Abstract
At the heart of this paper is a piece of participatory research around art walking practice. Presented as a pair on interleaved trialogues, the aim is to capture the experience of participation and the array of interactions, debates and perspectives uncovered whilst walking the wateryscape and subsequently. Undertaken as a piece of performative and transversal writing, the aim here is to open up, but refuse to resolve, questions of ways of representing the wet, of emotional and communal resilience and of the position of an art walking practice in representing marginalised and watery; human and non-human voices. In resisting closure and in foregrounding the ‘always in the making’ nature of walking practice (growing knowledge by following a path) the paper faces the unresolved future of a people yet to come. The assertion is that walking the liminal is both an unsettling and unsettled practice that is only emphasised when the walk is performed in the wateryscape.

Prompt: ‘Representing Resilience’?
Answer: ‘My boots’

Sea weed tangled in the grass
everything in flux
land was water, water land

(Lucy Guenot)

What is identified elsewhere as intertidal spaces (Jones 2010) and conceptualised elsewhere as ‘thinking like a wetland’ (Irvine et al. this volume) is here understood as ‘wateryscape’ for the phenomenologically-inspired association with dwelling and the human/non-human co-dependence such nomenclature implies. This understanding emerged from the AHRC ‘Researching Environmental Change’ Network: ‘Learning to Live with Water’ and associated (and integral) exhibition. These brought together a group of academics and artists out of which a number of foci and collaborative writing teams emerged. The central focus of this
article was to be on representing wateryscapes and questions surrounding arts practice in and of the wet. Gradually, and the product of the many hours of conversation, writing and negotiation of meaning that became the shaping methodology of our research, the participants here ‘assembled’ turned to critique this ‘brief’ and to engage at a much more convincing level with notions of representation, resilience and aesthetics as well as walking as art and research. One aim consequently became participation in the trigger activity of a First Friday Walk in the wet undertaken by the Gloucestershire based arts collective Walking the Land whose purpose is to connect ‘art, landscape and community’ (http://www.walkingtheland.org.uk/ Accessed 25 April 2012), and associated participants.

Taking a walk as point of departure, this paper seeks to interweave questions of arts practice, culturally-informed geographical fieldwork and resilience in the face of challenges to communal well-being with an exploration of the ways in which we might represent the ‘wateryscape’. Here we seek to build on work pioneered by Owain Jones (2010) who, in his consideration of ‘the time-spaces of UK tides’, explores the work of artists who draw the distinctive rhythmic and affective patterns of tidal processes into their art. The principle concern is to find a common language between the various practices at play and around the role of the arts community in developing a relational aesthetic (Bourriaud 2002) as part of communal resilience in the face of growing episodic or habitual flooding. This has become, therefore, a piece of practice-led research; a juxtaposing of a set of often distinct epistemologies, often held in tension. A key part of what became a creative tension was the recognition that we each bring a varying infrastructure to this work much of which cannot be fully articulated in a limiting frame. This was never the objective. For instance, it is beyond the scope of this article to examine the many ways in which walking is an unstable research process but sensitivity to this has underpinned many aspects of our discussions about the walk in question, such as (but not exclusively) acknowledgement of the diurnal and seasonal variations in the wateryscape walked, the facilitated nature of First Friday Walks and non-normative cultural interventions in and from the walk.

The walk in question was Walking the Land’s first ‘First Friday’ walk of 2012. In so doing the observer (non-participating) was (metaphorically) directed by Ingold (2010). This was an attempt to become knowledgeable – to grow knowledge by following a path made by Walking the Land’s facilitators and participants as we made our way through the wateryscape. Walk, talk (both on the day and subsequently) and participants became the research base.

Underpinning this participatory research was a depth of context (notably historical and cultural geography, socially-engaged art and a shared concern with the links between community and environmental resilience) which feed directly into this paper and which resulted in a piece of transversal narrative, an example
of ‘the deterritorialising power of art’ (O’Sullivan 2010). One of the intersections which focus this paper, therefore, is encounters through walking in liminal landscapes. Another is the recognition of the recent turn in cultural geography and the social sciences more generally, to Actor Network and non-representational theory and the impact this has had on our understanding of what the ‘work’ landscape may be said to do and the role of pedestrian practices in that understanding. Drawing on this rhizomatic principle we seek to represent (we choose this word carefully) through a triple interwoven narrative the array of interactions, debates and perspectives uncovered in the First Friday Walk and subsequently. We assert, moreover, that the wateryscape carries and conveys a distinct affective charge which narrates spaces, places and representations thereof in distinct ways. It is this assertion which this paper sets out to test. In so doing, however, we cannot hope to represent the totality of Walking the Land’s practice, the extent of the dialogue and interventions provoked or the variety of the work produced by the arts community that the collective draw into their walks, some of whom have not offered work coming out of this wet walk; others did not attend the walk.

Assembling 1: resilience; aesthetics; representation
That resilience has many nuances is indicated by the fact that the term is used by psychologists to describe how people live and cope under different situations of trauma and stress (Cork 2009), is applied in the biological sciences to describe sustainable ecosystems (Adger 2000) and has been taken up by the social science and policy communities to describe the capacity of economic, social and environmental systems to absorb shocks and still retain the same basic function and structure (Walker and Salt 2006). Further, in 2005 the Transition Movement emerged with an interest in how communities could build resilience and reduce their carbon emissions (Rob Hopkins 2011). The term is thus as fluid as the watery landscapes this special edition engages with. The path we tread in this article explores the boundaries between the resilience of wateryscapes and subjectivity through an arts walking practice. A specific walk that is liminal in a number of ways; in that it traverses a landscape that changes with the tide, with the seasons and over time, and the liminality of the conversations between participants that move back and forth through the spaces between disciplines and interests.

The metaphorical path criss crosses previously walked paths, those taken by artists such as Hamish Fulton, by psycho geographers such as Will Self and Iain Sinclair and artists and performers such as Deirdre Heddon. We tread paths also made by the anthropologist Tim Ingold (2010a; 2010b; Ingold and Vergunst, 2008), and natural scientists and geographers such as John Wylie (2002; 2005; 2007; 2009; 2012) and Owain Jones (2011a; 2011b; 2010). This art walking practice also finds common cause with other socially engaged artists working within and with communities from the Situationist International and Joseph Beuys to artists such as Tino Sehgal, whose concerns with what it means to belong
to a group (Higgins 2012) intersect with Nicholas Bourriaud's relational aesthetic and Felix Guattari's description of art as 'being a vital element in the crystallization of individual and collective subjectivities' (Guattari 1995: 130). All of these seek to build social and cultural capital as elements of resilience as do the many recent arts practices more readily identified with community resilience, such as those working with marginalised groups in health care settings or in the Transition Towns Movement. Further, the often aesthetic aspects of resilience that are incorporated into arts projects find echo in the business world; Shrivastava and Statler for example claim that 'aesthetic practice can draw the emotional and rational worlds together into a holistic experience that expands sense perception to produce 'socially responsible and sustainable outcomes' (Shrivastava and Statler 2010: 122). Arts practice can facilitate too the stillness that is demanded in looking and sensing with intensity thereby opening ourselves up to the 'scapes we shape and are shaped by. ‘Prolonged looking’, for instance, was practiced by Van Gogh, a technique in which looking or habitual observation becomes 'seeing' (Stone 1967: 391). Whilst for Lucas (2008: 304) ‘the action of inscribing a line has the potential of being so deeply ingrained that it informs our thinking across other practices' and echoes into individual and communal resilience. Emotional or affective resilience, our central concern here, is increasingly being addressed in flood risk management, has a political dimension and through aesthetic ideas such as sense perception (Ranciere 2004), firmly draws together the practices of arts and politics. Extending this in a compelling way, Guattari provides a theoretical base – an ethico-aesthetic paradigm – from which aesthetics and ‘social responsibility’ can meld with ecological sustainability in the belief that the repelling of ‘the ordeals of barbarism, the mental implosion and chaomic spasms looming on the horizon requires all disciplines to combine their creativity.’ (Guattari 1995: 135) Guattari’s concern is how to enable subjectivity of individuals, the group and institutions in the context of, the authors would claim, creating a resilient future. In contemporary art, this can mean moving away from an authored representation towards ‘representing’ a future yet to come, hence Walking the Land’s evolving practice is an attempt to replace ‘framed nature’ with a direct appreciation of nature, a response by participants to being in a place, shedding the ‘author’s voice’ and the subject/object divide, what Guattari referred to as the ‘ontological iron curtain between beings and things.’ (Guattari 1995: 8) Moreover, the arts practice demanded here is informed by the intensity, stillness and concentration found in Christian, Buddhist and Toaist meditation in which walking can be central. These practices speak to a resilience that is in and of itself emotional and affective; at one and the same time of the self and ‘in the world’ and which draw inspiration from work on environmental aesthetics by, amongst others, Berleant (2010), Brady(2003), Carlson (2008), Hepburn (1966), Parson (2008), Rolston (2002) and Saito (2010); who together question and develop ideas such as cognitive and non-cognitive aesthetic appreciation of the natural environment
and, the aesthetics of the everyday. Within, therefore, any sense of the formulation and maintenance of social, environmental and communal resilience the artistic sensibility can be seen as vital, not least because to undertake any form of arts practice requires a strong element of self-resilience. For some, a key part of the act of making work involves the internalisation of questions about how to achieve the desired result; what marks to make; colours to use; areas to select. Being an artist can be a time of great self-doubt and uncertainty, certainly a time of questioning and change. Nevertheless, by accepting that the work will find its own way, irrespective of how strong or weak it is, the act rather than the resulting work, becomes the prime purpose, a learning process akin to Deleuze and Guattari’s deterritorialisation (Deleuze and Guattari 1972) or ‘rupture’ in normality.

This performative turn dominates much recent discourse across many disciplines. In the field of participatory art alone there are many significant contributions including those by Ranciere (2004), Claire Bishop (2012) and Shannon Jackson (2011) which raise a plethora of ideas and questions. Likewise, in cultural geography Gregson and Rose (2000: 434) suggest that ‘Space too needs to be thought of as brought into being through performances and as a performative articulation of power.’ Whilst much of the thrust of performance in the visual arts is away from visuality, the artefact-making aspect of the performativity can be an important part of the process and for some is in itself a reflective process: learning through practice. In this way Walking the Land see their walks as both a way of supporting the art community and of enabling the making of work that reaches out to a wider community by ‘talking’ about a range of values about local places, one instance of which is the (four-year) collaborative project: ‘River’. In parallel with this arts-focused way of contributing to community debate, the collective are walking with groups and local schools with a view to enabling the wider community to voice their aspirations and knowledge in the context of the (recently revived) Cotswold Canals Restoration Project (2012) – a major landscape change initiative affecting the area’s river landscape and the debate on a Severn barrage.

There is undoubtedly a representational form at play here but in acknowledging this Walking the Land appear less concerned with the form itself, or even if any artefact emerges at all, but with ways in which we (participants; communities) can be open to embodied (watery) spaces and the interaction of the human and non-human. Once, however, a researcher’s perspective is admitted the key epistemological question must become that of the gap between fieldwork and representation. Philips (2005: 507-509) on the other hand, prefers to bridge this gap through the claim that the attraction of walking to the artist is that it brings together ‘ethical engagement and aesthetic representation’, avoids reifying the ‘scape and offers choreography that is inflected with, but not controlling of, the social’. Thus the authors offer here Liminal Assemblage as a modest example of the seeds of such a transversal practice, which functions not ‘to represent, even something real, but rather
constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 142). In addition, this attempt at performative writing of the wet raises some other important questions centring on the role of representation and ways of representing the wet. Does, for instance, the creation of wateryscapes demand perception in motion in which the abandonment of the deployment of the static framing graze mirrors the fluid and temporary nature of the wet 'scape the artist seeks to respond to, understand and represent? Does the very fact that the 'scape is marginalised make the work contentious and political and if so, are these marginalised voices (human and non-human) well represented by an arts walking practice?

In the social sciences there is a concern to acknowledge the role of the arts in research practices, to adopt a performative stance in which, according to Susan Finley, the aim involves 'the writing and rewriting of meanings that continually disrupts the authority of texts. Resistance is a kind of performance that holds up for critique hegemonic texts' (in Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 686). An assemblage flows towards and away from this principle, as with the tide, and leads also to the position of a refusal to fully close the authorial circle. In the same way that the wateryscape continually resists natural and cultural boundaries and management, the work here made and Walking the Land’s practice more generally, looks for fluidity and disruption of authorial authority. If the managed wateryscape is the text, the use of an arts walking practice, engaging every sense, seeks to makes these marginalised and non-human voices heard; against another tide, that of environmental degradation and disengagement with nature. To represent wateryscape is to resist and to be resilient.

Assembling 2: walking research and a First Friday Walk in the wateryscape

First Friday Walks are a central part of Walking the Land’s practice and process. On these they are joined by an assemblage of other artists, photographers, writers, visionaries, scientists and historians, other community members, or specific groups. The walks are designed to enable engagement with place and are based in a phenomenological approach which draws on notions of embodied practice and performativity and relational aesthetics. With such diversity comes an arts practice which draws people together; what both Bourriaud (2002:44) and Guattari would recognise as ‘constructed conviviality’. Through this Walking the Land practice mindful art walking, sensual walks, as a way to harness and share observations about self and one’s environment. The walks are less about making art than using it to ask questions about embodied experience, being in the group, the unhelpfulness of the nature/culture binary and emotional and communal resilience.

Here, then, is slow/rapid/ambling walking (and wayfaring) as performance and means to artistic production. Here too is the recognition that walking as research is not a stable frame but in these walks/works a bodily engagement with place, space and landscape and the sense in which we ‘enact’ and perform
in them is put to use in the pursuit of artistic ‘tasks’. We might imagine, therefore, that the work *Walking the Land* produces, either exploring the wet or the dry, are taskscapes in the sense best articulated by Tim Ingold (1993). Here too are strong parallels with Ingold’s (2010: 122) assertion of the power of ‘walking along’ in ‘becoming knowledgeable’ [his italics]. The ground as ‘a domain in which the lives and minds of its human and non-human inhabitants are comprehensively bound up with one another’ (Ingold 2010: 135) being both the locus of co-existence and knowledge. There are also resonances here with the methodological and performative praxis of ethno-mimesis (O’Neil and Hubbard 2010). Occupying the space between social science and art, this brings knowing into contact with ethnography in order to re-tell life narratives in art form and to uncover the immaterial and ‘unsayable’. Further, practitioners of ethno-mimesis suggest that the visual outcomes of this methodology may well both offer transformative possibilities and assist in the furthering of social justice; here recognised as resilience. Clearly, then, ethno-mimesis is far from the separation of knowledge and movement Elizabeth Curtis recognises in the supervised heritage trail (Ingold and Vergunst 2008). Rather what ethno-mimesis captures and *Walking the Land* practice is much closer to, are the walking traditions of a variety of indigenous peoples discussed in Ingold and Vergunst’s collection. For the Batek of Malaysia, for instance, ‘walking comprises a suite of bodily performances’ through which, and, as they go along, ‘knowledge is forged’ (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008: 5).

In seeking to establish linkages and common ground between *Walking the Land*’s practice and wider social and cultural theory around landscapes it is important to be mindful of the warnings of Lavery (2009) and others that academics have been guilty of writing about walking rather than practicing it and, for instance, notwithstanding its many merits and pioneering importance, Pearson and Shanks’s study of walking as site-specific performance is over-reliant on theory. Lavery goes on to highlight the ‘democratic’ and experiential nature of the pedestrian performance recognising it as part of ‘a quest to find a more fluid and mobile mode of interaction with our surroundings which is based on a self-generated rhythm’ (2009: 47).

It is far from axiomatic that the obvious is the least effective. Thus the most convincing prism through which to view *Walking the Land*’s practices would be work, such as those undertaken by Sarah Pink and her colleagues in a special edition of *Visual Studies* (2010) which seeks to give equal weight to the visual and to arts practice, alongside the scholarly. An equally rewarding viewing platform would be non-representational theory with its focus upon practice/performance/affect in and of the moment and not least
because it could be said to be based on a self-conscious ‘turn’ away from the methodologies of the social sciences and towards approaches found in the arts. It is, however, work which has both derived from and sought to deepen and expand this approach which offer the most potent rhizomatic entanglements with *Walking the Land*. In this the work of Hayden Lorimer (2010) but perhaps even more so that of John Wylie and Owain Jones offer the most tenacious connections, the latter because of his watery emphases; the former because of his walking practice.

In a compelling and coherent body of work Wylie’s point of departure was the antithetical perspectives of landscape history and landscape as text. Working from the belief that the latter disassociated the process of study from that which was studied Wylie turned to the presumption ‘of connection and immersion’ (2009:282) provided by an appreciation of ‘the evolving co-presence of self and landscape’ to be found in phenomenological and non-representational idioms. (2009: 278) Wylie thus sought to respond to Thrift’s call to ‘weave a poetic’ (2005: 237) of the commonplace. In moving beyond the straightforwardly narrative and towards embracing the creative register Wylie’s writing both echoed the non-linear nature of the walks he undertook and was underscored by the view that the landscapes through which we move are the point of interconnection between the human (mind; body) and the world within which it moves. Thus a walk up Glastonbury Tor became the way in which ‘distinctive senses of walker and ground, observer and observed, distil and refract … into performative orderings of self and landscape (2005: .236).

As Pink and her colleagues (2010) assert, the everyday world is experienced through the multiplicity of our senses and our sense of ‘scape shaped on a range of different corporeal and cognitive levels which become interwoven as we walk and experience. Furthermore, such interweaving can extend to that of walking, art and ethnography and offers a direct connection to First Friday Walks.

Through a fascinating exploration of the work of the writer Tim Robinson (2012), Wylie went on to reiterate his close intellectual connection to the dwelling perspective developed by Tim Ingold. Merlau-Ponty is another touchstone (perhaps we should say waymarker in a walking context) but a new strand of thinking has led Wylie on new paths. On these his concern is with the difficulties landscape phenomenology has escaping from assertions of romanticism, ‘myths of primitivism and baleful notions of authentic and proper dwelling’ (2009: 282) (concerns shared by Ingold (2011) who now prefers the term ‘habitation’), which is traced back to the Heiddegerian original. Where this takes Wylie to is a recognition of the problems inherent in any valorising of presence in landscape phenomenology – largely associated with ‘the fractured constitution of subjectivity’ which he seeks to balance by reference to ‘the constitutive aspects of absence, dislocation and distancing’ (2009: 287).

Here, however, is where *First Friday Walks* and Wylie’s landscape perspectives depart. Theirs is a firmly presentist and embodied
phenomenology which, in the context of the current paper at least, embraces the wet. Wylie’s walks are on dry land and whilst he does not turn his back (figuratively and literally) entirely on the wet he cannot be said to be walking the wateryscape. Jones (2011b; 2010), on the other hand, is closely concerned with the wet. It is his assertion that a crucial aspect of what we are experiencing when we enter into a watery landscape is the intersection of a set of rhythmpatterns driven by the watery agency of the tide. Tidal processes shape local landscapes of being, and feature as one part of relational formations between nature and culture. The landscapes in which these relationships are played out are, Jones asserts, liminal spaces, critical for human and non-human life. And whilst Jones is here focussing on a watery/tidal agency his depiction of the ‘hybrid timescapes’ thus created work perfectly well to articulate and animate the wateryscape: ‘non-human rhythms folding into social rhythms of economy and culture’ (Jones, 2011b: 2292). Wateryscape is, then, a complex inter-meshing of natural and social rhythms in which place is continuously and multi-variously practised and performed. The rhythm pattern of the tide and the resultant wateryscape extends into the socio-spatial by dictating where and when we walk; what to sense; how we represent. It is incorrect, nevertheless, to wholly equate the wateryscape with either the intertidal zone or the marshy wetland areas on the edges of these zones. In both instances human activity has rendered these considerably less ‘wet’ than unaffected topography.

There are, therefore, polysemic mental, material and affective interactions within the wateryscape, elegantly captured in the discussion of the Blues in a separate paper in this collection (see McEwen et al.) and the poetry of Philip Gross. It is evoked too in Monet’s Thames paintings and present in the opening chapters of Great Expectations. We might even mention the film Southern Comfort but some of the most powerful evocations come in the prose of Graham Swift (1983) and Adam Nicolson (1986).

If you sit on one of the banks of these rhynes, the high water in the field soaks up into the cloth of your trousers, so that the only thing to do is swim and move over from the watery peat to the peaty water, a half-noticed change from one half-element to another. ... Time stops ... You hang embedded in the place as though in a tomb, with some strange osmosis of the water sliding into the heart through the skin. It is a soggy, ambivalent fringe world, a world hinged to both and and ... But do not be discovered or admit to this odd behaviour. Floating in the rhynes is not what the moor-men do themselves ...

If you live in a place, some distance must be preserved. (Nicolson 1986: 40)

Wetness is not a substance but a quality that seeps and leaks into everything like a stain. Wetness blurs and softens ... But the low wet moors of the Somerset levels, thick with their waters are the negative, the feminine of that. They are the most female of landscapes and if you lie and sleep there on a summer afternoon, you
will dream not of prominence but of absorption, curling its flesh around you in the soft kiss of an insect-eating fungus ... “you’ll never get rid of the damp”, Harold Hambrow said. “The damp’s in the place.” (Nicolson 1986: 1-6)

Yet why, you may ask, did the Cricks rise no further? ... Perhaps because of that old, watery phlegm which cooled and made sluggish their spirits, despite the quantities of it they spat out, over their shovels and buckets, in workmanlike gobbets. Because they did not forget, in their muddy labours, their swampy origins; that, however much you resist them, the waters will return; that the land sinks; silt collects; that something in nature wants to go back. ... To live in the Fens is to receive strong doses of reality. The great flat monotony of reality; the wide empty spaces of reality. Melancholia and self-murder are not unknown in the Fens ... how do you surmount reality, children? How do you acquire, in a flat country, the tonic of elevated feelings? ... if you are born in the middle of that flatness, fixed in it, glued to it even by the mud in which it abounds....? (Swift,1983: 14-15)

One of the tracks Macfarlane follows in *The Old Ways* (2012: 59 and 75) – the Broomway: ‘made neither of water nor of land’ – brings knowledge of the rhythmspace of the wateryscape; the substance of the ground ‘so influencing mind that mind’s own substance was altered’. Central to writing such as this and to the current article are questions of how and why we might reduce the shared and phenomenological world of movement and sensorality to printed text, emphasised, moreover, by the inevitable detachment associated with writing about something already passed. The need is thus ‘to find a form through which to distil the experience of previous performative events’ (Mock, 2009: 12). The answer, Mock believes (2009: 12), is to be found in what Peggy Phelan has called ‘performative writing’, one of the most compelling examples of which is to be found in Carl Lavery’s Part in Mock’s collection: ‘Mourning Walk’(Mock 2009: 29-56). Similarly albeit in one place, we seek to draw the theoretical and experienced into a form of performative narrative. This place is both the written page and the First Friday walk. In taking this walk the academic member of the writing team (observer) was methodologically guided by Wylie when he was joined by colleagues on his walks up Glastonbury Tor. In these instances Wylie sought the anecdotal and impressionistic with ‘comments, observations, turns of phrase’ noted down and used to supplement the authorial narrative (Wylie 2002: 446). In drawing on the participants in the ‘First Friday’ walk the observer sought to eavesdrop, to occasionally interject – in the exercises the group undertook and in more informal conversation – but mostly to observe and respond to the walk. Finally, in that the route was unknown to the researcher the knowledge thus made echoes something of the qualities outlined by Ingold (2010: S134). Knowledge he argues, is not a construction ‘but an improvisatory movement – of “going along” or wayfaring – that is open ended and knows no final destination’.
A further path to knowledge took the form of two trialogues: between the observer and the two facilitators from *Walking the Land*; between the observer, *Walking the Land* and the work which emerged from the walk. The resultant assemblage takes the trialogue form as its structuring discipline. This triple-interwoven narrative, is our attempt to write the walk and the talk, something of the rhythms of which are captured also through a number of punctuating ‘encounters’. As O’Sullivan (2006: 1) asserts ‘with a … encounter…our typical ways of being in the world are challenged. Our systems of knowledge disrupted. We are forced to thought.’ Forced also to recognise the inside/outside hybridity of this participatory research and walking practice.
**outside/inside**

**Encounter 1**

I arrive in an unexpected pub. Unexpected because both the food and beer are good, it is very welcoming – not always a feature of Severnside pubs – and because it survives despite its location.

Am I the awkward interloper? The non- (and wholly refusenik) artist who will quickly get spotted as such. The academic, there to observe and therefore to disrupt the very dynamic I seek to observe?

And what of the observed? What is it that has drawn them to this particular watery walk and the depiction of the wateryscape?

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**inside/outside**

We drive the twelve or so miles together. The pub which I’ve visited once before is not where it’s shown on Google maps but luckily has its own direction sign; people should find it OK. We drive past the pub, the couple of miles to Purton, checking that we know the way, deciding that to walk from the pub and back would take too much of the groups’ time. When we return the pub is open and Anna already arrived.

Gradually people gather, a number of us eating together, some just rendezvousing. These convivial, informal, slow, starts have their strengths and yet I’m always carrying in my head the facilitators’ picture of the day.

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**the place/scape**

We notice a number of unusual garden styles – lions on gates, griffins on walls. It reminds me a bit of the sea side and as we reach the brow of a low hill, the Severn Estuary appears; clearly sea side albeit inland.

The attraction of the wateryscape is that it is an active as opposed to passive phenomenon; dynamic and constantly moving; continually changing. We are aesthetically attracted to ‘duplication’ in reflections: two skies; two horizons etc. Intrigued by these contrasts we constantly search out differences and comparisons in our gaze. Thus the fluid waterscape as opposed to the static of hills, fields and trees. The movement opposed by the still – the restless waters contrasting with resting landscape. Water’s surface intrigues us with its changes in light, texture and colour, our transient perception of it constantly in need of revisiting. It’s illusion is that it is both solid and liquid. This transitional and active phenomena engages on different levels, changes by the minute as tides and wind subtly sculpt shoreline and sky reflections duplicate colours and shapes.
Meanwhile people take responsibility for their own entry to the group, with us having simply created the situation.

As we walk conversations strike up again. For the majority of the group it’s their first visit to Purton despite the proximity for many. The isolated quality off the Severn villages and their watery landscape is having its effect.

As if not ready yet for the watery landscape, we walk along the tow path next to the canal, strange that the canal is the ‘firmest’ place around.

The wrecks dominate my thoughts about our visit to this watery landscape. They prevent the banks of the canal from being eroded, the river is now contained by these hulks that once floated upon the water, they have changed the land beyond, fixing it as a dry place, changing its previous sometime dry, sometime wet nature. This is resilience of a sort, adapting to changes in transport driven by commerce and trade. I ponder on the loss of habitat, loss of ways of life and opportunities to experience wildness. In my mind I use it as a metaphor for the proposals for a Severn barrage – would this similarly be seen as resilience in the face of climate change? Would it, like the hulks but on a grand scale forever destroy this unique, wet and changing landscape?

I am required to explain myself and my mission. Quizzical glances and direct questions. This is a further disruption. But it rapidly becomes obvious that I am not the only outsider – yes the only non-artist but not the only stranger. Introductions are required.

Encounter 2
Is a canal landscape – constrained; regulated; artificial; managed; a ‘watery’ landscape?

Encounter 3
But we soon turn off the canal path, through mud (someone falls!) and towards the Purton hulks.

What odd things these are. Beached to protect the canal bank from erosion by the encroaching Severn they have done their job so well that they are now bank themselves. Slowly (or rapidly) rotting, vandalised (is that the right word for it?) and abandoned, they are not crafts but neither are they entirely land.
Outside/Inside

Canal; mud; river; tide; light; space; these are what strike me across the first five minutes of our walk. But I'm still sceptical about being able to discern anything different about the group's creative practice in the wet.

Inside/Outside

It was a cold January day and we didn't do the things we do in summer – shoes off in the mud for instance. This meant it was harder to respond and required more effort from us than had we donned wet suits and waterproof cameras; more thoughtfulness.

Our response is often internalised and maybe not discernible. Perhaps the difference you are looking for isn't visible other than in the work... or its intent...

At times, taking in the whole 'gaze', wateryness can overwhelm by the sheer size of this multitudinous single feature and makes one draw breath. The sense of place imbued with watery environments is typified by their place in myth and folklore: the river spirit of the Severn; Ashrays of Scotland; Grindy lows of Yorkshire; the Naiads and Sirens of Greek mythology.

The Place/Scape

I draw and walk – take a photograph of the drawing in the place, draw and walk – take a photograph of the drawing in the place. This method is one I used a few weeks earlier, walking on the Ridgeway in Wiltshire. A very different place. I think it is appropriate in both landscapes because both are linear – how appropriate it would be in a watery landscape with no path is questionable. I think of Celts on the river and early Britons on the Ridgeway. River to land.

“...there used to be a ferry so we really have lost everything” (Companion 1) (referring to our contact with the river).

What have we lost in our evolution from water based to land based beings? Is this loss part of why I feel like a visitor in this place? I wonder about the many shoreline birds that are sharing the estuary with us, what a different evolutionary route they are taking.

Image by Anna Knight

Image by David Joyce
the place/scape
Seeing not Looking
In terms of my practice on the day, the walk was the practice; writing drawing and photography first helped concentration and observation and secondly recorded the process.

Drawing Sounds

inside/outside
Seeing not Looking
Being a land-based stranger in a strange, watery-world requires observation.
This walk was about sensitivity to place rather than literally diving in. We would do it differently at different times and through different places. A group of us are working on a project called ‘River’ and have already collaborated with being over water, under water and are planning boat trips.

Drawing Sounds

outside/inside
Encounter 4
Seeing not Looking
We stop to undertake the first exercise. But why do we stop? There are now many examples of mobile creative practices but aren’t we separating it out?

Encounter 5
Drawing Sounds
Silence, but not silence of course.
I’m wondering how many of my companions will filter out the industrial sounds, which for me dominate the soundscape.

Observing and representing a place by drawing can include senses other than sight, such as listening to how it sounds. I was disappointed that the sounds of calling, wading birds faded as we began to draw, the most constant noise to my ear was an industrial hammering from nearby dry land. Many of us drew the sounds of passing birds and someone with more acute hearing than me drew the sound of a stream draining into the river on the other bank. It was as if we were straining our ears to hear the special sounds associated with a watery landscape.
Encounter 6
A camera falls in the mud.
“I heard that it was going
to be wet … I’ve never
dropped it on hard ground … I deliberately sought
out the muddier path …
the car’s in a terrible state
when I go back [after
coming down to the river]
… I’ve done this so many
times now … It is so very
difficult to get the dried
mud out of the camera
… it’s not sand, it’s much
finer than that.” (Compan-
ion 2)

People are feeling cold; we walk on to warm up.
I observe that our own resilience is very much
about reverting to our land-based activity of walk-
ing – are we unable to survive in a watery landscape
without changing it?

Is this resilience though – how much of us would
survive without the experiences and fellow creatures
special to a watery landscape? If we adapt to a life
without these what will we be? Dry.

Encounter 7
In virtually all the literature
I’ve read on walking as
creative practice the walk
is the creative act. Here
this would seem to be the
case for the facilitators
from Walking the Land but
do they ever show this as
their work?

This takes us to the fraught issue of what art is
or isn’t. I offer no definition! Walking is a per-
formance that lasts only in the moment unless we
do something concrete to change that. But it is not
essential to come away with something tangible
and plastic. Walking the Land undertake two differ-
ent types of walk: our own longer walks which are
much more personal to us and are definitely part
of our practice and the First Friday walks. We do
act as facilitators: enabling others to make work
informed by pedestrian practices. But at the same
time we make work on these walks (some of which
is shown here) and we have come to realise – partly
stimulated by our discussions for this paper – that
First Friday walks are now also one element of our
practice. So there’s an ambivalence and transience
there. I like the idea that First Friday walks could be
either – it mirrors the wateryscape we were engag-
ing with.
Haikus and Reflections

We suggest to participants that we spend half an hour alone writing a Haiku and drawing motion. These structures and processes forcing us to observe and think in a different way.

Kel Portman

Q – “A landscape is in motion then?”
A – “Oh yes absolutely … and when you come back it has changed because the light has changed”. (Companion 3)

“… motion … light … wind … hair … it’s all in motion” (Companion 6).

In response to a question about what makes a watery landscape.

“The question is whether you alter your practice and the medium you use [to represent the wateryscape] or whether you stick with your normal practice.”

Q – And is there a right way?”
A – “No there’s no right or wrong way” (Companion 5)

It is low tide. Geology makes its mark on the river bed. Various described as “ribs” (companion 2) or “striations” (companion 6). This last companion stops, takes a piece of paper and places it in a thick, muddy ooze. Picks it up and places it in her notebook.

The man with the map tells me we are opposite Awre. We discuss the fact that here, in 1795, a grain barge is seized by (mainly) women and children from the Forest of Dean, the grain is sold for a just price to the crowd, the money given to the bargees and the sacks returned.

“Snippets of history … wouldn’t be here if it wasn’t for the river.”
Encounter 9

We've turned back on ourselves (not a circular walk after all) and, at last, encounter proper, sapping mud. This is what I was hoping for. We slog through and I overhear the remark which for me sums up the whole encounter with the wet: “I grabbed something that was loose” (companion 7) it is unfortunate, in a way, that this remark is not referring to the work this artist has made. It is also unfortunate that we don’t stop.

Reflections & Haikus

We arrive at our final stop and exercise. Not everyone responds. Tired? I’m knackered!

Making work stood in mud generated by the watery landscape through which we are moving, now that would be an encounter with the wet! We lead the group through a wet place, surrounded by river, meadows and far away hills. People are struggling, slipping and sliding, we only have a narrow path to walk, treading on tree roots, fallen branches and discarded fence posts. I remember summer walks by the river, shoes off, drawings made in the mud – how changeable is the watery landscape from season to season as well as day to day and tide to tide.

Encounter 10

Reflections & Haikus

We invite people to draw but some have to leave and others just want to talk. A shame in as much as it is such a wild, wet location. Blowing above this unique place - a ‘stars and stripes’ - I find it ambiguous; is it a threatening statement written in the sky—‘we will conquer this little wild west.’

We hear a few more haikus once we are back on dry land – the canal tow path - but it’s time to finish rather than let things dwindle. Some very positive feedback as people remove walking boots and climb back into cars. Soon the car park is empty save for the three of us and a puddle.

And once more a pub. But this one has very odd, infrequent opening hours: three hours a night for a few nights in the week and at weekends. That’s all they need allegedly as the place is very popular in the summer as the view over the estuary is spectacular. Wateryscape as tourist destination. Perhaps that how we encourage resilience – flood tourism?

Liminal Assemblage. January 2012
Iain Robertson and Walking the Land
Disassembling: concluding remarks
The process of assembling this article has begun to create a shared understanding of some of what wateryscape signifies to the writers. It has been an exploration of the unknowns between us, the production of individual and group subjectivity, an experiment in weaving differences into a living tapestry of ideas, and as such allegorical of the watery landscape in which we walked and of the landscape as a cultural construct into which the river pours and overflows creating a liminal space which itself can be seen to represent the ebbing and flowing between culture and nature. As such it also represents resilience as a relationship between individual and group subjectivity and natural processes. Walking the Land have all along expressed a concern about reaching conclusions in this process, largely because it has and will continue to be an emergent practice, one by which they have begun to explore. These liminal spaces are explored through walking with sound equipment, cameras, notebooks, drawing books and a larger group of people Walking the Land are concerned also with the liminal spaces created by our various understandings and experiences: by talking, reading, writing and, in this paper, by making an assemblage of our shared metaphorical journeys, a way of becoming something we weren’t at the outset.
We suggest that this ‘becoming’ aspect of our approach is particularly relevant in the context of landscape and community and emotional resilience as it implies a willingness to share ideas, knowledge, an unfolding of ‘one Universe of value into another’ (Guattari 1995: 102). And so, our multi-faceted, creative process points to a future yet to come and opens the possibility of a people yet to come, in as much as ‘the creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not yet exist’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1994: 108). This focus on people yet to come and the world that they will inhabit is a central concept for sustainability and community resilience. It is within this future that we place a shared representation of a wateryscape.

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