place’, Yi-Fu Tuan explains it thus: “If we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place.” (Tuan, 1977, 6)

What is meant by this is a stop in movement, in the literal sense, but also an internal ‘pause’, an active presentness that is a break in daily
mobility. This act of stopping and being present in ‘space’, and therefore creating memory, gives the space of the cemetery personal meaning, and therefore ‘place’.

In his studies on social and cultural geography, Tim Cresswell further explores what differentiates a ‘place’ from a ‘space’. He is specifically concerned with geographies of mobility and their role in shaping cultural outlooks. Cresswell’s notions of the creation of ‘place’, from an undifferentiated ‘space’, are based on concepts of mobility versus pause. The moments of pause spent while in a cemetery space during mourning infuse the space with meaning; the moments of pause built into my audio walks are there to tap into the meanings created by others infusing emotional layers by their own moments of pause and slowness. Memory is created by a pause in mobility; only through this pause can the creation of a lived-in intimacy, of ‘place’, begin. Although historical sites offer a complex background for imaginative wanderings through the past, histories are continually being made within these sites up into the present day. “Places are constructed by people doing things and in this sense are never ‘finished’, but are constantly being performed.” (Cresswell, 2004, 37) The memories housed in Abney Park, and upheld by stone grave monuments, are layered under the new memories being crafted by visitors, who come with their own motivations for the visit and interpretations of what they encounter there. A cemetery is a place of pause: the length of a visit for the living, the rest of existence before complete decomposition for the dead. A cemetery visit is often marked by its attending slowness. The pauses I have crafted within Thoughts on Mourning are short moments in the midst of longer periods of walking. For a mourner visiting Abney Park, there would be a long pause at the graveside, as the pause is the moment that inscribes meaning, whereas the walk is merely a ritual for getting there and a necessity to facilitate the moment of pause. For a
listening walker taking my audio walks, it is the walk, the movement, that inscribes meaning—the reason for being in the cemetery—with the moments of pause fleeting and only used as launch pads of reverie for further walking. For both modes of visiting Abney Park, pause and slowness are embedded in the practice of the visit, only with an inversion of primacy: the walk itself inscribing meaning, rather than the pause.

The first pause in my audio walk *Thoughts on Mourning* is within the first two minutes. Within the narrative of the walk, I introduce symbol to the listening walker through a quotation from William Godwin’s 1809 essay *On Sepulchres*, as I guide the listening walker to a bench to sit and look at a grouping of small gravestones just the other side of the path. At this moment of pause, I share Godwin’s thoughts on everything associated with his friend, “his ring, his watch, his books, and his habitation” (Godwin, 1809, 7), and that these formerly prosaic items take on a special meaning from having been associated with his friend. This observation that objects are infused with special meaning upon the death of a loved one that is presented in the audio narrative is accompanied by the visual symbol that the listening walker is looking at in that moment: the clustered grouping of small paupers’ gravestones. I use the combination of the audio narrative presenting Godwin’s thoughts on physical items taking on symbolic meaning, with the visual, of the clumped together gravestones to introduce symbol. For this moment of pause, I do not speak to the listening walker, instead I leave the listening walker to consider whatever thoughts and feelings these prompts have engendered while sitting on the bench looking at the gravestones, set to a piece of music from The Black Heart Procession.

This dual set-up of the audio echoing the visual prepares the listening walker for what to expect for the rest of the audio walk. I
layer the audio (lines of poetry, quotations regarding thoughts on
death and mourning practices, anecdotes, and music) over the visual
space of the cemetery to invite listeners to engage with the symbols
within the cemetery. The audio narrative of *Thoughts on Mourning*
presents thoughts on Anglo-American mourning practices from the
Victorian period and compares them with those of the twentieth-
century and to today. This narration of varying historical and
contemporary quotations on mourning, which is listened to while
being directed on a path through the cemetery, is a continuing
reminder that the primary use of a cemetery is for the placement of
bodies, and that the listening walker is traversing the resting place of
unseen but ever-present bodies that surround the walker through
every step of their visit. Rituals of mourning all coalesce around one
central act: the placement of the body in space. This act of placement
converts a previously anonymous ‘space’ into a meaningful ‘place’
for the mourner. Placement of the body of the deceased in a specific
and meaningful location reaffirms the memory of the once-living
person and serves to reassure survivors that the dead continue to
exist in some form. As Aubrey Cannon observes in her essay on
spatial narratives of death and memory: “Mortuary practices [...] are
nothing short of an affirmation of belief in immortality. At the very
least, the dead retain a place in the memories of the living, and that
memory is created and maintained by their placement in space.”
(Cannon, 2002, 192)

My *Thoughts on Mourning* audio walk also takes account of Tuan’s
view that that ‘place’ is a product of a ‘pause’ and a chance of
attachment. We see attachments and connections between people
and place. And even within a place itself, we can see borderland
worlds of meaning and experience layered within it. Onto Tuan’s
idea of pause creating place, Tim Cresswell adds the layer of
memory, both those that are personal and socially collective,
asserting that place and memory are entwined. Individuals craft private memorials in a cemetery space, and collectively society erects monuments to shared histories.

Intermixed with the private memorials housed in Abney Park cemetery, there are also monuments to shared history that illustrate the importance of cemeteries as communal outdoor archives. There is a statue of the renowned hymn writer Isaac Watts on the main path from the Stoke Newington Church Street entrance, leading up to the centre chapel. There is also a plaque set into a dirt mound that is dedicated to Isaac Watts in the far northeastern corner of the cemetery, which is where it is said he sat to write his hymns while overlooking the now-buried Hackney Brook when the land belonged to Abney Manor. Further along the path leading from the statue of Isaac Watts towards the centre chapel, there are the World War I and II memorial steps, with their list of names, high marble cross, and stairs where visitors can sit for a rest and which Abney Park’s annual summer theatrical productions sometimes use as a stage. Halfway through the narrative of Thoughts on Mourning I have the listening walker take a moment of pause to sit on a memorial bench honouring Betsi Cadwaladr while I share her life story. Afterwards, I guide the listening walker to continue on the path away from Betsi’s grave and bench and offer the following observation:

Stories like Betsi’s exemplify the meaning of cemeteries for me. They underscore the importance of cemeteries as a space to house memory. Not only our memories of loved ones, but cultural memory. Cemeteries weave the

5 The Abney Park Trust contacted the group who donated the War Memorial and they have given their consent for theatrical productions to use the memorial in this way.

6 Betsi Cadwaladr was buried in an unmarked pauper’s grave in 1860, which was left unmarked until the Welsh Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board installed her gravestone and memorial bench in 2012.
disparate threads of our various lives between strangers and across time, into a tapestry we can all share and read. To spend time in a cemetery space is to be a part of a temporal fabric, and to feel continuity through the ages. No matter your religious or secular affiliations, or lack thereof, there is something of importance here. A cemetery is not only a spiritual space, it is a time capsule. (Thoughts on Mourning transcript)

All of these public monuments in Abney Park illustrate that cemeteries house memories for the collective community and offer access to a wider shared history for visitors to encounter while walking through the cemetery. For private grief, it is through the placement of specific objects in space that mourners create a place to house both their grief and their memories. These mementos run a spectrum from the (relative) permanence of a gravestone, to the fleeting adornment of a flower. These symbols of remembrance embody another layer of meaning beyond the desire to honour the deceased; they are a continuation of ‘memento mori’ concepts, which were popular during the Victorian era and were symbolised through paintings, objects, and used as recurring motifs for mourning ephemera.

[Funerary] objects constructed in stone, wax, ivory, paper, or flowers to represent the body and flesh, have been associated with varying degrees of endurance such that material substances are seen in terms of their particular temporal qualities. What is lasting or ephemeral is conveyed through the perceived physical properties of the object. (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, 48)

These physical symbols take on further meaning beyond conceptualising one’s own mortality; they give voice to a silent language with which mourners can inscribe their grief in relation to others within the cemetery space. These objects become a language:
“Stones and flowers are conduits through which feelings and significance are communicated at intimate and public levels.” (Francis et al., 2005, 107)

Cemetery spaces are socially produced places, where meanings are negotiated through social action. To interpret the symbols within in the cemetery space, we need to understand it as a special place, separate from the ordinary or domestic sphere. The symbolism used within the cemetery space is as important to engendering meaning as its accompanying behavioural etiquette. The following is a situation that affected me quite deeply along the lines of this theme in 2013.

Towards the far north end of Abney Park, on the corner bend of North Boundary Ride, there was a recently planted tree, held up with supporting poles. On it, there was a typed laminated sign that read: “Please stop stealing my flowers. You are upsetting me very badly. I am David and Tom’s mum Margaret. Thank you.”

Below this sign was a very small black granite gravestone with the names of her sons, David and Tom, who had died nine years apart, in 1993 and 2002. A few paces further down lies the grave of her husband, who also died in 2002. Margaret had lost a lot. Next to her sons’ gravestone is a matching stone with a carved-out vase in which to put flowers. It was empty. It is striking to conceive of the heartbreak that this short note represented—a calmly stated basic request sent out to someone who could so heartlessly steal her flowers and disrupt a mother’s mourning. Who could do such a thing? What does ‘place’ mean to someone who could do this? This emotional commiseration aside, raised an interesting question. Why is stealing Margaret’s flowers from her sons’ grave so much more egregious than stealing them from her front garden? The empty
grave vase, from which the flowers are missing, has become a symbol of her remembrance, an extension of the grave itself.

The symbolic ritual of the visit, the coming to the same place to give an offering, these things mark a cemetery as different than a garden by virtue of their weighted symbolism. The flowers Margaret places on her sons’ grave are the embodiment of her continuing love and a symbol of her grief. The gravestone itself offers a permanence against which to lay her ongoing grief. Both of the temporal meanings of these symbolic objects—the relative permanence of their gravestone with the fleeting bloom of her flowers—anchor time.

A cemetery marks time with the dates inscribed on its stone monuments, along with the fleeting seasonal tokens left on graves, and personal memories that have been formed and the communal memories noted down in archives. The meaning of Abney Park cemetery as a place separate from its surroundings lies in the culmination of these symbols. Housed together, they create a social sponge of emotion, gathering to themselves meaning layered upon meaning over time. The flow of time within society continually reinforces and upholds the meaning that these symbols contain for the collective. “Objects build up layered meanings over time to form histories of social events, relations, and emotions that can be reanimated, denied or otherwise manipulated, depending upon the context of the object’s use.” (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, 50)

Encounters with these emotionally rich historical sites can inspire reverence, perhaps a touch of melancholy, and can spark possible histories in our imagination—a blending of personal and communal memory. One way in which our imaginations are activated is by the time capsule nature of a cemetery. Upon entering the wooded grounds of Abney Park, there is a sense that the sights that you see
and foliage you smell is much as it would have been experienced over one-hundred and seventy years ago, when Abney Park first opened, if perhaps now more overgrown. As you walk deeper within the cemetery, the sounds of the street fade away and there is a timelessness that envelops the walker. The gravestones, with their attending dates, add to this surreal feeling of being a step out of time. “One central feature of monuments is their claim to permanence and stability over time. The capacity of a memorial to physically endure time, or its apparent resistance to the effects of time, are equated with the persistence of living memory.” (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, 51)

In *Thoughts on Mourning*, I play with a fluidity of time by switching back and forth between Victorian and contemporary views on mourning. *Thoughts on Mourning* ends when I bring the listening walker back to the present day. I leave them with closing remarks on the time capsule nature of Abney Park cemetery, the weight of all of the generations of mourning that have taken place there, connected to the fabric of humanity, reaching back through time.

**Space and Time: Anachronistic Space and Multiple Becomings**

In this section I shall explore questions about time, as the layering of meanings applied to Abney Park cemetery relate to different temporal registers. I have found Doreen Massey’s use of Anne McClintock’s concept of anachronistic space useful in conceiving of Abney Park cemetery’s temporal density, with moments inscribing and reinscribing space, tracing slightly different narratives with every tracing, yet retaining every previous tracing layered within the space. As a further tool for my analysis, Doreen Massey’s concept of ‘contemporaneous multiple becomings’ offers a way of perceiving layers of anachronistic space that are layered within the site
simultaneously. I further explore how these multiple becomings offer opportunities for opening doors of perception into the different borderland worlds I explore with my audio walking practice.

A Victorian cemetery with contemporary usage creates an experience in the cemetery that at once contains traces of the past and is also constantly moving towards the future. In this context, the anachronistic space of Abney Park cemetery is rooted in its time capsule nature in the midst of modern life. The invitation here is to widen our perception of the meaning of a particular place, in this instance, Abney Park. Rather than restricting observations to the physical and tangible, the imagination is invited to engage in viewing the timeline of experience that Abney Park cemetery embodies: a date-stamped museum of grief, which doubles as a public community space. Walking through the cemetery, one can simultaneously experience a momentary flash of warm sun through the trees, which is there and gone in an instant, as well as acknowledge generations of previous experiences and actions going back through time. This is an active type of encounter which crafts and moulds the current place from the historical place.

In thinking about time and space, their relation to each other, and our experience of each, Doreen Massey notes that, unlike time, you can see space spread out around you. “Time is either past or to come or so minutely instantaneously now that it is impossible to grasp. Space, on the other hand, is there.” (Massey, 2005, 117) In an effort to integrate the incorporeality of time with the corporality of space, many people have tried to “puncture that smooth surface”. Referencing Iain Sinclair’s dérives through east London that evoke pasts and presents not usually noticed, in addition to her own temporal/spatial journeys between London and Milton Keynes, Massey introduces the concept of ‘anachronistic space’, which she
borrows and transforms from Anne McClintock’s definition. ‘Anachronistic space’ is a term that was coined by McClintock in her research on imperial racism and misogyny during Victorian England. However, while McClintock’s definition of anachronistic space focuses on an oppressive view of perceived temporal differences as they are manifest in women and people of colour, Massey introduces McClintock’s anachronistic space as “a permanently anterior time within the space of the modern”. (Massey, 2005, 117)

On the way between London and Milton Keynes we go through Berkhamsted. Right by the station stand the remains of a Norman castle: the motte and bailey and the moats around them still clearly defined, the grey stone walls now fallen and discontinuous, with the air of old grey teeth. We know then that the ‘presentness’ of the horizontality of space is a product of a multitude of histories whose resonances are still there, if we would but see them, and which sometimes catch us with full force unawares. (Massey, 2005, 117-118)

This opens up the interpretation of anachronistic space from describing people in space as a relation to time, to describing space itself as encompassing a multiplicity of time. This definition of anachronistic space presents as a temporal density: recent events layered over space that has, in the case of Abney Park cemetery, retained the same purpose for almost one-hundred and eighty years, layering moments inscribing and reinscribing space, tracing slightly different narratives with every tracing, yet retaining every previous tracing layered within the space.

Each audio walk I have created slides back and forth through time, by way of my narrative and by way of the walk itself, experiencing the space of the cemetery. The layering of meaning upon meaning
over time within the cemetery, with the grounds of the cemetery becoming a sponge for communal emotion layered through its use as a cemetery, culminates in a contemporaneous multiple becoming that creates a densely layered emotional landscape. This density of feeling, and a feeling of being a step out of time in this anachronistic space, can be felt by standing in one place, feeling the ground beneath your feet (and envisioning the countless paupers’ bones beneath the ground) and reading the gravestones that are the outdoor archive of love and loss of ages gone by. The density of feeling from standing in one place can then be taken on the move, to walk through the cemetery and acknowledge that the contemporaneous multiple becoming felt while standing still can be multiplied over and over again while walking through the space. It is these layers and meanings and sliding doors of perception I have endeavoured to capture with my audio walks.

All four of my audio walks use the history of Abney Park cemetery as backdrop against which I frame my narratives. For Thoughts on Mourning, I draw upon Abney’s Victorian history to explore Victorian mourning practices as the listening walker walks through Victorian graves; in Love, Wrath, Death, Lions, I use the Bostocks’ lion gravestone monument, housed in the cemetery, and their Victorian lives to tell my performed history of their love story; for Woodland Magick I tell the listening walker an animistic folktale about the buried Hackney Brook river, made subterranean over one-hundred-fifty years ago; and for Woodland Networks the walk through Abney Park’s nature reserve focuses on veteran tree specimens that were planted one-hundred-seventy-seven years ago as part of the original arboretum.

These four walks all culminate with the listening walker being ‘brought back’ to the present day at the end of the narrative. With the
exception of *Woodland Magick*, which ends when the folktale is told, each of the audio walks ends with different thoughts or prompts for the listening walker to conceive of the meaning of Abney Park cemetery in the present day as they find their way towards an exit, or continue on their own walk through the cemetery. For three of my four audio walks, the listening walkers are not brought back to either of the entrance gates on purpose. Being left to find their own way back out of the cemetery offers the listening walker time to ‘come back’ to the present day and process the walk without my accompanying presence. However, even though the guided audio has ended, my walks have not. This freeform exit path may take them a few tries to find an exit gate, as the paths are difficult to navigate and there is no signage directing visitors towards any landmarks or exits. This directional confusion in the cemetery creates a buffer zone between the end of the guided section of the walk and being brought back to contemporary life and noise of the surrounding streets. The commonality that these four different audio walks share is their temporal journey, from Victorian beginnings, winding back and forth through time, to all ending in the present day.

Time features prominently as a core theme throughout my walking practice. The concept of temporality is a recurring theme that I revisit with each layer of meaning that I investigate with my audio walks. Through the symbolism of memorial, by unpacking the time capsule nature of cemeteries as an outdoor archive, and exploring the relationship between nonhuman actants, I have created my walking practice to be an embodied experience of a selection of performed histories, reflective of the tapestry-like nature of interwoven spatial and temporal layers within the cemetery space. The concepts of temporal layering and the unique anachronistic space of a cemetery have informed the themes of my audio walking practice, so
capturing these changes throughout the evolution of my walking practice is key to its very purpose.

Researching and working with temporal journeys within the space of Abney Park led me to Massey’s work with space and place, wherein she offers a way of conceiving space as a sphere of a multiplicity of trajectories. In her research on these concepts, Massey invites us to consider three main points regarding space as she begins her enquiry: first, that space is the product of interrelations, where the interaction between people and between things takes place; second, that space is a sphere of contemporaneous plurality, a sphere where “distinct trajectories coexist”; and third, that space is always under construction, a place “always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed”. (Massey, 2005, 9) Massey further introduces the social aspect of space: “If time unfolds as change then space unfolds as interaction. In that sense space is the social dimension. Not in the sense of exclusively human sociability, but in the sense of engagement within a multiplicity.” (Massey, 2005, 61)

The multiplicity to which Massey refers is the confluence of multiple trajectories. Each person or object making up the ‘social’ of a space has their/its own trajectory. (Further exploration of the confluence of multiple nonhuman trajectories is explored in Chapter Four.) The meeting up of these different trajectories as they move through time across a given space is what creates the uniqueness of the space where they interact. This is the social aspect of space.

Using the analogy of a speeding train crossing a landscape (with the passengers on board merely catching glimpses of other lives as the train crosses through towns and countryside), Massey presents a picture of the fullness of a space that is not completely known to the individual. Just as these glimpses give us a single ‘snapshot’ of
someone else’s life, we too are only offering a ‘snapshot’ of our lives to those happening to watch the train speed past. With each encounter with a person or object, the train intersects an on-going history. The line the train traces through space, carrying our perceptions, is itself crossing other lines of perception, fanning out in a multiplicity of trajectories, each intersection of which creates its own unique space in time.

We can only know a space at any point in time within the limits of sensory experience. Crossing someone else’s trajectory and receiving a ‘snapshot’, we can flesh out their story with supposed histories and current purposes (e.g. that woman is running with a briefcase, therefore she is probably late for a meeting); however, these assumptions are merely an imagined construct. This practice of creating supposedly probable imagined circumstances can be applied to objects as well as to people in space. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks describe the slipperiness of crafting these creative archaeologies out of imagined circumstances when working with stories in space:

Decay and morbidity are the condition of archaeological enquiry. It is not just that things happened in the past, but that they may be touched, somehow, and now. This quest for sensuous knowing and corporeal knowledge is often what draws people, archaeologists and others, to the material past. The tangibility of remains of times gone offers access to what was thought lost, drawing on the energies of loss and restitution. The opportunity. These places are saturated with meaning: whilst little of physical worth is at risk here, everything of cultural value is at stake. They offer a series of challenges to those archaeologies, which call themselves ‘interpretive’ and ‘Romantic’, effectively to document and represent a locale that itself resembles a heterotopia and palimpsest. (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, 156)
This seduction of the material past, and being drawn to it as an archaeologist creating a narrative of history, or as an historian crafting a narrative from an archive, is a slippery slope to tread when working to flesh out a story. This is doubly applicable in a cemetery space as there is the ‘tangibility of remains’ in the form of a gravestone, and the ‘material past’ that is housed in archives—both are items from the past that can be held or felt today, and both just as stark with their lack of narrative information. Cemeteries have been described by Michel Foucault as ‘heterotopias’, and the writing and rewriting of Abney Park’s evolutions of meaning in space embodies the ‘palimpsest’, with its layerings of meanings and trajectories over time.

Heterotopias are most often linked to slices of time—which is to say that they are open onto what might be termed, for the sake of symmetry, heterochronies. The heterotopia begins to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time. This situation shows us that the cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance. (Foucault, 1986, 22)

This concept of ‘heterochrony’ within the heterotopia of the cemetery space calls to mind Doreen Massey’s concept of contemporaneous multiple becomings, as the multiple becoming of a cemetery is acknowledged through the mental exercise of piercing the surface of lateral space to tunnel into vertical time, opening up perceptions to the multiple meanings of a given space through time—all able to be experienced at any given ‘present’.

Concepts of time are not fixed and they change by way of cultural shifts through the ages. In her analysis of the philosophical
arguments of space versus time (and of space-time), Massey finds the recent twentieth-century shift towards favouring space (horizontality) over time (verticality) is still not a complete picture. By ‘horizontality’, Massey is referencing a focus on the spatial, the tangible. If time is considered vertical, then it would be represented as a tunnelling down through space, and an acknowledgement that the space on which a person stands is not the only manifestation of that space, that on that same space there have been a vast multiplicity of events and uses throughout time.

Acknowledgement of these vertical tunnelling layers within space requires the use of imagination, not merely the tangible. Horizontal space, on the other hand, is immediate and tangible. Vertical time is an intellectual task. Massey posits that “perhaps there is in this formulation (this mind’s eye imagination and the intellectual task at hand) too much emphasis on the purely horizontal and too little recognition of the multiple trajectories of which that ‘horizontality’ is the momentary, passing, result.” (Massey, 2005, 51)

Massey calls for a change in perspective, an imaginative opening up of space, the goal of which is to acknowledge within a space its potential to house many contemporaneous multiple becomings. From a Machenesque point of view, I would refer to these multiplicities that share the same space as ‘borderland worlds’.

Historical space is simultaneously its history and the contemporary additions that have been accumulated through time up until our current encounter—the imagined (or embellished) history into which we find ourselves weaving into our current narrative. Cemeteries are monuments to the past, with their main purpose being catalysts for reverie, remembrance, and mourning. To walk through a cemetery, and to imaginatively recreate the stories of those buried there, is an
act of creative, or interpretive, archaeology. As Pearson and Shanks frame it, interpretative archaeology is a “set of approaches to the ruined material past which foreground interpretation, the ongoing process making sense of what never was firm or certain. This archaeology entertains no final and definitive account of the past as it was.” (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, XVII)

What gives a cemetery its particular identity? Its ‘aura’? In his work *Space and Place*, Yi-Fu Tuan shares an anecdote of a supposed conversation between two famous physicists, Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg, upon visiting Kronborg Castle in Denmark. Bohr said to Heisenberg:

Isn’t it strange how this castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here? As scientists we believe that a castle consists only of stones, and admire the way the architect put them together. [...] None of this should be changed by the fact that Hamlet lived here, and yet it is changed completely. Suddenly the walls and the ramparts speak a quite different language. The courtyard becomes an entire world, a dark corner reminds us of the darkness in the human soul, we hear Hamlet’s, ‘To be or not to be’. (Tuan, 1977, 4)

The ‘aura’ and extra layer of awareness the physicists and Tuan are exploring here are an imaginative twist on perceiving space. The physical aspects of the Danish castle, or Abney Park cemetery, can be seen as nothing more than boundaried places containing stone. However, adding to these literal attributes the layered, unseen attributes of symbolic meaning, they change completely. To make sense of this ‘other’ meaning, a visitor to a heritage site must actively

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7 I analyse the necessity of creating these imagined or embellished histories out of the stark information we can gather about stories housed in space and in archives in Chapter Five.
engage with the space and use their imagination to discover its hidden layers and Machenesque borderland worlds.

For my audio walk *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions*, I present a performed audio play of the tumultuous love story of Frank and Susannah Bostock, who are buried in Abney Park cemetery. With this walk, I endeavour to bring Frank and Susannah to life in the mind of the listening walker and make their story feel immediate. The Bostocks lived and loved over one hundred years ago, so their trajectory within the space of Abney Park was long ago. However, their bodies lie there today (their unseen ‘tangible remains’, as described by Pearson and Shanks) and their lion monument gravestone can be interacted with by the listening walker at the time of listening. The snapshot of the Bostocks’ lives that is available to the casual (non-audio-walk-listening) visitor to Abney Park, is merely that: their sleeping lion gravestone. Through archival research and actor portrayal, I have endeavoured to transform their snapshot of a story into a moving mental image, with the aim of crafting a fuller picture and widening the crossing trajectories of the listening walker and the buried Bostocks, bridging temporal distances through the medium of the audio walk.

An interesting paradox of my audio walking practice is that in attempting to analyse the ever-shifting otherworldly aspects of Abney Park cemetery, I have frozen these perceptions and crossings of borderland worlds in time in a repeatable audio format. My audio walks become auditory snapshots of moving objects, images of something slipping just from view, capturing not the motion in the periphery of the eye, but instead a still image of the motion. The end result is a series of snapshots in time of one door of perception into another borderland, which when traced again will have changed (with chapel restoration, moving rubbish bins, chopping down and
regrowth of trees, flowering of plants, toppling of obelisks, changing tribes of wanderers who are fellow visitors on the journey). Each door is a peak into a snapshot of time, lived by the visitor as not a recreation of the walk that created it, but as an audio transparency layered over the walk they are taking. And walks yet to come.

One conundrum of note is there has been a rubbish bin on the Stoke Newington Church Street entrance side of Abney Park cemetery for at least four years that is one of my first path direction landmarks in Thoughts on Mourning. The rubbish bin was taken away midway through recording my fourth audio walk, Woodland Networks, so I was able to edit out the direction from “turn left at the rubbish bin” to instead “turn left at the first path up ahead” during the process of editing that audio walk. I then had to make a decision to either edit out the rubbish bin direction instruction from Thoughts on Mourning, or to leave it in as part of the time capsule nature of these audio walks. Descriptions of the chapel change drastically between being a crumbling ruin, to being under, and then post, renovation; but a path direction note may make the walk hard to follow in the future. It is a decision that is about the primacy of what these walks are for: recording history, or functioning for the community through time, evolving with the cemetery’s changes. I decided that documenting Abney Park as it was when I walked through it was the importance of what these audio walks aim to capture for the community, and these moments of being a step out of time are inevitable. If just through the course of working on Abney Rambles these changes are already manifest, then surely in the future these changes will be ubiquitous. There is no such thing as an ongoing ‘present day’.

Regarding time, the concept of ‘present day’, and the contemporary thoughts presented in my walks—all of these will one day themselves be dated and throughout the course of my Abney
Rambles project, have already become so. Hackney Council began refurbishment on the centre chapel ruin into a community centre in November 2015. The concept of ‘ruin’, and the use of the chapel’s ruinous state, is a point of pause for my walks where I used its striking appearance to provoke a certain atmosphere. When eventually the chapel is a fully functioning community centre, these meanings will be lost, and my walks will feel anachronistic. The walks themselves will become time capsules. As of October 2017, the centre chapel was stabilised and now hosts events for visitors. Although complete renovation is still underway (the current structure is without windows, doors, or interior fittings), the chapel is no longer a ‘ruin’, and the sections of my walks that refer to the chapel as such are now anachronistic. My audio walks will become another layer of memory archiving the past of an Abney Park that once was. The ‘aura’ of the cemetery space may shift over time, with not just the transformation of the chapel ruin to a community centre, but also other possible changes yet to be foreseen. However, what will not change are the gravestones and the meanings they contain. Housing the memories of the dead for mourners, some of those mourners now merely memories themselves, these stone monuments will continue to mark time and craft place, for mourners and heritage visitors alike. As long as Abney Park cemetery remains, there will be opportunity for pause and reflection, and in this lies its key to survival.

Through researching the heritage of Abney Park in relation to space, one of its defining spatial tensions is created by the buried Hackney Brook river. The discovery of the buried Hackney Brook, along with the ‘earth mystery’ study of Iain Sinclair, formed my fourth audio walk, Woodland Magick, which is a walk exploring ‘earth mystery’ through the crafting of a story of animistic folklore. The aim of this audio walk is to capture the intangible fourth element of Abney Park
cemetery: an otherworldly feeling of things unseen. Researching the buried Hackney Brook created a conceptual link between this otherworldly feeling of things unseen in Stoke Newington that Arthur Machen wrote about, with the literal nature of a river unseen, forming the northern boundary of Abney Park cemetery. Abney Park is a space of the unseen: unseen river and unseen bodies—both ever-present, yet unseen. Underfoot but not understood. Exploring conceptual layers within the cemetery space began with exploring the literal layers of water under the earth. Researching the complexity of layered meanings within Abney Park began with researching its buried river: Hackney Brook.

**Buried Rivers: The Subterranean Hackney Brook River in Stoke Newington**

The thirteen rivers and brooks of London still flow. Once they passed through fields and valleys, and now they run along pipes and sewers. But they have survived through the human world. They are buried, but they are not dead. (Ackroyd, 2011, 38)

As with many hidden things, there is a piqued curiosity and fascination with London’s buried rivers, which has manifested in numerous nonfiction publications, poems, and walking tours about these subterranean waterways. In the mid-nineteenth century, many rivers and land-traversing tributaries were rerouted and covered over. This made way for more continuous land and provided an effective sewage system. This system would carry London’s waste to be dumped into the Thames, to which most of the rivers and tributaries naturally already flowed. The sewage system was a great Victorian accomplishment, marking the era as more ‘civilised’ and distinct from the previous centuries of open sewage filling the streets and, what one can only imagine, was an ever-constant putrid smell.
This sewage system was inarguably a necessary civic development for the booming density of London population at the time. The same civic spirit towards health and cleanliness that turned London’s waterways into sewers also created the Magnificent Seven garden cemeteries. The two initiatives are linked in that they endeavour to serve a similar healthful purpose; and it is in Abney Park cemetery that these two civic health projects intersect.

While throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries underground natural mineral springs attracted Britons to spa towns such as Bath to ‘take the waters’, with the advent of the Victorian sewer system, there arose a new meaning for underground water. “The old rivers, with their intensely local benefits and pastoral memory traces, were also deemed anachronistic. Either rivers were of use, for transport or water power, or they were hidden, as carriers of disease and conduits of filth and waste.” (Sinclair, 2013, 16)

The idea of relegating London’s open flowing rivers to underground befoulment is a sad thing to envision; however London was already awash with waste—whether above ground or below. As London became ever more densely populated, this waste was becoming not just revolting, but bordering on a health and safety crisis. Underground water began to be associated with disease and perceived as threatening. Just as underground water may undermine the foundations of houses along its course, it may also pose a threat to the health of those who live by or near it. However, with the passage of time, the direct association of these rivers with the London sewage system has waned. The focus has been instead drawn to this hidden Victorian network flowing and pulsing beneath our contemporary city. As Peter Ackroyd notes in London Under:

Many people are fascinated by the course of the subterranean rivers; they track them,
sometimes with maps sometimes with dowsing rods, seeking for the life underground. They pursue them as far as they can through unpromising surroundings of council blocks or shopping malls or derelict plots of marshy land. On stretches of their route the outer world is in mourning for its lost companion. (Ackroyd, 2011, 47)

Iain Sinclair is one of these fascinated people who have tracked a subterranean river with a dowsing rod, enlisting the help of a professional dowser, he tracked the hidden course of the Hackney Brook river. The Hackney Brook was covered over in 1861, but it is very much still a presence in Stoke Newington. Sinclair was inspired by an engraving of the vanished Hackney Brook that “proved an inspiration for another way of looking at the future”. (Sinclair, 2013, 40) Engravings of St Augustine’s Church at the top end of Mare Street show the atmosphere to be bucolic. The river, with a footbridge, crossed in front of the church. The Hackney Brook does not flow to the Thames like most of its subterranean brethren; instead it flows into the River Lea, right alongside the point where the romantically named ‘Northern Sewage Outfall’ is pumped through elevated pipes. Hackney Brook is a convergence of two springs that join to sweep around Highbury, then flow through the northern boundary of Abney Park cemetery. The course of the river was what originally made the demarcation of the edge of the cemetery, which is why the northern boundary of Abney Park follows the uneven lines of a river's edge on a map, unlike the tidy edges that make up the cemetery’s other boundaries.

In 2009, Iain Sinclair gave a talk as part of the City of London Festival titled ‘London’s Lost Rivers: The Hackney Brook and other North West Passages’ that explored the theme of London’s lost rivers and underlying narratives and erasures in the city. In the talk, Sinclair describes his relationships to the rivers of London, those both
subterranean and flowing freely, and their relationship to his walking practice, finding that “walking over alongside the buried rivers of London stitches a form of collective memory to our sides”. (Sinclair, 2013, 2-3) London’s buried rivers share a haunting complexity. For Sinclair’s walk tracing the underground passage of Hackney Brook, he enlisted the services of a dowser. When he was walking with the dowser in Stoke Newington they met locals who told the walking pair that their cellars tended to flood whenever there was a heavy storm, and they blamed it on the river.

The Brook is there and, buried or not, it defines the area. You appreciate the reason for the siting of the grander houses, the lost villas and former gardens on the ridge above Morning Lane. You register, despite everything, the hysteria of development, the mess of declining industries, the geological soul of the place. The water is a transmitter. History can be revealed, through careful observation, keeping your ear to the ground. (Sinclair, 2013, 42)

Rejecting the aesthetic oppression of the large dominating developments of Westfield Stratford and the Olympic park, Sinclair found an instinct to oppose those gigantic structures by walking beside water. The inspiration for this walk, following the course of the buried Hackney Brook, was to find a mode of interacting with the land away from these huge and imposing modern structures that characterise that area of East London in favour of an older geology. Walking with the dowser, he felt “the power of the lost river, right alongside the road where we were walking.” (Sinclair, 2013, 54) To keep following faithfully the track of the river, they sometimes had to climb fences and traverse areas not meant for walking. In doing so, they came upon the camp of “an invisible community, a tribe leaving signs of a recent campsite behind them” living under a motorway. “It was as if they had chosen to cluster around the memory of the Hackney Brook.” (Sinclair, 2013, 55) There is a
recurring theme in Sinclair, Ackroyd, and Aidan Dun’s writings of ‘sensing’ London’s buried rivers, or otherwise reacting to them, perhaps without even knowing they are there.

[London’s rivers are] not lost, not at all. Just because you can’t see a thing, as Ed Dorn points out, doesn’t mean it’s not there. The rivers continue, hidden and culverted as they might be, to flow through our dreams, fixing the compass of our moods and movements. [...] Visible or invisible, they haunt us. It is not possible to understand the growth and development of Hackney, for example, without registering the presence of that subterranean river, the Hackney Brook. (Sinclair, 2013, 2-3)

Sinclair lives in Hackney, and describes his area as having a long history of dissent and proudly independent thought. Before it was a working class area, before the coming of the canals and railways, Hackney was a desirable suburb, with market gardens and farms, manor houses and orchards. “And all these blessings derived from the existence of a founding river, the Hackney Brook. Now bricked over, made into a sewer, lost to us”. (Sinclair, 2013, 14-15) Sinclair first mentions this trek to trace the lost Hackney Brook River in 2009, in Hackney, That Rose Red Empire. Through his writings, he comes back to the Hackney Brook again and again. He identified Hackney Brook as the suppressed lifeforce of the borough, that the villages of Hackney, Dalston, and Stoke Newington took shape from the way the Brook carved its way through the valley.

Now invisible, but felt and known, the Brook was a mischievous actuality as it continued to flood Stoke Newington cellars. The nature of the stream changed as it pulled west in a meander around the edge of Abney Park cemetery. [...] Hacking into tangled undergrowth, as clinging, dense and light-devouring as my book has become, bumping up against obscured gravestones and the sharp
wings of ivy-choked angels, I remembered what Poe and Arthur Machen had drawn from this area: confusion, double identities, a shift in the electromagnetic field. There was a long tradition, beginning with De Quincey, of searching for a northwest passage out of London, away from restrictive conventions of time and space. The route these men hinted at seemed to have an intimate relationship with the course of the submerged Hackney Brook: Abney Park, Clissold Park, pubs named after Robinson Crusoe, the slopes of Highgate Hill. (Sinclair, 2009, 551-552)

Sinclair writes about the layers of the city of London over the hidden waters as mirroring the connections and coincidences of layers he finds within life living in a city. In his odd-job as a painter in the late 1960s, scraping paint off the walls renovating a flat, he discovers that it was the address of Mr Malthus, a member of the Suicide Club in Robert Louis Stevenson’s New Arabian Nights. Sinclair was very keen on Stevenson, and “much taken with the coincidences and overlaps that are part of any life in the big city”. (Sinclair, 2013, 26-27) Sinclair continues with this metaphoric theme, noting that “the Chepstow Place house seemed to float on a reservoir of dark waters”. Julian Maclaren-Ross, “the great flâneur and confabulator”, stayed in that same Suicide Club flat, in which Sinclair was scraping the paint from the walls, while he worked on his final book. Sinclair then references his “very useful biography, Fear and Loathing in Fitzrovia: The Strange Lives of Julian Maclaren-Ross” (Sinclair, 2013, 29), which was written by Paul Willetts.

Here is where the coincidences and overlaps that Sinclair documents in his experience concentrically pull one layer further out into mine. Fear and Loathing in Fitzrovia was published by Black Spring Press, where a close friend of mine was Managing Editor during its publication. My friend put Paul Willetts in touch with me, when I was then living in New York City, because Willetts needed to
employ an on-the-ground researcher to go to the National Archives in Washington DC to assist him with the next book he was writing, *Rendezvous at the Russian Tea Rooms*. I worked remotely with Paul Willetts on that project for some months. To then be sitting in the British Library six years later, researching a walking practice that references this same author, was a very surreal experience.

What is fascinating to me about these coincidences and overlaps is that, much like the hidden rivers of London that Sinclair uses as metaphor here, many of these layers of similarity and conjunction of lives are unseen and never come to light. The flowing connections between lives and through time, criss-crossing each other, mostly are never discovered. However, they are still there, flowing quietly between us all as an unseen undercurrent. Discovering this startling coincidence reading about Sinclair’s startling coincidence is a perfect illustration of these hidden connections. And there is something almost eerie about this connection that brings me back to the metaphor of the river—the river that I was drawn to for this research: Hackney Brook, the mystery of dark water, and the otherworldly nature of things only partially seen.

While following the course of the Hackney Brook, Sinclair’s dowser shares a feeling of foreboding regarding London’s buried rivers. The dowser tells him:

> There is a disease pattern in certain districts of London, malfunction, malfate. I have researched these patterns, followed the viral rings outwards, like the ripples from a stone dropped in a pond. Houses built above lost rivers, the inhabitants have no knowledge of that history, carry a dark aura. Ill fortunate [sic] is always associated with this. (Sinclair, 2013, 32-33)
Of this ‘dark aura’, Peter Ackroyd makes a similar observation in an surprising phenomenon associated with London’s lost rivers:

In his survey entitled *The Geography of London’s Ghosts* (1960), G.W. Lambert concluded that approximately three-quarters of the city’s paranormal activity takes place near buried waters. Some may conclude that the spiritual properties of the rivers have been confirmed; the ritual activity at the Walbrook, for example, may thereby be justified. The more sceptical will believe that the flowing of buried waters merely creates strange sound effects. (Ackroyd, 2011, 49)

The eerie quality of Stoke Newington cannot be attributed merely to strange sounds effects, however, as the subterranean Hackney Brook creates no sound. In fact, in some areas, the Hackney Brook is not a rushing river at all, merely a diffuse saturation of earth raising the water table, before reforming into a flowing river once more. Without previous knowledge of the history of the area (or a dowser) a walker through Stoke Newington would not know that there is a buried river there. The Hackney Brook is always changing—underfoot, but not understood. Learning about these hidden rivers fascinated me. I began to wonder about the Hackney Brook, what it looked like underground, I began to anthropomorphise its struggle and unfair treatment—from a beautiful river flowing in the open air, at times called ‘bucolic’, inspiring Isaac Watts to write hymns upon its banks and city workers to escape the crowded city centre to build villas overlooking it—to then be buried ‘alive’ and turned into a sewer. I was filled with a rather strange level of sadness and empathy for a river so unappreciated and ruined. This emotional response towards the buried Hackney Brook, and descriptions of an otherworldly Stoke Newington by Poe, Machen, and Sinclair, coupled with my research into animistic folklore (which is explored in Chapter Four) led me to create a dark animistic folktale about the
Hackney Brook river, which is the story told in *Woodland Magick*. This audio walk is my endeavour to give an imagined voice to the buried river, and offer new perspectives on the space of Abney Park cemetery as a place that was partially built over it.

The Hackney Brook is not alone in its fate. Poet Aidan Dun wrote his long poem *Vale Royal* about the subterranean river Fleet that still runs under Kings Cross today. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, parts of the Fleet ran out in the open through a green pleasant land. But south of Euston Road, at this period, it was already bricked-over and buried. Sinclair comments on Dun’s poetic exploration of the area around Kings Cross and St Pancras Old Church, where the poem focuses for its following of the Fleet, that by

...an act of extreme self-hypnosis, [Dun] becomes convinced that the present developments, that narcissism of dark glass, the glittering arts centres, the forced gardens, newspaper offices, riverside apartments, are somehow a manifestation of Blake’s vision, or an extension of Swedenborg’s multiple city: the New Jerusalem. (Sinclair, 2013, 33)

Dun finds that the contemporary bustle of Kings Cross is a mirrored reflection of the flowing river below. Conversely, Peter Ackroyd sees tracing the line of a lost river as a slow journey, not bustle, a journey that recreates a sense of time that has been lost in the contemporary city—“or perhaps time is altered by the presence of the buried river. It may follow the speed of water beneath the ground. Time itself does not matter in the presence of the lost river.” (Ackroyd, 2011, 47)

Rivers and time are combined in metaphor: the ‘flow’ of time, the timeless river, the idea of London’s rivers flowing in the open air are of a time long past. These rivers today flow in darkness, and are as hidden from our view as the past is. In this way, the river becomes a
conceptual access point to conceive of the temporal shifts within the hidden layers of a place.

There is a darkness inherent in conceptions of water beneath the ground. The rivers that we sense but no longer see. In the Notes that accompany the poem of Vale Royal, Dun says: “The black stream is a ley-line whose energies have become stagnant through neglect, or negative through misuse.” (Sinclair, 2013, 26) (Ley-lines are another theme that I address in Woodland Magick and more fully explore in Chapter Four.) Through an exploration of the aboveground in Kings Cross as a manifestation of Blake’s vision and Swedenborg’s multiple city, Dun is, according to Sinclair, reasserting the Swedenborgian logic of the London of lost rivers, of cities beneath pavements:

‘They rejoiced that now as before they were in England, and in its great city’, Swedenborg wrote in The Last Judgement. ‘And they said that there is also another London below, not dissimilar as to the streets.’ A city of sleepwalkers, soft at its core, sinking into the hellish depths. Vale Royal is both post-Swedenborgian and pre-Swedenborgian; innocent, canny, open to echoes, and closed into on itself like a coffin made of mirrors. (Sinclair, 2013, 34)

Neil Gaiman, in his 1996 novel Neverwhere, writes of a fantastical place underneath London that mirrors the London above ground, but in warped and surreal ways, which he calls the ‘London Below’. This ‘London Below’ is the London of sewers, disused underground stations, and shifts in perception between everyday things that suddenly become otherworldly: this slippery shift between the ‘everyday’ and the fantastical is metaphorically manifested by things unseen from ‘below’. These recurring concepts shared between walkers and writers and creators of written worlds takes that which at first seems to be magic—then slips into what is perhaps a glimpse
into madness — to finally the resolution that these worlds are always there, unseen, coexisting with our day-to-day reality before receding into a subterranean London Below, that is the realm of all things that slip through the cracks of perception from London Above. Gaiman, Sinclair, Ackroyd, Dun, and Machen all explore concepts of a buried London Under, with cracks in perception explored as possibilities to access other borderland worlds.

Abney Park Cemetery as Community Space

Abney Park has a bit of a reputation. It is considered the ‘black sheep’ of the Magnificent Seven, with most cemetery bloggers and workers at other cemeteries mentioning this opinion in conversation. Part of the collaboration between the Abney Park Trust and myself has been an exchange of information. During the summer months of 2017, the Abney Park Trust surveyed 409 visitors to Abney Park cemetery to learn the demographics of visitors to the cemetery, as well as their current use of the space and future interests in the cemetery as a community use space. The results of the Abney Park Trust Community Use Survey were collated and reported to Hackney Council in September 2017. Bearing in mind that the results obtained during Abney Park’s 2017 user poll were only from those visitors who were willing to fill out a survey, the results showed that despite Abney Park cemetery having a reputation as a male cruising site, 63.8% of survey respondents were female, which illustrates to some degree that women are not intimidated to walk in Abney Park. Only 1.71% of respondents were twenty-four years old or younger, with 67% of visitors between thirty-five and sixty-four years of age. These findings show a mature community of visitors, not a

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community of teenage vandals. Any acceptance of these statistics needs to take into consideration that neither teenage vandals or men cruising for sex are likely to fill out a Hackney Council user survey; however these numbers also reflect my observations while walking within and studying Abney Park.

What has earned Abney Park its reputation as the ‘black sheep’ of the Magnificent Seven? It could be its history of a surprising amount of arson, with more fires set in Abney Park than any of the other Magnificent Seven. It could be the dense foliage of the nature reserve that creates winding paths of isolation through dark undergrowth. Or perhaps it is the daily drinkers who might seem menacing. While 19.32% of survey respondents ticked ‘drinkers’ as an aspect they disliked about Abney Park, and 15.89% ticked ‘lone men’—a more impressive 34.47% ticked that there was nothing they disliked about Abney Park at all.

A rather surprising 84.11% of respondents were ‘white or white British’—which is interesting in the context of Abney Park cemetery being located in the multicultural borough of Hackney. However, it is situated in the mostly white middle-class neighbourhood of Stoke Newington, which might reflect these numbers. However, that would in turn illustrate that the appeal of a visit to Abney Park cemetery does not extend beyond the neighbourhood of Stoke Newington out into greater Hackney. This could be a pain-point for the Abney Park Trust to consider when formulating future community outreach events. There appears to be a need to inspire the wider community of Hackney to feel Abney Park serves them as well. The other ethnic identities of the respondents to the survey were: ‘mixed background’, 3.91%; ‘other ethnic group’ 3.18%; ‘Asian or Asian British’ and ‘Black or Black British’, both 1.47%; with 5.87% preferring not to answer.
Religious affiliation data was less surprising than the ethnic demographics, with 65.04% of respondents ticking ‘atheist or no religion’, and only 16.38% identifying as Christian (9.78% of respondents preferred not to answer). The third most common religious affiliation was ‘secular beliefs’, at 5.13%’; followed by Jewish, 1.71%; Buddhist, 1.47%; Muslim, 0.24%; and Hindu, 0.24%. The religious demographic breakdown of visitors to Abney Park reflects its primacy as community use space and not as a religious space. Abney Park cemetery was founded as a nondenominational, unconsecrated, Dissenter cemetery. Abney Park is the only cemetery of the Magnificent Seven to be unconsecrated and to have no separation between Anglican, Dissenter, other faiths, or non-faith-based burials. While there has been a secularisation to some extent of all the Magnificent Seven as they have opened their gates as community spaces, the secularisation of Abney Park cemetery to be a mostly non-Christian community space is a natural progression from its inclusive Dissenter beginnings.

When asked the purpose for their visit, 72.86% of respondents to the Abney Park survey came to ‘go for a walk’, a further 16.38% came to ‘walk the dog’, which brings the total percentage of visitors coming to Abney Park for a walk to 89.24%, with a smattering of smaller percentages comprising exploring history, exercise, woodworking class, to see a play, or to volunteer. Only 8.56% of visitors came to Abney Park to visit a grave. This further illustrates the primacy of Abney Park’s position within the community of Stoke Newington as a community use space over its designation as strictly a cemetery. However, only a little over half (56.23%) of respondents had attended an activity or event in Abney Park, which shows that Abney Park’s position as a community space is more as a local park for walks than a place to engage with organised community events.
The low engagement with events appears to be due to a lack of knowledge about them, not a lack of interest in them, because 76.04% said they would like Abney Park to host more events, with the top response being more events about the site itself. My audio walks, in conjunction with the initiatives of Abney Park Trust Events Committee, aim to address these needs of the community.

Visits to heritage sites over the last several decades have involved a more interpretive and interactive way of engaging with the past than simply a didactic single narrative of history. As Jackson and Kidd note, visits have become “less about the object and more about the experience: an ‘encounter’ with a past that is ‘brought to life’”. (Jackson and Kidd, 1, 2011) In an effort to engage visitors to Abney Park with the cemetery as a community space, I offer my audio walks as a unique embodied experience of the space that invites a diverse reading of Abney Park’s layered meanings and history, as opposed to reading it as only a repository of the dead. Through this mode of interaction, the ‘experience’ of the space of the cemetery takes precedence over the ‘objects’ of dead bodies and headstones. In this way, I position myself as a ‘heritage interpreter’, finding the layered meanings for possible readings of the space and offering my audio walks as stories of both the site of the cemetery in the past, but also as a selection of the meanings that it could hold for the community today. The choice of which stories to tell, and which meanings to research, crafts a subjective practice that takes a constructivist approach to community engagement. A constructivist approach to heritage interpretation “simply suggests that we construct our own understandings of the world in which we live”. (Copeland, 2006, 84) This is positioned in contrast to a positivist approach that “provides only one view of complex issues and presumes that there is a fixed place that the visitor must come to know”. (Copeland, 2006, 84) Abney Park’s evolving ‘multiple
becomings’, as explored in the beginning of this chapter, offer a diverse array of perspectives on its heritage and its place within the community. The layers of heritage that I explore through my audio walking practice present four possible readings of the space and interpretations of its heritage; however, the listening walker is prompted to use their imagination when engaging with my walks, which may lead them to different conclusions about Abney Park’s layered meanings than I have explored. In addition, each audio walk (with the exception of Woodland Networks) leaves the listening walker in the middle of the cemetery and with the necessity of finding his or her own way out. The walks do not end neatly at the entrance gates, and so the walks do not end when the audio stops. The silent second half of each audio walk is the walk the visitors take themselves afterwards to exit the cemetery—or continue walking through it, exploring their own reverie and crafting their own experience, with perhaps different conclusions.

This subjectivity within my interpretation of heritage is inevitably personal. As Copeland notes, “the ‘expert’ interpreter constructs a particularly personal account of the site—how can it be otherwise? The individual internalises information about the evidence that has significance for him or her.” (Copeland, 2006, 85) My goal has been to share my subjective reading of Abney Park as a selection of possible layers of meaning within a multitude of possible layers, which visitors can discover for themselves once the prompt towards imaginative reading of the cemetery has been provoked. Visitors to Abney Park will hopefully feel empowered to find their own creative readings of the space, once the formal ‘cemetery’ label has been subverted and ‘permission’ has been granted to enjoy a creative experience outside of socially scripted cemetery behaviours. From a constructivist perspective, the various layers of heritage I present should form a scaffolding to enable visitors to make their own
constructions. However, “the onus should be on the visitor to do the thinking and sites need to value risk-taking by visitors through asking questions and to engender relevance through creating cognitive conflict” (Copeland, 2006, 90)

In a case study analysing his site-based performance project ‘The Iron Ship’, Baz Kershaw notes that staging encounters in heritage sites or museums is anomalous “because those sites are devoted to combating the ephemeral” (Kershaw, 2011, 123) The encounters that visitors enjoy and that breathe life into an historical space are not at odds with preserving the site as history because, on a long enough time line, both site and performance are ultimately ephemeral. As Kershaw finds, these levels of ephemerality are not equal, as some things are forgotten whereas some things are remembered, with their records in archives serving as a prompt towards continuing testimony, much as the lives of Frank and Susannah Bostock have been remembered and transformed into new testimony through my audio walk Love, Wrath, Death, Lions. For Kershaw’s heritage site of practice, the SS Great Britain, the ship transported from 1852-1875 an estimated 20-25% of Australia’s current ancestors. However, this history was superseded by the louder heritage narrative of its groundbreaking engineering. Before Kershaw’s heritage performance interventions on this narrative, the ship’s story was one of engineering innovation and maritime conquest, “but its major part in the history of colonialism and environmental degradation was almost completely ignored. As leading heritage industry critics have noted, such sites are memorials to forgetting even in the act of remembrance”. (Kershaw, 2011, 127)

Kershaw draws paradoxical correlations between the ephemerality of performance adding to the sustainability of heritage sites undergoing a process of decay. For the nineteenth-century SS Great
Britain, the ship was an amazing artefact that “was very actively adding to its earlier world records by playing host to the highest number of known types of rust to be found together anywhere on Earth”. And unless the ship could be somehow stabilised against this pervasive iron rot “within twenty to thirty years it would become little more than fragments a the bottom of the specially constructed 1839 Bristol dry dock in which it was built”. (Kershaw, 2011, 25)

Abney Park cemetery is in a state of decay, much like the SS Great Britain. Instead of rust, the ongoing destruction of the human heritage of the cemetery is due to its nonhuman heritage: reforestation toppling stone monuments into rock fragments sinking under the foliage of unchecked trees and root systems. And while Abney Park cemetery does not conceal culturally difficult narratives of colonialism, it does present a monological story of its simple ‘deadness’ that I challenge with my audio walks.

The trouble with my method of practice lies within the disembodied audio format, which does not allow for a give and take between myself and visitors to the cemetery. If they have questions, I am not there to answer them or engage in debate with contrary viewpoints on my readings of the space. In this way, live performance interactions with heritage sites can offer a platform for dialogue and more fruitful relationship building than through an audio format. However, the way in which an audio format succeeds where a live performance cannot is the personal, intimate nature of the experience that is designed to be taken alone. As my audio walks are offered as a solo practice to visitors, they are not at the discretion of a facilitator’s calendar and timetable, and the psychological barrier to entry is low, as there is no fear of embarrassment from interactive performers, which could make some visitors shy away from live heritage performances. The audio walks are free to download, so
anyone with access to a device that can play audio can take them, so there is no entrance fee. All of these aspects of an independent audio walking practice, I hope, create a comfortable and inclusive method of interacting with Abney Park for people who might otherwise feel heritage events are not for them.

The outcomes of using a constructivist approach are more varied than those of a simple positivist approach. They will give value to the historic environment, allow visitors an insight into the ‘secret garden’ of the expert, and enable value to be given to other sites that may be seen. […] The development of a constructivist approach to the historic environment offers a route out of the anodyne landscape of heritage presentation. (Copeland, 2006, 94)

The Abney Park Trust Community Use Survey presented at the beginning of this section, was undertaken as an endeavour to understand visitor responses to Abney Park’s heritage presentation. The data collected from this 2017 survey was from a fairly large set of visitors to the cemetery. Endeavouring to compile my own demographic data and community response to my walks was less successful. As the audio walks that I have created are available to download on my website, and are taken independently without my knowledge or presence, gauging the community response to my audio walks has been problematic. While my audio walks have been available online since 2015, with links to a short online survey that I ask listening walkers to complete, in the years that I have had this survey online I have only had six responses—five of which were from my friends. It was clear that more initiative was needed to compile response data. In conjunction with the Abney Park Trust, I organised an event called an ‘Afternoon in Abney Park Cemetery: Tea, Cake, and Audio Walks’ on 30 September 2017. I bought cake, set up urns for tea and coffee, printed out route maps and
information sheets, and sat in the classroom by the Egyptian Gates entrance from 1pm to 4pm and waited. While only ten completed surveys were sent back to me, over the course of the afternoon over twenty people stopped by to chat.

Even though the data I collected from my ten respondents is not statistically significant, I did learn that in-person engagement regarding my audio walks was far more productive than social media engagement initiatives had been. (The completed user surveys are in the end of my Documentation of Practice book.) The Abney Park Trust circulated the ‘Tea, Cake, and Audio Walks’ Eventbrite event page to their newsletter list, I promoted the event on my various social media channels, and we set up a sign out by the main pathway luring passersby with tea and cake if they would like to take an audio walk. I expected most people who did come by would do so rather quickly to pick up a map and other information and leave, and not necessarily take me up on my offer for tea and cake, but I was pleasantly surprised. Almost everyone who came by for a map and information about the audio walks had at least one cup of tea or a piece of cake, with a few people staying for more than one cup of tea to discuss Abney Park. Of the people who stopped by for a chat, half of them came in because they saw the sign out front. It appears that the social media initiatives of both the Abney Park Trust and myself were not reaching a wide enough (or engaged enough) audience. This went some way towards explaining the lack of engagement with my online survey. It appears that even though my audio walks are a digital medium, they still benefit from in-person engagement. As it is impractical for me to host open days at Abney Park frequently, the next-best initiative that I will be working on with the Abney Park Trust in 2018 is to amplify the park’s social media presence. This can be done by adding some of the benefits of in-person engagement, such as personalising social media posts as
being from specific Trustees, as well as sharing daily anecdotes or interesting news to humanise Abney Park’s online presence.

From the sparse data that I was able to compile during my ‘Tea, Cake, and Audio Walks’ afternoon, the demographic data for my respondents comprised eight who identified as women, two identified as men, and zero identified as ‘other’. Nine ticked ‘white or white British’, with one declining to answer. Three were agnostic, three were atheist, two were humanist, one declined to answer, and one found religious comfort in the ‘spaghetti monster’. These secular responses are in keeping with the official Abney Park Trust survey findings that the majority of visitors to Abney Park are not religious. The age ranges for my respondents were fairly evenly spread out between thirty and sixty-eight years of age. One of the open-ended questions I asked in the survey was if the experience of taking my audio walks changed their perception of Abney Park. The responses visitors shared were: “The walks enhanced my existing love of the park, I didn’t know about the Bostocks or about the buried Hackney Brook river.”; “It made the experience of walking in the park more intimate.”; “The cemetery is branching out! Yay for social engagement and using an underappreciated heritage source!”; “I learning about network of trees and all the fires.”; “It helped me realise very tangibly how many layers of meaning and history one can discover in the park. I was particularly struck by your comment in the Bostock audio guide about how every tombstone represents a life, with love, loss, and adventures that could be discovered by beginning to read the inscriptions, then how you went on to research their story in the archives.” I found the last comment especially striking, as I do not know the woman who wrote it, nor has she read any of my thesis, yet she used the phrasing “layers of meaning” that can be discovered in the park—and that is how I have envisioned my practice conceptually in Abney Park: as layers of meaning.
Lastly, I asked the respondents for suggestions for future audio walks. Most respondents wanted to hear more about specific deceased residents and graves, there was one request for more about the stone sculpture, two requests for the cemetery to be open afterhours for tours (one suggesting with light installations—both are problematic requests, but interesting that they saw Abney Park with potential as an artistic platform), and two requesting geolocation so as not to get lost. This last suggestion was a pain-point for me during the creation of my audio walks, as it was an ongoing problem crafting an audio walking practice in a serpentine cemetery with few clear landmarks.

All of my respondents shared a love for Abney Park cemetery, and none of the people who stopped by for a chat voiced any concerns about the cemetery to me. This might be perhaps because the people who engaged with my audio walks that day were people who had already engaged with Abney Park on their own initiative. However, there is an impression in the wider community that ‘anything goes’ at Abney Park; that it is a bit of a ‘naughty’ place without any rules. What has been surprising to learn since joining the Abney Park Trust Events Committee—and frustrating from an events-promotion point of view—is that it is just this impression people have of Abney Park that counterintuitively makes for highly sensitive community engagement planning on the part of the Abney Park Trust in their ongoing desire to showcase Abney Park as a family-friendly community space. From my experience, Abney Park has the strictest guidelines out of the Magnificent Seven for community events within the cemetery. Some examples of this include changes to a poster created to promote a theatrical production of Grimm's Fairy Tales in the cemetery in 2017. The poster showed characters from the fairy tales against a background of dark woodland; the theatre
company was told to change the background to some rather incongruous-looking bright summer flowers in an effort to not make the cemetery seem ‘scary’. For an event that I organised for Halloween 2017, which was a candlelit string quartet with mulled wine, we could not use the word ‘Halloween’ in promotional materials for fear the community would think that was insensitive, so we changed the name to ‘An All Hallows’ Evening String Quartet’. For the last three years, Abney Park has also declined involvement with the popular annual London Month of the Dead events and lecture series (whose sold-out events bring in revenue for Brompton Cemetery and Kensal Green Cemetery every year), for fear of giving the ‘wrong’ impression to the community that Abney Park is being in anyway irreverent towards their deceased residents. After some persuasion about the respectful treatment of the cemetery space by the London Month of the Dead team (with whom I am friends) the Abney Park Trust acquiesced and offered a guided tour as part of the London Month of the Dead 2017 calendar, however they posted no promotion of this onsite.

With their tightly managed public image in mind, it is with even more appreciation that I thank the Abney Park Trust for welcoming my Abney Rambles project into the Abney Park public identity. I was asked to represent the Abney Park Trust in the inaugural opening of the newly stabilised centre chapel to the public on October 7, 2017, where I gave a presentation of both the Abney Unearthed project and my research on Victorian garden cemeteries, titled ‘Abney Unearthed: An Evening Lecture on the Victorian Garden Cemetery’. Although the chapel is now only ‘stabilised’ and

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9 Abney Unearthed is a volunteer-based two-year project funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and Hackney Council to remap Abney Park cemetery, collating the various nineteenth and twentieth century grave plot maps with the graves and stone monuments as they are actually laid out in the cemetery, creating one coherent online map and searchable database of every burial within Abney Park cemetery.
not ‘refurbished’ (it is safe to enter, but has no windows or doors and the flooring is dirt and gravel) the opening of the chapel was an important milestone for Abney Park, after having stood as a burnt ruin for forty years. The chapel is the oldest surviving nondenominational chapel in Europe and is the only surviving public building designed by William Hosking, at that time considered a controversial architect. Hosking carefully planned the chapel to reflect a lack of bias towards any one Christian sect; it was not consecrated and functioned purely as a funerary chapel, not a place of worship. Its ten-part rose stained glass window paid homage to Abney Park’s impressive rosarium (that at the time rivalled Kew Gardens), planted by famed horticulturalists, Loddiges, which contained over 1000 varieties of rose.\textsuperscript{10} Sadly, the beautiful windows were destroyed by vandalism, culminating in the chapel being burned into a ruin sometime in the years between 1974 and 1979. There are no records of when the chapel burned because those are the years that Abney Park cemetery went into administration. There was no management during this time, resulting in five years of uncontrolled vandalism and fire damage. Abney Park’s centre chapel is a Grade II listed building 'at risk' Category A by English Heritage. Winning the bid for the extensive stabilisation project from the Heritage Lottery Fund meant that the centre chapel can now be open to the public and put to use by the community. The only other building onsite that has been previously available for community events is an ageing trailer ‘classroom’ by the Egyptian gates entrance that has a very small capacity, whereas the centre chapel has a sixty-seat capacity. In January 2018, now that the chapel has been stabilised, the Abney Park Trust won the bid for the second stage of chapel project: refurbishment. This second-stage initiative will focus on adding doors and running electrics, and hopefully, if funding is sufficient, restoring the stained glass windows according to the

\textsuperscript{10} A full account of Abney Park’s horticultural history is given in Chapter Four.
original designs by John Hoskins. Finally, after forty years, Abney Park can offer a fully functioning community use space back to Stoke Newington.

Abney Park cemetery was not the only casualty of the mid-twentieth century. The era saw rampant decline in the upkeep of all of London’s Victorian garden cemeteries, culminating in the active destruction they suffered during the 1970s (Highgate Cemetery suffered a string of headline-grabbing mock-Satanic ritualised vandalism in the 1970s, including midnight hunts for the Highgate Vampire). After a decade of orgiastic wreckage unleashed on the Magnificent Seven, cemetery Friends groups developed and stepped in to save these garden cemeteries. Since the early 1980s, volunteers raised funds for sensitive refurbishment. While the rest of the Magnificent Seven have regained their status as respectable community heritage sites (with the most dramatic turnaround being Highgate Cemetery, which has restyled itself from the realm of Satanic Vampires to exclusivity and pricey admissions for the ‘Disneyland of Death’) — the reputation of Abney Park remains barely elevated by renovation. I learned a few interesting things from the Abney Park visitors who stopped by for a chat during my ‘Tea, Cake, and Audio Walks’ day, but one of my main takeaways was the majority of visitors did not feel a management presence in the park. They did not know about my audio walks, but more surprisingly, only a few had heard about the annual summer outdoor plays that are performed, or that there are monthly free guided tours, or that there are also woodworking and stone-carving workshops available onsite offered by local community groups hosted by the Abney Park Trust. Perhaps the feeling of Abney Park cemetery being a renegade place left to grow wild, housing daily drinkers and easy sex, comes from this lack of perceived management. Abney Park is actually quite strictly and carefully managed, but this presence is not felt by
visitors, so the impression people have of the cemetery is of an uninviting community space, where ‘anything goes’ because no one is watching the space or curating a welcoming presence.

While my audio walks do not serve to enhance managerial presence within the cemetery, what they do aim to accomplish is to open up the many sides of Abney Park for visitors to explore. Reconnecting with Abney Park as a key site for community heritage, and a unique and protected nature reserve, will hopefully show visitors that Abney Park is a multifaceted community space—and much more than just a ‘black sheep’.

Dark Tourism and Thanatourism: Methods and Motivations for Engaging with Cemetery Space

In a contemporary secular age where ordinary death is hidden behind medical and professional facades, yet extraordinary death is recreated for popular consumption, dark tourism plays a potential mediating role between life and death. As such, the dead have always been guardians of the living, either through religious rituals or by secular myth making. To that end, dark tourism in death-sequestered secular societies, and the range of mediating relationships of mortality that may transpire, plays a unique role in our existential saliency. (Stone, 2012, 1584)

The motivations for visiting a cemetery are varied, with these motivations varying between visitors, but also between cemeteries—what they mean for local communities and where they sit within wider cultural associations. Cemetery researcher Rachel Raine found that visitors to cemeteries can be divided into four main categories: Devotion: mourners, pilgrims; Experience: morbidly curious, thrillseekers; Discover: information seekers, hobbyists; Incidental: sightseers, retreaters, passive recreationists. (Raine, 2013) With these
diverse motivations represented across visitors to cemetery spaces, there is no one type of visitor, or one type of visit. However, in an effort to find structure and methodologies for studying engagement with this type of heritage, taxonomy of study is helpful. In this section, I analyse theories of ‘dark tourism’ and ‘thanatourism’, putting forth definitions of both that have informed my audio walking practice, and how research into these areas illustrates the way in which community relationships with cemeteries are evolving.

The practice of travellers and local visitors seeking out and engaging with macabre sites has a long history. However, specific terminology forming an academic discourse regarding the motivations for, and methods of, engaging with these sites was not developed until the early 1990s, with the coining of the terms ‘dark tourism’ and ‘thanatourism’. Visiting places associated with death is not a new phenomenon. Previous to defining it as a separate research area, academics had produced a substantial body of research into tourism at battlefields and sites associated with war. According to Philip Stone, “the touristic packaging of death has long been a theme of the morbid gaze. For instance, visits to morgues in nineteenth-century Paris is without parallel in the Victorian imagination. [...] Nineteenth-century ‘dark tourism’, consumed within the confines of Romanticism, added to the propensity for secular death-related travel and which continues today”. (Stone, 2012, 1565) It was during the early 1990s, however, that a number of scholars drew attention to the increasingly close relationship between tourism and places of death or suffering. According to Duncan Light, in his survey on the development of dark tourism and thanatourism research, from what began as a “rather offbeat curiosity”, the study of the relationship between tourism and death has developed into a mainstream research topic, with a steady increase in papers in peer-reviewed
journals on dark tourism, and to a lesser extent thanatourism, with a “particular growth of interest since 2011”. (Light, 2017, 276)

During the past thirty years of study, the terms ‘dark tourism’ and ‘thanatourism’ have been often used interchangeably within academic discourse. Despite the slipperiness of these relatively new terms, the definitions that I have found most useful in discerning the difference between these two areas of study are that ‘dark tourism’ “tends to be an umbrella term for any form of tourism that is somehow related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy, or crime” and focuses on events of the late twentieth century; whereas ‘thanatourism’ “is a more specific concept and is about long-standing practices of travel motivated by a specific desire for an encounter with death”. (Light, 2017, 277) With its focus on death specifically, thanatourism can be considered as a subset of dark tourism, which represents a much wider genre.

Dark tourism tends to focus on arguments that are underpinned with the assumption that any site associated with death is essentially ‘dark’—whereas Seaton’s account of thanatourism was behavioural rather than essentialist and he focused on the motivations of visitors who go to places associated with death. (Light, 2017, 278)

This focus on visitor behaviour, rather than inherent ‘essentialist’ aspects of place, is key to my study of Abney Park cemetery as a community space. While there are many aspects of Abney Park that manifest in its various layers of heritage, it is the encounters visitors have with the space of the cemetery—and my goal of expanding the possibilities of visitor perception of the space through encounters mediated by my audio walking practice—that is the focus of my research. The long history of thanatourism is motivated more by thoughts of memento mori than a contemporary thrill-seeking dark
tourism activity. My audio walking practice in Abney Park is a thanatouristic practice. While aspects of dark tourism are explored in tandem throughout this section, my audio walking practice shares heritage with the softer, more introspective thanatouristic practice than the sometimes more contentious contemporary dark tourism attractions. All four of my audio walks engage with the space of Abney Park in different ways, however each of the aspects that I uncover and explore through my audio walking practice engage with Abney Park as a site of contemplation. The cemetery is a site of grief and past pain, however all of the deaths that are represented in Abney Park happened elsewhere. The cemetery is a site of death, however not a site of suffering. There is nothing of the horrific that happened within its garden walls; and as such a visit to Abney Park would fall under ‘grey tourism’ rather than darkest tourism. The main theory within thanatourism that my audio walking practice engages with is ‘mortality mediation’. This theory is a model of consuming dark tourism proposed by dark tourism researchers Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley, which draws upon notions of thanatopsis and the sociology of death to understand visits to places associated with death and suffering:

The mortality mediation thesis argues that death has been increasingly sequestered (removed from the public sphere) in contemporary societies leaving individuals isolated from the realities of death. Moreover, a decline in organised religion has removed the overarching framework through which individuals and societies come to terms with death and dying. Consequently individuals may feel a sense of anxiety and vulnerability about death in ways that can challenge senses of self. (Light, 2017, 288)
While ‘real’ death has been sequestered away from public view in contemporary Western societies\textsuperscript{11}, media representations of death within popular culture—be that sensationalised portrayals of celebrity death, or vivid fictional portrayals in films and television—‘absent death’ has become present in new mediated ways, with popular culture taking the place of religion as a way of understanding and coming to terms with death and dying. Within Western secular societies that are often labelled death-denying, ordinary death has largely been removed from the public realm and replaced with media-inspired cultural representations of what Stone terms ‘Significant Other Death’.

Dark tourism can be considered as a way in which death is represented and recreated in contemporary societies. Visiting places associated with death enables individuals to encounter and negotiate death in situations that do not involve terror and dread. It presents settings for individuals to satisfy their curiosity and fascination about death and confront the inevitability of their own death through gazing upon the death of Significant Others. Dark tourism, then, is one of a number of contemporary institutions that mediate between (or connect) the living and the dead. (Light, 2017, 289)

My audio walking practice addresses the personal issues of facing mortality, and the spaces that represent mortality, in a new way by reframing these thoughts as an embodied practice within a community (civic) space. As Stone notes: “Despite the obvious sociocultural differences of experiencing death (of others) and managing dying (of the self), the filtering process of modern-day mortality in many contemporary Western societies has been removed from civic discourse and public space and relocated as a

\textsuperscript{11} An analysis of the sequestration of death away from the public sphere in contemporary Western societies, and the resulting culture of death denial, is further analysed in Chapter Six.
personal issue.” (Stone, 2012, 1571) By taking the personal experience of confronting these issues, and setting the process within community space, my audio walking practice is presented as a bridge between the private and the communal. Within a cemetery space that is largely used and celebrated as a secular space, the sense of individual experiences that are had within Abney Park define the space more than communal experiences (such as religious services); independent secular experiences can fragment the meaning of death for individuals: “Dark tourism further individualises and fragments the meaning of death. In doing so, dark tourism adds to the multiplicity of reflexive cultural divides that the Self may draw upon to contemplate mortality.” (Stone, 2012, 1574) My audio walking practice adds one more layer to this fracturing process, in that my practice is meant for individual consumption, for visitors to come to Abney Park on their own to have private experiences and reflections on mortality that are not (necessarily) shared with others.

Thanatourism presents opportunities for a reconceptualisation of death and mortality into forms that provide a buffer against existential terror and dread. “Contemplating death through a dark tourism lens allows tourists to view their own death as distant, unrelated to the dark tourism product that they consume, and with a hope that their own death will be a good Romantic death and their lives will be meaningful and ontologically secure.” (Stone, 2012, 1573) Visits to sites of burial have long been framed as places for this type of contemplation; and the Arcadian setting of garden cemeteries softens thoughts of mortality by putting forth the image of a ‘good Romantic death’. My audio walking practice aims to take the contemplative setting of a cemetery landscape and open up different modes of contemplation through its layers of heritage that I explore with my audio walks.
In 1993, Chris Rojek explored the growing popularity of visits to graves and places associated with the death of celebrities and labelled these sites ‘black spots’. “[Rojek] interpreted this trend from the perspective of postmodernism, particularly the role of spectacle and the blurring of distinctions between real and imaginary.” (Light, 2017, 278) However, the contention that dark tourism is a contemporary phenomenon rooted in the postmodern world focuses specifically on those aspects of dark tourism that fall under that purview. Many researchers have found that interest in visiting sites of death and suffering has increased in recent decades, however this appears to be of more sensationalist engagement with recent sites of tragedy—with its accompanying poor-taste selfies in our Instagram age—however, this form of dark tourism bears little to no resemblance to the motivations that drive thanatourism. And while a recent spike in the visibility of dark tourism can be seen, dark tourism largely “is regarded as a contemporary phenomenon, whereas thanatourism has a much longer historical lineage”. (Light, 2017, 279) Regarding our death-denying age, theology and religious studies professor Reverend Robert Pagliari finds that death denial is not binary—but is instead on an increasing distancing scale:

Pagliari laments that while the collective Self has been death-denying due to attitudes towards medicine and mortality, society has subtly transgressed into a death-defying era, where emphasis on health education carry promises of corporal extension. Pagliari also argues contemporary society is now entering a death-deriding age, where death is mocked, commercialised, and sold for the sake of art and entertainment. Moreover, religious institutions, which once formed sacred canopies of mortality guidance, have largely been negated for the secular self. (Stone, 2012, 1566, emphasis in original)
This ‘death-deriding’ age manifests in some of the more criticised dark tourism practices of commercialising sites of suffering. The resulting seeming callousness of visitors to such sites comes from the appearance of visitors not empathising with these sites as places of real suffering, but instead focusing on the ‘fame’ of a catastrophe, such as bus tours and selfie stops through the radioactive ghost towns surrounding Fukushima.\(^{12}\) Despite recent extreme examples of dark tourism, mediations between visitors and death have been happening in a variety of contexts throughout history, merely shifting between mediums of portrayal. Depictions of death and dying in Romantic art and literature “provided a thanatopic mediation of death and, subsequently, (re)created death and the dead for (re)evaluation and contemplation for the living. In turn, the tourism of the day reflected these contemplative aspects and involved visits to sites of fatality depictd by the Romantic Movement.” (Stone, 2012, 1566) Encounters with death themes represented in the Romantic Movement were precursors and inspiration for the development of Victorian garden cemeteries. The mortality mediation offered by these cemeteries has a long-standing association with a desire for encounters with death. As such, cemeteries are key sites for thanatouristic practice and research.\(^{13}\)

**Thanatourism in Cemeteries**

The vast majority of current research into dark tourism focuses on contemporary or twentieth-century sites of tragedy. In comparison, very little research has been done into the ‘softer’ or ‘grey’ tourism practices of visiting cemeteries. In her research into the dark tourist

\(^{12}\) This practice was investigated and broadcast on the television programme ‘Dark Tourist’, Season 1, Episode 2, ‘Japan’, first aired 20 July, 2018.

\(^{13}\) How the Romantic Movement led to concepts of Arcadia and the eventual development of Victorian garden cemeteries is analysed in Chapter Six.
spectrum, Rachel Raine focuses specifically on visitors to cemeteries. During the summer of 2010, Raine interviewed visitors to three British burial grounds: Bunhill Fields, London; St Margaret’s Graveyard, Whitby; and Weaste Cemetery, Salford. Visitors were interviewed to discover their motives for visiting these cemeteries, with the aim of formulating a typography of dark tourists engaging with these sites from the data collected. Raine selected these three cemeteries to represent different types of burial sites in terms of type, size, and geographical location. She undertook this research in an endeavour to fill the current gap in academic discourse regarding visitor motivations to visit burial sites.

Raine divides the cemetery visitors she interviewed for her research into four visitor categories, beginning with the ‘darkest’ and most reverent and engaged with the sites of burial, to the ‘lightest’, and least engaged with the space: Devotion: mourners, pilgrims; Experience: morbidly curious, thrillseekers; Discover: information seekers, hobbyists; Incidental: sightseers, retreaters, passive recreationists. Referencing Christoph Hennig, Raine notes that “one specific function of tourism is to allow the physical enactment of myths”. Hennig proposes five myths that are significant to tourism: nature; the noble savage; art; individual freedom and self-realisation; equality and paradise. Raine focuses on the relationship between the ‘art’ myth and dark tourism, specifically visits to burial grounds:

[The art] myth relates to the appeal of visiting original works of art as opposed to copies; this can also refer to visiting artists’ birthplaces, childhood residences, and sites of death. [...] Hennig’s theory suggests that visitation to burial sites ‘allows the ritual enactment of mythological ideas’. Visitors may therefore be motivated to visit burial sites because they can perform physical activities within fantasy worlds. (Raine, 2013, 245)
My audio walking practice extends this idea of ‘performing physical activities within fantasy worlds’ beyond the realm of fantasy that manifests out of closeness with a particular buried resident in a cemetery (or proximity to fictional characters by walking through iconic sites) to create audio worlds that invite an extended fantasy interacting with the space of Abney Park in a multiplicity of fantasies (borderland worlds), all layered within the space of the cemetery.

St Mary’s Graveyard in Whitby has iconic status within gothic culture because of its relation to and mention in the novel Dracula. With regards to enacting the mythology of a place, Raine interviewed one visitor to St Mary’s Graveyard, which she designated as a secular ‘pilgrim’—who while not having religious, but rather secular motivations for her pilgrimage, nevertheless felt a ‘magical attraction’ and experienced an ‘undefined force’ radiating from the site.

[The visitor stated she was] motivated to visit the site because of her interest in Dracula and that the graveyard was mentioned in the novel. She also expressed genuine interest in gothic culture and described various ghost stories related to the site and the area. This visitor identified as a pilgrim in the sense that she loves the novel and the film Dracula, and the graveyard offers a physical place associated with the story where she can perform the myth as described by Hennig. (Raine, 2013, 249)

Further unpacking the four cemetery visitor types Raine outlines in her study, ‘Experience’ visitors come to cemeteries to confront and ‘experience’ death; ‘Discover’ visitors come to cemeteries to discover local history, using the cemetery space as an outdoor archive and repository of stories and local lore; ‘Retreaters’, however, enjoy cemeteries as peaceful gardens and community spaces, almost seeming to ignore the burial aspect of the cemetery space. “Passive
recreationists are the lightest category of all because they do not engage with the site in any way and use the site purely as an access route, or an open space in which to walk. This theme is the most significant of the four themes as it includes the largest number of people interviewed and observed." (Raine, 2013, 151) These findings are in keeping with the Abney Park Trust Community Use Survey conducted by Hackney Council in 2017, which was presented earlier in this chapter. Raine notes that the category ‘retreaters’ has not been identified in any previous literature on dark tourism, despite this category being the most common demographic of visitors to these sites. Victorian garden cemeteries were developed during an era of limited public green space, before the development of the prolific public parks that communities enjoy today. However, despite the seeming ubiquity of public green spaces available today, few of these community sites offer the lush wooded landscapes of garden cemetery nature reserves or the quiet that cemeteries offer. The findings of both the Abney Park Trust Community Use Survey and Raine’s interview research supports the view that many people desire to visit burial grounds as a space to relax and enjoy nature. “Burial sites not only offer contact with nature, but also provide places to contemplate man’s mortality and confront symbols of death, such as headstones. [...] Burial grounds provide visual symbols that man will one day become nature again once he returns to the ground after death; this is the ultimate enactment of Hennig’s myth.” (Raine, 2013, 253) As addressed in the previous section (and further analysed in Chapter Six) Raine also finds that sequestration of death away from public space has led to Western society’s changing relationship with death:

Society no longer has a lens through which to make sense of life and death, as old religious meta-narratives and public death rituals no longer play such significant roles. The reason this shift has taken place is due to the
medicalisation of death, as death is taken away from the public and placed into the private medical sphere where it then becomes invisible. As death is removed from the public sphere, representations of death are now communicated to us via the media. (Raine, 2013, 244)

This contemporary blurring of lines between ‘real’ death and ‘media’ death is manifest in the experience offered by Hollywood Forever Cemetery, located in Los Angeles, California. A visit to Hollywood Forever is a very different cemetery experience than that offered by Abney Park. Both its location in Los Angeles, and its deceased resident demographic consisting of movie stars and other figures of popular culture, Hollywood Forever is positioned as a tourist site as part of its reason for being. However, in addition to housing the remains of celebrities, the cemetery houses over 80,000 graves of other Los Angelenos—the vast majority of whom are not famous—and new burials are taking place up into present day, and beyond. Hollywood Forever is a working cemetery; so while it could be designated as a tourist site of more obvious description than Abney Park cemetery, contemporary mourners are a defining visitor demographic in Hollywood Forever, whilst in Abney Park they are more rare.

In her study of the tension between solemnity and celebration in Hollywood Forever Cemetery as community space, Linda Levitt found the expected mixed attitudes towards its mixed use. Hollywood Forever executive vice president Bill Obrock enjoys his cemetery’s unusual reputation: “Los Angeles Magazine declares us one of the 101 sexiest places in L.A. And a lot of people do find cemeteries to be a little spooky, but it’s also an extremely exciting and mysterious place, and it’s a very sexy place.” (Levitt, 2012, 20) While the Trustees of Abney Park cemetery work hard to counteract its reputation as a cruising site, Hollywood Forever appears to
embrace this perception—although ‘sexiness’ in this context suggests
a reference to the overall aura of celebrity and glamour about the
cemetery, not necessarily actual sexual acts taking place on site. As
Levitt finds, “that a cemetery is considered an exciting and romantic
location in the popular discourse immediately raises questions about
the use of this space beyond typical expectations of mourning and
paying tribute to loved ones interred there”. (Levitt, 2012, 20) The
stated motivations by Hollywood Forever’s managers for renovating
and relaunching the cemetery, after it fell into administration in the
late 1990s, were not only to restore the cemetery itself, but to actually
transform the death care industry by encouraging a cemetery
environment of celebrating life, rather than mourning death. As tools
for encouraging this cultural shift, they invite the use of their
cemetery as leisure space. This is where the seemingly divergent
cultural spaces of Hollywood Forever and Abney Park converge: the
stated development goals of both cemeteries are towards a
promotion of the site as community space. To detractors of this
melting of mourning and recreation, Levitt points out that some
members of the community may not be aware that tourists who
enjoy Hollywood forever as a community space are actually reviving
a social practice that began in the 1830s in America:

This period marks the establishment of the
Mount Auburn Cemetery in Boston and similar
‘rural cemeteries’ that used it as a model.
Established on the outskirts of urban areas,
rural cemeteries provided a refuge of nature for
city dwellers. The rural cemetery also became
leisure space, a location for strolling along
shaded paths and picnicking before the
development of city parks allowed citizens to
escape the noise and chaos of urban life.
Cemeteries provided the primary space
available for enjoying the outdoors in an urban
context. (Levitt, 2012, 21)
The development in the United States of ‘rural cemeteries’ in the 1830s mirrors the development of ‘garden cemeteries’ in 1830s Britain. The forming of these garden/rural cemeteries as sites of community leisure were key to their developmental purpose.\textsuperscript{14} Despite a long history of cemeteries as mixed-use community space, that predates the more recent designation of cemeteries as strictly single-purpose places of quiet mourning, some detractors of mixed use believe that cemeteries should serve this one purpose and are not receptive to other views on varied use of cemetery space.

In July 2018, Abney Park cemetery promoted an event on their Facebook page that sparked an online debate vocalising the conflicting concerns and desires for what Abney Park should represent for visitors. The event was for a comedic cellist who was to perform in the centre chapel. For her act, the performer mixed original songs and stories to the accompaniment of her cello for her family-friendly cabaret-style show. Detracting commenters on the event announcement felt that a comedic show in the centre chapel was disrespectful. I joined the conversation on the page, to learn what aspect of the performance was ‘disrespectful’. I posted to the conversation as an individual, not representing Abney Park, although I do represent them in certain instances as they have granted me access to their social media accounts. I found in this instance that it would be better to present my own views as a member of the public, as I did not want to speak on behalf of the Trust in a potentially contentious conversation. I learned from this online debate that it was the ‘mortuary’ aspect of the centre chapel that they felt rendered the building unfit for comedy. I pointed out to the woman who originally complained that the chapel had stood as a burnt ruin for forty years before it was opened only just the year previously as a community space, after funds were awarded for

\textsuperscript{14} A full analysis of the development of Victorian garden cemeteries in Britain is presented in Chapter Six.
renovation for this very purpose. I also added that the rest of the Magnificent Seven garden cemeteries hold many upbeat and inclusive community events in their chapels to bring in much-needed revenue and remain vibrant spaces for ongoing engagement, especially Brompton and Kensal Green cemeteries, who open their doors to a wide variety of performers and community groups. To this, another detractor mentioned that people would not wish comedic events to be held in Abney Park had they family buried in the cemetery, that Abney Park is a cemetery and should be treated like one. The manager of another Victorian garden cemetery in Bristol joined the discussion to add that she thought it was wonderful to reuse abandoned and neglected spaces whilst earning money to improve and upkeep their historic buildings. As most Victorian cemeteries do not receive government funding or money from new burials, she felt the argument was clear that such spaces need to bring in new audiences to keep the sites open for use and that it is a model that has worked very successfully at her cemetery. Another visitor to Abney Park weighed in on the side of supporting the varied events held on site. He commented that events like this happen at almost every one of the larger cemeteries in London, and that he did not understand why Abney Park was singled out for these disparaging comments, as there is a popular precedent. He found that events chosen for Abney Park are respectfully done, enjoyed by the community, and provide vital revenue, which is needed to help preserve Abney. Yet another visitor commented that while he does not personally enjoy all of the events on offer at Abney Park, he too has family buried there and does not feel that any of the events are disrespectful.

This spontaneous social media debate that took place for one event in Abney Park’s calendar offered interesting insight into how community users of the space feel about its mixed use. There were
two detractors, three supporters (not counting myself), and Abney Park opted to not add to the discussion at all, wishing to stay out of online debates. One of the Abney Park Trustees did message me privately, however, to thank me for my comments in defence of their events calendar. The feeling shared by the two detractors in this particular conversation was that a comedic event in the chapel was disrespectful to the site as a ‘mortuary chapel’ and this type of use negated Abney Park as a place of memorial. People who support these events do not feel that negation of memorial is a goal, but rather that mixed use works alongside the memorial aspect of Abney Park. The debate is not between ‘for memorial’ and ‘against memorial’; supporters instead hold the view that events space and memorial space are not mutually exclusive.

What is perplexing about this short online debate is that the event in question could be considered quite tame in contrast to the reputation Abney Park already holds for many visitors as a drinking, drugs, and sexual encounters space. Because the centre chapel has stood as a ruin for forty years—only opening to the public in 2017—the historic ‘use’ of the centre chapel up until very recently has been for vandalism and various illicit acts, not mortuary use. It would seem from its long history as derelict space that the ‘sanctity’ of the centre chapel has been vastly improved by renovation and opening for community events. The centre chapel was founded as nondenominational and is unconsecrated. As such, secular events taking place in the chapel are not disrespectful towards its meaning for the community, but rather represent its meaning as being reclaimed from derelict space to community space. In regards to the specific event in question that sparked this debate, the tone of the cellist’s performance was comedic, family-friendly, and the comedy was not related to the cemetery space, nor did it mock the dead. The
space of the chapel was used merely as an atmospheric backdrop for a secular community event.

Events that take place in Hollywood Forever, however, do not merely use the backdrop of the cemetery as community space, but engage directly with it as a cemetery—sometimes to challenge and even mock community experience of Hollywood Forever as memorial space. In 2001, the thrash metal band Slayer held a listening party for their album *God Hates Us All* at Hollywood Forever. Slayer’s lyrics are overtly and deliberately anti-Christian, with the choice to hold their album listening party in a space of mourning one of irony and overt mockery. In 2007, the heavy metal band Korn began their Family Values Tour with an after-hours party in the Cathedral Mausoleum at Hollywood Forever.

Using the cemetery as social space raises questions about protocol. If these are unconventional practices, what are the guidelines for appropriate behaviour? How should tourists and visitors behave in the company of mourners? Who decides what constitutes respect for the living and the dead? Should dark tourism sites be used only for a moral or social lesson? If tourists spend time at the Gettysburg Battlefield, for example, critics argue that visitors should mourn the loss of some 50,000 Civil War soldiers in a violent and bloody battle rather than cavort the ground searching for evidence of ghosts. The implication of such perspectives is that those who celebrate life without the guise of solemnity typically associated with the cemetery intend to disrespect the dead. In popular discourse and within the death care industry, many reflect the sentiments of those who find such activities in the cemetery irreverent. (Levitt, 2012, 22)

The issue of who creates guidelines of ‘appropriate behaviour’ is a debate with which many committees working for a community space
would be familiar. At Hollywood Forever, they host an annual outdoor film festival, Cinespia, screening films on the wall of their large Cathedral Mausoleum. Debates around the use of the Cathedral Mausoleum for Cinespia are similar to debates around the use of Abney Park’s centre chapel. “Many who feel comfortable with the presentation of a play or performance of classical music at a cemetery disapprove of Cinespia: showing films in the cemetery and projecting them on the mausoleum wall seems disrespectful towards the dead. In some regard, this disapproval veils a highbrow/lowlbrow critique, namely that ‘culture’ can find its place on sacred ground but popular culture cannot.” (Levitt, 2012, 23) And this is where lines of tension are drawn most starkly for community use of cemeteries: while the cemetery can be seen as a community space by most visitors, even mourners, the lines of appropriate use are divided by solemnity versus celebration. Community use of cemeteries has evolved over many centuries and has not remained a static relationship. Shifting cultural attitudes have formed what are ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ activities within cemetery space.

Through the course of my research, I have found an inverse relationship between the time since a death or tragedy and the ‘darkness’ of the space. Visiting sites of tragedy that have taken place many centuries ago do not usually fall under the heading of ‘dark tourism’—for example, a visit to the Tower of London is not considered ‘dark tourism’, merely ‘tourism’. Whereas a bus tour through Fukushima is very dark indeed. Following that line of reasoning, Victorian garden cemeteries, which are largely closed to new burial, fall under ‘grey’ tourism sites, and are usually more receptive to fluidity of community use within the space. Hollywood Forever, however, is a contemporary working cemetery that hosts what could be considered very irreverent events by the standards of even a very liberal-minded cemetery heritage manager.
No matter where members of the community fall on the scale of perception of ‘darkness’ or ‘lightness’ of their cemetery visits, or their views on solemnity versus celebration within burial sites, contemporary changing attitudes towards death and dying—and our cultural desire for secular mortality mediation—means mixed use of cemeteries as community space are likely to become more commonplace.

Conclusion

Through the crafting of my audio walking practice within Abney Park cemetery, I have explored how symbolism, layers of memory, contemporaneous multiple becomings, and anachronistic space might be understood. Through the medium of audio walks, I offer visitors to Abney Park a way to access the multiple layers of meaning that can be experienced in the cemetery. The audio walks are positioned as doors of perception into each of the borderland worlds that coexist within Abney Park. Each audio walk aims to enrich a visit to the cemetery by peeking under the surface of a casual visit and contemporary observation of the space. The doors of perception that I offer visitors to Abney Park are opened by an act of active imagination. In the context of a walking artist creating audio walks, there must be an acknowledgment of the imaginative nature of my chosen mode of opening the diverse histories and meanings of Abney Park that I share with the visitor. Much of this type of experience within an historic site is achieved by an interweaving of the historic with the imaginative in my audio walks. However, all excavations through history require us to position facts on an imaginative scaffolding of our own construction. This active experience is part of the appreciation, and indeed creation, of contemporaneous multiple becomings within anachronistic space:
the act of engaging with the past through creative imaginings while simultaneously, through that act, creating a new history as visitors walk through the cemetery retracing paths through the space.

The walks I have crafted offer doors into possible borderland worlds, each weaving together a possible trajectory within the space and forming a narrative based on a nexus of throwntogetherness offered by specific points along the walk. The concepts of symbolisation, layers of memory, contemporaneous multiple becomings, and anachronistic space form the foundation on which I have built my walks. Woven together, each of these concepts has contributed to building a depth of understanding regarding the tapestry of perceptual possibilities within a cemetery space. The kaleidoscopic potentials of place within Abney Park provide fertile ground for a walking practice, and add richness to the visitor experience. With the disembodied audio format, I aim for the listening walker to experience a fragmentation of temporal awareness. Listening to a voice already from the past (whether that be a remove of weeks, or years) brings to the fore thoughts of the cemetery at once moving forward and backward through time. Audio journeys through the past, that are explored in the midst of present-day sights alongside anachronistic gravestones, are an artistic culmination of Abney Park’s multiple becoming—the full richness of which I have endeavoured to offer the listening walker as they move through the space.

The layers of meaning within Abney Park cemetery that I have discovered through my practice offer up diverse perspectives on how to engage with the heritage of the cemetery. This diversity of meaning within the space itself is met with diversity of motivations for a cemetery visit brought to the experience by diverse visitors. As cemeteries today embrace a variety of perspectives and voices within
their walls, and mixed use brings a sense of community relevance to what is arguably a ‘dying’ mode of body disposal and grief, the transformation of the perception of cemeteries from morbid and solemn to celebratory and inclusive will evolve as society's sensibilities towards death evolve—and cemeteries will undergo a cultural perception shift once again.

My methodology for engaging the local community of Stoke Newington with Abney Park cemetery was to create an audio walking practice. I created the series of Abney Rambles audio walks with the aim of facilitating community engagement with the cemetery by offering audio walking journeys presented as four different perspectives on the space. Through my research into the literary heritage of Stoke Newington, I discovered the work of Arthur Machen, whose short story *N* most informed the method by which I frame my discoveries of layered meanings in Abney Park and conceive of these layers as operating within the same ‘space’ as one another, but not the same ‘place’.

Following on from the concepts of temporality presented in this chapter, the following chapter situates my walking practice within the wider field of literary walking heritage and psychogeography. I unpack my reading of Machen’s *N* in relation to my methodological practice and situate my audio walking practice within a literary heritage genealogy of Stoke Newington.
CHAPTER THREE

Psychogeography and Literary Occult Heritage in Stoke Newington

Introduction

If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.
—William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 1793

It is possible, just dimly possible, that the real pattern and scheme of life is not in the least apparent on the outward surface of things, which is the world of common sense, and rationalism, and reasoned deductions; but rather lurks, half hidden, only apparent in certain rare lights, and then only to the prepared eye; a secret pattern, an ornament which seems to have but little relation or none at all to the obvious scheme of the universe.
(Machen, 1924, 21)

When I began crafting my walking practice in Abney Park cemetery, the first step in this research journey was to define where my work would sit within the field of walking practice. The scope and breadth of walking practitioners whose work could have been instructive source material are far too numerous for the purview of this research. In order to refine the focus on whose work would best inform my walking practice, I began with my site of practice: Abney Park cemetery. My audio walks are first and foremost grounded in their location. My walks cannot take place anywhere else without losing their resonance and meaning. My walking practice delves into Abney Park’s layers of meaning and heritage, translating my research of these layers through my subjective experience of the
space, then records and documents these findings into audio experiences to be taken by visitors to the cemetery. This methodology for crafting a walking practice is rooted in psychogeography. Through my research into the buried Hackney Brook river, Iain Sinclair’s (2013) investigations into London’s buried rivers, and literary allusions to a mysterious ‘otherworldly’ aspect to Stoke Newington, my psychogeographical research lead me to literary heritage research linking Stoke Newington and North London back through Arthur Machen, William Blake, and Thomas De Quincey. It is through this psychogeographical research into this literary heritage that my audio walking practice became grounded in occult psychogeography. Defining a term as mercurial as psychogeography is a difficult endeavour. As psychogeographic researcher Merlin Coverley notes, defining the term resists “definition through a shifting series of interwoven themes and [is] constantly being reshaped by its practitioners”. (Coverley, 2006, 9) Founding member of Situationist International Guy Debord himself said that the adjective ‘psychogeographic’ preserves a “rather amusing vagueness”. (McDonough, 2009, 59) However, I will attempt over the course of this chapter to offer a clear theoretical lineage that has led to the definitions of psychogeography, and specifically occult psychogeography, which have informed walking practice. I offer definitions of psychogeography by Guy Debord alongside analysis of situationist practice by Tom McDonough (2009), Frances Stracey (2014), and Simon Sadler (1998). From this historical foregrounding, I explore how occult psychogeography became a spinoff subgenre of situationist psychogeography and where my walking practice sits within the wider field of psychogeography.

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15 From his essays presented and analysed in a variety of sources as outlined in this section.
The first section offers historical background into how the concept for psychogeography was borne out of the politically motivated interventions in social space enacted by the Situationists. I follow the development of psychogeography from its beginnings as a method of enacting a revolutionary politics aimed at overturning capitalism, to its later fracturing into subgenres, such as occult psychogeography, which shared an ideology more akin to the automatisms of the surrealists that the Situationist International sought to break away from.

The next section delves into the literary heritage of occult psychogeography, beginning with the walking and writing of William Blake, dubbed the ‘Godfather of Psychogeography’ by Iain Sinclair. I explore how Blake’s ideas of North London/South London duality that fuelled his physical upsets when he visited North London, and his ‘visions’ when he visited South London, set up an atmosphere of mystery and something ‘not quite right’ about North London.

I then bring my investigation into occult psychogeography into the twentieth century with the otherworldliness explored by Arthur Machen in his story about the worlds hidden behind our ‘everyday’ world that his character Arnold explores in *N*, as he investigates where to find ‘doors of perception’ into the ‘borderland worlds’ he has heard tell of in Stoke Newington.

From this literary occult background that introduces my specific site of practice, Stoke Newington, I then bring these investigations into contemporary Stoke Newington by way of Iain Sinclair and Geoff Nicholson’s walks through the neighbourhood and specifically Abney Park cemetery. I conclude with how the occult literary heritage of Stoke Newington informed my audio walking practice by
lending a rich otherworldly atmosphere on which to draw for my audio walks—an atmosphere set up by William Blake, Edgar Allan Poe, and Arthur Machen—and how Machen’s ideas of ‘doors of perception’ into ‘borderland worlds’ specifically informed my methodology, becoming the conceptual framework of my audio walking practice. The layers of heritage that I have uncovered through my research into Abney Park cemetery (nonhuman heritage, ‘earth mystery’, outdoor archive, mourning practices) all exist together, layered on top of and next to each other as disparate borderland worlds. Each can be accessed by opening a door of perception—my audio walks are positioned as a method for opening these doors. In the next section, I introduce the historical background and definitions of psychogeography that have informed the process of crafting my audio walking practice.

**Psychogeography**

Psychogeography, as a tool for constructing situations for social action, is a concept that developed within the Situationist International (SI) group and political movement of the 1950s. The SI was formed in 1957, when three independently operating movements came together for a meeting in the small Italian town of Cosio d’Arroscia. This first meeting of the SI brought together under one organisation the Lettrist International (Guy Dubord); the Movement for Imaginist Bauhaus (Asger Jorn); and the London Psychogeographical Association (Ralph Rumney). The common goal that these groups shared, and they came together to ratify, was “a commitment to a total transformation of life that informed their rejection of all artists and movements that only offered new artistic forms and media without equal commitment to a revolutionary politics aimed at overturning capitalism”. (Stracey, 2014, 2) They called themselves ‘Situationists’ because their method for creating
this art that would overturn capitalism was to construct ‘situations’—a situation being defined as any planned, group disruption of the normalised daily ‘spectacle’ of consumption.

While sharing ideologies with Marxism, the SI were searching for a new diagnostic terminology for their times, focusing on the developed world’s burgeoning post-war consumer societies of the late 1950s and 1960s. In the introduction to Debord’s 1967 *The Society of the Spectacle*, he paraphrases Marx: “The whole of life of those societies in which the modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. All that was directly lived has become mere representation.” (Stracey, 2014, 5)

Here, Marx’s ‘commodities’ is substituted for Debord’s ‘spectacles’. The shift in focus from commodities to spectacles is a reaction to the shift in society from mere consumption to the use of images to mediate consumption: in other words, advertising. With images beginning to mediate the relationship between goods and consumer, what was for sale took on a new larger-than-life aspect. The growing ubiquity of advertising in personal lives and social space not only promoted the goods for sale, but also marketed an attendant fantasy, typically an aspirant ‘lifestyle’. Today, ‘lifestyle’ advertising is not considered aberrant; in fact, it has its own advertising specialism known as ‘brand advertising’, where consumers are served advertisements that show the lifestyle attendant with their products—sometimes in lieu of products themselves—and the exciting, successful life you could have if you buy their brand. The SI sought to disrupt the homogenisation of society by changing aspirational consumerism. “If the spectacle was not just an image or a collection of images, but a social relationship between people that is mediated by images, then challenging the spectacle must involve an alternative form of social relationship.” (Stracey, 2014, 7) In order to challenge the normalisation of these images in the habits of
everyday life, the SI sought to take familiar habituated ‘spectacles’, then lead them astray. To this end, the SI developed a range of interventionist tactics,

referred to as ‘operatives’ or ‘perspectives’ that were parts of, but not in and of themselves, constructed situations. These included ‘unitary urbanism’ stemming from acoustic, spatial, architectural, gestural, poetic, and cinematic actions realised at the level of the urban environment. This led in turn to the practice of ‘psychogeography’, defined as the study of the specific effects and affects of the altered or détourned urban geographies or environments, consciously organised or not, on the emotions or behaviours of individual participants. (Stracey, 2014, 9)

Before the formation of SI, Debord had already laid the foundations for psychogeographic practice two years previously in 1955:

Psychogeography will aim to study the precise laws and specific effects of the geographic milieu, consciously planned or not, acting direction on the affective comportment of individuals. The adjective psychogeographic, preserving a rather amusing vagueness, can thus be applied to the data ascertained through this type of investigation, to the effects of their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or any conduct that seems to arise from that same spirit of discovery. (McDonough, 2009, 59)

Psychogeographic practice was one aspect of the various modes employed by the SI for spatial intervention; its implementation was enacted within the wider practice of dérive. “Dévive is defined as a technique of swift passage through environments. The concept of dérive is indissolubly linked with the recognition of the effects of a psychogeographic nature, and with the assertion of a ludic-constructive comportment, which contrasts on all points with the
classical ideas of the journey or the stroll.” (McDonough, 2009, 78)

The practice of the dérive or ‘drift’, was conceived as a mode of experimental behaviour linked to the conditions of modern, urban society. This practice consisted of traversing various urban environments, crossing boundaries between demographics tracing a transient passage through rapidly changing ambiances. The dérive was the first study of psychogeography and situationist psychology. The ephemeral and spontaneous nature of the drift made for a practice that could not be planned with a set outcome in advance. In the inaugural meeting of the SI, Debord stated:

“‘That which changes our way of seeing the street is more important than that which changes our way of seeing a painting.’ [...] The psychogeographic drift altered the Situationists’ perceptions of the street at the same time as it completed its taxonomy of the modern city. Psychogeography was playful, cheap, and populist, and artistic activity carried out in the everyday space of the street rather than the conventional art spaces of the gallery or theatre.” (Sadler, 1998, 69)

The SI’s set conditions for the group’s ‘constructed situations’ (which could include anything from the use of graffiti to create transitory décor, or rioting to engender new ways of experiencing the world) were that they were tactically deployed. “Constructed situations should be anti-hierarchical, non- or trans-disciplinary, amateurish or non-specialised, itinerant, ephemeral and, most importantly, collectively prepared or deployed.” (Stracey, 2014, 9)

Despite this rather straightforward-sounding directive of how to craft interventions in the name of SI, situationism slips away from easy definition as much as the psychogeography that was borne out of it. As Sadler observes:
The sooner that historians have completed the autopsy and preservation of situationism, the sooner others can make something new from its corpus. The air of mystique about situationism, now the reek of decay, has outlived its purpose, to the extent that it ever had one. One is not even meant to use the word ‘situationism’: ‘There is no such thing as situationism, which would mean a doctrine of interpretation of existing facts’, the Situationist journal *Internationale Situationiste* declared in its first edition. ‘The notion of situationism is obviously devised by anti-Situationists.’ (Sadler, 1998, 3)

Of course, Sadler continues, Situationists knew full well that there was such a thing as ‘situationism’. There has to be some way of verbally demarcating whatever it was that the Situationists thought they were doing by being Situationists. This denial of the very thing under discussion is echoed in psychogeographic theory. As the name implies, psychogeography attempts to combine subjective and objective modes of study. The starting point for the practice is an acknowledgement that the self cannot be fully separated from the environment; however, the resulting practice has to be relatable to more than one individual if it is to be a useful tool for rethinking environments.

As stated at the beginning of this section, the practices of the SI were to be a total rejection of “all artists and movements that only offered a new artistic forms and media without equal commitment to a revolutionary politics aimed at overturning capitalism”. (Stracey, 2014, 2) However, the SI journal *Potlatch* recommended sources for seeking the ‘sublime’<sup>16</sup>, a concept borne from Romantic era painting that aims to move the viewer to awe, melancholy, joy, or terror, and which eighteenth-century theorists had advocated as stimulants to...

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<sup>16</sup>I discuss how the ‘sublime’ paintings of the eighteenth and nineteenth century inspired the Arcadian landscape and garden planning that directly informed Victorian garden cemeteries in Chapter Six.
reverie. This prompt by Potlatch towards seeking the sublime opens the SI’s psychogeographic investigations into a more introspective practice. Seeking the sublime in the eighteenth century was undertaken with the intention to overcome the excessively ordered universe envisioned by the Enlightenment. As Sadler notes, for the SI seeking the sublime could induce new flights of fancy in a mid-twentieth-century city shaped by modernism.

The eighteenth-century picturesque and sublime had paid homage to nature, depicting it as a force poised to subsume or overwhelm humanity, at odds with the pastoral vision of people at ease in an ideal landscape. By analogy, the situationist city was at odds with the Corbusian vision of people at ease in an ideal urban landscape, a place where the struggle with nature, with the body, with space, and with class had inexplicably come to an end. (Sadler, 1998, 77)

And while the prompt here is to seek the sublime in order to subvert Corbusian urban planning, the way in which these particular drifts or reveries could manifest themselves would be in the personal and subjective realm, not necessarily in outward political actions. This subjective practice that taps into feelings and spatial intuition seems to harken back more to the Lettrist surrealism that Debord rejected than to an artistic practice with a “commitment to a revolutionary politics aimed at overturning capitalism”. One of Debord’s priorities was to create distinctions between SI’s practice and its surrealist precedents. The ‘drifts’ of the surrealists, which they called ‘automatisms’, had, according to Debord, “an insufficient awareness of the limitations of chance, and of its inevitably reactionary use, condemned to a dismal failure the celebrated aimless ambulation attempted in 1923 by four surrealists, beginning in a town chosen by lot.” (Debord, 2004, 228-229) However, despite this cutting commentary, Debord did have some tolerance for surrealist
methods, according to Sadler he “was amused by a friend who had wandered through the Harz region of Germany while blindly following the directions of a map of London”. However though, overall, the SI found surrealist automatism to be “creatively and politically exhausted, a genre of ostentatious weirdness”. (Sadler, 1998, 78)

And it is interesting that this desire to break from ‘ostentatious weirdness’ to a practice grounded in revolutionary politics and the overturn of capitalism, would herald romantic writer Thomas De Quincey as a situationist hero. “Situationists had become alert to the possibilities of drifting into the ‘hidden city’ by reading De Quincey. Admittedly, the drama of his ‘drifts’ may have had something to do with the fact that De Quincey was tripping on opium, and the name of this drug, as well as those of marijuana and cannabis, hung in the air on the pages of Debord and Jorn’s Mémoires.” (Sadler, 1998, 84) As a launch pad for artistic inspiration, few acts could be more subjective than the taking of drugs. On the one hand, Debord—and by extension, the SI—proclaimed that working in a collective towards creating acts of subversion with political ends to be the driving purpose of their work. Then, on the other hand, there is this method employed of altered consciousness, which seeks to find meaning through altered perceptions of space—a practice that seems to have more in common with Machen and an occult analysis of environments that with proactive activism. The fracturing of SI practices into subgenres was a contributing factor in the eventual dissolution of the SI.

To give some background context to this tension between psychogeographic methods, Debord’s previous movement, and precursor to SI, Lettrist International, was formed as a break from avant-garde Lettrist surrealism. The Lettrists celebrated the surrealist
imagination, using the experience of the city to revolutionise consciousness of language. Letterist International wanted to flip that notion on its head, and use their experience of language as a way of revolutionising consciousness in the city. In 1950, a leading Lettrist Gabriel Pomerand published a pictographic book of the bohemian Left Bank neighbourhood Saint-Germain-des-Prés, which presented the famous intellectual haunt as “a labyrinth, where every chance encounter with a word, a picture, a building, or a person seethes with legend and possibility, opening a secret utopia accessible to anyone capable of recognising it”. (Sadler, 1998, 95-96) This description could just as aptly describe the world as seen by Machen. The links back between the surrealism of the Lettrist movement of the 1940s follows directly through to the occult psychogeography subgenre that began in the 1960s. This surrealist imagination was rejected by SI, however with the introduction of psychogeographic practice into the tool kit for constructing situations, they opened the door for subjectivity, for personal exploration and, ultimately, to the occult psychogeography they ultimately rejected:

The Debordist element reacted quickly against those situationists for whom the mysteries of the drift were going beyond cool reasoning and heading down the same magic road as post-war Bertonist surrealism. In 1956 Potlatch attacked a ‘faction, comprising sometimes the most advanced in the search for a new behaviour’, which found itself ‘drawn to the taste of the unknown, mystery at all cost’ and ‘to the divers occult conclusions which border on theosophy’. The article’s tone became menacing: ‘The analysis and representation of this tendency eventually brought us to put an end to the relative political freedom which we had up till now mutually accorded ourselves’. (Sadler, 1998, 80)

If it can be said that a group is defined by whom it excludes, the SI seemed to be crafting a definition of their practice by expulsion of
what it was not. “The open-endedness of situationism might have been its greatest strength, but this was belied by the Situationist International’s posturing as a tightly organised revolutionary group, characterised less by free play than by a pattern of expulsions.” (Sadler, 1998, 158) And occult psychogeographic explorations had no place within the SI. The SI’s objectives were to use psychogeography as a tool to politicise public space by breaking existing spatial norms by, and for, the collective and thereby create a new politicised space. Occult psychogeography, on the other hand, seeks to find the breaks inherent in already existing space that can be discovered and experienced by the individual. Both practices of psychogeography herald William Blake and Thomas De Quincey as a progenitor, however it should be noted that De Quincey walked alone. As Debord wrote in 1956, “one may take a dérive alone, but everything indicates that the most fruitful numerical allocation consists of several small groups of two or three people”. (McDonough, 2009, 81)

While distinctions can be drawn between SI psychogeography and occult psychogeography, there are aspects of SI psychogeography that share an occult psychogeographic ideology. SI member Ivan Chtcheglov created a new map of Paris by pasting pieces of a world map onto the plan for the city’s Métro. The meaning that McDonough finds in this practice is that “one needn’t have recourse to imperial exotica, this modest collage suggests, for otherness to be found right around the corner, or at most a subway ride away”. (McDonough, 2009, 10) This ‘otherness’ could reference the otherness of immigrant cultures and shifting demographics in a densely populated city; or the otherness of layers of meaning, secret utopias, and borderland worlds to be discovered within urban space—or both. In reference to this shifting otherness within space, Debord wrote in 1955:

The abrupt change of environment in a street, within the space of a few meters; the obvious
division of a city into zones of distinct psychic atmospheres; the strongly sloping contour (with no relation to the unevenness of the terrain) that aimless walks must follow; the appealing or repellent nature of certain places—all this seems to be neglected. [...] The variety of possible combinations of environments, analogous to the dissolution of pure chemical bodies in an infinite number of mixtures, entails feelings as differentiated and as complex as those provoked by any form of theatre. (McDonough, 2009, 61)

It is through personal navigation of these differentiated and complex feelings that members of the SI found various methods of subjective practice that did not adhere to Debord’s stated manifesto. The diverse subgenres of psychogeographic practice that have evolved over the sixty years since the dissolution of the SI have resulted in a widely diverse walking practice ideology that escapes easy definition. As tricky as the origins of the term are to pin down, it is with coining the term ‘psychogeography’ that subsequent codified systems of thought for walking originated. While people had been walking and writing, and writing about walking, and walking for political or aesthetic purposes from time immemorial, one legacy of the SI, and Debord, is the coining of the term ‘psychogeography’. Schools of theory began to develop around and in reaction to this centralising concept. As Geoff Nicholson observes: “For millennia people found it perfectly easy to walk, and to think and write about walking, without having the sense that they were doing anything remotely ‘psychogeographical’.” (Nicholson, 2008, 48) However, once the concept was introduced into the activist imagination and academic discourse, it took hold as a methodology.

The automatisms of the early twentieth-century surrealists, with their seemingly random walking choices, and attendant amorphous findings, who crafted their walking practice based on chance, saw a
resurgence in late-twentieth century walking practice with psychogeographers creating varied conceits for beginning a ‘drift’ with no set plan or ideology in place. As with Phil Smith’s explorations within his ‘mythogeography’ and Geoff Nicholson’s anti-psychogeographic (yet psychogeographic) Martini Walk—much of these practices shift between and defy definitions. In a transcribed email-exchange interview between Geoff Nicholson and Will Self in The Believer magazine in 2009, Nicholson asks: “I remember an interview of yours where somebody asks you what’s the difference between a psychogeographic act and a stunt. And you reply ‘I’m too old for stunts.’” (Nicholson and Self, 2009, 69) This question is preceded by Nicholson describing his walk through the streets of Manhattan’s West Village, tracing the outline of a martini glass, stopping into bars to have martinis along the route until he found his ‘stunt’ was more absurd the more he drank, not less so. Self continues: “As to the gestural—yes, I am too old for walking lobsters on a leash through the Tuileries, or negotiating Florence by dice, or finding my way around Berlin using a map of Hartford, Connecticut.” (Nicholson and Self, 2009, 69) From the perspectives of Nicholson and Self within this interview, along with Alastair Bonnett’s declaration in Off the Map where he suggests that “there has never been a practice in the UK worthy of being called psychogeographic (other than perhaps as a literary practice)” (Smith, 2015, 923) there seems to be a high level of self-proclaimed absurdity within the discipline. Not to mention that using a map of Hartford, Connecticut to navigate Berlin is a spatial intervention that mimics the automatisms of the early twentieth century surrealists. It is here that we see the concept behind psychogeographic practice begin to loop back on itself as a temporal Ouroboros spanning the twentieth century. It feeds on its own lack of clear definition by redefining itself with every new meal it makes of its tail. This lack of clear definition does not mean that these practitioners do not take their
work seriously. In fact, it is a mark of how seriously they do take this work that the definition of what encompasses psychogeographic practice appears to be constantly in question within the psychogeographical community. As Self continues in his interview with Nicholson:

I also agree with you as to the sense of purposelessness engendered by these gestural walks—or stunts. But, I ask you, might the need to feel our peregrinations have a purpose be part of our problem? In other words: should we perhaps not simply accept that all we are doing is going for a walk? (Nicholson and Self, 2009, 69)

In wishing to break from the umbrella term of ‘psychogeography’ and free the practice into just ‘going for a walk’, walking practice would dissolve back into what the concept of the dérive was originally formed to contrast against; which, as stated previously, was that it was to be “indissolubly linked with the recognition of the effects of a psychogeographic nature, and with the assertion of a ludic-constructive comportment, which contrasts on all points with the classical ideas of the journey or the stroll.” (McDonough, 2009, 78)

As with the early splintered fracturing of the SI, thus too continued this fracturing of psychogeography as the practitioners who worked within it embraced some aspects and rejected others as suited their own walking practice and political ideologies. Merlin Coverley asserts that psychogeography was eventually discarded as a term by Debord due to a ‘vagueness of definition’ that became apparent when his followers returned from the field having attempted to put theory to practice to rather scattered results. “The meagre results of prolonged theorising reveal such a paucity of useful material that it is barely surprising that psychogeography fell from favour.”
Debord presented the situationist maps of Paris and the theory of the dérive to ratify SI group behaviour around specific tasks and objectives while codifying various psychogeographic techniques. The result of which was basically an organised spontaneity, which was “something of an oddity, and it certainly didn’t collate much real data. [...] In fairness, psychogeographers recognised that theirs was a necessarily inexact science, dealing with imprecise data”. (Sadler, 1998, 78-79) It was perhaps due to this vagueness that Debord did not mention psychogeography in his 1967 theoretical statement Society of the Spectacle. However, Coverley stands by the label ‘psychogeography’ for a walking practice:

Against all the odds, psychogeography has escaped from its expected fate as a forgotten footnote to an obscure movement, and has instead been reinvented as a shorthand for a number of practices, literary, political, and artistic, which concern themselves both with the rediscovery of those previously overlooked margins of the city and with an antiquarian desire to unearth the more occluded aspects of local history. The result has been a curious blend of walking and writing, in which London has been represented in a way that Debord and his fellow Situationists would surely never have envisaged. (Coverley, 2008, 110)

The ever-changing connections between theories and groups (and breaks between groups and spin-off groups) under the broad concept of psychogeography make for a practice that is difficult to clearly define. However, it is this embrace of ideological diversity and constant reinvention that is the key to the practice’s longevity. Filmmaker Patrick Keiller noted in an interview in 2009 with Steven Hanson, that once divorced from its political roots, it is unclear what role psychogeography can usefully perform:
The Situationists saw their explorations at least partly as a preliminary to the production of some kind of new space, but in 1990s London, they seemed to have become an end in themselves, so that ‘psychogeography’ led not to avant-garde architecture such as Constant’s ‘New Babylon’, but to, say, the *Time Out Book of London Walks*. (Hanson, 2004, 14)

For Coverley, this shows a paradox shared by psychogeography and the occult, “that by celebrating that which has been hidden, the spotlight of popular recognition must inevitably diminish as well as illuminate”. (Coverley, 2008, 114-115) This shift from the political roots of the Situationists to concepts of the literary occult is the genealogy of walking heritage that has led to my mode of walking practice.

Given the numerous questions posed by psychogeographic practitioners, and diversity within the practice as to answers to these questions—down to the merit of the questions themselves—situating where my audio walking practice sits within psychogeography is itself a question that slides through various possible descriptions. My walking practice has been most informed by the literary heritage of occult psychogeography; and as my audio walking practice is situated within a cemetery landscape, and deals with mourning practices, archiving of the buried dead, hidden networks, and animistic folklore, the answer to a methodological description of this rather occult and ‘hidden world’ of borderlands aspect of my walks positions my practice within the purview of occult psychogeography. The following section focuses specifically on defining occult psychogeography through its literary sources, in William Blake and Arthur Machen, and how this subgenre of psychogeography has informed my audio walking practice.
Literary Occult Psychogeography: Defining the Genre

You infiltrate zones of covert narrative, the undescribed, the unwritten, the unrecorded. The parts of Hackney and Stoke Newington that Machen touches on in his influential tale, \textit{N}. The story works so well because it echoes Edgar Allan Poe’s \textit{William Wilson} as well as anticipating works from the period of the psychogeographers. You move through unfamiliar streets in a way that you can only do once. This is not an uncommon London experience. (Sinclair, 2016, 172)

In this section, I will address the aspects of psychogeography that have informed my walking practice within Abney Park cemetery. The psychogeographic practitioners on which I will focus for this inquiry are the urban drifts and definitions of occult psychogeography of Phil Smith, Alastair Bonnett, and Will Self, and the walks of Iain Sinclair and Geoff Nicholson in Hackney, Stoke Newington, and Abney Park cemetery. The practices within psychogeography that sit alongside the walks I have crafted encompass occult psychogeography, with some crossover into urban ruins walks in decaying space. As defined by Phil Smith, occult psychogeography is the:

\begin{quote}
...presence in psychogeography of occult arts, whether in actual practice or (more usually) metaphor [...] a mystical and poetic conjuring of local esoterica within an original soundscape. [...] Such acts/events fall comfortably within a British neo-romantic tradition almost personified by Arthur Machen. (Smith, 2010, 110)
\end{quote}

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, Machen wrote a short story on occultist themes set in Stoke Newington titled \textit{N}. Stoke Newington, and Abney Park cemetery in particular, has inspired a variety of writers with its air of mysticism, which have informed my
walking practice, and which Geoff Nicholson and Iain Sinclair touch upon in the documentation of their walks through Abney Park cemetery, which is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Occult psychogeography grew out of a literary analysis of the ley-lines and hidden patterns of a half-invented mysticism—which is a very different ideological heritage than that of the anti-capitalist political interventions of Situationist International. The occult method of psychogeographic practice was an internal process of discovery and analysis of space, rather than an external movement towards social change; the patterns studied and the worlds behind our everyday world explored were hidden, rather than the overt social ubiquity of oppressive pro-consumerist images (‘spectacles’) of capitalist culture. Occult psychogeography is personal in its analysis, and the artistic works it pays homage to can border on madness (or a flirtation with the appearance of madness). Perhaps it was the manifestations of drug use, in the case of Thomas De Quincey, and solitary wanderings, as with Arthur Machen, that created a fracture of perception and the feeling of existing in a liminal space between two worlds that defines their walking practices. Situationist psychogeography is first predicated on its communal aspect: all constructed situations should be “itinerant, ephemeral and, most importantly, collectively prepared and deployed” (Stracey, 2017, 9), whereas occult psychogeography is predicated on a solitary practice.

And it is with this solitary practice that the subjectivity of psychogeography—the ‘psycho’ to the ‘geo’—comes to the fore. The otherworldliness explored by literary occult walking writers was not merely theoretical—brought on by opium, in the case of Thomas De Quincey, and a likely undiagnosed mental condition on the case of William Blake—however, it created a template nonetheless for future walking writers to view North London through the otherworldly
lens presented by these altered minds. This literary walking heritage is one of dualities: of the ‘everyday’ world and the unseen world just behind it; of waking and dreaming; of the observable and the felt; of north and south. Viewing North London as part of this duality can be traced back to William Blake, who Sinclair and Coverley herald as the “Godfather of Psychogeography”. (Coverley, 2010, 30) In the next section, I trace occult psychogeography back to William Blake and explore how contemporary psychogeographic practitioners have been informed by his writings.

Southern Visions and Northern Torments: William Blake’s London

In Peter Ackroyd’s biography on William Blake, he notes that Blake’s first childhood memory is of solitary walking. This description of Blake presents him, long before his fame as a political poet and prolific writer, to be first of all a walker. Growing up in 1760s Soho, on Golden Square, Blake was raised in the crowds of London life. A keen observer, from a young age he would walk through his neighbourhood, expanding ever further out, observing people. According to Ackroyd, Blake had a very strong sense of place and all of his life he was profoundly and variously affected by specific areas of London. As Blake’s walks took him farther out into areas beyond central London, he noted a sense of peace when walking in the fields and orchards of South London, but heading up to North London was a source of anxiety. Shortly before his death, in a letter to painter and friend John Linnell, Blake said: “When I was young, Hampstead, Highgate, Hornsey, Muswell Hill, and even Islington and all places North of London always laid me up the day after and sometimes two or three days.” (Whittaker, 2006, 286)

Sinclair also notes how embedded a sense of place is for Blake. How he moves through London and conceives of himself in relation to the
city, how his personal physical body is directly affected by the ‘body’ of London. The emotional reactions Blake has towards place become physical manifestations that create their own internal map—North: discomfort, South: calm.

The topography of London becomes a kind of spiritual body and almost a physical body for [Blake]. The descriptions of Blake, from childhood, are of walking out, pushing out from the centre—because he was born in the centre, in Soho—moving into the folds of the surrounding hills. The hills to the south tend to be associated with visionary experience, trees of angels in Peckham Rye. The trips to the north were always painful. (Sinclair, 2011, 8)

Blake’s physical discomfort whenever visiting North London, but not South London, is rather inexplicable. It seems there is some anxiety that overtakes Blake when he walks in North London. This could be linked to ‘visions’ he reported having, such as his first vision of a tree filled with angels in Peckham Rye when walking as a child, and the subsequent ‘visions’ he wrote of since that first encounter. According to Ackroyd, looking at Blake’s accounts from a psychological perspective, these spontaneous vivid images would seem to imply Blake suffered from a clinical condition—he was seeing visions constantly “and this prevented him from getting on with his daily work”. (Ackroyd, 1995, 139) To be living in one world—the day-to-day common world of reality shared by the majority of people—but overlaid on this world to have fantastical visions of another realm, could very likely create a fracture of perception and the feeling of existing in a liminal space between two worlds. Blake also saw visions of the dead: his dead brother, the dead monarchs he had drawn at Westminster Abbey, the spirits and angels that he frequently sketched in his notebooks.
[Blake] saw them in front of him, neither real nor unreal. He knew precisely what he saw, and with the study of obstinacy of his London stock he refused to be bullied or dissuaded. Is it any wonder then that he should have turned to Swedenborg, or to occult literature and radical spiritual groups? They could at least account for the phenomena, even justify them, and free him from a taint of madness. (Ackroyd, 1995, 139)

William Blake read Gothic fiction, and it is also likely that he knew the Gothic dramas popular in London theatres in late eighteenth-century London. According to Ackroyd, there is little doubt that Blake was drawn to popular melodramas of the day and borrowed some of their tropes—the Gothic elements of villains and heroes placed in abstract landscapes. Both the Gothic genre and the writings of Blake share a sense of alienation or exclusion from the conventional literary establishment. Ackroyd draws connections between Blake’s interest in the Gothic genre to contemporary writers of fantasy literature, they too tend to be political radicals with an urban sensibility, not untouched by an interest in the occult. It is this interest in the occult that later walking artists use to link Blake’s writings to twentieth-century occult psychogeographical practice.

Iain Sinclair was personally affected by the writings of Blake, and describes coming upon a poetic passage that he says was to affect the rest of his life and writing. The poem was Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion, which struck Sinclair literally and metaphorically to be where he lived, for at the time Sinclair lived on Albion Drive in Hackney—which is situated in Blake’s dreaded North London. In Jerusalem, Sinclair found an interesting set of instructions for a particular kind of walk. He found that it was,

An eccentric journey laid out, a trajectory which is both spiritual and physical, and which
suggests that the eastern portion of the city, at that time, was pretty much somnolent and well off the official charts. If it was London, London had not yet claimed it. Mills would give way to foul industries. Blake’s lines spike the energy points, the place names, and make London into a stripped body. The litany of his mental journey is like acupuncture. (Sinclair, 2011, 18)

Commentators at the time, writing about Blake’s Jerusalem itinerary, questioned ‘Why does it go through Highgate’? And the reason Blake scholar John Adlard put forward was that Highgate was on the Great North Road—a road which subsequently moved east and up Stoke Newington and out through Tottenham. But, originally, it came over Highgate Hill. (Perhaps as a nod to the older cartography of the area, there is still today a short length of road less than half a mile long by Highgate Wood named ‘Great North Road’.) The road moved, so the naming of place carries with it the original meaning as it moves. However, it is no longer the same traceable track that Blake would’ve walked—nor would it have been even had the road stayed in one place, as London is ever-expanding and has swallowed up those once-remote regions long ago, making any attempt to follow Blake’s original walk an exercise of the imagination.

A walking trajectory taken from the past slips into different regions and meanings with the passage of time, and even slips into different places on the ground as it slips through different atmospheres through time. Although, whether travelling more westwardly or more east—the journey is still through the North: a region that was the most unsettling for Blake. Highgate Hill, over which the Great North Road of Blake’s time travelled, was the entrance to the city, and Blake himself says, repeatedly, that he is uncomfortable in this landscape. Highgate is also connected to various forms of belief in Druidic sites, according to Sinclair, that there are triangulations of energy across London, paths between important loci on Parliament
Hill, Penton Mound in Islington, and the Tot Hill in Westminster. “A
projected triangle enclosing so many of the ancient energy generators
in London. And Blake seems to have prefigured a lot of that too, but
in higher register.” (Sinclair, 2011, 20) The Penton Mound was (or is,
depending on your perspective) in Islington, where Pentonville Road
now climbs its way from Kings Cross towards Angel, walking two
miles north from Angel is Stoke Newington—the neighbourhood
where occult psychogeography resonates through its literary
heritage.

Iain Sinclair identifies Bunhill Fields, the
Dissenters burial ground, as the focal point of
his psychogeography of London, but surely it is
Stoke Newington, where Defoe was schooled at
the Dissenters Academy and which was later to
provide a home for Edgar Allan Poe, that must
take precedence as the city’s most resonant
psychogeographical location. (Coverley, 2006,
35)

When walking from the Kings Cross St Pancras and Gray’s Inn Road
side, Islington frames a sort of doorway marking out the barrier
between central London and the London of the North. (This is also
the trajectory from which Machen’s character Arnold approaches
Stoke Newington in N, which I will address later in this chapter.)

William Blake scholar Jason Whittaker remarks that, while Blake was
a great walker around London in his earlier days, starting the
journey at Highgate may have marked the northern limit of his
typical explorations. The hills of Highgate and Hampstead
effectively marked the periphery of much of London during the
eighteenth century. Given the open space, streams, and orchards that
once made up these suburbs, walks through these areas would have
been out in the open air and would seem conducive to good health—
not a weakening of it. Yet Blake claimed walking in these areas could
make him ill afterwards for up to three days. Whatever the reason,
psychosomatic or otherwise, North London affected Blake in negative ways. It is rather strange that he kept going back, if these persistent physical ailments always followed the journey. Perhaps there was something about the otherworldliness of North London that drew Blake to keep coming back towards the North, almost as a siren call.

The idea of retracing these roads in Blake’s or Machen’s steps results in a walk that is not truly tracing the walks taken by either man. It is merely an imaginative construct for another separate walk, one taken today. These tracings are merely a tool that can be used as a framing structure for a walk—not their walk. Sinclair finds that retracing Lambeth in search of Blake is an impossible act:

Ackroyd talks about Hercules Road where the Blakes lived in Lambeth, south of the river. [...] Well, I don’t know. I, in the course of things, have walked these streets and visited all the sites where Blake lived. But you can’t get at it by that method, you can’t reach back in any way. (Sinclair, 2011, 27-28)

Having myself retraced Charles Dickens’ route in Night Walks, walking for four hours in 2012 in the middle of the night from Bermondsey, over Waterloo Bridge, back to old Billingsgate Market (and finding nothing during this process of either Dickens or his revelations, merely a lot of late-night drinkers and an anticlimactic questioning of what any of it was all about) I agree that “you can’t reach back in that way”. However, Sinclair later contradicts himself on this point and goes back on this observation. Sinclair’s contradiction is a common occurrence in psychogeographical research. It follows its practitioners over switchbacks that can render the final analysis as paradoxical as the walks that they trace. Sinclair finds that you can get back to Thomas De Quincey and William Blake, because time comes in layers. He comments on the vortex of
energy he feels he is constantly sucked back into, and the way that he was sucked back into seeing the landscape through Blake, by seeing the connections between the Hawksmoor churches. Sinclair highlights a key difference between modern London and the city of Blake’s time: in the eighteenth century, London was not crosscut by tube lines and fast transit, people lived and died in their respective corners of the city, in sectioned-off almost tribal camps, each one defined by different smells, crafts associated with certain streets and courts, competing church bells. The whole map of energy for London of the eighteenth century was different than it is today with our (relative) homogenisation of place through transit lines and the commuter lifestyle.

We don’t have a way of reading things anymore. The pushing through of railways, the cutting of canals, the construction of virtual cities, all of this affects and remakes the topography of London. But you can get back. Time comes in layers, it’s plural, where place is singular. You can get back to De Quincey. You can go back to Blake. (Sinclair, 2011, 42)

It seems that Sinclair has two minds about the ability to ‘get back’ to another time, through the eyes of another writer, another walker. In literal ways, you can never retrace the experience of someone else, especially an experience from over two hundred years ago.

One way in which an audio walking practice deviates from a written walking practice is the audio of the walk freezes at least the audio aspect of that slice of time in aspic. However, as with written walking practice, if the walks are to be taken by listeners, as with readers, the future tracings will always be anachronistic. They can retrace but never completely recreate. There is an element of imagination and envisioning the supposed past with any process of creative archaeologies. Sinclair notes, referencing Ackroyd, there is
another way of seeing Blake as a Londoner, to flesh out a persuasive account of the poet’s life as chronological narrative: where he lived and how the books were written. “But there’s a process in there that involves risky leaps of imagination. A heritaged version of Blake that might, and perhaps should, have been.” (Sinclair, 2011, 27) From Blake’s vision of a layered London, Whittaker finds a direct through-line to Thomas De Quincey. “Sinclair has made it clear that if Blake was the godfather [of psychogeography], then De Quincey quickly adopted the child.” (Whittaker, 2006, 279) Sinclair compares his walking journey following the buried Hackney Brook as it progressed as if the river walk he crafted became intertwined with another notion, De Quincey’s Northwest Passage:

De Quincey contemplated a hidden path out of London, his own Northwest Passage. He would stumble across a particular street that let into another street. He would lose himself, trust in blind instinct. Walk by night. He would move through other dimensions. His concept was picked up by later authors like Arthur Machen, who decided that the promising area to explore was suburban Hackney, Stoke Newington. Which brings us back, very neatly, to Hackney Brook. And my feeling that we were escaping from the monolithic density of the new by tracking an old river. (Sinclair, 2013, 56-57)

Sinclair’s investigations to trace the unseen Hackney Brook echo my investigations in Abney Park cemetery. Both endeavours walk over buried ‘things’ always present underfoot, but unseen—buried river and buried bodies—that coalesce into one investigation of space in Abney Park cemetery, which houses both buried river and buried bodies. Subverted water becomes a dark metaphor, when seen through the explorations of Sinclair, and offers a hypothetical explanation for the otherworldly Stoke Newington presented in Arthur Machen’s N. Machen’s Stoke Newington of hidden worlds just out of view, of shifting perceptions into borderland worlds,
became the theoretical framework of my walking practice. Machen presents an image of Stoke Newington that starts as a search for the sublime golden ‘other’, and ends with a hint of the dark broken ‘other’—two sides of what one can expect to find when examining the otherworldly borderlands that are just past our perception. A literary heritage that leads to Machen’s presentation of Stoke Newington as an otherworldly other, can be traced back to William Blake’s inexplicable dread of North London, and Thomas De Quincey’s sublime ‘other’ of the Northwestern passage—both sides of North London’s possibility of otherworldly others: one a promise, one a threat.

**Literary Occult Psychogeography in the Twentieth Century**

Ian Sinclair notes that William Blake came back into fashion in the late 1960s in London, that the counterculture of the era found qualities in Blake that resonated with the political climate, and that artistic practitioners interacting with Blake had reinvented him in their own image. Blake was presented alongside contemporary poets such as William S. Burroughs and Michael Horovitz as sharing a certain similar ethos, despite the chasm of one hundred and fifty years between their eras and their very different writing styles. Allen Ginsberg stated repeatedly that he “owed his core vision to the voice of the Lambeth poet”. (Sinclair, 2011, 9) This is the time when the 1960s counterculture movement co-opted Watkins’ ley-lines for the ‘earth mystery’ school of thought, encompassing spiritual, quasi-religious, and pseudoscientific ideas. The correlations between Blake and ley-lines became rewritten and referenced to create a new association that, when looking at Watkins’ source material, does not actually correlate to what Watkins originally put forth ley-lines to
Watkins never attributed any supernatural significance to ley-lines. He believed that they were simply pathways that had been used for trade or ceremonial purposes. Nevertheless, the new meanings shared and used between writers and practitioners during the 1960s becomes the basis for a particular ‘earth mystery’ school of occult psychogeography that became validated as an established philosophy by its own self-referential continued use and development.

Whittaker, commenting on Blake’s influence on Iain Sinclair, finds that his psychogeographic practice becomes effective because it reconnects with, and further develops a form of English mysticism that was never entirely abolished:

[A]nd this is why, ultimately, it is Blake rather than Debord who is the godfather for Sinclair—but by ditching much of the New Age mumbo-jumbo of his earlier works Sinclair ironically moves much closer to the spirit of Blake by investing his texts with a little more hard-headed, Parisian scepticism. (Whittaker, 2006, 280)

What Whittaker discovers is not that Blake could be co-opted completely into an ‘Age of Aquarius’ mysticism, leaving nothing left but ‘New Age mumbo-jumbo’, as he calls it, but rather instead bringing the texts, notebooks, and thoughts of William Blake into a psychogeographic practice uses these themes without necessarily buying into the full spiritual rhetoric. In his essay Walking thro’ Eternity: Blake’s Psychogeography and Other Pedestrian Practices, Whittaker points out some of the eccentricities of psychogeographic practice as it transferred away from its Parisian routes in

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17 Alfred Watkins originated the idea of ley-lines and surveyed alignments, which articulated the prehistoric landscape of Britain, in his native Herefordshire in the 1920s. The idea has its fullest exposition in his book The Old Straight Track (1925) with photographs taken throughout his native Herefordshire.
Situationism into London during the 1970s. Referencing Phil Baker, who draws a direct correlation between Iain Sinclair as the “doorway into this unravelling of Blake’s golden thread through the Jerusalem-Babylon of London” (Whittaker, 2006, 279), he observes that Sinclair does not have his roots in the Situationists, but rather in the ‘earth mysteries’ school that experiences a resurgence in the 1960s—an era which Sinclair himself credits with having brought Blake’s work back into the collective counterculture social consciousness. It is not clear which came first—the era’s interest or Sinclair’s—however Sinclair explores his intrigue with Blake upon his return to London from Dublin in 1967. This ‘earth mysteries’ school emphasised “the land’s apparently ancient lore and sacred geometry as espoused in the theory of ley-lines proposed by Alfred Watkins in the 1920s”. (Whittaker, 2006, 279)

Conversely, according to Coverley, the theory of ley-lines is less a precursor to psychogeography than an indication of the “degree to which the latter has become entangled amidst a confusion of New Age and esoteric ideas, bearing little if any resemblance to Debord’s conception”. (Coverley, 2006, 51) Harkening back to the original publication of the theories of ley-lines put forward by Watkins, there was not a mystical element to his observations. Watkins’ merely notes routes, geometries, and lines of geologies without any underlying addition of spiritual meaning—all of this, according to Coverley, was imposed after the fact by an ‘Age of Aquarius’ mindset that chose to find meaning in ley-lines over and above what Watkins observed.

In the years since its early publication, Watkins’ work has been placed under the pseudoscientific umbrella of ‘earth mysteries’ school with its sponsorship of esoteric practices, from dowsing to geomancy, and ley-lines have found themselves mutated into lines of ‘force’
or ‘power’. The exact nature of this force of power remains unclear but this reworking of Watkins’ original notion mirrors similar representation of psychogeography itself, which has been similarly distanced from its origins. (Coverley, 2006, 53)

Ley-lines have taken on a depth of meaning beyond the observations that Watkins originally put forward; however that follows on from the alterations and fractured developments of psychogeography itself. In Lights Out for the Territory, Sinclair finds himself following what he terms a ‘schizogeography’—“bent ley-lines that exist only to assert some deranged territorial piracy” (Sinclair, 1997, 213). The term ‘ley-lines’ becomes stretched and co-opted from Watkins’ original observations about connections between English Neolithic burial mounds, which he presented and published in the 1920s (and about which archaeologists have since argued and refuted), to a resurgence in secondary meaning popularised in 1960s following the publication of John Mitchell’s book The View over Atlantis in 1969. This book merged Watkins’ ideas with mystical concepts not present in Watkins’ own work—and with it eclipsed Watkins’ original straightforward definition with the ‘earth mysteries’ definitions of ley-lines, which is the prevailing association referenced today.

Long before Watkins wrote of ley-lines, and the ‘Age of Aquarius’ infused them with ‘earth mystery’, William Blake was writing of hidden layers embedded in London, from his inexplicable unease felt in North London, to his sense of calm and visions of angels he experienced in South London. To Whittaker, Sinclair’s identification of Blake as a source of English psychogeography is a natural choice, as Blake was an astute recorder of what he saw and heard in London’s streets; and the specificity and attention to detail of Blake’s accounts of his contemporary everyday London life bring to mind direct connections with Situationism. Whittaker says of Blake that he...
was a “sacro-geometer and psycho-geomancer who created ludic and liminal spaces whereby new orders emerge out of games of disorder”. (Whittaker, 2006, 279) Blake was a political poet and walking observer of London crowds and spaces; and correlations could be drawn here between these aspects of Blake and the Situationists. However, the difference here lies in the Situationists interventions in society and space as they saw it within an observable plane towards tangible social action—whereas Blake documented society as he saw it as a spectrum of space, hidden layers, temporal shifts, visions, and meanings just out of reach. It is this exploration of hidden layers that resonates with my walking practice and is my chosen methodology for opening doors of perception to the coexisting layers of meaning within Abney Park cemetery.

In Phil Smith’s Walking’s New Movement, he describes a spectrum of occult psychogeography as one that consists on one end of the “softer, literary versions” popularised by Peter Ackroyd, and at the other end the London Psychogeographical Association’s “work of so elaborate and arcane a nature that it tests the most enthusiastic and esoterically informed reader [...] a labyrinthine text, encouraging a paranoid and hyper-exegetical reading sustaining multiple simultaneous connections.” (Smith, 2015, 608) From this dense, and rather unflattering, description, it appears Smith does not appreciate this form of occult psychogeography, and continues on to say that “many psychogeographies have, not surprisingly, resisted all such ‘occult’ fancies; in practice and in principle”. (Smith, 2015, 608) Smith’s walking practice focuses mainly around concepts of urban drift—a walking practice that embodies spontaneous movements and flow in an urban environment. My walking practice could be categorised as the opposite of this: a prescribed movement within a woodland landscape. However, upon closer inspection, my walks
started as drifts before I wrote them down and set them to prescribed paths; and my woodland landscape is set between two bustling streets of an urban environment. Smith’s drifts become prescribed when he writes them down and publishes them in books; his urban environments become wooded when he drifts into green space, or cemeteries. The definitions of one psychogeographic practice and another change shape when the practice moves between practitioner, space, documentation, and subsequent walkers who would take the walks at a later time based on the documentation. When through the course of his walking practice Phil Smith wanders into a Basingstoke cemetery, is he an occult psychogeographer? When my audio walks leave my listening walker at the main gates on Stoke Newington High Street, have I set them up for an urban drift? Is there value in drawing boxes around our diverse walking practices?

Alastair Bonnett posited in 2014 that maybe psychogeography had never existed in the UK at all. However, according to Smith, Bonnett had a pre-Off the Map view that psychogeography was a vibrant practice worth ‘defending’, insomuch that he felt occult psychogeography was “driving radicalism into an embrace with nostalgia and the left-reactionary tradition of ‘Merrie England’ to the detriment of historic authenticities” (Smith, 2015, 1008) This was done in two ways: through romanticising decay and abandoned landscapes and through a hostility to the destruction of old buildings. (And I must confess here to being guilty of both.) In his published research, Left in the Past, Bonnett presents a case study from 1996. This case study comprised a walk created by the Manchester Area Psychogeographic (MAP) and their interaction with an unnamed graveyard that is:

[M]agnificent in a way no well-kept churchyard could be. From the vandalised vaults to the used condoms, the overgrown lawns and trees,
the graffiti, the remnants of the Church and the weathered gargoyles, the atmosphere and emotional responses generated were absolutely overwhelming. And to think Aldi are going to destroy it and turn it into a buck cheap supermarket. (Bonnett, 2010, 163)

The question that arises from this study is: why is this ‘preservationism’? On one hand, the graveyard will have more historical value for the community than a newly built supermarket; however, the graveyard is already a ruin. Any preservation towards that effect would then have to restore the monuments and the cemetery to its original layout and condition. However, this is not apparently what MAP want. They wish to preserve the lack of preservation. The decrepitude itself is what the group wishes to protect.

If it seeks to ‘preserve’ anything it is the transforming and depredating rot and decay; something to throw in the face of [quoting Murray] ‘an antiquarian walk that breathes life into the dead, restores, by the power of imagination, a splendour that has departed, and where the mighty have been overthrown, raises them again to their seats’. MAP’s walk resists that kind of heritage ‘preservationalism’, a kind complemented in its homogenisation to ideology by Aldi’s wholesale destruction. Two sides of the same coin: one destroying the fabric, the other its radical meaning. It is clearly the radical meaning that MAP seeks to preserve; it means, an embodied immersion in rot, abjection and used condoms. (Smith, 2015 1008)

The issue brought up by Bonnett in relation to this case study is the apparent hostility towards new buildings from the demographic (i.e. psychogeographers) he considered to be avant-garde, transgressors of the conventional, and anti-‘English Heritage’. This study illustrates the subjective nature of psychogeography. Even when
undertaken by an activist group for conservation purposes, there can be contested purposes within a group, or between groups—or by outsiders who have a preconceived notion of what that group’s values should be. MAP appear, from this study, to be of a unified front regarding their version of preservationism of the heritage of this particular graveyard—their subjective view of an appropriate stasis for the site would be that of decrepitude. However, a cemetery preservation society would perhaps see the used condoms and cracked monuments as the true affront to preservation. It depends where on the timeline one wishes to freeze an historical site in aspic. Group dynamics can lend a sense of objectivity to a practice, however, ultimately, all practice is subjective. Nicholson finds that any exploration of London is by necessity subjective, and to have any meaning it has to be personalised:

Like every London walker, I realise that I’m always walking in somebody else’s footsteps. No part of London is genuinely unknown. However obscure or hidden the place and its history, somebody has already discovered it, walked it, staked a claim to it. Your own exploration therefore has to be personalised; you’re doing it for yourself, increasing your own store of particular knowledge, walking your own eccentric version of the city. (Nicholson, 2008, 41-42)

My audio walking practice and explorations of mourning, archival, and nonhuman heritages sit between these two views. While I appreciate the aesthetics of an ‘antiquarian walk’ and have written my audio walk Love, Wrath, Death, Lions to breathe “life into the dead, restored, by the power of imagination”, I have done so in a graveyard, which states from the outset the fallacy of this fantasy. The characters who narrate the walk are dead and know they are dead—and the listening walker knows that they are dead as well. I have woven the two drives together for the walk. The long-dead
people I have endeavoured to give ‘new life’ through imagination are given new life in the midst of “rot, abjection, and used condoms”—to which the landscape of Abney Park cemetery is no stranger. This form of occult psychogeography does not render these two preservationist drives mutually exclusive.

My walking practice in Abney Park cemetery is a solo practice—and the process of crafting the practice itself was subjective—however my practice is recorded and offered up for interpretation to any individual who seeks to participate in the audio recordings. Other than my preliminary research, my walks are mostly informed by the space and how I intuitively felt my audio walks needed to be arranged, and in what fashion—both physically mapping my walks in the space, but also sonically crafting the walk experience in terms of story and music. My walks are, ultimately, a personal interpretation and emotional expression of the site of Abney Park cemetery. According to Smith, this is actually the ‘business of psychogeography’:

The struggle for the subjective in psychogeography is not an added bonus or a self-indulgence allowable once the serious business is complete; it is the serious business. The architecture of multiple selves rather than the architecture of the streets is the key terrain of psychogeographical change; nothing changes until we first realise, each one of us, that we are alone and that nothing changes unless we allow that aloneness to change it. (Smith, 2015, 534)

But, more than all this, the main difference that Smith sees with regards to the direction of psychogeography today, is that many contemporary psychogeographers have been doing their work online, rarely (or sometimes never) visiting the site themselves and working on the ground and within the space for their craft. Whereas the ‘romantic occultists’, with their love of history, have kept ‘true’ to
the psychogeographic ethos of needing the ‘geo’ with the ‘psycho’. The original idea of dérive was not merely a compilation of computer data.

My audio walking practice has been validated by Smith here as a psychogeographic practice by virtue of it being grounded in location. My methodology is firmly rooted within Abney Park cemetery as my site of practice, with walking the paths, and tracing again, the only mode of creation. The ground itself, and not the internet, nor even maps (other than veteran tree lists that came with a map), were consulted for the creation of my walks. My chosen paths, while freeform in their creation to a certain extent, still uphold ‘traditional’ or ‘classic’ versions of history in the space and the heritage of a walking tour. The embodied adherence to site through walking practice is what Smith has found to be more prevalent in occult psychogeography than in the more digitised and theoretical approach to radical practices:

Though I have been embarrassed by the antiquarianism and credulity of much of what has passed for occult psychogeography, what I realise now, in a flash of understanding that cuts through the grey mire of defeatist leftist interpretation, is that it was these very obfuscations of occultism and the well-worn tracks of the uncanny (in a virtuous ambiguity that is as objective as it is human) that brought at least some dérivistes, including myself, into an immersed rather than a token practice. (Smith, 2015, 1027)

This observation was echoed by Geoff Nicholson, when he attended an annual psychogeography festival titled ‘Conflux’ in Brooklyn, New York (he did not state which year he attended). As a self-professed non-psychogeographer, Nicholson was somewhat sceptical going in regarding the conference. “I have never called
myself a psychogeographer, except ironically.” (Nicholson, 2008, 26) He does concede that he might be considered a ‘flâneur’, in the sense that the word means, “literally ‘stroller’ in French, though a term loaded down with all kinds of baggage”—but then hastens to add that even that looser definition is “me only up to a point”. (Nicholson, 2008, 26) After numerous caveats explaining how he is not a psychogeographer, Nicholson states his reason for attending a conference on psychogeography: he had been working with maps of New York City to craft a new walk, and having reached a creative block, he attended the conference in search of inspiration. Nicholson found instead exactly what Smith had found: that much of the work by these psychogeographic practitioners had been done online, there were websites and apps for smartphones; and, perhaps due to the rain, there was little actual walking offered for participants. Nicholson found instead that there were many lectures and computer interactions, which were to take the place of, and represent, the ‘real’ walking.

Nicholson laments the distancing these technologies place between the walkers and taking a walk. This form of mediation appears to take the place of actual interactions in space, as opposed to sitting alongside these interactions. I use technology as a tool with my walking practice, however everything available online is to further the experience of walking within the space of Abney Park cemetery. All four of my audio walks are available to stream or download from my website www.AbneyRambles.com, and there are links to other audio walks I have written in other spaces, blog posts I have written about walking in cemeteries, cemetery photography, and a live Twitter feed of cemetery news that I update regularly on my @AbneyRambles Twitter account. However all of these digital opportunities are presented as supporting data and theme-based content, which all supports the main purpose of the website: taking a
walk physically in Abney Park cemetery. I have written no smartphone apps or other online interfaces meant to interject themselves either between the walker and the cemetery or take the place of the cemetery for the walker. My website has allowed international listeners to enjoy my audio walks and have a glimpse of what to expect in the space, but the technological attributes of my walking practice are first and foremost tools for walking in Abney Park.

When Nicholson left the psychogeographic conference to trace his own martini-shaped walk in the West Village (mentioned in the interview with Will Self earlier in this chapter), instead of a ‘truer’ version of psychogeography, he found instead an epiphany of sorts contesting the basic tenets of psychogeography as a walking practice:

> It occurred to me, not exactly for the first time, that psychogeography didn’t have much to do with the actual experience of walking. It was a nice idea, a clever idea, an art project, a conceit, but it had very little to do with any real experience of walking. And it confirmed for me, what I’d really known all along, that walking isn’t much good as a theoretical experience. (Nicholson, 2010, 150)

Smith does not share Nicholson’s full rejection of theoretical psychogeography as a method of walking practice. However, he is concerned with what Iain Sinclair declared as the ‘franchising of psychogeography’, finding that through the dissolution of locus, some of the original spirit of the idea has been lost along the way:

> [Iain Sinclair] referred to the LPA’s [London Psychogeographical Association] ‘rebranding’ of psychogeography as a ‘franchise’ that ‘became a bit of a monster on the back of that’. That ‘monster’, now fallen and decomposing, provides us with a rich and dispersed ground,
long escaped from its franchise, and now open to all sorts of adventures, aesthetics and misuses as from the 1990s activity among these revolutionary groups diminished and interest in psychogeography passed to the arts community (where it remains vigorous). (Smith, 2015, 330)

Nicholson’s stance correlates with Sinclair’s and Smith’s assessment that psychogeography had become a franchise, or at least ubiquitous, when walking down Stoke Newington High Street in *Walking in Ruins* he meets a friend:

As I stood looking up at the bust of Poe, a friend of a friend happened to walk along the street, a former rock-group manager now a local librarian, and I explained what I was doing there. ‘Ah’, he said, unprompted, ‘you’re on a drift’. Thus the language of psychogeography spreads around the world like a contagion’ (Nicholson, 2013, 201)

Nicholson does not link his prodigious walking practice and literary documentation to the title ‘psychogeographer’—however, in action, method, and tone he could be defined as clearly one of their number.

The next section further explores the occult literary walking theme through Arthur Machen’s *N* and how Machen’s ideas of ‘doors of perception’ into ‘borderland worlds’ specifically informed my methodology, becoming the conceptual framework of my audio walking practice.

**The Story of N: Arthur Machen’s Stoke Newington**

After reading *N*, Machen’s short story about Stoke Newington, I began to investigate the space of Abney Park as a series of otherworldly, coexisting borderlands, with each layer of meaning within the cemetery sitting right on top of and next to each other,
identifiable with a simple shift in perception, opening a ‘door of perception’ to these other layers of meaning. My methodology for exploring these different layers of meaning is through an audio walking practice, offering four distinct invitations to visitors to Abney Park to slip between different perceptions tracing and tracing again the same space, sliding between the borderlands within Abney Park cemetery. Throughout this thesis, I refer to my four audio walks as ‘doors of perception’ and the different subject matters and areas studied within each audio walk as ‘borderlands’.

Arthur Machen was a writer on the fringes of the decadent movement in London at the end of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century. He achieved a fluctuating level of celebrity as the author of stories that mixed the paranormal with paganism, and autobiography with fiction. Many of Machen's stories are explorations of a world beyond the one that is revealed to us by our senses. Through Machen’s novels, and in his nonfiction works comprised of stream of consciousness notes on walking within London intermixed with autobiography, Machen writes of a hidden world behind the commonplace world we walk through day-to-day. The very accessibility of wonder behind and within the commonplace was his recurring area of philosophical study.

The focus of Machen’s work was not to explain the unknown or paranormal, or even put forward a set hypothesis or belief system: “I do my best to conquer this ‘scientific’ nonsense; and so, as I have noted, I try to reverence the signs, omens, messages that are delivered in queer ways and queer places, not in the least according to the plans laid down either by the theologians or men of science.” (Machen, 1924, 14) Instead, his writing explores borderlands that reside in the liminal areas of perception within everyday life, where signs and omens can be read by those who know how to look; where
the posing of the question can be more important than discovering the answer—exploration sitting comfortably (or uncomfortably) within uncertainty. As opposed to a dedicated study of the supernatural, Machen’s work was instead an imaginative unveiling of the mysterious qualities inherent in what we think of as our ‘everyday’ environment.

According to Merlin Coverley, London provided Machen with much more than merely inspiration for his writing. In essence, it provided him with a new means of experiencing environment.

Machen, like De Quincey before him, stands within a tradition of writer as walker. The Gothic image of the London streets in his books is informed as much by autobiography as it is by imagination and it is rooted in his wanderings through the city and it is here that Machen becomes a prototype for both the flâneur and for today’s breed of psychogeographer. (Coverley, 2006, 48-49)

Machen had a lifelong interest in esoteric traditions, for a time joining an occultist society along with the poet WB Yeats, and in later life he was increasingly drawn to a mystical version of Christianity. According to English political philosopher John Gray, Machen’s view of life is perhaps best presented in one of his most memorable short fictions, published in 1936 when he was seventy-three years old, entitled simply N. This short story discusses and takes place in Stoke Newington, and its themes of hidden mystical meanings and unseen layers inherent in space were a key inspiration for my Woodland Magick audio walk. Extrapolating the concept out further of hidden layers within Stoke Newington, and specifically within Abney Park cemetery, encompasses the themes of the other three audio walks in my practice. Each audio walk explores a ‘hidden’ layer of meaning within the cemetery. While Woodland Magick deals
with magical hidden themes more explicitly, the coexisting layers explored in the other three audio walks (woodland networks, outdoor archive, and mourning heritage) are each their own borderland worlds hidden just out of view during a casual observation of Abney Park. A door of perception needs to be opened to view these other coexisting worlds that are there just under the surface. My audio walking practice endeavours to open these doors of perception. As Machen posits, these half-hidden worlds can only been seen by the ‘prepared eye’, by someone who is open to seeing the secret patterns behind the obvious of day-to-day life:

It is possible, just dimly possible, that the real pattern and scheme of life is not in the least apparent on the outward surface of things, which is the world of common sense, and rationalism, and reasoned deductions; but rather lurks, half hidden, only apparent in certain rare lights, and then only to the prepared eye; a secret pattern, an ornament which seems to have but little relation or none at all to the obvious scheme of the universe. (Machen, 1924, 21)

My audio walking practice is an endeavour to engender in the listening walker this ‘prepared eye’ with which to see hidden worlds and to open different doors of perception. With regards to these hidden worlds existing in the commonplace, it is the very seeming ‘normality’ of Stoke Newington that lends it its secret garden aspect. To discover hidden layers in a suburb suggests that magical worlds are not the sole purview of Gothic towers or enchanted forests—that ‘magick’ could be everywhere. As Gray describes it:

It’s typical of Machen that he should have set a tale of magical transformation in the seemingly prosaic location of the London suburb of Stoke Newington. ‘He who adventures in London’, he wrote, ‘has a foretaste of infinity’. Machen viewed London as unknowable, and he
believed that if you walked around the city without any premeditated plan or direction you might stumble on regions that haven't been seen before or would be since. (Gray, 2013, BBC)

As Sinclair writes in Hackney, That Rose Red Empire, referencing N:

There is a magic place, close to Abney Park, which nobody can find twice. Believing this consoling fable, I suppose, makes Stoke Newington possible: the self-confident, self-contained inhabitants, their nice shops, their historic library and surveillance monitors. Living here allows you to peruse the dangerously vulgar streets of Lesser Hackney and to congratulate yourself on your good fortune. (Sinclair, 2009, 552)

This is an intriguing inversion of the idea of a fantastical hidden layer beneath the prosaic, to instead be that very fantastical possibility that allows the prosaic to feel ‘special’. My interpretation of Stoke Newington’s otherworldly aspect would not serve to make the area more ‘self-confident’, as Sinclair suggests, but instead more likely less so. Especially as the story of N begins with introducing the search for a magical and idyllic place of “deep hollows with streams running from the rocks; lawns all purple and gold with flowers, and golden lilies too, towering up into the trees, and mixing with the crimson of the flowers that hung from the boughs” (Machen, 2010, 9)—but ends on a very different note altogether, with pub gossip tales of a dangerous place to be avoided, not sought out. A place that used to centre around a ‘lunatic asylum’ that housed stories of sadness.

Machen wrote N in a format of stories within stories, the structure itself leading the reader down a rabbit hole of linear uncertainty. N begins with three old men sipping warm alcoholic punch by a fire,
reminiscing about their London haunts of days gone by, the streets that have stayed the same, the streets whose aspects have completely changed as shops closed and others opened, now comprised of new buildings and new smells; the London they know of is disappearing. The old men rarely venture out of central London and have seemingly limited curiosity outside of their extremely confined geographical sphere. One of the old men mentions that he grew up in Stoke Newington and the conversation turns to discuss a friend who (supposedly) knew all about Stoke Newington:

At least he ought to have known about it. He was a Poe enthusiast, and he wanted to find out whether the school where Poe boarded when he was a little boy was still standing. He went again and again; and the odd thing is that, in spite of his interest in the matter, he didn’t seem to know whether the school was still there, or whether he had seen it. [...] We couldn’t get a negative or a positive. He confessed that it was strange. [...] He talked like a man who had gone into the mist, and could not speak with any certainty of the shapes he had seen in it. (Machen, 2010, 8)

This story of a confused Poe enthusiast leads to discussion by another of the old men of a distant cousin coming up from the country who went to Stoke Newington and told a tale of the wondrous, otherworldly gardens near the (fictional) Canon’s Park. The man who was raised in Stoke Newington says there is no such place and the arguing continues. The third old man of the group witnessing this debate, Arnold, becomes the protagonist who we follow for the rest of N. At an undisclosed day after this discussion, intrigued by the mystery of Canon’s Park, Arnold picks up a (fictitious) book written by a Reverend Thomas Hampole titled

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18 There is a ‘Canons Park’ (no apostrophe) in London, however it is located in the borough of Harrow, 11 miles from Stoke Newington.
London Walk: Meditations in the Streets of the Metropolis\textsuperscript{19}, in which he describes the joy of discovering a familiar walk through the city as having an entirely new aspect when bathed in the first rays of dawn; that this effect of change is almost magical, and it is as if this well-known walk were beheld for the first time. Reverend Hampole goes on to say:

Some have declared that it lies within our own choice to gaze continually upon a world of equal or even greater wonder and beauty. It is said of these that the experiments of the alchemists of the Dark Ages are, in fact, related not to the transmutations of metals, but to the transmutations of the entire Universe. This method, or art, or science, or whatever we choose to call it (supposing it to exist, or to have ever existed), is simply concerned to restore the delights of the primal Paradise; to enable men, if they will, to inhabit a world of joy and splendour. It is perhaps possible that there is such an experiment, and that there are some who have made it. (Machen, 2010, 14)

What this concept implies is that living in ‘the delights of primal Paradise’ is the true golden alchemy. That living in a world of wonder is a matter of choice by a change in perception, that a daily walk can be turned magical by a simple change of time of day and of light. There are other tales of marvel told by characters in \textit{N}: a man Hampole meets in Stoke Newington, a devotee of mystical philosophy, who tells him of a splendid garden view from his window, that Hampole sees for himself before it disappears into the commonplace pavements and shop windows he passed every day. The mystic tells him that which we now regard as stubborn matter is, primarily, the “Heavenly Chaos, a soft and ductile substance, which could be moulded by the imagination of uncorrupted man into whatever forms he chose it to assume.” (Machen, 2010, 17)

\textsuperscript{19} This fictitious book title is intriguingly similar to that of Arthur Machen’s 1924 autobiography: The London Adventure or the Art of Wandering.
After reading these accounts in Hampole’s book, our protagonist Arnold travels to Stoke Newington himself, where he meets some local old men in a pub who he entices to tell him tales of local history in exchange for half pints of bitter. The old men do not know of any magical gardens, even though they tell Arnold that they know the rundown area of Canon’s Park well. They do, however, know of an insane asylum that once stood on the site, and they share tales of being scared of the area as boys for various reasons, none of the men can agree on what unsettled them:

‘There was always something about the place I didn’t altogether like’, said one of them at last. ‘But I’m sure I don’t know why.’ ‘Wasn’t there some tale of a murder there, a long time ago? Or was it a man that killed himself, and was buried at the crossroads by the green, with a stake through his heart?’ ‘I never heard of that, but I’ve heard my father say that there was a lot of fever about there formerly.’ (Machen, 2010, 27)

This passage marks a sharp change in what has previously been said throughout N about the otherworldly nature of Stoke Newington. Up until now, the hidden world that characters speak of has only been referenced through stories of a wondrous paradise, that only some people can see, and even those who do, can glimpse only fleetingly. The stories and impressions the old men in the pub share open the door to a darker side to this hidden layer of perception, one encompassing feelings of fear and unease. The old men describe an unidentifiable discomfort that instead of being seen and felt vividly as a moment of perfection, then slipping away, is instead its opposite: confused, unseen, and far from slipping away, has remained with them, always present and unidentifiable. It is this same sense of unease, this unqualifiable hidden sensation that Iain Sinclair attributes to the buried Hackney Brook river. And it is this
aspect of unease within the hidden layers of Stoke Newington that I have focused on for my *Woodland Magic* audio walk: a tale of animistic folklore that I wrote about the buried Hackney Brook river. I offer the following description seven minutes into the audio walk narrative:

Arthur Machen and Edgar Allan Poe knew there was something not quite right about Stoke Newington. Something uncanny, something flickering in the shadows, just out of sight. The balance is unsettled here. The suffering of River Spirit has infused every brick and beast radiating outwards from her with a touch of magic from the power of her torment. (*Woodland Magick* transcript)

As with *Woodland Magick*, Machen’s *N* is a presentation of a possibility for perception, not a prescribed declaration of the order of the natural world being particularly one way or another. According to Gray:

Machen's fictions aren't intended to persuade the reader that events of the kind he describes could actually happen. He thought of the world as a kind of text in invisible writing, a cipher pointing to another order of things—but you needn't accept anything of this occult philosophy to find his stories more than just entertaining. What they deal with is the nature of human perception. (Gray, 2013, BBC)

Gray sees within *N* echoes of Thomas de Quincey and Edgar Allan Poe, connections that are frequently drawn by other writers and theorists (such as Iain Sinclair, Merlin Coverley, and Jason Whittaker) between these writers, who have been drawn at different eras to the otherworldly nature of North London, specifically Stoke Newington. Poe’s school time in Stoke Newington is mentioned in *N,*
further underscoring these connections even within the connecting writings themselves.

It is not clear from reading N whether Machen himself felt the promise of the Northwest Passage dreamed of by De Quincey, or the unease experienced by Blake—or a mixture of both, or neither of these. N instead explores these different layers of perception previous writers have attributed to Stoke Newington as a mixture of light and dark, and not from a first-person perspective. Allowing the mystery of Stoke Newington to unfold by way of many third-party wildly varying accounts, Machen opens up possible meanings behind the hidden layers of Stoke Newington without offering any definitive answers. Instead, Machen poses various questions that are left unanswered, closing out the tale of N with a rather non-ending as mixed as the layers of perception he has proposed.

When Machen writes of wandering about London and coming upon streets he could never find again, he echoes the experiences of the wandering Thomas De Quincey—except without the hallucinatory benefits of opium, or Blake’s undiagnosed ‘visions’. Machen hints at occult experiences by describing hidden worlds or perceptions lying under the surface of Stoke Newington, both good and bad. However, these explorations have no explicit need for a mystical or drug-induced source. These doors of perception can be opened by a mental choice to take a pause in what we assume to be the ‘everyday’ and activate a more fluid mode of perception. As Gray suggests:

Some of the most valuable human experiences [...] come about when we simply look around us without any intention of acting on what we see. When we set aside our practical goals—if only for a moment—we may discover a wealth of meaning in our lives, which is independent of our success or failure in achieving our goals. Matter may not be soft and ductile as Machen's
reclusive mystic believes, but our lives are changed when we no longer view the world through the narrow prism of our purposes. (Gray, 2013, BBC)

Our daily commutes and movements through the world are walks in the sense of transportation, but not walks in the sense of a mode of experience. The shift from a walk as commute, to a walk as mode of perception, is an active process to not only look at the environments that we move through, but to see.

As Machen writes in *The London Adventure*, he was present, but did not participate, when one night a few friends decided to perform an impromptu séance as a party game in an actor’s lodging-house. And while most of the friends felt nothing had happened, one woman present felt a spirit had indeed come to them and was very shaken by the experience. While Machen himself did not believe a spirit had come into the room, he did believe that *something* had happened:

I still disbelieve in the presence of the spirit of the poor, dead Blank in that actor’s lodging-house in Bath. But I think that something happened; that the doors were opened; that the human spirit came into momentary contact with unconjectured worlds which it is not meant to visit. I think of these things as I pass along the interminable wandering of the London streets; of the strange things which may have been done behind the weariest, dreariest walls. (Machen, 1924, 68)

This is the crux of the main concept that Machen puts forth for our consideration in *N*: that we can come into contact with worlds—perhaps those that are unsettling and that we are ‘not meant to visit’—even in the most commonplace of neighbourhoods, such as Stoke Newington, and even behind the ‘wearist, dreariest walls’. It is this sense of impending wonderment behind every corner or behind
any wall that offers up possibilities for borderland worlds all around us.

For Machen, a trained eye can reveal the eternal behind the commonplace. In this light, the otherworldly nature of the hidden London that Machen explores perhaps is not a peek into another mystical dimension—an occultist invisible order of things hidden behind appearances—but, instead, a window into what is already there that we never stop to perceive as we rush by day to day. Machen called North London ‘terra incognita’—the ‘unknown land’. As Sinclair finds:

> There is always a Machen theme, an excuse to draw the unwary in. A search for Edgar Allan Poe’s school: the one he actually attended or the more engrossing fiction from his William Wilson tale. Those who embark on a London quest begin in a pub. They yarn, they misquote, improvise. They walk out, eventually, through a one-off topography they are obliged to shape into a serviceable narrative. (Sinclair, 2009, 552)

This idea of London’s topography as a duality runs through many literary and psychogeographical writings: from one-off topographies, to a bedrock timeless Londinium, to a topography always in flux, hidden topography, topography following ley-lines, topography flowing underground by way of buried rivers. Coverley notes that since the occult heyday of the late Victorian era, much of London’s iconic typography has been erased through a combination of wartime destruction and peacetime redevelopment. Yet beneath the modern soaring glass buildings of London’s seemingly endless new construction project, London’s occult traditions remain intact. And for those who know the way, an enchanted realm may still be found behind the all too often banal exterior of the contemporary city.
London’s occult nature can best be characterised as a current that flows beneath the surface, occasionally breaking through to disrupt our everyday experience, more often remaining undetected and unacknowledged. (Coverley, 2008, 95)

Coverley’s use of word ‘current’ is especially applicable here, given the amount of literature dedicated to subterranean London, especially London’s buried rivers, by Iain Sinclair, Peter Ackroyd, Aidan Dun, Paul Talling, Tom Bolton, Nicholas Barton, et al.—and numerous buried-river-themed walks and tours available to take in London today. There is something that triggers the imagination about the hidden underground rivers of London, whose original aspect was thwarted long ago in the cause of Victorian progress. The buried Hackney Brook is of special interest to my study, as the mythology and mystery of this river sparked my imagination as a starting point for engaging with the layers of heritage and meaning, of not only Stoke Newington, but of Abney Park cemetery as its locus.

**Psychogeography in Abney Park Cemetery: Iain Sinclair and Geoff Nicholson**

As explored in ‘Buried Rivers: The Subterranean Hackney Brook River in Stoke Newington’ in the previous chapter, discovering the existence of the buried Hackney Brook river that forms the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery was the starting point for investigations into Abney Park’s ‘earth mystery’. Through research into the buried Hackney Brook, I discovered Iain Sinclair’s journey, tracing the buried river with a douser to follow its course aboveground through areas that show no outward sign of its existence. In this section, I discuss the walking practices of Geoff
Nicholson and Iain Sinclair as they undertook and documented walks in Abney Park cemetery.

The Hackney Brook is where my study of occult literary heritage meets my site of practice. Although Abney Park cemetery was not founded until after Blake and De Quincey were walking and writing, the Hackney Brook was there, flowing freely above ground at that time. The Hackney Brook, which today flows underground forming the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery, situates these literary discoveries of Stoke Newington into a fixed point within Abney Park specifically.

In a discussion with Iain Sinclair, which he documented for Lost Art of Walking, Nicholson asks him what he thinks about walking while under the influence of LSD, or other psychedelic drugs, for the supposed enhancing effects upon observation. Crafting a walking practice while under influence of mind-altering substances was a documented method used by Guy Debord and Asger Jorn in their work with Situationist International. To the question of drug taking, Sinclair replies that you can train yourself to log and sense those details anyway:

> Over the years you can come to recognise aspects and details, down to the smallest particulars and incorporate them into a larger sense of the whole. That’s really what walks are about. As well as hooovering up information it’s a way of actually shifting a state of consciousness and you get into things you didn’t know about, or you begin to find out about, and that’s the interesting part, otherwise it’s just reportage. (Nicholson, 2008, 53)

This unpacking of layers, shifts in consciousness, and “getting into things that you didn’t know about”, describes my process of working with my audio walks in Abney Park cemetery. Previous to
creating my walks, my experience of Abney was, I thought, a rather complete one. I had been walking through the cemetery for six years, during different times of year and times of my life, alone or with friends, absorbing the atmosphere and engaging with the stone monuments, chapel, and trees in an active way. However, all of these encounters were undertaken without any research-driven documentation, nor any further research into other modes of interacting with the site outside of casual conversation with other people who frequented the cemetery. What I uncovered within my own experience when I began to write, photograph, and record my findings, coupled with the information, observations, and opinions of others, offered up a new density of possible perceptions of the space. These findings ignited my imagination, opened up a door of perception into subterranean goings-on and possibilities bordering on mysticism—which opened up even further upon my reading of literary occult walking texts. This is when my walks in Abney Park grew from merely ‘reportage’ into a walking practice.

Iain Sinclair walked from Albion Drive in lower Hackney up to Abney Park cemetery on the 24th of October 1994. Geoff Nicholson walked through Abney Park cemetery on an unspecified date for his book Walking in Ruins, which was published in 2013. There is a nearly twenty-year spread between the walks of these psychogeographers; nevertheless, their work renders almost identical observations. Their aesthetic focal point does appear similar. However, the derelict nature of the Abney Park described by Nicholson in 1994 is far more ‘sinister’ than the Abney Park that I encountered in 2008, and have been subsequently acquainted with ever since. Sinclair writes of a community of miscreants among broken statues and ‘sinister drifters’ who lurk in the undergrowth and vandalise the stone monuments with graffiti. Today, there are broken monuments, but they are, for the most part, upright, and
made safe along the main paths by the Abney Park Trust. Of the centre chapel, Sinclair writes:

It has always been the architect William Hosking’s intention that this should be an interdenominational chapel, a single ‘cell’ betraying no bias towards any of the Christian sects who would use it. But this Special Brew occultism was pushing it, mocking the heritage of an antiquarian who had been invited to take part in the restoration of St Mary Redcliffe in Bristol, and who shared with Joseph Bonomi a particular interest in the arcane Egyptology of the cemetery entrance. (Sinclair, 1997, 33-34)

As of writing, in 2018, it has been twenty-four years since Sinclair’s evening walk in Abney Park. The paths are now clear, but the surrounding woodland is, as ever, in its tangle of overgrowth. The graffiti Sinclair mentions is scrubbed clean and the centre chapel is the same state of delicately balanced crumble that Sinclair encountered decades ago. When I wrote *Thoughts on Mourning* in 2014, the corrugated iron sheeting that he mentions was still there, the only difference was the addition of a temporary plywood construction wall around the chapel, so you could only look at the chapel from a fifteen-foot distance.20 The ‘Special Brew occultism’ is still alive and well; however, I have never gotten the impression that any of Abney’s daily loafers are ‘sinister drifters’. Perhaps I am more accommodating towards persons belonging to the day-drinking contingent.

20 This description of Abney Park cemetery corresponds with the observations recorded for my *Thoughts on Mourning* audio walk, which was recorded in 2014 when the centre chapel was in ruin. It has since been partially renovated and is open to the public during special events. I gave the inaugural lecture opening the chapel 7th October, 2017 presenting the Heritage Lottery Funded ‘Abney Unearthed’ project and research, as well as a presentation of my own research on the history of Abney Park and Victorian garden cemeteries.
Nicholson boldly states his preference for dilapidation at the beginning of his walk in Abney Park cemetery: “I like walking in cemeteries, in town and in country, at home and abroad. They don’t absolutely have to be ruined, but I much prefer it when they are.” (Nicholson, 2013, 194) He notes that when you walk in ruined graveyards and see other walkers, they seldom look as though they’re there to visit anyone’s grave (as, ostensibly, in ruined graveyards the majority of graves will have been there for far too long to have visitors), so his supposition is that they must be up to no good: “Well, he must be up to no good, skulking around the graves in the middle of the day, nothing better to do, an idler, a ne’er-do-well’, and of course you realise he (and it usually is a he) may well be thinking exactly the same thing about you.” (Nicholson, 2013, 197-198)

This observation caught me up short. Through my walking in Abney Park I had not previously given any thought to my gender. I have encountered many women walking in Abney Park; however, upon reflection, they are usually accompanied, pushing a pram, or are just jogging through. It is interesting to note that a solitary cemetery walking practice, at least according to Nicholson, is a masculine pastime. Even though my audio walking practice was crafted as a woman walking alone through this space, I did not feel it altered my walking practice in any noticeable way. It was not until I read Nicholson's comments about being a male walking alone in the cemetery that I considered my gender during my walking practice.21

As with Sinclair, Nicholson also takes note of people “sitting or sometimes lying around, usually experiencing the effects of cheap

alcohol”. (Nicholson, 2013, 198) I have taken note of this myself in my walk ‘Crossing Paths/Different Worlds in Abney Park Cemetery’ published in 2015 in Ways to Wander: 22 “Upon entering the Victorian gates on Stoke Newington High Street, ignore (or not) the Strong Brew-favouring vagabonds who have made the right-hand corner their local.” (Reagan, 2015, 7)

I had not read Sinclair’s or Nicholson’s accounts of their Abney Park walks before writing ‘Crossing Paths/Different Worlds’, which makes the coincidence of ‘Strong Brew’-referenced 23 parallels that Sinclair, Nicholson, and I draw from our observations at Abney Park quite striking as this tableau within the cemetery has not altered through the course of over twenty years.

The air of ‘something else’, the mysticism, that Sinclair picks up on in his walk in 1994 appears to be an air of rebellion against Abney Park’s original purpose—that the cemetery’s original meaning has been submerged under the overgrowth, spraypaint, and had been infused with a new meaning of ‘sinister drifters’. He illustrates for us an image of a threatening and hidden anarchy, something dangerous and unruly, an atmosphere completely at odds with the original intent of the garden cemetery. This is a futuristic dystopia when viewed through the lens of what the original deceased residents and

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22 Walking practitioner Blake Morris, in conjunction with Walk Exchange, has undertaken a project beginning in 2016 to walk all fifty-four walks in Ways to Wander. Morris walked ‘Crossing Paths/Different Worlds in Abney Park Cemetery’ in January 2018. He wrote a postcard response of experience of tracing my walk and posted it to me: “Situationist Zombies emerge from the grave; Together we lost your trail, inhabited solitudes; Sinners, we search for the chapel, fire set to the undead; No sightings of vagabonds, but we avoided the children in their bright green vests.” Morris has invited me to join him on his journey tracing the remaining fifty-four walks. I aim to join him in Summer 2018.

23 I referenced ‘Strong Brew’ in my published walk, as opposed to ‘Special Brew’ to avoid reference to brand names.
architects might have thought of its then (and present) state. Of the graffiti on the centre chapel Sinclair writes:

Marc composes his black and white account. I snap a colour record. The pinkish white DOG. The triangle of concentration. A sense of this and of all the other triangulations of the city: Blake, Bunyan, Defoe, the dissenting monuments of Bunhill Fields. Everything I believe in, everything London can do for you, starts there. The theatre of obelisks and pyramids, signs, symbols prompts, whispers. The lovely lies that take you out into the light. That bless each and every pilgrimage. (Sinclair, 1997, 34)

As of writing, in February 2018, work is well underway on the centre chapel to rouse it from its forty-year ruinous state and reintroduce it into use as a community centre. Stabilising the roof and other structural renovation works were completed in September 2017. It has yet to be decided how the next stages will proceed. The 2017 funding that Hackney Council was awarded has been for ‘stabilisation’; the next stage will be ‘renovation’, the funds for which were approved January 2018. While the chapel space is currently open for events, it is a brick-and-stone shell, with no doors, windows, or interior, and a gravel floor. Hopefully, the next stage will be to recreate the original stained-glass windows according to John Hoskins’ beautiful designs, but this will be an expensive undertaking that the council is unsure it will be able to afford. Even before windows, doors, and or an interior are added to the centre chapel, the aspect it presents within the landscape of Abney Park cemetery is already a vastly different landmark than what Sinclair documented in 1994, or even the chapel that Nicholson encountered in 2013. The differences apparent between their walks through Abney Park and my walks through the cemetery are mirrored yet again by visiting walkers taking my walks that were recorded before
the centre chapel stabilisation work was underway, who will, in turn, find my walks anachronistic with references to an erased decrepitude.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored the aspects of literary occult heritage and psychogeographic practice that have informed my audio walking practice within Abney Park cemetery, specifically occult psychogeography, based in the literary walking heritage of William Blake, Thomas De Quincey, and Arthur Machen. Through this research, I discovered Machen’s story *N*, which most informed the method by which I frame my discoveries of layered meanings in Abney Park and conceive of these layers as operating within the same ‘space’ as one another, but not the same ‘place’. The occult literary heritage of Stoke Newington informed my audio walking practice by lending a dynamic and otherworldly atmosphere on which to draw for my audio walks. Machen’s ideas of doors of perception into borderland worlds specifically informed my methodology, becoming the conceptual framework of my audio walking practice.

I created the series of Abney Rambles audio walks with the aim of facilitating community engagement with the cemetery by offering audio walking journeys presented as four different perspectives on how to view the space. I have created my audio walking practice to be an embodied experience of a selection of layered meanings within Abney Park, which are reflective of the tapestry-like nature of interwoven spatial and temporal layers within the cemetery space. The layers of heritage that I have uncovered through my research into Abney Park cemetery (nonhuman heritage, ‘earth mystery’, outdoor archive, mourning practices) all exist together, layered on
top of and next to each other as disparate borderland worlds. Each can be accessed by opening a door of perception—my audio walks are positioned as a method for opening these doors.

In this chapter, I have also explored theories behind the hidden mystery of the buried Hackney Brook, which runs along the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery. My walks are situated within a cemetery landscape and encompass themes of mourning practices, the buried dead, and woodland animism that paint an audio tableau of a ‘hidden world’ with allusions to occult literary origins. These aspects position my practice within the purview of occult psychogeography. Through an analysis of the walks of Geoff Nicholson and Iain Sinclair within Abney Park cemetery, I have drawn correlations and discordances between their work and my own, positioning my work on a timeline of Abney Park’s evolution that will see my walks soon set alongside other walking practices in the cemetery that have now become anachronistic. It is with a touch of sadness that I reflect upon the precipice of change that Abney Park is now at the threshold of. The Abney Park that I have been researching and working within for six years will soon be an Abney Park of the past. But it is beautiful as well that I have had the chance to add my practice to the current canon of slightly nostalgic time capsule visions of an Abney Park that is ever-changing. And Abney Park’s ever-changing dynamism is what will allow it to serve its community for decades to come.

In the next chapter, I will introduce two borderland worlds that I have crafted into audio walks from two different perspectives on nonhuman heritage: Woodland Networks and Woodland Magick. For crafting these audio walks, I drew on Machen’s ideas that I have put forth in this chapter, along with investigations into the nonhuman heritage and agency of plants, animals, and stones in Abney Park
cemetery. Through interrogation of the complex networks at play within the cemetery, I aim to illustrate that the ecosystem of Abney Park has many actants, whose goals and works have separate drives of their own that are unrelated to human agency—and the hidden patterns and meanings of these nonhuman layers that may be revealed through an audio walking practice.
CHAPTER FOUR

Woodland Networks and Woodland Magick Audio Walks:
Explorations of Minded Agency of Nonhuman Actants in Abney Park Cemetery

I cannot avoid the conclusion that all matter is composed of intelligent atoms and that life and mind are merely synonyms for the aggregation of atomic intelligence.
– Thomas Edison24

‘Dwelling’ is viewed as a complex performative achievement of heterogeneous actors in relational settings in time and space: an embodied, co-constituted habituation of the human and nonhuman.
(Cloke and Jones, 2004, 313-341)

In this chapter, I investigate the nonhuman heritage and agency of plants, animals, and stones in Abney Park cemetery. Through the course of crafting my practice, it became clear that the nonhuman elements of the cemetery had a performative role, and this led me to consider how these complex networks at play were influencing my work. To address this question, I have turned to Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) (2005), Jane Bennett’s (2001, 2010) concepts of ‘vital materialism’ and ‘enchantment’, theories of modern animism, and a selection of scientific studies into the agency of nonhumans. Walking through the cemetery, I found evidence of vital materialism at work in the fluctuating interactions between nonhuman actants, which I explore through my audio walk Woodland Networks. Through my research into the buried Hackney Brook, I felt connected with themes from animistic folklore, which I brought into my walking practice by borrowing these perspectives

on nonhuman actants for my audio walk *Woodland Magick*. It is intended that the reader listen to both audio walks, while following along with their corresponding transcripts and photographic journeys in the ‘Audio Walk Transcripts and Photographic Journeys’ section at the end of this thesis, before proceeding with Chapter Four.

This chapter aims to illustrate that the ecosystem of Abney Park cemetery has many actants, whose motives and works have separate drives of their own that are unrelated to human agency. Each actant within Abney Park cemetery is living a hidden life that, through closer human observation, flowers into view. My *Woodland Networks* audio walk guides the listening walker through a door of perception to see this ‘hidden’ borderland world. Although, as I hope to illustrate, the agency of the natural world is not hidden at all, to those who would but see. By way of visiting selected veteran trees mapped throughout the cemetery, I introduce underground mycorrhizal fungal networks, deadwood habitats, a history of fires, and various interactions between trees, stones, and humans in Abney Park as an invitation to reconceive mindfulness and agency within nature. I aim to illustrate with my *Woodland Networks* audio walk that, while the multilayered interactions between actants within Abney Park can be explained by science, they are no less magical.

*Woodland Magick* is about the Hackney Brook river. Discovering that a buried river forms the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery, and reading Iain Sinclair’s earth mystery provocations that this subverted waterway could be infusing the neighbourhood of Stoke Newington with thwarted energies, inspired me to write an audio walk that would take a visitor to Abney Park through a door of perception into this Machenesque borderland world of unseen forces

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25 Iain Sinclair’s perspectives on the ‘earth mystery’ school of psychogeography are explored in Chapter Three.
creating a sense of unease; and to that end, Arthur Machen’s story *N* was a key source of inspiration for crafting this otherworldly feel. Building upon the themes presented in Machen’s *N*, of a magical hidden world behind the ‘everyday’ world, formed the foundation of my ‘earth mystery’ audio walk *Woodland Magick*. Researching ways to bring the story of the buried river into my walking practice, I connected with concepts of modern animism and animistic folklore. I have used these themes within my *Woodland Magick* audio walk to craft an animistic folktale about a River Spirit in Abney Park cemetery, more akin to Celtic animism legends than the scientific advancements that formed the basis of my *Woodland Networks* audio walk. Through anthropomorphising the river, fires, and trees, along with the ‘power of words’, I have crafted a practice that shares a common basis with Celtic animism and poetry.

Together, *Woodland Networks* and *Woodland Magick* offer visitors to Abney Park two different ways to approach and appreciate the intricate nonhuman ecosystem that is Abney Park as a nature reserve. I begin this chapter with a horticultural history of Abney Park cemetery, followed by Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Jane Bennett’s ‘vital materialism’, in relation to nonhuman actants in Abney Park. I continue the analysis of nonhuman actants with the agency of plants and stones, by way of my *Woodland Networks* audio walk, exploring lab studies of fungal root networks and an Arnos Vale Cemetery case study in Bristol, followed by the process by which I crafted my *Woodland Networks* audio walk. I conclude with concepts of animism, how these themes have informed my audio walking practice, and the process by which I crafted my *Woodland Magick* audio walk.
Horticultural History of Abney Park Cemetery

Abney Park cemetery is a Local Nature Reserve (the first to be designated in Hackney) and a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The cemetery’s design (created by the joint efforts of architect John Hoskins and horticulturist George Loddiges) was created with the goal of Abney Park cemetery to be a space that combined interment with public open space and an arboretum of non-native trees from all over the world. This was long before the creation of the great Victorian parks of London, Clissold Park down the road on Stoke Newington Church Street did not open until almost fifty years later, in 1889. Abney Park cemetery opened for burial in 1840; however its history as a wooded park predates its service as a cemetery by about one hundred fifty years, or possibly more. The site was previously the grounds of Fleetwood House and Abney House, built in the late seventeenth century, and previous to that, uncultivated woods and scrubland. Situated in the borough of Hackney, it is the area’s only mature woodland. For as far back as documentation goes, the land has been a wooded park, sloping from what is now Stoke Newington Church Street in the south to what was then the above-ground Hackney Brook (the main ‘character’ in my Woodland Magick audio walk) in the north, before building works and sanitary initiatives diverted the Hackney Brook underground in the 1850s.

At the beginning of the Victorian era, Stoke Newington was not only known for its Dissenter reputation, it was also a popular suburban neighbourhood for wealthy city workers looking for a picturesque retreat for their families. At the time of Abney Park cemetery’s founding, the soil was found to be of excellent quality and the idea of a nature reserve on the site appears to have been born from this
A guide to Abney Park cemetery, written by Thomas Burgess Barker in 1869, describes the area of Stoke Newington, and the soil of Abney, thus:

In days gone by, Stoke Newington was one of the great homes of horticulture and floriculture; orchids, ferns, Alpine dahlias, carnations, and auriculas might be seen in abundance and splendour; and even now all the varieties of trees, shrubs, and plants from the wide-spreading and graceful cedar to the hyssop growing on the walls, are to be found. [...] Perhaps it would be difficult to find in the range of English gardens, thirty acres of land varying so distinctly, and, at places, so abruptly in the nature and quality of their subsoils. The surface, after the removal of the turf, is composed of a fine vegetable mould, well adapted for horticultural purposes, as the health and size of the ancient trees (amongst which are some fine exotic specimens) amply prove. (Barker, 1869, 11-18)

As part of the layout design for Abney Park cemetery, from 1839-1840, famous local nurseryman and horticulturist George Loddiges planned an arboretum to conserve the existing woodland on the site, as well as introduce new exotic species.

Loddiges planted some 2,500 varieties of trees and shrubs, including pines, firs, flowering fruit trees, magnolias, rhododendrons, hardy deciduous trees, and more exotic specimens including acacia, box, dogwood, laburnum, maple, wild olive, and quince. Loddiges also created a rosarium with 1,029 varieties of rose. (Curl, 2000, 106)

At the time, it was a nationally important collection greater than the Royal Botanical Gardens at Kew. As the cemetery business declined in the twentieth century, the woodland seeded itself and the reserve is now one of London’s most important sites for wildlife.
Abney Park was originally laid out with clearly defined areas for walking and interment, with the arboretum mostly confined to the lining of avenues and not between the graves themselves, which were landscaped with flowers and shorter shrubs, both by design and by additions planted by mourners. This design gave Abney Park a sense of space, more akin to a woodland garden than a overgrown wood. All of these features have long since disappeared beneath a spread of independent seedings from existing trees and native trees naturally seeding with the help from birds and other animals, this new ‘wild’ ecosystem is a lush habitat for diverse flora and fauna. As management retreated, nature began to reorder the cemetery.

There was once on the site a remarkable tree that has unfortunately now been lost to time. It was an imposing cedar of Lebanon, right by the entrance gates on Stoke Newington Church Street, which was the original entrance to Abney House. The tree was the same species of as the 300-year-old centre feature of another Magnificent Seven cemetery, Highgate Cemetery’s Circle of Lebanon, which is still thriving there today. Abney Park’s cedar of Lebanon was also the growth of many centuries. One remarkable aspect of this tree is it had a mower’s scythe embedded in its trunk. This quirky feature would have been a wonderful addition to the cemetery landscape as an allegory for the relationship between life and death (the Grim Reaper versus the ‘World Tree’ of life) not to mention its historical value as a tree within the cemetery older twice over than the cemetery itself. I cannot find what happened to the tree, and since there is no specific record, I must assume it died naturally in the course of time.

Arboriculturalist and chair of Sustainable Hackney, Russell Miller, examined the biodiversity and evolution of the Abney Nature
Reserve in his 2008 study *The Trees and Woodland of Abney Park Cemetery*. Miller noted that in 1890 many of the original trees were lost to make room for burials and replanting, which may be what happened to the ancient cedar of Lebanon, although removal of such an ancient tree for this purpose seems rather rash and unlikely. As space decreased and new burials fell off, the cemetery entered an era of sharp decline in funding. The twentieth century saw the manicured garden left increasingly to its own natural devices. Once the mowing and clipping stopped, natural succession of trees and shrubs began. This process ushers in what is called a ‘secondary woodland’, which is a forest or woodland area which has regrown after a major disturbance (in this case, pruning and gardening) until a long enough period has passed so that the effects of the disturbance are no longer evident. Abney Park self-seeded during World War II and has continued to do so ever since. Few of the original arboretum species survive, but those that do are magnificent and rare trees. The woodland is remarkably diverse, thanks largely to the site’s history as an arboretum, but also due to sensitive planting over the last thirty years. As of 2008, there were:

…forty-nine native species and another 126 exotic species on site. Significantly, 70 species are regenerating naturally either by seed, sucker or layering. In the late nineteenth-century many of the original trees were replaced with more fashionable, but sadly less durable, species. Only around two dozen of the original 1840 specimens survive. (Miller, 2009, 87)

These impressive curiosities hidden within the new woodland are all that remain of Loddiges’ great planning scheme. Most are remarkable in both their size and rarity.
Today, ninety-five per cent of the trees in Abney were not planted by human hand. Which is interesting as there are still shoots sprouting from root systems that dated back to the eighteenth-century trees planted during the era of Abney House and Fleetwood house. This creates a blurred concept of original growth, as even if the shoots would be considered new growth, they are growing from an original root system. This makes the ecosystem of Abney more complex to date than simply analysing the rings on any given tree.

The quantity and quality of Abney’s habitat supports vast numbers of species that are usually found only in small numbers, if at all, in London. One of the aspects that makes Abney’s woodland unique is its amount of deadwood.

For a wooded ecosystem to thrive, it needs a wide variety of insects and fungi, which are both housed in deadwood. Under the canopy, elm suckers can reach twelve metres in height before being found by bark beetles carrying Dutch elm disease, this premature death leads to standing deadwood habitats. In this case, Dutch elm disease may be bad for the tree, but good for the woodland. (Miller, 2009, 87)

Another benefit of the heavily wooded landscape is it deters most visitors from wandering off the paths. This allows fallen trees to decay unmolested, by either visitors, or grounds crews needing to adhere to health and safety concerns.

Indeed, the low intervention approach of the Abney Park Trust and the Council’s arboriculture unit has greatly assisted in the development of a vibrant deadwood habitat. Tawny owls breed annually in large cavities in the hybrid black poplars. The diversity of both living and dead trees makes Abney Park’s woodland a biodiversity treasure worthy of its status as a London SINC.
The Abney Park Veteran Tree Project was funded by the London Tree and Woodland Grant Scheme, with the aim of protecting and promoting Abney's veteran trees, which are classified as trees that are of particular value to wildlife due to damage, decay, or old age. In 2009, over 170 old trees at Abney were surveyed and sixty were found to have veteran characteristics. Abney Park's large, old trees are vital for providing homes for bats, owls, and other large animals. Even more importantly, many insects and fungi can only exist where there are old trees at just the right stage of decay. Abney Park has a remarkable diversity of insects and fungi, with many locally and even nationally rare species. Orange Shield Cap and Silky Rosegill toadstools can be found growing on rotting poplar wood in late summer and autumn. Other rare fungi live inside the old trees. Hundreds of species of insect, most of which have yet to be identified, inhabit the dead and dying trees.26

When I first began my research into the dynamic relationships that make up Abney Park’s nonhuman heritage, I had thought the bodies buried underground would nurture the nonhuman life thriving above ground. However, the utopian image I had of the full cycle of life being present in the abundant ecosystem of Abney, of a symbiotic relationship between human decomposition and the woodland canopy that surrounds visitors, could not be further from reality. Only natural burial can benefit ecosystems in this way—and even then only with shallow burials that allow insects and fungi to do their work breaking down the body into usable nutrients, and certainly not to the burial density of Abney Park’s over two-hundred thousand deceased residents stacked within its thirty-two acres. In addition to these issues, methods of embalming and lead coffins

26 Information on projects pertaining to Abney Park as a nature reserve and various flora and fauna developments are updated regularly on Abney Park’s website: [http://www.abneypark.org/nature/](http://www.abneypark.org/nature/)
have leached arsenic into soil—there are warnings against mushrooming in Abney Park as many mushrooms can contain arsenic. Embalming chemicals, lead coffins, and cement-walled tombs were originated to stave off death’s corporal corrosion. It is ironic that all these processes are exactly what stave off life.

**Nonhuman Actants: Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) and Jane Bennett’s ‘Vital Materialism’**

I want to highlight what is typically cast in the shadow: the material agency or effectivity of nonhuman or not-quite-human things. I will try to make a meal out of the stuff left out of the feast of political theory done in the anthropocentric style. (Bennett, 2010, preface)

Actor Network Theory (ANT) is described by Bruno Latour as “the name of a type of momentary association which is characterised by the way it gathers together into new shapes”. (Latour 65) Latour asks us, how would we look at the world differently if we saw matter as ‘actants’? ‘Actant’ is a term coined by Latour that describes a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, and alter the course of events. By that definition, almost everything you can think of has the capacity to be an actant. ‘Actant’ is a substitute word for what in a more subject-centred vocabulary are called ‘agents’. An actant is neither an object nor a subject, but an intervener.

The association of multiple actors at play within Abney Park cemetery is constantly evolving as the space of the reserve is always in flux. The ecosystem, in general, has been the way it is currently since the beginning of the twentieth century, even though the individual trees and species have changed over time and the
ecosystem has become progressively self-seeding. However, crafting a walk is an experience of a moment in time, it is capitalising on a ‘momentary association’. For my *Woodland Networks* audio walk, I take note of the decay of a stump, the smell of plants that grow only in summer, the paving or wood-chipping of a path leading from one to the next of ancient trees, the symbiotic interaction between a broken marble obelisk and a tree, the cycle of human care stripping the green algae patina off the Bostock lion grave monument (only to have it bloom back again), and the human ritual of bringing orange roses to rest between the lion’s paws—all of these interactions are fleeting and contained in a specific time. Every walk I write is a ‘momentary association’—however *Woodland Networks* focuses on these specifically, to hone in visitor awareness to a layer of the interaction with the ecosystem that could not have happened during Abney’s Victorian beginnings. A visit today differs from what a visit would have been like one hundred seventy seven years ago, with its manicured gardens and wide avenues—the through line back to that time is the veteran trees. I imagine the tales they could tell, having witnessed the passing of an age.

Abney Park is filled with a variety of life and supports itself with very little human interaction. Even the human interaction that is carried out within Abney Park is mostly for the benefit of humans wishing to preserve ancient trees and keep clear navigable paths through the monuments for our enjoyment—efforts that the ecosystem of Abney Park would be just as successful without.

Latour asks, “there is hardly any doubt that kettles ‘boil’ water, knives ‘cut’ meat. [...] How could the introduction of those humble, mundane, and ubiquitous activities bring any news to any social scientist?” (Latour, 2005, 71) And the word choice here of verbs in relation to inanimate objects denotes a sort of middling agency—that
of a catalyst more than an actant. The kettle, after all, needs electricity or a hob; the knife needs a human hand. This is the main reason why objects did not previously play an active role, according to Latour. It has been due to the definition of actors and agencies most often chosen by social scientists.

If action is limited \textit{a priori} to what ‘intentional’, ‘meaningful’ humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list, or a tag could act. They might exist in the domain of ‘material’ ‘causal’ relations, but not in the ‘reflexive’ ‘symbolic’ domain of social relations. […] ANT is not the empty claim that objects do things ‘instead’ of human actors: it simply says that no science of the social can even begin if the question of who and what participates in the action is not first of all thoroughly explored, even though it might mean letting elements in which, for lack of a better term, we would call non-humans. (Latour, 2005, 71)

As I will address in the next section with Cloke and Jones’ Arnos Vale Cemetery study, a wider definition of actants expanded beyond actions of what “intentional, meaningful humans do” encompasses a much wider scope of possible trajectories, and deepens the complexity of understanding of what actions come to pass within a nonhuman ecosystem. The interactions between trees and stones is not static, but dynamic.

Within Jane Bennett’s theories of the agency of nonhuman ‘actants’, she attests that we are all essentially made of the same ‘stuff’, that our ‘selfness’ is linked to quarks and other subatomic particles— which comprise everything.

I invoke [Spinoza’s] idea of conative bodies that strive to enhance their power of activity by forming alliances with other bodies, and I share
his faith that everything is made of the same substance. [...] Lucretius, too, expressed a kind of monism in his De Rerum Natura: everything, he says, is made of the same quirky stuff, the same building blocks, if you will. Lucretius calls them primordia; today we might call them atoms, quarks, particle streams, or matter-energy. (Bennett, 2010, preface)

Bennett classifies her work for Vibrant Matter as a philosophical project that aims to “think slowly an idea that runs fast through modern heads: the idea of matter as passive stuff, as raw, brute, or inert. This habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings) is a ‘partition of the sensible’, to use Jacque Ranciere’s phrase.” (Bennett, 2010, preface)

Bennett asks us how political responses to public problems would change if we were to take seriously the vitality of nonhuman bodies and to see objects, plants, and animals as not only assistants or hindrances to humans, but as agents with trajectories all their own. Ecologist Suzanne Simard asks a similar question. Simard’s views regarding how changing perceptions of how we see plants and animals could improve human stewardship of our planet is one of the closing thoughts I leave visitors with at the end of Woodland Networks:

A forest is a cooperative system. To me, using the language of ‘communication’ made more sense because we were looking at not just resource transfers, but things like defence signalling and kin recognition. We as human beings can relate to this better. If we can relate to it, then we’re going to care about it more. If we care about it more, then we’re going to do a better job of stewarding our landscapes. (Woodland Networks transcript)
This view that we are all made of the same ‘stuff’ and that every animate and inanimate object has these common building blocks, the building blocks of life, can be seen as a modern form of animism, which I will address in further detail in the final section of this chapter. One aspect of Bennett’s study that is fascinating to contemplate is its invitation to explore other possible perspectives for considering nonhumans, what Bennett terms ‘thing-power’. Considering thing-power opens up possibilities for conceiving of alternate states of being. Thing-power calls to mind the way we viewed the world as children: a world filled with animate beings all filled with personalities and drives, with secret lives lived just beyond view. The world was filled with magical possibilities for thing-power when we were children. Bennett sees thing-power as a “good starting point for thinking beyond the life-matter binary, the dominant organisational principle of adult experience”. (Bennett, 2010, 20) This idea of different perspectives available to those who would consider the magical possibilities of thing-power echoes Machen’s doors of perception into borderland worlds. These are different terminologies for the same experiential goal: lifting the veil on the expectations of our ‘everyday’ encounter with nonhumans within space to be receptive to alternate worlds of experience coexisting within and between our own. This calls to mind the importance of imagination, which is a key ingredient in curiosity. Most people are born with a healthy curiosity; it is what drives learning and adaptation in humans to our environments. And, as humans, our great scientific achievements and novel inventions have all been brought about by the boldly curious. As we mature, there can be a loss or devaluing of imagination and playfulness; which is usually a key aspect of daily life for children. A disconnect arises from what Bennett terms the ‘fable of everyday life’. It takes curiosity and an engaged imagination to want to envision the perspectives of the nonhumans with which we humans share the planet.
In this vein, I am curious about the powers of the earth, in a form of woodland magic, as in an ‘enchanted forest’. The image of the enchanted forest has been with us since ancient animistic principles and the dawn of folklore. The ‘enchanted forest’ is a trope that, across cultures, humans have revisited again and again as a source of magic, danger, and life lessons that can be found in a wide scope of traditions of storytelling. As humans, we are ourselves a vital materiality and we are also surrounded by it, although we do not always see ourselves or our surroundings this way in our busy daily routines. In my *Woodland Magick* walk, I explore elemental Spirits and craft a mythology within the ‘enchanted forest’ of Abney Park cemetery.

‘Enchantment’ with the world is a concept also addressed by Bennett in regards to a state of viewing the world. She does not reference this state of being as necessarily in relation to an enchanted forest, but as a way of engaging with the world at large. She speaks of our modern disenchantment as:

…the inevitable price for rationalisation or scientisation [and] is, they say, the eclipse of wonder at the world. Max Weber makes this point when he says that life in a disenchanted world is tamped with ‘the imprint of meaningfulness’. In this world, there are no mysterious, incalculable forces that come into play, but rather one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. (Bennett, 2001, 8)

Through my *Woodland Magick* audio walk, I explore these “mysterious, incalculable forces” through possibilities for vital materialism between actants within the cemetery: subterranean river, trees, gravestones, earth, chapel, and fire. While this audio walk is a folktale of my own construction, there is nothing explicitly saying
these perspectives cannot at the same time be possible. What is the difference, ultimately, between vital materialism and the magic of an enchanted forest? As Bennett says:

Vital materialists will try to linger in those moments during which they find themselves fascinated by objects, taking them as clues to the material vitality that they share with them. This sense of a strange and incomplete commonality with the out-side may induce vital materialists to treat nonhumans—animals, plants, earth, even artefacts, and commodities—more carefully, more strategically, more ecologically. But how to develop this capacity for naïveté? One tactic might be to revisit and become temporarily infected by discredited philosophies of nature, risking the taint of superstition, animism, vitalism, anthropomorphism, and other pre-modern attitudes. (Bennett, 2010, 17)

While walking through Baltimore, Bennett encounters a grating covered with various objects and a dead rat outside a bagel shop. Many people would walk by this conflux of items (if being dead does indeed then render one an ‘item’) but she stops and analyses this collage of a moment in time. She is struck by this tableau as something greater than the sum of its parts, that was a melding together of the weather, the street, the morning, and herself. And, indeed, it was the very ‘self’ of the grouping that she acknowledges gave that snapshot of matter meaning.

This window onto an eccentric out-side was made possible by the fortuity of that particular assemblage, but also by a certain anticipatory readiness on my in-side, by a perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power. For I came on the glove-pollen-rat-cap-stick with Thoreau in my head, who had encouraged me to practice ‘the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen’. (Bennett, 2010, 4)
This mirrors what a listening walker should hopefully mentally bring with them when experiencing my audio walks in Abney Park cemetery. When the walker listens to the audio walk track, it could be fairly simple to look without seeing. To be the patron in the bagel shop, not the philosopher in the gutter. Things do have a power unto themselves to affect themselves and are not rendered more valid by the human gaze. However, as a human, the way in which we acknowledge the agency of Abney Park’s ecosystem is by default through our human gaze. Therefore, it is vital that we look—even if (or especially if) our gaze affects nothing. This is the participatory nature of the audio walking experience. The need to meet my audio walk guidance halfway with a mind prepared for ‘an experience’—in whatever way it presents itself to the walker as an individual.

What helps begin this process of acknowledging the agency of nonhumans is breaking down the binaries that may be assumed to be static: life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic. Everything on our planet works together to its own ends, even if those ends cannot be seen to have a consciousness in the way that we think of it as humans. The earth itself has forces of extreme power (magnetism of metals, gravity) that are not separate ‘wills’, nevertheless are powerful actants for change in our environment, of which we are all a part. Human agency is part of an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity. The goal of both my Woodland Networks and Woodland Magick audio walks is to enable an opening up to perceiving interactions between nonhuman actants in Abney Park cemetery—whether through its ‘enchanted forest’ of fungal networks and veteran trees, or through an act of imaginative interaction and childlike wonder through storytelling, each by way of a participatory observation on the part of a human actant (listening walker).
The Agency of Plants: Fungal Root Networks

Trees have made ‘wild’ the very place where they were deployed to contribute order, and the dwelling presence of some of them has complexly transformed from being ‘in-place’ to being ‘out-of-place’. (Cloke and Jones, 2004, 325)

One of the definitions of an agent is manifesting actions towards a goal; which is why it is far easier to label nonhumans as ‘actants’ rather than ‘agents’. However, plants and animals do have goals. They do have agency. A commonly held belief is that active action or agency belongs to humans alone. As Bennett states, referencing Kant: “Agency refers to the intentional choices made by men and women as they take action to realise their goals”. (Bennett, 2010, 28) What, then, of the agency of tree and plant networks that have clear independent goals from those of humans? Trees bend and grow towards light sources, root systems crack through stone to reach new earth, trees show very powerful agency with regards to these actions—and, while they are undertaken relatively slowly from a human perspective, they are still actions.

Mycologist Paul Stamets discovered that fungal systems are a form of bio-internet. Around ninety per cent of land plants are in mutually beneficial mycorrhizal relationships with fungi. Mycorrhizae are fungal associations between plant roots and beneficial fungi. The fungi effectively extend the root area of plants and are extremely important to most wild plants. Fungus colonises the roots of the plant, which provide the fungi with food, in exchange, the fungi help the plants suck up water and boost their host plants' immune systems.

Mycorrhizae also connect plants that may be widely separated; Stamets termed this the
‘Earth’s natural internet’. He first had the idea in the 1970s when he was studying fungi using an electron microscope. Stamets noticed similarities between mycelia and ARPANET, the US Department of Defense’s early version of the internet. (Fleming, 2014, BBC Earth)

This underground internet connects the root systems of vast areas of plants, they communicate with each other regarding danger (e.g. damaged root systems, attack by parasites, and distressing climate changes). Our idea of the static, mindless life of plants is rather myopic. There is a large aspect of their unseen lives that speaks to teamwork and perhaps even planning ahead, in the form of preparation in one part of the system for danger that has been alerted to by another part of the system.

Dan Cossins investigates this phenomenon of plant communication in more depth in a 2014 study published on the online journal The Scientist. Citing a University of Aberdeen study, the paper presents evidence that aphid-infested bean plants release odorous chemicals known as volatile organic compounds (VOCs) into the air to warn their neighbours, which respond by emitting different VOCs that repel aphids and attract aphid-hunting wasps. This is fascinating in and of itself; however, the study went on to discover that the plants also communicated underground, if the plant was cut off from expelling VOCs, due to being separated by a plastic bag. Five weeks earlier, the researcher filled the pots with soil containing a mycorrhizal fungus that connects the roots of plants with its hyphae, the branching filaments that make up the fungal mycelium. In each pot, were planted five broad bean plants: a ‘donor’ plant surrounded by four ‘receiver’ plants. One of the receivers was allowed to form root and mycorrhizal contact with the donor; another formed mycorrhizal contact only; and two more had neither root nor mycorrhizal contact. Four days later, the researcher placed
individual aphids or parasitoid wasps in spherical choice chambers to see how they reacted to the VOC bouquets collected from receiver plants. Only plants that had mycorrhizal connections to the infested plant were repellent to aphids and attractive to wasps, an indication that the plants were in fact using their fungal symbionts to send warnings.

In another study, Ariel Novoplansky of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel, took one garden pea plant that the team subjected to drought-like conditions in a pot with root connections to plants that were not. What they found was the plants were communicating via their roots. Unstressed neighbours not only responded as if exposed to drought themselves, but also released more of the same drought cues via their roots, which in turn were perceived by further, more remote, unstressed plants. Yet another study undertaken by Monica Gagliano of the University of Western Australia in Perth found that plants emit sounds out of the range of human hearing. This is groundbreaking in its implications. This speaks to proof of a capacity for life beyond that which we can perceive. This speaks to a scientific foundation for animism.27

Cossins’ study goes further to say that more evidence is being compiled finding that, far from being unresponsive and uncommunicative organisms, plants engage in regular conversation. In addition to warning neighbours of herbivore attacks, they alert each other to threatening pathogens and impending droughts, and even recognise kin, continually adapting to the information they receive from plants growing around them. Moreover, plants can ‘talk’ in several different ways: via airborne chemicals, soluble compounds exchanged by roots and networks of threadlike fungi,

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27 University of Aberdeen study; Ben-Gurion University of the Negev study; and University of Western Australia study referenced by Dan Cossins, ‘Plant Talk’, *The Scientist*, 2014
and, perhaps, even ultrasonic sounds. Plants, it seems, have a social life that scientists are just beginning to understand. We should not try to press the agency of nonhumans through the grid of what we consider as humans to be language.

What these findings illustrate is that the idea of plant agency is not merely a theoretical concept. It is something qualifiable in a lab setting. It is a scientific phenomenon that need not rely on a belief in a world of magical animism to be true. However, what is magic except science we have yet to understand? There is a magical element to what these plant networks do, even if it can be documented and duplicated under lab conditions, it is still wondrous.

It also speaks to our profound human hubris that the mainstream contemporary Western cultural default view is a belief that we are the only beings on our planet with agency. Even people who might admit that animals have agency would not stretch so far as to say that plants do. It does seem that the evidence is pointing to a very complex agency, for both the individual as well as for the greater good of the plant network. Bennett sees these networks as possibilities for enchantment: “Such sites of enchantment today include, for example, the discovery of sophisticated modes of communication among nonhumans, the strange agency of physical systems at far-from-equilibrium states, and the animation of objects by video technologies.” (Bennett, 2001, 4)

Although, in this context, she is referring to the artificial intelligence of nonhuman computers, it is applicable to any mode of communication between nonhumans—it truly is a scientific enchantment, magic within the context of a modern turn towards secularisation.
In Arnos Vale cemetery in Bristol, England, a study was taken up analysing the ecosystem of trees and stones in a cemetery environment. The study, published in 2004 and conducted by geographers Paul Cloke and Owain Jones, investigates the intricate nonhuman network of the cemetery. Arnos Vale is a Victorian garden cemetery that opened one year before Abney Park cemetery, in 1839 (the same year as Highgate Cemetery in London). As was the common fate of these lavishly landscaped garden cemeteries as they progressed through the twentieth-century, Arnos Vale fell into financial hardship as the years went by and there was not enough funding for upkeep. Over time, the cemetery became less successful, and its highly organised grandeur was transformed into a more unkempt, wild, and disorganised space. As a result, the use of the cemetery became more mixed. As with Abney Park, the primacy of its memorial function began being overtaken by its use for recreation and conservation. This mirroring of Abney Park and Arnos Vale’s developments as community use-space renders the Cloke and Jones study uniquely applicable to my investigation into the nonhuman networks of Abney Park.

Another linking commonality between these two cemeteries is that Arnos Vale and Abney Park were both built to John Loudon’s ‘gardenesque’ cemetery style. This style is marked by a symbolic meaning behind the trees planted. Trees were central to not only the look of the cemeteries Loudon designed, but also their symbolic meaning. Loudon used tree symbolism as a language for mourning and reflection, which led to many of the trees he chose for a variety of different cemeteries to be similar, and any designer emulating his style would plant these same trees as well.
Loudon listed 44 types of tree which he considered to be ‘cemetery trees par excellence’, and a further 127 types of tree for further variation in larger cemeteries. He advocated predominantly evergreen coniferous trees, particularly cypress, juniper, and yew. This specification should be understood in a number of contexts. Loudon was aware that certain evergreen trees, particularly the cypress and yew, had ancient associations with sites of burial. Their sombre colour suited the Victorian ‘cult’ of death and funeral culture and their lack of leaf litter and prim forms matched the desire for symbolic and practical order. (Cloke and Jones, 2004, 317-318)

The nonhuman networks of Arnos Vale began to manifest their own agency separate from human interventions with the loss of funding rampant through all garden cemeteries through the progression of the twentieth century. Even when basic mowing was still implemented, there was no longer the same level of staff on hand to hand-weed between individual graves, so that is where many ‘rogue’ trees found refuge. The gravel beds and joints within the masonry of the grave monuments provided safe havens for seed germination. And now, in Arnos Vale, many gravestones have a ‘companion’ tree growing from them. Which means, for many of these graves, the root systems and encroaching size of the tree as it grows are gradually leading to the grave’s destruction.

Although some of the graves have been maintained against this organic intrusion, thousands of graves have been, and are still being, destroyed by the spreading, growing trees. This has made the site dangerous in many places, with the tomb structures being gradually toppled by roots and expanding trunks, particularly on slopes, which comprise much of the cemetery, as Arnos Vale is largely situated on the side of a hill. Much like in Abney Park, much of the original
landscaping layout is lost to time, having been submerged under the flourishing growth of unchecked trees and various shrubs on the site.

According to Cloke and Jones, over recent years there has been a significant ‘re-viewing’ of the world by social theorists arguing that previous ideas of agency have been far too narrow, and that differing forms of agency need to be recognised and understood—and that, most visibly, there has been an interest in the agency of animals.

[Chris] Philo and [Chris] Wilbert discuss situations where animals ‘often end up evading the places to which humans seek to allot them’. In such ‘transgressions’, it is the ‘animals themselves who inject what might be termed their own agency into the scene and forge their own ‘other spaces’. Philo and Wilbert acknowledge that some might view with unease their talk of animal agency, so our move here to expand these ideas of agency and even transgression into the world of trees may be regarded as problematic, not least because of the view that both wilfulness and an ability to choose are essential ingredients of any form of agency. (Cloke and Jones, 2004, 325)

If a definition of agency includes actants valuing their own lives and striving to reserve them in challenging circumstances, then surely the actions of the plant networks mentioned in the previous section on fungal root networks fulfil these criteria. Cloke and Jones found Actor Network Theory (ANT) to be the theory that has been the most influential in proposing and drawing together fundamentally new ways of understanding the relations between nature and society. They use two aspects of ANT in their inquiry: first, that ANT has recognised the agency of nonhumans as an essential element in how the ‘natural’ and the ‘social’ flow into one another; second, ANT has provided a new metaphor for framing nature as both a real material actor and a socially constructed object.
The aspects of ANT that apply to my inquiry into Abney Park cemetery are more in line with the former than the latter. Acknowledging nature as a ‘socially constructed object’ is still viewing it through the lens of human experience. While, of course, any inquiry into the diverse networks at play in nature would by default be viewed through a human lens (my own), my endeavour is to remove myself from the equation, inasmuch as that is possible while confronting the complexity it offers through no other medium than my own sensory experiences and thought processes. However, my goal with my investigations into the agency of plants and animals in Abney Park is to imagine and illustrate their perspective through my walks, not merely how their agency affects the human actants in the cemetery—but how nonhuman actants affect their fellow nonhumans and defend against human actants.

Cloke and Jones prepared themselves for their study to be met with unease by their extension of agency of animals to include plants—however, what if I were to go one step further to extend this agency to include stones? I do not mean to imply that gravestones have the same communication and growth networks as plants and animals; however, if I were to leave off Actor Network Theory for a moment and go back to Bennett’s ‘vital materialism’, then there might be a place for gravestones in this ecosystem of agency.

The spark of thing-power does exist for gravestones. They are ‘actants’ in this bio-ballet, even if they are not ‘actors’: an actant is neither an object nor a subject, but an intervener. The stones ‘intervened’ on the trees’ behalf (unwittingly) in Arnos Vale when they gave them safe harbour from the lawn mowers to grow. And the stones themselves change over time as they are shifted, cracked and toppled by the growing trees and root systems, until any
unkempt Victorian-era cemetery will, without human intervention, mostly resemble a pile of interesting rocks. The monuments are players in this ecosystem; and, despite the seeming permanence of stone, their constant changing proves otherwise.

Cloke and Jones introduce into this network Heidegger’s concept of ‘dwelling’. They conceive of dwelling as a more ‘placed’ understanding of the agency of trees in a cemetery: “’Dwelling’ is viewed as a complex performative achievement of heterogeneous actors in relational settings in time and space: an embodied, co-constituted habituation of the human and nonhuman.” (Cloke and Jones, 2004, 327)

Heidegger’s notion of dwelling suggests a dynamic, intimate, ongoing togetherness of beings and things that make up landscapes and places, and which bind together nature and culture over time. The key to this concept of dwelling is time. There is nothing transient in networks that ‘dwell’. And the biodiversity of Victorian-era cemeteries are a product of time, a long enough period of time for all of the actants in the network to share a cohabitation that leads to a specific dwelling place, with its own visible character formed of a very particular coming together of humans and nonhumans.

The natural agency of the various networks at play in Abney Park has been both a help and a hindrance to the Abney Park Trust. As much as human agency, as manifested by the agency of the Trust, is in line with preservation, they have a slightly different aim than the nonhuman networks in Abney Park. Where does the primacy of trees and habitat end and the primacy of stone monuments begin? Very often, these two actants are at war with each other, each hindering the other. The Abney Park Trust has to make constant careful choices regarding which must make room for which in each specific case. It
is a daunting job, and one that is neverending. Here, human agency is clearly the primary force and final voice in whose agency takes primacy. The ever-evolving nonhuman agency of plants, animals, and stones creates a fascinating bio-ballet in Abney Park cemetery. The relationships between the prized 'dead wood' habitat, with insects and animals and their networks, the stone monuments interaction with the trees—both helping and hindering each other in myriad ways—trouble the conservation efforts of humans in choosing who 'wins'.

Woodland Networks aims to capture this sense of wonder at the complexity of nonhuman networks. Interweaving research on mycorrhizal networks with visual and tactile examples in Abney Park cemetery of these relationships to be explored on the walk brings these theoretical concepts to life in an embodied way. Over the course of the thirty-seven-minute walk amongst the veteran tree specimens, listening walkers encounter interactions between lightning, fire, deadwood, and fungal growth with the trees, stone monuments and tree symbiotic relationships, and human interventions upon the relationship of fungal/algae growth and stone. Woodland Networks aims to highlight the density and complexity of relationships enacted within Abney Park cemetery into a complete experience and new perspective, to uncover a new perception of the interactions between these actants in the nature reserve that is Abney Park.

Process of Crafting Woodland Networks

The process of creating Woodland Networks was different from the creation of my other three audio walks. I wanted to create Woodland Networks in an entirely new way—while still retaining the artistic vision that drove me to write my audio walks in the first place. My
background experience is in performance and short story and playwriting. Therefore, my original conception of how my walks would be formatted, and the process of creating them, was in line with that model of creation: writing a script, then recording the walks as self-contained audio worlds to be layered over the embodied action of walking through the cemetery.

The initial process of writing of all of my audio walks was an embodied process for me of walking through Abney Park to write the walks and craft the route taken. However, my other three audio walks have been crafted by a disembodied process of recording the audio walks offsite, to be made embodied again on-site upon listening by the walker. With Woodland Networks, however, I wanted to weave my own embodied process of walking in the cemetery, with real-time reactions to the space, in and amongst the written script of the veteran trees, fungal networks, and stone/human/plant interactions that I planned to cover throughout the walk. By recording the sounds of birds, my footsteps, and audio changes when I walk through smaller or wider paths, into the chapel, and even allowing the wind to fight my words when I walk down the main wide avenue towards the exit, these audio aspects create a shared experience with the walker. Instead of being a disembodied voice guiding from a removed distance, for Woodland Networks my language changed from addressing the listening walker as ‘you’, to referencing actions taken within the walk as ‘we’. I brought myself into the walk as a companion on the journey, walking right beside the listening walker on their walk. And this shift in perspective altered the way I framed my observations, and creates a more intimate invitation to look slowly and closely than from the remove of a voice recorded and edited elsewhere.
For my other three audio walks, I began first by walking in the cemetery, finding moments along the way that ‘spoke’ to me, then crafted a script to work with and react to the areas I found and the overall prescribed story, or thought journey, that I wanted to convey. For *Woodland Networks*, I worked the other way around. For this nature walk, I first needed structure. Since this walk was to be my first walk without using creative writing or storytelling, I needed a scaffolding to hold together my observations so that the walk did not end up a series of disjointed observations without an overall arc of narrative—which could have been a choice, but did not adhere to my statement of purpose for these walks: engaging the community with the cemetery in a new informative way. I wanted *Woodland Networks* to be a snapshot in time of Abney Park, with elements of spontaneity, but also educational.

I began with the map: ‘The Veteran Trees of Abney Park Cemetery Nature Reserve’. Through my research, I knew of the importance of deadwood for the ecosystem of the nature reserve and also the sustaining ‘mother-like’ aspects of veteran trees, and this is where I wanted to begin. I used this map to select the specimens I would cover over the course of my audio walk. I also uploaded a PDF file of the map onto my website, www.AbneyRambles.com, for visitors to follow along as they take the walk for their convenience, with no need to pick up a physical map from the visitors’ centre, if they so choose. I began by mapping out the area I wanted to cover within the cemetery, and the specimens of interest to highlight, within the length of time I felt most appropriate for an audio walk. I have tried to keep my walks at around 30 minutes, and the completed audio track for *Woodland Networks* is 37 minutes, 26 seconds.

All of the veteran trees in Abney are marked by green plaques on wooden posts with horticultural information about the tree, a story
about the tree (if there is one), and a number corresponding to its place on the map. While the map is very helpful for navigating these 40 veteran specimens, there is no way to know by looking at the map which specimens are the oldest or which have the most interesting stories. The map gives very accurate directions to finding the veteran specimens; but the only way to learn their stories is to walk to each tree and read the plaque. Conversely, a visitor does not need a map to enjoy learning about the veteran trees, and can simply walk through the nature reserve coming upon these information posts as a surprise through the course of their stroll. However, there is currently no place to get all of the information I cover in *Woodland Networks* simultaneously. My audio walk melds this information into one access point.

Once I had my route in place, I wrote the script for the information I wished to cover on the walk, then I recorded the walk in situ walking the route through the cemetery for timing, taking notes for where to move commentary for pacing. I then traced the route again, this time recording observations as I walked the route, in free association without a script. I then transcribed these notes into the already-written script, which I then recorded again walking through the space, reading the new script that included the original script, as well as the observations, but layering yet again any observations I came across through the course of the walk. This recording was then transcribed one more time, then edited down to the essential elements, editing out any irrelevant side comments, to comprise a final script, which I then took to record in Abney the fourth, and final, time. What this process of recording, transcribing, tracing, re-recording, and editing offered was a dense layering of weeks of

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28 One point of confusion is a few of the specimens are listed with their Latin names on the map, but their common names on the plaques. I have chosen to use the names used on the map, as it was my original source material and the physical guide walkers would be using to navigate the space of the cemetery.
observations into one finalised walk. The orange roses in the Bostocks’ lion’s paws, the rat that ran across my path, and the empty bottle of Jack Daniels, did not all happen to me on the same day, but they are all real experiences I had while tracing and tracing again this particular route through the nature reserve. What this continuously condensed process of crafting this audio walk offers is a temporally panoramic view of a nature walk in Abney Park that a visitor can experience all at once through one audio walk.

Part of this condensing of experiences process that stood out to me during the crafting of this walk was the shifting of human traces. This was an interesting discovery as the stated purpose of this audio walk is to explore the nonhuman networks within Abney Park, not the human element. However, the cemetery is a park for humans as well, and these traces and interactions cannot be ignored. The part of the walk that exemplifies these relationships most clearly is the broken obelisk. In this collection of items: broken obelisk grave monument, tree growing around monument, and carrier bag with cans within monument, created a powerful visual metaphor for all of these symbiotic relationships at play in Abney in one place; and that shock of seeing a shimmer of meaning exemplifies what Jane Bennett calls ‘thing-power’. Bennett encountered her own collection of seemingly random things one morning in Baltimore looking at a drain grate outside a bagel shop: a workman’s glove, matted oak pollen, dead rat, plastic bottle cap, and a stick of wood:

I was struck by what Stephen Jay Gould called the ‘excruciating complexity and intractability’ of nonhuman bodies, but, in being struck, I realised the capacity of these bodies was not restricted to a passive ‘intractability’ but also included the ability to make things happen, to produce effects. When the materiality of the glove, the rat, the pollen, the bottle cap, and the stick started to shimmer and spark, it was in
part because of the contingent tableau that they formed with each other, with the street, with the weather that morning, with me. For if the sun had not glinted on the black glove, I might not have seen the rat; had the rat not been there, I not have noted the bottle cap, and so on. But they were all there just as they were, and so I caught a glimpse of an energetic vitality inside each of these things, things that I generally conceived as inert. (Bennett, 2010, 4-5)

My collection of things (broken obelisk, tree, carrier bag) encountered during the course of my walk is the interaction between the broken marble obelisk and the tree growing around it. The motivations for both tree and broken obelisk can be seen to be in conversation to support each other to their own ends via their own agency: the broken obelisk and the tree both enacting agency via thing-power to keep each other upright.

However, there was another layer to the thing-power tension between the tree and the obelisk—inside there was rubbish. I call this rubbish to the attention of the listening walker because I looked inside the obelisk as part of my investigation of the relationship between the tree and the obelisk, and inside with the carrier bag and the cans, another layer of interaction was revealed. It seemed important to mention this finding in the walk because it is what I discovered while walking there; however, I would not have discovered the rubbish had I not already set the task for myself to document the walk. Is the rubbish an important part of this walk? Its discovery was not written into the original concept for what I aimed to show visitors to Abney Park. I did not want to write an audio walk discussing the nature reserve to have rubbish in it. In a wider context of meaning, *Woodland Networks* was written to explore the nonhuman networks that work together creating the ecosystem of Abney, not a documentation of how humans interfere or mar those relationships—however, the moment the carrier bag was left by the
person and received by the obelisk it separated from a human trace to become a nonhuman trace, as these three items together became nonhuman. The obelisk and the tree and the carrier bag are a microcosm of what is happening throughout the thirty-two acres of Abney Park. The gravestones choke the trees, the roots of the trees crack and topple the gravestones, the humans stabilise the gravestones and cut the plants back from the paths, and visitors picnic, drink, litter, and fornicate throughout the park. What seemed at first a break in my narrative—the discussion of broken monuments and rubbish—upon reflection became one of the most important moments within the walk as a visual metaphor of nonhuman relationships.

Considering thing-power offers possibilities for a state of being that opens a new door of perception to the conflux of interactions within Abney Park that might be walked passed quickly—or thought about slowly, when the time is taken to observe. One example of this within Woodland Networks is the prompt to stand and look at the copse of a veteran stump of a Horse Chestnut, that is now a collection of young-looking shoots of trees, that when walked passed quickly could be taken to be a bush, and not an ancient veteran tree with root networks extending deeply down and outwards, under our walking feet and important to the ecosystem of Abney Park.

The mode of practice I used for crafting Woodland Networks was most informed by the work of Janet Cardiff. Cardiff’s audio walking practice has a spontaneous feel to it, even though her work is scripted, and recorded over, with snippets of other voices or pre-recorded audio or music, she speaks with an intimacy and naturalness that gives the listener the impression that she is having a conversation with you. Cardiff’s vocal quality, of quiet voice in low register, I have used throughout my walking practice, however her
speaking mode of spontaneity and conversational tone is unique to Woodland Networks.

Most of Cardiff’s work is in urban environments, however her first audio walk that she created was in a forest titled Forest Walk:

I was doing a residency at the Banff Centre in Alberta, Canada, experimenting with some various technologies, and I created what became my first audio walk. It didn’t have very good instructions and the quality of my mixing was terrible since it was mixed on a 4-track cassette deck, but the work really inspired me and changed my thinking about art. Probably only 10 people heard it at the time, but it was the prototype for all the walks that followed. When I listen to it now, I can appreciate the freshness and looseness, even with all of the bad editing. (Cardiff, 1991)

The editing process for all of my audio walks has been by far the trickiest aspect, even with the benefit of twenty-first century technology. I wrote my walks as a script, then recorded them at home, then took the recorded audio to track the course of the walk in Abney, marking down the times taking notes such as ‘cut three seconds here’, ‘bring the music in five seconds earlier here’, then coming back home to edit the timing again. Then back to the cemetery, tweaking as I went, so turning on a certain path was in line with not only the turning directions, but coming upon a particular area was aligned with a specific piece of music for Thoughts on Mourning and Woodland Magic, or a change in storytelling tone for Love, Wrath, Death, Lions. The editing rounds took at least a six or seven times each going back and forth. It was painstaking. Recording Woodland Networks in situ helped in that aspect, as I was already

walking the route in real time, so editing for timing was minimal. However, I did not notice previously that Abney Park is under a flight path. I had to pause recording whenever a plane flew overhead. Nor did I realise how many people are around talking constantly—the sensitive microphone would pick up even conversations from far away. I was used to having the sound-studio-like silence of my flat to record the audio and mix it together with music exactly how I wanted it to sound. Recording live in Abney Park, there were suddenly all of these news variables.

I solved this problem by coming to record in Abney Park as soon as the gates opened in the mornings at 8 a.m. I had the cemetery almost entirely to myself, except for the occasional jogger or dog walker. For some parts of the recording, I did not stop when a plane went over, or if a dog barked in the background. As long as it was not disruptive to my narrative, I decided to stop trying for the illusion of being alone in nature—that these occasional unplanned audio moments should be included as the genuine background sounds in Abney Park. My other three audio walks are sound bubbles of little audio worlds that a listening walker can step into; Woodland Networks, by contrast, is messy and immediate. I did not get to craft a glossy version of the walking experience. However, the audio version of Abney Park that I did capture is authentic, which offers its own aspects of interest.

One conundrum of note, is there has been a rubbish bin on the Stoke Newington Church Street entrance side of the cemetery that is one of my first path markers for Thoughts on Mourning, that has been there for at least four years, when I first used it as a landmark. The rubbish bin was taken away midway through my recording of Woodland Networks, so I was able to edit out the direction from ‘turn left at the rubbish bin’ to instead say ‘turn left at the first path up ahead’. I then
had to make a decision to either edit out the rubbish bin direction instruction from *Thoughts on Mourning*, or to leave it in as part of the time capsule nature of these audio walks. Descriptions of the chapel in *Thoughts on Mourning* change drastically between being a crumbling ruin, to being under, and then post-renovation, however a path direction note may make it hard to follow in the future. It is a decision that is about the primacy of what these walks are for: recording history, or functioning for the community through time, evolving with the cemetery’s changes.

This introduces the concept of temporality that is a reoccurring theme that I revisit with each layer of meaning that I investigate with my audio walks. Through the symbolism of memorial, by unpacking the time capsule nature of cemeteries as an outdoor archive by way of storytelling, and exploring the relationships between nonhuman actants, I have created my walking practice to be an embodied experience of a selection of performed worlds, reflective of the tapestry-like nature of interwoven spatial and temporal layers within the cemetery space. The concepts of temporal layering, and the unique anachronistic space of a cemetery, have informed the themes of my audio walking practice, so capturing these changes throughout the evolution of my walking practice is key to its very purpose.

The slippage between temporal moments and a feeling of being out of time is also illustrated in Cardiff’s audio walk Missing Voice: Case Study B (1999). Cardiff’s walk has the listening walker ramble through descriptions of a 1990s Whitechapel that is, at points, alien to a contemporary walker. In years to come, my audio walks will become another layer of memory archiving the past of an Abney

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Park that once was. The atmosphere of the cemetery space may shift over time, with the transformation of the chapel ruin to a community centre already well underway, and other possible changes yet to be foreseen.

One regret I have is that I did not take photographs every time I traced the Woodland Networks route in Abney Park. I recorded Woodland Networks four times, once with the original script, once with no script, just walking the route recording observations and thoughts as they came to me along the walk, then, after transcribing my voice notes and writing them into the written script, a third time, weaving together the original written moments, with the voice-note moments, then recording again with the spontaneous notes then added to the script, and, finally, with further spontaneous moments that arose while making the final recording. So, the final recording is a mix of three elements: the scripted walk, the transcribed notes that became the second and third versions of the scripted walk, and the improvised moments recorded in real time in the space during the final fourth recording. I only took photos the first and last time I traced the route, so there are photos of the basic journey, but since aspects of all four of these walks went into the final walk, not all of the moments that happen within the walk are documented for the photographic journey, specifically the handprint on the large bracket fungus and the orange roses on the Bostock lion (which I recreated by buying orange roses and placing them how I remembered them).

The other three ‘borderlands’ that I have explored in Abney Park cemetery via my audio walks have been of the mind: a thirdspace, a fusion of the physical and the remote into a blurred notion of real and virtual in an insular experience for the listening walker. As I described previously, the process for crafting Woodland Networks was different from the other three walks I have created. The final
uploaded track was not recorded all in one take, however that is the feeling I wanted the audio to have, an immediacy that I am right there taking the walk with them, that the thoughts and observations I share are in real time, and that the cemetery space surrounding the listening walker is rich with the sounds and offered perceptions they can investigate themselves by taking out their headphones and continuing on their own ramble.

In the next section I will unpack concepts of animism that have informed my *Woodland Magick* audio walk.

**Animism**

As a metaphysical monism, animism is based upon the idea that nature’s essence is minded. (Orr, 2012, 269)

In this section, I address theories of animism as explored by religious studies professor Harvey Graham; modern animist, activist, and philosopher Emma Restall Orr; and anthropologist Istvan Praet. I illustrate how their concepts, alongside the histories of the Hackney Brook presented by Iain Sinclair and Paul Talling, have informed my *Woodland Magick* audio walk.

English anthropologist Edward Tylor reintroduced the term ‘animism’ into common use in the late nineteenth century and considered it to be the first phase in the development of modern religions. If I am to share Emma Restall Orr’s assertion that some form of animism has been a part of the human experience since our incarnation as *homo sapiens*, then this would mean our understanding of the world, and our place in it, has been based for over two hundred thousand years on the view that every animate and inanimate entity is interconnected through energy and some form of
‘mindedness’. “This vast span of time makes the past five to ten millennia of civilisation somewhat fleeting, and the last fifteen-hundred years of widespread monotheism a blink.” (Orr, 2012, 111) Given that some form of animism has apparently been evident at the beginning of every culture worldwide, this presents a powerful image of a binding together of an almost instinctual ideology of the human species.

I began this inquiry with a view towards understanding animism for its possible artistic applications within my practice. Within animism are many different branches of what is, essentially, a very broad term. I do not claim methodological heritage with any specific indigenous culture, pagan, or ancient tribe, whose intricate histories speak of specific legends in relation to nonhumans. Instead, my practice has been informed by modern animism that has a more open definition than historic animism, which is based on specific myths. As a metaphysical monism, animism is based upon the idea that nature’s essence is minded. In opening up the definition of animism from anthropomorphised spirits within nature into a wider concept of what is considered ‘minded’, Orr explains it thus:

In his practice of learning and reference, the animist will acknowledge the spirits of a place, the spirits of a river, of fire and storm, the spirits of a tribe, of motherhood, of the dead, the spirits of a gathering, of an event in time, and so on. In doing so he is reaching to perceive those fleeting patterns that, so filled with energy and potentiality, are the essential moments flowing into moments, the raw creativity that manifests each form, saturating each experience. (Orr, 2012, 270)

Viewing animism as an acknowledgement of the connections and patterns of energy within nature does not require a pagan or spiritual belief system. In A Contribution to the Theory of the Living
Organism, published in 1943, as referenced by Orr, English zoologist Wilfred Eade Agar used the term ‘consciousness’ to describe the varying degrees of awareness evident within nature. His perspective and definition of this was in tune with the animistic. “We must ascribe consciousness to every living agent, such as a plant cell or bacterium, or even (if the continuity of nature is not to be broken) to an electron”. (Orr, 2012, 131)

As religious studies professor Graham Harvey has found, mystical attributes in regards to animistic belief systems can sometimes be a case of the academy misunderstanding shamans whom they have interviewed about animism, rather than a sharp break in ideology between pagan animists and modern animists:

Whether ‘power’ is understood socially or as something akin to amystical electricity depends on the particular culture in question. Animism may provide examples of both, and the history of academia demonstrates the ease with which discourses of power can be misunderstood. [...] By analogy with electricity such scholars attempted to fit the religious beliefs of Oceanic peoples into Western notions of evolutionary progress. In fact, as Peter Mataira makes clear, these are key terms in the expression of the social interconnectedness of the cosmos. They do not imply anything more—or less—mystical than the power in Foucault’s writings. (Harvey, 2005, 129-130)

This misunderstanding of the use of metaphor within these indigenous belief systems by outsiders within academic discourse might perhaps explain misunderstandings and contradictions within and between descriptions of animism. Harvey found that similar mistaken attributions of belief in mystical powers have been made elsewhere. The Oglala Lakota term ‘waken’ does not refer to an impersonal power, but is an adjective that potentially defines all
kinds of persons as relationally, socially powerful. Shamans call on those they are related to, rather than drawing on metaphysical power. These examples, which Harvey drew from a variety of instances, he found to illustrate the academic tendency to mystify indigenous discourse as spiritual and pious rather than practical and social. As Orr explains: “Many definitions of animism speak of the physical world being comprehensively enspirted. [...] Spirit can be seen as comprising those essential forces and energies that, moving within particular structures or patterns, vitalise and empower.” (Orr, 2012, 104)

An ‘essential force’ does not necessarily denote spiritual beliefs. Magnetism and gravity are essential forces, which are vital and real and grounded in scientific findings. The study of quantum mechanics has proven there to be constant movement, atom exchange, and connection within, and between, all matter. This is not labelled as a form of mysticism, yet the premise could be seen to arrive at the same conclusion: all matter, all beings—the whole earth—is in flux, contains energy, and is connected. Much like the fungal systems mentioned earlier in this chapter, quantum physics has proven these connections exist globally on a quantum level via incrementally smaller concentric vibrating strings (string theory). Ancient shamans believed this to be true before science proved it to be so. As I stated previously: magic could be said to be simply science that we have yet to understand.

Machen explored this concept of humans misunderstanding the various meanings and communications within nature when crafting his 1907 book The Hill of Dreams. He wondered whether all objects of nature could actually be purely symbolic: “whether nature does not endeavour to talk to us and tell us amazing secrets by the signs and cyphers of trees and ferns and herbs and flowers and hills and
streams”. (Machen, 1924, 80) Machen presents an analogy of how much may very well be missing from our human perspective of nonhuman interactions:

Suppose a Tuscan to come to a village of savages and talk in his beautiful speech, and suppose the inhabitants pronounced him a curious, gibbering creature and made him a slave to amuse the children by the strange sounds he uttered. Even so, perhaps, may be our state with regard to inanimate nature. The oak and the elm that we fell for our need may be wonderful signs: the brooks may indeed be books: the fern may be a great secret: the flower by the way the word of a great mystery: and whether we call the hills beautiful or dig coal from him, we may equally misunderstand their office. (Machen, 1924, 80)

The minded agency of nature that I anthropomorphise in my Woodland Magick audio walk is an extension of this idea, that as humans we cannot understand the possible deeper mystery or emotional worlds of nonhuman networks within inanimate nature. Machen’s early twentieth-century sensibilities were attuned to the supernatural, and this served as a starting point for a twenty-first century walk. Borrowing concepts of modern animism, I have used these themes within Woodland Magick to craft an animistic folktale about a River Spirit in Abney Park cemetery, more akin to Celtic animism legends than the scientific advancements that formed the basis of my Woodland Networks audio walk. Through anthropomorphising the river, fires, and trees, along with the ‘power of words’, I have crafted a practice that shares a common basis with Celtic animism and poetry. As Celtic Reconstructionist Pagan Erynn Rowan Laurie describes her craft in A Word Among Letters: Animist Practice in Celtic Reconstructionist Paganism:
Words are alive. Stones have souls. Swords speak to humans. There is much in Celtic literature and historical sources about the Celts to suggest that the early Celtic peoples practiced animistic, polytheistic religions before they were converted to Christianity. Even after the conversion, source texts are alive with tales and poetry that suggest a sense of soul or spirit dwelling within the nonhuman. [...] Poets declare their forms as books, sunlight, stars, sound, waves of the sea, animals. This declaration of form implies a living spirit within that has intelligence and volition that can be engaged by those who are aware of its presence. (Laurie, 2013, 123)

Laurie stresses that the Celtic Reconstructionist Pagans do not regard the ancient tales as literal history, but instead as mythic and spiritual truths that resonate through the ages and teach deep lessons to those who would but hear and understand. “Through the tales, much of this wisdom is embodied in the memory of the landscape where each mountain and river has a holy, numinous presence.” (Laurie, 2013, 130)

Animist Andrieh Vitimus describes the agency of trees in his paper Pragmatic Tree Spirit Magic as having a significant role in a variety of earth-based spiritual and magical traditions. Trees represent communication, and in totemic shamanism, certain plants have information and a willingness to communicate. “Trees and plants play a significant role in a variety of earth-based spiritual and magical traditions. In many traditions, people will use trees to empower their magic, to make magical talismans or to ground out negativity.” (Vitimus, 2013, 202)

For my Woodland Magick audio walk, I chose trees to be the communication networks through which the elemental ancients (river and fire) infused Stoke Newington with an unbalance to
explain the otherworldly atmosphere that has been noted by writers over the years in Abney Park cemetery. Arthur Machen wrote of Abney Park’s otherworldly unseen dimensions in his story *N*. Iain Sinclair put forward the notion in his 2009 lecture *London’s Lost Rivers: The Hackney Brook and Other North West Passages* that Stoke Newington is so ‘weird and mysterious’ because it follows the line of the long-lost Hackney Brook river. As Sinclair noted in ‘Lost Rivers’:

> There is also the unregistered darkness of water beneath the ground. The rivers that we sense but no longer see. In the *Notes* that accompany the poem *Vale Royal*, Dun says: ‘The black stream is a ley-line whose energies have become stagnant through neglect, or negative through misuse’. Two kinds of water are always present. Or indeed a single mysterious substance capable of those shifts and metamorphoses Conrad noticed, from shimmering sundance tesserae to occulted black in an instant: ‘less brilliant but more profound’. (Sinclair, 2009, 26)

What I have endeavoured to capture with my *Woodland Magick* audio walk is this dark tension and struggle: the subversion of purpose that polarises the intent of River Spirit, from peaceful and life giving, to tormented and poisoned. This darkness, literal in the sense of subterranean, but figurative in terms of theme.

**Process of Crafting Woodland Magick**

The starting point for exploring the layered meanings within Abney Park that I wished to explore with *Woodland Magick* began with researching the grounds of the cemetery itself and the literary heritage of Abney Park cemetery and Stoke Newington. The site of Abney Park was formed from the estates of Fleetwood House and Abney House, where the hymn writer Isaac Watts lived under the patronage of Lady Abney in the eighteenth century. Watts was
supposedly particularly taken by a heronry on an island in the thirty-foot-wide Hackney Brook at the northern end of the park, where the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery is today. The Hackney Brook flowed above ground until it was covered over in 1861. As Abney Park cemetery was founded in 1840, for the first twenty-one years of its operation, the river remained a striking feature of the landscape. The association with Isaac Watts, and the nonconformist community of Stoke Newington, quickly made Abney Park the foremost burial ground for Dissenters—those practising their religion outside the established church, also known as nonconformists. Abney Park cemetery was founded on these principles, with a nondenominational chapel at its core, and was open to all, regardless of religious conviction.

Due to Stoke Newington’s Dissenter heritage, the area housed progressive thinkers, such as Daniel Defoe and Robert Louis Stevenson, and also a young Edgar Allan Poe. Although Poe was a boy at the time of his residence, he would later write about his time at Manor House School on Stoke Newington Church Street, fancifully reimagining the plain Victorian school building as a dark and rambling Elizabethan maze of a mansion in an area of Stoke Newington that he described in *William Wilson* as:

> A misty-looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees, and where all the houses were excessively ancient. In truth, it was a dream-like and spirit-

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31 A memorial mound and plaque now commemorates the spot where Isaac Watts is believed to have sat to compose his hymns on the bank of the now-buried Hackney Brook river. This mound is also the termination point for my audio walk *Thoughts on Mourning*.

32 However, in Poe’s case, he attended primary school in Stoke Newington as an eight-year-old boy and did not move to the area through a choice of his own. Poe attended Manor House School from 1817 to 1820. The school has been since demolished, the place where it stood now marked with a bust statue of Poe over The Fox Reformed wine bar on Stoke Newington Church Street, 320 metres from Abney Park cemetery.
soothing place, that venerable old town. At this moment, in fancy, I feel the refreshing chilliness of its deeply shadowed avenues, inhale the fragrance of its thousand shrubberies. (Poe, 2014, 549)

Arthur Machen further ensconced Stoke Newington’s uncanny otherworldly reputation in his story *N*, wherein he recounts the description of the area told by a man who went there looking for Poe’s old school, but upon leaving couldn’t remember where he’d been or if he’d actually seen it or not: “He confessed that it was strange. [...] He talked like a man who had gone into the mist, and could not speak with any certainty of the shapes he had seen in it.”

(Machen, 2010, 8) This referencing again of the “mists” of Stoke Newington gives the impression of a place that is shrouded and hard to uncover, with visitors leaving having felt they’ve experienced something uncanny. Researching the development of Stoke Newington through its nonconformist beginnings and literary heritage, I discovered Iain Sinclair took up an investigation of Stoke Newington’s uncanny reputation through a walking practice and his investigations into William Blake, who felt ill at ease in north London in general. Sinclair’s investigations led him trace the uncanny aspects of Stoke Newington to be born in part from the buried Hackney Brook river. To this end, he traced the course of the subterranean river in *Swimming to Heaven: The Lost Rivers of London*.

Before beginning my research into Abney Park cemetery, I did not know there was the buried Hackney Brook river along its north boundary. Prior to beginning my research, I had been a visitor to Abney Park for four years; however I had never seen any indication of the Hackney Brook’s existence. This important feature of its

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33 I further explain how I used Machen’s story *N*, in ‘The Story of *N*: Arthur Machen’s Stoke Newington’ in Chapter Three.

34 Kensal Green and West Norwood cemeteries, both members of the Magnificent Seven, also stand on the banks of lost rivers.
formation is not advertised to visitors—there are no signs or posted information that there is a buried river there. It is a completely ignored and forgotten feature. This discovery of the buried Hackney Brook forming the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery brought my literary uncanny investigations full circle. In plumbing the depths of where the sense of the uncanny in Stoke Newington originates, through the literary heritage that marks Stoke Newington out as separate from its neighbouring areas in Hackney and Islington, a case could be made for the buried Hackney Brook forming part of the mystery and adding to the mythology of the area. Taking inspiration from Iain Sinclair’s walking practice methodology for crafting his literary explorations of space, I began walking in Abney Park cemetery looking for layers of meaning to be found there.

Based on the discovery of the buried Hackney Brook, my idea of theoretical layers within Abney became embodied in the physical reality of earth layered over buried water. Based on the buried Hackney Brook, I wrote a dark allegorical tale on the subject that became my Woodland Magick audio walk. For Woodland Magick, I explore the emotional life of the Hackney Brook river as a character, ‘River Spirit’, and the world of animistic spirits and ley-line energies that such a character would inhabit. Machen himself conceived of animism as one possible perception of things in nature. As he describes in his first autobiography Things Near and Far:

The world of the senses is very largely a world of illusion and delusion. To give a sharp example of what I mean: I would say that the old story of the oak and the dryad is much nearer to the real and final truth about the oak

35 Writing the animistic folktale for Woodland Magick inspired me to expand the story into a full-length play based upon the original concept titled ‘Borderland’, which is projected to be produced by my theatre company ‘Strange Productions’ in Abney Park cemetery September 2019.
than the scientific classification and description of the tree in a manual of Dendrology. Not that I believe that a spirit in the shape of a beautiful woman of another order of being to our own is somehow bound up with the life of the oak tree; but I do believe that the truth about the oak tree—as about all else—is a great mystery, which is quite beyond the purview of all sensitive—that is scientific—perception and enquiry. (Machen, 1923, Chapter IX)

In keeping with Machen’s observations, *Woodland Magick* is an animistic folktale exploring the possible worlds behind our observable world. The audio walk is playful in tone and does not put forward River Spirit and Fire Spirit to be real beings in an actual love war in Abney Park cemetery. However, the concept that something like a unknown character, or consciousness, behind these elemental powers is the door of perception opened here—the possibility and the question raised being important to the walking experience of Abney Park.

In his writings, Sinclair mentions both Poe and Machen as feeling “confusion, double identities, a shift in the electromagnetic field” (Sinclair, 2009, 551-552) of Stoke Newington. Sinclair writes in *Blake’s London: The Topographic Sublime* that William Blake felt a sense of unease regarding most of north London, including his walks traversing Stoke Newington. During Blake’s and Poe’s time, the Hackney Brook river was still flowing above ground, but by the time Machen published his story about the mysterious hidden worlds behind the veneer of Stoke Newington in his story *N* in 1936, the Hackney Brook had been buried for seventy-five years.

The concept I introduce with *Woodland Magick* is that the conversion of the openly flowing river to subterranean water flowing in darkness can twist the energy of a place and create a ley-line. The burying of the Hackney Brook river does not appear to be the
beginning of the ‘unease’ in Stoke Newington, however it does appear to have focused and heightened it, if Sinclair’s and Merlin Coverley’s accounts of ley lines are to be explored as a mode of psychogeography.

In crafting the path of _Woodland Magick_, there were main spaces I wanted to take the visitor through along the walk, as well as visual points I wove into my narrative. I begin by taking the listening walker through the Stoke Newington Church Street entrance, as that is the side of the cemetery where an ancient Cedar of Lebanon used to stand, which I mention in the narrative in the beginning and introduces the ancient nature of Abney Park’s trees into the story. I chose music boxes for the thematic music to accompany the narrative because they are natural instruments made of wood and metal, and I wanted a stripped-down feel to the musical choice. The audio walk begins with a recording of ‘Hungarian Rhapsody’ from a simple wooden music box that my father gave my mother as a wedding present, and that my mother would wind and put next to my bed when I was small child to help me fall asleep. It is one of the most beautiful sounds in the world to me and is a piece of music with deeply personal emotional resonance. One day, if I get married, I would like to walk down the aisle as this music box plays. I tried finding another music box recording of Hungarian Rhapsody online, but no recording was the same as my music box, and none of them carried the emotion I was trying to capture. My mother has a friend with a home recording studio where she lives in California, so she took the music box to him to record in his studio, and that is the recording that is used in _Woodland Magick_. The music box music for the beginning and the ending of the audio walk was not chosen at random, but is the epitome of the most emotionally charged sound in the world, to me. The other music box recordings mixed into the middle were found online to add darker elements and break
monotony, however my music box recording is brought in again at the end to hint at perhaps an ending that would be frightening for mortals, but a happy release for River Spirit and Fire Spirit.

After the initial entrance into Abney Park, and as the Hungarian Rhapsody music box music fades out, we follow the main path along, I then guide the listening walker to turn left along a narrow path that takes the walker by a striking tree stump that is hollowed out and hangs over the path at eye-level, with a gaping hole about a foot across. This location is where I introduce the relationship between trees and River Spirit:

There will be a gaping tree trunk coming up here, on your right-hand side, leaning over the path. When you reach it, let’s pause for a moment. The once peaceful and life-giving river has turned vengeful in her isolation. River Spirit manifests herself the only way she can. She holds an ancient conversation with her elemental brethren—Tree Spirits and Stone Spirits. As River Spirit twists in frustration, her misery is felt by the roots of the ancient Tree Spirits, flowing up their root systems to their canopy. River Spirit’s anguish flutters out of their leaves as the Tree Spirits carry her story to those who would but hear her speak. Sometimes her sadness channels too much energy, and Tree Spirits cannot contain her message. Her anguish breaks through their trunks, like the Tree Spirit you see here, who was torn violently open at the witching hour one of her deepest nights of loneliness and torment. Like a woodland seashell, if you listen close—you can more feel than hear—that this is a portal to down below, where River Spirit twists and sighs. (Woodland Magick transcript)

Following the paths along, turning left and right on ever-narrower paths to the background of various versions of music box music, I guide the listening walker to a large gash on the side of veteran tree
#4, which was struck by lightening. This is where I introduce Fire Spirit as a character who is trying to free his ancient nemesis and love, River Spirit, who was buried alive. As I explain in *Woodland Networks*, Abney Park cemetery has been set on fire more than any other of the Magnificent Seven. From the centre chapel fire that reduced it to a ruin in 1978, to the rounds of lightning strikes through out its 178-year history—to, most shockingly, an never-apprehended arsonist who set fires at the bases of the trees comprising the original arboretum, at what date and for what purpose, no one still knows.

After introducing Fire Spirit, I guide the listening walker to the centre chapel, where I show veteran tree #22, and the tree that has survived the most fires in Abney—no less than three times. Here, too, is where the stones of the centre chapel mark the bones of the archways—and with trees, fire, and stone all in conflux in the exact centre of cemetery, this is where I have chosen to have the fault of the ley-line run through Abney Park, where the forces of these animistic spirits within my folklore tale finish out their story.

What I have endeavoured to capture in my audio walk is this sinister tension and struggle, the subversion of purpose that polarises the intent of River Spirit, from peaceful and life giving, to tormented and poisoned with degrees of twilight and shadow, of half-knowing, believing, assuming, concluding. This half-knowing is a key theoretical construct of *Woodland Magick*. In trying to capture the shimmer around the edges of liminal experience—one that can only be seen from the periphery of our vision—to examine too closely is to lose meaning, and to lose truth. The truth I wish to anthropomorphise within my *Woodland Magick* audio walk lives in twilight: the half-known mystery is the extent of the possible truth—and this half-known mystery is the experience of otherworldly Stoke
Newington of which Poe, Machen, Sinclair, and Nicholson have all written. In keeping with the tradition of these writers, *Woodland Magick* poses questions, present possibilities, and disappears into the shadows.

**Conclusion**

The aspect of Abney Park cemetery that is the most visible, yet perhaps, paradoxically, the least noticed by a visitor to the cemetery space, is the nature reserve, and the complex interactions between nonhuman actants within it. In this chapter, I have investigated the nonhuman agency of plants, fungi, animals, and stones in Abney Park, and how these findings have informed my *Woodland Networks* and *Woodland Magick* audio walks. Abney Park is a nature reserve and, as such, does draw a portion of the community who come to study fungi or bird watch. However, for most casual visitors to cemetery spaces, the flora and fauna are merely a pleasant backdrop to the stone monuments that they have come to see. While any nature reserve would manifest dynamic relationships between nonhuman actants, the unique element of human interference within cemeteries offers a depth to these interactions in the sense of working with, around, and against these interactions. A group can sometimes be best defined by what it is *not*, and the actions of nonhuman actants of Abney Park cemetery are more clearly shown by their contrast and juxtaposition to human actants.

Through the medium of my two audio walks, *Woodland Networks* and *Woodland Magick*, I aim to inspire a process of acknowledging the agency of nonhumans—opening a door of perception to this borderland world that would perhaps not have been a point of view previously familiar to the listening walker—and to engage the community who uses the cemetery with the fascinating nonhuman
history of Abney Park cemetery. By breaking down binaries that may be assumed to be static: life/matter, human/animal, will/determination, and organic/inorganic, these two audio walks also pose larger questions about our human position in a world that is both human and nonhuman. Everything on our planet works together to its own ends, even if those ends cannot be seen to have a consciousness in the way that we think of it as humans. Human agency is part of an interfolding network of humanity and nonhumanity. The goal of both of these audio walks is to facilitate an opening up to perceiving interactions between nonhuman actants in the ‘enchanted forest’ of Abney Park cemetery, by way of a participatory observation on the part of a human actant (listening walker).

In the next chapter, I analyse Abney Park as an outdoor archive through my *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* audio walk portraying the life story of a couple who are buried in the cemetery: Frank and Susannah Bostock. Crafting the tumultuous love story for my performed audio walk about the Bostocks began with first encountering their sleeping lion gravestone. This large white marble monument continually accrues dirt, moss, and encroaching foliage that camouflage it into the surrounding gravestones and shrubbery. However, as it is a prominent grave monument and important as the promotional symbol of Abney Park, the marble lion is frequently scrubbed down clean, back to a gleaming white, which makes the stone monument look brand new and out of place from its gravestone neighbours. This human/nonhuman interaction with the Bostock lion is explored in the narrative of *Woodland Networks*. This relationship between stone and moss, and between the Abney Park Trust and stone, is an example of the cemetery-wide negotiations that take place between human and nonhuman actants in Abney Park cemetery. Underneath the stone lion monument lies a man who
embraced nonhuman relationships more readily than human ones, and the physical fluctuations of his gravestone is an exemplar of the tension of human/nonhuman relationships as the custodians of Abney Park battle back the nature reserve.
CHAPTER FIVE

Love, Wrath, Death, Lions—A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock Audio Walk and Historiography in the Archive

Transforming archival data into historical narrative is a subjective act. The writing of history always requires the intervention of a human interpreter. (Manoff, 2004, 16)

The past ‘as it was’ or ‘as it happened’ is an illusionary category, neither stable nor homogeneous. (Pearson, 2001, 11)

In this chapter, I explore the historiography of archive use and how I endeavoured to represent and breathe life into historical documents by use of artistic interpretation to fill in the gaps in information available to create my audio walk of the story of a couple buried in Abney Park cemetery: Love, Wrath, Death, Lions—A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock. It is intended that the reader listen to both audio walks, while following along with their corresponding transcripts and photographic journeys in the ‘Audio Walk Transcripts and Photographic Journeys’ section at the end of this thesis, before proceeding with Chapter Five.

I chose the Bostocks as my research subject for animating the outdoor archive of Abney Park cemetery for two reasons: first, their gravestone is a large white marble monument topped with a sleeping lion, which is one of the most prominent grave monuments in the cemetery and which Abney Park uses in their promotional materials. It is a recognisable mascot for Abney Park. And, secondly, because the Bostock family who are buried beneath the marble lion were a circus family of some international renown, so there would be an opportunity for rich source material in the archives.
Throughout my research, I found conflicting and contentious reports of the character of Frank Bostock, and the facts of his marriage to Susannah on record create contradictions in what could be interpreted from these accounts of their personal lives. To help with my interpretations of the somewhat disjointed source material that I gathered through my research into the lives of the Bostocks, I have turned to the research of archivists who have also used archives for creative purposes. Throughout this chapter, I illustrated the pitfalls of the ‘seduction’ of the archive, and on what basis I have founded my artistic reimaginings of the life and character of the Bostocks.

In 1883, Susannah filed a petition for judicial separation from Frank on the grounds of cruelty. The long list of grievances in her petition, which is on file in the National Archives, comprises fifteen detailed violent attacks. Researching Frank’s relationship with dangerous animals in his care, especially with his lions, there is an aspect of these human/nonhuman relationships that appears, from the archival documentation, to have been easier for Frank than the human relationship with his wife Susannah. It is telling that the gravestone atop the family plot of eight people interred is that of a lion, with no other imagery denoting aspects of the other seven people interred there—Frank’s relationship with his family seeming to come secondary to his relationship with his lions. The dichotomy between Frank the lion-trainer’s tender care of dangerous ‘wild beasts’, via his ground-breaking animal psychology perspectives and ethos of nonviolence, and Frank the husband, who manifested violent behaviour towards his wife Susannah, who by contrast would seem to not be threatening, is the point of tension embedded in the archive, and which needed to be addressed to craft an audio walk animating their story for visitors to Abney Park.
The choices I made in crafting their narrative have raised some pertinent questions regarding fidelity to the archive and my reading of what I found there. Throughout this chapter, I analyse my choices with a critical reflection on the basis behind these narrative choices and possible other outcomes of interpretation, as well as look at the relationship dynamics between Frank and his animals versus Frank and his wife—and how my audio walk seeks to address both of these sides of a complex archival history. Next, I explain the process by which I crafted my *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* audio walk. I conclude with what *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* aims to offer visitors to Abney Park cemetery in terms of animating the outdoor archive of the space, and what a visit to the Bostock lion gravestone illustrates in terms of human and nonhuman relationships.

**Historiography: Creative Histories in the Archive**

Emotion is another tool with which to split the rock of the past, of silence. (Farge, 2013, 32)

In her analysis on the use of archives as a resource for piecing together the possible narratives of people who lived long ago, Carolyn Steedman (2001) gives a warning regarding what she terms ‘the seductions of the archive’, and the ‘entrancing stories’ that they contain, which do the work of the seducer. An entrancing story crafted by the researcher’s imagination, from snippets found within an archive, is quite a different thing from the historical analysis that inspires it. It is easy to be swept up in crafting an emotional (or at least ‘meaningful’) story from the information that is found. Viewed in that light, the audio walk that I have crafted from the archives is a product of this seduction, which is the seduction to flesh out the Bostocks’ narrative from the frustratingly sparse accounts available in the archive. As Steedman points out:
You know perfectly well that the infinite heaps of things they recorded, the notes and traces that these people left behind, constitute practically nothing at all. There is the great, brown, slow-moving strandless river of Everything, and then there is the tiny flotsam that has ended up in the record office you are working in. Your craft is to conjure a social system from a nutmeg grater. (Steedman, 2001, 18)

While I did not navigate household ledgers of nutmeg graters and food orders, the documents I did work with (the ships logs of dates and names of trips to New York City; birth and death records; census reports; and the stark listing of grievances of physical abuse accounted by Susannah Bostock in her petition for judicial separation) all left me with many gaps to fill in order to craft a coherent narrative for my audio walk. Imagination is a key ingredient in both the crafting, and the experiencing, of my audio walks; and the interaction of imagination with the archive is what I have endeavoured to navigate with Love, Wrath, Death, Lions, in particular. Steedman writes of this navigation between the ‘place’ of memory and imagination that:

History (the formal written history, or history-writing) has provided a way of thinking about what is in a particular place—a place which for the moment shall simply be called Memory. To interrogate that place, we have to be less concerned with History as stuff (we must put to one side the content of any particular piece of historical writing, and the historical information it imparts) than as process, as ideation, imagining and remembering. (Steedman, 2001, 67)

Crafting a narrative out of the archive is an act of imagination. Herein lies the difficult negotiation between the archive and the researcher; especially a researcher for whom the research becomes a
creative project—here Steedman’s reference to ‘process’ taking precedence over ‘stuff’ is most apparent. Most of the work of crafting my Love, Wrath, Death, Lions audio walk was undertaken when the archive work was completed. The ‘ideation and imagining’ become the bulk of the project. As Pearson and Shanks frame it, the active process of interpretation is to “clarify or explain the meaning and significance of something, deciphering and translating the past in the present. [...] Interpretation is also about the performance of a work—acting out something to give it an intelligible life.” (Pearson and Shanks, 2001, 11)

There is a difference between writing ‘historical fiction’ and ‘history-writing’. This difference is highlighted by historian Arlette Farge, in her work The Allure of the Archives. Farge asserts that the idea that a novelist (or, in my case, a performed audio story writer) resurrects the archive is actually a mistaken assumption. Farge describes this work (working with archives to craft characters from people who actually lived, and working from details of their lives that have been actually recorded) as inevitably, despite the collection of all of these ‘facts’, a work of fiction. “It’s true that a writer can make marionettes out of eighteenth-century men and women, adroitly or clumsily, bringing the readers in on the trick and providing entertainment. But this has nothing to do with ‘writing history’.” (Farge, 2013, 76)

When researching people’s lives, there is a burden felt to do them justice, to tell their story fairly, even if it is indeed a ‘story’, and not ‘history-writing’. The names, dates, steamer passage ledgers, and census records are ‘history’, but that is not what I wished to capture for Love, Wrath, Death, Lions. I did not wish to merely ‘write history’—the benefit and beauty of the opportunity presented by the medium of an audio walk, brought to ‘life’ by way of actor portrayal of the characters of Frank and Susannah Bostock, lies in its possibility
for emotional resonance. I have crafted all four of my audio walks from disparate emotional worlds, all of which are, inevitably, personal. This infusion of my personal interpretation of facts within an emotional landscape is what transforms the work from a transcript of ‘history’ into an artistic mediation between the listening walker and the gravestone archive in the cemetery. While I foreground my walk as an historical journey through the tumultuous love story of the Bostocks, it is, ultimately, as much my creative story as their life story.

The intention of my stated format of telling a story, rather than a piece of ‘history-writing’, lies not only in my desire for emotional resonance with the work for the listening walker visiting Abney Park, but also in the need to have the audio tour follow a plot arc. This is both the constraint and the opportunity of working in place. There must be a beginning, a middle, and an end; it must follow a prescribed path through the cemetery, that is at once picturesque and in line with the tone, but must also be mapped in such a way that it ends at the Bostocks’ gravestone; it must fit within an ‘acceptable’ timeframe for a walking tour; it must inform, yet also entertain—all of these constructs of form inform the function. On top of these logistical concerns, I wanted to craft a story that is interesting, that takes the listening walker on an emotional journey that opens a door of perception into the cemetery as a space of outdoor archive, that engages the visitor to Abney Park with the space of the cemetery in an embodied way, and that brings the narrative to a satisfying conclusion: an ending.

As Steedman points out, history does not have ‘ends’. Researchers can read the snippets of a life, and craft an arc and meaning from these traces, but from the lived point of view of the real historical persons at the time, there is just ‘life’. Things happen in succession,
but not necessarily in any identifiable plot arc. Yes, people die (which is, of course, an ending); however, stories of their children and their legacies continue: families, homes, and artefacts impact the future in myriad ways. To tell a story from a selection of facts and events is to sort the available information flotsam into a somewhat artificial construct and impose meaning. This is something people often do with memories of their own lives. Crafting a meaningful narrative after the fact is the way our brain processes and orders our past, aligning events in a certain way helps us make meaning of, and learn lessons from, the somewhat random events that befall us.

Psychologists have termed this ‘narrative identity’, or ‘life story model’, which asserts that people living in modern societies provide their lives with unity and purpose by constructing internalised and evolving narratives of the self. Furthermore, this narrative is a story—it has characters, episodes, imagery, a setting, plots, themes, and often follows the traditional model of a story, having a beginning, middle, and an end. (McAdams, 2001, 100)

The result of this psychological gymnastics for meaning we impose upon our own narratives leads quite naturally to imposing this same ‘narrative identity’ drive to find patterns, narrative, and meaning within the disparate lists of events found in an archive. As historians Maggie B. Gale and Ann Featherstone note, “in a culture dominated by the need to self-define, the archive has become a vital cultural tool as a means of accessing versions of the past”. (Gale and Featherstone, 2011, 17) It is this habit of self-assessment that comes into play when analysing an archive. Researchers replace and reorder archive materials inside a history. Through their research, Gale and Featherstone found that historians “disconnect [archive materials] from one context and reconnect them with another or with other materials; we renegotiate their position in a hierarchy and, like the
detective, we make our clues *mean* something.” (Gale and Featherstone, 2011, 29)

The resulting story is a compilation of what the researcher concludes is a ‘best guess’ assumption of the past narratives of individuals from the compiled data: an exercise in crafting a story arc from of the complexity of a real life. Steedman acknowledges this drive to impose order on fragments: “We have seen David Carr counter Ricoeur and Mink and Hayden White and their claims about stories being told things rather than lived things, about the power of narrative to attach to the real world an order and form it does not intrinsically possess.” (Steedman, 2001, 149)

Frank Bostock wrote a book that, while titled *The Training of Wild Animals*, was in fact an autobiography. It was easy, therefore, to have beginning/middle/end anecdotes woven within his narrative as they were taken directly from his book, in his own words, which he crafted into plot arcs I could easily appropriate for my audio walk. As I embedded these anecdotes within the larger narrative of the travelling circus life of the Bostock family, further anecdotes were woven into the plot arc in the same theme—from the press clippings of Frank’s police arrest coming back from Germany after selling off Susannah’s jewellery, to their arrival and work in Coney Island, Brooklyn. The fact that a petition for judicial separation was brought on the ‘grounds of cruelty’ due to domestic violence, but a completed separation was never filed, followed by the move to New York City, all led to an inference, on my part, of a romantic resolution to the Bostocks’ differences, where the facts of the case fit into a nice plot arc of love triumphing after a period of darkness. While I have “attached to the real world an order and form it does not intrinsically possess”, I believe the artistic license I have taken with the Bostock’s
relationship is at least probable, based in the documented facts that are available.

One reason that there is as much documentation available as there currently is about Frank and Susannah Bostock is due to their moderate fame. And that fame was not restricted to the UK, but extended internationally. This means there is documentation on the Bostock family and travels in multiple locations and countries, and various newspapers from England and America, as well as the published book *The Training of Wild Animals* written by Frank Bostock (with the help of editor Ellen Velvin) in first-person voice. This book gave me invaluable information about how Frank saw himself, and helped me to flesh out his character tone by taking passages directly out of his book, using his own words to tell his tale within *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions*.

Crafting the character of Susannah Bostock was a different matter. (I describe that process and the reasons behind my choices in the next section.) Through my research, I discovered conflicting accounts of Frank Bostock’s character. It was a difficult choice as a researcher and storyteller to reconcile these two very different accounts of Frank, which appear to show a stark difference between the public persona and the private person. This conflicting report offered a fertile opportunity for storytelling—but one with contentious results.

**Historiography: Crafting the History of Frank and Susannah Bostock**

Researchers need to work with the precarious idea that they will only ever create an incomplete picture. (Gale and Featherstone, 2011, 29)
Frank Bostock lived from 1865 to 1912, and Susannah Bostock from 1866 to 1929. They were married in 1884. I chose to subtitle to *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* as a ‘Performed History’ as it is an historical account of their lives, in that I got my information through Frank Bostock’s book *The Training of Wild Animals*, and documents housed in the British Library, the National Archives, Ancestry.co.uk, and press clippings—therefore it is a ‘history’. However, I have embellished their story with emotional interpretations through my writing of the script, and further interpretations of tone through the vocal choices of my actors—therefore it is ‘performed’.

As the Bostocks were real people who were fairly well known, there came with this particular audio walk a feeling of personal accountability to be as accurate as possible within my artistic interpretation. My audio walks *Thoughts on Mourning, Woodland Magick*, and *Woodland Networks* dip in and out of historical references, with the majority of the walking experience based on my artistic interpretations of the respective themes within the space of the cemetery and were made with a feeling of autonomy whilst crafting them. For *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions*, I scrupulously researched as much documentation of the lives of the Bostocks that was available to complete their story. I was also sensitive to the fact the Bostocks most likely have living descendants. Should they listen to this audio walk, they could be offended, as some of the facts I uncovered, such as Frank’s physical abuse of Susannah, were very negative.

The Bostocks had seven children, one of whom died in infancy. I assume, with six children surviving into adulthood, there would be a high probability of the existence of living descendants. However, I have not researched them, as their stories are not relevant to my narrative, which focuses on the tumultuous love between Frank and
Susannah. Whether there are living descendants or not, it is important to be as faithful to historical accounts as is feasible, in deference not only to the memory of Frank and Susannah, but to the veracity of my audio walk to be taken by visitors to Abney Park. As historian Gesa Kirsch points out, referencing Jacqueline Jones Royster: “As scholars, we have an ethical responsibility to members of the community we study, and, in the case of historical subjects, to their descendants, who have a right to the respectful and dignified treatment of their ancestors.” (Kirsch, 2008, 25)

The unsavoury aspects of Frank’s personality that came to light through my research no one reading his book, The Training of Wild Animals, or the press clippings of his circus escapades, would likely have suspected. Frank Bostock’s book was written from his point of view and, as such, is a rather flattering and dashing account of his exploits as an animal trainer and circus man. The National Archive’s court reports of Susannah Bostock’s petition for judicial separation proceedings, on the other hand, were decidedly different. There appeared no hint, publicly, that he was anything other than an exceptionally gentle man. This dichotomy fascinated me.

Frank Bostock was famous for saying: “No wild animal is ever tamed, only trained.” Frank believed that it is a delusion to think that a wild animal is ever really ‘tamed’, “that he merely acquires a receptiveness to man’s control, and for the time being drops his ferocity”. (Bostock, 1903, 184) Frank was renowned for his groundbreaking gentleness regarding his treatment of the animals in his care. In The Training of Wild Animals, he espouses:

I would not allow anyone employed by me to stay another day if I had once found out that he was using any cruelty whatever to the animals in my charge. Kindness may not be appreciated by wild animals in one sense, but it
Frank undoubtedly tends to promote comfort and health. (Bostock, 1903, 49)

Frank banned the common practice of keeping red hot irons or firearms on hand in case of emergency attacks because they were cruel and unsafe, instead explaining to the trainers he employed that it was in a big cat’s nature to lash out if provoked, or to accidently hurt in play, and that if the big cats ever learned they could cause pain and harm to the humans who kept them, then the power of the trainer over the animals would be gone, and the big cat could no longer be relied upon to perform. Instead of hot pokers or guns, he used defensive tactics, sounds, and sticks and chairs to train the big cats. As Frank once told an interviewer: “The only weapons we use in my shows are intelligence, pluck, vigilance, and patience.” (Bostock, 1903, 165) There was no punishment for an animal that injured a trainer. If an animal wounded a trainer, Frank’s thinking was, the trainers were not to react in any way lest the animals learned that they are capable of inflicting injury. Many trainers were, of course, injured fairly often, but Frank taught them that it is a most unwise trainer who ever makes the slightest sign of pain or annoyance.

Every trainer expects to be clawed somewhat, and there is no successful trainer in the business who does not bear many marks of scratches and tears. My own body and limbs are elaborately tattooed with testimonials from my feline friends of many years past. All this is a matter of course. (Bostock, 1903, 188)

There are two reasons the lion atop the Bostock grave monument is sleeping: first, sleep is an often-used metaphor for death and is widely used in funerary sculpture; and, second, the stone lion is a symbol of the trainable, gentle lion that resulted from Frank’s famously different way of treating the animals in his menagerie. In
my audio walk, Frank tells the story of how he became a lion trainer and of being emotionally affected by seeing a lion abused in his youth:

The lion-tamer my father had at that time was the great feature in the show. It struck me, however, that he was extremely cruel. The trainer handled the lion so roughly that, enraged at the injustices and indignities to which he was subjected, the animal suddenly turned upon him, and would certainly have killed him had not prompt assistance been rendered. Wrought up and excited by the occurrence, I begged my father to let me take his place, but he would not hear of it. The next day I took the law into my own hands, and it was in the lion’s cage that my father found me, to his horror, when casually going the rounds of the show. (Love, Wrath, Death, Lions, transcript)

Frank treated all of his animals with gentleness, respect, and an understanding of them and of their disparate natures as animals—despite over the course of his training career being severely mauled by a tiger, which kept him bedridden unable to walk for six months, and having a finger bitten off by an ape. His ethos, that he taught to every trainer working under him, both male and female, to not show anger or pain or react in any way towards an attack, to keep the upper-hand, and keep calm, was an instruction, it would seem, only the most steely and stoic of performers could carry out. But to maintain a position with the Bostock circus, carry it out they must. During his time in Coney Island, Frank dismissed one trainer immediately on site after discovering he kept on hand the forbidden hot pokers. Frank’s notorious gentleness is what is referenced most often in the public sphere. To read the list of Susannah’s copious allegations of cruelty, after forming such a starkly contrasting image of Frank’s character, is hard to reconcile. This polarised dichotomy brings to mind a secret life, of a stark division between how Frank
felt was the appropriate way to handle animals versus the appropriate way to handle humans, namely his wife.

In 1893, after having been married for six years and having four children, Susannah petitioned for judicial separation on the grounds of cruelty, listing in her petition numerous incidents of violence committed by Frank towards her. The details of the court petition in the archives were comprised of a very dry account of dates and events, made even more horrific in my imagination by the cryptic nature of how little they offered by way of backstory, explanation, or emotion. Since there was little documentation of Susannah as a person besides this court petition, I chose to make my character of Susannah in my audio walk that of a fighter for family and her personal rights. This also makes for a more dynamic story than reading her as merely a victim. Polarised characters, such as damsels and villains, do not make for very interesting storytelling. In that vein, I did not want to portray Frank as an evil miscreant either. Frank was widely known for the gentleness with which he treated the animals in his care. He seemed to be a remarkable man with ideas about animal psychology and welfare that were far ahead of their time. If he was indeed the cruel abuser of Susannah’s accounts, then Frank was a man who embodied a stark difference between his public persona and his private person.

That Frank would have a well-hidden ‘monster’ lurking underneath his beatific menagerie caretaker image is not only disturbing, but also contentious. Was the case of marital cruelty Susannah brought against Frank true? Did she want a judicial separation because of Frank’s philandering (there is one mistress on record in the archives, there could have been more) and, perhaps, wished to slander his famous gentleness as a double-barbed vengeance? A Times news piece from 1893 announces charges against Frank Bostock brought
by Susannah, and his subsequent arrest and bail. Frank had sold jointly owned items, including some of their wedding presents and some of Susannah’s jewellery, to run off to Germany with a woman named Florence Read. In his absence, Susannah filed theft charges against him, and when he returned to England, he was promptly arrested, as the Times news piece reports. I could find no further information on Florence Read. I do not know who she was, how she and Frank met, or who did the leaving of whom in Germany.

As far as is housed in the National Archives, there was no evidence brought to the case other than Susannah’s testimony. I chose to take this testimony on faith. This is where the role of ‘researcher’ meets my subjective experience. I read her harrowing account of abuse with deep emotion and an instinct towards feminist solidarity. And, for that, I must make concessions regarding my presentation of the ‘truth’ in the performed history I have written. However, as Farge points out, inability to verify the past is inevitable.

The first illusion that must be cast aside is that of the definitive truthful narrative. An historical narrative is a construction, not a truthful discourse that can be verified on all of its points. This narrative must combine scholarship with arguments that can introduce the criteria of truthfulness and plausibility. (Farge, 2013, 95)

The ‘truth’ I presented for Susannah in Love, Wrath, Death, Lions is of fighter and survivor, but also of a woman in love. The ‘truth’ I presented for Frank was of a fiery, passionate man, daring in the ring, risky with women, with demons inside that he held back in the lion’s cage only to unleash on his wife at home. His inability to be faithful to Susannah was perhaps a manifestation of dysfunction in his human relationships. When Frank came back from Germany, Susannah had already moved out of their Palatine Road house in
Stoke Newington to a new home a few miles away on Spencer Road in Haringey. Moving the family out of the Stoke Newington house and pressing charges of theft against Frank are both very clear signs that Susannah was finished with Frank. However, despite these aggressive steps towards separation, somehow Frank won her back, and in 1898 the whole family moved to New York City. This is when their fortunes changed. The Bostocks were very successful in New York, founding Dreamland Coney Island Amusement Park in Brooklyn and touring America with their circus and menagerie. Their gamble on a new future in New York City paid off, and the Bostock brand was made famous. It was against the backdrop of ragtime music and the electric light of Dreamland Tower that I wrote them as falling in love again in my audio walk, by building something new together in an exciting new city. I do not know if this version is ‘true’, but it is plausible. I wished to show both sides of Frank’s character through the audio walk, which is a difficult narrative choice to navigate, to show the light and the dark without alienating listening walkers taking the Love, Wrath, Death, Lions journey. As addressed earlier in this chapter, the archive only offers the researcher lists, facts, reports, and court documents. The emotion and the meaning, and the story arc weaving them together into a narrative, comes down to filling in the gaps as a best-guess, and hoping to steer clear of the seduction of the archive and not create narratives that slip into a fully fanciful account of the past.

**Historiography: The Archive As a Contentious Source**

In her 2004 paper, *Theories of the Archive from Across the Disciplines*, MIT Humanities Library collection manager Marlene Manoff notes that with the increasing digitisation of archival material, there is an added layer of selected history edits over the existing selected history already presented in the archive by archivists. Historical
record is not an objective representation of the past, but rather a selection of objects that have been preserved for a variety of reasons. “The methods for transmitting information shape the nature of the knowledge that can be produced. Library and archival technology determine what can be archived and therefore what can be studied. Thus Derrida claims ‘archivisation produces as much as it records the event.’” (Manoff, 2004, 12)

Gale and Featherstone echo this assessment in their research, stating that not only is no archive free of either ideology or the fluctuations of economics in its formation and operation, but that archives are also not stable in content. Manoff further notes:

> Regardless of what historians may have once believed, there is currently a widespread sense that even government records that appear to be mere collections of numbers are, in fact, already reconstructions and interpretations. Someone decided what was worth counting and how to count it. Many researchers also have made the case that archives are not neutral or innocent. (Manoff, 2004, 14)

And herein lies the difference between what Manoff considers the modern homogenisation of what constitutes an archive, and the historic separation between documents in an archival office and, for my purposes, a gravestone in a cemetery.

The digital environment has further eroded these distinctions. As libraries, museums, and archives increasingly make their materials available online in formats that include sound, images, and multimedia, as well as text, it no longer makes sense to distinguish them on the basis of the objects they collect. (Manoff, 2004, 10)
In this sense, although my research is comprised of ledgers, court, and census documents, newspapers, and a gravestone, all from the nineteenth century, my access point for all of these ‘documents’ is both digitised and corporal. In the contemporary use of the term, Manoff argues, ‘archive’ has expanded to be an umbrella term encompassing a variety of historical media—a cemetery is indeed no longer merely a form of outdoor archive locked in place, but also simply ‘archive’ along with paper documents, when its contents (gravestones and records) are digitised.36

Content fluctuates according to what is kept and what is added by the custodian, but it is also defined by the researcher’s processes of meaning-making. A high percentage of what lies in the average archive is never read or examined; it is only given meaning through examination and definition. In other words, even if the content remains constant over time, its signifying potential meanings are in continuous flux according to who chooses to use it and in what manner and context. (Gale and Featherstone, 2011, 21)

Manoff draws special attention to the gaps (or perhaps, even more nefariously, purposeful edits) in some disciplines of study more than others—specifically in postcolonial narratives and in women’s studies.

In women’s studies, for example, a considerable amount of scholarship has been devoted to redressing the limits of the official record. One way of defining women’s studies might be as a project to write women back into the historical record—to fill the gaps and correct the omissions in the archive. [...] Scholars focus on the absences and the distortions of the archive,

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36 The outdoor archive of Abney Park cemetery is currently, as of 2018, in the middle of a two-year complete Heritage Lottery Funded digitisation project called ‘Abney Unearthed’, which will make Abney Park’s outdoor archive freely available online.
as well as new contributions by contemporary women. (Manoff, 2004, 15)

This pervasive lack of historical information on women might go some way to explaining why I found nothing in the press or in the archives relating to Susannah Bostock that was not connected to her husband. The closest document that I found to her autonomous voice was her petition for judicial separation— from her husband.

Gesa Kirsch’s research into feminist Mary Bennett Ritter informed my analysis of the information I was able to find on Susannah Bostock; and Kirsch’s perspectives on female voids in the archive assisted me in creating Susannah’s character for the audio walk. As Kirsch notes in her research into the life of Californian feminist Dr Ritter, despite her impressive history promoting women studying science in the University of California system at the turn of the twentieth century (the same time as when Susannah moved to Brooklyn with the Bostock menagerie) the only mention Mary Ritter received in historical record is due to her marriage to the first director of the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. She is ‘Mrs Ritter’ in this context, not ‘Dr Ritter’. Her separate agency and qualifications are not recorded in light of her gender.

It is interesting to observe that a single decision made by archivists— whose papers are worth collecting under his or her own name— can greatly influence accessibility and coherence of materials as well as the recognition accorded to an individual’s achievements and contributions to public life. As far as I can tell, the main reason that any of Ritter’s papers survive is because she eventually married William Ritter, the first director of the SIO [Scripps Institute of Oceanography]. Yet she lived an interesting life in her own right, one worth restoring to public record. (Kirsch, 2008, 21)
This tale of archival void in Kirsch’s American research is in no way constrained to California. My research into the life of Susannah Bostock bore as little fruit. Susannah’s petition for judicial separation would have been kept in court archives regardless of association, but under what heading? To be found by whom? The *Times* news piece reporting the charges filed by Susannah and her husband’s arrest when he came back from Germany would not likely have warranted a forty-seven-line article in the *Times* if her husband did not have notoriety. Kirsch felt that the very aspects of Mary Ritter’s character that drew her to research her story might be the very aspects that kept her from telling an accurate history.

In setting out to do my archival research, my primary goal has been to find out more about Ritter’s work, life, and accomplishments, but I also have to admit that I am fascinated by the things I first noticed when reading Ritter’s autobiography—her determination to succeed, her ‘I-shall-keep-going-until-I-drop’ attitude, and her feminist activism. At the same time, I try to resist too romantic a notion of this particular historical figure. [...] As Janet Eldred and Peter Mortensen remind us, archival research is, to some degree, always a nostalgic enterprise, a fact we need to acknowledge in our work. (Kirsch, 2008, 24)

My emotional response to Susannah’s account of her abuse was a factor in how I wrote her character, and writing an overly romantic version of her as a heroine was an easy trope to fall into—especially given that the petition for judicial separation was the only direct information I could discover about her. Portraying Susannah as a fighter for family and her rights and standing up to her husband also makes for a more dynamic story than reading her as merely a victim. And, in the end, engaging the listening walker with the story and characters is equally important as crafting a multilayered experience.
Regarding narrative and character decisions like these, Farge notes that there is always an active choice:

The archive always preserves an infinite number of relations to reality. Into this complex game, in which figures appear, if only as sketches, slip fable and fabulation, and perhaps even the ability for someone to transform everything into fantasy, to write one’s story or to turn one’s own life into fiction. [...] Narra- tion and fiction are woven together. The resulting cloth is fine-spun, and one cannot easily spot the seams. (Farge, 2013, 30-31)

No further court proceedings were filed after the petition for judicial separation. From this, I gathered that the international move aided in putting right the Bostocks’ marital problems. It seems they were happily married from that point until his death. I formed this impression from a lack of documentation stating otherwise, and, as such, I understand that the absence of proof is not proof to the contrary. I think perhaps I am too fond of happy endings. However, as this was my artistic invention, I allowed myself some leeway in this interpretation of events. The archive only offered up information to a certain point, and what it did offer proved to be conflicting. The resulting audio walk is crafted as a ‘dream’, as Steedman describes it:

Bachelard’s work [...] can enlighten on the pleasures of opening bundles in the county record office. But it cannot help with what is not actually there, with the dead who are not really present in the whispering galleries, with the past that does not, in fact live in the record office, but is rather, gone (that is its point; that is what the past is for); it cannot help with parchment that does not in fact speak. It is a dream that the Historian makes in the Archive, and it is the dream to which we must return. (Steedman, 2001, 81)
The goal of an historical writer is to fill the gaps in the archive, to tell the story of what isn’t there. As Manoff observes, “transforming archival data into historical narrative is a subjective act. The writing of history always requires the intervention of a human interpreter”. (Manoff, 2004, 16) With Love, Wrath, Death, Lions, I have crafted an audio journey of a possible history. The walk is heavily informed by archival findings, but equally informed by my emotional resonance with the material and the atmosphere of Abney Park cemetery, which is the silent, ever-present landscape wherein all of this tumultuousness is performed.

Love, Wrath, Death, Lions aims to offer visitors to Abney Park cemetery one story that animates the outdoor archive of the space, however a visit to the Bostock lion gravestone specifically presents other themes as well, in terms of human and nonhuman relationships. Frank Bostock seemed to show an instinct towards intuition about the mental state of the animals in his care. He had no university education (having left school at the age of fifteen to join in his father’s menagerie), or specialist zoological training, other than what he taught himself through his experience training dangerous animals, yet he observed: “Every trainer takes for granted that if he is attacked and thrown, the other beasts in the cage will join in all too quickly. The fellowship of animal for animal in the bonds of slavery is stronger than that of animal for man.” (Bostock, 1903, 83)

Referring to the state of the animals in his care as in “the bonds of slavery” tellingly shows that Frank seemed to know all too well the situation his animals found themselves in, and appeared to feel empathy for their role in his livelihood. Perhaps the most revealing clue into Frank’s analysis of the mental powers of his animals is a piece of advice he gave to all trainers in his employ:
The finest lion-trainers are men of the most absolute personal integrity, who smoke and drink very little, if at all, and who possess self-control to an unusual degree. It is a fact very little known and somewhat difficult to realise by those who have not studied the matter, that in some curious, incomprehensible way, wild animals know instinctively whether men are addicted to bad habits. For those who are the least bit inclined to drink, or live a loose life, the wild animal has neither fear nor respect. If a man had begun to deviate somewhat from the straight road, the animals will discover it long before his fellow men. (Bostock, 1903, 182)

This belief that wild animals can instinctively know when a trainer has no personal integrity is an interesting observation to be made by a man purportedly leading a double life of empathetic gentleness disguising fierce cruelty. Frank firmly believed that the mind of an animal only differs from human intellect by a matter of degree. He seemed to be a remarkable man with ideas about animal psychology and welfare that were far ahead of their time. If he was indeed the cruel abuser of Susannah’s accounts, then Frank was a man who embodied a stark difference between his public persona and his private person. However, perhaps this fracture was not the tension between a showman and private man, but instead the tension between his ability to navigate human versus nonhuman relationships.

**Process of Crafting Love, Wrath, Death, Lions—A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock**

Susannah Bostock’s court petition for judicial separation from her husband Frank, that is housed in the National Archives, was comprised of a very dry account of dates and events, made somehow even more horrific in my imagination by the cryptic nature of how little they offered by way of backstory, explanation, or emotion. Since
there was little documentation of Susannah as a person besides this court petition, I chose to make my character of Susannah a fighter for family and her personal rights. This also makes for a more dynamic story than reading her as merely a victim. Polarised characters, such as damsels and villains, do not make for very interesting storytelling. In that vein, I did not want to portray Frank as an evil reprobate either. Frank was widely known for the gentleness with which he treated the animals in his care. It is interesting to try to reconcile these two very different accounts of his character, which appear to show a stark difference between the public persona and the private person.

However, I must acknowledge my romantic notion of Susannah Bostock. When reading of her abuse in the court documents, I was very personally struck. Reading the judicial petition at the National Archives caught me completely off-guard by how suddenly emotional I had become. The list of Susannah’s grievances was long and very difficult to read. I did not know what information I would find in the archive when I arrived. What I uncovered shocked me, and took my audio walk in a completely different direction than I had originally intended. I had set out to write a simple love story. I had planned to find an engaging gravestone, research the people to whom it belonged (not expecting to find very much), then write a mostly fictional springtime walk through Abney Park set to soft music, incorporating poetry, a touch of nostalgia, then end at their graveside, with some sort of summation about being together forever under the earth, locked in love. What I got instead was gritty, hard, and all too real. My whole audio walk concept took a quick ninety-degree turn from a frothy springtime ramble into a very different emotional space. I had uncovered a story far darker and more complex than I had expected to find.
My emotional response to Susannah’s account of her abuse was a factor in how I wrote her character; and writing an overly romanticised version of Susannah as a heroine was an easy trope to fall into—especially given that the petition for judicial separation was the only direct information I could discover about her. However, the discovery of that court document was a catalyst moment for the story of the walk as a whole as well. The emotional resonance I had regarding the story of the Bostocks while holding their court documents in my hands changed my audio walk idea from a breezy, theoretical version of love into something much messier. After reading Susannah’s testimony in court of fifteen counts of cruelty, I left the documents on my reserved table and went into the ladies’ toilets. I locked myself in a stall and burst into tears. I do not consider myself to be someone so fragile that a court document from 120 years ago could affect me so much; and the surprise of the intensity of my emotion, and the embarrassment of crying in public, especially in the toilets of the National Archives, came as a complete shock.

However, I knew then that I had my narrative arc. Those documents also formed my decision of who the ‘Susannah’ in my audio walk would be. I was angry at Frank, I felt deep empathy with Susannah, and I had an opportunity to give her a voice. ‘My’ Susannah would not have the voice of a victim. Portraying Susannah as a fighter for family and her rights, standing up to her husband, also makes for a more dynamic story than reading her as merely a victim. And, in the end, engaging the listening walker with the story and characters is equally important as crafting a multilayered experience.

In that vein, I did not want to portray Frank as an evil, moustache-twirling miscreant forever tying Susannah to the tracks either. Something did not sit right with the two very conflicting portrayals.
of Frank’s character: Frank’s gentle animal training, against the litany of abuse charges brought against him. These charges could be viewed, perhaps, with suspicion were they not added to the theft of Susannah’s wedding presents and jewellery to run off with a mistress, leaving her with four children and little money. Abandoning a wife and family does not speak to an exceptionally ‘gentle’ nature. Despite everything they went through, the judicial separation was never finalised. Frank came back from his ill-fated elopement, and Susannah and Frank began their lives again. As I have Susannah explain in the audio walk:

By that summer we had arrived in the United States. Frank set up near 5th and Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. We all crammed ourselves into one wagon and in the other two wagons we housed four monkeys, five parrots, three lions, a sheep, and a boxing kangaroo. It was like the old days again. We were building something new together, something larger and more magical than anything we’d attempted before—something that by 1904 would come to be known as Dreamland Amusement Park Coney Island. (Love, Wrath, Death, Lions transcript)

No further court proceedings were filed after the 1893 petition for judicial separation. From this, I gathered that the international move aided in putting right their marital problems. It seems they were happily married from that point until his death. I formed this impression from a lack of documentation stating otherwise, and, as such, I understand that the absence of proof is not proof to the contrary. For the audio walk, I wrote a catharsis for Susannah that I perhaps needed for myself. I think perhaps I am too fond of happy endings.

In my walk Thoughts on Mourning, I describe the cemetery space as a ‘temporal fabric’ of society, as a ‘time capsule’. Archives are a form
of time capsule, holding documents from the past for researchers to view in the future. In this way too, cemeteries contain stone ‘documents’ of names, birth and death dates, and perhaps a short bit of information about the person(s)’ lives—cemeteries are outdoor archives in stone. In Thoughts on Mourning, I reference the space of the cemetery itself as an archive to be interpreted; in Love, Wrath, Death, Lions, it is the archive that is first interpreted, then brought into the cemetery space. I have used the audio medium to craft a walking experience that brings alive both readings of archive—outdoor archive with written archive—within the space of the cemetery, which has the added resonance that the dead you are researching are actually present right under your feet.

A cemetery is a place for the dead. In an archive, you are also dealing with the dead. In my research crafting the story of the Bostocks, enacted by my actors, I was dealing with the ‘living’ Bostocks. I conjured in my imagination the living Bostocks, journeying back in time, to have their characters speak through my actors. There is a double agency layered there: the writing of my script, coupled with the actors’ readings of it. The resulting narrative brings the Bostocks to ‘life’. Transferring the story of the ‘living’, actor-portrayed Bostocks into the space of the cemetery was another matter. That exercise was bringing their living story into the realm of the dead. Upon entering the cemetery gates, the narrator (myself) introduces the beginning of the walk by explaining that the story the listening walker is about to hear is of a couple who is dead:

I’m going to take you back in time, to tell the life story of a couple who have found their final resting place here. It’s a story about love, anger, adventure, passion, lion taming—and of course death. This is the story of Frank and Susannah Bostock. Buried right here in Abney Park cemetery. (Love, Wrath, Death, Lions transcript)
The characters begin telling their story in a jovial, upbeat tone; they are not let in on the audience’s secret—that they are in fact dead. The music (a soft piano rendition of Clair de Lune) is languid and pretty, and the characters are animated in their speech. However, they speak in the past tense. This is the only clue that listening walkers may pick up on that the characters might know their fate. This, coupled with the numerous gravestones lining the listening walker’s path, add to the feeling of a happiness that will be fleeting. The listening walker knows where he or she will end up at the end of the walk right from the beginning: at the Bostock’s grave.

Building the script began with reading Frank Bostock’s book *The Training of Wild Animals*, written with the help of editor Ellen Velvin, which was originally published in 1903, nine years before his death. This book is part how-to manual and part autobiography, which was very helpful in crafting his voice, as every word that Frank’s character says in my audio walk is a direct transcript from this book. In it, he tells many personal stories that gave me a feeling for the kind of man he was, and a convenient way to assuage my personal feelings of accountability to the voice of Frank, due to the fact his character is speaking his own words. The following source materials were found in this order, first: birth, death, and international travel records on Ancestry.co.uk, which gave me a timeline for the lives of the Bostocks. Next, I found news clipping of their menagerie travels and exploits in the British Library; and, lastly, what gave me the pivotal narrative crisis in their story: the petition for judicial separation, which is housed in the National Archives.

As stated previously, I had no inkling of what kind of people the Bostocks were or what kind of relationship they had prior to my research. In crafting the narrative arc, I switched between using the carefully curated voice of Frank’s autobiographical book, with the
stark account of the petition for judicial separation. As hard to envision or understand as the petition account was for me to reconcile with Frank’s public persona, it had the truth of the non-curated voice, a peek into a private matter, something that perhaps should not be seen. Steedman notes that, through her research, there was a marked difference between holding Henry Fielding’s novel *Joseph Andrews* in her hands, a novel she knew he wanted someone to read, versus reading something that was not intended for your eyes, a vestryman recording an allowance, for example.

“For the most part, in the archives, the originator of the documents in all likelihood never imagined a person such as you, the historian, one day coming across these documents held in an archive for research. They had nothing like you in mind at all.” (Steedman, 2001, 151) As a vestry ledger will contain, in all likelihood, very little emotional content, judicial archives can be just as stark, however loaded with potential for emotion. They are the stripped-down moments told without embellishment or delicacy, and nothing like a published text. As Arlette Farge notes in *The Allure of Archives*:

[Published texts are] nothing like the judicial archives, which are the rough traces of lives that never asked to be told in the way they were, but were one day obliged to do so when confronted with the harsh reality of the police and repression. Whether they were victims, accusers, suspects, or delinquents, none of these individuals ever imagined that they would be in the situation of having to explain, file a complaint, or justify themselves in front of the unsympathetic police. [...] People spoke of things that would have remained unsaid if a destabilising social event had not occurred. In this sense, their words reveal things that ordinarily went unspoken. [...] The archival document is a tear in the fabric of time, an unplanned glimpse offered into an unexpected event. (Farge, 2013, 6)
The two opposing accounts I had of Frank Bostock, his published text versus the petition, differed not only in content, but in tone. One, a fully formed and flattering narrative account, the other, a harsh court listing of dates and grievances. I believe it is important for both sides to be present in the audio narrative. It is equally important that both sides be present in the physical walk itself, manifested by way of path navigated through the space of the cemetery.

To map out the path for *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions*, I chose the terrain of the path to thematically follow the arc of the narrative. The Bostock’s story begins outside the main Egyptian Gates, on the east side of Abney Park cemetery, off Stoke Newington High Street. These gates are large and wide, the avenue they lead onto also wide, straight, flat, and cobbled. The beginning of their tale is the tale of Frank finding his calling to train wild animals as a young boy and of Susannah falling in love. These are happy, excited, hopeful narrations, told by each of the characters about their perceptions and hopes at the time. The beginning of the narrative is part budding romance and part exposition storytelling; so the airy, cobbled, wide avenue with tall trees either side is a peaceful and fitting beginning. I set this part of their story to Debussy’s ‘Clair de Lune’, a rather languid and romantic piano piece composed at the end of the nineteenth century (sometime between 1890 and 1905).

As we enter the more wooded part of the cemetery, Frank tells of his first encounters in the cage with a lion and Susannah tells of how she fell in love and married Frank. Clair de Lune fades out, allowing their narrative to take the fore, until Frank announces the point in his childhood when he became ‘The Boy Trainer’, where I cue up the classic circus theme, ‘Entry of the Gladiators’, by Julius Fučík, which was composed in 1897. When we reach the centre chapel, Frank tells
a harrowing story of when one of his lions escaped under the streets of Birmingham. For this, I have the listening walker take a seat on some felled trees to better focus on Frank’s tale and allow the narrative to take precedence over navigating the cemetery space. Frank’s story is overlaid over the sound of lion roars (which I recorded off nature clips on YouTube), whilst admiring the chapel ruin (which it was at the time of recording in 2015, the chapel has since been partially renovated). When Frank’s story is finished, the listening walker then proceeds to the other side of the chapel, where Susannah takes over the narrative.

From here, the listening walker progresses onto a darker, more narrow walking path, where Susannah introduces the scandal of Frank running away to Germany with his mistress Florence Read, the theft of her jewellery and wedding presents, and his betrayal. As her character becomes more angry, leading up to her bringing charges against Frank in court, the listening walker takes a right turn to walk through a small gully with steep sides and rocks to navigate. Susannah guides the listening walker to:

Take the forked path to the right here, and this crumbling path is almost as hard to walk as my story is to tell. I had no idea how long this new level of betrayal had been going on, but this was the final insult. My heart could take no more pain and hardened to hate. Wrath even. I took my case to court. I wanted everyone to know the abuse and fear I had suffered in silence for far too long. I petitioned for a divorce under the grounds of cruelty and I was going to lay bare everything. I didn’t care anymore. My heart was broken. I wanted throw his fate to the hounds of hell and just escape with my children. (Love, Wrath, Death, Lions transcript)
After this, the narrator guides the listening walker to a bench that is just up ahead and to take a seat, where the court account of her numerous abuse grievances is read. This is a break from walking, but is also another time when it is important for the details of the story to take precedent over the navigation of the cemetery space.

In the first draft of the script, I catalogued every offence Susannah named in the judicial petition, of which there are fifteen. This descriptive list made it through to the final version of the script, and into the attorney actor portrayal of the court proceedings; until I found, upon editing the audio, that they were simply too numerous. There was the logistical issue of story flow, I felt the listening walker was sitting on the bench appointed for hearing this section of the story for far too long and the story was losing momentum. But, on top of that, I had written this story with a happy ending. I had written the tale to illustrate the light and dark of a complicated love story. If I included too much of Susannah’s account of her grievances, all the listening walker would see would be dark. There would be no redeeming the character of Frank after this. From an audience perspective, any positive turns in his narrative would most likely fall on deaf ears and be lost. Even I, who wrote it, stopped believing it.

I decided for Susannah to read a selection of grievances that had nothing to do with hitting her face, as, to me, those were the incidents that seemed the most personal and most offensive. Of the 15 total recorded grievances, I settled on relating the following four (of which the ‘Respondent’ is Frank, and the ‘Petitioner’ is Susannah):

That in the month of August 1889 at Bangor North Wales the Respondent struck the Petitioner, and in the same month the
Respondent struck the Petitioner and attempted to throw her out of the caravan. That in the month of September 1890 at Armagh Ireland the respondent struck the Petitioner and in the month of November 1890 at Leeds he struck her and threw her out of a carriage cutting her hands. (Love, Wrath, Death, Lions transcript)

I was prepared to field criticism on this decision, as it goes against what I had originally set out to do: to defend the memory of Susannah and what she suffered. It was a difficult narrative choice.

The most bizarre aspect of the Bostocks’ relationship, to me, is the sharp dichotomy between how Frank treated his menagerie and how he treated Susannah. For him to never strike an animal in training, then come home to hit his wife, is quite baffling to me. Since I felt so, I wrote Susannah’s character to say so as well. Many of my personal observations came through the voice of Susannah, as hers was the voice I crafted to be the main narrator, and the voice I wrote from scratch with very little to go on. Susannah filed her grievances with the court and also put a warrant out for Frank’s arrest for stealing her jewellery and wedding presents, so that when he did return to England from Germany after his tryst with his mistress, he was promptly arrested. To me, this action shows her to be a strong woman; this is not the action of a woman quietly waiting at home for her straying husband to return. She had also moved out of the house they shared on Palatine Road in Stoke Newington, an action I see as cutting ties and making a clean break of it.

In the walking narrative, after the court petition has been read, Susannah tells the listening walker to get up from the bench and walk left along the main avenue, set to the calming refrain of Clair de Lune once again. I used the same piece of music as at the beginning when they were first falling in love as an allusion to the ending of the dark years, and the beginning of finding their love again. Susannah
leads the listening walker down the wide avenue, which echoes the space of the beginning of the path when they were falling in love as well. The difference between the wide-open avenue of falling in love, versus the more wooded avenue of rediscovering love, is the second avenue has tall shading trees, instead of open sky, this alludes partially to a residual darkness they will carry with them as part of a love story tainted, but also to a calmer love that has been through trying times and has come out the other side more grounded.

Susannah guides the listening walker along this avenue, telling of how much she liked walking here when she lived in Stoke Newington, but that the trees were much smaller and there was more light, she adds: “But the shade is nice too. It feels like a good place to tell secrets.” I do not know if Susannah actually walked in Abney Park cemetery when they lived in Stoke Newington. However, it was a popular nature reserve during their time living there and they lived nearby. It is very probable that she could have walked in the cemetery at some point. The ‘Susannah’ I crafted enjoyed walking in Abney Park to clear her thoughts.

From here, the comfortable walk along the wide path coincides with the reconciliation between Susannah and Frank and their fresh start in New York City. The description of their move to Brooklyn and their Coney Island Dreamland project is overlaid with the upbeat ragtime music piece ‘Elite Syncopations’ by Scott Joplin, written in 1902. This music is not only appropriate to the period, but also conjures up images of Coney Island Amusement Park with visitors dancing under the carnival strings of new electric light that would have been streaming up and down Dreamland Tower. The Bostocks seemed to have entered their own Dreamland when moving there, leaving their worries behind in England to create a fantasy world in
Brooklyn’s new theme park where they could be different people. People who were actually happy.

Susannah guides the listening walker finally to the end, at their graveside, to look at their sleeping lion. The listening walker hears of Frank’s rather anticlimactic death from influenza, at only 46 years of age and nowhere near a lion’s cage, and of Susannah’s subsequent seventeen years without Frank.

My voice comes in at the end as the narrator to give a summation to their story, but also to make a bit of an editorial caveat. I acknowledge the abuse Susannah suffered, and how viewing her story as a twenty-first century feminist, I found it difficult to tell. However, I also acknowledge her strength, and her apparent love for Frank, that seemed to weather so many storms. I chose the exit music for the listening walker to find their way out of the cemetery as Edith Piaf’s ‘Non, je ne regrette rien’ (‘No, I regret nothing’). Having been released in 1959, exactly thirty years after Susannah’s death in 1929, this is the only piece of music in the walk that is not period-appropriate. However, it fits both in meaning and in tone to the sentiments with which I wanted to end the walk; so for this ending I took a bit of artistic liberty. The listening walker is left to find their own way out of the cemetery with this parting thought:

The one thing researching their story has shown me, is even almost one hundred years on, how immediate and human they felt. We’re not so different today from the Bostocks. We all have ambition, we all fall in love, we all try to make things work with the people we’re silly enough to fall in love with; and we all want the best for our children. Throughout the ages, we are all the same. Spending time in the national archives taught me this about the Bostocks. As you leave the cemetery today, look to your left, and to your right, these stories aren’t archived
for you or me to research, but think, if they were, what stories would they tell us? (*Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* transcript)

The choices I made in crafting their narrative have sparked some questioning feedback. My choice to have Frank and Susannah’s continued marriage and move to New York City denote a new start to their relationship without domestic violence has been received by some people who have taken the walk to be at best ignoring—and at worst making light of—domestic violence. Hosting an in-person interactive day at Abney Park cemetery in September 2017, when visitors to the cemetery had the opportunity to take my audio walks, then come by the classroom afterwards for tea and cake for a discussion, resulted in positive feedback from the Bostocks’ story. Criticism regarding the treatment of forgiveness after domestic violence was flagged up in a friendly way by one of the Abney Park Trustees. However, the members of the public who took the walk fed back that they took these attitudes in context with an apparent reconciliation and cessation of violence, and did not feel that the choice to make the Bostocks’ story have a happy ending detracted from their enjoyment of the walk.

I have endeavoured to navigate a very tricky narrative with *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* to show the multifaceted, real, messy love that this family shared and endured. The findings from my Abney Rambles tea and cake feedback day showed that visitors to Abney Park who took the audio walk, and also took the time to share their thoughts with me, were happy with the experience, requested more walks along the same theme, and resulted in me feeling encouraged to continue a similar endeavour with other buried residents of Abney Park in the future, even though the tightrope walk between archive and creativity will most likely always be fraught with contentious outcomes.
Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the historiography of archive use in creative historical works, and how I have constructed my walk *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions—A Performed History of Frank and Susannah Bostock* through the use of archives. The choices I made in crafting my narrative have raised some interesting questions, which I address further in my Documentation of Practice book. Throughout this chapter, I have analysed my choices with a critical reflection on the basis behind these narrative choices, as well as looked at the relationship dynamics between Frank and his animals versus Frank and his wife—and how my audio walk seeks to address both of these sides of a complex archival history.

There are debates within archival research communities regarding the validity and comprehensiveness (or, rather, lack thereof) of what documents and artefacts are housed within archives, particularly in the area of postcolonial and women’s studies. However, as long as researchers acknowledge whatever biases may be at work in the creation and curation of any given archive, then the resulting historical account can accommodate these gaps with a negotiation between truth and supposition. Archival research produces a version of history that is a best-guess narrative based on the artefacts available. For creative archival research, there is somewhat more leeway in the archive’s use towards the end product, as the end product is stated to be a creative production. However, for the reasons stated in this chapter, I have adhered to the facts of the Bostocks’ lives as closely as my research was able to uncover.

By way of a performed life story of one family’s gravestone—the Bostocks—I hope to illustrate for visitors to Abney Park the tapestry of lives that are documented by all of the gravestones housed in the
cemetery. *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* presents one sliver of all the life histories contained within the cemetery. The aim of this audio walk is to open a door of perception for visitors to humanise the gravestones that surround them on their visit—and to open the door to acknowledging that gravestones mark not only time, but also lives. While it is obvious that each gravestone’s inscription is for a person, the humanity behind the name and date, behind the archival data, may not be fully appreciated. My *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* audio walk enhances the visual archive nature of Abney Park cemetery as a multi-layered experience of community history. A cemetery is a three-dimensional, walk-through archive, with snippets of information housed in gravestones that visitors to the space read and interpret. In order to bring these buried people to life in their minds, visitors to Abney Park would need to fill in the vast gaps in information with their own imagining of who these people could have been, just like a researcher in an archive would have to do to craft a completed story from the fragments housed there.

Not everyone who visits Abney Park cemetery comes to appreciate the archival nature of the gravestones: some come for the nature reserve, for a picnic day out, to take part in an open-day crafts fair, see a theatrical performance, for exercise along the paths, or to merely cut through on their way somewhere else. However, for the type of visit that interacts with this outdoor archive, an audio walk that brings to life the complex story behind this one gravemarker, the Bostocks, will hopefully inspire cemetery visitors to look around at the thousands of other gravemarkers that surround them on their visit. *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* is an invitation to imagine what stories these other gravestones could tell us. The stories that these stone monuments represent are not only those of the people who are interred beneath them, but also of the people who erected these monuments and were left behind to mourn. The gravestones are
monuments to them as well, representing a heritage of mourning in the cemetery. In the next chapter, I analyse Anglo-American mourning heritage from the Victorian era through to today, and the initiatives behind the Victorian garden cemetery movement and what these cemeteries offered to mourners. I present perspectives from the contemporary ‘death positive’ movement through my *Thoughts on Mourning* audio walk as an endeavour to create a private space to think on these themes.
CHAPTER SIX

Thoughts on Mourning Audio Walk Exploring Mourning Heritage and Temporality in a Victorian Garden Cemetery

The cemetery is an open space among the ruins, covered in Winter with violets and daisies. It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place.

– Percy Shelley, Adonais, 1821

The motivation for writing Thoughts on Mourning came from what I first experience when I enter Abney Park cemetery. While the nature reserve is the most prominent physical feature encountered upon entering Abney Park, my attention is drawn by its gravestones. They offer clues into its history as a Victorian garden cemetery and the history of mourning rituals that have taken place within its gates. My aim with Thoughts on Mourning was to introduce the ethos behind the structured practices of Victorian mourning to listening walkers by guiding them through the Victorian garden cemetery as an embodied experience of a cultural site that celebrates this ethos. The audio walk is intended to heighten the respect and care that went into its monuments and its importance as a repository for cultural memory. The door of perception that Thoughts on Mourning opens for visitors is into the borderland world of Abney Park’s Victorian garden cemetery beginnings. This audio walk explores a world of shared rituals of the Victorian era, and it also presents contemporary perspectives offered by a new wave of ‘death positivity’ that has a shared heritage with Victorian thoughts on death processes. The audio walk is an invitation to visitors to Abney Park to contemplate this history by way of a walk through the garden cemetery. It is intended that the reader listen to both audio walks, while following along with their corresponding transcripts and photographic
In this chapter, I explore what garden cemeteries offered Victorians in mourning, and how my walking practice engages with Victorian views on death and dying within the space. Along with garden cemeteries, I will also be investigating some of the changes in Anglo-American mourning practices since the Victorian era. This chapter focuses on the kind of death that most residents of Western countries encounter—the everyday peacetime deaths, often in old age, that characterise economically developed countries. In order to focus on the community aspects of grief and mourning within this chapter, I have chosen to study death from natural causes, as these types of death and attending modes of grief will be shared amongst the widest set of visitors to Abney Park cemetery.

This chapter begins by tracing how Victorian garden cemeteries came into being from initiatives in social health that dealt with the putrefaction of overflowing city-centre churchyards. They also served to create welcoming spaces for mourning—spaces that would encourage visits rather than repulse them. Until the mid-nineteenth century, London's dead were buried in small parish churchyards, which quickly became dangerously overcrowded. In the first fifty years of the nineteenth century, the population of London more than doubled from one million to over two million people. Overcrowded graveyards led to doubling up of grave use, resulting in shallow graves, where corpses could be pushed to the surface by shifting earth and animal interference, giving way to abhorrent smells and contamination of local water. In 1832, Parliament passed a bill encouraging the establishment of private cemeteries outside London. Over the next decade, seven cemeteries were established, now known colloquially as the ‘Magnificent
Seven’. The development of these garden cemeteries during the Victorian era offered burials in spaces that were created to be enjoyed equally by the community as public parks. This attitude towards places of burial, that they should not be places sequestered away from community activity, has been revived within the death positive movement.

This chapter then proceeds to the main sociological ideas that inform *Thoughts on Mourning*. These are gathered in two sections: *Walking Practice in the Context of a Death-Denying Culture: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*; and *Difficult Discussions: Death Awareness, Death Positivity, and What Death Means Now*. These sections look at the basis for why mourning practices are important for processing the human experience and present a picture of the values and rituals associated with Victorian mourning practices. I then introduce the ‘death positive’ movement as a comparison to the Victorian ‘cult of the dead’, which offers contemporary perspectives on how to incorporate death and mourning into our current culture by their endeavours to bring this discourse out into the open.

These concepts of bringing an intimacy with the processes of death back into the processes of mourning are the groundwork on which I built the premise of *Thoughts on Mourning*. This audio walk explores the perspective that Victorian mourning practices helped with the grief process more than contemporary death practices of commercialisation, outsourcing, and sequestering of death away from loved ones into an institutional setting. Throughout this chapter I present analysis of the difficult discussions our communities are having (and not having) around death and dying, and how the death positive and death awareness movements are working towards normalising these discussions through various initiatives. I offer my audio walk *Thoughts on Mourning* as an addition to the death positive
initiative, which I position as similar to the café table with tea and cake at ‘death cafe’—offering a softer introduction to difficult themes.

The last section in this chapter, *Walking, Memorial, Temporality, and Pause* brings this analysis back to my practice. First, I will draw connections between memorial and walking through Carl Lavery’s *Mourning Walk*, exploring how they are linked through the embodiment of thoughts and movement through space as a retracing of memories and shifting temporal connections. Next, I build on concepts of walking and memorial to present pause and memorial, with John Wylie’s study of memorial benches, pause, and dichotomies of presence/absence, remembering/forgetting, and love/loss.

The chapter concludes with the process by which I crafted my audio walk *Thoughts on Mourning* and the ways in which my audio walk aims to share new perspectives and opens a door to a possible way of reconceiving pain, loss, and perspectives on mourning today.

**Walking in a Garden Cemetery: The Aesthetics of Mourning**

Allow me to suggest that there should be several burial grounds, as far as practicable, equidistant from each other, and what may be considered the centre of the metropolis; that they be regularly laid out and planted with every sort of hardy trees and shrubs; and that in interring the ground be used on a plan similar to that adopted in the burial ground of Munich, and not left to chance like Père La Chaise.

— John Claudius Loudon, from a letter to the *Mourning Advertiser*, 1830

A cemetery can and should, by the exercise of art, be made as beautiful as possible.
The Victorian garden cemetery was developed as an artistic creation. The architects and landscapers worked together through symbolism of mourning trees, shrubs, and flowers, along with stonework, to create beautiful havens of remembrance. The garden cemetery is a quintessentially Victorian construct when viewed within the context of their views on mourning ritual. A society who brought structure and beauty to loss, made space for this style of mourning with the structure and beauty of their cemeteries.

The Victorian era is distinctive from the preceding and following eras in many unique ways. However, perhaps the most iconic attribute of the era is its perceived preoccupation with death and mourning. The evolution of this sensibility has its roots in a few factors. The Romantic period of painting and literature of the late eighteenth century grew into the subgenre of gothic literature and sublime painting of the nineteenth century. This aesthetic in art progressed into the ‘real’ world in the form of landscape and garden planning in the theme of an ‘Arcadia’, which brought funerary thoughts of memorial into the garden. This had a direct knock-on effect of bringing the garden Arcadia aesthetic into the cemetery—a previously cramped and odiferous place—to instead create a pleasant environ for mourning and reflection.

A memorial in a garden would not only evoke memories of the departed within a comfortable and pleasing setting, but ideas of Arcadia as well: most importantly, all references to the horrors of decay, bones, decomposition, and the dank, unwholesome graveyard were swept away. Graves in beautiful landscapes, surrounded by honeysuckle, willows and creeping ivies, were places where the living could linger over picnics and remember their dead in a way
that almost suggested their continuing presence. Here was the peaceful, beautiful ideal, a place fit for reflection and memories, where death was civilised. Images of the tomb were brought into the garden, and the garden was brought into the tomb: and thus the concept of the garden cemetery was born.

The Victorian garden cemetery “sought to mirror Elysium by creating an Arcadian setting for the mortal remains of the deceased: man’s idea of paradise on earth”. (Rutherford, 2008, 6) The beauty of these cemeteries not only helped to make the logistics of death and burial less revolting to the senses, but also to allow for reverie and peace of mind for mourners who would then have a pleasant place to visit and remember their loved ones. Garden cemeteries were designed with paths for walking, gardens for pretty views, and benches for visitors to stay for a time. They were created to not merely be looked at, but to be enjoyed as a place to spend the day. A family day out to have a stroll through the graves was not considered morbid, but merely a way to show love for the deceased. These cemeteries were inspired by visions of Arcadia: “The tomb in the garden was a place where the living could weep moderate tears, recall the dead to mind, reflect, remember, and keep the departed ‘alive’ in some way in thought and spirit.” (Curl, 2000, 13)

This Victorian impulse to visit the dead and keep them ‘alive’ with family outings to landscaped parks speaks to a desire for beauty and reference in relation to the dead that is a recurring theme within Victorian practices of mourning.

The garden cemetery movement began in France with Bernardin de Saint-Pierre. However, pinpointing the originator of this aesthetic is problematic. A profoundly delayed bouncing of ideas between Britain and France took place at the time: the Arcadian garden
originated in Britain in the late eighteenth century, which then inspired continental visitors to take these ideas back home. However, it was in France that de Saint-Pierre presented the plans for a Parisian Garden Cemetery in 1784—however, the French government would not act on these proposals to found Père-Lachaise Cemetery until twenty years later, in 1804. The famous garden cemeteries of Victorian Britain were inspired by Père-Lachaise Cemetery; however, they were not begun until thirty years later—all of which was originally inspired by British ideas cultivated some fifty years previously. Nonetheless, it took the glamour and fame of Père-Lachaise to give the aesthetic traction.

Père-Lachaise was the prototypical nineteenth-century funerary garden, and soon became world-famous. It was visited by many people interested in the problems of burying the dead in a civilised fashion, and its influence was enormous throughout Europe and America. Nothing less than a revolution occurred, and Père-Lachaise became the powerful exemplar of an entirely new culture of nineteenth-century death that transformed the disposal of corpses in many countries thereafter. (Curl, 2000, 25)

Of all the Magnificent Seven garden cemeteries, Abney Park boasted by far the most lavish garden. At its zenith, Abney Park eclipsed Kew Gardens with over 2,500 varieties of shrubs and trees, and over 1,000 species of rose bushes. Although now self-seeded and overgrown, a few of the original one hundred and seventy-seven year old species of trees (and one holly bush) from the original arboretum still exist to be enjoyed today.37 The original Loddiges cemetery layout of diverse plant varieties offered not only an aesthetically pleasing park, but educational opportunities as well to see rare imported specimens. Walking through Abney Park today,  

37 My audio walk Woodland Networks explores these specimens, and full horticultural history of Abney Park is presented in Chapter Four.
and marvelling at the veteran specimens that have survived its tumultuous history, creates an anachronistic experience within the cemetery. The temporal shift of trees and stones gives a glimpse of the beauty that the original designers of Abney Park cemetery were creating.

The Victorian ‘cult of the dead’ was not only housed in cemeteries, tombstones, and monuments. Expressions of social position and status could be infused into everything from hearse, mourning cards, and dress, down to coffin plates and handles. In the catacombs of Brompton and Kensal Green cemeteries in London today, you can still see the vestiges of Victorian wreaths placed against the coffins. Crumbling bits cling to these cages of the flowers once laid there. These artefacts have been left untouched, their placement frozen in time, left to disintegrate exactly where they were originally arranged.

Other than grave flowers in catacombs, many commonplace mourning articles have survived intact: various small portraits, mounted mourning cards, linen handkerchiefs with black borders, mourning fans of black silk, and various items of mourning dress. One thing intrinsic to the mourning culture of this era is how objects could embody emotion. Not having the plethora of life traces that we now possess of passed loved ones (photos, videos, etcetera), items such as hair jewellery were a way to keep a lost loved one close, and the wearing of special garments broadcast your grief to the world more powerfully than a post on social media. Current commentary that post-mortem photography or mourning hair art is ‘morbid’ or ‘grotesque’ is looking at these items from the myopic lens of the present day. Contemporary societies in the developed world capture memories and totems with offhand ease. I believe we are perhaps too quick to condemn the Victorians for using what they had available at
the time for remembrance—and many of these items are very touching and beautiful.

However, outside of museum collections, the most impressive legacy of the beauty of Victorian mourning is its garden cemeteries. Through the course of *Thoughts on Mourning*, my audio guides the visitor through Abney Park cemetery and around the centre chapel ruin, where I offer a quote by Percy Shelley about cemeteries (the quote with which I open this chapter) and invite the listening walker to consider modern mourning in relation to the garden cemetery aesthetic:

> ‘The cemetery is an open space among the ruins, covered in Winter with violets and daisies. It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place.’—Percy Shelley 1821. That quote reminds me of Abney. How beautiful and private death seems here. Instead of the sweeping flat lawn and endless tract-home stones of so many modern places of internment, here in this garden cemetery there are enclaves, spaces for privacy and reflection. Spaces for death to retain some of the romance and beauty that make mourning a bit more bearable. (*Thoughts on Mourning* transcript)

The main difference between early nineteenth century church graveyards and the later garden cemeteries is that enjoyment of these garden cemeteries was not relegated to only mourners. Beautiful monuments erected by the upper and middle classes to reflect their wealth and good taste when death visited the family added to the beauty of the landscaping. The locations of the Magnificent Seven as a ring around what was once outer London placed them all fairly equidistant from London city centre; as such, these garden

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38 *Thoughts on Mourning* was recorded in 2015 when the centre chapel was in ruin; it has since been partially renovated and is open to the public during special events.
cemeteries became destinations for respectable weekend outings. Indeed, these cemeteries were one of the very few places where widows and single ladies might visit unaccompanied. There could even be matrimonial possibilities. The place these garden cemeteries had within Victorian culture, and the perspective of their place in daily life, shifted dramatically heading into the twentieth century. Victorian garden cemeteries exemplified the time and space people gave during this era for grieving and honouring the dead. This is in contrast to attitudes through the twentieth century that grief was something to be shushed away and kept private, and dying people are to be sequestered away from society like an uncomfortable secret.

My audio walk *Thoughts on Mourning* addresses difficult death themes in the space of a garden cemetery to emphasis the Victorian approach to this fear of death—creating a peaceful space for remembrance through the longevity of stone and beauty of gardens. With the fracturing of societies, many of these mourning gardens no longer offer the same sense of community and communal grief that they once did. As Sarah Rutherford notes in her study of Victorian garden cemeteries:

> Interest in Victorian cemeteries waned in the twentieth century as mortality became more remote from everyday life. They have become consistently underrated for their visual and architectural qualities and contribution to the quality of life. Fortunately, interest is growing again, prompted by thriving studies in family history, by the threats from a recurring acute need for more burial space, and by an appreciation of their value as cultural landscapes and ornamental open spaces. (Rutherford, 2008, 6-7)

While this is good news for the taphophile, saving garden cemeteries for ‘ornamental’ or historical preservation reasons does not address
the personal need people have for these spaces. Cemeteries serve a vital purpose in bereavement, however the communities who use them are dispersing. There is a need for the reintroduction of death into our community discourses.

Walking Practice in the Context of a Death-Denying Culture: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

Is death really the final taboo? Incest is a taboo. Death is 100% universal.
– John Troyer, Director, Centre of Death and Society, University of Bath

In America, where I live, death has been big business since the turn of the twentieth century. A century has proven to be the perfect amount of time for its citizens to forget what funerals once were: family- and community-run affairs. In the nineteenth century no one would have questioned [a] daughter preparing her mother’s body—it would have seemed strange if she didn’t. No one would have questioned a wife washing and dressing the body of her husband or a father carrying his son to the grave in a homemade coffin. In an impressively short time, America’s funeral industry has become more expensive, more corporate, and more bureaucratic than any other funeral industry on Earth. If we can be called best at anything, it would be keeping our grieving families separated from their dead. (Doughty, 2017, 3)

Through my walking practice, I use the space of Abney Park cemetery as a physical reminder of death processes through the graves and monuments themselves, but also as a temporal touchstone to a time in the past (the Victorian era) when mourning practices were codified by societal ritual that gave a voice and a visual presence to grief, which gave structure to the individual

39 John Troyer, conference paper presentation, Death Salon 2014, personal notes
experience. By addressing common twentieth and twenty-first century Anglo-American mourning practices, and attitudes towards dying, death, and the treatment of the corpse, I aim to illustrate that these distancing practices, that comprise the mainstream twentieth-century processes of mourning, are part of what is fuelling death denial. I posit that disconnecting from our dead, sequestering the corpse away from the bereaved, denies a final piece of closure for the living. There is a growing movement towards death acceptance called the ‘death positive’ (or ‘death awareness’) movement and ideas of ‘The Good Death’. These movements share many tenets with Victorian views on the place of death within one’s own life, family, and society—before the advent of commercialisation in twentieth-century death processes.

Nineteenth-century mourning holds an iconic status within contemporary minds. The Victorians and mourning are often presented as synonymous in the cultural retrospective eye. Today, we have numerous photographs from the era of theatrical funeral processions that people would stop and line the streets to see. Due to the tiered progression of regimented socially appropriate mourning dress customs, from ‘deep mourning’ to ‘half-mourning’, museums now house the copious ornate mourning ephemera of fans, jet jewellery, and black-bordered handkerchiefs (to name but a fraction of these items), as well as mourning hair art and post-mortem photography—all of this, to the contemporary eye, can appear fetishistic. I challenge this perception. I offer the perspective that the Victorians did not have a ‘cult’ of the dead, but rather it is the contemporary mindset that is the ‘phobic’ of the dead.

At the end of the Victorian era an age of ever-growing death denial began, brought on by the two-pronged forces of advancement in science and a societal decline in religion. People no longer felt
comfortable with death as merely a ‘passing on’, or another phase. Rapid medical advancements fought back disease and prolonged life. At the rate of scientific progression at the beginning of the twentieth-century, if the trajectory were to have continued, it seemed to suggest people might not have to die at all. Victorian views on the cycle of life and the processing of grief began to be seen as unnecessarily maudlin—and seen as a ‘cult of the dead’. Historian Joanna Ebenstein was Director of the Morbid Anatomy Museum in Brooklyn, New York (until its closure in 2016). She asks us:

Why is it morbid to think about death? People argue all the time about what makes us ‘human’ as opposed to ‘animals’, but the one distinction I think that has not broken down is that human beings are uniquely aware that they are going to die. And the fact that we’re not supposed to think about it or talk about it with any kind of dignified discourse I find really perverse. (Ebenstein, 2012, Midnight Archive interview)

This observation is the basis for what, of late, could be seen in certain circles as a resurgence, or neo-renaissance, in death acceptance. From Ebenstein’s museum that explored the intersection of death, art, and oddities in New York City, to The Order of the Good Death (that started in Los Angeles and has since gone international), which is a consortium of death industry professionals, academics, artists, and armchair philosophers who all ask these questions: Why is an experience so universal considered in today’s Western culture the last taboo? How can we crack through this fear into acceptance?

According to the ‘death positive’ ethos, by accepting the inevitability of our death, and the eventual death of everyone who we love, we can begin to live life with greater awareness of the value of every day. Confronting these questions is not an obsession with the macabre or a wish to die—it is the opposite of this: boldly staring
death in the face, holding these moments of life while we can, and living without fear. The death positive ideology is about embracing life, not living a circumscribed life cowering from death. In contemporary Anglo-American society, we have distanced ourselves further and further from the processes of death. My assertion is that this distancing is the source of this fear: when we became the ‘phobic of the dead’.

With the advent of embalming at the beginning of the twentieth century, the bereaved began having their loved ones prepared for burial at funeral homes, as opposed to being washed and dressed and laid out at home. Instead, the deceased would be taken off the premises rather quickly and the rest of the care of the corpse would be handled by professionals, with the final presentation of the deceased to their living loved ones the result of chemicals, plastic facial scaffolding, and cosmetics—all of this lending the appearance of ‘sleep’ and distancing the family from the realities of putrefaction. Historian Mark Dery noted that, in the nineteenth century, families prepared their own dead for burial by laying the body on a board and washing and dressing it for the wake, which was traditionally held in the front parlour of the family home. By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, death was disappearing from everyday life, “swept aside in the cultural housecleaning called modernism”. (Dery, 2011, *Ghost Babies*)

In Geoffrey Gorer’s seminal mid-twentieth-century study on death denial, *The Pornography of Death*, he posits the reason for the taboo nature of death discussion (in daily life, or in art) is its removal from our personal experience:

In the 20th century [...] there seems to have been an unremarked shift in prudery; whereas copulation has become more and more
‘mentionable,’ particularly in the Anglo Saxon societies, death has become more and more ‘unmentionable’ as a natural process. I cannot recollect a novel or play of the last twenty years or so which has a ‘deathbed scene’ in it [...] this topic was a set piece for most of the eminent Victorian and Edwardian writers. [...] One of the reasons, I imagine, for this plethora of death-bed scenes, apart from their intrinsic emotional and religious content, was that it was one of the relatively few experiences that an author could be fairly sure would have been shared by the vast majority of his readers. (Gorer, 1955, 50)

This observation is echoed by Caitlin Doughty⁴⁰, in her memoir on her time working in a crematorium, Smoke Gets in Your Eyes:

If decomposing bodies have disappeared from culture (which they have), but those same decomposing bodies are needed to alleviate the fear of death (which the are), what happens to a culture where all decomposition is removed? We don’t need to hypothesise: we live in just such a culture. A culture of death denial. (Doughty, 2015, 165)

The general consensus through my research and conversations with death industry professionals has been that we are, indeed, in an era of the ‘phobic of the dead’. In Philip Mellor’s essay Death in High Modernity: The Contemporary Presence and Absence of Death, he grounds the basis of our modern practices of banishing death from view in an avoidance of existential chaos. Referencing Anthony Giddens’ views on where humans gain feelings of ontological security, Mellor asserts that these feelings find their emotional and cognitive anchors in a “practical consciousness of the meaningfulness of our day-to-day actions. This meaningfulness,

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⁴⁰ Mortician and death industry veteran Caitlin Doughty is owner of Undertaking LA, Death Positivity activist, and founding member of The Order of the Good Death.
however, is always shadowed by the threat of disorder or chaos.” (Mellor, 1993, 12) Mellor goes on to link to Søren Kierkegaard’s concept of ‘dread’ with Giddens’ assertion that humans face an ever-present danger of being overwhelmed by anxieties concerning the ultimate reality and meaningfulness of day-to-day life. This is echoed by Ernest Becker in his analysis of the existential crisis that foregrounds humans’ denial of death in his work The Denial of Death:

Man is literally split in two: he has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever. It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live with. [...] It is only if you let the full weight of this paradox sink down on your mind and feeling that you can realise what an impossible situation it is for an animal to be in. I believe that those who speculate that a full apprehension of man’s condition would drive him insane are right, quite literally right. [...] Pascal’s chilling reflection: ‘Men are so necessarily mad that not to be mad would amount to another form of madness.’ (Becker, 1973, 26-27)

Referencing Erich Fromm, Becker wonders why most people do not become insane “in the face of the existential contradiction between a symbolic self, that seems to give man infinite worth in a timeless scheme of things, and a body that is worth about 98¢. How to reconcile the two?” (Becker, 1973, 27-28) This tension between our daily constructed realities and the dread of the grand existential question is something our complex societies (mostly) successfully help us to navigate (or avoid) through distraction. Mellor asserts that society strives to keep this dread at bay by ‘bracketing’ out of everyday life those questions that might be raised about the social frameworks that contain human existence. As humans, we have developed complex societies that occupy our minds with day-to-day
tasks, and religious or spiritual belief systems that occupy our thoughts otherwise. These multi-layered buffers keep most of the debilitating existential thoughts from slipping society into chaos.

However, the social ‘bracketing’, as Mellor terms it, process is not always successful. Death is a potent challenge to this bracketing process. Confronting one’s own death, or the death of others, creates a fracture in the normal daily processes of life. As society has progressed, death has become a less frequent occurrence in our lives, due to medical advancement, and has further been closed off from view by the rise throughout the twentieth century in hospitals and care homes as the site of death. This makes death, when encountered in contemporary Anglo-American culture, all the more poignant for its perceived rarity. These encounters break the bereaved person involved out of his or her day-to-day systems of meaning, raising questions of the reality of the social frameworks in which they participate, “shattering their ontological security”, as Mellor describes it.

Death is therefore always a problem for all societies, since every social system must in some ways accept death, because human beings inevitably die, but at the same time social systems must to a certain extent deny death to allow people to go on in day-to-day life with some sense of commitment. (Mellor, 1993, 13)

For an increasingly secular contemporary society, much of the denial of death stems from a fear of the unknown. Without the comforts of religion as a bulwark against existential crises, and with societies increasingly fracturing—with the current trends towards frequent moves of house and of children leaving their town or even their country of origin—there is a separateness experienced between individuals in many communities. Sociologist Tony Walter notes:
A strong belief of philosophy, whether religious or atheistic, seems to serve the dying and grieving well; what makes things hard is the process of secularisation, lasting a generation or two, as older people lose their childhood faith and churches no longer provide the support older people may still expect. More serious is how dying people today find themselves surrounded by strangers in unfamiliar surroundings—the care home, the hospital—where their prime status is not that of grandmother or sister but of patient. (Walter, 2017, 16)

Added to the individual stress that accompanies these community structures beginning to disperse, and personal agency lost through the process of becoming ‘Patient’, there is the secular fear of being forgotten, that is added to the spiritual fear of annihilation. The disappearance of the body in contemporary experiences of death and mourning ritual is a direct consequence of the disappearance of dying persons from the public sphere as well.

At the time of death, and for many also the time leading up to it, embodied persons disappear from view, their relationships with other non-dying persons in greater society, outside of the cloistered realm of the hospital or care home, come under threat and their influence may cease. (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, 4)

Hallam and Hockey found that when individuals need to confront intangible themes, recourse to metaphor has provided a means by which these themes are made accessible:

Recent studies have stated that the use of metaphor is essential if memories are to be grasped. Similarly death, as a field of experience that cannot be ‘known’ in a direct sense, has been elaborated extensively through metaphors and cultural representations. Here we can note that metaphor is, at its simplest, a
The softening effects and distance offered by metaphor presents a somewhat more manageable pathway for the bereaved to comprehend the incomprehensible, and to face the overwhelming emotion of grief and strenuous personal processes of confronting the unknown. Some denial of death is necessary to prevent full existential meltdown. We could not do our laundry or go to the bank if every moment was weighed down with the knowledge that we are going to die, and the attending questions of whether or not we will continue to exist, in some form, after this inevitability. However, shutting out these musings completely, cutting ourselves off from our dead and living in a sterilised ‘death-free’ society, has meant that, in our modern whitewashed Western efficiency, we have erased death from public view and, therefore, through foreignisation, increased our fear of death, not lessened it.

In Jane Littlewood’s paper *The Denial of Death and Rites of Passage in Contemporary Societies*, she explores two questions related to the sociology of death, dying, and bereavement. The first question relates to the denial, and associated medicalisation, of our understanding of death-related issues. She argues that this process is relatively recent and has resulted in the removal of death and dying from the community and to its relocation in the hospital or similar institution. The second question relates to the role that rituals play in contemporary society. Littlewood argues that death-related rituals are still widely performed, but have been removed from the community and relocated into the personal realm of private grief. Quoting Ariès, she notes:

> The relative of the cremated person rejects the physical reality of the site, its association with the body, which inspires distaste, and the
This shift is also what Caitlin Doughty’s observes during her time as a crematorium worker in California during the early 2000s. Only rarely would family members attend a cremation. And of those who did, even fewer still wanted to be involved in the process logistically, by pushing the button on the cremation machine, for example. Contemporary people find interactions with death processes to this level of intimacy distasteful; and a society who would welcome such interactions could be seen from the contemporary perspective as fetishising death in a ‘cult of the dead’. Littlewood references Gorer and Peter Marris, flipping common perceptions on their head regarding Victorian mourning from a ‘cult’ to a ‘golden age’:

Gorer’s (1965) work has been extremely influential in portraying the Victorian era as a ‘golden age’ for grief. Marris (1986) continues this tradition in the following vein: ‘Traditionally, full mourning in England would begin with the shuttering of the house and the hanging of black crepe while the dead person was laid out in his or her old home. [...] When the period of mourning is over the family can take up the thread of daily life without guilt because the customs of society make this a duty’. (Littlewood, 1993, 77-78)

This highlights the paradox inherent in what we have termed the morbid ‘celebration’ or ‘cult’ of the dead in the Victorian era. These regulated customs were not in place to keep the mourner in mourning for perpetuity. The Victorians may have mourned extravagantly, but they mourned within a prescribed timeframe— and then stopped mourning. Of course private grief acknowledges no such timeframe nor set end date, however social mourning in the
Victorian era did. This system was not a life sentence of demonstrative social grief. It was, instead, the very system that helped them to move through clear societal pathways out of mourning. Anglo-American contemporary secular bereaved are mostly left to craft their own way through the mourning process, largely within a society that advocates the confining of grief to private space. The bereaved may not have a notion of when to try to move beyond their deep grief or, perhaps, due to keeping grief private and not shared outwardly in clothing and through community ritual, they may not be able to do so at all. These private and hidden mourning processes could further entrench and prolong grief for the individual, despite outward appearances to the contrary. As Hallam and Hockey point out:

[The Victorian] time of mourning was marked through the wearing of public and private costume, which was coded to convey the social status and rank of the bereaved. Here there was a transfer of emphasis from the body of the deceased to the social body of those in mourning. By this stage in the death ritual the natural body was virtually forgotten and culture's concern was to support the accumulation of meanings attributed to the social body. Thus the ‘natural’ time of death conveyed through the decaying body was displaced by the social time of mourning registered through the living body, its attire and adornment. (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, 69)

This transfer of focus from the physical dead loved one, to the conceptual living ritual, helped ease the focus from putrefaction and despair, to community, shared grief burdens, and pleasant reflections of the deceased. These processes are action-based and optimistic. The motivation for the Victorian mode of mourning does not show itself to be one of stagnation, but of transition.
There appears to be a general consensus in the area that the rituals of the past must be helpful to people who have been bereaved but it remains undemonstrated exactly how such rituals might be rehabilitated in order to fit contemporary, complex, and secular societies. (Littlewood, 1993, 78)

Littlewood wrote this rather despondent query in 1993. Since then, contemporary Anglo-American society has undergone a quiet death acceptance revolution, where a secular response to death does appear to have found its avenue. In 1993, global communication was not what it is today, and with the advent of the internet (and all the associated social media avenues it has afforded) people are finding new forms of communication regarding death and community-building between people interested in these topics. From informal ‘death cafe’ meetups (where strangers come together to drink tea, eat cake, and discuss death, this model is analysed later in this chapter), to organised conferences in museums and universities, and lecture series in repurposed cemetery chapels, the death positive community has co-opted, in a way, a mode of ritualising these topics that is a conflux of the nineteenth-century literary salon with the academic symposium structure. The communities that form in and around these events lead to offshoots of other secular activities, such as cemetery tours and trade shows, like the annual Ideal Death Show, where visitors who are in the death industry, academia, or merely curious, can learn about eco-funerals, shroud wrapping, and enjoy talks on wide variety of subjects surrounding death.

Allowing the trappings of death, and the professionals who work in the industry, to become tactile, immediate and conversational lifts the mystique that usually surrounds coffins, urns, and private rituals, and brings them out into the open to be picked up and discussed. Rather than the first time a person is introduced to the processes of the death industry being when they are in the depths of
grief, instead stories of funerals and ritual are shared over drinks and accepting the naturalness of death becomes easier through these shared practices when people are not in the throes of overwhelming emotions and can learn about these processes conceptually before they are confronted with them logistically.

I have aimed through my Thoughts on Mourning audio walk to create an avenue for visitors to Abney Park cemetery to encounter these complex and emotionally difficult themes and to hopefully look at death and mourning in a new way. My research into death denial showed me a void in acceptance and a need for people to have a space to think on these issues. Thoughts on Mourning aims to offer a private, independent, personal space for visitors to listen and think on these themes through a walking meditation.

**Difficult Discussions: Death Awareness, Death Positivity, and What Death Means Now**

In this section, I will address some of the current disputes regarding the terminology ‘death awareness’ and ‘death positivity’, death ‘taboo’ or ‘denial’ (or lack thereof), and next steps for addressing the issues surrounding death in our contemporary western communities, specifically in the UK. My methodology for sourcing the perspectives that are shared in Thoughts on Mourning was by way of academic literature on the subject of Victorian mourning, recent reports by Dying Matters and Public Health England, as well as first-person interviews. I have drawn on recent research by sociologist and former director of Centre for Death and Society, at the University of Bath (CDAS), Tony Walter; interviews with current director of CDAS, and advocate for both death awareness and death positivity, John Troyer; Louise Winter, co-founder and funeral director of Poetic Endings, and Anna Lyons, death doula and Personal, Social, Heath,
Education (PSHE) teacher, both of whom are co-founders of ‘Life. Death. Whatever.’, which is a blog, annual events series, and “initiative to redesign the dialogue around death and dying, to open it up and to find new approaches to this important subject”. In addition to these resources, I have drawn on my personal experience and involvement in the ‘death positive’, or ‘death awareness’, community from 2014 to 2017.

‘Death Awareness’ vs ‘Death Positivity’

The ‘death awareness’ movement refers to a somewhat amorphous yet interconnected network of individuals, organisations, and groups comprised of scholars, advocates, and counsellors. As a social movement, ‘death awareness’ had considerable success in the last half of the twentieth century; and thousands of university-level courses on the topics of death and dying are now offered. The current ‘death positive’ movement has its roots in the death awareness movement, but with the difference that the terminology ‘death positive’ was a reaction to the ‘sex positive’ movement, which carries with it a genealogy of activism with the goal of bringing death studies out into open wider cultural discourse—not merely in hospice care and academia—and to not be ashamed about an interest in death. Whereas being ‘death aware’ can be a private, reflective, or studied experience, being ‘death positive’ is an outward and active experience.

The current death awareness movement, alongside death acceptance movements and natural death movements, took shape in the 1970s. According to John Troyer, the death positive movement is a reinvention of these death movements and that today they share the same goals. These goals are to open up conversations around death

by breaking social taboos around these conversations by combatting the societal pervasiveness of death denial. The term ‘death positivity’ can become loaded with assumptions and echoes of previous associations, harkening back to AIDS activism and protests, with an historical link between that language, politics, and economics:

The last decade has been an extremely exciting time to work on all things death positive. There was a different time, not so long ago, during the era of 1980s/1990s AIDS protests and end-of-life activism pursued by ACT-UP, Queer Nation, and the Gay Men’s Health Crisis in New York that the term ‘death positive’ meant something extremely different than today. The very idea of connecting death and positivity created a political urgency that thousands died pursuing. Today’s death positive activists should reflect upon this recent past in order to understand how pursuing end-of-life activism, both today and in the future, builds on many lives cut short far too early. The future of death positivity lies in seeing how its past incarnations created an activist playbook for the future. This re-engagement with death acceptance is a positive and hopeful development that, in turn, supports and encourages the end-of-life conversations happening every day. (Troyer, 2017, email interview)

For Anna Lyons, the terms are not so interchangeable:

I do not think they are the same thing, but I also think that neither of them really know what they are. I think there are many different strands that you can associate with both of them, but ‘death awareness’ does not equate to ‘positivity’ but I think they are both really difficult terms. I much prefer ‘death awareness’. The term ‘death positive’ can be very confrontational. It is much more of a label, I feel very uncomfortable when people say that I’m death positive, whereas I would definitely
agree that I am death aware. (Lyons, 2017, telephone interview)

The difference between death awareness and death positivity is a tension of terminology that both Anna Lyons and Louise Winter were conscious of when they set up their annual month-long initiative to redesign the dialogue around death and dying, in conjunction with the National Trust, ‘Life. Death. Whatever.’ The perception from people who work within the field of death work (funeral directors, death doulas, palliative care nurses, et al) is that ‘death awareness’ is on-the-ground and practical, that this aspect of the movement is for practitioners who are working with people who are bereaved, or dying themselves. Death awareness initiatives are based on having conversations with people who need it the most, and the death awareness movement is linked closely with the work that Dying Matters42 do. Whereas the term ‘death positive’ is used most often by the wider community: academics, artists, and activists within the general public who do not have hands-on experience with death work, but who identify with the ideology of open conversation around death topics. Whereas ‘death awareness’ is a toolkit for practitioners, ‘death positivity’ is a toolkit for a wider range of social activists from a variety of disciplines and perspectives.

In his 2017 social analysis What Death Means Now, Tony Walter does not address ‘death positivity’ as a term, instead referring to the current movement as a whole as ‘death awareness’. From his point of view, the movement is flawed. He does not see our current society breaking away from a ‘taboo’ of death; however he does acknowledge that the conversation is not out in the open.

42 In 2009, the National Council for Palliative Care (NCPC) set up the Dying Matters Coalition to promote public awareness of dying, death and bereavement. Today, Dying Matters is a coalition of 32,000 members across England and Wales which aims to help people talk more openly about dying, death, and bereavement, and to make plans for the end of life.
The ignorance of many modern people about death and dying is indisputable. What is disputable is the frequent claim that death is taboo in contemporary western society. [...] There is little evidence of a society-wide death taboo in the west. [...] Death sells newspapers, books, movies, by the bucket load: far from marginal, it is integral to the capitalist economy of western media. (Walter, 2017, 11-12)

While Walters claims that death is everywhere in the media, and therefore not a taboo, he does acknowledge that media deaths—often violent, youthful, tragic, or of celebrities or disaster victims—do not represent the kinds of death western audiences are likely to encounter personally.

It is therefore questionable that media portrayals of death seriously challenge death’s sequestration, though there are exceptions. Most significant, perhaps, are social media. Pervasive mobile social media enable social interaction any place, any time—not only between mourners but also with the dead. The social media dead may be celebrities, but may just as easily be your grandmother or your friend’s friend. Social media return death and loss to centre stage. (Walters, 2017, 109-110)

The assertion that death experienced via social media has more resonance and immediacy for people within current society than death on television is problematic because social media is not a trusted portal of truth. Despite the ubiquity of social media in our current cultural landscape, the distance created by the computer or mobile screen, and the heavily edited and filtered content of social media, are not indicators of intimacy with death in our lives, and the very medium itself precludes the interactions that do happen from being in any way embodied.
Walter further rejects the notion of a contemporary climate of death denial by contesting Ernest Becker’s 1973 *Denial of Death* (discussed in the previously in this chapter) and which is often referenced in death positivity conversations.

Overall, Becker’s ambition to link the personal, the social, and the political is impressive, but he uses too heavyweight a theory—denial—to explain what can often be more easily explained in terms of unfamiliarity. This, along with the health that many enjoy for decades, means that for many people for much of the time death is not so much denied as out of sight and therefore out of mind. (Walter, 2017, 14-15)

This statement appears to present a rebuttal that is more a discussion of the terminology, not necessarily the grounding ethos behind the death aware and death positive movements. Whether facilitating death conversations makes one ‘death positive’ or ‘death aware’, whether death is a ‘taboo’ or merely ‘out of sight, out of mind’—the end result is the same. People within contemporary Western society, by and large, are not having these end-of-life conversations. As Lyons has found in her work as a death doula, people do not take necessary steps towards making end-of-life plans. “I cannot tell you how hard it is to get someone, who is even really aware of what is happening, to make an end-of-life plan.” (Lyons, telephone interview) Walters believes that labelling our current silence around end-of-life and death conversations a ‘taboo’ is merely rhetoric to spur people to action.

Given the lack of evidence for a society-wide death taboo, not to mention regular denunciations of this supposed taboo since at least the 1960s, one has to conclude with sociologist Loftland that the identification of a death taboo has to be understood not as social science but as rhetoric that motivates action, specifically the imperative to talk. As a reason
to talk about death, taboo-busting is psychologically effective but objectively questionable. A better reason to talk is [...] what death means now is not what it meant a generation or two ago, so humans need together to develop new crafts of dying and mourning. (Walter, 2017, 24-25)

If the tension on this topic is around the term ‘taboo’, then perhaps it is merely a buzzword that motivates people to action. A call to action by any other name would not change the vast interest in the topic. In which case, perhaps it would be best to rebrand this movement as ‘breaking silence’ instead of ‘breaking taboos’. If talking is what people want to do—and they sign up in sell-out numbers to do so—then what people seem to want most is a platform, whether that be a café table, a conference podium, or a blog. If there is no need for this activism, then there would seem to be no need for the over 5,000 death cafes hosted internationally, or The Order of the Good Death, who will be hosting their eighth annual international Death Salon conference in Boston, Massachusetts in 2018. The wide variety of blogs, books, and conferences on this subject proves that, while there may not yet be a sociological study on the effectiveness of these movements, they are here in contemporary society and are very popular, across international borders and cultural backgrounds.

However, the ‘taboo’ label is contentious, even for members within the community. Louise Winter also has issues with the labelling of our attitudes around death as ‘taboo’. Winter has discussed the issue on a variety of platforms, including a TEDx talk at King’s College London in October 2017, about death not being a taboo. Funeral homes have bricks-and-mortar businesses on our high streets, and every adult has at some point either been bereaved themselves, or been closed to a bereaved person. However, Winter finds that while death itself may not be considered taboo, the very difficult emotions that surround it can be.
We do not have effective coping mechanisms for grief, and we do not know how to behave when someone dies, because we are not exposed to it as a society anymore. It’s not like it used to be, when growing up half of people’s siblings would not survive because they would die from horrible diseases. Society has changed a lot. No one close to me died until I was 25. We’re not as exposed to it. It’s the terrifying plethora of emotions that come along with grief—that is where the taboo is. It’s similar to the way that talking about mental illness is difficult, because it brings up uncomfortable and unfamiliar emotions that we don't have the capabilities to deal with. (Winter, 2017, telephone interview)

Anna Lyons is a Personal, Social, Health, Education (PSHE) teacher, working with children in primary school; however in 2015 she stopped working with this age group for her outreach initiatives. Parents pulled their children out of lessons because they did not want them exposed to conversations dealing with the fact that life is finite. Despite her initial success with children creating artworks engaging with death topics, and older children making a short movie that they presented at a death awareness conference in 2016, the initiative was short-lived. Lyons found that within the death awareness and death positivity communities, there is a bubble of acceptance, but that outside of this bubble, death denial is pervasive.

Death denial absolutely exists. I’ve seen it right up until the end of life. I have worked with people who, bizarrely, will engage a doula, still not acknowledging that their life is ending—not acknowledging it to themselves, and not acknowledging it to their families. It is really sad, but it’s fear, absolute fear. I work mostly with young people and families, usually parents with young children, and one of the parents is dying, and they want to protect their
children from bad things. The idea seems to be, that if we deny it, if we pretend it’s not happening, then it won’t impact [the children]. Or at least they think, it won’t impact them in my lifetime! It’s amazing the difference it makes when people are accepting of it, but I really feel strongly that death denial is still a thing. (Lyons, 2017, telephone interview)

Studies show that, taboo or not, people are not having end-of-life conversations. According to a 2012 report by the Dying Matters Coalition, part of the National Council for Palliative Care (NCPC), 73% of UK respondents said they were ‘very comfortable’ discussing death, but only 13% of those respondents had actually written a will or taken steps towards planning their end care. Even with the advent of death awareness groups, and a slowly growing cultural shift towards a desire for a ‘good death’, there is still a barrier towards taking definitive death preparation actions, which is apparent in even the self-professed ‘very comfortable’.

At the beginning of the twentieth-century, it was common for people to die at home. But, as the century progressed, the rate of home deaths fell while the rate of hospital deaths increased. According to a 2013 Public Health England report, while 67% of respondents stated they would prefer to die at home, with only 7% stating they would prefer to die in hospital, the vast majority of deaths (approximately 90%) occur in hospital, irrespective of the dying person's wishes regarding the matter. Anna Lyons has found, in her experience, that hospital death is not a ‘good death’.

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Hospitals are a law unto themselves; hospitals are not a good place to die. They don’t have the time. Unless you are on a very specific ward where people do die, and are expected to die, people go into hospitals for curative purposes, they go in to come out. And even though that is not the case, many times, even though many people do die, they haven’t addressed that. They don’t do anything. They don’t have the staffing levels. (Lyons, 2017, telephone interview)

There appears to be a disconnect between what people assume, or hope, will happen to them when they die, versus the reality of this experience—for the dying person, as well as for the bereaved who are left behind. Walters believes that the issue with contemporary medicalisation of death is actually an issue with institutionalisation.

While the death awareness movement inveighs against death denial and taboos, social scientists more often highlight death’s absence from everyday life. Death has become medicalised and professionalised, ‘sequestered’ from mainstream society, leaving many citizens de-skilled and unfamiliar with death. [...] Western modernity separated death from life, so death became largely invisible. The dying were removed to a hospital, nursing home, or other institution, even if many of the preceding months had been spent in the person’s own home (which could mean a care home or other kind of supported living). From the nineteenth-century, fewer dead bodies were buried in the churchyard through which villager regularly walked to worship; increasing numbers were taken to an out of town cemetery or (in the twentieth century) crematorium. Bodies thus moved from the community’s heart to its periphery. (Walter, 2017, 107-108)

This sequestration of our dead and dying is largely what makes these conversations so foreign to contemporary communities, and through
foreignisation, thus more intimidating to discuss. One contentious, and to my mind unnerving, point brought up by Walter, is a challenge to the rather widely accepted notion that a ‘good death’ is one at home surrounded by loved ones. Walter puts forth the rather radical notion that perhaps dying alone could be considered a ‘good death’ as well: “Since many elderly people live on their own, and choose so to do, dying at home may well entail dying alone and may be what some want. So far, however, dying alone has been little researched; it has much more often simply been asserted as bad.” (Walter, 2017, 33-34)

While the elderly wishing to be independent and stay out of care homes, as long as their abilities can allow, is a well-understood desire—and perhaps dying alone could be seen as a natural end result of living alone—living alone does not equate to dying alone. Not least of which the claim that “dying alone has been little researched” seems problematic in that what methodology could researchers employ to study dying alone as the only person involved is, by necessity, dead? Of course there will be exceptions to any rule. There are people who enjoy a wide range of circumstances that the general public would find undesirable. The conversation here should not be about forcing any one definition of the ‘good death’ upon anyone—it is about choice, personal agency, informed dying persons and loved ones, and a conversation between both. However, the notion of dying alone being introduced into definitions of the ‘good death’ is a theoretical death, disturbingly disconnected from the realities of dying alone.

In her capacity as a funeral director, Winter performs a number of council and public health funerals, many of which are for people who have died alone. She finds this part of her job “miserable and depressing”:
[These funerals] take ages to organise, often the person has been dead for six months before the council have finished their investigations and we are allowed to do the funeral. By the time we collect them, they have been in a mortuary for six months and they’re in an awful state. Or, they’ve been found when they’ve been dead for quite some time. That happens quite a bit as well. And when I read the medical records, they have not died in a nice way. Then, the only people who turn up are the funeral director and a woman from the council, and it’s always done in a cheap coffin in a public grave or at the cheapest time slot in the crematorium, which is 9am, and you get a 10-minute service. I think as a society we’ve lost a massive opportunity to make the most of elderly people and a dying generation. I think we need better care homes and better systems because we have lost all sense of community. It’s really sad. By the time I get involved, it’s too late. The whole thing is quite unpleasant and very sad. This is clearly not a good death. (Winter, 2017, telephone interview)

While this description of the elderly dying alone is harrowing, Winter found that collecting the dead from care homes not to be much better. That the processes of body removal in care homes is very regimented and death is kept well hidden. Care homes do not like exposing the residents to death. If someone dies in a care home, Winter and her team have to go out late at night in collect them, and remove them very subtly out the back and not use the main entrances. “They just want the dead person out of there with as little fanfare as possible. Actually, death is a taboo in care homes.” (Winter, 2017, telephone interview)

This attitude of protecting the elderly and dying from the realities of death is an end-of-life bookend that mirrors the motivations to protect young children from the realities of death. When an elderly
person enters an end-of-life care home, unless they are suffering from advanced dementia, they will most likely have some awareness that this will be their last home. To be secreted out the back seems to deny older dying persons respect on two levels: one, assumptions that they are devoid of their own agency and oblivious to their status as a dying person; two, that they are to leave their final home in secret with no observance of this final passage. Winter has encountered a few rare care homes through the course of her work where the dead were lead out through the front door, and the residents and staff were invited to be there and to take a moment while they bring the deceased person through for their final death processes. It is no secret that people die in care homes, showing respect as they leave elevates their death process to a moment of dignity and shared acknowledgment that reflects a community ethos within those select care homes, as opposed to an anonymised factory approach to the dying process.

Death Cafes

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Tony Walter has suggested that the death cafe phenomenon is an act of defiance against capitalism. While there have been ‘death salons’ going back hundreds of years, the current ‘death cafe’ model was conceived by Jon Underwood in 2011. Since then, over 5,000 death cafes have been held internationally under the social franchise brand ‘death cafe’. The model for a death cafe is simple: they are free-to-attend events that last a few hours, where people can arrive in groups or alone (if you are with someone they request you move about the room to not sit together), people can get a cup of tea and a slice of cake from a side table, the room settles into groups of roughly five or so people, and then the organiser puts forth a starting question, usually: “What made you want to come to a death cafe today?” Halfway through the
set time for the death cafe, everyone is requested to move around and mix up into new groups, and a second conversation question is asked.

As one of the most prolific and pervasive events within the death awareness/death positivity community landscape, I will address the issues surrounding death cafes in this section as separate from, however in some ways an exemplar of, the movement(s) as a whole, beginning with Walter’s comments on death cafes:

More dramatic is the claim that confronting and talking about mortality will save western civilisation. Jon Underwood, founder of the death cafe movement in the UK, has suggested—reflecting Terror Management Theory—that consumer society is driven by the illusion that we will live forever; thus death denial drives capitalism. Talking about death at death cafes will therefore help create a more sustainable society. That talking for 90 minutes with a few strangers whom one may never meet again provides a shortcut to economic revolution, the end of capitalism even, maybe be a heart-warming idea, but is a remarkably big claim. (Walter, 2017, 24)

Having attended several death cafes myself, this claim has never been spoken of between myself and others, nor is it anywhere mentioned on the death cafe literature. Speaking with Winter, Lyons, and others in the death community regarding death cafes, the consensus is that the idea was fantastic but—while taking on capitalism was never a driving ideology—the model was flawed. However, the driving ethos behind the death cafe has simply been to invite the conversation into wider discourse. One issue facilitators faced when wishing to hold a death cafe was the regimented nature of the model, and that since Jon Underwood never hosted death cafes himself, he never revisited the model to address the flaws
inherent within it. One of the main tenets of the death cafe model was that they were not places to grieve and not a support group for the bereaved. However, on the other end of the spectrum, they were not platforms for philosophical or political debate either, they were for ‘soft’ conversations, over tea and cake. Lyons noticed that the people found the model lacking and that there are very few repeat people. People who come to a death cafe come out of curiosity; however do not begin to frequent them. Lyons believes that people do not invest in death cafes because it all depends on who is facilitating it, how they facilitate it, and who is there. There can be quite traumatic conversations, and people came away feeling that it was not helpful. This is because the concept of the death cafe, essentially, was just a space. It was a space where people accepted that the conversation was going to be about death and dying, and as Walters points out:

> It seems unlikely that practical local action will emanate from metropolitan death cafes where urban strangers talk for an hour or two with other urban strangers and then go their separate ways. There are, however, other death cafe models. Diealog, a compassionate community initiative in the largely rural county of Dorset, offers death cafes in small market towns with the invitation ‘Talk about death and grow our caring networks’. Here the aim is that talking together can lead to practical action. The Church of England has trialled a potentially similar model, GraveTalk, in some of its parishes; here people who already know each other within a local congregation discuss death, dying, and funerals. (Walters, 2017, 54-55)

Lyons gave a talk at this particular group, Diealog, but it is a very different model. Diealog is a group of people who come together every month—and it is generally the same people—they all have an interest in death in dying, but it is much smaller. Death cafes can sometimes have upwards of eighty or ninety people attending,
whereas Diealog is usually about five or six people. And this is where the difference lies. If a person is outside of a close-knit community, or outside of a church system, like the Church of England, coming to a small group who meets frequently can feel intimidating and exclusionary. The model of the death cafe was not that it is for one denomination, or one community, it is for everyone. It offers freedom to come to a one-off event and not feel that you are intruding on an existing group or a private and ongoing conversation.

When Winter first began her career in the death profession, and began to facilitate talks within the community, she hosted death cafes. However, after she began to be involved with death work herself, she stopped hosting them. She began to have issues with death cafe as a format—that perhaps they have the potential to be damaging and not very effective. The name itself—‘death cafe’—only attracts people who already have an interest in the subject; and the format only attracts people who are not shy about having a conversation with strangers. A person has to have a certain level of confidence to attend a death cafe. Winter found through talking with people that there were many personal obstacles that a visitor would have to overcome to get to the point where they are finally in a chair having a conversation.

It’s only attracting people who are going to want to have that conversation anyway. It only applies to less than 1% of the population, and the rest of the country is left stuck in the same situation we’re battling. I spoke with Jon about a bricks-and-mortar death cafe concept and I ended up pulling away from it because I felt that it was putting death in a space that wasn’t part of society, it wasn’t part of a normal wider conversation, it was shoving it in a room somewhere and putting loads of creepy skulls everywhere, which also just adds to this
concept that there should be a destination for death—not that it should be part of life every day. (Winter, 2017, telephone interview)

This observation addresses why we need to have these conversations within a community activism context. One disheartening aspect about the death cafe model is that the people drawn to these conversations are sometimes the very people who might least need to have them. An afternoon spent at a death cafe can be seen as a ‘cultured’ thing to do, death cafes in New York City have been featured in the New York Times, and it can have the association of attracting the middle-class museum-going set. There is a feeling within the death community, not just at death cafes, that perhaps everyone is speaking in a fishbowl, where every conference or museum lecture becomes people who agree with each other taking turns at revolving international podiums and café tables, which is a valid criticism. However, a desire to expand the conversation beyond the confines of the death community does not completely negate the conversations we are currently having. Walters notes that:

‘Talking about death’ is a good message. But this does not mean that everyone needs to talk about death all the time. Some people will not want to talk about it, or certain aspects of it, now, in this group, with this family member or with this healthcare professional. And they should not be criticised for not wanting to talk. (Walter, 2017, 28)

While this is a laudable observation, the death awareness and positivity movements merely propose an invitation, not a mandate. They are open, inclusive communities that will meet you where you are (or are not) within the conversation.

One aspect of the death cafe movement that Winter, Lyons, and others have agreed upon is that it found a medium that people can
identify with. People come together to drink tea and eat cake. If nothing else, it grounds death conversations in a familiar context and the idea is that the conversation on the (taboo/denied/out-of-mind) topic of death is normalised. People understand it. And, imperfect as the model is, it certainly got people talking. With the dissolution and increasing fracturing of organised religion, people are searching for structure around difficult issues that used to be held together with the social scaffolding of religion and community. As Walters notes:

> With the formal Protestant ban on relationships with the dead dissolving, it becomes increasingly easier to acknowledge continuing bonds with the dead, to creatively appropriate angels in the new online language of mourning, and for the funeral industry to offer spiritual comfort through the dead becoming part of the earth’s ecosystem. The blurring of the life/death, living/dead boundary may be part of a much broader cultural dissolution of boundaries that were central to modernity: male/female, gay/straight, human/animal. (Walter, 2017, 111)

We are currently in an age of more flexibility of identity and personal agency within and across previously held strict binaries than previously experienced in modern cultural memory. And perhaps these death conversations are merely an extension, and reflection, of that cultural tide.

Winter and Lyons believe the key to engaging our communities with these discussions is education. We have sex education in schools, why not death education? And sex and death, having their own taboo genealogy, once again seem to bookend this conversation:

> The key is children. We get our preconceptions of death from our childhood. Unless we go into schools, and put healthy programmes in place to get children engaging with all of these death
topics, then nothing is going to change. In fact, it’s going to get worse, because people are increasingly sheltered from death. And why don’t we have death education in schools? Without that, I don’t think there’s much hope at all for mass change. All the death cafes in the world won’t change anything. (Winter, 2017, telephone interview)

It is against this backdrop of our current Western contemporary culture’s attitudes about relegating death conversations, and dying persons, into the fringes of discourse that I have written my audio walk Thoughts on Mourning. These preceding two sections have explored both the prevalence and the ramifications of these attitudes. Moving on from this framework that inspired me to write a walk about death acceptance, the next section will now bring this analysis back to my practice.

**Walking, Memorial, Temporality, and Pause**

*Thoughts on Mourning* is organised into two separate modes of being in Abney Park: sections of walking through the cemetery, and sections of pause on benches. The moments of pause and movement written into the audio walk mirror the pause and movement of a visit to a cemetery space. A cemetery is a place of pause: the length of a visit for the living, the rest of existence before complete decomposition for the dead. A cemetery visit is often marked by its attending slowness. The pauses I have crafted within *Thoughts on Mourning* are short moments in the midst of longer periods of walking. For a mourner visiting Abney Park, there would be a long pause at the graveside, as the pause is the moment that inscribes meaning, whereas the walk is merely a ritual for getting there and a necessity to facilitate the moment of pause. For a listening walker taking my audio walks, it is the walk, the movement, that inscribes meaning—the reason for being in the cemetery—with the moments
of pause fleeting and only used as launch points of reverie for further walking. For both modes of visiting Abney Park, pause and slowness are embedded in the practice of the visit, only with an inversion of primacy.

In this section, I will first draw connections between memorial and walking through Carl Lavery’s *Mourning Walk*, exploring how they are linked through the embodiment of thoughts and movement through space as a retracing of memories and shifting temporal connections. Next, I build on concepts of walking and memorial to present pause and memorial, with John Wylie’s study of memorial benches, pause, and dichotomies of presence/absence, remembering/forgetting, and love/loss.

**Carl Lavery’s ‘Mourning Walk’**

It does not seem farfetched to claim walking as an alternative form of psychotherapy, an activity in which enchantment acts as a bridge between past and present, self and cosmos, life and death. (Lavery, 2009, 51)

Carl Lavery’s *Mourning Walk* is a combined performance, essay, and walking practice that reconstructs his father’s eighteen-mile daily commute from the town of Market Harborough in Leicestershire to the village of Cottesmore in Lincolnshire, to mark the ninth anniversary of his father’s death, or ‘Dad’, as he refers to him within his work. In reconstructing Dad’s journey, Lavery enlisted the help of his mother to predict what highways and roads Dad must have taken. This route is conjecture, but most recollections from the past have a bit of conjecture mixed in with fact to flesh out the story. Lavery’s journey is, in all probability, the journey his father would make every day, but it is not for certain. This does not lessen the weight of what the journey meant for Lavery. The symbolism of the
walk does not change if his route is slightly different, or if he has to make do with country frontage roads instead of walking along busy (and most likely dangerous) highways. The personal meaning infused in this recreation is the main importance of the act. For historical accuracy, he should have also been driving a car instead of walking; so it is apparent from the outset that the value in this walk is not merely recreating a facsimile of the past as a direct retracing of his father’s footsteps.

As Lavery walks, memories of his father are called to mind, and he writes down these memories. As he walks, his perception of the space around him shifts back and forth through time. After the completing of this walk, and after writing the memories that were brought to the surface by the tracing of his walk, he crafts a timeline for both his father and himself—of his father’s life through remembering his daily commute and Lavery’s own memories of his father that are called to mind by the landscape as he moves through it. Lavery’s walk is a walk of mourning and remembrance by way of movement and an embodied way of accessing memory. These written memories Lavery then performs live for an audience in the form of a monologue, with moments of pause:

The dates that run through the piece serve to mark shifts in direction. They are usually followed by a lengthy pause. Images are similarly projected on a screen behind me. Unlike the written text, they have a sense of duration, and last as long as I see fit. (Lavery, 2009, 28)

Lavery documents his walking practice in relation to his father’s death in a few ways. His father died in bed in the summer of 1995. On the ninth anniversary of his father’s death, Lavery walked eighteen miles from a town in Leicestershire to a village in Lincolnshire, where he finished his walk by performing a ‘ritual’ in a
field (which he keeps as a private moment and does not describe, so the reader is left to guess what this might be). Lavery then takes these written accounts of memories accessed during the walk, and performs them twice as a spoken performance accompanied by photographic images behind him—the first time two years following the walk in 2006, and then a section time, in another two years from the original performance, in 2008. Then both of these performance experiences are written down into an account of the walk, the writing, and the performance into a final documentation artefact that is published in 2013, in *Walking, Writing, and Performance*. The resulting *Mourning Walk* documentation artefact, is comprised of a series of temporal layers, of not only the layers of memory that are uncovered through Lavery’s walk that shift back and forth in time, but also the final documentation of walking/writing/performance layers from different times produced and reproduced tracing again within the practice itself.

The written script of my audio walk *Thoughts on Mourning* is informed by my readings of Victorian mourning practices, poetry, and contemporary works—the walk began as a written work, grounded in words. Lavery crafted *Mourning Walk* in just this way as well: “For me, walking and writing are intimately connected: one leads to the other.” (Lavery, 2009, 42) It is from this root beginning that our different walks took shape, using different narrative vehicles, to tell similar stories of death acceptance—one of personal acceptance, and one of cultural acceptance. Shifting temporal layers and methods of documentation informed the crafting of *Thoughts on Mourning*. My audio walk is also a layering of temporal traces: I quote various Victorian texts and historical accounts, intermixed with contemporary perspectives, which were researched, written, and recorded as ‘contemporary’—but are already anachronistic as of this writing, as *Thoughts on Mourning* was recorded four years ago, so
the audio walk is now a temporal artefact itself. However, other than these temporal layering similarities, Lavery’s walking practice is quite different from mine in a few key ways. *Mourning Walk* is an exercise of personal loss; *Thoughts on Mourning* is a meditative walk exploring varying cultural modes of dealing with loss. *Mourning Walk* covers an eighteen-mile linear journey; *Thoughts on Mourning* remains enclosed in Abney Park’s thirty-two acres and crosses over itself. *Mourning Walk* is a written documentation of artefact of performance for a personal walk that he has already taken in the past; *Thoughts on Mourning* is an audio walk that is offered to strangers to take in the future.

Despite these differences, both walks inhabit a shifting temporality—not quite then, but not quite now, slipping back and forth through time, both a temporal shift in recounting the past through the walk, but also a temporal shift in the documentation of the walk itself. Lavery’s walk was taken in 2004, then performed in 2006, and again in 2008—the memories that shifted back and forth in time during the action of taking the walk, then themselves shift through time as the memories are traced through the walk again through performance one year and then four years into the future. *Thoughts on Mourning* explores Victorian and contemporary views on mourning—references sliding back and forth through time as the listening walker moves through the cemetery—and was recorded in 2014, which freezes the ‘contemporary’ of *Thoughts on Mourning* now in the past. The further time progresses away from 2014, the more references to ‘contemporary views’ will become as anachronistic as Abney Park’s Victorian headstones. The space of the cemetery serves this fluid temporal narrative as it embodies anachronism. The act of walking itself also assists this sliding through time. As Lavery notes:

> In *Mourning Walk*, I was acutely aware of a curious temporal paradox: the further I
advanced in real time and space, the more I seemed to lose myself in memory and daydream. There were times, for instance, on the walk, when I had the impression that past and present had entirely collapsed, and that I had magically returned to other landscapes which, for some reason or other, had, until that moment, remained hidden and out of reach. (Lavery, 2009, 50)

This ‘magical returning’ and creation of ‘enchantment’ through walking is what I have endeavoured to uncover within Abney Park cemetery through *Thoughts on Mourning*—the layers of meaning that lie hidden, that by audio meditation (or as Lavery terms it, ‘reverie’) can be revealed. Lavery’s opening up to possible hidden worlds adds a Machenesque aspect of discovery through his mourning walk. The heterotopic nature of the cemetery opens up possibilities for reverie moving across a temporal plane. The atmosphere of Abney Park, along with the action of walking, and the accompanying audio narrative of poetry and various perspectives on mourning from the Victorian era and today, coalesce to offer an embodied experience of this enchantment, this slipping through time, and flipping from the ‘real’, to imagination, then back again. “Like enchantment, walking is a synthetic act that combines a series of opposites in a dynamic dialogue: inner/outer, past/present, the poetic/real.” (Lavery 51) Lavery’s style of documenting his *Mourning Walk* is open and flexible; his narrative switches styles and flips between decades, much like a walker’s own mind often can do when alone on a walk. This is also how I have crafted *Thoughts on Mourning*. I guide the listening walker through Victorian views, to contemporary views, back to Victorian views on mourning, interspersed with anecdotes. The idea was to craft a flow of thought, with continuity resting on the emotional, rather than the temporal, journey.
Lavery notes: “If I am walking, I almost physically feel the current of time slowing down in the gravitational field of oblivion.” (Lavery 29) There is a fascinating connection between the actions of the body and the workings of the mind. It is common for a person to say, “I went for a walk to clear my head”. The rhythm of walking is hypnotic, the mild exertion of energy a pleasant sensation, and, in my experience, the passing of landscape and views, the sense of motion, is freeing. Carl Lavery comments on the liminal state experienced by a walker as daydreaming, but not the daydreaming of disengagement with the daydreamer’s surroundings, but a dreamer present and within the space—a ‘world dreamer’.

[Quoting Gaston Bachelard] ‘Such a dreamer is a world dreamer. He opens himself to the world, and the world opens itself to him.’ [...] Bachelard’s poet, ‘the world dreamer’, is ostensibly a modern-day Orpheus, a subject who enters the daydream of reverie in order to allow the ghosts of the (human) world and (inhuman) cosmos to speak. In this impossible exchange, this enchanted communication, the subject, Bachelard notes, opens himself to the Other. For me, the transcendence that Bachelard speaks of here has existential effects: it is what allows the subject to affirm loss and accept death. (Lavery, 2009, 50)

Ultimately, it is this opening up to world experience and “affirming loss and accepting death” without fear that is the goal of Thoughts on Mourning. Lavery’s Mourning Walk is an intensely personal account, documenting the loss, and subsequent emotional processing of that loss, of a beloved father: ‘Dad’. My walk diverges from Lavery on this point of focus, as it is the denial of death as Concept, rather than death as Person, that is my inspiration for creating it—however the two walks sit alongside each other in terms of using an embodied practice to process these deeply emotional themes. My audio walk uses a different narrative from Lavery to tell the story; however, my
practice is in conversation with Lavery’s practice regarding these themes. In the following section I explore mourning within landscape. Lavery processed his love and loss through movement, John Wylie, in his study of memorial benches in Cornwall, England, explores love and loss through static monuments within landscape through pause—and the tensions between the dichotomies of presence/absence, remembering/forgetting, and love/loss.

**John Wylie’s Memorial Benches and Landscapes of Loss**

All across the hillslope the memorial benches basked in the light. They stood (or so it seemed to me) as sentinels of love, and now even more than before in this marking the landscape was made something constitutively inaccessible, non-coincident with itself and with the gaze of any onlooker. Without losing anything of their power and sincerity the benches withdrew the entire scene into absences, distances. For it’s love that will tear us apart—love is a tearing-apart. (Wylie, 2009, 286)

Within Abney Park, there are quite a large number of park benches evenly spaced along the paths upon which visitors can rest. Most of these benches are the sort of wooden slat benches to be found in most public parks. There are a couple of wooden benches made from sturdier blocks of wood with small brass plaques commemorating the memory of a loved one; however, these benches are along the paths and not connected to a grave. The most striking memorial bench within the cemetery is the green stone bench and accompanying headstone in honour of Betsi Cadwaladr. This is the only memorial bench in the cemetery that is stone, and the only memorial bench located on the site of the person’s grave whom it commemorates. For this reason, I have woven Betsi’s story into the

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45 Photographs of Betsi Cadwaladr’s memorial bench and headstone are in the *Thoughts on Mourning* ‘Transcripts and Photographic Journey’ section at the end of this thesis.
narrative of *Thoughts on Mourning*. Her memorial bench offers a different way of thinking about the deceased, as it is an embodied interaction with memorial. The bench is designed to be sat upon, and the angle of the bench necessitates the visitor to face a particularly chosen view—in the case of Betsi’s bench, the view is of her gravestone and the woodland and other gravestones behind it. The bench is facing perpendicular to her grave so that the visitor has a clear view of the gravestone, but can see down the straight path leading to and from it as well. This gives the bench a sense of space.

The view from a memorial bench is part of the embodied experience of the memorial. Geographer John Wylie crafted a study of memorial benches on a cliffside in Mullion Cove, Cornwall in 2009 titled *Landscape, Absence, and the Geographies of Love*. In this work, Wylie developed themes of landscape in terms of absence and presence in the physical space of the cliff, while also exploring “motifs of absence, distance, loss, and haunting” (Wylie, 2009, 275). The benches Wylie studied were spaced out along the cliffside at different heights and angles; however, all were facing outwards towards the sea. Using the benches as ‘place-makers’ in space, Wylie’s study analyses what these benches represent in terms of the geographies of love, asserting that such geographies represent a simultaneous opening-onto and distancing from, creating tension within openness and distance, finding that landscape, absence, and love are entangled.

The memorial benches in Wylie’s study were placed on the Mullion Cove cliffside to commemorate loved ones. However, Betsi’s bench was placed in Abney Park in 2012 (one hundred fifty two years after her death in 1860) by the Royal College of Nursing and the Welsh health board that shares Betsi’s name: the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. This commemoration is a different kind of
love. Originally, working-class Betsi was buried anonymously in a pauper’s common grave along with four others. She is heralded as the ‘forgotten Florence Nightingale’ and celebrated for her work and sacrifice as a nurse, her fierce independence, and for training to go to the Crimean war at the age of sixty-five. There were many people who felt an emotional connection with Betsi’s life story, and they set up a petition to have her grave commemorated. Hers is an adventurous tale to tell. The following is an excerpt from the section of *Thoughts on Mourning* when the listening walker is seated on Betsi’s bench:

At the age of fourteen she escaped through a bedroom window using tied sheets, and left Bala. From there, she then travelled to Liverpool where she entered into domestic service. Later, she returned to Wales, but then quickly fled again, this time to avoid marriage, opting instead to live with her sister in London. Here in London, she first encountered the theatre, which became a great interest to her. In 1820, aged thirty-one, she again returned to Bala— which by then she considered to be quite 'dull', so she ran off again, this time to become a maid to a ship's captain and travelled for many years, visiting South America, Africa, and Australia. At times she performed Shakespeare on board the ship. Despite her stubbornness and independence, Betsi herself claimed that in the course of her travels she was proposed to by over twenty men. (*Thoughts on Mourning* transcript)

What I have endeavoured to craft with this section of my audio walk is to take the moment of pause offered by her memorial bench and use this moment as an opportunity to paint a mental picture for the listening walker of what sort of woman Betsi was, and what sort of a rare and exotic life she led. Coming to visit Betsi’s memorial bench can give visitors to Abney Park an idea of Betsi’s story and her historical importance. However, the audio narrative of *Thoughts on*
Mourning takes this opportunity further and fills the moment of pause offered by Betsi’s bench with her life story, which merely sitting on the bench or reading the inscription would not illuminate for a visitor not talking my audio walk. This offering of a depth of meaning to the memorial bench, and offering a fuller picture of the woman whom it commemorates, is the unique opportunity offered by an audio walking practice.

Previous to the installation of Betsi’s memorial bench, her grave was unmarked, yet her body was still present underground in the space. For Wylie’s memorial benches, the benches are present, and it is the bodies that are absent. This tension between presence and absence, marked by memorials of loss, is what Wylie maps in his geographies of love. When studying the landscape of the benches at Mullion Cove, Wylie finds that they are about absence and love, but also more widely about memory—especially as most of their plaque markers are inscribed ‘In Loving Memory of…’ These benches are reminders of love.

Remembering love, that is, and not just commemorating it, keeping it alive in other words, because remembering is a sort of loving. But once memory and love are even mentioned in this way, then just as with all the absences constitutively at work in the apparently seamless present landscape, so the purity of these terms is straightaway ghosted: remembering/forgetting, loving/losing. (Wylie, 2009, 278)

These memorial benches remind us that we cannot have one without the other—we cannot have love without loss; and there is nothing lost if there was never once love. As cemeteries have fallen out of contemporary fashion as a way to commemorate loved ones, and scattering of ashes becomes a more frequent way that the bereaved process their loved one’s remains, memorial benches, especially
along cliffsides such as Mullion Cove, have become more prevalent. These benches mark the absence of not only the person they commemorate, but by their very presence on the cliff, suggest the absence of the deceased’s body itself—as scattered to air and sea. In this way, the presence/absence dichotomy is most felt in relation to the benches, even more so than in a cemetery. Wylie finds that the memorial benches differ from graves, even though the hillside does in some ways remind him of a graveyard, in that graves embody place. Graves embody the placement of the body, and the placement of grief—whereas a memorial bench is in place of a body. The body is not present, however, neither is the focus.

When engaging with a memorial bench, however, the eye is outward from the memorial. The visitor shares perspective with the memorial not of the memorial.

You are looking with them because the bench is theirs, it has become the embodiment anew of their now-in-one-way absent perspective, and so when you sit it is as though you are sitting beside them, with them, conversing, sharing the view. There is something convivial about these benches: places to sit and watch and talk and maybe even rest in peace for a while. (Wylie, 2009, 281)

When viewed in this context, housing a memorial bench within a cemetery might even seem overly self-referential. A memorial bench
within a cemetery does not mark the absence of the body, however the invitation to sit and “rest in peace” awhile is the same. This is an invitation to take time (the rest), not to take place (make up for the lack of a body). Within the dichotomy of presence/absence, remembering/forgetting, love/loss—what strikes with the most emotional resonance is Wylie’s observation that you cannot have one without the other. In looking at the beautiful seaside view, sharing this view with the benches, and the memories and pain of people he did not know personally, he felt the benches, in their ever-outward look withdrew the entire pastoral scene into a manifestation of this absence and distance. There is beauty in the benches’ sentry over the sea, however the unspoken main locus of their silent witness is pain.

It is this pain of loss that is the underlying driver for everything I have researched and presented in this chapter. Wylie’s memorial benches as silent sentries of heartbreak; Lavery’s walking embodiment of memory processing the loss of his father; twentieth-century death denial, sequestering dying persons away from society as a way to hide from reminders of the inevitability of loss—and the Victorian ‘cult of the dead’, as a codified societal ritual, all of which is merely the highly decorated scaffolding of an elaborate coping mechanism to process the pain of loss. Throughout the ages of human history that archaeologists, scientists, historians, and anthropologists have studied, it is artefacts from funerary rites that hold the lion's share of our museum space and cultural imagination. Throughout the roughly one-hundred and eighty years of mourning practices that I have studied throughout this thesis, there have been huge cultural shifts in what are considered ‘acceptable’ mourning practices, but one thing that binds all of these practices—as diverse and conflicting as they may seem—is the inalterable human need we share to process the price we pay for love: the pain of loss: “For it’s
love that will tear us apart—love is a tearing-apart.” (Wylie, 2009, 286)

Process of Crafting Thoughts on Mourning

The journey towards writing Thoughts on Mourning can be traced back to my long-held personal interest in historic cemeteries that began when travelling through Europe as a teenager. Exploring local historical cemeteries has long been the first stop on my itinerary when I travel. When I first moved to London from New York City in 2008, Abney Park was the closest cemetery to me, located just a mile from where I lived off Newington Green. I would often go to Abney Park to walk or sit and write, enjoying its overgrown quiet atmosphere as a place to process the major life upheaval that I had undergone. With benches tucked away off small winding paths, Abney Park presented a secret-garden-like atmosphere that mixed the thrill of exploration with the comfort of finding someplace hidden, along with the privacy for personal reflection that a thickly wooded landscape allows. In the first few tumultuous years I spent adjusting to my new life in the UK, Abney Park was my sanctuary.

Since Abney Park held personal meaning for me long before my PhD work began, the initial process of crafting an audio walking practice within the cemetery came from a personal and emotionally driven space. I began writing Thoughts on Mourning by taking note of my observations as I sat in Abney Park, beginning with free association writing of whatever came into my mind or moved me on a particular day. As this was my first audio walk I was writing for Abney Park, my thoughts were not as clear on what the cemetery meant to me, or to the community, as they are today. I had yet to tease out the different layers of meaning—the different ‘doors of perception’ and ‘borderlands’—that helped me to organise my observations in my
later research. These initial notes were thoughts on everything all at once.

At this time, in 2014, I had only recently discovered the ‘death positive’ community. After attending the second annual three-day conference Death Salon at Barts Pathology Museum in London in April 2014, I joined a variety of online groups and learned about the Morbid Anatomy Library in Brooklyn, New York. (The small Morbid Anatomy Library was started by Joanna Ebenstein as a solo project, that later received funding to become the Morbid Anatomy Museum, in 2014.) I reached out to Joanna Ebenstein via email and scheduled time to come see her library when I was next visiting New York City. Even though, in the beginning, I did not know anyone in the death positive community, I found the group very receptive to being approached without introduction and I became involved within the community rather quickly. I attended a variety of pop-up lectures in various small museums in London; and in Amsterdam I met Joanna Ebenstein for the first time in person at the first annual Weekend of Anatomy conference co-organised by Morbid Anatomy and Museum Vrolik, held in May 2014. It was at this conference where Ebenstein first asked me to speak at her museum in New York City. Over the course of the following two years, I presented six keynote lectures at the museum, before they closed in 2016. Back in London, I began attending the annual lecture series hosted by Barts Pathology Museum, where I would eventually become a volunteer.

With my involvement in the death positive community front-of-mind—and having attended many lectures within the community addressing different aspects of Victorian attitudes towards death—I realised that what struck me most about Abney Park cemetery, and indeed almost any cemetery from the Victorian era, is the beauty of these old cemeteries in comparison to most of the modern twentieth-
century cemeteries I was used to seeing growing up in southern California. Instead of stark efficiency, Victorian garden cemeteries exemplified the time and space people gave during this era for grieving and honouring the dead. Grief was not something to be shushed away and kept private, and dying people were not sequestered away from society like an uncomfortable secret. Through my writing while sitting in Abney, I realised that this was what I wanted to make my first audio walk about: the social scaffolding that gave structure and beauty to the grieving process in the Victorian era juxtaposed against twentieth-century death denial.

I began by collecting various thoughts and stories from the early nineteenth-century to present day. I then wove them together in a meditative arc, beginning with my personal reflections on the nineteenth-century perspective on death, the thoughts of William Godwin, and a quote by poet Percy Shelley. After this, I let the music I chose come to the fore, as the listening walker is asked to sit on a bench and observe a rather unusual horizontal line of cramped-in gravestones just across the path from this bench. This is the first meditative prompt. After this, the listening walker is guided to continue past the statue of Isaac Watts, with a bit about his history and connection to Abney Park cemetery, then onto the centre chapel ruin, (as it was when I wrote it, by autumn 2017 the chapel was no longer a complete ruin and partially renovated) where I share contemporary reflections on today’s attitudes by historian Mark Dery, as well as thoughts from today’s death positive community.

After walking a ways deeper through the cemetery, I follow up these scene-setting musings with a story about a woman buried in Abney Park cemetery, the nurse Betsi Cadwaladr. I include her story for a couple of reasons. Firstly, hers is a fascinating story to tell, one that spans love, adventure, war, sacrifice, and bravery; but, also, it is the
story of a woman initially conscripted to an unmarked grave. As she was a nurse, the Royal College of Nursing and the Welsh health board that shares Betsi’s name, installed the bench and headstone in 2012 that now mark Betsi’s final resting place and shares her story with visitors to the cemetery. Her story accomplishes a few things for my narrative: it humanises what could otherwise be seen as a rather theoretical or dry reflection on what has the potential to be (and arguably should be) an emotion-filled and intimate space: the space of the cemetery. It also brings to our attention the importance of memorial. If Betsi’s grave were to have remained unmarked, her story would fade into history and only be accessible to those actively researching her. With the placement of her gravestone and memorial bench, visitors to Abney Park cemetery can sit for a while and read a bit about Betsi, this woman that perhaps they’d never heard of before, and engage with her sliver of history.

Her posthumous memorial journey is an example that illustrates the importance of marked history, and supports my audio walks in their aim to offer a variety of ways of engaging with cemeteries. Cemeteries are not only for private grief; they are also spatial libraries that house our societal narratives, making them key heritage sites.

After Betsi’s story, the listening walker continues on a winding way following some of the more narrow and overgrown paths through Abney Park. Here, I again let the music come to the fore, allowing the listening walker mental space for his or her own reflections and time to look around at the various gravestones and foliage, absorbing the atmosphere of what he or she is seeing, underlain by the mood I have created through the music of the Black Heart Procession.
From here, I then read a twentieth-century passage on grief, followed by a Victorian perspective. I allow the music to lead the audio once again, until we come to the end of the walk, at the Isaac Watts memorial stone at the far northeast corner of the cemetery. Here, I end with my own personal reflections, this time instead of focusing on nineteenth-century mourning, I focus on the cemetery as it is today, and the importance cemeteries hold for me and what thoughts and reflections they inspire. I then leave the listening walker to find his or her own way out of the cemetery, set to an irreverent and upbeat song about death, Jason Webley’s ‘Dance While the Sky Crashes Down’.

I wanted the end of the audio walk to be as waking from a dream. The music throughout the entire walk has been very sombre and reflective, and I have built in sections for the listening walker to get lost in his or her own thoughts. I did not want the end of the audio walk to be an abrupt exit at one of the cemetery gates. There should be time to come back to the present, to come out of the reverie, and perhaps, as well, to shake off some darker thoughts that may have come upon the listening walker. I chose my exit music, Jason Webley’s ‘Dance While the Sky Crashes Down’, to lyrically convey the exact tone of poetry I wanted to leave the listening walk with to meld with my views regarding death topics, all set to a gypsy waltz.

**Working with the Music**

The feedback from my choice to use music within my audio walks has been mixed. One perspective is that it takes away an element of freedom of thought from the listening walker and creates a prescribed atmosphere with too much guided feeling. I have found from listening to the sources of feedback, from people who have appreciated the music as a backdrop to their own emotional worlds.
and thoughts, and from those who felt the music was intrusive, that the difference appears to lie in whether the listening walker usually walks with music in their day-to-day lives. Personally, I never leave home without my headphones. Music is the constant backdrop of my walking life. I see it as a launch pad towards different emotions and trains of thought. I am thinking all the while on myriad subjects, the music being merely a tool towards reverie. In that vein, having music as a backdrop for a walk through Abney Park was a natural choice, from my perspective, for introducing a tone, but not prescribing a particular train of thought. The music is there merely as a background that sets the scene for the listening walker’s own thoughts to be played out upon. Walkers who usually listen to music as they go through life were absorbed in their own thought worlds as they took the audio walk; those without music as a daily companion found it intrusive. Learning of this disparity in walking experience was part of the trial and error aspect of creating these first audio walks in Abney Park. And, due to learning this, and in deference towards the diversity of Abney Park visitors who would take my audio walks, I use music to a much lesser degree in *Woodland Magick* and *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions*—and use no music at all in *Woodland Networks*.

As *Thoughts on Mourning* was the first audio walk that I created, I did not have the benefit of feedback yet, so I was ignorant of these different visitor preferences. Because music is important to my personal walking experience, when I began crafting *Thoughts on Mourning* creating a musical backdrop was key to crafting the audio walk. My audio walking practice is that of ‘walks’, not ‘tours’—and the format of my walks is of separate audio worlds that I introduce my listening walkers to as doors of perception into different aspects of Abney Park. Key to crafting a world is crafting its sonic landscape and, for *Thoughts on Mourning*, the highly emotional nature of the
subject matter to me personally meant the music choice needed to be equally personal.

Choosing the music to underlie the meditative aspect of this audio walk naturally led me to think of the music that has so often brought me to that very place on its own. The music of the Black Heart Procession has been very important to me since I first started listening to them in 2000. They are a band from hometown, San Diego, California. I have seen them play once live and an old friend from back home has played with them off and on over the years. They have been the audio backdrop for many poignant moments in my life. Their music is not only haunting instrumentally, but their lyrics are perfectly in tune to the air of introspective melancholy I wished to evoke in Thoughts on Mourning. The resonance I feel with the music of the Black Heart Procession stems partly from my personal memories and emotional ties. However, that aspect has helped me to know this music intimately enough to craft and carve moments with the building blocks of their music with greater familiarity. Rather than having it impede my communication with the listening walker by conferring personal meaning to a piece of music or paced section that would not come through in the final audio walk, I believe it lent me the opposite, an ability to edit the music exactly how I wanted to because of my familiarity with it—and I was very liberal with my editing. Using their music like clay, I cut sections from a main track, looped sections in on themselves for background, and spliced different songs together to craft the various mood changes and effects I hoped to produce.

One potential roadblock I saw to this creative spree was permission from the Black Heart Procession to do this. While I am not monetising this project in any way, it is available on the internet, open to the public, and anyone can access and download Thoughts on
Mourning, which owes a direct creative debt to the Black Heart Procession. I emailed their manager from their band website, as well as found an email address for the band directly online, and hoped they would give me permission. I did not hear anything back for over a month. I had already progressed quite far into the crafting of Thoughts on Mourning and was getting nervous about proceeding. I did some more research and found the lead singer, Pall Jenkins, on Facebook. Since we have a mutual friend on the social media site (the same friend who used to play with them occasionally back home), I was able to send Pall Jenkins a private message via Facebook. To my immense joy, he messaged me back immediately, saying not only did I have his full permission to use their music as I chose, but he found the project to be very interesting and was looking forward to hearing it when it was completed. It was more than I had hoped for in terms of consent; he was actually supporting the project and was happy to be a part of it. They always say to never meet your heroes, but you never know when they might surprise you with a wonderfully positive reaction in support of a fellow artist.

After I finished the final editing, I sent the audio walk to Pall Jenkins and received a one-line message back: “Wow. Creepy.” While ‘creepy’ was not exactly the emotional world I was looking to craft—working more towards melancholy and introspection than actual creepiness—I was honoured that Pall Jenkins listened to my audio walk, and it is rather a professional accomplishment to have been called ‘creepy’ by the Black Heart Procession. I then contacted Jason Webley, the artist who wrote and performed the exit music song, ‘Dance While the Sky Crashes Down’, and he was equally magnanimous with giving me full permission to use his song in Thoughts on Mourning. I thank both the Black Heart Procession and Jason Webley for their generous permissions at the end of the audio walk.
Transferring the Script into the Space

Transferring the script for Thoughts on Mourning into the space was a multistage process. It first consisted of making sure the walk tracked to the paths where I wanted the listening walker to go. This was a process of trial, error, rewriting, and tracking again in the space to make sure the timing was in sync with the path, and consistent each time. Sometimes the weather was beautiful and the paths were dry, sometimes it had just rained and the paths had become bogs, which I had to scale the sides of the walkways to walk around and clamber through bushes. (In the two years since the recording of this audio walk, Hackney Council now keeps all main pathways covered in wood chip or sand, so mud bogs are not the issue they used to be.) I took an average walking pace of these varying conditions in order to account for differences in walking pace during different times of year and weather, which should account as well for the differences in walking pace and stride between individuals.

I built in references to landmarks, as well as pauses to sit on a bench or stand in a certain spot, to allow the pacing of different walkers to catch up to the narrative. One thing that was difficult with regards to signposting these walks, in comparison to other urban walks that I have taken by other artists, is the cemetery space is a nature reserve with no street signs and few defined spaces where it is clear to the listening walker where he or she should turn. Recruiting various friends as a test group to take Thoughts on Mourning, I found from their initial feedback that different parts of the audio walk were confusing to different people—and to some it was not confusing at all. I found this to be a frustrating level of variation that I was not sure how to fix, as no two people found the same sections difficult to follow. In the end, I decided to keep the walk as I had originally written it. Even for those who did get lost, the meditative aspect of
Thoughts on Mourning meant that people were able to get something out of the experience, even if they were not standing where I had planned for them to stand, or looking at the monuments I wished for them to see. It made for a slightly different experience for each person; however Abney Park cemetery offered these initial walkers plenty of meditative spaces, not only those prescribed by me.

After doing my best to conquer the logistical issues of mapping the space for the listening walker via audio, what was most important was to have the core meaning and emotion I was trying to convey come across. With regards to Thoughts on Mourning, I had initially written the script to be a constant narrative, with only a few purposeful moments for personal thoughts, as selected signposts for pause with very deliberate ‘please pause here to think’ messages. However, through the editing process, and through listening to the audio again walking in the cemetery, I felt it was too rushed. So I split up what had been recorded as one monologue into separate spoken sections of information. For logistical reasons as well, this ended up offering useful flexibility to then craft the sections of information around specific guideposts along the way, building in pauses for narrator comment, walking instructions, or music interludes accordingly.

When I first started working on Thoughts on Mourning, I knew what I hoped to have people think and feel regarding their visit to Abney Park: a sense of rich history, the beauty of a Victorian garden cemetery, an appreciation for Victorian views on mourning and the ‘death positive’ movement, and a touch of pensive melancholy—but I wasn’t sure how to evoke this in other people. Through an audio walking practice, I was able to be a disembodied voice, aiding their imaginations towards an emotional experience that interacted with the space of the cemetery, if they were willing to meet me halfway. I
gathered my mourning research and crafted the arc of the script for *Thoughts on Mourning* with relative emotional detachment. I knew the length of time I felt the walk should be, the areas of the cemetery that I wished to cover, and the opinions I wished to share throughout it. However, when I began to put the text to music and to walk it within the space, I became incredibly introspective. Perhaps it is because *Thoughts on Mourning* is all recorded in my own voice, and is mostly my own thoughts and perspectives on my research. *Thoughts on Mourning* is infused with emotion and crafted with great care. At points, I felt I had an almost audio diary composed of my own thoughts I was sharing back to only myself in a self-contained feedback loop. Perhaps, too, it was the combination of the music I chose, which is highly personal to me, or having these quotes directly linked to the space of Abney Park, which is also quite personal to me, but I found myself taking this walk over and over, constantly tinkering and reworking, changing song edits, pausing. Walking the space, again and again. I walked well into the evening sometimes, where twice I was almost locked into the cemetery at night—a fate I warn my listening walkers against at the beginning introduction to this very walk. I did learn, however, that the cemetery guard leaves one gate open at the Egyptian gates entrance off Stoke Newington High Street and stands by it for half an hour past closing time to allow a safe exit for late stragglers.

*Thoughts on Mourning* was crafted as an invitation to experience a Victorian garden cemetery while engaging with Victorian and contemporary mourning viewpoints on an emotional and immersive level—with the audio format offering a way to walk through this particular door of perception within Abney Park. The intimacy of the format and tone of *Thoughts on Mourning* offers a different experience for a visitor to Abney Park than a guided walking tour in a group, or setting out independently with a pamphlet or notes from a website, a
few dates and a mute object to appraise based on the bare facts written on headstones and other information empirically available. Triggering an emotional response also triggers curiosity by making Abney Park alive and personal, and hopefully furthers engagement with the site. This added layer of perception into a way of experiencing Abney Park that is offered to visitors might spark new ways of viewing the space that visitors had not previously conceived of before their visit. After taking this audio walk, I hope my listening walkers leave with more questions than answers. I want them to leave already planning to come back. As he or she exists, walking through the overgrown woodland, I hope the walk has given the visitor a new appreciation for the love and care that went into crafting Victorian garden cemeteries, and what place they can hopefully hold in our future communities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the development of twentieth-century death denial and how I have crafted an audio walking practice within a Victorian garden cemetery with the aim to offer visitors a space to meditate on these themes. The narrative throughout Thoughts on Mourning shares Victorian and contemporary ‘death positive’ perspectives to open a door into how we can re-engage with these practices today. Through an analysis of Anglo-American mourning practices from the Victorian era, through the twentieth century, to today, I have presented a picture of the values and rituals associated with the Victorian ‘cult of the dead’ as a juxtaposition against the contemporary ‘phobic of the dead’. These concepts, of bringing an intimacy with the processes of death back into the processes of mourning, are the groundwork on which I built the premise of Thoughts on Mourning: that Victorian mourning practices help with the grief process to a greater degree than
contemporary death practices of commercialisation, outsourcing, and sequestering of death away from loved ones into an institutional setting. *Thoughts on Mourning* aims to not only offer an invitation to see the Victorian garden cemetery perhaps in a new way, but to use the mode of walking, and intimate interaction with the space, to present views of death positivity.

Through my research I have found that shutting out thoughts of mortality completely, cutting ourselves off from our dead, and living in a sterilised ‘death-free’ society, has meant that we have erased death from public view; and, therefore, through foreignisation, increased our fear of death, not lessened it. There appears to be a disconnect between what people assume, or hope, will happen to them when they die, versus the reality of this experience—for the dying person, as well as for the bereaved who are left behind.

The death positive movement has been somewhat misunderstood in certain circles, sparking even confrontation and social media trolling by some people who view the death positive community as a group who look forward to death and wish for people to die. As this is the diametric opposite of what the community stands for—embracing life—it seemed that an invitation into the ethos of this caring and empathetic community might serve as an educational tool without being ‘preachy’ or aggressive towards those who oppose ‘death positivity’, or who are put off by the straightforward approach towards death, dying, and end-of-life care of the ‘death awareness’ community. The sometimes surprisingly caustic reception of death positive activists online, to me, shows a level of emotional investment that is perhaps more rooted in fear than anger. By crafting a welcoming, disembodied audio experience—to literally ‘walk’ a visitor through these themes of death positivity—I have aimed to offer a gentle hand into this ideology, which will hopefully
engage more people than a mutually defensive debate on social media.

Setting my audio walking practice in a Victorian garden cemetery offers a visual reminder of how death was approached in the Victorian era and adds a multisensory aspect to the audio when embodied as a walk. My research into death denial showed me a void in acceptance and a need for people to have a space to think on these issues. *Thoughts on Mourning* aims to offer a private, independent, personal space for visitors to listen and think on difficult death themes through a walking meditation. This independent experience I hope will soften some fear-based misunderstandings to manifest instead into fruitful community discussion. The Arcadian environs of Abney Park cemetery present an opportunity for a walking practice that addresses these emotionally charged themes in a setting where death contemplation is softened by beauty—just as the Victorians intended.
CHAPTER SEVEN

Thesis Conclusions

I created my Abney Rambles series of audio walks with the aim of facilitating community engagement with Abney Park cemetery by offering audio walking journeys presented as four different perspectives on the space. My audio walking practice sits within the context of wider Abney Park Trust community engagement initiatives. Members of the public who are not familiar with Abney Park, the complex heritage that it holds, or the year-round events calendar organised by the Abney Park Trust, might not think of the cemetery as their local nature reserve and heritage site – my work aims to widen public perception of this important community space.

I have created my audio walking practice to be an embodied experience of a selection of layered meanings within Abney Park, which are reflective of the tapestry-like nature of interwoven spatial and temporal layers within the cemetery. The layers of heritage that I have uncovered through my research into Abney Park cemetery (nonhuman heritage, ‘earth mystery’, outdoor archive, mourning heritage) all exist together, layered on top of and next to each other as disparate borderland worlds. Together, the Abney Rambles series of audio walks are positioned as doors of perception into each of the borderland worlds that coexist within Abney Park. Each audio walk aims to enrich a visit to the cemetery by peeking under the surface of a casual visit and contemporary observation of the space. The doors of perception that I offer visitors to Abney Park are opened by an act of imagination. In the context of a walking artist creating audio walks, there must be an acknowledgment of the imaginative nature of my chosen mode of opening the diverse heritages and meanings of Abney Park that I share with the visitor. Much of this type of
experience within an historic site is achieved by an interweaving of
the historic with the imaginative in my audio walks. However, all
evacuations through history require us to position facts on an
imaginative scaffolding of our own construction. This active
experience is part of the appreciation, and indeed creation, of Doreen
Massey’s ‘contemporaneous multiple becomings’ within
anachronistic space: the act of engaging with the past through
creative imaginings while simultaneously, through that act, creating
a new history as visitors walk through the cemetery retracing paths
through the space.

I put forth here the conclusions I have reached through crafting my
audio walking practice and researching this thesis, beginning with
the theoretical implications of my reading of the space of Abney Park
cemetery, followed by my findings regarding heritage engagement
applications of my research, concluding with a critical reflection on
where my audio walking practice both meets – and falls short – of
my community engagement objectives.

**Theoretical Implications**

When I began my research into crafting a walking practice in Abney
Park cemetery, the first step on this research journey was to define
where my work would sit within the field of walking practice. My
audio walks are first and foremost grounded in their location and
cannot take place anywhere else without losing their resonance and
meaning. My walking practice delves into Abney Park’s layers of
meaning and heritage, translating my research into these layers
through my subjective experience of the space, then records and
dокументes these findings into audio experiences to be taken by
visitors. I initially became interested in exploring Abney Park as a
place that combines a shared community history and mourning
practices, and how symbolism and layers of memory that are found within the material objects in the cemetery become layered with meanings over time. My aim was to illustrate how this layered complexity can be experienced and explored by a visitor to Abney Park cemetery by way of taking audio walks. Abney Park is not a typical cemetery—it is both a site housing grief monuments and a community space. Abney Park exists between and within these two definitions. With my audio walks, I guide the listening walker through the various aspects that comprise the whole of Abney Park cemetery through an exploration of the many temporal and spatial layers that make up its unique diversity. Researching multiple meanings within space, I became interested in Tim Cresswell’s theories of layers of memory, and how this might be applied to the ways in which life and death are sedimented in Abney Park cemetery and can be explored through moments of pause. Yi-Fu Tuan’s theories on space and symbolisation offered an analysis of the symbolic complexities that illuminate the ways in which Abney Park carries symbolic meanings for mourners and community groups alike. Cemetery spaces are socially produced places, where meanings are negotiated through social action. To interpret the symbols within in the cemetery space, we need to understand it as a special place, separate from the ordinary or domestic sphere. The symbolism used within the cemetery space is as important to engendering meaning as its accompanying behavioural etiquette.

The walks I have crafted through Abney Park offer doors into possible borderland worlds, each weaving together a possible trajectory within the space and forming a narrative based on a nexus of throwntogetherness offered by specific points along the walk. The concepts of symbolisation, layers of memory, contemporaneous multiple becomings, and anachronistic space form the foundation on which I have built my walks. Woven together, each of these concepts
has contributed to building a depth of understanding regarding the tapestry of perceptual possibilities within a cemetery space. With the disembodied audio format, I aim for the listening walker to experience a fragmentation of temporal awareness. Listening to a voice already from the past (whether that be a remove of weeks, or years) brings to the fore thoughts of the cemetery at once moving forward and backward through time. Audio journeys through the past, that are explored in the midst of present-day sights alongside anachronistic gravestones, are an artistic culmination of Abney Park’s multiple becoming—the full richness of which I have endeavoured to offer the listening walker as they move through the space.

Doreen Massey’s concept of ‘contemporaneous multiple becomings’, anachronistic space, along with concepts of temporal layering, mourning practice, and the unique nature reserve aspect of Abney Park cemetery, have all informed the themes of my audio walking practice. In thinking about time and space, their relation to each other, and our experience of each, Massey notes that, unlike time, you can see space spread out around you. This opens up the interpretation of anachronistic space from describing people in space as a relation to time, to describing space itself as encompassing a multiplicity of time. This definition of anachronistic space presents as a temporal density: recent events layered over space that has, in the case of Abney Park cemetery, retained the same purpose for almost one-hundred and eighty years, layering moments inscribing and reinscribing space, tracing slightly different narratives with every tracing, yet retaining every previous tracing layered within the space. The method by which I frame my discoveries of layered meanings in Abney Park conceives of these layers as operating within the same ‘space’ as one another, but not the same ‘place’.
Concepts of time are not fixed and they change by way of cultural shifts through the ages. In her analysis of the philosophical arguments of space versus time (and of space-time), Massey finds the recent twentieth-century shift towards favouring space (horizontality) over time (verticality) is still not a complete picture. By ‘horizontality’, Massey is referencing a focus on the spatial, the tangible. If time is considered vertical, then it would be represented as a tunnelling down through space, and an acknowledgement that the space on which a person stands is not the only manifestation of that space, that on that same space there have been a vast multiplicity of events and uses throughout time. Acknowledgement of these vertical tunnelling layers within space requires the use of imagination, not merely the tangible. Horizontal space, on the other hand, is immediate and tangible. Vertical time is an intellectual task. Massey calls for a change in perspective, an imaginative opening up of space, the goal of which is to acknowledge within a space its potential to house many contemporaneous multiple becomings. From a Machenesque point of view, I refer to these multiplicities that share the same space as ‘borderland worlds’.

Time features prominently as a core theme throughout my walking practice. The concept of temporality is a recurring theme that I revisit with each layer of meaning that I investigate with my audio walks. Through the symbolism of memorial, by unpacking the time capsule nature of cemeteries as an outdoor archive, and exploring the relationship between nonhuman actants, I have created my walking practice to be an embodied experience of a selection of performed histories, reflective of the tapestry-like nature of interwoven spatial and temporal layers within the cemetery space. A Victorian cemetery with contemporary usage creates an experience in the cemetery that at once contains traces of the past and is also constantly moving towards the future. In this context, the anachronistic space of Abney
Park cemetery is rooted in its time capsule nature in the midst of modern life. The invitation here is to widen our perception of the meaning of a particular place, in this instance, Abney Park. Rather than restricting observations to the physical and tangible, the imagination is invited to engage in viewing the timeline of experience that Abney Park cemetery embodies: a date-stamped museum of grief, which doubles as a public community space.

Each audio walk I have created slides back and forth through time, by way of my narrative and by way of the walk itself, experiencing the space of the cemetery. The layering of meaning upon meaning over time within the cemetery, with the grounds of the cemetery becoming a sponge for communal emotion layered through its use as a cemetery, culminates in a contemporaneous multiple becoming that creates a densely layered emotional landscape. This density of feeling, and a feeling of being a step out of time in this anachronistic space, can be felt by standing in one place, feeling the ground beneath your feet (and envisioning the countless paupers’ bones beneath the ground) and reading the gravestones that are the outdoor archive of love and loss of ages gone by. The density of feeling from standing in one place can then be taken on the move, to walk through the cemetery and acknowledge that the contemporaneous multiple becoming felt while standing still can be multiplied over and over again while walking through the space. It is these layers and meanings and sliding doors of perception I have endeavoured to capture with my audio walks.

My methodology for crafting my audio walking practice is rooted in psychogeography. Through my research into the buried Hackney Brook river, Iain Sinclair’s investigations into London’s buried rivers, and literary allusions to a mysterious ‘otherworldly’ aspect to Stoke Newington, my psychogeographical research lead me to literary
heritage research linking Stoke Newington and North London back through Arthur Machen, William Blake, and Thomas De Quincey. It is through this psychogeographical research into this literary heritage that my audio walking practice became grounded in occult psychogeography. Occult psychogeography grew out of a literary analysis of the ley-lines and hidden patterns of a half-invented mysticism— which is a very different ideological heritage than that of the anti-capitalist political interventions of Situationist International. The occult method of psychogeographic practice was an internal process of discovery and analysis of space, rather than an external movement towards social change; the patterns studied and the worlds behind our everyday world explored were hidden, rather than the overt social ubiquity of oppressive pro-consumerist images (‘spectacles’) of capitalist culture. Occult psychogeography is personal in its analysis, and the artistic works it pays homage to can border on madness (or a flirtation with the appearance of madness). Perhaps it was the manifestations of drug use, in the case of Thomas De Quincey, and solitary wanderings, as with Arthur Machen, that created a fracture of perception and the feeling of existing in a liminal space between two worlds that defines their walking practices. Situationist psychogeography is first predicated on its communal aspect, whereas occult psychogeography is predicated on a solitary practice.

After reading N, Machen’s short story about Stoke Newington, I began to investigate the space of Abney Park as a series of otherworldly, coexisting borderlands, with each layer of meaning within the cemetery sitting right on top of and next to each other, identifiable with a simple shift in perception, opening a ‘door of perception’ to these other layers of meaning. My methodology for exploring these different layers of meaning is through an audio walking practice, offering four distinct invitations to visitors to
Abney Park to slip between different perceptions tracing and tracing again the same space, sliding between the borderlands within Abney Park cemetery. My audio walking practice is an endeavour to engender in the listening walker a prepared eye with which to see hidden worlds and to open different doors of perception. With regards to these hidden worlds existing in the commonplace, it is the very seeming ‘normality’ of Stoke Newington that lends Machen’s *N* its secret garden aspect. To discover hidden layers in a suburb suggests that magical worlds are not the sole purview of Gothic towers or enchanted forests—that ‘magick’ could be everywhere. Our daily commutes and movements through the world are walks in the sense of transportation, but not walks in the sense of a mode of experience. The shift from a walk as commute, to a walk as mode of perception, is an active process to not only *look* at the environments that we move through, but to *see*. This is the crux of the main concept that Machen puts forth for our consideration in *N*: that we can come into contact with worlds—perhaps those that are unsettling and that we are ‘not meant to visit’—even in the most commonplace of neighbourhoods, such as Stoke Newington, and even behind the ‘wearist, dreariest walls’. It is this sense of impending wonderment behind every corner or behind any wall that offers up possibilities for borderland worlds all around us. For Machen, a trained eye can reveal the eternal behind the commonplace. In this light, the otherworldly nature of the hidden London that Machen explores perhaps is not a peek into another mystical dimension—an occultist invisible order of things hidden behind appearances—but, instead, a window into what is already there that we never stop to perceive as we rush by day to day.

Before beginning my research into Abney Park cemetery, I did not know there was the buried Hackney Brook river along its north boundary. Prior to beginning my research, I had been a visitor to
Abney Park for four years; however I had never seen any indication of the Hackney Brook’s existence. This important feature of its formation is not advertised to visitors—there are no signs or posted information that there is a buried river there. It is a completely ignored and forgotten feature. This discovery of the buried Hackney Brook forming the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery brought my literary uncanny investigations full circle to the space of the cemetery itself. In plumbing the depths of where the sense of the uncanny in Stoke Newington originates, through the literary heritage that marks Stoke Newington out as separate from its neighbouring areas in Hackney and Islington, a case could be made for the buried Hackney Brook forming part of the mystery and adding to the mythology of the area. Taking inspiration from Iain Sinclair’s walking practice methodology for crafting his literary explorations of space, I began walking in Abney Park cemetery looking for layers of meaning to be found there. The buried Hackney Brook was of special interest to my study, as the mythology and mystery of this river sparked my imagination as a starting point for engaging with the layers of heritage and meaning, of not only Stoke Newington, but of Abney Park cemetery as its locus. The Hackney Brook is covered over, but still there underground. It is always changing—underfoot, but not understood. Learning about the hidden rivers of London fascinated me. I began to wonder about the Hackney Brook, what it looked like underground, I began to anthropomorphise its struggle and unfair treatment—from a beautiful river flowing in the open air, at times called ‘bucolic’, inspiring Isaac Watts to write hymns upon its banks and city workers to escape the crowded city centre to build villas overlooking it—to then be buried ‘alive’ and turned into a sewer. I was filled with a rather strange level of sadness and empathy for a river so unappreciated and ruined. This emotional response towards the buried Hackney Brook, and descriptions of an otherworldly Stoke Newington by Poe, Machen, and Sinclair,
coupled with my research into animistic folklore, led me to create a dark animistic folktale about the Hackney Brook river, which is the story told in *Woodland Magick*. This audio walk is my endeavour to give an imagined voice to the buried river, and offer new perspectives on the space of Abney Park cemetery as a place that was partially built over it. The Hackney Brook is where my study of occult literary heritage meets my site of practice. Although Abney Park cemetery was not founded until after Blake and De Quincey were walking and writing, the Hackney Brook was there, flowing freely above ground at that time. The Hackney Brook situates these literary discoveries of Stoke Newington into a fixed point within Abney Park specifically. Discovering that a buried river forms the north boundary of Abney Park cemetery, and reading Iain Sinclair’s earth mystery provocations that this subverted waterway could be infusing the neighbourhood of Stoke Newington with thwarted energies, inspired me to write my *Woodland Magick* audio walk, which takes a visitor to Abney Park through a door of perception into this Machenesque borderland world of unseen forces creating a sense of unease. This unease is borne of darkness: literal in the sense of subterranean, but figurative in terms of theme.

To that end, Arthur Machen’s story *N* was a key source of inspiration for crafting this otherworldly feel. Building upon the themes presented in Machen’s *N*, of a magical hidden world behind the ‘everyday’ world, formed the foundation of my this ‘earth mystery’ audio walk. Researching ways to bring the story of the buried river into my walking practice, I connected with concepts of modern animism and animistic folklore. I used these themes to craft an animistic folktale about a River Spirit in Abney Park cemetery. Through anthropomorphising the river, fires, and trees, along with the ‘power of words’, I crafted a practice that shares a common basis with Celtic animism and poetry. What I have endeavoured to
capture with this audio walk is a dark tension and struggle, the subversion of purpose that polarises the intent of River Spirit, from peaceful and life giving, to tormented and poisoned with degrees of twilight and shadow, of half-knowing, believing, assuming, concluding. This half-knowing is a key theoretical construct of *Woodland Magick*. In trying to capture the shimmer around the edges of liminal experience—one that can only be seen from the periphery of our vision—to examine too closely is to lose meaning, and to lose truth. The truth I wish to anthropomorphise within my *Woodland Magick* audio walk lives in twilight: the half-known mystery is the extent of the possible truth—and this half-known mystery is the experience of otherworldly Stoke Newington of which Poe, Machen, Sinclair, and Nicholson have all written. In keeping with the tradition of these writers, *Woodland Magick* poses questions, present possibilities, and disappears into the shadows.

Together, *Woodland Networks* and *Woodland Magick* offer visitors to Abney Park two different ways to approach and appreciate the intricate nonhuman ecosystem that is Abney Park as a nature reserve. Each actant within Abney Park cemetery is living a hidden life that, through closer human observation, flowers into view. My *Woodland Networks* audio walk guides the listening walker through a door of perception to see this ‘hidden’ borderland world. Although, as I have shown in Chapter Four, the agency of the natural world is not hidden at all, to those who would but see. By way of visiting selected veteran trees mapped throughout the cemetery, *Woodland Networks* introduces underground mycorrhizal fungal networks, deadwood habitats, a history of fires, and various interactions between trees, stones, and humans in Abney Park as an invitation to reconceive mindfulness and agency within nature. Exploration of possibilities within nonhuman agency and mindfulness led me to researching animism for its possible artistic applications within my
practice. Within animism are many different branches of what is, essentially, a very broad term. As a metaphysical monism, animism is based upon the idea that nature’s essence is minded. Opening up the definition of animism from anthropomorphised spirits within nature introduces a wider concept of what is considered ‘minded’. Viewing animism as an acknowledgement of the connections and patterns of energy within nature does not require a pagan or spiritual belief system. What the findings in Chapter Four illustrate is that the idea of plant agency is not merely a theoretical concept. It is something qualifiable in a lab setting. It is a scientific phenomenon that need not rely on a belief in a world of magical animism to be true. However, what is magic except science we have yet to understand? There is a magical element to what plant networks do, even if it can be documented and duplicated under lab conditions, it is still wondrous. It also speaks to our profound human hubris that the mainstream contemporary Western cultural default view is a belief that we are the only beings on our planet with agency. Even people who might admit that animals have agency would not stretch so far as to say that plants do. It does seem that the evidence is pointing to a very complex agency, for both the individual as well as for the greater good of the plant network—it truly is a scientific enchantment, magic within the context of a modern turn towards secularisation.

My audio walk Love, Wrath, Death, Lions aims to offer visitors to Abney Park cemetery one story that animates the outdoor archive of the space. In her analysis on the use of archives as a resource for piecing together the possible narratives of people who lived long ago, Carolyn Steedman gives a warning regarding what she terms ‘the seductions of the archive’, and the ‘entrancing stories’ that they contain, which do the work of the seducer. An entrancing story crafted by the researcher’s imagination, from snippets found within
an archive, is quite a different thing from the historical analysis that inspires it. It is easy to be swept up in crafting an emotional (or at least ‘meaningful’) story from the information that is found. Viewed in that light, the audio walk that I have crafted from the archives is a product of this seduction, which is the seduction to flesh out the Bostocks’ narrative from the frustratingly spare accounts available in the archive. The documents I had to work with (the ships logs of dates and names of trips to New York City; birth and death records; census reports; and the stark listing of grievances of physical abuse accounted by Susanna Bostock in her petition for judicial separation) all left me with many gaps to fill in order to craft a coherent narrative for my audio walk. Imagination is a key ingredient in both the crafting, and the experiencing, of my audio walks; and the interaction of imagination with the archive is what I have endeavoured to navigate with Love, Wrath, Death, Lions, in particular. Crafting a narrative out of the archive is an act of imagination. Herein lies the difficult negotiation between the archive and the researcher; especially a researcher for whom the research becomes a creative project—here Steedman’s reference to ‘process’ taking precedence over ‘stuff’ is most apparent. Most of the work of crafting Love, Wrath, Death, Lions was undertaken when the archive work was completed. The ideation and imagining become the bulk of the project.

There is a difference between writing ‘historical fiction’ and ‘history-writing’. This difference is highlighted by historian Arlette Farge, who asserts that the idea that a novelist (or, in my case, a performed audio story writer) resurrects the archive is actually a mistaken assumption. Farge describes this work (working with archives to craft characters from people who actually lived, and working from details of their lives that have been actually recorded) as inevitably, despite the collection of all of these ‘facts’, a work of fiction. When
researching people’s lives, there is a burden felt to do them justice, to
tell their story fairly, even if it is indeed a ‘story’, and not ‘history-
writing’. The names, dates, steamer passage ledgers, and census
records are ‘history’, but that is not what I wished to capture for Love,
Wrath, Death, Lions. I did not wish to merely ‘write history’—the
benefit and beauty of the opportunity presented by the medium of
an audio walk, brought to ‘life’ by way of actor portrayal of the
characters of Frank and Susannah Bostock, lies in its possibility for
emotional resonance. I have crafted all four of my audio walks from
disparate emotional worlds, all of which are, inevitably, personal.
This infusion of my personal interpretation of facts within an
emotional landscape is what transforms the work from a transcript of
‘history’ into an artistic mediation between the listening walker and
the gravestone archive in the cemetery. While I foreground my walk
as an historical journey through the tumultuous love story of the
Bostocks, it is, ultimately, as much my creative story as their life
story. As Steedman points out, history does not have ‘ends’.
Researchers can read the snippets of a life, and craft an arc and
meaning from these traces, but from the lived point of view of the
real historical persons at the time, there is just ‘life’. Things happen in
succession, but not necessarily in any identifiable plot arc. To tell a
story from a selection of facts and events is to sort the available
information flotsam into a somewhat artificial construct and impose
meaning. The goal of an historical writer is to fill the gaps in the
archive, to tell the story of what isn’t there. With Love, Wrath, Death,
Lions, I have crafted an audio journey of a possible history. The walk
is heavily informed by archival findings, but equally informed by my
emotional resonance with the material and the atmosphere of Abney
Park cemetery, which is the silent, ever-present landscape wherein
all of this tumultuousness is performed. As the Bostocks were real
people who were fairly well known, there came with this particular
audio walk a feeling of personal accountability to be as accurate as
possible within my artistic interpretation. My audio walks Thoughts on Mourning, Woodland Magick, and Woodland Networks dip in and out of historical references, with the majority of the walking experience based on my artistic interpretations of the respective themes within the space of the cemetery and were made with a feeling of autonomy whilst crafting them. For Love, Wrath, Death, Lions, I scrupulously researched as much documentation of the lives of the Bostocks that was available to complete their story. Historical record is not an objective representation of the past, but rather a selection of objects that have been preserved for a variety of reasons. Gale and Featherstone echo this assessment in their research, stating that not only is no archive free of either ideology or the fluctuations of economics in its formation and operation, but that archives are also not stable in content. Out of these many-layered mediations between a researcher and the original ‘truth’ of a story that the researcher struggles to uncover, the resulting interpretation can be nothing more substantial than that—a possible history. Conquering the ‘seduction of the archive’ lies in the blank spaces our imagination leaps to fill, and acknowledging these desires. Crafting Love, Wrath, Death, Lions was an exercise in navigating between storytelling and restraint. It is with this audio walk that I manifest most fully Copeland’s idea that in endeavours to become heritage experts, at best we are ‘heritage interpreters’.

The motivation for writing my Thoughts on Mourning audio walk came from what I first experience when I enter Abney Park cemetery. While the nature reserve is the most prominent physical feature encountered upon entering Abney Park, my attention is drawn by its gravestones. They offer clues into its history as a Victorian garden cemetery and the history of mourning rituals that have taken place within its gates. My aim with Thoughts on Mourning was to introduce the ethos behind the structured practices of Victorian mourning to
listening walkers by guiding them through the Victorian garden cemetery as an embodied experience of a cultural site that celebrates this ethos. *Thoughts on Mourning* addresses the personal issues of facing mortality, and the spaces that represent mortality, in a new way by reframing these thoughts as an embodied practice within a community space. By taking the personal experience of confronting these issues, and setting the process within community space, my audio walking practice is presented as a bridge between the private and the communal. Within a cemetery space that is largely used and celebrated as a secular space, the sense of individual experiences that are had within Abney Park define the space more than communal experiences (such as religious services); independent secular experiences can fragment the meaning of death for individuals. This audio walk is intended to heighten the respect and care that went into its monuments and its importance as a repository for cultural memory. The door of perception that *Thoughts on Mourning* opens for visitors is into the borderland world of Abney Park’s Victorian garden cemetery beginnings. This audio walk explores a world of shared rituals of the Victorian era, and it also presents contemporary perspectives offered by a new wave of ‘death positivity’ that has a shared heritage with Victorian thoughts on death processes. The audio walk is an invitation to visitors to Abney Park to contemplate this history by way of a walk through the garden cemetery.

While ‘real’ death has been sequestered away from public view in contemporary Western societies, media representations of death within popular culture—be that sensationalised portrayals of celebrity death, or vivid fictional portrayals in films and television—‘absent death’ has become present in new mediated ways, with popular culture taking the place of religion as a way of understanding and coming to terms with death and dying. Within Western secular societies that are often labelled death-denying,
ordinary death has largely been removed from the public realm and replaced with media-inspired cultural representations of what Philip Stone terms ‘Significant Other Death’. Bringing an intimacy with the processes of death back into the processes of mourning are the groundwork on which I built the premise of *Thoughts on Mourning*. This audio walk explores the perspective that Victorian mourning practices helped with the grief process more than contemporary death practices of commercialisation, outsourcing, and sequestering of death away from loved ones into an institutional setting. *Thoughts on Mourning* addresses difficult death themes in the space of a garden cemetery to emphasise the Victorian approach to this fear of death—creating a peaceful space for remembrance through the longevity of stone and beauty of gardens. With the fracturing of societies, many of these mourning gardens no longer offer the same sense of community and communal grief that they once did.

The general consensus through my research and conversations with death industry professionals has been that we are, indeed, in an era of the ‘phobic of the dead’. According to Mellor, the basis of our modern practices of banishing death from view in an avoidance of existential chaos. As humans, we have developed complex societies that occupy our minds with day-to-day tasks, and religious or spiritual belief systems that occupy our thoughts otherwise. These multi-layered buffers keep most of the debilitating existential thoughts from slipping society into chaos. For an increasingly secular contemporary society, much of the denial of death stems from a fear of the unknown. Without the comforts of religion as a bulwark against existential crises, and with societies increasingly fracturing—with the current trends towards frequent moves of house and of children leaving their town or even their country of origin—there is a separateness experienced between individuals in many communities. I have aimed through my *Thoughts on Mourning* audio walk to create
an avenue for visitors to Abney Park cemetery to encounter complex and emotionally difficult themes and to hopefully look at death and mourning in a new way. My research into death denial showed me a void in acceptance and a need for people to have a space to think on these issues. *Thoughts on Mourning* aims to offer a private, independent, personal space for visitors to listen and think on these themes through a walking meditation.

**Heritage Engagement Applications**

Visits to heritage sites over the last several decades have involved a more interpretive and interactive way of engaging with the past than simply a didactic single narrative of history. As Jackson and Kidd note, visits have become “less about the object and more about the experience: an ‘encounter’ with a past that is ‘brought to life’”. (Jackson and Kidd, 1, 2011) In an effort to engage visitors to Abney Park with the cemetery as a community space, I offer my audio walks as a unique embodied experience of the space that invites a diverse reading of Abney Park’s layered meanings and history, as opposed to reading it as only a repository of the dead. Through this mode of interaction, the ‘experience’ of the space of the cemetery takes precedence over the ‘objects’ of dead bodies and headstones. In this way, I position myself as a ‘heritage interpreter’, finding the layered meanings for possible readings of the space and offering my audio walks as stories of both the site of the cemetery in the past, but also as a selection of the meanings that it could hold for the community today. The choice of which stories to tell, and which meanings to research, crafts a subjective practice that takes a constructivist approach to community engagement. A constructivist approach to heritage interpretation, according to Copeland, simply suggests that we construct our own understandings of the world in which we live. This is positioned in contrast to a positivist approach.
that provides only one view of complex issues and presumes that there is a fixed place that the visitor must come to know. Abney Park’s evolving multiple becomings offer a diverse array of perspectives on its heritage and its place within the community. The layers of heritage that I explore through my audio walking practice present four possible readings of the space and interpretations of its heritage; however, the listening walker is prompted to use their imagination when engaging with my walks, which may lead them to different conclusions about Abney Park’s layered meanings than I have explored. In addition, each audio walk (with the exception of Woodland Networks) leaves the listening walker in the middle of the cemetery and with the necessity of finding his or her own way out. The walks do not end neatly at the entrance gates, and so the walks do not end when the audio stops. The silent second half of each audio walk is the walk the visitors take themselves afterwards to exit the cemetery—or continue walking through it, exploring their own reverie and crafting their own experience, with perhaps different conclusions. This subjectivity within my interpretation of heritage is inevitably personal. As Copeland notes, “the ‘expert’ interpreter constructs a particularly personal account of the site—how can it be otherwise? The individual internalises information about the evidence that has significance for him or her.” (Copeland, 2006, 85)

My goal has been to share my subjective reading of Abney Park as a selection of possible layers of meaning within a multitude of possible layers, which visitors can discover for themselves once the prompt towards imaginative reading of the cemetery has been provoked. Visitors to Abney Park will hopefully feel empowered to find their own creative readings of the space, once the formal ‘cemetery’ label has been subverted and ‘permission’ has been granted to enjoy a creative experience outside of socially scripted cemetery behaviours. From a constructivist perspective, the various layers of heritage I
present should form a scaffolding to enable visitors to make their own constructions.

The motivations for visiting a cemetery are varied, with these motivations varying between visitors, but also between cemeteries—what they mean for local communities and where they sit within wider cultural associations. Cemetery researcher Rachel Raine found that visitors to cemeteries can be divided into four main categories: Devotion: mourners, pilgrims; Experience: morbidly curious, thrillseekers; Discover: information seekers, hobbyists; Incidental: sightseers, retreaters, passive recreationists. With these diverse motivations represented across visitors to cemetery spaces, there is no one type of visitor, or one type of visit. However, in an effort to find structure and methodologies for studying engagement with this type of heritage, taxonomy of study is helpful. Towards that end, I have analysed theories of ‘dark tourism’ and ‘thanatourism’, putting forth definitions of both that have informed my audio walking practice, and how research into these areas illustrates the way in which community relationships with cemeteries are evolving. During the past thirty years of study, the terms ‘dark tourism’ and ‘thanatourism’ have been often used interchangeably within academic discourse. Despite the slipperiness of these relatively new terms, the definitions that I have found most useful in discerning the difference between these two areas of study are that ‘dark tourism’ “tends to be an umbrella term for any form of tourism that is somehow related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy, or crime” and focuses on events of the late twentieth century; whereas ‘thanatourism’ “is a more specific concept and is about long-standing practices of travel motivated by a specific desire for an encounter with death”. (Light, 2017, 277) With its focus on death specifically, thanatourism can be considered as a subset of dark tourism, which represents a much wider genre. The vast majority of current research
into dark tourism focuses on contemporary or twentieth-century sites of tragedy. In comparison, very little research has been done into the ‘softer’ or ‘grey’ tourism practices of visiting cemeteries. My research aims to go some way towards addressing this gap in thanatourisitic study.

While there are many aspects of Abney Park that manifest in its various layers of heritage, it is the encounters visitors have with the space of the cemetery—and my goal of expanding the possibilities of visitor perception of the space through encounters mediated by my audio walking practice—that is the focus of my research. The long history of thanatourism is motivated more by thoughts of *memento mori* than a contemporary thrill-seeking dark tourism activity. My audio walking practice in Abney Park is a thanatouristic practice. While aspects of dark tourism are explored in tandem in this thesis, my audio walking practice shares heritage with the softer, more introspective thanatouristic practice than the sometimes more contentious contemporary dark tourism attractions. All four of my audio walks engage with the space of Abney Park in different ways, however each of the aspects that I uncover and explore through my audio walking practice engage with Abney Park as a site of contemplation. The cemetery is a site of grief and past pain, however all of the deaths that are represented in Abney Park happened elsewhere. The cemetery is a site of death, however not a site of suffering. There is nothing of the horrific that happened within its garden walls; and as such a visit to Abney Park would fall under ‘grey tourism’ rather than darkest tourism. The main theory within thanatourism that my audio walking practice engages with is ‘mortality mediation’. This theory is a model of consuming dark tourism proposed by dark tourism researchers Philip Stone and Richard Sharpley, which draws upon notions of thanatopsis and the sociology of death to understand visits to places associated with
death and suffering. Through the course of my research, I have found an inverse relationship between the time since a death or tragedy and the ‘darkness’ of the space. Visiting sites of tragedy that have taken place many centuries ago do not usually fall under the heading of ‘dark tourism’—for example, a visit to the Tower of London is not considered ‘dark tourism’, merely ‘tourism’. Whereas a bus tour through Fukushima is very dark indeed. Following that line of reasoning, Victorian garden cemeteries, which are largely closed to new burial, fall under ‘grey’ tourism sites, and are usually more receptive to fluidity of community use within the space.

Pagliari’s ‘death-deriding’ age manifests in some of the more criticised dark tourism practices of commercialising sites of suffering. The resulting seeming callousness of visitors to such sites comes from the appearance of visitors not empathising with these sites as places of real suffering, but instead focusing on the ‘fame’ of a catastrophe, such as bus tours and selfie stops through the radioactive ghost towns surrounding Fukushima. Despite recent extreme examples of dark tourism, mediations between visitors and death have been happening in a variety of contexts throughout history, merely shifting between mediums of portrayal. Depictions of death and dying in Romantic art and literature provided a thanatopic mediation of death and, subsequently, recreated death and the dead for reevaluation and contemplation for the living. Encounters with death themes represented in the Romantic Movement were precursors and inspiration for the development of Victorian garden cemeteries. The mortality mediation offered by these cemeteries has a long-standing association with a desire for encounters with death. As such, cemeteries are key sites for thanatouristic practice and research. Thanatourism presents opportunities for a reconceptualisation of death and mortality into forms that provide a buffer against existential terror and dread.
Visits to sites of burial have long been framed as places for this type of contemplation; and the Arcadian setting of garden cemeteries softens thoughts of mortality by putting forth the image of a ‘good Romantic death’. My audio walking practice aims to take the contemplative setting of a cemetery landscape and open up different modes of contemplation through its layers of heritage that I explore with my audio walks.

Through my walking practice, I use the space of Abney Park cemetery as a physical reminder of death processes through the graves and monuments themselves, but also as a temporal touchstone to a time in the past (the Victorian era) when mourning practices were codified by societal ritual that gave a voice and a visual presence to grief, which gave structure to the individual experience. By addressing common twentieth and twenty-first century Anglo-American mourning practices, and attitudes towards dying, death, and the treatment of the corpse, I aim to illustrate that these distancing practices, that comprise the mainstream twentieth-century processes of mourning, are part of what is fuelling death denial. I posit that disconnecting from our dead, sequestering the corpse away from the bereaved, denies a final piece of closure for the living. There is a growing movement towards death acceptance called the ‘death positive’ (or ‘death awareness’) movement and ideas of ‘The Good Death’. These movements share many tenets with Victorian views on the place of death within one’s own life, family, and society—before the advent of commercialisation in twentieth-century death processes.

The pain of loss is an underlying driver for everything I have researched and presented in Thoughts on Mourning and analysed in Chapter Six: Wylie’s memorial benches as silent sentries of heartbreak; Lavery’s walking embodiment of memory processing the
loss of his father; twentieth-century death denial, sequestering dying persons away from society as a way to hide from reminders of the inevitability of loss—and the Victorian ‘cult of the dead’, as a codified societal ritual, all of which is merely the highly decorated scaffolding of an elaborate coping mechanism to process the pain of loss. Throughout the ages of human history that archaeologists, scientists, historians, and anthropologists have studied, it is artefacts from funerary rites that hold the lion's share of our museum space and cultural imagination. Throughout the roughly one-hundred and eighty years of mourning practices that I have studied throughout this thesis, there have been huge cultural shifts in what are considered ‘acceptable’ mourning practices, but one thing that binds all of these practices—as diverse and conflicting as they may seem—is the inalterable human need we share to process the price we pay for love: the pain of loss.

_Thoughts on Mourning_ was crafted as an invitation to experience a Victorian garden cemetery while engaging with Victorian and contemporary mourning viewpoints on an emotional and immersive level. The intimacy of the format and tone of _Thoughts on Mourning_ offers a different experience for a visitor to Abney Park than a guided walking tour in a group, or setting out independently with a pamphlet or notes from a website, a few dates and a mute object to appraise based on the bare facts written on headstones and other information empirically available. Triggering an emotional response also triggers curiosity by making Abney Park alive and personal, and hopefully furthers engagement with the site. This added layer of perception into a way of experiencing Abney Park that is offered to visitors might spark new ways of viewing the space that visitors had not previously conceived of before their visit. After taking this audio walk, I hope my listening walkers leave with more questions than answers. I want them to leave already planning to come back. As he
or she exists, walking through the overgrown woodland, I hope the walk has given the visitor a new appreciation for the love and care that went into crafting Victorian garden cemeteries, and what place they can hopefully hold in our future communities. Setting my audio walking practice in a Victorian garden cemetery offers a visual reminder of how death was approached in the Victorian era and adds a multisensory aspect to the audio when embodied as a walk. This independent experience I hope will soften some fear-based misunderstandings to manifest instead into fruitful community discussion. The Arcadian environs of Abney Park cemetery present an opportunity for a walking practice that addresses these emotionally charged themes in a setting where death contemplation is softened by beauty—just as the Victorians intended.

Unpacking the four cemetery visitor types Raine outlines in her study, ‘Experience’ visitors come to cemeteries to confront and ‘experience’ death; ‘Discover’ visitors come to cemeteries to discover local history, using the cemetery space as an outdoor archive and repository of stories and local lore; ‘Retreaters’, however, enjoy cemeteries as peaceful gardens and community spaces, almost seeming to ignore the burial aspect of the cemetery space. “Passive recreationists are the lightest category of all because they do not engage with the site in any way and use the site purely as an access route, or an open space in which to walk. This theme is the most significant of the four themes as it includes the largest number of people interviewed and observed.” (Raine, 2013, 151) These findings are in keeping with the Abney Park Trust Community Use Survey conducted by Hackney Council in 2017. Raine notes that the category ‘retreaters’ has not been identified in any previous literature on dark tourism, despite this category being the most common demographic of visitors to these sites. Victorian garden cemeteries were developed during an era of limited public green space, before the development
of the prolific public parks that communities enjoy today. However, despite the seeming ubiquity of public green spaces available today, few of these community sites offer the lush wooded landscapes of garden cemetery nature reserves or the quiet that cemeteries offer. The findings of both the Abney Park Trust Community Use Survey and Raine’s interview research supports the view that many people desire to visit burial grounds as a space to relax and enjoy nature.

**Critical Reflection**

My walking practice in Abney Park cemetery is a solo practice—and the process of crafting the practice itself was subjective—however my practice is recorded and offered up for interpretation to any individual who seeks to participate in the audio recordings. Other than my preliminary research, my walks are mostly informed by the space and how I intuitively felt my audio walks needed to be arranged, and in what fashion—both physically mapping my walks in the space, but also sonically crafting the walk experience in terms of story and music. My walks are, ultimately, a personal interpretation and emotional expression of the site of Abney Park cemetery. Previous to creating my walks, my experience of Abney Park was, I thought, a rather complete one. I had been walking through the cemetery for six years, during different times of year and times of my life, alone or with friends, absorbing the atmosphere and engaging with the stone monuments, chapel, and trees in an active way. However, all of these encounters were undertaken without any research-driven documentation, nor any further research into other modes of interacting with the site outside of casual conversation with other people who frequented the cemetery. What I uncovered within my own experience when I began to write, photograph, and record my findings, coupled with the information, observations, and opinions of others, offered up a new density of possible perceptions.
of the space. These findings ignited my imagination, opened up a door of perception into subterranean goings-on and possibilities bordering on mysticism—which opened up even further upon my reading of literary occult walking texts. This is when my walks in Abney Park grew from merely ‘reportage’ into a walking practice.

The choice to have my audio walks available online was done as an effort to reach as many potential visitors to Abney Park cemetery as possible. The motivation for my use of technology with my practice was not one of driving distancing intermediaries between visitors and the space of the cemetery, but rather the opposite—an effort towards increasing the numbers of potential visitors to the Abney Park, and increased personal engagement when they got there. Phil Smith has found that many contemporary psychogeographers have been doing their work online, rarely (or sometimes never) visiting the site themselves and working on the ground and within the space for their craft. Whereas, as he notes, the ‘romantic occultists’, with their love of history, have kept ‘true’ to the psychogeographic ethos of needing the ‘geo’ with the ‘psycho’. This is what I have have done with Abney Rambles. Geoff Nicholson laments the distancing some contemporary technologies place between the walkers and taking a walk. This form of mediation appears to take the place of actual interactions in space, as opposed to sitting alongside these interactions. I use technology as a tool with my walking practice, however everything available online is to further the experience of walking within the space of Abney Park cemetery. On my website are to be found all four of my audio walks available to stream or download, links to other audio walks I have written in other spaces, blog posts I have written about walking in cemeteries, my cemetery photography, and a live Twitter feed of cemetery news that I update regularly on my @AbneyRambles Twitter account. However, all of these digital opportunities are presented as supporting data and
theme-based content, which all supports the main purpose of the website: taking a walk physically in Abney Park cemetery. I have written no smartphone apps or other online interfaces meant to interject themselves either between the walker and the cemetery or take the place of the cemetery for the walker. My website has allowed international listeners to enjoy my audio walks and have a glimpse of what to expect in the space, but the technological attributes of my walking practice are first and foremost tools for walking in Abney Park.

One way in which an audio walking practice deviates from a written walking practice is the audio of the walk freezes at least the audio aspect of that slice of time in aspic. However, as with written walking practice, if the walks are to be taken by listeners, as with readers, the future tracings will always be anachronistic. They can retrace but never completely recreate. There is an element of imagination and envisioning the supposed past with any process of creative archaeologies. The trouble with my method of practice lies within the disembodied audio format, which does not allow for a give and take between myself and visitors to the cemetery. If they have questions, I am not there to answer them or engage in debate with contrary viewpoints on my readings of the space. In this way, live performance interactions with heritage sites can offer a platform for dialogue and more fruitful relationship building than through an audio format. However, the way in which an audio format succeeds where a live performance cannot is the personal, intimate nature of the experience that is designed to be taken alone. As my audio walks are offered as a solo practice to visitors, they are not at the discretion of a facilitator’s calendar and timetable, and the psychological barrier to entry is low, as there is no fear of embarrassment from interactive performers, which could make some visitors shy away from live heritage performances. The audio walks are free to download, so
anyone with access to a device that can play audio can take them, so there is no entrance fee. All of these aspects of an independent audio walking practice, I hope, create a comfortable and inclusive method of interacting with Abney Park for people who might otherwise feel heritage events are not for them.

A cemetery is a three-dimensional, walk-through archive, with snippets of information housed in gravestones that visitors to the space read and interpret. In order to bring these buried people to life in their minds, visitors to Abney Park would need to fill in the vast gaps in information with their own imagining of who these people could have been, just like a researcher in an archive would have to do to craft a completed story from the fragments housed there. Not everyone who visits Abney Park cemetery comes to appreciate the archival nature of the gravestones: some come for the nature reserve, for a picnic day out, to take part in an open-day crafts fair, see a theatrical performance, for exercise along the paths, or to merely cut through on their way somewhere else. However, for the type of visit that interacts with this outdoor archive, an audio walk that brings to life the complex story behind this one gravemarker, the Bostocks, will hopefully inspire cemetery visitors to look around at the thousands of other gravemarkers that surround them on their visit. *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions* is an invitation to imagine what stories these other gravestones could tell us. The stories that these stone monuments represent are not only those of the people who are interred beneath them, but also of the people who erected these monuments and were left behind to mourn. The gravestones are monuments to them as well, representing a heritage of mourning in the cemetery, which is enhanced by the visual archive nature of Abney Park cemetery as a multi-layered experience of community history. I chose the Bostocks as my research subject for animating the outdoor archive of Abney Park cemetery for two reasons: first, their

357
gravestone is a large white marble monument topped with a sleeping lion, which is one of the most prominent grave monuments in the cemetery and which Abney Park uses in their promotional materials. It is a recognisable mascot for Abney Park. And, secondly, because the Bostock family who are buried beneath the marble lion were a circus family of some international renown, so there would be an opportunity for rich source material in the archives.

Of my four audio walks, it is *Love Wrath, Death, Lions* that has sparked the most conversation. Throughout my research, I found conflicting and contentious reports of the character of Frank Bostock, and the facts of his marriage to Susannah on record create contradictions in what could be interpreted from these accounts of their personal lives. To help with my interpretations of the somewhat disjointed source material that I gathered through my research into the lives of the Bostocks, I turned to the research of archivists who have also used archives for creative purposes. After discovering the conflicting accounts of Frank Bostock’s character, it was a difficult choice as a researcher and storyteller to reconcile these two very different accounts of Frank, which appear to show a stark difference between the public persona and the private person. This conflicting report offered a fertile opportunity for storytelling—but one with contentious results.

There are debates within archival research communities regarding the validity and comprehensiveness (or, rather, lack thereof) of what documents and artefacts are housed within archives. Archival research produces a version of history that is a best-guess narrative based on the artefacts available. For creative archival research, there is somewhat more leeway in the archive’s use towards the end product, as the end product is stated to be a creative production. However, I have adhered to the facts of the Bostocks’ lives as closely
as my research was able to uncover. My emotional response to Susannah’s account of her abuse was a factor in how I wrote her character, and writing an overly romantic version of her as a heroine was an easy trope to fall into—especially given that the petition for judicial separation was the only direct information I could discover about her. Portraying Susannah as a fighter for family and her rights and standing up to her husband also makes for a more dynamic story than reading her as merely a victim. And, in the end, engaging the listening walker with the story and characters is equally important as crafting a multilayered experience.

Throughout Chapter Five, I have analysed my choices with a critical reflection on the basis behind these narrative choices and possible other outcomes of interpretation, as well as looked at the relationship dynamics between Frank and his animals versus Frank and his wife—and how my audio walk seeks to address both of these sides of a complex archival history. Frank was widely known for the gentleness with which he treated the animals in his care. That Frank would have a well-hidden ‘monster’ lurking underneath his beatific menagerie caretaker image is not only disturbing, but also contentious. Was the case of marital cruelty Susannah brought against Frank true? Did she want a judicial separation because of Frank’s philandering (there is one mistress on record in the archives, there could have been more) and, perhaps, wished to slander his famous gentleness as a double-barbed vengeance? Frank firmly believed that the mind of an animal only differs from human intellect by a matter of degree. He seemed to be a remarkable man with ideas about animal psychology and welfare that were far ahead of their time. If he was indeed the cruel abuser of Susannah’s accounts, then Frank was a man who embodied a stark difference between his public persona and his private person. However, perhaps this fracture was not the tension between a showman and private man,
but instead the tension between his ability to navigate human versus nonhuman relationships.

The choices I made in crafting their narrative have sparked some questioning feedback. My choice to have Frank and Susannah’s continued marriage and move to New York City denote a new start to their relationship without domestic violence has been received by some people who have taken the walk to be at best ignoring—and at worst making light of—domestic violence. Hosting an in-person interactive day at Abney Park cemetery in September 2017, when visitors to the cemetery had the opportunity to take my audio walks, then come by the classroom afterwards for tea and cake for a discussion, resulted in positive feedback from the Bostocks’ story. Criticism regarding the treatment of forgiveness after domestic violence was flagged up in a friendly way by one of the Abney Park Trustees. However, the members of the public who took the walk fed back that they took these attitudes in context with an apparent reconciliation and cessation of violence, and did not feel that the choice to make the Bostocks’ story have a happy ending detracted from their enjoyment of the walk. I have endeavoured to navigate a very tricky narrative with Love, Wrath, Death, Lions to show the multifaceted, real, messy love that this family shared and endured. The findings from my Abney Rambles tea and cake feedback day showed that visitors to Abney Park who took the audio walk, and also took the time to share their thoughts with me, were happy with the experience, requested more walks along the same theme, and resulted in me feeling encouraged to continue a similar endeavour with other buried residents of Abney Park in the future, even though the tightrope walk between archive and creativity will most likely always be fraught with contentious outcomes.
All of my respondents shared a love for Abney Park cemetery; and none of the people who stopped by for a chat voiced any concerns about the cemetery to me. This might be perhaps because the people who engaged with my audio walks that day were people who had already engaged with Abney Park on their own initiative. However, there is an impression in the wider community that ‘anything goes’ at Abney Park; that it is a bit of a ‘naughty’ place without any rules. What has been surprising to learn since joining the Abney Park Trust Events Committee—and frustrating from an events-promotion point of view—is that it is just this impression people have of Abney Park that counterintuitively makes for highly sensitive community engagement planning on the part of the Abney Park Trust in their ongoing desire to showcase Abney Park as a family-friendly community space. From my experience, Abney Park has the strictest guidelines out of the Magnificent Seven for community events within the cemetery. Perhaps the feeling of Abney Park cemetery being a renegade place left to grow wild, housing daily drinkers and easy sex, comes from a lack of perceived management. Abney Park is actually quite strictly and carefully managed, but this presence is not felt by visitors, so the impression people have of the cemetery is of an uninviting community space, where ‘anything goes’ because no one is watching the space or curating a welcoming presence. While my audio walks do not serve to enhance managerial presence within the cemetery, what they do aim to accomplish is to open up the many sides of Abney Park for visitors to explore. Reconnecting with Abney Park as a key site for community heritage, and a unique and protected nature reserve, will hopefully show visitors that Abney Park is a multifaceted community space—and much more than just a ‘black sheep’.

Despite a long history of cemeteries as mixed-use community space, that predates the more recent designation of cemeteries as strictly
single-purpose places of quiet mourning, some detractors of mixed use believe that cemeteries should serve this one purpose and are not receptive to other views on varied use of cemetery space. The spontaneous social media debate regarding a comedic cellist performing in Abney Park’s centre chapel presented in Chapter Two offered interesting insight into how community users of the space feel about its mixed use. People who support Abney Park’s events calendar do not feel that negation of memorial is the goal, but rather that mixed use works alongside the memorial aspect of Abney Park. The debate is not between ‘for memorial’ and ‘against memorial’; supporters instead hold the view that events space and memorial space are not mutually exclusive. Using the cemetery as social space raises questions about protocol. If these are unconventional practices, what are the guidelines for appropriate behaviour? How should tourists and visitors behave in the company of mourners? Who decides what constitutes respect for the living and the dead? The issue of who creates guidelines of ‘appropriate behaviour’ is a debate with which many committees working for a community space would be familiar. At Hollywood Forever cemetery in Los Angeles, they host an annual outdoor film festival, Cinespia, screening films on the wall of their large Cathedral Mausoleum. Debates around the use of the Cathedral Mausoleum for Cinespia are similar to debates around the use of Abney Park’s centre chapel. Many who feel comfortable with the presentation of a play or performance of classical music at a cemetery disapprove of showing films in the cemetery and projecting them on the mausoleum wall. “In some regard, this disapproval veils a highbrow/lowbrow critique, namely that ‘culture’ can find its place on sacred ground but popular culture cannot.” (Levitt, 2012, 23) And this is where lines of tension are drawn most starkly for community use of cemeteries: while the cemetery can be seen as a community space by most visitors, even mourners, the lines of appropriate use are divided by solemnity versus celebration.
Community use of cemeteries has evolved over many centuries and has not remained a static relationship. Shifting cultural attitudes have formed what are ‘acceptable’ and ‘unacceptable’ activities within cemetery space. No matter where members of the community fall on the scale of perception of ‘darkness’ or ‘lightness’ of their cemetery visits, or their views on solemnity versus celebration within burial sites, contemporary changing attitudes towards death and dying—and our cultural desire for secular mortality mediation—means mixed use of cemeteries as community space are likely to become more commonplace.

The layers of meaning within Abney Park cemetery that I have discovered through my practice offer up diverse perspectives on how to engage with the heritage of the cemetery. This diversity of meaning within the space itself is met with diversity of motivations for a cemetery visit brought to the experience by diverse visitors. As cemeteries today embrace a variety of perspectives and voices within their walls, and mixed use brings a sense of community relevance to what is arguably a ‘dying’ mode of body disposal and grief, the transformation of the perception of cemeteries from morbid and solemn to celebratory and inclusive will evolve as society’s sensibilities towards death evolve—and cemeteries will undergo a cultural perception shift once again. It is with a touch of sadness that I reflect upon the precipice of change that Abney Park is now at the threshold of; I agree with Geoff Nicholson that there is something enchanting about walking in ruins. However, while the Abney Park that I have been researching and working within for six years will soon be an Abney Park of the past, its development into a diverse community space is the ultimate goal—and one that I celebrate and am actively working towards. It has been a wonderful opportunity that I have had the chance to add my practice to the current canon of slightly nostalgic time capsule visions of an Abney Park that is ever-
changing. And Abney Park’s ever-changing dynamism is what will allow it to serve its community for decades to come.

It is with deep appreciation that I thank the Abney Park Trust for their support and for welcoming my Abney Rambles project into the Abney Park public identity. As of writing, February 2018, my next project working with the Abney Park Trust is to provide a live-guided *Women of Abney Park Cemetery* tour in April 2018. This project is in collaboration with a fellow cemetery tour guide, Samantha Perrin, as our first project together under our cemetery tours company name ‘Doyennes of Death’. *Women of Abney Park Cemetery* is also presented in partnership with the Old Operating Theatre Museum and Herb Garret, who are co-branding our project and including this walk in their ‘Death/Life/Afterlife’ lifecycle 2018 events calendar. I will be presenting my keynote lecture on the Bostocks that I presented at Morbid Anatomy Museum in 2016, *Love, Wrath, Death, Lions: A Coney Island Love Story: The Dark and Tumultuous Lives of Frank and Susannah Bostock*, in Abney Park cemetery in the centre chapel in autumn 2018. I continue to serve on the Abney Park Trust Events Committee and work towards expanding Abney Park’s social media footprint. Our community engagement efforts are gaining in popularity, as we have filled our events calendar for the year through Autumn of 2018. After completion of my *Women of Abney Park Cemetery* tour in April 2018, I will continue to co-produce cemetery tours with the Old Operating Theatre for the other six cemeteries in the Magnificent Seven, completing the entire project *Women of the Magnificent Seven* throughout 2019.
Abney Rambles:
Performing Heritage as an Audio Walking Practice in Abney Park Cemetery

Documentation of Practice Book

Romany Reagan

February 2018

www.abneyrambles.com
Veteran Tree Management

Pollarding involves removing all of a tree's branches to promote new growth. Pollarding was used for centuries in English woodland management. It allowed animals to browse below trees whilst fresh growth was created above head height, beyond the animals' reach. Veteran oak pollards are some of the oldest trees in Europe. Britain has many fantastic old pollards ranging from 400 to over 1000 years old. However, there is concern because there are few 200-400-year-old trees to replace them. This is one reason why managing young veterans is so important. These days, street trees are often pollarded to restrict their growth.

Retrenchment is a natural process whereby an old tree dies back to a smaller, lower crown. Stag-headed oaks are classic examples of early stage retrenchment, e.g. the oak by the pond in Springfield Park. Retrenchment can be caused by storm damage (as with Veteran chestnut 24). It can also be encouraged by crown reduction — removing the upper crown whilst retaining all low branches (e.g. Veteran chestnut 26).

Halo Pruning involves pruning the trees around a veteran rather than the veteran itself. By felling or pollarding neighbouring trees more light is allowed to reach the veteran. This is particularly necessary where old trees are surrounded by younger, more vigorous trees. (e.g. Veterans 29, 34, 33, 30, 25).

Biodiversity

Big, old trees are vital to provide homes for bats, owls and other large animals. Even more importantly, many insects and fungi can only exist where there are old trees at just the right stage of decay. Abney Park has a remarkable diversity of insects and fungi, with many locally and even nationally rare species. Beautiful orange shield cap and silky rosegill toadstools can be found growing on rotting poplar wood in late summer and autumn. Other rare fungi live inside the old trees. Hundreds of species of insect, most of which have yet to be identified, inhabit the dead and dying trees.

Veteran Trees of Abney Park Cemetery Woodland

1. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
2. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
3. Japanese cherry Prunus serrulata
4. Silver birch Betula pendula
5. Plantier's poplar Populus nigra 'Plantierensis'
6. Plantier's poplar Populus nigra 'Plantierensis'
7. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
8. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
9. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
10. Plantier's poplar Populus nigra 'Plantierensis'
11. Plantier's poplar Populus nigra 'Plantierensis'
12. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
13. Weeping ash Fraxinus excelsior Pendula
14. Common lime Tilia x europaea
15. Common ash Fraxinus excelsior
16. Perry's weeping billy flex aquifolium Argentea Marginata Pendula
17. Bhutan pine Pinus wallichiana
18. Common ash Fraxinus excelsior
19. Common ash Fraxinus excelsior
20. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
21. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
22. Western Catalpa Catalpa speciosa
23. Hybrid black poplar Populus x canadensis Serotina
24. Horse chestnut Aesculus hippocastanum
25. Spotted horn Crataegus monogyna
26. Horse chestnut Aesculus hippocastanum
27. Plantier's poplar Populus nigra 'Plantierensis'
28. Horse chestnut Aesculus hippocastanum
29. Common hawthorn Crataegus monogyna
30. Fontainebleau service tree Sorbus latifolia
31. Fontainebleau service tree Sorbus latifolia
32. Common ash Fraxinus excelsior
33. Fontainebleau service tree Sorbus latifolia
34. Horsebeam Carpinus betulus
35. Common ash Fraxinus excelsior
36. Common ash Fraxinus excelsior
37. Common ash Fraxinus excelsior
38. Narrow leafed ash Fraxinus angustifolia
39. Common ash Fraxinus excelsior

You can find photographs and more information at www.abney-park.org.uk

The veteran trees in Abney Park Cemetery Nature Reserve were surveyed and identified by: Russell Miller Arboriculture TechArbor
BA (Econ) Hons; Tech Cert (dist)
Ian Graham, former Arborcultural Manager, L. B. Hackney

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Designed by Mike Titter

The veteran trees in Abney Park Cemetery Nature Reserve are a 13-hectare woodland with around 250 old trees. In 1840 the site was planted as an arboretum of exotic trees by Hackney's famous Lodigges nursery. Several rare and interesting old trees remain from this period. As the cemetery business declined in the 20th century, the woodland tended itself and the reserve is now one of London's most important sites for wildlife.

The concentration of old trees, excellent dead-wood habitats, and the fact that the site has never been built on, make Abney Park a priceless inner London haven for invertebrates and fungi. Bats, tawny owls, sparrowhawks, wood mice and bank voles also find homes here. The Abney Park Veteran Tree Project was created in 2009 in recognition of the importance of the old trees. The project was funded by the London Tree and Woodland Grant Scheme.

Abney Park Veteran Tree Project

A veteran tree is a tree which is of particular value to wildlife due to damage, decay or old age. Many small mammals, birds, invertebrates and fungi rely on veteran trees for food or shelter. Some species can only live on old, dead or dying trees.

This is why veteran trees are so important for biodiversity. During 2009 over 170 old trees were surveyed and 60 were found to have veteran characteristics. Thirty of the more vulnerable veterans were chosen for the project.

Many of the trees were in desperate need of work to stop them falling apart or being shaded out by vigorous young ash. Hackney Council's tree gang were trained in veteran tree management techniques and set about this vital task. In particular the old poplars, now over 120 years old, needed to be re-pollarded to stop them splitting apart. Indeed, several poplars failed before work began.

The project has been a great success and many trees have been given a new lease of life thanks to pollarding or halo pruning.

A Veteran tree has characteristics of benefit to wildlife. These include deadwood, decaying wood, cavities, rot holes and slime fluxes.

Key:
- Veteran tree
- Path

Inclusion detailed location map
This walk begins at the south wrought iron gates to Abney Park cemetery, which are located on Stoke Newington Church Street. The listening walker should cue up the audio walk when they are standing directly outside the gates on the sidewalk, facing the cemetery.

Before we walk through the gates into Abney Park Cemetery to begin, what do you expect to see on this walk we’re about to take today? Probably some trees and headstones, other visitors. What do you expect to learn? Given that this audio walk is titled ‘Woodland Networks’ and is described as a walk through the veteran trees and nonhuman networks at play in Abney, you most likely are expecting this to be a nature walk.

And it is.

But this walk we’re about to take is about more than merely pointing out trees in the nature preserve. I want to show you the many networks at play here in Abney, the nonhuman acts working together – and against each other – in this vibrant ecosystem that is more than just a backdrop for headstones, but a thriving nonhuman community in its own right.

Please enter the gates now. When you see the main path up ahead, turn right.

This walk is only a selection of the veteran trees here. If you want to see the rest of them, there are green plaques on wooden posts dotted throughout the cemetery along the paths for you to come across and explore. There is also a map of the veteran trees available at the visitor centre, which is by the Egyptian Gates entrance on the other side, and a PDF version of the map is available on my website, Abneyrambles.com. I hope this walk inspires you to take a wander and discover these other specimens.
I've also recorded this walk in the summer, when everything is green, and lush, and full, if you're taking this walk at other times of year, some of the interactions I mention maybe dormant or hidden from view.

At the first path up ahead, turn left, then make an immediate right.

So, what is a veteran tree? These are old trees that come in many forms, not all of them are large and stately, some have been pollarded (which means the top branches have been cut off) so they don’t grow too top heavy in high winds that can make them fall over and also encourages new growth; they can be coppice stools, where shoots grow out of a veteran stump (which can render a veteran tree looking more like a cluster of small trees or even a bush), but often they are larger trees that have been around long enough to have damage that creates cavities and other niche habitats for fungi, insects, and animals enriching biodiversity. Veteran trees have extensive root systems that form the underpinning of the rest of the ecosystem of a woodland – the root systems within Abney are many hundreds of years old and the networks of communication through these systems are unique to this park. Abney is a rare oasis of mature woodland in urban London.
Up here on the right-hand side is a memorial tree planted in memory of Elisa Banyon. This newly planted tree is a white lilac, which should grow to perhaps 10 feet in height and have beautiful white flowers with a heady fragrance every spring. There are twenty memorial trees that have been planted so far in Abney, but they're not all marked and some are quite hidden.

Continuing on the path away from the memorial tree, up here on our left-hand side, we'll see our first veteran tree — #4, which is a silver birch. As we come to the veteran trees along this walk, feel free to push pause and read the plaques, and then start again whenever you're ready.

If we come over here to the right-hand side of the tree, you can see a large gash through the trunk, which is caused by lightning. This tree is the first of quite a few hollowed out trees we're going to come across today. Today, I see many spider webs, and what looks like white lichen. What can you see?
Ok, keep walking straight now passed the statue of Sir Isaac Watts, we’re headed just on the other side of him, there’s veteran tree #6, which is a Plantier’s Poplar. The tree is going to be on the left of the path, and the plaque is on the right.

Notice how the smells of the plants and trees change as you walk through the cemetery. Some areas smell different from others, they each have their own signature. And each area stays the same, no matter how many years I come here, the plants and the trees retain their own ecoscent, so as I move through the space I find different scent memories pocketed away.
The cavity in #6 actually goes pretty deep. I can imagine things like living in there, but right now I don’t see anything alive. But just because I can’t see it, doesn’t mean that it’s not there. It looks like there’s some side cuts, can you see on the side here? On the right-hand side. Caused by a saw of some kind, maybe.

Ok, we’ll be turning left here on the next path, but first across the way is veteran tree #7, which is a Hybrid Black Poplar. This tree is thought to be damaged by fire as well. Tawny owls breed annually in large cavities in the Hybrid Black Poplars. There are quite a few here in the cemetery.

Behind #7 over here, on the left, is a very large cavernous stump. I’m climbing up here a bit. The fallen tree is hollow, and now it’s a habitat. If you come up closer, you can just see inside through the darkness.
Now we’re going to keep walking down the main path here. On either side of this avenue you can see there are many toppled obelisks and urns, bits of headstones cracked and lying about. That’s the root systems making all the stones a bit tippy. The gravestones and roots are in this constant tango. Which, when we get to the end of this avenue, can be noticed most by its lack of presence with the Bostock lion, as there’s been so much care to keep it in good repair and maintained away from too much evidence of time.

It should be coming up here on the right pretty soon.

Depending on what stage the Trust is in their cycle of cleaning it when you take this walk, the lion will either be a dark patina with a green algae-looking-type substance covering it like the other surrounding monuments, or a freshly-scrubbed gleaming white marble, standing out starkly against the trees and stones, looking as if it was erected here yesterday.

Right now, when I’m looking at the lion, there are flowers that are put between his paws. Two orange roses. People also put coins there. Today? No coins. Just the roses. Perhaps you can see an offering when you’re walking here. Take a look.
Once, when I was walking here and stopped by the Bostock lion, an old man came up to me, whom I believe is one of the daily regulars here in Abney, and he said, “Do you know that you’re supposed to put flowers and coins here in his paws and make a wish?” And I said, no, that I didn’t know this was a thing that was done. Apparently, the Bostock lion has become a place of ritual for people to put coins and flowers and make an offering to the peaceful lion.

I don’t know the meaning behind it, and when I asked him, he couldn’t tell me how the ritual began, just that whenever he came by the lion he put in a coin or brought a flower. I didn’t have any flowers, but I took out a coin and put it between the lion’s paws and that seemed to make him happy. This is what he thought should be done here.

But right now there are only the roses. Which is an interesting take on the classic interaction between the three main elements of a cemetery space: humans, stone, and plants. For most people who bring flowers to headstones in a cemetery, it’s in remembrance of their loved one, directly related to the headstone to which they’re taking them. But the offering of flowers to the Bostock lion, isn’t about specific grief, or perhaps even about grief at all. It’s a symbolic gesture that is outside of one specific reference to remembrance. The Bostock lion has been imbued with meaning beyond the Bostocks themselves, and now has become a site for various people in the community to impart their own meaning, their own ritual, and to personalise their interaction with the lion monument in what seems to be a spontaneous new custom that developed organically through word of mouth.

Ok, make a right here on the main path just after the Bostock lion, and then we’re going to walk on straight for a bit.
We're going to be making a left here on this main path, but before we do, walk straight up, and on the right-hand side will be veteran tree #24, a horse chestnut.
The smell changes again when you get up to the horse chestnut. I don’t know if you can smell that. It’s the same wonderful plant that was over by the Isaac Watts statue. Have you noticed the scents change as you move through the different areas of foliage in here? Pay attention to that as you walk through the cemetery.

What’s so amazing about coming to an urban woodland like this is your sense of smell is so activated, in a completely different way than the surrounding urban streets. It’s a refreshing break.

There’s some beautiful deadwood at the foot of the horse chestnut. It looks to be crumbling back into the earth. This tree is very healthy and strong and big. I’m recording this in the early morning, right when Abney opens, and this morning there are a few birds in the tree, singing away their morning songs. If you’re taking this walk in the afternoon or the evening, you might hear different birds. Push pause in this recording and take a moment to hear what birds are with you now.

Ok, now let’s walk back now to the path we were going to be turning left from, but which will now of course we’ll now be turning right.

Awww! A little rat just ran across my path. There are quite a few rats here, actually. I’m sorry if you don’t like rats, I happen to quite like them.
There’s a helpful fungus that grows on root systems, and they’re called mycorrhizal networks. Experts of these mycorrhizal networks have discovered that trees talk to each other. They communicate their needs and send each other nutrients via a network of fungi growing within and between various root networks. These fungal networks help trees send warning signals about environmental change, search for kin, and transfer their nutrients to neighbouring plants before they die.

Around 90% of land plants are in mutually beneficial mycorrhizal relationships with fungi. Fungus colonises the roots of the plant, which provide the fungi with food and, in exchange, the fungi help the plants suck up water and boost their host plants’ immune systems. Mycorrhizae also connect plants that may be widely separated. When this relationship was first discovered in the 1970s, it was termed the ‘Earth’s natural internet’.

This underground internet connects the root systems of vast areas of plants, they communicate with each other regarding danger (for example, damaged root systems, attack by parasites, and distressing climate changes).

Ok, right here on our right there should be a small path turning right, and then just here on our left will be veteran tree #25, which is a spotted thorn. Ooo and a squirrel. This tree here is an original Loddiges planting, from the beginning of the cemetery nursery in 1840 – one of only twenty specimens that survive from the original arboretum.
This old Hawthorne is another hollow tree, offering rich deadwood. The hollow on #25 is on the other side of the tree, and I don’t want to encourage you to get off the path, but I’ll go over there for you. Wow. It’s almost split in two. The nature preserve caretakers will probably have to cut down the top-heavy branches soon before it splits in two entirely. But it still appears to be alive and healthy, despite all that. It’s looks to be too wide open I think to be a habitat for bats or owls. But it could be a rich place for fungi and insects. It’s amazing a tree that looks like it’s just bark is actually quite alive. Appearances can be deceiving.
Ok, back to the path here. We’re going to continue walking on this path until it turns right at the end, and then just keep following it along until we reach #29, which is a 177-year old veteran Hawthorn tree that hosts a bracket fungus so rare, that Kew Gardens holds a sample from this specimen for its reference collection.

When you walk in this section of Abney, these little paths are paved, and there are kerbstones on either side that keep the soil and the creepers at bay. The area all through here is thick with undergrowth and the paths wind around each other like a maze. In the summer, when I’m walking now, you can feel the branches and the trees and ivy encroaching in on you. It’s a much more intimate walking experience.
Our idea of the static and mindless life of plants is rather myopic. There is a large aspect of their unseen lives that speaks to teamwork and perhaps even planning ahead, in the form of preparation in one part of the system for danger that has been alerted to by another part of the system. What I find most interesting about the hidden networks of communication between trees via root systems and VOC emissions from their leaves is that the idea of plant agency is not merely a theoretical concept – it is something qualifiable in a lab setting. It’s a real-world scientific phenomenon that need not rely on a belief in magical spirits to be true. However, what is magic except science we have yet to understand? There is a magical element to what these plant networks do, even if it can be documented and duplicated under lab conditions, it is still wondrous.

We should be coming up to #29 here on our left, the Common Hawthorn. It looks to be just deadwood. Hmmm. I’ve asked the Trust whether this deadwood here in front of us is all that’s left of the Hawthorne, but they said the tree should still be here alive, not just deadwood. I can’t see which one it is. Perhaps you can?

Ok, keep walking down the path until it ends, then make a right here on the main path.
Our next tree isn’t a numbered veteran, but an interesting tree nonetheless. Just right across the path, down on the right here, you can see some bird boxes, or what I think are bird boxes, just up against the trunk. This tree looks like it’s been pollarded or cut back. These boxes could be a human interaction to create more bird habitat, although it does seem a bit redundant considering the rich natural bird habitat in Abney, so I asked the Trust what they mean, and they said any birdhouses on site may or not be in use, but either way it would be ecologically damaging to remove them now.

The Trust put up bat boxes when they were carrying out the works to the Chapel – specifically to mitigate against any potential loss of roosting space that the works may have caused. However, they didn’t find any roosting bats in the Chapel, the bat boxes were merely a safety measure for habitat preservation. I wish they had found bats, but perhaps they prefer the trees, which is just as well. These boxes on this tree could either be birdhouses or bat boxes, either way, they are here to stay.

On the right-hand side of this tree is a massive bracket fungus. It’s a shame, because coming up close to it, I can see some fingerprints on the bottom where people have touched it. The surface of the fungus looks like the wings of a butterfly or a moth, it’s almost like velvet and I can see the fingerprints clearly on it and I wish they wouldn’t have done that. It doesn’t look like they’ve dug in, they just touched it, but I don’t think that’s nice or right. But it’s right off the main path, so what are you going to do.

I’ve seen this fungus for many years, actually. Almost every time I come to Abney. I walk around and eventually I end up passing by this tree and this bracket fungus. They can live for decades, but I don’t know the longest lifespan of a bracket fungus. Doing a bit of internet research all I could find was how to get them off your trees, not cultivate them, so long-living bracket fungi don’t appear to be of interest to the greater public.
Right next to the tree with the fungus, just a few paces down, there is a broken gravestone obelisk, and not only is it broken, but you can see how they’re hollow inside. This one is made of marble, and you can actually see inside the broken monument. And right here is a great image of the symbiosis between trees and gravestones, because the tree has grown around the obelisk, keeping it upright – and, actually, I think the obelisk is keeping the tree upright, so this is a perfect example of the relationships at play in many Victorian garden cemeteries.

After much of the money for garden upkeep ran out, and subsequent management upheavals and changing hands throughout the twentieth century, Victorian garden cemeteries were left to their own devices with little to no human intervention – where plant life and headstones began their merry war for primacy. This conflux here of an obelisk and a tree is a beautiful allegory for the (sometimes) symbiotic relationship between stones and trees.

Looking inside of the obelisk now I can see cans and a carrier bag. Leave it to humans to treat it as a bin. But, despite that, you can also see how these are constructed. It’s an interesting insight into how these were made. Take a look at how they’ve joined them from the inside.
Walking a bit further down, on our left, will be veteran tree #28, another horse chestnut. It looks nothing like the massive stately horse chestnut we saw earlier, and it’s hard to tell it is a veteran tree because now it’s become a ‘copse’, which is a collection of small trees shoots growing up out of the main veteran base.

Take a moment here to look at this tree. If you were walking past it, not seeing the plaque here announcing that it’s a veteran, or having a map to hand, you might not ever know that this is a veteran tree, that it’s very old, and its root networks are important to the ecosystem of the reserve. Much of what makes nonhuman networks so fascinating is their hidden aspect; their complex relationships and tenacious life through history can’t be learned by first glance. These networks require us to look more slowly.
Ok, continue on this path here, just to the right of #28.

And then make a left at the fork.

And make a right up here on this path coming up.
On your right-hand side here is an excellent example of deadwood, which is also veteran tree #21, a Hybrid Black Poplar. The rich dead wood here of #21 is one of the largest deadwood outcroppings in Abney. Huge massive logs, and some of them with some deep caverns, similar to #7 we saw earlier, but not quite as deep. Come close to them, see what you can see inside these logs.
Behind the logs, up towards the right, are a few large bracket fungi. What's interesting about this fungus is it looks like there is the same green algae-looking substance growing on it, just like that on the Bostock lion, and little weeds and small plant shoots growing out of it too. There is so much life harmonising on this one tree.

And an empty bottle of Jack Daniels, because this is also a place of humans.
Further along here on the right-hand side is veteran tree #22, a western Catalpa. Many trees in Abney have suffered through fire, however #22 has suffered more than most. For quite a few years now, #22 has been my favourite veteran tree. When I've come for a walk in Abney, I often like to take a break here and sit on the grass by #22 and look at the chapel. This tree has suffered not just one, but multiple fires — yet has thrived. I love the survival nature of this tree. In the summer now it has leaves that are about 6-8in across. It's growing big, lush, up to about, I don't know, 20ft high I'm guessing? Absolute fecundity. I find it interesting, because it's the tree that's been the most abused, but the tree that seems to be thriving the most as well. There's something sort of "I defy you" about #22. It's an inspirational tree.
If we continue walking now around the chapel to the right, we can see veteran tree #23, another Hybrid Black Poplar. This tree here has been struck by lightning. There have been many fires in Abney, both by lightning and human hand. These trees are hearty and have lived through a lot. #23 also has some bracket fungi on the base of it. It's a bit overgrown now, but it is there.
Now, at the time that I’m taking this walk, which is July in 2017, the council has recently refurbishment the chapel. And you can see, if you’re walking close to the time when I am, there’s some wire mesh in the windows, and if you walk towards the gates and look at the doorway inside, there’s some mesh hanging there as well, but it’s not actually to keep humans out. Well, the window wire mesh probably does double duty as that, but the inside mesh is for when they have the gates open, not to keep people from exploring the inside of the chapel, but to keep pigeons out. Because apparently once pigeons roost you can never get rid of them.

So, that’s an interesting interaction between the human custodians of Abney and the preserve, because even though we’re surrounded by 32 acres of rich habitat for a variety of birds – pigeons want none of it. They want the chapel.
Take a moment to come inside the chapel, if you can, or just take a look from the gate. Sometimes the gates are open; sometimes they’re locked. Today, I’m lucky and they’re open. Despite the fire that reduced this chapel to almost a ruin 40 years ago, it still stands. For 177 years these walls have housed grief and love. Now the chapel is a part of Abney Park in a new way. Finally, after 40 years, it will serve its community again, and open its arches to new visitors, to share history and local cultural events, and new memories will be made within its walls again. You can feel the history here.

Ok, let’s leave the chapel now. Replace the mesh, as it was, to keep the pigeons. Ok, so walk back to the main path here and across we’re just going to go right towards the memorial monument. You should be able to sit it with its steps just up ahead. And we’re going to be taking the path to the left.
And just up here, on your left-hand side, will be another original Loddiges planting – veteran tree #16, which is a Perry’s Weeping Holly. This is a 177-year-old holly tree. This impressive holly has also survived fire. Since this holly tree is older than the graves that are surrounding it, anyone who wanted a plot around this amazingly ancient holly bush, would obviously had to work around it. As old as the graves seem here, this vibrant green holly is far older. Its age not readily apparent by size of the bush or green of its vibrant leaves. I wonder what this holly has seen.
There's some wild blackberry bushes right here in front of the holly. I've always wondered if you can eat wild blackberries. But I was warned, never eat *anything* in the cemetery. Even if you're a professional forager, this is not the place to do so. Because of the Victorian practice of having lead coffins, and also from embalming fluid in later years, the ground here has been saturated with arsenic. So, eat these blackberries, and you may join them!
Ok, let's keep walking straight to the main path up ahead and then make a right.

Up ahead on your right-hand side will be another Loddiges veteran tree #17, a Bhutan Pine. This pine was once one of two, but one of them has since died.

This pine didn’t survive the fire that was set against it 25 years ago. Like with people, sometimes it’s not the direct injury that kills the tree. The fire weakened the tree, which left it vulnerable to root disease, which is eventually what killed it. The strain of root disease that killed the pine is unusual in London, an indicator of the complex interconnected life cycles of decline and parasitism spawned by the Old Arboretum. However, this tree still plays its part in the ecosystem of Abney by providing a vital deadwood habitat.
Continue down the path now to veteran tree #18 a common ash.

As you will have no doubt have noticed by now, fire has unfortunately played a significant part in the demise of many specimens here in Abney. Five out of the twelve trees that failed to survive the high winds of a very bad storm in 2007 showing signs of fire damage. These were mainly Common Ash and Italian Black Poplars, which were planted in 1890. Neither species compartmentalises fungal pathogens well. The agents of decay were a common fungus, a brown heart rot that has had to diversify from its preferred host, Elm, as a result of Dutch Elm Disease.

Up here on our left is ash tree #18, which was also damaged by fire many years ago. The bark was killed, and a parasitic fungi colonised. Now this tree is hollow. However, it is still vigorous with new growth. The cavities and deadwood provide homes for bats, birds, mammals, insects, and more fungi. This is an example of human intervention with the nature preserve working for its benefit. #18 is a beautiful specimen. There’s a little path here worn away, it looks as if I’m not the only one to do this. Oh wow, this is the largest cavity that I’ve seen yet. In case you aren’t coming back here, which I probably shouldn’t recommend you do, but, if you do come back here, there is a little path that takes you up here, so I don’t feel too bad taking you off the main path to see it, come have a look at this hollow tree. Do you notice anything different about the hollow of this veteran than the others that we’ve seen today? Be careful if you get close, because it does go quite deep.
Ok, walk back to the main path now, and we’re going to keep walking straight ahead.

Local arboriculturist Russell Miller noted upon inspection that a high proportion of the remaining specimen trees have basal damage consistent with arson, suggesting that at some point someone made a determined effort to destroy all that was left of the original arboretum. The arsonist has caused the premature demise of many fine trees; and there are others still standing here that will fail before their time.

However, habitats have been created for hundreds of insects and fungal species because the vandal accelerated some of Abney’s trees into veterans - trees with cavities and other niche habitats, which adds to Abney’s biodiversity.

When woodland researchers use phrases like ‘forest wisdom’ and ‘mother trees’ to describe elaborate fungal networks and other symbolic aspects of these elaborate ecosystems, they are using terms which can be compared to neural networks in the human brain. They are seeking to study and define interactions between plants in a way that the wider public can understand. As ecologist Suzanne Simard said: “A forest is a cooperative system. And using the language of ‘communication’ made more sense because we were looking at not just resource transfers, but things like defence signalling and kin recognition. We, as human beings, can relate to this better. If we can relate to it, then we’re going to care about it more. If we care about it more, then we’re going to do a better job of stewarding our landscapes.”
As we’re leaving, up here on the left, you can just see the forest school beyond the fence. This is where school children learn about the wonders of the forest, build dens, go on nature walks, make natural arts and crafts, and play woodland games through the nature preserve that is Abney. I think it’s wonderful that young children come here and learn about the nature preserve. That the cemetery isn’t scary. That it’s a place of life. That it has diversity in its many uses. Whether that be for a community space, for concerts, art exhibitions, or plays – to learning about trees, insects, and animals, or how to garden and woodworking. The fact that schools come here teaches children from a young age to be more death positive, because it demystifies the cemetery. It’s not the haunted ruin in the wood, or where ghosts lie, it’s a place for nature, and for life.

As you leave the cemetery, on the right-hand side is the visitors’ centre, where you can find more information about a variety of interesting aspects of Abney, and also Stoke Newington. I want to thank you very much for taking this walk with me today. This walk was made possible by the research conducted by local arboriculturist Russell Miller, the Abney Park Cemetery Trust, and various nonhuman interaction case studies researched for my PhD thesis. Thank you.
This walk begins at the south wrought iron gates to Abney Park cemetery, which are located on Stoke Newington Church Street. The listening walker should cue up the audio walk when they are standing directly outside the gates on the sidewalk, facing the cemetery.

[Cue Hungarian Rhapsody music box]

Enter the gates from Stoke Newington Church Street, when you get to the main path, turn right.

Just ahead is where Abney Manor House used to stand; the gates where we just entered are the original gates to the manor house that used to preside over the grounds where Abney Park Cemetery is today.

As we walk to the right, we’re heading towards the site of where a magnificent tree used to stand. It was an ancient Cedar of Lebanon, which was as old as the manor house that used to be where we are walking now.

As we walk on the wide path, keep an eye out on your left-hand side for a small path that forks left. Don’t turn there, but when you see a clutch of bushes just past it – that is where the tree used to stand.

There is nothing here now to hint that it existed, it had disappeared shortly after Abney opened – whether through either natural death or other causes, is now unknown. But it was right there where the 300-year old tree, with a gardener’s mowing scythe embedded in its trunk, stood for so many centuries. Through time, the tree had absorbed the scythe, and when the cemetery was built around the majestic tree, it served as a beautiful allegory for the tango between life and death. It is truly a tragedy that this tree is no longer standing sentry over the dead.
In Highgate Cemetery, their famed Circle of Lebanon is named for its own ancient cedar, which grows still today as the dramatic centre feature for their Egyptian tombs. Highgate’s cedar is also now over 300 years old itself, having, just like Abney’s, been a part of the grounds of the manor house which stood on the grand estate in that cemetery’s previous life. Highgate’s cedar is still a flourishing specimen, unfortunately Abney’s ancient cedar, and the allegorical scythe, are lost to time.

The famous author and walker Iain Sinclair believes that Stoke Newington is so weird and mysterious because it sits atop the long-lost Hackney Brook River. Hackney Brook was a waterway equal in length to London’s largest lost rivers, which flowed across Stoke Newington and Hackney. The Victorians covered it over and turned Hackney Brook river into a sewer – as they were fond of doing to so many rivers – creating a subterranean water world that flows unnoticed under London today.

The northern boundary of Abney Park cemetery is defined by the course of this river. Although you can no longer see it, it is still there – right now – flowing quietly in the darkness. When the cemetery land was still part of Abney Manor, Sir Isaac Watts was particularly taken by a heronry on an island in the river and took his inspiration for writing his hymns from afternoons spent there.

A beautiful river with an island of herons was walled-up and turned into a sewer – and this entombed River Spirit suffers from her subverted purpose. Once flowing freely out in the cool air, supporting a community of herons that nested on her little island – now River Spirit has no light or creatures for company. She is walled up alive in her earthen tomb, and yet can never die – and she has been slowly going mad.

Look for a turn up here on your left, and take that path. It is just past a green veteran tree plaque marked #1.
There will be a gaping tree trunk coming up here, on your right-hand side, leaning over the path. When you reach it, let's pause for a moment.

The once peaceful and life-giving river has turned vengeful in her isolation. River Spirit manifests herself the only way she can. She holds an ancient conversation with her elemental brethren – Tree Spirits and Stone Spirits.

As River Spirit twists in frustration, her misery is felt by the roots of the ancient Tree Spirits, flowing up their root systems to their canopy. River Spirit's anguish flutters out of their leaves as the Tree Spirits carry her story to those who would but hear her speak.

Sometimes her sadness channels too much energy, and Tree Spirits cannot contain her message. Her anguish breaks through their trunks, like the Tree Spirit you see here, who was torn violently open at the witching hour one of her deepest nights of loneliness and torment.

Like a woodland seashell, if you listen close – you can more feel than hear – that this is a portal to down below, where River Spirit twists and sighs.
Continue now along the path, to the wooden bench you see just ahead and turn right.

[Cue Dark Music Box Lullaby by Midnight Syndicate]

Tree Spirits are the guardians of communication. And they whisper their ancient truths to the wind, flowing over the cemetery gates into the streets of Stoke Newington, thickening the air with an inexplicable melancholy.

Make a right here on this path.
Make a left up here at the family vault of Henry Spicer, and continue on towards the statue of Sir Isaac Watts that you can see just up ahead.

When you reach it, make a left.

Arthur Machen and Edgar Allan Poe knew there was something not quite right about Stoke Newington. Something uncanny, something flickering in the shadows, just out of sight. The balance is unsettled here. The suffering of River Spirit has infused every brick and beast radiating outwards from her with a touch of magic from the power of her torment.

After making a left, we are now looking for a tree up ahead; he is on your right hand side, across this centre island of these rose bushes. It is unmissable due to a large black gash running up the length of its trunk. It is announced by green plaque #4.

Take a moment to read this plaque, and then to come look at this Tree Spirit.
Come take a closer look at the new life this noble tree now nourishes within his scar. One mark of Tree Spirits is their unfailing ability to create light out of darkness, and to create life out of death – however this scar is no accident. River Spirit is not the only Spirit enraged.

Fire Spirit, the most elusive and terrible of the ancient Spirits, has been roused to action. Driven wild by his separation from River Spirit, Fire Spirit has scorched the earth of Abney Park cemetery again and again in a desperate attempt to free her – his love and his nemesis – from her earthen tomb.

He has cast fires of lightning, like what has befallen this tree, fires set by people having late-night picnics, fires lit by errant cigarettes, inexplicable fires – the other spirits of Abney do not know where he will stop.
Let's leave this Tree Spirit now in peace and walk back towards the statue of Sir Isaac Watts, around the memorial steps and towards the stone centre chapel up ahead.

For over one hundred years these fires have plagued the cemetery. Fire Spirit makes his power manifest most often through the actions of Men, which he finds very fitting as they were the very beasts who buried his love alive.

[Cue Dark Music Box Lullaby by Midnight Syndicate]

As we head towards the other side of the chapel, there is a tree that has been set on fire no less than three times – and yet still stands sentry. We are walking towards that tree now. It does not matter which way you walk around the chapel. This grand tree is directly on the other side.
Here we should be now, the plaque for this tree is #22. Take a moment to read his plaque.

Walk now amongst and around these strongest Tree and Stone spirits, exploring this atmosphere, or rest on the grass as you prefer.

That this, the strongest of the Tree Spirits in Abney Park cemetery stands here in its heart – right next to the strongest of the Stone Spirits here, the chapel – is no accident. Here we are standing on a ley line that runs through the energy of Abney Park cemetery. These Stones and Trees have withstood the strongest blasts of Fire Spirit’s rage – because here, he is strongest as well.

The Tree Spirits do not condone Fire Spirit’s methods of reaching River Spirit, however they do not try to stop him.

They have an old understanding.
Fire Spirit seduces the minds of men to do his bidding. That is why Abney Park cemetery has suffered more fires than any of the other Magnificent Seven. Abney is a cemetery caught in an ancient love war.

In a rage one night in the 1970s, Fire Spirit extended his wrath to Stone Spirits and eviscerated the beautiful centre chapel into a stark stone husk devoid of everything, even her lovely stained glass.

Stone Spirits and Tree Spirits have suffered greatly at the hands of Fire Spirit. And on a walk through Abney Park Cemetery you can feel the cracks in these bonds within the ancient community of Abney. The tensions are building.

River Spirit is told of all that Fire Spirit has done for her over the century through the roots of Tree Spirits. For a long time now, Fire Spirit has not had the benefit of River Spirit's steady calm that has always balanced him from time immemorial.

However, River Spirit no longer wants to calm him.

She wants Fire Spirit to unleash all of his power upon the earth, to scorch everything in sight to dust, to reach her – finally – and free her from her living grave.

The time may come. It may come soon. When River Spirit is granted her desperate wish and is free. The River Spirit who emerges from the earth will not be the balancing protector who was entombed.

That River and Fire, could never be. Their yin and yang forever doomed to never meet.

Things are different now. River is more Fire now. River is destruction now. Twisting underground in torment, River Spirit has built up her magical energy to flip the elements, invert the compass, and thwart all natural laws.

She is a new River Spirit who is ready to stand side by side with Fire Spirit — and when she emerges. Run.

[Cue Hungarian Rhapsody music box]
This walk begins at the main entrance Neo-Egyptian eastern gates to Abney Park cemetery, which are located on Stoke Newington High Street. The listening walker should cue up the audio walk when they are standing directly outside the gates on the sidewalk, facing the cemetery.

[Cue 'Clair de Lune']

Narrator: Here we are outside the Neo-Egyptian gates to Abney Park cemetery. It is one of the Magnificent Seven garden cemeteries that form a ring around what was, in Victorian times, outer London. From 1800 to 1850, the population in London swelled from one million, to 2.3 million people in just 50 years. This surge of life into the city, meant that parish churchyards could no longer cope with the sheer volume of the dead. They began piling up in ever-more odorous and cramped graves. Thus, the birth of the Garden Cemetery, where air and space were plentiful and visits to loved ones who had passed changed from disturbing chores, to opportunities for pleasant reflection. This garden cemetery, Abney Park, was established in 1840, and it has a rich and varied history, that I wish I could go into now, but this isn’t a story about the cemetery. This is a love story.

Please enter the gates now.

I’m going to take you back in time, to tell the life story of a couple who have found their final resting place here. It’s a story about love, anger, adventure, passion, lion taming – and of course death. This is the story of Frank and Susannah Bostock. Buried right here in Abney Park Cemetery.

If you keep a casual walking pace and continue through the cobbled avenue towards the three-pronged fork up ahead, we should be on track. When you get to the circular stone junction, take the path to the right. Keep on that wide path and continue on to the chapel. It’s a few minutes up ahead. If you get there before I do, please take a seat or walk around the beautiful ruin. I’ll let you know where we’re turning next.
Frank Bostock, who was known far and wide as the ‘Animal King of America’, had many narrow escapes in his life and his body bore numerous scars from encounters with jungle-born beasts. In Kansas City, he was attacked by Brutus, one of his lions, who leapt on his back and lacerated it very badly. In Indianapolis, Rajah, a royal Bengal tiger, grabbed him by the leg and tore the flesh severely and in New York one of his fingers was bitten off by an ape. His bravery started at a very young age. Here’s how it all began...

Frank: Although my family was one of animal trainers and exhibitors, my father did not wish me to follow so hazardous a profession, and decided that I should become a clergyman of the Church of England. But during one vacation I went home and saw my father’s wild-animal exhibition, and there all the glamour and fascination of the show came upon me. There is no doubt I had inherited my father’s instincts. The lion-tamer my father had at that time was the great feature in the show. It struck me, however, that he was extremely cruel. The trainer handled the lion so roughly that, enraged at the injustices and indignities to which he was subjected, the animal suddenly turned upon him, and would certainly have killed him had not prompt assistance been rendered.

Wrought up and excited by the occurrence, I begged my father to let me take his place, but he would not hear of it. The next day I took the law into my own hands, and it was in the lion’s cage that my father found me, to his horror, when casually going the rounds of the show. He watched me for a while in fear and trembling, and then said, his voice quivering with anger and fright: ‘If ever you get out of there alive, my lad, I’ll give you the biggest thrashing you ever had in your life!’

But he didn’t. He was so overjoyed at my safety and so proud of my success, that after much persuasion I got him to allow me to take the place of the cruel lion tamer. I was fifteen at this time [Cue circus theme – aka ‘Enter the Gladiators’] and was called, ‘The Boy Trainer’. From that time my college days were over, and I knew there could never be any other life for me other than that of a trainer and showman.
Susannah: When I met Frank I was immediately struck. He was so tall and impressive in his trainer’s uniform, all dark blue and gold buttons. Like a soldier or an actor, but more exciting than either of these. He seemed at once in complete control, yet gentle. He captivated me. I was the daughter of a circus man myself, my father was Francis Bailey. We were a perfect match. We married in 1884 and within three years our families joined forces to create the Bostock, Wombwell, and Bailey Circus. For years we travelled around England, Ireland, and Europe with Frank’s ever-growing menagerie of exotic, large, and dangerous animals.

Frank: There is a constant presence of danger in wild-animal training, which few who have once felt it escape. I’ll tell you a thrilling experience of mine in Birmingham, England, in 1889. We had a remarkably fine specimen of African lion at the time. This lion was, however, one of the greatest worries and anxieties I have ever had. He had killed one man, and wounded several attendants, so powerful were his paws, and so quick his movements in reaching out of his cage. He required the most careful watching at all times, and was a very difficult animal to manage, in spite of unlimited time and patience spent on him. Kindness had no effect on him whatsoever.

Narrator: We should be at the chapel now. Or, if you’ve already made it here, please find your way to the jumbled pile of felled tree stumps at the right end of the chapel from the path where we first entered. If you’re listening to this when there are no longer any tree stumps, then please take a seat on the grass, or stand if you prefer, right next to the tree with a plaque that reads of its multiple fire survivals – that’s a story in and of itself! But for now, let’s content ourselves with Frank’s rather shocking story of his tour stop in Birmingham.
On opening day we tried to move him from one cage to another. But with a terrific wrench and twist he got himself free \textit{[ Cue lion roar sounds]} and sprang over our heads and into the street, dashed through the lions’ tent to the rear of the building, pushed himself through a rift, and made off for the city of Birmingham, which contained at that time over two hundred thousand people. He ran directly into the dark, twining sewer system. In about twenty minutes, nearly every person in Birmingham knew what had happened. The fear was intensified by the fact that as the lion made his way through the sewers, he stopped at every manhole he came to and there sent up a succession of roars that echoed and reverberated until the very earth seemed to be full of weird sounds, driving some of the people nearly wild with terror.

Afraid of a citywide riot, we played a little trick with a tame lion in a covered cage brought to the gaping mouth of the sewer. We made a great racket inside the sewage tunnel shooting blank cartridges and banging pots then, slamming the cage door, we unveiled the imposter ‘captured’ lion. The crowd cheered and all was well – until around midnight when I had to confess to the police chief that the lion was still loose under the streets of Birmingham. Turning white as a sheet, he immediately called a midnight task force of sewer employees and my own circus hands to scour the sewers for my deadly beast.

We found him finally after about an hour of searching the serpentine stench. With nothing but an iron pot and my boarhound we subdued him and hoisted the real lion out of the sewer into a cage and ready for the next day’s performance with no one else the wiser. Well, until now.

\textbf{Narrator:} Let’s continue on our walk now. Going along to the right-hand path around the chapel, we’ll follow around to the other side, where we’ll see up ahead a large white monument and steps. \textit{[Cue Clair de Lune]}
From this monument, we’re going to take the right-hand path again, then pass the statue of Isaac Watts, who we should keep to our left. Then keep walking straight ahead on the only path there that’s right in front of you. I have another walk where actually I tell a bit more about Isaac Watts, but the thing about love is, it doesn’t encompass other people. It’s the story of two souls in their own struggle. If you look around here to the right, and to the left, we will have passed many stones. Each gravemarker marking a life and a meaning. It’s hard in a place as densely populated as Abney to focus on only one couple, with each voice piled upon voice clamouring for your attention. You have to tease out the individual stories from the beautiful cacophony of the past. The noise of each of these stones and stories they are aching to tell us, and it’s a sad thing to walk past them now. Encapsulated within each stone here is a lifetime. To choose one thing is by default to not choose another – this by no means devalues those who you do not chose. However, whenever I walk here, in my favourite cemetery, the voices of those stories whom I’m not sharing, ring loudly in my ears.

I give them my time, in my own way. My quiet ramblings through here, my private reading of their inscriptions. They have my time, and I hope you give them yours when this walk with the Bostocks is through, but right now, it’s Susannah’s time...

Susannah: Things were going well for us, the show was popular, Frank thought of the marvellous idea of creating a large ring where the animals would interact with the trainer with the public seated all round. The ringed circus? He invented that, you know. We lived out of caravans, but I didn’t mind. Life was exciting.

Then something changed in Frank. I don’t know if it was the danger of training such ferocious animals every day, but whilst he was always so gentle to them, he began to be ferocious towards me. A cruel violence would seize him at a moment’s notice. As if the lions were somehow inhabiting him, and he channelled them in waves like some fearful ocean. Our tiny caravan became a raft too brittle to hold me safe.
One cold January, in 1893 we quarrelled, well we always did in those days. He stormed out and the next day he came back and began packing up our things, I thought he was taking them to the caravan for our next journey. But I quickly found out he had taken our belongings – many of my things too, our wedding presents, my jewellery – and sold them to elope with a young Miss Florence Read and run off to Germany.

Take the forked path to the right here, and this crumbling path is almost as hard to walk as my story is to tell. I had no idea how long this new level of betrayal had been going on, but this was the final insult. My heart could take no more pain and hardened to hate. Wrath even. I took my case to court. I wanted everyone to know the abuse and fear I had suffered in silence for far too long. I petitioned for a divorce under the grounds of cruelty and I was going to lay bare everything. I didn’t care anymore. My heart was broken. I wanted throw his fate to the hounds of hell and just escape with my children.
Narrator: Do you see this bench coming up straight ahead on the main path? I think it’s best we take a seat for this one.

Thomas Dyson: Will the court please be seated. Bostock vs Bostock: Petition for Judicial Separation. Filed 16th day of March 1893. Particulars of the times and places when and where the acts of cruelty mentioned in the third paragraph of the petition were committed and the nature of the said acts. Delivered pursuant to order dated the 16th day of March 1893.

That in the month of August 1889 at Bangor North Wales the Respondent struck the Petitioner and in the same month the Respondent struck the Petitioner and attempted to throw her out of the caravan.

That in the month of September 1890 at Armagh Ireland the respondent struck the Petitioner and in the month of November 1890 at Leeds he struck her and threw her out of a carriage cutting her hands.

Delivered this 29th Day of March 1893 by Thomas Dyson of Devonshire Chambers, Bishopsgate Street.

Narrator: A Times article from 1893 tells of the arrest of Frank Bostock upon his return from Germany.

Times Journalist: At North London, Frank Charles Bostock, proprietor of a menagerie, was charged on a warrant before Mr Lane Q.C., with stealing a variety of articles, value £75, belonging to his wife Susannah. It was ascertained that the prisoner had gone to Germany, and intended to go on to Russia; but on Friday he returned to London, and was apprehended in Carey-street, Strand. Mr Dyson now appeared for the prosecution and Mr Gilbert Lewis defended.
[Cue Clair de Lune]

Susannah: Take a walk with me. Let's continue to the left on this wide avenue; just leave all that nastiness behind. I love these trees. Well, they're much larger now than they were when I used to walk here, there used to be more light, more sun. But the shade is nice too. It feels like a good place to tell secrets.

I know what you just heard is awful, well it was. But it's funny how things work out. Frank came back from Germany and his ill-fated elopement with Miss Read. I had him arrested, as you know, for stealing our wedding presents and my jewellery to sell to run off with her, so he came back to London to a bit of a surprise. Or not. He should've known me well enough by then to know I wouldn't take that lying down. I had moved out of our Palatine Road house up to Spencer Road by then. I didn't want to stay in that house another minute.

He was released on bail and wanted to talk, at first I wanted none of it, but he seemed such a changed man. Something happened to him in Germany, he seemed to see me, see himself, in a new way. After nine years of marriage and four children you would think you'd seen all the inner corners of each other, but then something refracts the light, shadows change, and suddenly you're confronted with something new.

We decided it was time for us to all have something new, as a family – New York City.

[Cue 'Elite Syncopations' by Scott Joplin]

By that summer we had arrived in the United States. Frank set up near 5th and Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn. We all crammed ourselves into one wagon and in the other two wagons we housed four monkeys, five parrots, three lions, a sheep, and a boxing kangaroo. It was like the old days again. We were building something new together, something larger and more magical than anything we'd attempted before – something that by 1904 would come to be known as Dreamland Amusement Park Coney Island.
Narrator: I’m going to interrupt right now, to bring your attention to the romantic family gravemarker coming up on your right-hand side, which is what we’ve come here to see. The stone lion you see up here on your right is the gravestone of Frank and Susannah Bostock, which is topped quite appropriately by a lion. The lion is peaceful, which represents not only their final peace in death, but also the peaceful hand Frank always maintained with the most dangerous animals in his care. This is a fitting place to hear the conclusion of their story.

Susannah: Those were heady days of shows and spectacle, with the newly available electric lights streaming through the crowds and up the huge Dreamland Tower. It all burnt down in 1911, and no one had the strength or the heart to rebuild it.

By then we had already returned to England. Frank brought with him his new American ideas that took the circus circuit by storm. It seemed everything he touched turned as gold as his buttons. And then something rather shocking happened, well shocking for our family, just a couple years later Frank died in bed of influenza. Of all the damned things. He had survived vicious maulings and death-defying adventures for decades, leaving his body a delta network of river scars – and in the end he died in bed, at a mere 46 years of age. I didn’t expect Frank to leave us so soon, so strangely, and nowhere near a lion’s cage.

I stayed in our house in Kensington and set our children up as they all left to have their own adventures. Frank’s will left us £22,000 and we lived well. Were able to keep our house and even take trips back to New York first-class by steamer. I died the 6th of June 1929, after many long years without my Frank, but now we’re reunited here, under this stone, inside this earth. In this beautiful place. Abney Park, in Stoke Newington, where I’ve always considered my true home lies. You may well want to judge Frank and I for the choices we made, but I wouldn’t trade it for the moon. How could I? Frank gave me the world.

Narrator: This rollercoaster of emotion and love that we’ve heard is as tumultuous a funfair as a relationship can be – and please excuse my pun. However, it’s hard to hear their story without thinking of the funfair, or the rollercoaster. Part excitement, part fear (and of course – in the cold light of morning – the let down of deflated tents and strewn popcorn) all of these remind me of the excitement and the deceit of the circus’ promise. I think this is something we can all identify with. Did I research Susannah’s story without my own twenty-first century feminist rage? Of course not! Did I also read it with a woman’s passion and respect for the complexity of love? Yes.

The one thing researching their story has shown me, is even almost one hundred years on, how immediate and human they felt. We’re not so different today from the Bostocks. We all have ambition, we all fall in love, we all try to make things work with the people we’re silly enough to fall in love with; and we all want the best for our children. Throughout the ages, we are all the same. Spending time in the national archives taught me this about the Bostocks.

As you leave the cemetery today, look to your left, and to your right, these stories aren’t archived for you or me to research, but think, if they were, what stories would they tell us?

[Cue Edith Piaf, ‘Non, je ne regrette rien’]
This walk begins at the south wrought iron gates to Abney Park cemetery, which are located on Stoke Newington Church Street. The listening walker should cue up the audio walk when they are standing directly outside the gates on the sidewalk, facing the cemetery.

[Cue Black Heart Procession – ‘Destroying the City of Hearts’]

We will enter Abney Park cemetery from the gates on Stoke Newington Church Street. Please stand outside these gates while I introduce you to this experience. We are about to go on a journey through the cemetery. Please allow yourself about 45 minutes before dusk for this walk. You don’t want to be trapped behind these gates come nightfall...

We are now ready to leave the city streets and sounds behind us and enter a world of sadness, love, memories, time, mourning, and reflection. Please enter the gates now.

When you reach the main path, turn right.
[Cue Black Heart Procession – ‘The Waiter #2’]

Victorian mourning has something iconic about it, something theatrical and showy, something presentational and, to the modern eye, perhaps rather gratuitous. Even the commonly used term for Victorian mourning practices, the ‘Cult of the Dead’, carries an air of judgement, as if they were enthralled into some form of mania. People who were perhaps even a bit unhinged.

I challenge this.

I invite you to take this walk with me and hear varied voices weigh in on the experience of processing death – both in mourning a loved one or reflection on your own mortality. People who are afraid of death are paradoxically those who are also most afraid of living.
Turn left up here, right by this rubbish bin. When you make a left, then immediately make a right onto this little path.

In his 1809 ‘Essay On Sepulchres’, William Godwin reflected on the importance of physical items that remind us of our loved ones. While carrying no inherent value that can be empirically equated with a person – the connection with things we can see and touch is nonetheless real. He said: “I cannot love my friend, without loving his person. It’s in this way that everything which practically has been associated with my friend, acquires a value from that consideration: his ring, his watch, his books, and his habitation. The value of these things as having been his, is not merely fictitious; they have an empire over my mind; they can make me happy or unhappy; they can torture, and they can tranquilise; they can purify my sentiments, and make me similar to the man I love.”
There will be a bench here up on your left. I'd like you to pause and sit here awhile. Look at the stacking of stones across the way from you. Each of these markers marks a life, a person, a loved one. Take a moment to consider the weight of these residual love traces, how do they make you feel?

[Cue Black Heart Procession – ‘The Water #4’]

Continue now down the path towards the statue of Isaac Watts and the chapel you can see up ahead.

[Cue Black Heart Procession – ‘The Orchid’]
This is the first public statue of the nonconformist hymn-writer and theologian Isaac Watts. It was erected in 1845, just five years after Abney Park cemetery was founded. Watts lived for more than 30 years and died in the Abney Manor House, which once stood where we now stand. While the park is more overgrown now than Lady Abney would’ve kept it, Isaac Watts drew his inspiration for his books and hymns by wandering through the grounds of the manor, walking as we do now through these very woods. Keep walking until you are standing right in front of the doors to the chapel.

Walk around the chapel to your right. We’ll do a complete circle around it so you can appreciate its beauty, even while in ruin. We’ll end up heading towards the path that is now to your left.

“The cemetery is an open space among the ruins, covered in winter with violets and daisies. It might make one in love with death, to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place.”

– Percy Shelley, 1821

That quote reminds me of Abney. How beautiful and private death seems here. Instead of the sweeping flat lawn and endless tract-home stones of so many modern places of internment, here in this garden cemetery there are enclaves, spaces for privacy and reflection. Spaces for death to retain some of the romance and beauty that make mourning a bit more bearable.

And what is modern mourning?

Author and professor Mark Dery noted that, in the nineteenth century, families prepared their own dead for burial by laying the body on a board and washing and dressing it for the wake, which was traditionally held in the front parlour of the family home. By the first decade of the 20th century, however, death was disappearing from everyday life, swept aside in the cultural housecleaning called modernism.
You should now be back around the chapel to the path that was originally on your left, make a
ing a right here around the mound and the bench, onto the path that curves to your right. Then
keep walking straight ahead.

Joanna Ebenstein is director of the Morbid Anatomy Museum in Brooklyn, New York. She
asks us, why is it deemed morbid to be interested in death? Death, after all, is the greatest
mystery of human life, and everyone who ever has lived has died or will die, and so will I. How
could being concerned with such an important thing be seen as morbid?

That simple observation is the basis for what of late could be seen as a resurgence, or neo-
renaissance, in death acceptance. From Joanna’s museum exploring the intersection of death,
art, and oddities in New York City, to The Order of the Good Death, that started in Los
Angeles and has since gone international, which is a consortium of death industry
professionals, academics, artists, and armchair philosophers who all dare to ask this basic
question – why is an experience so universal considered in today’s western culture the last
taboo? How can we crack through this fear into acceptance? By accepting the inevitability of
our death, and the eventual death of everyone who we love, we are being more honest about
the way we live life. Confronting these questions is not an obsession with the macabre or a
wish to die – it is the vibrant singing opposite of this – boldly staring death in the face, holding
these moments of life while we can, and living without fear. It is an exuberant and defiant cry
into the void – I am here now. And now will not be wasted.
At the fork in road up ahead, turn left at the rectangular Grecian pillar.

Turn left onto the main path.

Turn left onto the small path.
There is a stone bench up ahead on the left-hand side. This is the grave of Betsi Cadwaladr.
Let's sit down here.

Betsi Cadwaladr has been called 'the forgotten Florence Nightingale'. Betsi was born in 1789 near Bala, north Wales. She was one of 16 children and her mother died when she was only five years old. Betsi got employed locally as a maid where she learned housework, to speak English, and to play the triple harp. She was not happy there, though, and at age of 14 she escaped through a bedroom window using tied sheets, and left Bala. From there, she then travelled to Liverpool, where she entered into domestic service. Later, she returned to Wales, but then quickly fled again, this time to avoid marriage, opting instead to live with her sister in London. Here in London she first encountered the theatre, which became a great interest to her. In 1820, aged 31, she again returned to Bala – which by then she considered to be quite 'dull', so she ran off again, this time to become a maid to a ship's captain and travelled for many years, visiting South America, Africa, and Australia. At times she performed Shakespeare on board the ship. Despite her stubbornness and independence, Betsi herself claimed that in the course of her travels she was proposed to by over 20 men.

After acquiring nursing training, and at the age of 65, she joined the military nursing service with the intention of working in the Crimea, despite the attempts of her sister Bridget to dissuade her. Florence Nightingale, who came from a privileged background, did not want the Welsh working-class Betsi to go, saying that if Betsi went to the Crimea it would be against her will, and that Betsi would have to be made over to another superintendent. Betsi responded: "Do you think I am a dog or an animal to make me over? I have a will of my own."

Conditions in the Crimea eventually took their toll on Betsi's health, and she returned to Britain in 1855, a year before the war ended, suffering from cholera and dysentery. She lived in London, again at her sister's house, during which time she wrote her autobiography. She died in 1860, five years after her return, and was buried in a pauper's common grave with four others, here where we are sitting now, in Abney Park cemetery. In 2012, the Royal College of Nursing and the Welsh health board that shares Betsi's name installed the bench and headstone here to mark Betsi's final resting place and share her story with visitors to the cemetery. Ok, let's walk again.
Stories like Betsi’s exemplify the meaning of cemeteries for me. They underscore the importance of cemeteries as a space to house memory. Not only our memories of loved ones, but cultural memory. Cemeteries weave the disparate threads of our various lives between strangers and across time, into a tapestry we can all share and read. To spend time in a cemetery space is to be a part of a temporal fabric, and to feel a continuity through the ages. No matter your religious or secular affiliations, or lack thereof, there is something of importance here. A cemetery is not only a spiritual space, it is a time capsule.
Turn left onto small path.

Turn right onto small path.
Literary theorist Roland Barthes’ book *The Mourning Diary*, is the actual diary he kept while processing the loss of his mother in 1977. In it, he makes the following observation about the fracture between the perception of mourning, and the experience itself: “It is said that Time soothes mourning. No, Time makes nothing happen; it merely makes the emotivity of mourning pass. Emotion (emotivity) passes, suffering remains. Mourning does not wear away, because it is not continuous. Grief breaks the continuity of time, ruptures the linear progression of life. It has no distinct beginning nor end, and it cannot be accommodated by our usual concepts of time, psychological evolution, and personal development.”

You’re going to T-up with the large path just ahead, but walk straight on, on the small path right straight towards the chapel.
Turn left up here, around Celtic cross.
Turn right, on the small path at the 4-way stop.

Turn left on the main path.

“Our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them: they can be injured by us, they can be wounded; they know all our penitence, all our aching sense that their place is empty, all the kisses we bestow on the smallest relic of their presence.”

– George Eliot, 1859
Turn right at fork on small path to the right of the fallen pedestal and base.
Ahead to your right you will see some stone steps curving around a mound and a flat monument set into it, which is a tribute to Isaac Watts. Walk towards this mound and find a comfortable place to sit or stand.

[Cue Black Heart Procession – ‘The Waite #2’]

Edgar Allen Poe famously said in The Premature Burial: “The boundaries which divide Life from Death are at best shadowy and vague. Who shall say where the one ends, and where the other begins?” In no other place is the wavering fabric between life and death, between reality and illusion, as viscerally felt as in a cemetery space. Even the most rationally minded person can find themselves believing in ghosts or catching movement in the shadows – caught as we are in this heterotopic atmosphere, that is a separate world from where most people live day to day. In 1742, Edward Young wrote in his epic dark poem Night Thoughts: “By night an atheist half believes a God.” I believe the same may be said for visiting a cemetery; there is a frisson around the edges here. An undeniable liminality that pulls at the imagination and opens up your mind to what’s possible. I am agnostic. (Which essentially means I believe nothing has been unequivocally refuted and any possible truth is possibly true.) Here, in Abney Park cemetery, I feel the full breadth of what that statement actually means. Here I feel the weight of 150 years of mourning; I feel connected to the fabric of humanity, reaching back through time. Here, there is magic.

Now the guided section of this walk has ended. Now it’s time to leave you and for you to find your own way out of the cemetery. I won’t tell you which way to go. Have fun.

[Cue Jason Webley – ‘Dance While the Sky Crashes Down’]

I would like to thank for their generous permission both Pall Jenkins of the Black Heart Procession for use of their songs during this walk and Jason Webley for the exit track ‘Dance While the Sky Crashes Down’.

END
PUBLICATIONS, KEYNOTE LECTURES, AND CONFERENCE PAPERS

Publications


One-hour Keynote Lectures

• Victorian Arcadia: An Evening Lecture on the Victorian Garden Cemetery and Arnos Vale History, May 2018, Arnos Vale Cemetery, Bristol


439


• Gothic Sensibility: Victorian 'Gloomths' and the Contemporary 'Death Curious', October 2015, Barts Pathology Museum, London


• Death and Eroticism: The Darker Side of Desire, March 2015, Barts Pathology Museum, London

• A Theoretical Ghost: Analysing the Uncanny Through the Lens of Charles Dickens' 'Night Walks’, November 2014, Morbid Anatomy Museum, Brooklyn, New York


• Death and Eroticism: The Darker Side of Desire, June 2014, Morbid Anatomy Museum, Brooklyn, New York

Conference Papers

• Victorian Garden Cemeteries Are More Than Just ‘Spooky Graveyards’, A Wake for Jeremy Bentham, UCL, February 2018

• Abney Rambles: Reconceiving a Victorian Garden Cemetery for Contemporary Communities by Way of an Audio Walking Practice, Remember Me Conference, University of York, April 2018
• The Gendered Garden: Sexual Transgression of Women Walking Alone in Cemeteries, Death and the Maiden Conference: Exploring the Relationship Between Women and Death, University of Winchester, July 2017
• ‘Cult of the Dead’ or ‘Death Positive’? Embodied Victorian Mourning Practices and Their Relation to Contemporary Death Acceptance, Skeletons, Stories, and Social Bodies Conference, University of Southampton, March 2017
• ‘Cult of the Dead’ or ‘Death Positive’? An Analysis of Victorian Mourning Ephemera and Its Role in Death Acceptance, American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Hyatt Convention Center, Denver, CO, November 2016
• ‘Woodland Magic’ Pecha Kucha, Walking Women Symposium, Somerset House, July 2016
• ‘Cult of the Dead’ or ‘Death Positive’? An Analysis of Victorian Mourning Ephemera and Its Role in Death Acceptance, Death, Art, and Anatomy Conference, University of Winchester, June 2016
• ‘Cult of the Dead’ or ‘Death Positive’? An Analysis of Victorian Mourning Ephemera and Its Role in Death Acceptance, Death and Culture Conference, University of York, September 2016
• Death & Eroticism: The Darker Side of Desire, Marginal Death Research Symposium, University of York, December 2015
• Panel Chair: Barts Pathology Museum, Interactions With the Real: RHUL Practice-Based Research Conference, November 2015
• Grief Symbolisation, Multiple Becomings and Anachronistic Space: The Cemetery as a Unique Ground for a Walking Practice, TaPRA, Royal Holloway, September 2014


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1. Marriage register, 1887, Frank Bostock and Susannah Bailey (Source: ancestry.co.uk)
2. *The Times* article clipping announcing the charges against Frank Bostock brought by Susannah, his arrest and bail, 1893 (Source: The British Library, newspaper archive)
3. Bostock vs Bostock, Divorce Court Minutes and Petition for Judicial Separation, 1893, 14 pages (Source: British National Archives)
5. Passenger list of steamer to Queenstown Ireland, 1909, for Frank, Edith, Elsie, Constance, Ernestine, Vera and Frances. (Source: ancestry.co.uk)
6. 1911 England census of household (Source: ancestry.co.uk)
7. Frank Bostock’s obituary, Kalgoorlie Western Argus, 1912 (Source: Trove Digitised Newspapers)
8. Passenger list of steamer to New York 1921 for Susannah and two daughters, Elsie and Ivy (Source: ancestry.co.uk)
9. Index of wills 1929, Frank’s will amount and beneficiaries (Source: ancestry.co.uk)
10. Electoral register, 1929, Susannah Bostock, Kensington Mansions address (Source: ancestry.co.uk)