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Between places: the walking-writing method in rural industrial space

II.

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Degree submitted for: Ph.D

October 2019

Keele University

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisors, Emma and Ceri, for their expertise, guidance and patience.

Thank you also to my wife, Charlie, for being so supportive.

The Keele Dawdlers have been an invaluable source of camaraderie, cake and enlightening discussion over the years.

Last but not least, thank you to the Keele Writers for their great company and all the amazing workshop feedback.

Abstract

This thesis utilises the walking-writing method to produce a work of creative non-fiction that explores the issues of memory, time and queer identity in rural spaces. The body of work about the walking-writing method has covered rural spaces and queer geographies, but rarely do they intersect. Structured on a series of walks, or *dérives*, in Quantock Country and along the North Somerset coastline, the thesis returns to the site of Hinkley Point C at varying phases of construction. Beginning with an analysis of Hinkley Point as a vector of what John Urry has termed ‘technological landscape guilt’,¹ the thesis turns to the industrial history of Somerset and the representation of rural spaces as menacing and uncanny.

¹ John Urry, *Consuming Places* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.187.

Introduction

Hinkley Point is squat and solid, three grey-blue boxes on the shore; part of the landscape, a reliable, unchanging fixture that may as well always have been there. As a teenager wandering the coastline, if I walked too far and become lost, those buildings were my north star. I loved them even though we had potassium iodide tablets delivered to our house in the event of ‘a release of radioactive iodine’.² The accompanying letter advised that the tablets should be kept in a memorable and easily accessible place, in case of emergency. Those towers are the reason I return. Likewise, for Smith and Smith, the power station is ‘an inescapable feature of the West Somerset coastline’.³ On their journeys along the coast over a period of two years, they both ‘arrived at a reluctant fondness for the buildings, for there are times when the coast here can be misty and desolate, and Gibberd’s halls, despite their modernity, lend a medieval potency to the scene’ (p.60). It is as much a part of the landscape as the Wick Barrow, Watchet Harbour and Shurton Bars – and the sea itself.

In his 1956 text, ‘The Theory of the Dérive’, Guy Debord sets out a series of apparently stringent guidelines for practising psychogeography through the method of the dérive.⁴ Loosely translated to English as ‘drift’, he describes a dérive as being ‘a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances’ (p.62). The nature of the dérive is

² Anon, 2012, ‘Radiation emergencies’ [Somerset County Council website] (2012) Available at: <<http://www.somerset.gov.uk/policies-and-plans/plans/radiation-emergencies/>> Accessed 25 July 2018.

³ Rosie Smith and Howard Smith, *West Somerset Coast in Watercolours: Brean to Porlock – a Journey* Weston-super-Mare: The Garret Press, 1996), p.59. Further references will appear in the text.

⁴ Guy Debord, ‘Theory of the Dérive’, in *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006), pp.62-66.

playful, random and subversive. More often practised in urban areas, it is a way of reclaiming a place by navigating it in new and unexpected ways that encourage participants to engage with familiar surroundings with a sense of newness (p.62).

This research project began by exploring the beach at Shurton Bars on a series of *dérives*, with the intention of documenting my experience of the coastline near Hinkley Point before the Hinkley C development changes the nature of the place. The Hinkley C development consists of two new nuclear reactors on a 170 hectare site.⁵ The Government approved the deal for Hinkley Point C in 2016 and it is scheduled to begin generating electricity in the year 2025.⁶ Following the construction of a new bypass around Cannington in 2015,⁷ upgrades to the wharf at Combech, the construction of campus homes for Hinkley C employees and preparation work on the site itself, a length of seawater cooling pipes were installed in December 2017, marking the first phase of construction of the reactors.⁸ Drone video footage displays the sheer scale of the pipes and the building site;⁹ people are dwarfed by the size of the nuclear island built for the reactor and, as the shot pans out, we can see that the Hinkley C site is even larger than A and B combined.

⁵ Tammy McAllister, 'Hinkley Point C: Building Challenges.' [BBC News website] (19 March 2013) Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-21687437>> Accessed 25 July 2018.

⁶ Anon, 'Hinkley Point: UK approves nuclear plant deal.' (15 September 2016) [BBC News website] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-37369786>> Accessed 25 July 2018.

⁷ Anon, 'Cannington bypass opens for Hinkley Point nuclear plant.' (17 December 2015) [BBC News website] Available at: <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-35119221>> Accessed 25 July 18.

⁸ Anon, 'About Hinkley Point C' [EDF website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://www.edfenergy.com/energy/nuclear-new-build-projects/hinkley-point-c/about#timeline>> Accessed 25 July 2018.

⁹ Michael Taylor, 'Hinkley Point C: Dramatic drone footage shows the latest development as Britain's first nuclear power plant in over 20 years takes shape' [Somerset Live website] (19 January 2018) Available at: <<https://www.somersetlive.co.uk/news/somerset-news/hinkley-point-c-dramatic-drone-1087823>> Accessed 25 July 2018.

As I proceeded with my walking research, the focus shifted to become an analysis of the walking-writing method across multiple parts of Somerset, particularly sites of rural industry. Rather than plotting routes through the landscape, I wandered wherever my feet took me, using various methods to record my responses. On the earlier walks, I used a notebook to write notes and draw pictures. Finding it difficult to resist the temptation to edit myself, I later switched to a speech-to-text app. As a queer identifying woman, my research challenges the masculinist ideologies that often characterise walking-writing methodologies, in addition to contributing a non-normative voice to the growing body of work on the relationship between walking and writing.

There is a long relationship between walking and creative practice.¹⁰ The walking-writing method has been utilised by performance artists and writers practising across a diverse range of media, such as Rosana Cade, Laura Oldfield Ford, Marina Abramovic, Ceri Morgan, Rebecca Solnit, Morag Rose, Will Self, Iain Sinclair, Phil Smith, Sue Porter, Robert Macfarlane and many others. Indeed, Macfarlane writes that the ‘compact’ between writing and walking ‘is almost as old as literature’,¹¹ citing his favourite examples of walking-writers from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, Macfarlane admires George Borrow, who, Macfarlane writes, ‘was a walker of awesome stamina’ (p.18) who ‘mixed dream, confession, social history and memoir’ in his writing (p.19); Henry Williamson, who wrote *Tarka the Otter* inspired by wandering on Dartmoor after being invalided home from the First World War Macfarlane (p.21); Chaucer, whose ‘convivial pilgrimages [...] became tinged with a morbid historicism’ (p.21) and Thomas Hardy, in whose novels ‘stretches of path can carry memories of a person’ (p.22). These walking-writers are unified, argues

¹⁰ Ceri Morgan, ‘Walking Studies: The Eastern Townships and William S. Messier’s *Dixie*’, *Nottingham French Studies*, Vol.55, No.2, (June 2016), pp.224-238.

¹¹ Robert Macfarlane, *The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot* (London: Penguin, 2013), p.18. Further references will appear in the text.

Macfarlane, by the way they write about ‘the tingle of connection, of walking as séance, of voices heard along the way’ (p.21). Macfarlane values connectedness and is therefore keen to point out that walking-writing is not always an appealing relationship for having attracted, over the years, writers he deems to be ‘delusionists, bigots and other unlovely maniacs’ (p.23). Walking-writing is not, he writes, merely ‘a way of cleansing the besmirched male soul’ (p.23) but rather a way of connecting with those who walk beside, behind and in front of you. Macfarlane admirably sets himself apart from the writers he labels ‘multi-purpose misanthropes [...] nationalists [and] nostalgists’ (p.23). However, such protest would carry more weight if he acknowledged his own privilege as a white, middle-class man tramping – even trespassing, with flask of whisky in hand – across the country during the dead of night (p.8). Walking as an everyday practise is difficult for some people in certain places whilst it is easier for others. There are places and modes of walking which are more easily accessible to able-bodied people than to people with disabilities. Furthermore, large groups of people such as immigrants, people of colour, women and gender non-conforming people, for example, unfortunately are, or feel, at greater risk of violence in certain spaces and therefore cannot walk freely. Such privilege, or the lack of it, is explored by Rosana Cade in ‘Walking: Holding’.¹²

‘Walking: Holding’ is a performative piece which explores ‘the experience of queer and minority identities in urban environments’ (Cade 2018). The project invites volunteers to walk the city whilst holding hands, first with the artist herself (Rosana Cade) and then with a range of local people representing diverse sexualities and genders. Cade has said that she feels she is perceived differently depending upon whose

¹² Rosana Cade, ‘Walking: Holding’ [artist website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://rosanacade.wixsite.com/performance/walking-holding>> Accessed 24 July 2018. Further references will appear in the text.

hand she is holding, and therefore that when the person changed it also ‘changed’ her identity (Cade 2018). Cade has said that one of the aims of Walking: Holding was to ‘ask questions of the social diversity and cultural codes within each town that it takes place’ (Cade 2018). I seek to ask such questions of non-urban communities. A number of walking-writers have explored non-urban space. For example, Phil Smith, Ceri Morgan, Rebecca Solnit who walks rural, urban and suburban areas in *Wanderlust*,¹³ Jean Sprackland, who documented her walks on Ainsdale Sands in *Strands*,¹⁴ and John Wylie, who uses the walking-writing method on the North Somerset coast path to explore issues of performativity.¹⁵ Additionally the Poetry Pin project originated at Hinkley Point,¹⁶ and has increased its range to bring geolocated poetry trails to multiple locations in the South West: Exeter, Bideford, Taunton, Weston-super-Mare and the Old Mineral Line on Exmoor (Poetry Pin 2018). Members of the public are invited to contribute to the poetry trails (Poetry Pin 2018). Each poem can only be read at the location to which the author ‘pinned’ it, creating an interactive, textual trail (Poetry Pin 2018). However, there are few walking-writers who work with a focus on queer perspectives within rural communities and this is the niche my research fills.

More recently, mental health practitioners have begun to research and encourage mindful ‘walking’,¹⁷ which involves concentrating on every sense: the breeze on your skin, texture of the ground underfoot, smells and sounds of the world in order to obtain

¹³ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (London: Verso, 2002).

¹⁴ Jean Sprackland, *Strands: A Year of Discoveries on the Beach* (London: Vintage Books, 2013).

¹⁵ John Wylie, ‘A single day’s walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol.30, No.2 (June 2005), pp.234-247.

¹⁶ Anon., ‘Welcome to the Poetry Pin Project’ [Poetry Pin website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://poetrypin.info/>> [Accessed 25 July 2018].

¹⁷ R.A. Gotink, K.S. Hermans, N. Geshwind et al., ‘Mindfulness and Mood Stimulate Each Other in an Upward Spiral: a mindful walking intervention using experience sampling,’ *Mindfulness* (2016: 7) pp.1114-1122.

a meditative state. My own walking-writing method originated because, like Rebecca Solnit, I found the rhythm and exertion of walking to be meditative.¹⁸ Walking-writing is also a particularly useful method for generating place writing, and it is a method which can be shared with others as part of a group (Keele Dawdlers).

The work is divided into two chapters dedicated to different areas of Somerset: The first chapter covers Steart Marshes and the beach up to Hinkley Point; the second, Nether Stowey and part of the Quantock Hills. Together, these areas represent the diversity of the Somerset landscape and industry in the county. Steart Marshes are a relatively new development funded by the World Wildlife Trust, which describes the marshes as a ‘working wetland’.¹⁹ The land used for the development was previously agricultural land – largely fields – on a headland intruding into Bridgwater Bay. Today, the marshes not only provide a buffer to rising sea levels, but also a salt marsh used for raising lamb and beef; and its waters are used for cultivating fish stocks (World Wildlife Trust 2018). Other parts of the site have been designed to encourage tourism and they include several information boards and access to multiple viewpoints from which to look out over the sea onto the islands of Steep Holm and Flat Holm and, beyond that, on a clear day, the south coast of Wales.

Along the coastline towards the west, the beach is a mixture of sand and pebbles, characterised by a series of limestone intrusions called ‘bars’, hence the name Shurton Bars. At low tide, the sea itself is almost too far away to see, little more than a thin silver line on the horizon, and it is possible to walk miles out across rippling mudflats. However, the beach and parallel footpath are fenced off to prevent unwanted access to Hinkley Point in the west. The beach is now home to several large signs exclaiming

¹⁸ Solnit, *Wanderlust* pp.14-29.

¹⁹ Anon, ‘Steart Marshes’ *World Wildlife Trust*, [World Wildlife Trust website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/steart-marshes/>> Accessed 4 July 2018. Further references will appear in the text.

‘You are entering a nuclear site’, their posts sunk into the sand.

Roughly five miles inland, Nether Stowey is a quiet village made up of cobbled streets and ancient cottages, where houses jut out over the stream that runs down the high street. There is a primary school, a church, several pubs and, on the edge of the village, a cheese factory. In the past decade, new housing estates have sprung up as farmers have sold off land to companies such as Barratt Homes, and these new suburbs are referred to derisively by locals as ‘Legoland’, because each house looks the same.

Nether Stowey is part of Quantock Country, a geographical area which covers the Quantock Hills and the ring of villages at the edge.²⁰ The Quantock Hills themselves are a relatively small ridge, formed of slates and sandstones (pp.28-38), heading southwards from the sea towards Bridgwater. During the spring, the hills are made a vibrant purple from growing heather. They are home to roe deer, which are not easily scared because they are used to visiting humans. The height of the hills affords a commanding view across the Somerset Levels and towards the coastline, where Hinkley Point seems small compared to the sea behind it.

The first chapter explores the definition of the ‘countryside’ and the way industrial sites contribute to what John Urry terms ‘technological landscape guilt’.²¹ This term refers to an environment which ‘is seen as inappropriate for visual consumption’ due to ‘matter which is out of place’ (p.187). He cites ‘the viewing of a nuclear power station on an attractive coastline’ (specifically, Heysham power station in Morecambe Bay) as one example of this and, in contrast, ‘farm buildings next to a high technology park’ (p.187) as another.

²⁰ Peter Haggett, *The Quantocks* (Chew Magna: The Point Walter Press, 2012), p.2. Further references will appear in the text.

²¹ Urry, *Consuming Places*, p.187

Mainstream representations of rural spaces portray them as pastoral idylls, and E. Melanie DuPuis argues that such idyllic images are created through an exclusionary process rendering rural places ‘devoid of rowdy teenagers, homosexuals, the homeless, or women working the land’.²² Instead of representing the true range of rural diversity, the pastoral image has become associated with ‘order, purity, middle-class prosperity, family and masculinity’ (p.127). However, the other side of this idyllic portrayal is the fact that rural spaces are often laced with menace in the work of Agatha Christie and the popular television show *Midsomer Murders*. Jack Halberstam, whose work on gender and sexuality documents the experience of existing and walking within a female masculine body,²³ identifies as ‘one of those people for whom lonely rural landscapes feel laden with menace’.²⁴ A sense of rural menace manifests itself in my work as a sense of the uncanny and the haunting image of Hinkley Point as an ‘obsessive presence’.²⁵ In addition, the female masculine body provokes a reaction of ‘unbelonging’,²⁶ not dissimilar to the reaction of technological landscape guilt. Gender non-confirming bodies, such as Halberstam’s, are unfortunately particularly at risk of violence: Stonewall’s Trans Report concludes that 41% of trans people and 31% of gender non-conforming people have experienced a hate crime or incident because of their gender identity or presentation.²⁷ Halberstam argues that the female masculine body is subject to a different, more stringent kind of gaze, noting that people often

²² Melanie E. DuPuis, ‘Landscapes of desires?’ in Paul Cloke, Terry Marsden, and Patrick Mooney, eds. *The Handbook of Rural Studies* (London: Sage Publications, 2006), pp.124-132.

²³ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998).

²⁴ Judith Halberstam, *In A Queer Time and Place* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005), p.22.

²⁵ Nicole Brossard, *Baroque at Dawn* trans. Patricia Claxton (Toronto: McClelland & Stuart Ltd, 1997), p.45.

²⁶ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p.6.

²⁷ Chaka L. Bachmann, and B. Gooch, ‘LGBT in Britain: Trans Report’ *Stonewall* [pdf through Stonewall website] (2017) Available at: <<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt-in-britain-trans.pdf>> Accessed 26 July 2018, p.8.

appear ‘frightened’ by Halberstam’s presence in designated female spaces, such as restrooms.²⁸ It is not the body itself, but other reactions to the non-conforming body that create the ‘sense of menace’ in rural places, which are generally less populated and therefore less diverse than urban spaces.

In Chapter 2, I write about rural spaces and landscape, using the walking-writing method to examine memory in terms of being its own place and space.²⁹ Solnit imagines human memory as a place; ‘memory, like the mind and time, is unimaginable without physical dimensions, to imagine it as a physical place is to make it into a landscape in which its contents are located’ and, therefore, the act of remembering can be imagined as a real act: as walking (p.77). In practise, this means that ‘to walk the same routes again can mean to think the same thoughts again’ (p.77). During my walk in Nether Stowey, I create this link explicitly between walking and remembering by walking routes that I regularly walked during my childhood: to my old house from the local primary school; to the park; and to the library where my mother worked. In addition, I create an explicit link between the present and past via a shared notebook, which my grandfather, who was a policeman, used while walking on his beat and which I used in turn to record my own walking notes.

In ‘The Theory of the Dérive’, Debord states that ‘the average duration of a dérive is one day, considered the time between two periods of sleep’ (p.64). This may appear prescriptive, but the nature of psychogeography is playful, and he contradicts himself numerous times throughout the text. According to Debord’s interpretation of a day, as being ‘the time between two periods of sleep’, a day could be almost anything. It could be five minutes in between a brief period of waking; it could be an hour between

²⁸ Jack Halberstam, ‘On Pronouns.’ [blog post] (September 3 2012) Available at: <<http://www.jackhalberstam.com/on-pronouns/>> Accessed 23 July 2018.

²⁹ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p.77.

naps; or 36 hours without sleep. Debord even states that a day is not linked to a 'solar day' (p.64) and, therefore, the 'day' could in fact fall during night. Furthermore, he writes that 'a *dérive* often takes place within a deliberately limited period of a few hours, or even fortuitously during fairly brief moments; or it may last for several days without interruption' (p.64). A *dérive*, therefore, can take place over almost any length of time. This is the first indication that Debord's guidelines are not supposed to be taken literally, and that his 'Theory of the *Dérive*' is more playful than its academic style might cause it to appear. However, it is important to note that the original text has been translated from French, and therefore some nuances in meaning may have been lost. Additionally, the French mode of writing is traditionally more formally academic than English.

Not Just Straight White Men

Overall, this thesis aligns itself with debates in what Hayden Lorimer and Ceri Morgan term ‘walking studies’,³⁰ about accessibility and the inclusion of non-normative voices in the body of walking-writing work. It will argue in opposition to Debord’s assumption that walking is a method of understanding exclusively urban spaces, by drawing upon rural geographies³¹ and, in particular, queer rural geographies. Phil Smith has coined the term ‘mythogeography’, which, he writes in *On Walking*, is ‘an experimental approach to places as if they were sites for performances, crime scenes or amateur excavations [...] of multiple layers of treasure’.³² It is its own discipline, separate to psychogeography because it embraces ‘both respectable and non-respectable knowledges’ (p.59). Therefore, although it is ‘drawn from psychogeography’, it is separate to it and, unlike psychogeography, it seeks to ‘reconnect with some of its original political edge’.³³ Smith also deems psychogeography to have become ‘detached from activist meaning and reconfigured as a literary practice’ (Smith 2015). The crucial difference is that ‘there can be no mythogeographers or mythogeography departments. Only people interested in experimenting. A useful archive of mythogeography would be a contradiction in terms’ (Smith 2014, p.60). Here, Smith touches upon the key contradiction in psychogeography which is that, by writing about the movement, we are turning it into work rather than a playfully subversive anarchic

³⁰ Hayden Lorimer, ‘Walking: New Forms and Spaces for Studies of Pedestrianism’ in Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, eds. *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp.19-33; Ceri Morgan, 2016. ‘Walking Studies: The Eastern Townships and William S. Messier’s *Dixie*’, *Nottingham French Studies*, Vol.55, No.2 (June 2016), pp.224-238.

³¹ Michael Woods, *Rural Geography* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2005); Ceri Morgan, ‘Walking Studies: The Eastern Townships and William S. Messier’s *Dixie*’ (June 2016).

³² Phil Smith, *On Walking and Stalking Sebald* (Axminster: Triarchy Press, 2014), p.59. Further references will appear in the text.

³³ Phil Smith, ‘Not Psychogeography’ [Mythogeography website] (2015) Available at: <<http://www.mythogeography.com/not-psychogeography.html>> Accessed 20 July 2018. Further references will appear in the text.

activity. Smith therefore positions mythogeography away from psychogeography by embracing an anti-elitist approach, which is focused on the collective and public participation with a strong emphasis on experimentation, play and sense of place.

The most important ‘rule’ in mythogeography, writes Phil Smith in *On Walking*, is that there are no rules: ‘I would not want to pretend that there is any one right way to walk [...] so long as your walking does not exclude the walking of others’ (p.12).

However, the very notion of walking for the sole purpose of experimentation excludes those who cannot afford the time to abandon all responsibilities to walk aimlessly, and it also excludes those for whom it might not be safe to wander. Indeed, despite his intentions, Phil Smith is unfortunately ‘othering’ these walkers.

However, the increasing number of female psychogeographers and walking-writing practitioners are challenging the privilege inherent within psychogeography, mythogeography and walking-writing more broadly, to make these practices more inclusive, accessible and less elitist. For example, Morag Rose formed the Loiterers’ Resistance Movement, a Manchester based psychogeographic group which identifies its aim as ‘to decode the palimpsest of the streets, uncover hidden history and discover the extraordinary in the mundane’ through the method of drifting.³⁴ The LRM note that ‘the streets belong to everyone’ and run public dérives every month, to which everyone is invited. Public engagement is encouraged. Additionally, Ceri Morgan’s walking-writing method, which draws upon the collective approach of La Traversée, a Montreal-based geopoetics research group, combines elements of psychogeography and geocriticism. Morgan introduced geopoetics to Keele University, where her work has led to the formation of ‘the Dawdlers’; a walking-writing group with the aim of ‘using walking

³⁴ Morag Rose, ‘About The LRM’ *The Loiterer’s Resistance Movement* [LRM website] (n.d) Available at: <<http://thelrm.org/index>> Accessed 23 May 2018.

methodologies' to facilitate creative writing.³⁵

Contemporary walking studies challenge class, gender-conforming and able-bodied privilege and aims to make the field more democratic by redefining what is meant by 'walking'. Drawing on the work of Sue Porter, Morgan describes walking as 'not necessarily a bipedal activity' (Morgan 2019, forthcoming). Phil Smith also notes that, for his work, walking includes 'wanders that involve the use of prostheses, mechanical limbs or wheelchairs' (Smith 2014, p.7). Despite the many changes and reanimations which psychogeography has been through since its inception, its core principle of questioning and subverting the built environment remains.

Another key tenet that has endured since Debord published 'The Theory of the Dérive' is the urban character of psychogeography and walking-writing methodologies in general. Indeed, in 'The Theory of the Dérive', Debord writes that 'wandering in open country is naturally depressing', in part because 'the interventions of chance are poorer than anywhere else' (p.63). Debord's rather unfair characterisation of rural spaces leads him to conclude that 'the maximum area' of the 'spatial field' (p.65) suitable for a dérive 'does not extend beyond the entirety of a large city and its suburbs. At its minimum it can be limited to a small self-contained ambiance: a single neighbourhood or even a single block of houses if it's interesting enough' (p.65), notably excluding the rural.

However, the line between the urban versus the rural is not so clear cut, as Raymond Williams notes; 'there is a wide range of settlements between the traditional poles of country and city: suburb, dormitory town, shanty town, industrial estate. Even the idea of the village, which seems simple, shows in actual history a wide variation: as

³⁵ Ceri Morgan, 'Walking and writing memoryscapes', in Sarah De Nardi et al (Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Memory and Place* (2019, forthcoming).

to size and character, and internally in its variation between dispersed and nuclear settlements'.³⁶ Furthermore, there is no such thing, in the UK, as a landscape untouched by humans. Every area of this country has been shaped by industrial development and human habitation of some kind; even our 'wilderness' areas such as the Yorkshire Moors are presently designated National Parks, looked after by county councils and charities. Before this, they were sites of ancient human habitation and industry, foraging, gathering or worship.

West Somerset was an industrialised area for hundreds of years and many old lime kilns, mines, mills and factories can be observed and visited in the county today. Nowadays, these spaces are often ignored altogether, or renovated to include tea rooms and other exhibits which gloss over the industrial past. In 'The Tourist Gaze and the Environment', John Urry argues that rural places have, in collective cultural memory, been reinterpreted as pristine landscapes to gaze upon, rather than as the sites of work and industry.³⁷ He argues that the term 'landscape' has come to mean 'the whole natural scenery' (p.175) and that tourism is concerned with 'visually consuming that very environment' (p.173). The tourism industry brings approximately £1.28 billion into Somerset annually and can be said to account for around 10% of employment in the county.³⁸ The Visit Somerset Organization identifies walking and cycling routes, agricultural heritage, attractive small towns and villages, and wildlife as key tourist attractors (p.5): all features which emphasise the rural idyll but ignore the work that has

³⁶ Raymond Williams *The Country and the City* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.1.

³⁷ John Urry, 'The Tourist Gaze and the Environment' in *Consuming Places*, pp.173-192. Further references will appear in the text.

³⁸ Anon, 'Tourism in Somerset: A Destination Management Plan,' [pdf available through Visit Somerset website] (2015) Available at: <<https://www.visitsomerset.co.uk/dbimgs/Tourism%20in%20Somerset%20-%20A%20Destination%20Management%20Plan.pdf>> Accessed 13 April 2018, p.4. Further references will appear in the text.

always taken place in rural spaces.³⁹ Sites of rural industry, such as Hinkley Point, are condemned as being contributors to ‘technological landscape guilt’. Presenting a realistic representation of the diverse range of bodies that exist in rural spaces can, therefore, contribute to undoing the myth of the countryside as being a ‘pastoral idyll’ and a ‘passive’ space for consumption.

The construction of Hinkley Point C provided the inspiration – and the geographical starting point – for this project and has remained a recurring image throughout. The eye can’t help but be drawn to it; the unnatural grey boxes are part of the landscape and a way of orienteering oneself within it. The political fighting between the Government and environmentalist groups over its construction has also imbued the site with an almost symbolic presence: of modernity and new technologies, but also of a step backwards away from clean energy. In the future it will be a geological marker for the Anthropocene, ‘a distinct geological epoch shaped by humankind’,⁴⁰ linking countless generations of people through construction, employment and future clean-up. It has what Nicole Brossard terms an ‘obsessive presence’ (p.45) in my writing, which can perhaps be attributed to the danger it poses in addition to the necessary function it fulfils. Like me, Brossard is a lesbian feminist writer for whom water, particularly the St Lawrence River, plays a significant part in her novel *Baroque at Dawn*. In *Baroque at Dawn*, Nicole Brossard describes the St Lawrence River as an ‘obsessive presence. An argument that sweeps away all misgivings’ (p.45); Hinkley Point has caused arguments and created misgivings, prompting emotional protests against its existence. In my writing it is also a comforting, nostalgic presence. For Morgan, ‘affect or emotion can

³⁹ DuPuis, ‘Landscapes of desires?’, p.126

⁴⁰ Tom Bristow, *The Anthropocene Lyric* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p.2.

play a key role in people's experiencing of space and place'.⁴¹ The emotional draw of Hinkley Point gives it a significant presence in memory, an outwardly quiet yet muscular presence that disguises the ongoing work inside of its halls. It has become a focal point on the North Somerset coastline, a site, and a sight, to which I obsessively return.

⁴¹ Ceri Morgan, Writing Heartlands and Nicole Brossard's *Hier* *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (2011), p.198.

Chapter 1: Steart Marshes, Shurton Bars and Hinkley Point

‘The sea is the womb
That cradles the grave
That rocks the tomb
That births the wave
That smooths the bed
That lays the dead.’ – Somerset folk tale⁴²

On the map, the sea rests at the top: a pale, static blue that belies the life it contains. The River Parrett comes from its wide mouth, opening at Steart Point onto the flats. My finger follows the river as it snakes down on the right-hand side, a series of ‘c’ shaped curves bisecting the town of Bridgwater. The river rushes, muddy and full, past riverside flats and industrial estates, containing shopping trolleys, old pennies and silver glimpses of fleeting fish. On the south side of the town, the river is crossed by the thick blue rope of the M5 as it runs parallel to the railway line and then, narrowing, on the Levels past small villages and farms like Dunwear, Hay Moor, Burrowbridge, Stathe.

Finally, it slinks into the bottom right-hand corner of the map sheet, towards unknown territory. It is water which has decided Somerset’s character. The levels as they flood in winter and drain in summer; the river which brought trade and industry to the county; the sea which physically shapes the county’s shores and less directly the economy and way of life. This particular stretch of coast has also been home to an oil

⁴² Sharon Jacksties, *Somerset Folk Tales*, (Stroud: The History Press, 2011), p.20.

retort at Kilve; lime kilns; mining; ports; and fishing industries, all supplied, in one way or another, by the sea. And it is always the sea that draws me back.

I drive from Bridgwater early in the morning, before the rush hour begins. The A39 cuts through the landscape, with wide corners and 60mph limits that speed me through the suburbs of Durleigh, then the villages of Cannington and Combwich, heading past farms at Keenethorne and Fiddington and Gunter's Grove. The necessity of car travel across rural areas is one reason why they are not always considered good places for exploring walking methodologies; to travel by car disconnects the body from the landscape and removes the embodied experience of walking. In *Wanderlust*, Rebecca Solnit laments the common usage of the car as a mode of transport, stating that 'I routinely see people drive and take the bus remarkably short distances, often distances that could be covered more quickly by foot'.⁴³ Solnit broadly argues that walking is a form of empowerment, and that we must fight against the encroaching influence of machines upon human movement in order to 'resist both oppressions and the erosion of the vital body in action' (p.xiv). However, in her assumptions about other people's lives, Solnit displays a problematic ableism, and she takes this further by writing that 'walking is no longer, so to speak, how many people think' (p.259) suggesting that as humans we have lost our ability to walk or think and that the two are so intrinsically connected; if you cannot walk, you cannot think.

In addition, Solnit's views demonstrate a Westernised view of walking. It is untrue that every place in the world 'is no longer on the scale of our bodies, but on that of our machines' (p.258). Furthermore, bodies versus machines is a binary opposition that disguises any subtle connections between the two. Medical advances such as pacemakers mean that 'bodies' and 'machines' are not always separate. Indeed, Solnit

⁴³ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p.259. Further references will appear in the text.

recognises this but only to lament again that ‘it is the unaugmented body that is rare now, and that body has begun to atrophy as both a muscular and a sensory organ’ (p.258). Again, this is problematic in its assumption that only a certain kind of body, and therefore of walking, is the ‘right’ one.

Furthermore, driving is itself an embodied experience, merely a different type of embodied experience to walking.⁴⁴ In his essay ‘Driving in the City’, written in response to de Certeau’s 1980 text ‘Walking in the City’,⁴⁵ Nigel Thrift argues that de Certeau’s theory must be updated to include driving, arguing that ‘this system of automobility has also produced its own embodied practices of driving and ‘passenger’ each with their own distinctive histories still waiting to be written’ (p.46). In response to Solnit’s argument that a ‘postpedestrian city [...] risks becoming a dead language’, Thrift notes that ‘she may be missing other languages which also have something to say’ (p.44). The experience of driving is an emotional, complex act which is still interconnected with the environment despite lack of feet upon the ground (p.47). For Thrift, driving is an act which ‘produce[s] new bodily horizons’ (p.46) because, in an environment which is designed to accommodate cars, it forces the driver and passenger(s) to see the landscape from another point of view, over the top of the dashboard or through a window at the speed of 40-60mph. However, Thrift makes similar ableist assumptions as Solnit does about the type of embodied experience that driving entails, and the drivers in his new language are inevitably middle-class employees with the money to afford up-to-date cars which come with the latest software. Driving a 1985 Peugeot 205, for example (such is my car for this journey) is a

⁴⁴ Nigel Thrift, ‘Driving in the City’, *Theory, Culture & Society*. Vol.21, No.4-5 (1 October 2004), pp.41-59. Available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0263276404046060> Accessed 3 July 2018. Further references will appear in the text.

⁴⁵ Michel de Certeau, ‘Walking in the City’, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, 1988), pp.91-110.

very different physical experience. Lack of power steering means the car is heavy and clunky to handle, and manoeuvres such as reverse parking and performing a turn in the road leave me with a, not unpleasant, ache in my arms as if I have carried something for a long way. There are few ergonomic features in this car; the headrest is too short, meaning it presses into the back of my neck, and I have to stretch my arms almost to their fullest extent in order to reach the steering wheel. Upon taking a corner slightly too fast, I feel the car roll to the side. The fields, full of bright yellow rapeseed crops, flash past. Up ahead, a tractor pulls out of a junction and I am forced to follow it until there is enough space to overtake, the angry face of the man in the car behind is visible in my rear view mirror.

The A39 was once a small lane called ‘New Road’, traversed by horses and carts, passing the now defunct Sandford Farm before cutting up to Cannington, and then back down past a flour mill, waterworks, and multiple small farms.⁴⁶ It was a long journey between the ports on the coast and the brickworks in Bridgwater. The newer parts of the A39 were fields at that time. Later, parts for Hinkley Point A and B were transported along this road when the stations were built during the late 1950s-1960s.

People left their houses to take photos and watch huge lorries carry the generators, take photos and share stories. The *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser* wrote about the ‘new road to Hinkley’ on Saturday 13th July 1957, noting that the new road would be six miles long and cost £461,000 to complete.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Bridgwater, Somerset* [map]. 1889. Scale not given. OS County series. Available at <<https://www.old-maps.co.uk>> Accessed 11 June 2018.

⁴⁷ Anon, ‘New Road to Hinkley’, *Taunton Courier and Western Advertiser*, 13 July 1957 [British Newspaper Archive] Accessed at <<https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk>> 21 July 2018.

My stomach flips as the car crests the hill at speed. My back is warm against the woven fabric seat and, since there is no air conditioning in the car, I have both windows open and the wind roars in my ears. The ripe smell of manure fills my nostrils; there is a tractor spreading muck in a nearby field. The smooth handle of the gearstick is worn from years of use, the numbers long since rendered invisible. It is muscle memory that guides the gears into their correct places, that eases off the accelerator before I even need think about it. In Cannington, a new exit from the roundabout stretches out to a new bypass that will create a shorter route up to Hinkley Point. Designed to cut the levels of construction traffic through the village, it curves gracefully upwards, with views towards the Quantock Hills. Although I could go that way, I wish, instead, to retrace my old school bus route, which was once as familiar to me as the back of my hand. Here is the Millennium Forest where, sixteen years ago, I went with my class and planted a tree. The teacher helped me guide the sapling into the hole, and I filled in the soil and patted flat the damp earth. The trees are grown now. Free of their plastic guideposts, they clamour towards the sky. It is early winter, and they are bare. I do not know which one is mine.

As a result of the Hinkley Point C development, archaeologists have uncovered evidence of a large Iron Age settlement here on the coast. Cotswold Archaeology is the company which carried out the dig at the site, beginning in March 2012 and running until May 2016.⁴⁸ They uncovered an extensive settlement with a roundhouse, pastoral enclosure, and evidence of grain production. Remains of Iron Age pottery, including Aegean pottery, evidenced that they traded between other settlements. Today the site is

⁴⁸ Anon., ‘Archaeology at Hinkley Point’, *Cotswold Archaeology* [blog] (n.d) Available at: <<https://archaeologyathinkleypoint.wordpress.com/>> Accessed 20 June 2018.

inaccessible; fenced off and marked by multiple signs stating ‘YOU ARE NOW ENTERING A NUCLEAR SITE’ upon which someone has drawn several large skulls and crossbones. A yellow sticky note is stuck to another sign and, in faded writing, it reads: ‘love knows no gender’. The wind threatens to blow me off my feet. I was so near to Hinkley, it looked to be within touching distance – a squat solid surprisingly large brick on the shore, and yet so far. A signed diversion routes me away from the beach, up to the village, through fields.

Retreating to follow the diversion, I am struck by an overwhelming sense of dread; I can’t help but imagine the power station blowing up, with me directly in the radius of the explosion. No one knows I am here – only that I am vaguely ‘walking around Somerset’ – and would not know what had happened to me. I am alone, but for the thousands of workers working in the halls less than a mile away, yet we cannot reach out to each other and they do not know I am here, while their work and presence is made clear to me only through the low buzzing of power lines above my head.

The path leads me through the ‘Wildlife Area’, a contradictory patch of managed land where trees and wild flowers are allowed to grow. The path cuts through patches of tall grass. It is a muddy track overarched by willow trees with branches that have been manipulated to grow in an arch shape, as if I am walking through a Disney-like forest clearing. Ahead of me, a pheasant emerges from the overgrowth and then freezes, staring at me, and I, at it. Then it turns and runs down the path, and I follow it. It stops occasionally, looks back to see I am still following, then carries on running. I follow it in this manner for maybe a hundred metres until a plane flies low overhead, presumably preparing to land at Bristol, and the sound of the engines scares the bird away.

On the other side of Hinkley Point, at Lilstock, the wind flaps and whistles in my ears. There are only two other people here, standing next to a car and, I assume, deciding against a walk, but as I pass them they greet me. They explain they are from Surfers Against Sewage, doing an organised litter pick, but the wind has scared most participants away. Would I mind taking a plastic bag and some gloves, and picking litter as I enjoy my walk?

Of course, I say. Why not? We take carrier bags, which blow out like kites, and head to the beach. It's pebbly, hard going. There are several other people with bags, scattered around. Hinkley Point dominates the coast. The sea is grey, reflecting the dull sky. We walk towards it. There is a depressing amount of litter lining the beach. We walk towards the sea first, which draws me towards it. I pick up the large items I see – unidentifiable white plastic sheets, nets and beer rings, discarded picnic equipment, DUPLO blocks, drinks bottles and mermaid's tears. There's something that looks like a bit of a car.

Above the beach, the grass headland. From this vantage point, we can see the curve of the coast, Lilstock to the west, Hinkley Point to the east. If it were a clear day, we would be able to see the coast of Wales across the sea, about 10 miles away. Almost close enough to swim over. If I swam west and did not stop, I would eventually reach the shores of Québec. I stand on the sea's edge, socks and shoes in hand, and scrunch my toes up onto the hard sand. The tide has not long departed, and the sand is wet, cold and densely packed. My bare feet leave shallow indentations next to other beachgoers' handprints and sandcastles: soon the tide will come back in and smooth them over, as if we were never here at all.

Arriving in a small hamlet called Knighton, the road is too potholed for my car so I abandon it at the top of the lane and walk the rest of the way. Knighton's houses are

old cottages, with deeds going back to the 1700s. Others are expensive new builds, constructed toward the end of the lane on what was once farmland. The road is paved to begin with, but after a mile it turns to unpaved farm track. I cross the farm yard, which is abandoned, the barns shuttered and locked. There is a footpath leading to the beach at Shurton Bars. Covered with sharp red stones that stick into the soles of my shoes, the path is bordered on each side by fields of wheat rustling in the breeze. It feels good to stretch my legs after the drive and I make good time, reaching the bottom of the hill feeling woolly mouthed and out of breath. Hinkley Point looms over the beach, three grey cubes that almost merge into the drizzle and cloudy sky. I struggle over the pebbles. A bit further down the beach, there is one person walking a dog but no one else in sight. I can hear the distant sounds of construction. The sea wall lines the beach, and groups of seagulls flock together on top of it, in a row. They scatter when I stand on the sea wall and watch the waves folding over each other, pummelling the beach, wrinkling the sand and then smoothing it out again in a never-ending process which, John Wylie writes, means ‘their incessant production is also their apparent erasure’.⁴⁹ For Wylie, the sea is in a constant process of transformation, ‘always different, always the same’ (p.241). Kevin Meethan writes that liminal spaces can represent a border, a transitional space or a temporal change and the coast, particularly the beach and the sea, represents all of these things.⁵⁰ He also emphasises that the sea is a place of work and danger, and this is represented in local folktales which serve as warnings. The story of the monster fish, for example, served as a tale to warn people away from the shifting Berrow

⁴⁹ John Wylie, ‘A single day’s walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol.30, No.2 (June 2005), pp.234-247.

⁵⁰ Kevin Meethan, ‘Walking the Edges: Towards a Visual Ethnography of Beachscapes’ *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-Between* eds. Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts. (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.69-86. Further references will appear in the text.

Sands.⁵¹ The sea can also be a liminal space between the realms of life and death; ‘the sea is the womb which cradles the grave’ (p.20).

The presence of Hinkley Point, currently neither power station nor beach, a border between public and private land, between beach and industry, between the wild sea and the manmade engine halls, means this particular beach is not popular with tourists. John Urry terms this ‘technological landscape guilt’ (p.187), a phenomenon undermining the building of the countryside’s ‘place-myth’ as a relaxing place for people to relax and generally get away from the world and back to nature.⁵² This sense of reinvention, danger, mortality and liminal existence explains why I was so drawn to the sea as a teenager. Adolescence is not only an important boundary between childhood and adulthood, but, for me, it was also a period spent in the figurative ‘closet’. The closet is a liminal space representing a transition between straight and queer existence.⁵³ Furthermore, as part of the constant process of coming out to every new person one meets, the closet contains multiple different personas embodied between countless before-and-afters. In making this choice – to be ‘out’, or not, over and over again – a person adopts multiple personas and can simultaneously perform all of them in various different contexts, often more than one at a time. We are a different person ‘before’ to whom we become ‘after’ leaving the closet. The necessity of adopting various personas in different temporalities is partly responsible for the creation of what Halberstam has termed ‘queer temporality’.⁵⁴ Halberstam argues that the never- ending process of coming out results in ‘a stretched out adolescence’ (p.153) which ‘challenges

⁵¹ Jacksties *Somerset Folk Tales*, p.15.

⁵² John Urry, ‘The Making of the Lake District’ in *Consuming Places*, pp.193-210. Further references will appear in the text.

⁵³ Dianne Dentice, and Michelle Dietert, ‘Liminal Spaces and the Transgender Experience’, *Theory in Action*, Vol.8 No.2 (April 2015), pp.69-96.

⁵⁴ Judith Halberstam, *Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2005) p.152. Further references will appear in the text.

the conventional binary formulation of a life narrative divided by a clear break between youth and adulthood' (p.153). In addition, Halberstam writes, 'queer temporality disrupts the normative narratives of time that form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all of our modes of understanding' (p.152), referring to typical milestones such as marriage and becoming a parent. However, since same-sex marriage and adoption are becoming more common, queer lives are more commonly following conventional temporal patterns.

For Halberstam, then, 'hegemonic constructions of time and space are uniquely gendered and sexualised' (p.8), and, whilst heteronormative assumptions mean that no external space is specifically queer space, unless or until it is explicitly identified as being so, the interior space of the self can be anything and everything all at once. The queer body becomes a palimpsest of potential identities, meanings and assumptions based on performative gender markers such as style of clothing, build, or length of hair. Likewise, the spaces occupied by the queer body are 'are studded with bias, riven with contradiction, and complicated with opaque emotional responses' (p.22), whether they are safe, threatening or anything in between. Halberstam notes in particular that 'lonely rural landscapes feel laden with menace' (p.22).

Times have changed – and quite rapidly – since the publication of *Female Masculinity* in 1998; same-sex marriage was legalised in 2014 and the fight for gender recognition and transgender rights is now at the forefront of the LGBT movement.

Halberstam has since moved away from using exclusively female pronouns, and has not adopted exclusively masculine pronouns either, instead referring to themselves as a 'free floater' who varies between female and male pronouns and everything in between.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, Halberstam, and other people who embody female masculinity

⁵⁵ Halberstam, 'On Pronouns.'

and gender non-conformity, continue to face scrutiny in daily life, particularly in gendered spaces such as restrooms and locker rooms, because it remains largely the case that ‘the categories available to women for racial, gendered and sexual identification are simply inadequate’.⁵⁶ ‘Pinned’ by names and gender markers (p.8), the masculine female body continues to be subversive and even shocking to some, necessitating a degree of caution, and perhaps fear for their safety, for masculine women occupying non- specifically queer spaces. I do not identify as masculine or ‘butch’ and am therefore less visibly queer, but knowing that I may not be welcome if I was more visible can also lead to a feeling of ‘unbelonging’ (p.6). Being the object of the male gaze is also an uncomfortable experience.

The spaces where queer women can freely exist are still, even today, considered liminal spaces outside of mainstream culture. Kevin Meethan argues that, if liminal spaces lie ‘beyond normal social and cultural constraints’, the beach is a freeing liminal space where those who are marginalised from society are able to embody a more authentic experience.⁵⁷ However, this is not a realistic assumption, there are still gendered expectations placed on the body on the beach. In addition, Meethan writes of tourist behaviour being ‘different from the usual established routines of daily life’ (p.70), ignoring the under-populated beaches which do not appeal to tourists, such as the beach at Shurton Bars.

Here, a solitary fisherman sits on the boot of his car, fishing rod dangling from it into the sea. I slow on my approach; this is the first person I have seen in miles. He reels in the empty line before casting it out again with a deft flick of the wrist. The line splashes into the water and is swallowed by the waves. He looks up but does not

⁵⁶ Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, p.7. Further references will appear in the text.

⁵⁷ Kevin Meethan, ‘Walking the Edges: Towards a Visual Ethnography of Beachscapes’ *Liminal Landscapes: Travel, Experience and Spaces In-Between* eds. Hazel Andrews and Les Roberts (London: Routledge, 2012), pp.69-86. Further references will appear in the text.

acknowledge me as I pass. When women walk alone, we put ourselves at risk and must weigh up whether that risk is worth taking. In order to counteract this, I find myself walking taller and faster than usual, making sure to keep my head up and a confident, concentrating frown upon my face. With my back towards him, I pick up my pace.

To walk and write is a performative methodology in itself. Deidre Heddon and Misha Myers explored this in the creation of their Walking Library.⁵⁸ Made for the Sideways Arts festival, the Walking Library carried a stock of 90 books, which had been chosen for their relevance as Heddon and Myers walked and carried the books across Belgium. Along the way, they read extracts aloud with other participants, forming a walking-reading group. Heddon and Myers found that ‘the book, as much as the landscape, forms on the move because reading, as much as writing – and walking – is a creative and performative process’. They ran out of breath as they read aloud, and found themselves measuring the distance and time travelled in terms of how many pages of the book they had read; ‘the landscape through which we walked was both made and unmade by the cacophonous texts with which it was set in relation, at the same time as it rewrote those texts through its felt and sensed particularities’ (p.652).

In the places where the sea covers the sand and pebbles, I walk along the sea wall instead. Holding my arms out to either side for balance, seagulls scatter in front of me. I am thinking of Coleridge’s ‘Lines Written at Shurton Bars’.⁵⁹ Addressed to Sara shortly before their marriage, the poem draws upon images of nature to represent the problems their relationship is having. ‘The sea-breeze moans’ (line 31) and, looking out towards Flat Holm island, Coleridge sees the lighthouse, ‘the Watchfire, like a sullen star’ (line 40). This beach is where I walked with my first girlfriend and we held hands

⁵⁸ Deidre Heddon and Misha Myers, ‘Stories from the Walking Library’, *Cultural Geographies* vol.21, no.4 (1 October 2014), p.651. Further references will appear in the text.

⁵⁹ Samuel T. Coleridge, ‘Lines Written at Shurton Bars’, in Jackson, H.J., ed. *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.24-27.

without worrying about being seen. With her fingers entwined in my own and the sea salt air blowing my hair around my face, it felt like the only place in the world worth being. In daily life, at school or in town, we pretended not to like each other very much.

Phil Smith, in his performative walk of the South Devon coastline, writes under the name ‘Cecile Oak’ and also assumes the personas of ‘The Stranger’ and ‘The Guide’, A. J. Salmon, to document the south coast of Devon in his book *Anywhere*.⁶⁰ Smith assumes the identity of Cecile Oak, an academic who ‘lives in the south of Italy with her daughter, and lectures in Performance at the University of Tropea’ (preface ‘The Stranger’). Oak is travelling to attend a conference in Paignton which is cancelled, leaving her to wander the area until she can return home. Smith performs an embodied experience as a woman who is new to both psychogeography and to Devon. A playful and overtly ‘meta’ text, full of puns and teasing details, *Anywhere* is a reminder of the performativity of everyday life and the way that colours our perceptions of the environments we inhabit.

Tim Edensor writes that, when we are walking, ‘intrusions reveal the powerful affective, sensual and imaginative effects of such vestiges, which, like the figure of the ghost, are amorphous and slippery.’⁶¹ We tread the land our ancestors worked, lived on and sustained, retracing footsteps. However, Edensor argues that ‘in official sites of memory, in conservation areas, museums and monumental landscapes, and in the commodified nostalgia of shops and heritage tourism, classified artefacts and authoritative accounts inscribe selective versions about the way things were. Yet even at these sites, the excessive material, sensual, semiotic and epistemological effects of

⁶⁰ Cecile Oak, *Anywhere: A Mythogeography of South Devon and how to Walk it*. (Charmouth: Triarchy Press, 2017). Further references will appear in the text.

⁶¹ Tim Edensor, ‘Mundane Hauntings: Commuting Through the Phantasmagoric Working-Class Spaces of Manchester, England’, *Cultural Geographies* Vol. 15, No. 3, (1 July 2008), pp.313-333), p.314. Further references will appear in the text.

words, places and things escapes attempts to stabilize memory' (p.330). Commercial, touristic spaces are designed to gloss over unseemly parts of rural history, such as the difficult lives of servants who ran big country houses, and the fact that many such houses were built using slave trade profits.

Today, thousands of tourists flock to the south-west in search of relaxation and the taste of a simpler life. They wish to gaze upon a landscape untouched by the human hand. However, what they find is not the wild natural landscape but a managed one, looked after by organisations and corporations responsible for its upkeep in order for it to retain its place-myth. In the UK, there are no 'wilderness' spaces; everything is managed by a body of some sort. The imaginary line between the 'industrially transformed cities' and the urban vs. the rural is not so clear cut. Raymond Williams argues there is, in fact, 'a wide range of settlements between the traditional poles of country and city: suburb, dormitory town, shanty town, industrial estate. Even the idea of the village, which seems simple, shows in actual history a wide variation: as to size and character, and internally in its variation between dispersed and nuclear settlements [...] the 'country way of life' has included the very different practices of hunters, pastoralists, farmers and factory farmers, and its organisation has varied from the tribe and the manor to the feudal estate, from the small peasantry and tenant farmers to the rural commune, from the latifundia and the plantation to the large capitalist enterprise and the state farm.'⁶² There are pockets of urban space within the countryside, and small villages and towns can be bustling. In particular, today retail parks and tourist attractions are major points of rural industry. The countryside, therefore, does not remain a 'passive' thing to be merely consumed but is a site of life, work, and layers of history that make it ripe for walking and writing. It is haunted by layers of memory that

⁶² Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p.1.

form a text of their own and, as we walk, we read the text and add chapters of our own.

It is another four kilometres to Steart Marshes, slow walking across hard pebbles and soft sand which gives way underneath my feet. Upon arrival, I expect to find a boggy wilderness, criss-crossed with wooden walkways not dissimilar to those that prehistoric Somerset people would have built and used.⁶³ Instead, this is a modern and well-kept tourist site with public toilets, information boards and purpose-built viewing huts for bird watchers. A wooden sign directs me to the visitors' toilets, or to several colour coded walkways. Winds batter the coast and the sky is grey. In the distance, a cyclist crests the ridge of the hill. As I walk through the car park my hair blows around my face and into my eyes.

The small car park is almost full but there are few people in sight. I make my way up the walkway, passing young trees on either side of me. The path is made up of fine, white grits which quickly cover my black shoes. They're comfortable right now, but at the end of the day my feet will be full of painful blisters. I struggle to the information board, which explains the reasoning for the project as the desire to cultivate an area of brackish wetland for rare species. There is a sheet of A4 paper for visitors to add their email addresses to the mailing list. I add mine, underneath an address from Leicester University. Half an hour later, while I am wandering up to The Breach, I receive an email about a willow weaving workshop. The fences are woven from willow, which was a significant industry in Somerset and remains a popular pastime and trade.⁶⁴

⁶³ J. M. Coles, and B. J. Orme, *Prehistory of the Somerset Levels* (Victoria: AbeBooks, 1989).

⁶⁴ Kate Lynch, 'From Cradle to Grave: Willows and Basket Making in Somerset' *BBC* [BBC News Website] (n.d) Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/legacies/work/england/somerset/article_1.shtml> Accessed 30 July 2018.

Today, commercial willow growers provide the materials but traditionally willows grow in well-saturated areas, such as the Somerset Levels. The fence moves gently in the wind but remains steadfast in the ground.

This landscape has been designed to give the impression of wilderness – to perform wilderness – but it is a carefully managed landscape. The land was being used for agriculture as recently as 2012, and now the patchwork of fields has been transformed into marshland, a World Wildlife Trust project that simultaneously ‘buffer homes and businesses from rising sea levels and provides a habitat for a rich mix of wetland wildlife’,⁶⁵ both flood defence and conservation project. The marshes are not yet established, and many of the young trees planted on the sides of the walkways have not thrust through their plastic guide posts. The posts are curling apart in a way that reminds me of umbilical cords. As I make my way up the path, the wind threatens to blow me off my feet. Several times, I pick up my foot and it gets blown off course before I set it down again, and I end up lurching around. The small ponds and the boggy areas are filled with rippling water. A few ducks battle against it, trying to get where they need to go. Two Canadian geese attempt to fly against the wind, then finally give up and take shelter in the space between the grassy hills. There is an eerie noise, like the sing-song sound produced by rubbing a wet finger around the rim of a wine glass: it is the wind whistling around the electricity pylons and the wires. The pylons cut through the site, leading to the Hinkley Point nuclear power station.

Cold rain on my thighs and damp in my hair, breeze drying out my lips. I remember the way my first girlfriend used to apply lip balm before she kissed me and later we woke, in the depths of the hot summer night, and reached for each other. The

⁶⁵ Anon, ‘Stearth Marshes’ *World Wildlife Trust*, [World Wildlife Trust website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://www.wwt.org.uk/wetland-centres/stearth-marshes/>> Accessed 4 July 2018. Further references will appear in the text.

white grit path leads to a crossroads, with new signs that point to ‘Quantock Viewpoint’ and the rather ominous sounding, ‘The Breach’. An unfortunate name, conjuring images of difficult births, feet first. It is an alien concept to me, the idea of carrying a baby as the body changes beyond recognition and yet, without thinking, my feet carry me off toward The Breach, continuing past those unfurling, umbilical tree guideposts. When I get there, I find a wooden hut with placards about the types of birds you can spot on the marsh. There are two doors, entering rooms with low windows for viewing the birds. Having passed no other souls on my way here, I am surprised to open the door and find two people, who stare through the window with binoculars. We greet each other in quiet voices but they sit very still. The rustling of my waterproof, and the thud of my boots on the ground, seem too loud. We sit near each other on the bench for a while, looking out of the floor-to-ceiling glass window. There are not many birds out, they wisely shelter from the wind.

Opening the door to the other room, I am unsure of what to expect inside – it is empty but for a wooden bench and a book for identifying birds. I look at illustrations of merlin and peregrine, spoonbill and water pipit, but cannot identify any outside. It is warm and sheltered from the wind howling and battering the sides. I sit on the bench and am physically close to the marsh and the pond, I could reach out and touch them were I not separated by a wall, and yet the room is almost silent, and I am unable to hear the calling of birds through the thick glass window. There is only the splash of water against the glass as they flap their wings. Even though I am here, thighs scraping the wooden bench, hand pressed against the glass window, the effect is that of watching the marshes through a TV screen. This is a scene made for consumption.

I listen to the wind, eat one of my ham sandwiches and flip open my grandad’s notebook to make notes. The first few pages are covered with his handwriting. Untidy

and sparse – he was naturally left handed but schooled to use his right – it is difficult to make out what he wrote here. As far as I can tell, it is mostly numbers and times of appointments; notes taken at the phone, maybe. I flick through the pages, enjoying his voice, not wanting it to end, but when I come to a blank page I put the nib of my pen to it and try to write something. In the end, I use the blank space in the notebook to draw a picture of the pond. As I shade in the area with pencil, it reveals the ghosts of letters that were imprinted from other pages when he pressed the pen hard to paper. The palimpsest of notes and memories across the years manifests in this line drawing of the pond, with white letters stark across the water.

Back down the path to another crossroads. This time I choose the Steart fork. The path is made of crushed beige stone, planted with shrubs that have not yet grown, and it is bordered by willow fences to discourage us from going off track. The wildlife is either still dormant after winter, or hiding from the winds. As I trudge along the path I see only one other person, the man on the bike who I saw earlier. He approaches from a path that is blocked by a closed gate with a sign saying ‘Summer Route Only’. It looks the same as the path I am on, what makes it a summer route? Phil Smith’s advice for walking is to break and ignore rules, to ‘walk wavy against rules’,⁶⁶ but instead to ‘walk as if everything were free’ (p.18).

This stance comes from a position of privilege, freedom from fear of authority. Nonetheless, I open the gate and continue upward. This path is on higher ground, at the total mercy of the wind, which whips my face and pushes me around. It looks out onto a great lake, which tents up in waves in the wind. The path is built up, rising above the land on a small ridge. For a while, I seem to be getting close to Hinkley Point but then the path curves around and I am walking away from it again.

⁶⁶ Smith, *On Walking*, p.17. Further references will appear in the text.

The path winds around and after a while I am back at the Quantock Viewpoint again. The light is dimming fast; soon it will be evening. In the distance, the man on the bike does another loop of the pathway. He gains speed on the downhill section, coat billowing behind him. In a few minutes he will have caught me up and looped around me again. It feels like I've been walking for ages. Disillusioned, I begin to question the point of the exercise, but when I'm wondering what to do I see a small murmuration of starlings. Small, at first – maybe a few dozen birds. But as they circle and swoop, more groups come in to join them. I stand and watch them, a cloud of shape moving as one. While I'm standing there, the man on the bike catches me up and loops me again. As the sun sets lower in the sky, solar powered lamps flick on overhead, illuminating the pathway and enabling me to find my way back to the car park.

Both Steart Marshes and Hinkley Point have been designed, built and maintained by humans in order to serve specific needs, but they are presented in vastly different ways. Whilst Steart Marshes are presented as a natural return to ancient land uses, Hinkley Point can be said to contribute to 'technological landscape guilt' which occurs when 'material objects are present which can be interpreted as inappropriate', writes John Urry, citing Heysham power station in Morecambe Bay as an example.⁶⁷ Whereas Steart Marshes contribute to the coast's rural place-myth as a quiet, pristine, natural place, the presence of Hinkley Point seeks to undo it (pp.187-188).

However, Peter Haggett identifies four waves of early industrial land uses in Somerset, beginning with Mesolithic peoples who used flint tools and are thought to have begun the process of woodland management to increase hunting yields.⁶⁸ The second wave, 'at around 4,500 BC', saw the settlement of farming communities:

⁶⁷ John Urry, 'The Making of the Lake District' in *Consuming Places* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1995), p.187. Further references will appear in the text.

⁶⁸Haggett, *The Quantocks*, p.48. Further references will appear in the text.

Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age peoples whose presence is remembered by the landscape in the forms of tracks, forts and barrows, including Wick Barrow near Hinkley Point (pp.48-56). During the Iron Age, ‘a second major forest clearance began’ (p.57). The third wave was characterised by Roman occupation; the Romans built ports and roads to support their economy, and also engaged in field enclosure practises (pp.59-61).

Later, in the Victorian period, Somerset was a site for copper and iron mining, which necessitated the building of railways and canals. There were also woollen and silk mills in the villages, and large-scale construction projects to build hospitals, schools and workhouses (pp.125-138). There was even an attempt to pump oil from a retort at Kilve, although this proved not to be economically viable.⁶⁹ Although the Quantocks could not be said to have ever been a major industrial area, there is a long history of varying degrees of human habitation and industrialisation. Far from being a pristine landscape, the land has been repeatedly planted and ploughed, dug over, burnt and mined by countless people from all different walks of life. It continues to be occupied by layers of evidence that they existed. Despite the fact that many rural places are shaped by human influence, Debord ignores them in his 1956 essay ‘Theory of the Dérive’.⁷⁰ Instead, he writes of ‘the primarily urban character of the dérive, in its element in the great industrially transformed cities’, and describes cities as being ‘centres of possibilities and meanings’ (p.63). In quoting Chombart de Lauwe, he implies that only cities can offer a reflection of life (p.62). Of course, it is people who create the city and bring meaning to it, but that is also the case for rural places.

⁶⁹ Anon, ‘Kilve Oil Works’, *Museum of the Scottish Shale Oil Industry* [website] (n.d) Available at <https://www.scottishshale.co.uk/GazBeyond/BSEnglandShale/BSES_Works/KilveOilWorks.html> Accessed 29 July 2018.

⁷⁰ Debord, ‘Theory of the Dérive’, pp.62-66.

Furthermore, Debord rules that the appropriate area for a *dérive* ‘does not extend beyond the entirety of a large city and its suburbs’ (p.64). In the introductory chapter, I explored the ways in which Debord contradicts himself and uses academic lexis to disguise a playful nature. His ‘rules’ for the *dérive* cannot therefore be taken for hard and fast ones, but the text inarguably ignores rural areas. Nonetheless, in the years since, rural psychogeography has been practiced more generally by Rebecca Solnit, Phil Smith, Robert Macfarlane and, in the South West, by the likes of John Wylie, on his walk along the South West coast path.⁷¹

Wylie details a single day’s walking a part of the South West coast path in North Devon, a stretch of coast roughly forty miles from Shurton Bars. Wylie examines the affective and performative aspects of coastal walking, debunking the notion of walking as a solitary, romantic activity ‘in which a commonly male subject undergoes rhapsodic or epiphanic experiences in the vicinity of a nature explicitly framed by the precepts of a sublime aesthetics, a nature at once fearful, awesome and transformative’ (p.237). Such a romantic notion portrays the rural landscape as an almost otherworldly space, which is fit only to be gazed upon and serve our needs. However, it is also a living space which constantly alters, and is altered by, humankind. Therefore, Wylie writes, ‘the relation between self and landscape is not always that of observer and observed’ (p.236). Our bodies exist within the landscape, they are not completely separate from it. Rather, the senses of both landscape and self are what Wylie terms as being ‘mutually configured’ (p.239) in a constantly shifting relationship in which, he writes, ‘self and the world overlap and separate in a ductile and incessant enfolding and unfolding’ (p.240). As the body travels through a place, then the place, the body and the self are

⁷¹ Wylie, John, ‘A single day’s walking: narrating self and landscape on the South West Coast Path’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol.30, No.2 (June 2005), pp.234-247.

each being transformed: we tread across grass, breaking the stalks of flowers, we get mud on our skin, shift pebbles and scare animals, become sweaty and out of breath. However, to be in the landscape is also to be up against it. For Wylie, walking does not necessarily ‘embed’ the self in the landscape (p.240). Rather, we fight the elements and terrain. The affect of coastal walking connotes ‘configurations of motion and materiality [...] from which distinctive senses of self and landscape, walker and ground, observer and observed, distil and refract’ (p.236). We adopt new identities as we perform the act of walking, our sense of self at varying degrees of being removed and embedded within the place, and it ‘is precisely the primary capacity of affecting and being affected, from which these two horizons, inside and outside, precipitate and fold’ (p.236). Wylie argues that ‘a walker is poised between the country ahead and the country behind, between one step and the next, epiphany and penumbra, he or she is, in other words, spectral; between there and not-there, perpetually caught in an apparitional process of arriving/departing’ (p.237). Therefore, the individual walker becomes the ghost haunting the landscape while they are ‘stuck’ inside a liminal space.

Chapter 2: Nether Stowey and the Quantocks

It is my grandad's notebook, or one of them. A hard backed, black rectangle, one of dozens which he would have carried and filled as he undertook his police rounds in the 1960s and 1970s. His beat encompassed several villages in Quantock Country, from Cannington, Nether Stowey, Over Stowey and Spaxton right up onto the Quantock Hills. He worked in a large circular route, which he drove on his motorbike – so I have been told – stopping along the way to look in on people and have a cup of tea, maybe a scotch, and a biscuit. He befriended the local biker gangs and took photos of the hills in summer. This notebook is nearly fifty years old, and it languished for ages in an under-utilised drawer since he died. I found it, nestled amongst other scraps of paper and envelopes, a collection of pens and some sticky tape. This chapter documents my walk along part of his old police beat, which is also a route through the village where I grew up, retracing the mundane walks of my childhood around Nether Stowey. I will retrace his steps from their old house in Cannington, through Spaxton, up onto the Quantock Hills and down into Nether Stowey. I will be walking backwards in time, into both my own and my grandfather's memories. In addition, I will be repeating his route from my perspective as a queer woman, an outsider, and therefore embodying different realities to those that my grandfather experienced as a straight, white man in a position of authority over the local community.

It is an unseasonably cool May morning when I leave the guesthouse after a breakfast of sausage, egg and toast, feeling full and ready for the day. My car's engine turns over a few times before it comes to a juddering start, and there is a worrying smell of diesel. I drive with the windows open again, and can hear the engine gurgling each time I change up a gear. First, I find my way to the old police house in Cannington.

Although it was supplied rent-free to my grandparents while my grandfather worked at the police station next door, the houses have since been privately purchased. I pull the car over to the side of the road and, take some time to look at the gardens. In one, a screen of rhododendrons grows high but, in another, the grass lawn has been removed and replaced with concrete to form a double driveway. An early morning mist lies over the ground.

The mist grows thicker on my approach to the Quantock Hills, making for a somewhat alarming drive because visibility is so low. I pull over again, this time to read the car manual and remind myself how to turn the fog lights on. Later, I find myself subconsciously moving forward in the driver's seat, peering through the windscreen with my heart in my mouth, half expecting a lorry to come barrelling into me around each bend. After a slow six miles I reach Spaxton just as the sun starts coming out, helpfully burning away the mist and revealing the gift of a clear blue sky. Travelling up into the peak of the hills is a slow, tedious journey through narrow lanes and steep gradients that the car can handle only in second gear. On several occasions, I pull over to let a faster car pass, and by the time I reach the top, the mist has completely cleared, burnt away by an anaemic sun.

Although the Quantock Hills, which became England's first designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), in 1956, are a relatively small and popular area for walkers, it feels isolated up here. The curve of the land hides the villages and hamlets below, so it feels as if I am the only person for miles around, were it not for an ice cream van, a bench, and a bin stuffed with litter. Rough twigs scrape my legs and pollen sticks to my clothing. There is Hinkley Point on the edge of my vision. As always, my eyes are drawn back to it, tiny and shimmering in the heat on the distant shore, but then they adjust to something else nearby; a quick movement in the bushes. I

stand as still as possible and wait to see what emerges. It is a roe deer, standing calmly confident, she stares straight at me and then turns slowly and walks away. I realise I have been holding my breath and let it out in a quick sigh.

In the back of this notebook, my grandfather has written about the spring that forms here and flows down the hills through to Nether Stowey. ‘Wendy was the first to spot it,’ he writes, ‘and was eager to build a dam.’ He, too, notes the construction site on the distant shore, which was, at that time, construction for Hinkley Point A. I attempt to orient myself to find the spring he is referring to. The stream may already run underneath my feet here, at the beginning of a journey that will travel for miles under the Earth’s surface, percolating through the sandstone and slate that makes up the Quantock Hills,⁷² until it breaks out from underground at a point of least resistance, on the hills, amongst grass and heather. A tiny, nameless spring. Once, it provided drinking water for the nomadic peoples who travelled the land, camping up here when winter floods hid their homestead on the lower grounds below.⁷³ Now, birds come to bathe, deer to drink, and walkers come to take photographs. And then it moves down the hillside, slippery silver, sunlight glinting, picking up debris and growing faster, faster.

Alice Oswald, who lives in Devon on the bank of the river Dart, has been quoted as saying that ‘I frequently get told I am a nature poet living in a rural idyll, but just like the city, the country is full of anxious, savage people’.⁷⁴ This sense of anxiety echoes the ‘menace’ felt by Halberstam, and it manifests itself in *Dart*, according to Armitstead, as a ‘determinedly anti-romantic’ view of the river (Armistead 2016). The

⁷² Haggett, *The Quantocks*, p.22.

⁷³ J. M. Coles and Coles, B. J. Orme (1990) *Prehistory of the Somerset Levels*. Pamphlet produced by the Somerset Levels Project, English Heritage.

⁷⁴ Claire Armistead ‘Interview: Alice Oswald’ (22 July 2016) *Guardian* [Guardian website] Available at:
<<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/22/alice-oswald-interview-falling-awake>>
Accessed 29 July 2018.

working class characters that populate the poem have been, writes Armitstead, ‘excavated [...] from millennia of cultural sediment’. This sense of excavation, of layers, a palimpsest of different existences, comes alive on the river. Additionally, Oswald says, ‘I am interested in how many layers you can excavate in personality’ (quoted in Armitstead 2016). Oswald portrays the river Dart as a ‘self-maker, speaking its meaning,’⁷⁵ babbling over rocks in its own language, and this stream does too (p.48). It disappears down steep slopes and inside tunnels of its own making, simultaneously shaping the landscape and residing in it.

Giving up on the notebook and using the OS map instead, I attempt to navigate my way to the place where the stream enters Nether Stowey, but this is a wooded area where thick tree coverage makes it difficult to find the stream. Struggling, unsure of my place on the map, I begin to worry that no one knows I am out here. The woods are evidently home for someone; a large oak tree, too wide to wrap my arms even halfway around, cradles litter amongst its roots: several empty beer cans, cigarette butts, a can of Relentless energy drink and an empty plastic bag, which is snagged on a broken branch. Worried about being found alone, I listen for any sound of the stream’s voice with which to orient myself, but all I can hear is that plastic bag rustling in the wind.

In *Dart*, Oswald produces ‘a sound-map of the river’ (Author’s Note), inspired by local stories. Every time a voice changes, she identifies it, in small text, in the margins. This small marginalised text gives the impression of a whispered voice identifying itself without interrupting the flow of the poem (or indeed of the river). For example, on page 4, a ‘chambermaid’ is identified as the voice: ‘in a place of bracken and scattered stone piles and cream teas in the tourist season’ (p.4, lines 114-115). Her

⁷⁵ Alice Oswald, ‘Dart’ (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 2002), p.48. Further references will appear in the text.

voice shifts, on page five, into that of a naturalist: ‘shhh I can make myself invisible’ (p.5, line 127). Were it not for the identifiers in the margins, it would be difficult to locate the exact places where the voices shift, but they each want to be heard, to make themselves known.

It is the river Dart itself which carries these voices, their memories and their layered histories, across the land. Oswald’s methodology was to record conversations with ‘people who know the river’ (Author’s Note), and then use these recordings to create the characters whose voices are identified in the margins.

Nonetheless, she explicitly states that the voices in the finished text ‘do not refer to real people, or even fixed fictions’. Instead, ‘all voices should be read as the river’s mutterings’ (Author’s Note). The voices, lives and histories of both real source material and poetic licence are, therefore, intrinsically bound up with the river Dart and are only able to be heard as long as the river continues to speak. In this way, the river also gives a voice to those who might not otherwise be heard: dead tin miners lost underground (p.271, line 10); the sewage worker, who carries out work that is vital to ‘the metabolism of the whole South West’ (p.30, lines 840- 841) in a place where ‘no one can see me’ (p.30, line 838); working class oyster gatherers, fishermen, and dairy workers; and indeed the sound of silence itself (p.22).

I walk a hundred yards in the direction I think is east, and then back upon myself, retracing my steps, overcome with a sense of déjà vu. Nether Stowey is lost, unseen behind thick trees, unheard of in the wind. The useless map refuses to fold back together along its original lines. All around me is heavy branch and muddy ground sucking at my boots, no sign of the sky. Even the sun struggles to reach through the tree canopy. But here, listen. A swallow calls to a mate, flaps its wings, leaving an empty branch springing up and down in its wake. And there, at last, with a hand cupped to one

ear, I hear it; the stream muttering quietly. It is hidden in a shallow ditch amongst an undergrowth of shrubbery. At last I have found it, a thin stream of clear water. Here is a small pile of pebbles; the remains of a dam. I crouch down, thigh muscles straining, and put my hands in the cool water, which runs between my fingers. I unlace my boots, remove my socks, and, carrying them, step into the water. A sharp pebble digs into the sole of my left foot, breaking the skin. The stream swirls around my ankles. Walking downstream, I think of the women who came before me to make their lives here. My mother, who left university and returned home after a year because she missed it so much. My grandma, who left her adopted home of Singapore to marry my grandfather, have two daughters and go to work at the cheese factory. My great-great grandma, who single-handedly ran the family farm in the years after her husband did not return home from the First World War. I feel the weight of all these histories settle upon me and remember the teenage years during which I was desperate to leave and make my home anywhere else, to stop being the only 'dyke' in a school of three hundred people. I watch my blood swirl in the water.

Much was made of Carol Ann Duffy's appointment as Poet Laureate in 2009, when she became not only the first female poet laureate but also the first to be openly non-heterosexual.⁷⁶ In 2012 she wrote 'The Thames' as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations. 'The Thames' celebrates 'history as water'⁷⁷ moving through history as the Thames moves through London, carrying the sound of Bow bells 'somewhen' deep inside of it (line 24). The embodied river 'lie[s] back' (line 1) and remembers, drawing upon sound, sight and taste. It 'chokes on sewage' (line 19) and

⁷⁶ Anon, 'First Female Poet Laureate Named'. [BBC News website] (1 May 2009) Available at: <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/8027767.stm>> Accessed 28 July 2018.

⁷⁷ Carol Ann Duffy, 'The Thames' (2012) [online] Available at: <<https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/themes/exhibitions/poetry-for-the-palace/the-queens-gallery-palace-of-holyroodhouse/the-thames-carol-ann-duffy>> Accessed 16 July 2018. Further references will appear in the text.

‘taste[s] the drowned’ (line 27), becoming almost human as it absorbs centuries of memory. Embodied human experiences – choking, drowning, listening and tasting – become the river’s experiences. Furthermore, Duffy’s use of the word ‘someday’ identifies time as a place, inextricably linking the two concepts: our memories and history are intrinsically tied up with the places where they are made. Tina Richardson writes about the relationship with place being ‘intrinsically tied up with our knowledge and memory of it [...] these practices are imprinted on our psyches over time, forming our relationships with space’.⁷⁸ When multiple psyches inhabit one space, all those experiences are recorded upon it, becoming what Tim Edensor terms a kind of ‘mundane haunting’.⁷⁹ He uses mundane haunting in order ‘to reinscribe the significance of everyday urban space, that habitual realm’ and also ‘to emphasize the mundanity of haunting, which arises through both banal and spectacular processes’ (p.314). He writes that ‘the focus on the spectacular diminishes the ubiquity of haunting’, going on to note that ghosts may be ‘embedded in familiar, lingering fixtures and features that provoke a homely recognition of that which was supposedly over and done with’ (p.314). In particular, he examines working class spaces and the ways in which ‘processes of urban regeneration are only partial in their attempts to erase and commodify the past’ (p.314). In the case of the police houses, like the ex-council houses Edensor writes about (p.320), they have shared features such as the style of doorways and windows, and the paved footpath which runs up the middle of each garden; remnants of their previous usage which have not yet been altered by the people who purchased them.

⁷⁸ Tina Richardson, ‘Memory, Historicity, Time’ in *Walking Inside Out* ed. Tina Richardson. (London: Rowan & Littlefield International, 2015), p.149.

⁷⁹ Tim Edensor, ‘Mundane Hauntings: Commuting Through the Phantasmagoric Working-Class spaces of Manchester, England’, *Cultural Geographies* Vol. 15, No. 3, (1 July 2008), pp.313-333.

At the bottom of the hill, the stream emerges into a clearing where children splash in the water, dip their hands in, chase sticks by the current. Fish slip by underneath cover of weeds. Years ago, the trees it watered were felled, timber used to build homes, and the stream continued to move forwards through a small settlement, not much to look at: a pub, allegedly haunted by a ghostly woman with no hands, where as a teenager I worked in the kitchens; a mill house. The water powered the wheel which was used to mill grain for making bread. It flipped round the wooden panels, beating them in a chanting circle rhythm, it was raised in the air and then fell, splashing, the force of its weight and movement hammering wooden walls.

I cross a small bridge over the stream, trailing my hand along the smooth metal railing. A sign tells me not to enter the water. Leaning over the railing, I can see dozens of pennies flashing on the stream bed: dozens of wishes passersby have made. I dig in my pocket for a penny of my own, close my eyes and throw it in. It lands with a small splash, scaring the silver fish which flip and swim through dark fronds of weeds, shimmering water in the sun. The water grabs cobblestones from the pavement and carries them with it. No longer are there horses and carts and feet tramping down the road by the river, but instead cars parked at its banks and my feet padding in trainers. Finally, the stream dips back underground to make its inevitable way to the sea.

The cobblestones are hard underneath the soles of my boots. A man nods ‘hello’ to me as we pass each other, performing an awkward dance to see who will be the one to stand aside. The pavement is narrow here and he passes in a waft of tobacco smoke, before stopping to greet another man on the other side of the road. They call across the road to each other, voices loud in the still village, carried to my ears even after we are out of sight of each other.

The houses bordering the stream have bay windows that jut out over it, so that

those standing next to the windowsill are standing over, or on top of, the water. Today, however, the stream lives only part of its life above ground; the rest has been concreted over for pavement. In *The Old Ways*, Robert Macfarlane writes that ‘paths are the habits of a landscape. They are acts of consensual making’⁸⁰ to which the human eye is drawn because ‘the imagination cannot help but pursue a line in the land – onwards in space, but also backwards in time to the histories of a route and its previous followers’ (p.15). But, according to Macfarlane, humans cannot leave tracks or create paths on asphalt (p.13) and our everyday walking goes unrecorded. Macfarlane’s romantic impression of paths and track-making comes from a position of privilege which he does not acknowledge. Paving paths means they are accessible to a greater number of people, enabling them to join in as walking-writing practitioners where they may have been unable to do so across muddy tracks or boggy fields and, in turn, diversifying the creative texts that arise from the practise.

Furthermore, it is not impossible to leave tracks in artificial materials; wet concrete often retains footprints, asphalt becomes malleable in heat, concrete is worn away over time, and humans may also leave muddy or wet tracks behind. Additionally, our tracks do not necessarily have to take only one form, of physical marks on the ground, but can also be recorded by other means, such as writing, drawings, or photographs. Soil may have a hand pressed into it, for example. Grass may be flattened by our weight, and pebbles may be arranged into new formations or inscribed with our names.

Indeed, Coleridge, who wandered the Quantock Hills with Dorothy and William Wordsworth, has had his mundane walking routes preserved by asphalt in the form of the Coleridge Way, a path that is marked with the image of a quill and retraces his steps

⁸⁰ Macfarlane, *The Old Ways*, p.17. Further references will appear in the text.

along across the North Somerset Coast and Exmoor.⁸¹ Coleridge came to Nether Stowey after his plan to purchase land and found a self-sufficient ‘pantisocracy’ in the United States proved financially difficult⁸² and he settled, instead, for his cottage in Nether Stowey. Here he grew vegetables in the garden, kept chickens, ducks and geese, and wrote poetry (p.75). Whilst living in Nether Stowey, Coleridge wrote some of his most famous works including ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’ and ‘Kubla Khan’. In ‘Frost at Midnight’, Coleridge celebrates his son’s existence and rejoices in the fact that he ‘shalt wander like a breeze by lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags/Of ancient mountain’⁸³ as opposed to ‘in the great city, pent midcloisters dim’ (line 52). In this quotation, Coleridge’s own romantic view of rural living is quite clear. But he lasted a mere three years in Nether Stowey, a period that was extremely successful for his writing career but which was dogged with personal and marriage problems, not to mention the fact that the locals, who thought he was a French spy, did not embrace him or his walking habits.⁸⁴

Nonetheless, for Coleridge and Wordsworth, walking was an essential part of their writing method and they covered many miles across the Quantock Hills and Exmoor. In his biography of Coleridge, Richard Holmes identifies this period of his life as one of the most prolific, writing that he ‘must have been producing something like fifty lines of blank verse a day’ (p.144). In particular, Holmes imagines that ‘the coming of spring to the Quantocks, the lengthening days, the seductive trails of wild flowers leading up into the combes above Stowey, must also have stimulated him’ (p.144).

⁸¹ Anon, ‘The Coleridge Way Route Guide’, *Visit Exmoor, 2018*. [Visit Exmoor website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://www.visit-exmoor.co.uk/coleridge-way/cw-route-guide>> Accessed 4 June 2018.

⁸² Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.75. Further references will appear in the text.

⁸³ Samuel T. Coleridge ‘Frost At Midnight’ (1798) in *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 87 lines 55-56.

⁸⁴Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (London: Penguin, 1990), p.155 and p.159.

As we walk the Coleridge Way in the present, we also walk back in time with Coleridge. This is, according to Macfarlane, ‘a double insistence of old landscapes: that they be read in the then but felt in the now’.⁸⁵ Although the paving and signposting of the path is a modern addition, the path itself has always been there, produced by what Macfarlane terms ‘acts of consensual making’ (p.17). For Macfarlane, ‘a walk is only a step away from a story, and every path *tells*’ (p.18). He describes his foot as being both ‘a unit of progress and [...] also a unit of thought’ (p.27).

Of course, Coleridge and Wordsworth went on to become more famously Lake District poets, and the Lake District as a tourist destination has capitalised on this association, for example opening Wordsworth’s home in Grasmere, Dove Cottage, into a museum and the Visit Cumbria website recommends visitors ‘feel Wordsworth’s works come alive in the places that inspired him’.⁸⁶ In his essay ‘The Making of the Lake District’, Urry argues that the Lake District was not a popular destination until the eighteenth century, writing that ‘the area had to be discovered; then it had to be interpreted as appropriately aesthetic; and then it had to be transformed into the managed scenery suitable for millions of visitors’. Indeed, he goes on to argue that the Lake District’s ‘place-myth’ was created in part as a result of the incorporation of Romanticism in to it.

Likewise, the Quantock Hills have used their association with Coleridge, and his brief residency in Nether Stowey, to appeal to tourists. The Visit Somerset Organisation describes Coleridge as ‘Nether Stowey’s famous former resident’;⁸⁷ The National Trust

⁸⁵ Macfarlane, *The Old Ways*, p.33. Further references will appear in the text.

⁸⁶ Anon, ‘Wordsworth Attractions in the Lake District and Cumbria’, *Visit Cumbria*, [Visit Cumbria website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://www.visitcumbria.com/wordsworth-attractions-lake-district/>> Accessed 7 March 2019.

⁸⁷ Anon, ‘Nether Stowey’, *Visit Somerset*, [Visit Somerset website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://www.visitsomerset.co.uk/explore-somerset/nether-stowey-p1904393>> Accessed 4 June 2018.

has added a tearoom to Coleridge Cottage;⁸⁸ and the Coleridge Way. The Quantock Hills became the first place in the UK to be designated an ‘Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty’ in 1956. The name itself is contradictory: being designated an AONB means it is now the responsibility of a committee to uphold its ‘natural’ status and every decision made by that committee is designed to increase its revenue from tourism.

After being acquired by the National Trust, Coleridge Cottage was opened to the public in 1998. Local families were invited to attend the opening ceremony with Lord Coleridge. Today, I am back here for the first time in a decade. I can see a lot of work has been done on it and they have added and expanded the attractions. The cottage garden is now part of the museum, where flowers and vegetables grow, and there is a small gazebo where visitors can write their own thoughts or poems. In the gazebo, I flick through the notebook and read other people’s poems and reflections. Some write about their memories of the village:

‘I used to stand by the gate and watch the lorries rumble past with deliveries when they were building Hinkley A. Gestured for them to beep the horn; some of them did.’

‘My father drove the cows up the lane twice a day, but once they got away from him and ate our neighbour’s lettuces.’

I add my own memory; ‘The first time I kissed a girl was on the Coleridge Cottage open day in 1998,’ the stubby pencil scratches across the page. ‘We were spooked by the thought of the mannequins watching us.’

Leaving the gazebo and returning through the garden, past beans climbing up bamboo poles, heavy green tomatoes dangling on their vines, and great sticks of rhubarb

⁸⁸ Anon, ‘The Tea Room at Coleridge Cottage’ *National Trust* [National trust website] (n.d) Available at: <<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/coleridge-cottage/features/the-tearoom-at-coleridge-cottage>> Accessed 4 June 2018.

just waiting to be picked. The gate clicks shut behind me. The sun is baking down on Lime Street. I follow the stream along the cobbles. A cat watches me from a bay window. There are hardly any people around. At the corner, the intersection of the oldest streets: Lime Street, Castle Street and St Mary street, is what is known as Stowey Cross. Here, a large clock tower marks the time. It is accompanied by the war memorial and the lockup, which, according to a plaque attached to stonework with rusting nails, was once used for holding the village drunks. It is now a bus shelter, its iron bars long since replaced with a bus timetable behind a plastic window. Next to this, a red phone box that smells of musty of cigarettes and metal but contains no phone. The village notice board displays notices of upcoming car boot sales.

Occupying the corner plot on the street is the Quantock Tea Room. I have taken Phil Smith's advice: 'do not take your own food. Allow the food to come to you' and therefore come without much sustenance (only water).⁸⁹ Loose coins jingle in my pocket and I look longingly at the menu: a cup of tea and a cheese sandwich will go down very nicely. Smith is correct that food is much more satisfying when it is arrived upon unexpectedly, rather than planned out (p.37). The tea room used to be a newsagent and post office. When I enter, a little bell tinkles over the door. The place is half shop, with gifts and knick knacks, and half cafe, with wooden tables covered in spotty tablecloths. Each table has a flower in a Coca-Cola bottle at its centre. Apart from me, there are two other people in there, sitting opposite each other at a table for two and looking at the menu in silence. They raise their heads in unison as I pass. There is a pile of torn up napkins on the table in front of them. I take a table in the back corner, in front of the window. After I place my order, I get my grandad's notebook out of my bag and flip

⁸⁹ Smith, *On Walking*, p.37.

through it, hoping to find an entry about Nether Stowey. My grandfather's handwriting is a messy scrawl that requires as much decoding and guesswork as it does reading. I come across an entry about a motorbike being stolen from outside the garage on Lime Street. The talk on the next table turns to the upcoming farmer's market, and we pass time sipping tea until, outside, there is a loud bang. A bus driving past has accidentally hit a parked car. Someone runs in, 'any of you have a car that looks like this?' We all rush out to look and to enjoy a long analysis about the size of the buses, the suitability of the roads and the frequency with which these incidents takes place. There's an apology, an exchange of details. The car is scratched with a small dent. By the time we go back in, my tea is cold and the proprietor gives me a fresh pot with a free biscuit, revealing a dimpled smile as she walks away. I take my time finishing up, hoping she will come by again.

On my walk around Steart Marshes, I had recorded my thoughts as I walked using a voice-to-text app. I do not want to do that here for fear of looking weird and out of place. It is unavoidable that the walking body becomes the observed as well as being the observer, but I suppose it doesn't matter since no one is around. When Coleridge lived here, he was known for his behaviour of walking around talking to himself. We know he would walk and compose his poetry aloud, then write it down when he got home – perhaps this is the best way for truly composing work inspired by landscape, which requires a forgetting and remembering the essence of it.

It is quite a shock after coming from the Midlands: there is barely anyone on the streets, and everything seems very small. The newsagent and the garage haven't changed their signage and even the library contains the same decor and furniture: I remember those tiny plastic tub chairs, having spent hours in them reading every *Sweet Valley High* book I could get my hands on. Outside the library, a mother and two

children are sorting glass bottles into the large recycling bins there, glass breaking loudly at the bottom and the children shrieking in delight. I watch a cat disappear behind the bins, a silver tag flashing on its collar. In the high street, a group of people are setting up tables for the monthly farmers' market. They unpack vegetables, eggs and bread from their vans and arrange it under plastic awnings.

On the edge of the village, a small triangle of grass is constrained by roads. It is a meadow in the middle of the A39 and the Nether Stowey slip road. I walk over and crouch down, grass tickling my shins. Traffic roars past but here, on this island, daisies and buttercups poke through the soil; bees gather pollen; a ladybird climbs a blade of grass. The A39 bisects the village, separating the main village from the church and the cheese factory. As primary schoolchildren being led to church services, we crossed this road with the help of the local police.

A blast of wind hits me every time a car roars past. The A39 going through Nether Stowey was constructed in the late 1960s, following the construction of the Cannington stretch which was built in the 1950s when the first Hinkley Point Reactor was built, and further improved in the 1960's when Hinkley B was built. The road bypasses the centre of the village. The old road led through the village down St Mary's and Lime Streets. The bypass changed the character of the village by effectively splitting it into two parts. The main road now cuts the village in half, separating the church and the cheese factory from the rest of the village, and separating the village cemetery into two parts. The cemetery is linked to the park, where I used to play.

I walk past my old house. The front door has been repainted and the front lawn paved over and turned into the driveway, but other than that it looks the same. I stand outside and look at it for as long as I dare, not wanting to look suspicious. It must have been bin day, because the rubbish bins remain on the pavement at the front of the house.

A leaflet has been missed and it flutters in the wind. I bend down to pick it up, the pavement hot to my fingertips; it is about the developments at Hinkley C. 'Building better energy together', it promises, detailing a plan of the site which will come all the way up to Doggetts Farm, and including a diagram of how a pressurised water reactor generates electricity. I pocket the leaflet to look at later, fearing that someone will ask me why I'm standing there.

At the house next door, I hear the front door open and a man walks out, whom I recognise as my old neighbour. He lived with his wife and two daughters, who I used to play in the street with. I walk past the house, contemplating saying hello. Finally I decide to go for it. He is friendly and although he does not recognise me, he remembers me when I tell him I used to live next door. His wife comes out and invites me inside for a coffee. Their house has been redecorated with wooden floors replacing the 1990s carpets. We drink coffee in the conservatory while their new puppy jumps up at my lap.

'The new people next door are friendly,' they say. 'They'll probably let you look around.'

We go next door and I ring the bell, when the door opens I am suddenly transported to my childhood years. The kitchen is the same one my dad fitted nearly twenty years ago. I peer at it over the shoulder of the woman who has answered the door. 'Can I help you?' she says.

I explain that I used to live here, until I was ten, and the neighbours suggested I ask for a look around. I half expect to be turned away and have the police called on me, but she invites me in. I go upstairs to the room that used to be my bedroom, where I read books late into the night and kept my secret diary underneath my bed. It has been painted blue, but due to the awkward shape of the room, the furniture is placed almost exactly where I used to keep it.

Conclusion

Today, construction at the Hinkley Point C site is well underway, and as a result there are several areas of the beach and inland footpaths, that I walked early in this journey, which are no longer accessible to the public. Whilst the landscape has been constantly and quickly changing, I have been able to utilise the walking-writing method to ensure that it is recorded in this work of creative non-fiction, therefore contributing to a growing body of work dedicated to documenting the process. There is much to be gained as well as lost from the Hinkley Point C project. It is, after all, set to be a major supplier of energy for the UK and urgently needed jobs within the local area. The Hinkley Point C Community Fund funds a free community bus between Bridgwater and Minehead, and has also contributed hundreds of thousands of pounds to local projects that would otherwise have been unable to get started, including the Sydenham Community Hub and the Wembdon Village Hall. In addition, were it not for the Hinkley C project, Cotswold Archaeology would likely never have discovered evidence of the Iron Age fort on the site, which I wrote about in Chapter 1, and therefore several important discoveries marking a previously lesser-known period of evidence in British archaeology would not have been made. On the other hand, the environmental cost of Hinkley C cannot be overemphasised; the area of the coast taken up by Hinkley Point C was previously home to a great number of wildlife including whimbrel and black-tailed godwit, peregrine falcons, kestrels, and several species of butterfly. Bridgwater Bay itself is a Nature Reserve and a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and one has to wonder as to the impact of a new nuclear power station on the site.

It is these contradictions which, in part, have caused my fascination with

Hinkley Point and therefore its ‘obsessive presence’⁹⁰ both in this thesis and my novel, *How Not to Get Pregnant*. In the novel, Hinkley Point is often referred to in descriptions of setting and landscape and provides a point of fascination due to the fact that it is simultaneously how many of the characters earn their living and a threat to their potential physical safety and to livelihoods such as farming. A main theme in my novel is the notion that landscape shapes the characters as much as they shape it, although they may not realise the extent to which this is true. In addition, the nuclear power station’s Gothic presence contributes to and foreshadows the almost apocalyptic final scenes in the novel, which occur once Foot and Mouth disease has taken hold.

Overall, my intention was to write a novel in which the main characters are in a same-sex relationship but where the plot and source of conflict in the novel does not come from their sexuality. I specifically wanted to write a coming of age novel, which also happened to be about lesbian characters, rather than a coming-out novel where the main conflict arises from their sexuality. Therefore, I made the conscious decision to include the plot about foot-and-mouth disease in order to explicitly provide an external source of strife and conflict in their lives. When everything else seems to be failing, they can return to each other and enjoy an easy, healthy relationship. Additionally, I chose foot-and-mouth due to its association with the rural, farming communities, and the landscape in general. When the disease that destroys a family farm has been introduced by people or animals travelling across the landscape, or from smoke blowing across the landscape, it doubles the threat as the land is suddenly a threat more than a provider, yet must also be protected in attempts to stop the disease from spreading further.

It felt important to write about rural spaces that are not pastoral idylls, and

⁹⁰ Brossard, *Baroque at Dawn*, p.45.

returning to the South West felt a natural place to explore the walking-writing method, as a place where I was able to explore the notion of walking back in time through both personal and collective memory. When I revisited these sites to conduct fieldwork and refine my walking-writing method, I was struck by my emotional response to returning. Walking and writing stirred more emotion in me than I had expected it to. There came a point where I would imagine myself back within certain spaces in order to tap into certain emotions, and hopefully these affective spaces come through in the novel.

However, the final product is not strictly ‘life writing’, except in the sense that it is informed by my life and memories (no matter how accurate or inaccurate they may be). I started using a fake name and designing a pretend power station rather than use the real details of Hinkley Point, but doing so made the text feel less ‘true’ and genuine. As a result, the settings in the novel are based on real settings, but they became mostly unrecognisable throughout the writing process, as the nature of fiction necessitates small changes to details such as location, topography, name and physical appearance.

In 2025, Hinkley Point C will come ‘online’ as a generating power station. Its long life, followed by the lengthy process of decommissioning and the necessity of ensuring the nuclear waste remains safely stored on the site, means that Hinkley Point’s impact will certainly outlast myself, as well as those who designed and built it. After we are gone, it will still be there, square and strong. And, just as the sea will continue its never-ending washing in and out, in and out on the shore, Hinkley Point’s muscular halls will stand sentinel.

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