

On keeping Portland (weird).
Fiction, folklore and art; filling the holes of the Isle of Portland.

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Note

If you so wish, you may read any of the following stories, in any order, without necessarily reading the more theoretical writing in between; *Beating the Bounds* (3), *Wabsey* (7-13), *High Angle Battery* (16-19), *The boulder* (29-32), and *The Abandoned City* (37-42).

In a desperate effort I kept going until the wobbling phantom of grey became a tangible reality. When I reached it, I couldn't help but fold my body onto the stone in relief. I thought of the photos of the ceremony that took place here every seven years. Schoolchildren folded over the boulder just as I was, 'beaten' with the Reeve Staff. Back when beating children as punishment was common practice, the nominated schoolboys would have actually been hurt by the ceremony. I wondered if the beating was hard enough to feel the indents and ridges on the staves where Portlanders' rent collection was recorded. A knowing and respect of the island's Royal boundary beaten into their minds, marks of the monarchy's profits beaten into their skin.

The stone was cold on my torso. Finally, my journeying was over, and I could begin. Gulping down the last of my water, I wiped the sweat from my brow and entered the Island and Royal Manor of Portland.

Introduction

As I'm leaving, the owner of Newcross bookshop tells me, through bouts of awkward laughter but with a look in his eye that is discerningly serious, that whatever I do, do not say the word 'r*****' when I go back. It's a weird place, full of strange happenings and odd histories. At least that's what the bookshop owner tells me when I say I'm researching Portland. In fact, almost everyone who has heard of Portland has shared with me speculations on the island, whether that be the prohibition of the 'R word', rumours of incest, whether or not Gary Glitter is incarcerated there, ruminations on Portlanders' 'character', references to Thomas Hardy and Ian McKeown and the strangeness of their writing, hearsays about the prisoners and the quarrying of stone and sometimes even memories, or feelings experienced on childhood holidays.² On Portland, the spatial and temporal proliferation of folklore into reality stems from the island's unique relationship to fiction, layers of which are nested within each other like fossils from times gone by. Layers of fiction nest on top of, within and between the rocky layers of this tiny island of watery edges – a tiny island that is actually an isle, whose material stretches far beyond its strict boundaries.

Leaning on Tim Ingold's framework of 'meshwork', I explore how, on Portland, fiction has become an agent within its meshwork, one that is able to create and repair lifeways in the face of extraction. Through experimental diagramming, which morphed

² Thomas Hardy's book is called *The Well-Beloved*, (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan London Limited, 1972) and Ian McKeown's *On Chesil Beach*, (London: Jonathon Cape, 2007).

through various versions and configurations before taking its final form, I have constructed a theoretical framework that maps how folklore, local idioms and unique histories are embedded within the functioning of the island.

Alongside the meshwork, Ben Bratton's concept of 'the stack' is an essential element of my thesis that helps to illustrate how the meshwork might move into new territories. The 'stack in the meshwork' diagram shows how artists like Kneed, or the not-for-profit arts organisation b-side, are able to enrich the meshwork of Portland by working with ways of life that already exist to encourage new encounters and influence new trajectories. Furthermore, through Katrina Palmer's fictions, which themselves address the question of extraction on Portland, I question fiction as a potentially extractive process. How might fictioning *from* a place, rather than *with* a place, change the 'stack in the meshwork' diagram?

Eventually I deep dive into Portland's 'weirdness'. Through Mark Fisher's conceptualisations of 'the weird' and Raymond Williams' ideas around residual culture, I explore how Portland's 'weirdness' might be a practice that can reject the dominant hegemony, resist extraction and work across various temporalities to weave the future into Portland's meshwork.

Through each section, I explore the potentiality of art and fiction to 'fill the holes' of a community which has faced, and still faces, the ruin of extraction. In place of the council's help, funding and efficient infrastructure, I will explore how art and fiction are able to maintain history, provide consistencies within the present and create future pathways. Portland is the perfect case study for this specific exploration of fiction. The 'weirdness' of Portland, as practiced through folklore and fiction, already exists on the island as a method with the power to resist the gentrifying, homogenising and extractive ways of the current neoliberalist system. The presence of fiction and folklore keep this weirdness, as a practice of resistance, alive. Thus, keeping Portland weird keeps Portland alive.

To understand the forthcoming musings on the meshwork, it is important to first trace the watery edges of Portland and its history. Under the pressure of a restricted word count, it would be impossible to thoroughly historicize Portland; instead I will outline context that I believe to be essential to understanding the relevance of this thesis.



Figure 2: Tunnel entrance to the Verne Citadel, Portland. The mist is low and the road curves through the tunnel. The traffic lights show green but there are no vehicles.

Extractive beginnings

I am writing back and forth between London and Dorset. Portland stone is as close to me in London as it is there. The development of Portland as an ‘extractive zone’ has produced a city (London) that hides within its fabric the political geographies and social landscape of the Isle of Portland. From as early as the 14th century, Portland’s historical and agricultural landscape began to be sacrificed for quarries, which soon after would provide the majority of stone to rebuild London after the Great Fire of 1666. Though quarrying has destroyed most remnants from Portland’s early settlers, the island has been occupied since prehistoric times. Remains of a Mesolithic settlement still exist at Portland Bill, amongst one of the last areas of original, un-quarried landscapes.

Portlanders resisted enclosure for longer than many, holding on to their common lands which expanded into areas of open grassland and multiple agricultural strip fields, (also home

to their famous Portland mutton).³ Gravelkind, a unique inheritance law that allowed the subdivision of land between all tenants, including women, continued for centuries until it was abolished by the Property Act of 1925. Now the old field names are quarry names. Despite a long history of common land, Portland has in fact been in possession of the Crown since Saxon times, hence its official name 'Island and Royal Manor of Portland'. During William II's reign (1087-1100), he imposed a land tax to secure supplies of Portland stone for the Crown and also pay for its defence from coastal attacks. This tax was collected by the Reeve, who carved lines onto a staff to record payments. This rent was known as 'quit rent', as in return residents were freed from any obligation of service to the lord, for example military service.

The common land of Portland was (and still is) divided in two. The Crown Freehold land is controlled by the Crown estate and is leased to the council, property developers and quarrying firms. For every tonne of stone quarried on this land, the Crown receive a fee, generating income from the extraction of stone. The Crown Common land is administered and overlooked by the Court Leet, an ancient court that was never absorbed by the local government and still holds legal power on Portland today.

Wabsey

On arriving at his office that morning, the postman discovered that his service was being relocated from Dorchester onto the isle of Portland. The postal commissioner had sat him down and explained, without faltering in her usual cold tone, that there had been another fatal accident on a boat trip to the mainland from Portland, on which the island's previous postman had been travelling at the time of its sinking amid the stormy current. Her lack of surprise or sadness in retelling the story of his death could only have been helped by the fact that the postman was one of many that year who had faced the peril of the crossing – and had not made it back alive.

³ Doomsday book records that in 1086 there were nine hundred sheep on Portland. Whilst other areas were experimenting with breed development, Portland's sheep remained isolated. During George III's excursions to Portland, he took a particular liking to the mutton and it has since been considered a delicacy. The sheep's population on the island reduced drastically following the reduction of agricultural land owing to quarrying. A few were reared on the mainland and kept the breed alive until they were reintroduced back onto the island in 1977 for a trial period in the prison garden. The sheep now thrive on the island at Fancy's Farm, located in part of an old ROTOR radar station used during the Cold War. For more information on Portland sheep, see Katrina Palmer, *End Matter*, (Belgium: Artangel and Book Works, 2015), 91-92 and "Portland," RBST, accessed August 25, 2023, <https://www.rbst.org.uk/portland#:~:text=History,sheep%20of%20Portland%20remained%20isolated>.

It was that same day that the postman set off to make the crossing. The ferry was known to be a treacherous navigation, but it was the only way to access the island, apart from the long and pebbled stretch of Chesil beach whose edges tightened and widened depending on the tide. Although Portlanders were of their own kind, jealous of their rights and often disapproving of Kimberlins entering their community, not having a safe crossing to the mainland made communications, healthcare and so on, almost impossible.⁴ The postman knew of a letter to the King, sent and signed by almost all the families of the island, which politely begged the King to resource the island's infrastructure.

For now, though, the boat was the only way. The best way to access Southwell, the village on the furthest side of the island from the ferry crossing, was by foot. Since there were no road names or house numbers attached to the addressed recipients, the postman's journey was urged on by short interactions of shouting between locals, who directed him through courtyards to various workmen and washer women whom he interrupted to hand out letters. He politely asked one woman if she knew where he might find a Harry Pearce. Pearce being the most popular of only a few common surnames on the island, the woman had to pause, presumably to deduce which Harry Pearce in Fortuneswell would most likely be receiving a letter from the mainland. He was told in a rough and thick island accent that Harry Pearce, the woman's sister's son, was better known as 'Sunday Mornin'" and that if he found the layman called 'skiffy' he would know where Sunday Mornin' was.

The postman headed southward, through Easton, with the hope of eventually ending up in Southwell, where he would deliver the last of his letters. The shortest route, looking from above, would cut directly across the common farmlands. As a Kimberlin himself the postman didn't dare cut through. The clinking chisels from the quarries were carried by the sea breeze. Every now and then he would hear the horses' clacking hooves and protesting grunts as they dragged stone blocks on wheels to Priory Corner, for onward dispatch from the Merchants railway, built for transporting huge quantities of Portland stone to Castletown. From there, it was shipped onto the mainland, before it graced the buildings of almost every city in the British Isles.

⁴ 'Kimberlin (n.) 1. Portland dialect for a person living on the Isle of Portland who does not descend from a lineage of at least two generations of Portlanders. 2. Portland dialect for a person from Weymouth, or by extension, a stranger, outsider or foreigner. [Middle English cōmeling n. From Old Germanic comling & (early) komeling, kimeling. Non-native, foreigner]'. Definition taken from Duncan Whitley, who constructed a film about the discovery of an underground cinema on Portland. For the definition and more information about the film, see "Kimberlin," Duncan Whitley, accessed June 5, 2023, <http://duncanwhitley.net/kimberlin>.

A more immediate rustling caught his attention – something wriggling in the undergrowth a few meters from the trodden path. He hurried on in the fear that it could be a long eared furry thing, or an ‘underground mutton’ as Portlanders called them, he didn’t dare think the ‘R word’. The repetitive clinks against the stone began to put him at ease, since if the quarrymen had spotted any such animal, they would have suspended work for the day to avoid risking their fate.

He made it to Southwell with just one letter left, addressed to a Mr. John Stone. After asking half a dozen people, all of whose responses were edged with distrust at an outsider asking questions, and none of whom knew anyone by the name of Mr. John Stone, the postman decided to make a final call into the alehouse that looked out over onto the prisoners, who were labouring stone at the southern quarry beyond. Guards stood at each entrance to the site, overlooking their work. Overlooking them both, guards and prisoners, were women drinking tea in the cottages on Gypsy Lane, their upstairs bedrooms temporarily converted into theatres where the women became voyeurs, revelling in their intrigue.

Inside the alehouse, lent against the bar was a fisherman, with pale amber hair that curled around his large facial features and skin that was weathered in red patches by the sun and had not long begun to wrinkle with age. Upon asking of his Mr. John Stone, the postman was sent away with a shake of the head.

The following week, after he had returned the letter back to the sender, it appeared again in his pile for the island, but this time with ‘Commonly known as Wabsey’ scribbled underneath the original name. On the postman’s return, the locals were friendly, many of them having recognised him from the week before and nodding or waving as he made his way to Southwell. This time he entered Southwell from the top end and decided to try the alehouse first. To his surprise the same fisherman was stood against the bar. He turned upon his entering, as if he knew already who to expect, and remarked that if he was going to keep a habit of visiting, he would have to make his acquaintance. The postman rather nervously introduced himself as Richard Harris, whose name the fisherman repeated slowly under his breath before he said ‘Harris, nice to meet you sir, I’m Wabsey’.

Wabsey! The postman scrambled through his bag and thrust the letter to the fisherman, whose wiry eyebrows raised in surprise as he squinted to read the envelope and exclaimed, ‘Well I never, ‘spose that must be me!’.

The first road bridge from Portland to the mainland was built in 1839 and drastically changed Portland's insular community. At this time, within the small population, there was insufficient local labour for the building of the breakwaters. Thus, a prison opened for male convicts who were subject to one of the harshest punishment regimes in the country and exploited to help build the breakwater, construction of which began in 1849. The port was completed in 1872 and became, for a time, the largest man-made harbour in the world. Both Verne hill and the Nothe headland were formed into armed fortresses to protect the Navy, whose employees contributed to the tripling of Portland's population over just twenty years. In the 1860s, the government bought up a third of the island, and the introduction of government works, (including leasing the land to larger private quarrying firms rather than local businesses), also contributed to the dramatic spread of housing developments across the island, which continued into the twentieth century.



Figure 3: The Royal Breakwater Hotel is towered over by a derelict block, which once served as barracks for the Royal Navy. Work on this building was abandoned, leaving it in its current state of dilapidation.

Between 1990 and the turn of the century, the Navy moved its base to Portsmouth, with devastating effects on the local economy. Despite leaving large areas of the island with derelict buildings and infrastructure, for example secret labs used during the Cold War, this derelict land and infrastructure remains closed off from public access. Today, Portland Port, a commercial and private operation owned by John Langham, own a large area of Portland, after Langham Industries bought the port from the Ministry of Defence in 1997. They uphold a double exclusion of Portland's land – preventing its residents from free access and yet neglecting this land themselves. Portland Port has come under attention recently, since its deal with the Home Office to moor the Bibby Stockholm barge for asylum seekers at Portland, a deal which will reportedly make Portland Port £2.5 million in profit from their first 18-month contract with the Home Office.⁵ In a report released in July, the company claimed that the barge aligns with their ethos of continuing to 'grow and support the local economy and community', a seemingly hypocritical ethos since they are neglecting the remains of Portland's historical land and (inhumanely) increasing its population without helping to fund already-struggling community services.⁶ They admit that the profits from their commercial operations are 'reinvested into the business', although interestingly Langham Industries and John Langham himself donated over £78,000 to the UK Independence Party (UKIP) between 2003 and 2016.⁷

At the turn of the century, amongst defence closures and private companies like Portland Stone Firms (now the largest landowner on Portland) acquiring local, family run

⁵ "How the Tories' refugee barge sparked a battle in Dorset," Socialist Worker, accessed August 18, 2023, <https://socialistworker.co.uk/features/how-tory-berge-plan-sparked-a-battle-in-dorset/>.

⁶ Portland Port could spend the money spent on UKIP donations restoring the abandoned infrastructure that they keep restricted from the public and yet neglect themselves. This infrastructure might provide a much more humane place for migrants to stay and simultaneously restore abandoned and neglected sites. Instead, Langham Industries support right-wing policies that keep migrants in extremely dire conditions and stop residents from accessing the lost history of their land. For the mentioned report published by Portland Port, see "Portland Port - Frequently Asked Questions," Portland Port, accessed August 19, 2023, <https://www.portland-port.co.uk/news/113/Portland+Port+-+Frequently+Asked+Questions>.

⁷ For records of donations from Langham Industries and John Langham to UKIP, see "Donations," The Electoral Commission, accessed August 19, 2023, <https://search.electoralcommission.org.uk/?currentPage=1&rows=10&query=Langham%20&sort=AcceptedDate&order=desc&tab=1&et=pp&et=ppm&et=tp&et=perpar&et=rd&isIrishSourceYes=true&isIrishSourceNo=true&prePoll=false&postPoll=true®ister=gb®ister=ni®ister=none&optCols=Register&optCols=CampaigningName&optCols=AccountingUnitsAsCentralParty&optCols=IsSponsorship&optCols=IsIrishSource&optCols=RegulatedDoneeType&optCols=CompanyRegistrationNumber&optCols=Postcode&optCols=NatureOfDonation&optCols=PurposeOfVisit&optCols=DonationAction&optCols=ReportedDate&optCols=IsReportedPrePoll&optCols=ReportingPeriodName&optCols=IsBequest&optCols=IsAggregation>.

quarries, the local economy began to drastically falter, with widespread de-regularisation and a marketisation of the workforce.⁸ Regeneration projects, such as the proposed Southwell Business Park in place of the top-secret Admiralty research establishments, soon fell into dissolution. An attitude of neoliberal denial haunted the local economy, with neither statutory bodies or quasi-public institutions accepting responsibility for economic policy. In 2007, the number of teenage pregnancies was double that of the rest of Dorset and significantly higher than the national average.⁹ Still facing high levels of unemployment and low wages, 2015 also saw the closure of council run youth services. The erosion of other community facilities, such as Portland hospital, is still an ongoing battle for Portland's residents.¹⁰ Despite senior managers in Dorset Council being among the highest paid in the country, infrastructural or economic aid remains unlikely.

Despite facing a long history of extraction, Portland has managed to hold onto many of its old island customs.¹¹ It has held onto a magic, a 'weirdness', that even Kimberlins, like the Newcross bookshop owner, can't help but feel upon visiting. To explore how idioms and fictions that create that 'weirdness' work as an agent within its meshwork, it is just as important to try and express a *feeling* of the place as it is to lay out its historical context. Listing unique island customs cannot impart an atmosphere of place in the same way that fiction might. Thus, throughout this dissertation I use fiction to help me. I also use fiction as a way of performing my own argument. Fiction here also reduces the irony of a dissertation, itself written within the extractive system of knowledge operation that is 'the university',

⁸ For more about the history of the quarrying of Portland Stone and its use in London, see Ruth Siddall and Gill Hackman, "The White Cliffs of St James's: Portland Stone in London's Architecture," *Urban Geology in London*, No. 31, May 2015, <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/~ucfbrxs/Homepage/walks/PortlandStJames.pdf>.

⁹ For more statistical information about the social and economic state of Weymouth and Portland see, Philip Marfleet and Jenny Lennon-Wood, *Forgotten Towns; Weymouth, Portland and the Coastal Economy*, (Bournemouth, South Dorset Research Group, 2022), <https://www.bournemouth.ac.uk/sites/default/files/asset/document/Forgotten%20Towns.pdf>. This report also outlines other examples of relevant statistics surrounding the deprivation of Weymouth and Portland, for example how the 2012 Olympic games was the perfect opportunity for a long-term regeneration project, but instead authorities prioritized tourism attractions and short-term infrastructural solutions. See Marfleet and Lennon-Wood, *Forgotten Towns* (2022), 34-37.

¹⁰ Following the closure of community beds at Portland hospital in 2018, groups such as 'Keep Portland Hospital' have formed to keep pressure on the health chiefs to resolve the staffing issues. In 2019, more than 200 protestors from another campaign group, 'Save Portland Hospital', held hands around the hospital to show the community's need for this facility.

¹¹ For a thorough account of many of Portland's unique customs, see J. W. Warren, *The Island and Royal Manor of Portland: Notes on History, Laws and Customs*, (Frome and London, Butler and Tanner Ltd.: 1939).

which aims to elucidate how fiction and art might work as anti-extractive agents within a meshwork of place. As I go on to address in part III, storytelling can become a point of encounter which alleviates research from the traps of ‘data gathering’.



Figure 4: A photo of a laundrette on Portland. The signage, which reads ‘Island Laundry’, looks recently repainted, but as if the font and design have remained the same for a long time.

Part I; A meshwork of place

To grasp the material and mythic qualities of Portland at once is a difficult aspiration. To grasp them separately, though, is almost impossible. Instead, I propose the methodology of ‘the line’ as a means of revealing a ‘meshwork’ that might delineate the lineaments (physical

and mythic) of the space in question. In his 2011 book 'Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description', Tim Ingold proposes the concept of meshwork, in relation to, but necessarily differentiated from, a network.¹² For Ingold, the meshwork is a way to conceptualise the world for the wayfarer. He conceives of every strand as a 'way of life' and every knot 'a place'.¹³ This analogy serves as a visual and conceptual aid for the contextual consistencies of Portland. In the context of this thesis, a nuanced adaptation of Ingold's framework is necessary, subtly diverging from its original conceptual intent to produce a map that lays out the functioning of the place. This thesis already traces the crumbly edges of the place in question, the Isle of Portland, within which the meshwork dynamically operates, so it doesn't follow that each knot inherently symbolises a discrete 'place'. Instead, knots might simply be confluences or points of encounter, showing the interaction between and crossing of strands or 'lifeways'. It seems important that the strands aren't exhausted in the knots – although a knot might change the trajectory of a strand, it is still always made up of multiple strands that are not broken in the process of the knot. In other words, even if the knot has influential power, it doesn't change the interiority of strands. Change occurs because the knot is an emergent agent within the meshwork – without the knots, lifeways would never encounter each other in a way that produced change – therefore the knots become a means for possibility within the meshwork.

The current system of neoliberalism is one under which globalisation and rapid technological advancements have cloaked information, for example, geographical knowledge and access to 'culture', under the guise of being a basic resource (the origins of this ideology of course being colonialism). Ingold observes how, as a result, the world is imagined as a network of interconnected points of transport, points that are immediately accessible for us to 'conquer'. Consequently, as a deliberate departure from conventional modes of interconnecting 'networks', Ingold posits a meshwork with lines that delineate the movement of 'wayfaring'. In its application to Portland, the metaphor of the meshwork seems relevant only when taken out of the context of wayfaring. Although this is a methodology I am using to explore Portland, to suggest that a Portlander might be a kind of 'wayfarer' moving through their own meshwork seems to reduce and undermine the very complexity of life and community on the isle that I am attempting to map. But the distinguishment Ingold makes between the 'network of transport' and the 'meshwork of wayfaring', the lines between the

¹² Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, (London: Routledge, 2011), 151.

¹³ Ingold, *Being Alive*, 151.

latter importantly *not* being connectors and instead simply ‘paths along which life is lived’, is important to my suggestion that within the context of Portland, fiction has the power to constitute some of these lines.

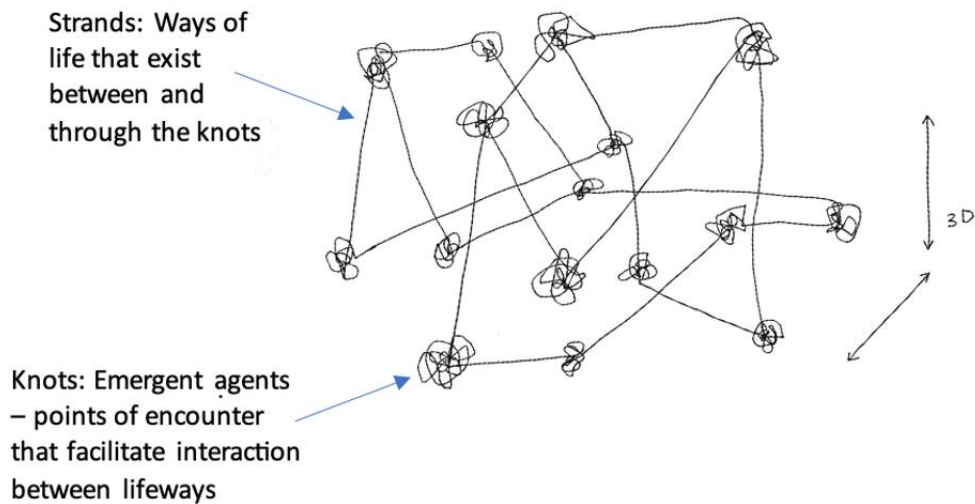


Figure 5: The meshwork.

In its consistency and integrity, fiction seamlessly proliferates into the fabric of the meshwork as a way of life. It can create and repair lines that have previously been destroyed and therefore becomes a way of traversing the extracted landscape of the isle. On Portland, fiction is carried through local idioms and oral history, and therefore has intrinsic value ‘on the ground’. In ‘Fiction as Method’, Simon O’Sullivan defines ‘on the ground’ as ‘when [something] is not explained, interpreted, or simply defined by philosophy’.¹⁴ This definition speaks to the ungraspable affect of fiction, (as well as the arts more broadly), that is difficult to capture theoretically because it is often experienced on a level of subjectivity that is not defined by our relation as subjects within the capitalist system.¹⁵ Folklore works ‘on the ground’ and has been a ‘way of life’ for people on the island for many years. Fictions are spoken into reality to create lines that have become part of the meshwork of place – mention

¹⁴ Simon O’Sullivan, “Non-philosophy and Art Practice.” In *Fiction as Method*, eds. Theo Reeves-Edition and Jon K Shaw, (London: Sternberg Press, 2017), 290.

¹⁵ For example, it is often difficult to explain, in a concise ‘academic’ manner, the affect of fiction; the academic system, as a system of knowledge production which is rooted in a Western philosophical understanding of language, expression and phenomenology, often provides a limited framework in which to explore phenomena such as fiction, which can work ‘on the ground’, between people in communities.

of the 'R word' had quarriers stop work for the day in the 1800s and today the prohibition of speaking the 'R word' is written into the contracts of visiting artists by b-side. There are real 'roots' to the taboo, but it is also always more than its own historical reality. In 2005, when the Wallace and Gromit film 'The Curse of the Were-R*****' was released, advertisements for the film with the 'R word' were all changed to 'bunny' to avoid offending the locals. Through its circulation as folklore it has become a taboo, seamlessly woven into everyday existence, which has unforeseen but actual effects. It is more than the 'bad omen' that travel articles stipulate, it is a fiction that is enmeshed within a lifeworld of the community, a fiction that delineates certain histories and realities within Portland's meshwork.

As well as creating strands of the meshwork, fiction might also have restorative power; perhaps fiction provides, not so much an escape, but repairs a route through an extracted society and site of infrastructural collapse. Where tradition has been lost or is waning, owing to the difficulties of maintaining what were once essential shared community spaces and rituals under the increasingly financialised, increasingly extracted social environment, often folklore works to maintain, or slowly re-invent these spaces and rituals. The High Angle Battery is an abandoned military battery just west of the Verne Citadel, which has been converted into a high security prison for male sex offenders. The land, which until 1846 was common land used for agricultural purposes, was enclosed by the Admiralty with government money to quarry stone for the construction of the breakwater, which was quarried by the convicts from Portland prison. In 1982, in a disused section of the Admiralty quarry, the convicts dug the trenches and built the fortifications for the batteries. The batteries were abandoned soon after they came into use owing to their positioning, which was too far in land for them to be any use as a coastal defence. Now, the abandoned battery is known locally as the 'ghost tunnels' and visiting them to share ghost stories is considered a rite of passage. People of all ages gather there for various purposes; raves, existential hunts, storytelling, picnics. The authorities regularly attempt to close off the site from the public, but as soon as the gates are padlocked, they are undone again. The folklore surrounding the space, with myths of ghost encounters and tales of strange happenings, has drawn the land and people back together in an encounter which creates new community rituals. Thus, this is an example of fiction being an agent within the movement of the meshwork – one that helps to repair lines and facilitate ways of living on Portland.

High Angle Battery

Wildflowers and weeds have formed a ring around the old turntables left in the abandoned military battery on the east of the island, a hundred meters or so from the Verne Citadel. Turntables that were built as mounts for guns now house pyramidal orchid, autumn hawkbit, red campion, purple toadflax, common reeds and common weeds. Sections of grass between the flowers have dried to pale orange in the heat of the early summer. The ring is almost perfectly formed, apart from small patches of exposed grey concrete and short tubes of metal which are fixed amongst the shrubs.

A network of old tramway tracks and bridges, now almost entirely obscured by wild growth, still sections this part of the island.

In 1982, almost 140 years after prisoners were exploited to build the breakwater, the next centuries' convicts came back to the same patch of land to build the gun battery. During their digging, the convicts uncovered roman coffins, human bones, querns and pottery. These items were discarded.

After its abandonment, nature finished the work of the convicts to decorate the circles of the gun emplacements that would hold within them the future spirits of the land. I think this is where they sit.

This ring is one of six that protrudes from semi-circular indents in the walls that separate the trench from ground level.

Beyond the circle, above the dug trench, there's a crow. It stays exactly still, its beak parted about half an inch and its feathered neck stretched up slightly, so its head is pointed towards the sun. There it sits, alone and black against the green and yellow land, entranced upon the rock.

When my toes are a few steps from the bird, its head rotates like a gun would have on the axis of the turntable. I can't help but feel as if the bird and the circle are somehow connected – the circle controlling the bird's bodily angles. The turntable, which was never actually used for the rotation of guns, since the battery was rendered useless soon after it was built, must be syphoned by the spirits. The spirits must have found that the latent rotational power of the table could be reactivated to move other beings that were also connected to the rock of the land, without interfering with the original object in question.

The next tunnel leads me back out into the pale heat of late May and up a concrete ramp. As I ascend to ground level, a rusted door to an empty stone cubicle, just large enough for one person to stand in, creaks open. As it rotates, I strain to try and see past the tunnels to the turntables, but they are obscured from view.

The spirits have reclaimed control of a land stolen from the people. This land is theirs again.

Importantly, lines within the mesh aren't connectors, and therefore the 'meshwork' becomes a discursive mode that in its conception immediately rejects an ideology of growth, along with the idea that cultural access should be immediately available to everyone. By cultural access I mean, for example, the presumption that a one-way line exists from white culture to the knowledge and resources of Black and Indigenous cultures. If the purpose of the lines isn't to connect the knots of the meshwork, then they simply encounter one another within the mesh, interacting and changing direction. Portland, as an extracted landscape, reveals the potentialities of fiction, which rather than aid the capitalistic idea of 'growth' or 'progress', is able to enrich the meshwork of place, for example, turning abandoned spaces into sites of potential. Fiction becomes an agent of encounter, between communities, between land and people, between the material and mythic.

In his chapter 'Fiction as Method', O'Sullivan suggests that the 'production of fictions [can] allow – almost as a side effect – for a glimpse of the real'.¹⁶ On Portland, there is a unique relationship between reality and fiction that seems different to elsewhere. Through the modality of folklore, fiction is enmeshed into the reality of the island. Simon speaks of 'the real' in a Lacanian context, in as much as 'the real' represents the processes by which subjectivities are produced, existing in our unconscious. In this sense, fiction allows glimpses of the 'real' because, unburdened by the constraints of lived 'realisms', it has the ability to 'glitch' everyday reality, causing gaps through which to see subjectivity. On Portland, however, fiction, or the 'made-up-ness' of the island, becomes a method not necessarily to 'apprehend', but rather to traverse, quotidian reality.¹⁷ Fiction can still slip the constraints of everyday reality but, in this context, the side effect doesn't seem to be a glimpse of the 'real' but rather a way of life that in turn creates new possibilities within reality. When land was still shared and worked by the people of the island, a lore called 'Gravelkind' was in practice which stipulated that the land could be passed on to both sons and daughters, and therefore from mothers to daughters, as opposed to the passing from father to son that was customary. Gravelkind became a practice of demarcation and inheritance that itself was a form of

¹⁶ O'Sullivan, "Non-philosophy," 308.

¹⁷ B-side director Rocca Holly-Nambi referred to uniqueness of Portland, with its folklore and local idioms, as its 'made-up-ness'. Rocca Holly-Nambi, Conversation over Microsoft Teams, May 24, 2023.

fictioning around gender. Portlanders made their own feminist traditions that simultaneously reflected and rejected patriarchal reality. The interaction between reality and fiction does not produce an 'enlightenment' to reality – a 'real' is very much still going on as part of people's lives. Instead, on Portland, there seems to be a merging of fictions with reality, so that not only does fiction become part of reality, it also becomes a tool to access the 'possible'. The side effect of this multiplication of encounters that happen through the way fictions proliferate as part of the meshwork of place is that *more happens*, or more could happen. There's an expansion in a still limited space that becomes an enrichment and diversification of the possible.

Keep Portland Weird

I'd always thought the dentist waiting room was a funny place. Never as full as the doctor's, and without the toys for the kids. Much more sterile, as if the white of the walls was meant to somehow convince you that you'd leave with white teeth, too.

I'd been waiting almost thirty minutes and had been battling with 'the NHS is underfunded and the government is fucked' and 'I truly do not have time for this and is it weird if I use the dentist's toilet' for about the last twenty.

I decided to speak to the receptionist – a middle-aged but younger-than-me-looking brunette with ironically bad teeth. Not that her teeth knew anything about being ironically bad, they couldn't help the irony of where the mouth that homed them worked every day.

I realised there were no words being exchanged between our held stare and quickly stuttered over the very normal – but in a British context potentially relationship threatening and definitely highly awkward – comment, that I had been waiting for a long time and wanted to know when I could see the dentist.

I could tell from the way she said, 'oh sorry love, he won't be a minute', that she had grown up in Weymouth.

Before I could respond she asked me if I still lived on Portland, information I guessed she knew from my records which showed my last dentist was on Avalanche Road. I had to stop going because the practice, which had forever been run by the Alan Pearce family, crippled under the weight of demand and couldn't recruit any NHS staff. The late Alan Pearce died during covid and the place hadn't been open since.

The receptionist looked as interested in my dentist sob story as my cat does when I call its name five times in different tones of high pitched and waggle my fingers together to try and get its attention.

Without breaking her smooth complexion nor her gaze fixed to me she said, 'Portland is just such a weird place, isn't it'.

Her comment stuck with me on the drive back over the water. It irked me that people, even from Weymouth, accused Portland of being weird.

*As I approached the first roundabout before the island expanded beyond, a motorcyclist in a full r***** suit caught my eye. As they passed me, they noticed my gawk and ever so slightly nodded in my direction, so that, at the slow pace they were going, the furry ears on the hood fell forward over the helmet.*

Portland was weird! But it was my weird, it was our weird. So long as it was weird it was ours – my mother's, my grandmother's, my niece's, my friends'. I liked its made-up-ness, it was ours. So long as it hadn't been made the same, like the photos of the perfectly white teeth exposed by smiles burned into my brain from the dentist's waiting room, it was ours.

'Keep Portland Weird' is Portland's slogan, spoken and understood between locals but used against them by others. The slogan originated in Austin Texas, as a way to bolster small local businesses, emerging as a paradigm akin to 'shop local'. Subsequently brought to Portland, USA in 2003, it exploded into a consumerism driven motto, manifesting itself on bumper stickers and slogan-laden apparel. As the slogan travelled across the Atlantic to the shores of Portland, Dorset, its semantic underpinnings morphed from the domain of quasi-principled, kooky consumerism to a more profound existential significance. On Portland (Dorset), 'Keep Portland Weird' is a defiant stand against the homogenising forces of neoliberalism and gentrification. As extractive capitalism has enclosed land, absorbed family businesses and destabilised the local economy, Portland has faced the destruction of community rituals, folklore and cherished traditions. Thus, the 'Keep Portland Weird' mantra has been embraced by the community as a way of holding onto the 'weirdness' that exists, a weirdness that becomes ways of life within a landscape of extraction and exists as a practice through folklore, local idiom and storytelling. There is a pride in the 'made-up-ness' of Portland that works against gentrification. Through claiming the slogan, Portlanders are claiming their otherness. By appropriating the appellation of 'weird', a descriptor regularly ascribed to them by Kimberlins, Portlanders subvert its derogatory connotation and transform it into a slogan of empowerment that celebrates their community identity. Indeed, the 'weirdness' seems to

embody a practice of fictioning that manifests as strands within the meshwork, forming and nurturing lifeways that traverse the community and land of the island.

Part II; A stack in the meshwork

So far, I have explored how embedded traditions, including the folklore that is invented, spoken and maintained by the people of Portland, exist within the meshwork of the place as strands which can move through both the geographical and metaphysical landscape in the face of extraction, creating and repairing pathways of life. Despite the knots symbolising a condition of emergence within the meshwork and showing how, through an action of encounter, the trajectory of strands might be changed, the knot can't account for the existence or effect of factors that might arise from outside of Portland's meshwork (but can be built into it). It is necessary to consider these external factors because it might be that these are the agents capable of encouraging existing strands together into a knot. Of course, organic encounters between lifeways on the island do happen, and the meshwork gradually expands and changes shape because of these encounters. But the existence of intervening factors increases the regularity of these encounters, drawing existing strands together, holding space for their interaction and sometimes even encouraging the strands to branch into new lifeways that exit the knot with more departure points than when they entered, thus enriching the meshwork.

However, the solitary knot appears as a constrained theoretical construct when endeavouring to chart the potential influence of external elements in facilitating the restoration and proliferation of established lifeways. Thus, I will introduce Benjamin Bratton's idea of 'the stack' alongside Ingold's meshwork to theorise the workings of art and fiction on Portland. For Bratton, the stack emerges as both an apparatus and a framework which holds space for how computational genres have and can reshape contemporary political boundaries.¹⁸ Bratton poses the stack as a way of scaling and conceptualising the organic and inorganic networks that we all live within. He names each layer of the stack as 'Earth, Cloud, City, Address, Interface, User' and proposes that between these layers mingle human, physical, social and computational systems.¹⁹ For the purposes of this thesis, the

¹⁸ For a much more in-depth description and development of Bratton's ideas around the stack, see Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, The MIT Press: 2016).

¹⁹ Bratton, *The Stack*, 11.

value of this model lies in the stack's structural essence, serving as a compelling framework for concurrently visualising diverse descriptive, organisational, and infrastructural facets intrinsic to arts organisations and artistic endeavours. For example, the layers might constitute the vision of the organisation or project, its creative approach, geographic scope, funding and resources, programming and activities, collaboration or facilities, etc.²⁰

If the stack was to be visualised within the meshwork of Portland, this might provide a framework more suited to mapping the potential of art and fiction to repair and create strands within the meshwork by unobtrusively creating space for encounters. I propose that if you zoomed into a knot, it could in fact be mapped as a stack. If you were to envision the knot three-dimensionally, you could see how lines in the meshwork are knotted around and through layers of a stack. It is the layers of the stack that become platforms for reflection and encounter and allow for changes in the permutation and proliferation of strands. In other words, if a stack represents the 'interior' of certain knots, it has the potential to transform the way in which each knot organises and holds together the multiplicity of strands that pass through.

²⁰ I will attach this framework to specific examples later, see page 24 and 27. Also see Figure 1, which shows example stacks within Portland's meshwork.

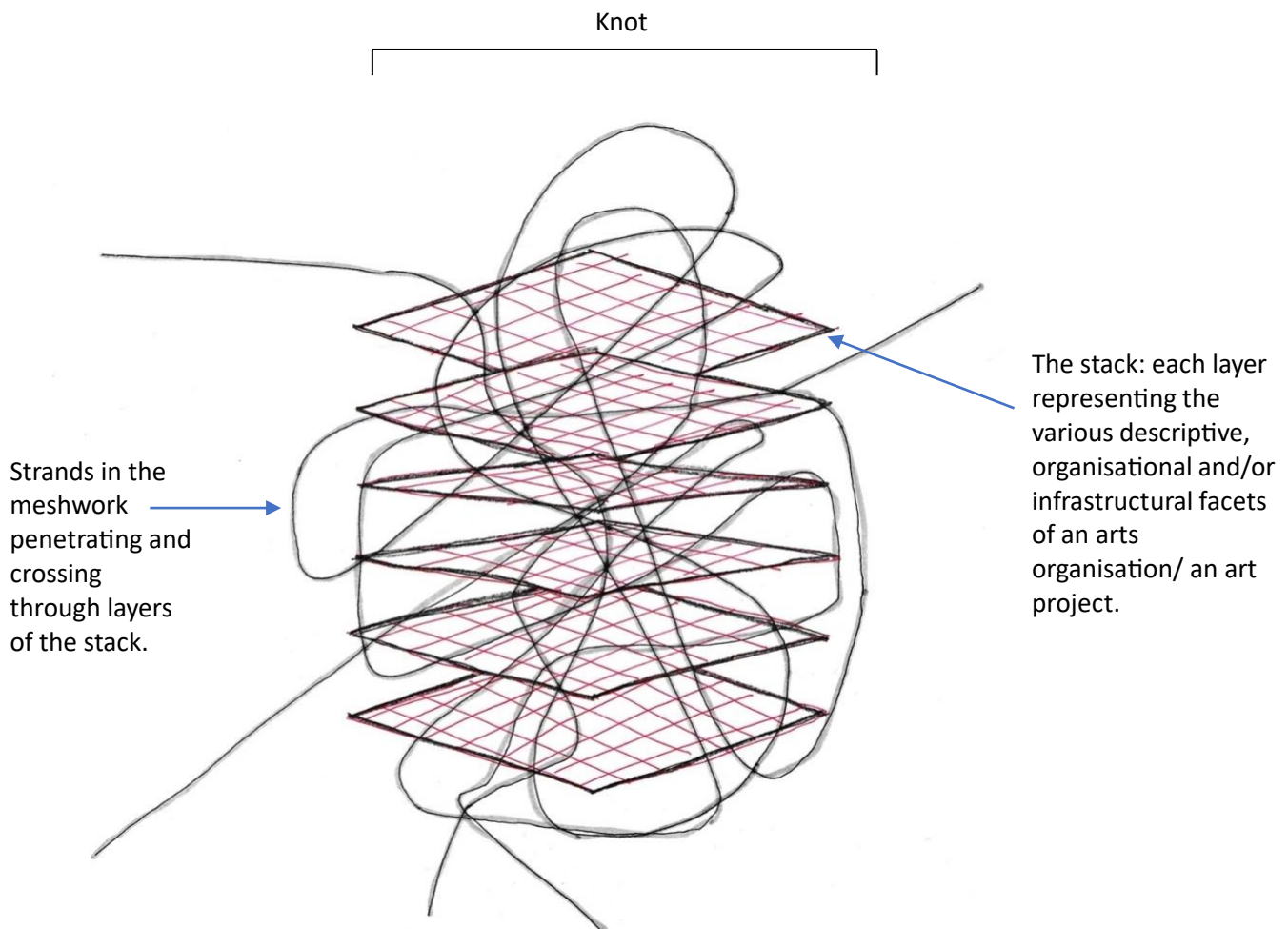


Figure 6: A stack (in a knot) in the meshwork.

b-side

In order to elaborate on how the stack works within the knots of the meshwork, I must first introduce b-side – an arts organisation that, as I shall subsequently investigate, assumes symbolic significance as a stack conducive to holding space for encounter and cultivating the strands of Portland's meshwork. b-side is a non-profit arts organisation, based on Portland, that has been running since 2008 to facilitate interactions between the island, its residents and commissioned artists. Throughout the year b-side works with the local community and artists to commission art, research and events.²¹ Their projects culminate in a four-day festival and parade in September. At the heart of b-side's motto is the island's slogan, 'Keep Portland Weird'. b-side itself is an organisation, but also a collection of members of and friends to the community, that has emerged from this 'weirdness'. b-side actively try to maintain and allow

²¹ For more information on b-side and their previous and upcoming projects and events on Portland, see their website, "This Landm," b-side, accessed Aug 26, 2023, <https://b-side.org.uk/>.

space for Portland's 'weirdness' through the facilitation of encounters which allow for the autonomy of the island and its residents' voices to gather at the surface, whether that be through workshops, historical research or art projects.

b-side has been based on the island for twelve years and has since gained a reputation among both the locals and also further afield, a reputation which inevitably accompanies a great responsibility as custodians of Portland culture. Through values of slowness and consistency, a trust has been built between the organisation and the residents. As well as inviting artists and researchers from outside of Portland, b-side also host local community groups in their project space and prioritise civic engagement to allow for encounters between the residents themselves. During an artist talk in April, a resident from Portland spoke in profound earnest about the organisation, admitting that 'without b-side, this island would die'. Financially, this seems appropriately spoken, as with funding from the Arts Council, Dorset Council, Pennsylvania Castle and the Heritage Lottery Fund, b-side does also provide a much needed economic boost within a landscape that continues to face the repercussions of extraction, privatisation, and gentrification. But the residents' words did not seem to resonate in the context of Portland's economy. They resonated between us, 'on the ground', bouncing between generations of her family on the island the b-side shopfront that evening.

Commissioned artists are invited to work with the community and reflect Portland back to its residents. b-side facilitate these encounters, between Kimberlins and residents, between fiction and reality and between art and people, as a way of keeping the community, its history and its future alive. It is in this way that we might think of b-side as a stack within the meshwork of Portland. Various existing lifeways, including but not limited to fiction (existing folklore, local idioms, storytelling etc.), community relationships, community activism, rituals and relationships with the landscape are drawn into the knot by b-side, before being ported into different layers of its stack, which can then reflect, connect and proliferate these strands into the meshwork. The layers of the b-side stack might encompass various dimensions such as curated workshops, project funding initiatives, distinctive ethos of 'slowness', hosted festivals, represented artists, research ventures, archival endeavours, and the array of facilities at their disposal. When strands emerge from the knot, they have not been fundamentally changed or cut, but instead have forged new connections. They have been enriched by encounters within the stack and therefore might change direction or even multiply.²²

²² See the map (Figure 1) for a visual example of b-side's stack in Portland's meshwork.

Kneed

Under the current theme ‘This Land’, b-side have commissioned community researchers to investigate the derelict remains of what was once a row of 17th Century thatched cottages. Situated directly on the edge of Chesil, only one cottage, at the southern end of Brandy Row, has survived the elements. The researchers, many of whom are people living in the surrounding area, are creating a report which explores the history of the site and outlines how the cottage, which has fallen into a state of disrepair, might be protected for future community use. In the process, lost and forgotten archives have been uncovered, stories and memories have been shared and families have been connected. When complete, the report is intended to be presented to local authorities as a lobbying instrument, advocating for the transformation of the site into a community asset.

Alongside this research, b-side have commissioned artists Leonie Rousham and Ishwari Bhalerao, who go by the collective name ‘Kneed’, to collaboratively engage with the community in response to the Brandy Row cottage, with the aim of producing a ‘socially engaged’ artwork that will ‘gather and share knowledge, and upskill and empower the community’.²³ At the centre of Kneed’s work is a speculative tendency – they explore the possibilities of what might become of the site if we give more value to the faculty of imagination rather than practicality. Throughout the year kneed have been in conversation with community organisers, island experts and residents of all ages, gathering memories, stories and imaginings that are all prompted by the weather at Brandy Row, using the model of a weather forecast as a more formal and accessible mode of perception to invite and facilitate the local imaginings through an invented radio station. Their work will culminate in a format that is predominantly audio based. During the festival, they will solicit and disseminate local voices through an audio tour around Brandy Row as well as through live broadcasts under the name of ‘The Weather or Not Station’.

It is important to note that Portland has a long history of extreme weather – being surrounded by the sea, the land is at constant risk of weather changes. The rocks’ edges crumble with the weather and many a storm have caused shipwrecks on its shores. Given the prominence of fishing as a main industry on Portland, (prior to the development of commercial and unregulated fishing that adversely affected the local fishing economy), for

²³ “This Land Open Call (Brandy Row),” Curator Space, accessed August 2, 2023, <https://www.curatorspace.com/opportunities/detail/this-land-open-call/6192>.

many of the locals it was customary to tune into radio weather forecasts. In fact, one of the earliest radios was constructed by Portland locals.²⁴ Radio is a tool of navigation that has been part of systems of communication that have existed within the meshwork of Portland for almost a century. Kneed harness the potential of radio as a navigational tool, transcending its conventional geographical use. They draw this lifeway – this historical index of communication – into their stack and recontextualise radio to become a means of speculative navigation to protect communal land. As a result, Kneed’s work steers the meshwork’s strands into new trajectories.

Kneed are drawing on islanders’ sensory interaction with weather as a form of embodied understanding of living in this specific place. They use the weather forecast as a fictioning device to weave the locals’ sensory engagement with the weather into a forecast for the future of Brandy Row, and thus facilitate a communal reimagining of this space from within. Their engagement with the residents has stretched over a year and a half and has included formal workshops with youth clubs and more informal chats with older residents or community characters, like ‘fisherman squeaker’, Andrew, a local herbalist, and Dan from the environment agency. Two of their workshops with younger residents were acted out as weather forecasts. The participants were asked to draw a weather map, like the ones you might see in news forecasts. They were also asked to imagine a space they would like to see for young people at Brandy Row. With the use of a green screen to show their weather map behind them, they then collaboratively performed their imagined use of Brandy Row in a forecast format. One of the imaginary outcomes included a friendship bench, whilst another included a virtual reality kitchen run by young people who grow and cook for each other. In this sense, Kneed are using the weather forecast as an accessible index to facilitate children’s imagination, whilst simultaneously opening an encounter between the history of the island and their futures.

The radio format of ‘The Weather or Not Station’ speaks to the afterlife of their work. Radio is a form of non-physical archiving that does not necessarily require a specified receiver, but that spews out waves which endlessly bounce around the ether. In this sense, the stories and narratives that will be heard through ‘The Weather or Not Station’ accommodate a long-term time scale of fictioning. Similarly, although Kneed’s work will be presented to an audience at the festival, viewers (or listeners) are inconsequential for their engagements with

²⁴ More information about the Portland III valve radio, designed by the Marshall brothers, can be found at the Portland Museum, in Wakeham.

the community to live on after the festival has passed. Alongside facilitating workshops, Leonie and Ishwari have also been teaching the skills required to use the technical equipment for audio recording. These skills can be carried through into the futures of the participants, whose contributions will also be absorbed into the future of Brandy Row. Kneed are providing a platform through which generations of islanders' imaginations can pass, gathering skills and knowledge along the way, before using this encounter to enrich their own relationships to the world around them. In this way we might also think of Kneed's project as forming a stack within the meshwork, drawing in strands and allowing them to feed through various dimensions. The layers of the stack, such as technology, resources, their own model of imagining, participation and performance, encourage a reflection of the island's material and political consistencies back to its residents, helping to imbue reality with their own imaginations. Encounters between people, ideas, imagination, reality and the past, present and future encourage strands to leave the knot in a new direction, expanding the meshwork into new territories.

Interestingly, all the conversations that Kneed conducted with the older residents referred to the education of the younger generation on the island's history. Their ideas centred around sharing stories and presenting and preserving artefacts. For them, the closure of the Minor Injuries Unit in 2020, for example, or the disparity between house prices and wages, mean that under their present circumstances of decay and extraction, the idea of imagining a future is politically charged and sometimes challenging. Thus, for the older generations, history becomes a means of thinking about the future. History and tradition, Portland's 'weirdness', and its unique folklore, become ways of life that can traverse the present into the future. Kneed's role, then, becomes a vehicle for facilitation, reflection and imagining. Through their conversations and their workshops, they ask how strategies of community activism that already exist (or once existed) on the island might be used elsewhere. If, for example, the beach is a living archive, filled with fossils of Portland's past, they imagine how Brandy Row could become a community centre that is also a living archive of Portland that might change with the tides.

To create their radio, Kneed recorded the audios of the forecast performances that they facilitated with various groups within the community. Fragments of these audios, alongside their own narratives as artists, will be gathered for the culmination of work on show at the b-side festival. But the work that Kneed are doing is far more than the culmination of audio in 'The Weather or Not station'. In using the weather forecast as a framework within which fiction and imagination weave themselves into a very real question concerning the future,

Kneed unobtrusively enrich the meshwork of place. Somewhere within the knot of strands that forms through and around Kneed's stack, the past, present and future of the land and community is simultaneously activated, so that strands leave the knot enriched by these spatial and temporal encounters. By creating a model that allows all ages of residents to engage in this encounter between history, tradition, land and their own sensory understanding of it, Kneed facilitate a nesting of imaginations and fictions through their 'stack' which can reconfigure strands of the meshwork into a conjectural gathering of the possible.²⁵

Part III; Navigating extraction

On weather

The way raindrops fall and make wet. How storms consume and make ruin. The way the tide can rise and drink in the landscape. Celestial weather with a heavy earthly physicality. 'This language of inhuman being'.²⁶

In his 2015 publication *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen grapples with David Abram's *Becoming Animal; An Earthly Cosmology*. After reading Abram's writing, which argues for an 'active ecological materiality', Cohen reflects on 'this language of inhuman being', of stone, of weather, of earth, as something that possesses 'not representations, but participations, dances, presences.'²⁷ On Portland, the weather and the stone participate in the meshwork of place. These strands do not exist in the meshwork because I, or Kneed, or any other researcher or artist, have recognised their importance. They are ancient lifeways – strands that have existed throughout generations of settlers and communities. If the storm and the rock participate in the meshwork of place, perhaps fiction is a presence, or a possibility, that is held within their 'inhuman language'. Ultimately this is what Kneed are tapping into, the possibility of fictioning that emerges from within the geology of place. Because of Portland's unique geology, and importantly, the extraction of it through quarrying, this inhuman language is not necessarily something that can be heard, but it becomes a presence (or absence) that can be felt. Fiction emerges as a possibility from

²⁵ See example of Kneed's stack in Figure 1.

²⁶ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Stone: An Ecology of the Inhuman*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 188. See also David Abram, *Becoming Animal; An Earthly Cosmology*, (New York, Pantheon Books, 2010).

²⁷ Cohen, *Stone*, 188.

within the geology, as a method which might traverse the stormy and rocky strands of meshwork. It becomes a means of translating the inhuman language of the island itself.

The boulder

Why was I down here? I was tired. There was something about the stone that made me strangely quiet inside. The way it seemed to absorb something from my being that left me with a stillness. Every step I took down here echoed between the stones. Were the stones absorbing me or were they bouncing me off each other? I couldn't work it out.

I approached one of the larger boulders towards the edge of the quarry. Slowly, I let my whole body lean into its hard exterior. First my arse and my shoulder blades, then the backs of my arms, my calves, and eventually, as my head touched the smooth edge, I let the small of my back press into its cool surface. I thought of the Horrocks sister and her encounter with the Loss Adjusters against the stone. The way they had all been touching the stone and touching each other touching the stone.

My stillness ruminated as I let the boulder hold me upright. Did it want me here, the stone? Could it help but to absorb my anxiety? Did it want the warmth of my body?

As I'd begun to worry, my back had come away from the stone and only the back of my heels kept their contact. With a shaky outward breath I let my body slide down the boulder until I was on the ground, leaning against its hard edge.

Maybe I could fall asleep here, attached to a dug-up piece of the island's middle, both me and the boulder attached to the island by force of gravity.

Katrina Palmer is a London based artist whose work covers mediums such as audio, sculpture, fiction and installation. In 2015, Palmer spent four months on the Isle of Portland after tracing the stone's journey in reverse; from a memorial sculpture in London back to the island's hollowed out rock. 'End Matter' is the name of her fictions, which unfold through three site specific audio walks and a book of the same title, which in its format of endnotes, addendums, epilogues and postscripts, extends and complicates the narratives of the audio walks.

In her 1957 exploration 'Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things', Jane Bennett lays a path for philosophers such as Cohen by introducing the concept of 'vibrant matter' to describe the 'material agency' and vitality she believes non-human, or 'not quite human',

things to possess.²⁸ Traces of Bennett's thinking echo throughout Katrina Palmer's 'End Matter'. It is not that Palmer's fictions are animist, or even panpsychist, in the sense that she uses fiction to give a voice, a mind or a soul to the stone, or to literally 'translate' what Abram calls an 'inhuman language' into something 'human-like'. It is rather that Palmer uses fiction to make sense of stone's presence, or, in Portland's case, to make sense of its *absence*. Palmer grapples with the absence of stone through the fictional research group, the 'Loss Adjusters', who are dedicated to ensuring the counterbalance of absence and presence. Their projects, or 'avenues of adjustment', which are filed away in their collective minds, include *The Reformulation of Absence as a Sensually Engaged Experience*, *Compensating for the Depletion of Real Things with Fictionality*, and *The Supersensible Object*.

End Matter is a nonlinear index that switches between characters and traverses various temporalities through an interplay of nested fictions. The flat above the Loss Adjusters' office, 52 Easton Street, is home to an unnamed writer. Although we never know if the experiences of the characters reflect Palmer's own experiences on Portland, it might be assumed (given that this is the flat in which Palmer lived whilst creating the work) that the writer in 52 Easton Street is a self-reflexive gesture from Palmer, effectively enmeshing herself within the narrative fabric she weaves. The writers' stories are told through the Loss Adjusters, who are trying to discern whether the writer herself has disappeared, and in the process recover her deleted stories from her computer. The writer's stories tell of strange happenings – one tells of the 'Horrocks Sisters' and includes a sexual encounter between the Loss Adjusters and one of the sisters, who is pressed against a boulder in Bowers Quarry. Perhaps most notable is the vignette of Ash, who carries a body in a wheelbarrow before burying the corpse at the graveyard. When the writer visits the graveyard again, Ash is pushing the same wheelbarrow, this time filled with rubble rather than a corpse. In the 'Postscript' we discover that after the Loss Adjusters recover Ash's story, they seek him out to advise him that because he filled a hole with a body, the rubble of which now has nowhere to go, he must push this rubble around with him 'until the very end of his days' to restore balance.²⁹ Presumably, since the only way stories are narrated in the book is through the discovered writing of the anonymous author, this later interaction between Ash and the Loss Adjusters has also been imagined by the anonymous writer. Since the Loss Adjusters only sought out Ash *after* discovering the story of his burial, it becomes clear that the narratives

²⁸ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 10.

²⁹ Palmer, End Matter, 63.

are interwoven and nested within one another. Palmer's nesting of fictions prevents the reader from absorbing 'End Matter' as a neat or concluded whole. Her clever manipulation of timelines forms a collection of end matter which affords multifarious points of entry and prevents any easy way of demarcating a linear narrative; almost as if her fictional nesting is a tactic against extraction itself.

As readers, we are asked to spatially navigate the book – jumping back and forth, for example, between the map, 'appendix (b)' and 'Attachement' to try and gauge 'End Matter' in its entirety. As listeners, we are asked to walk alongside Palmer's three audio stories, spatially navigating the island with fiction as our guide.³⁰ Each audio story is intended to be experienced in the location of each of the writer's stories; Bowers Quarry, St. George's graveyard and 52 Easton Street. If a long-term time scale of fictioning emerges from weather and radio in Kneed's project, Palmer is drawing from the stone a deep-time scale of fictioning, offering narratives that take us through Portland's holes, drawing the meshwork deeper into the cavities of the island. In this sense, as a fiction which emerges from Portland's geology, 'End Matter' somehow offers a way to navigate the geological extraction continuously faced by the island.

Through 'End Matter', Palmer herself does the work of the Loss Adjusters. She acknowledges the tangible absence of displaced stone, imagining a world where the violence of extractive capitalism is accounted for and its consequences taken seriously. Palmer's work also performs its own argument. The existence of her fictions give voice not only to the absence of stone but also to the missing objects' effects, a phenomena also investigated through the Loss Adjusters' project 'The Supersensible Object'.³¹ Furthermore, the Loss Adjusters are concerned with *Compensating for the Depletion of Real Things with Fictionality*, a fictional project that in reality aligns with Palmer's artistic ethos, as 'End

³⁰ To listen to the audio stories, see "Audio Walk: The Loss Adjusters," Soundcloud, accessed May 20, 2023, <https://soundcloud.com/artangel-2/sets/audio-walk-the-loss-adjusters>.

³¹ Palmer writes of 'The Supersensible Object': 'The term, which is both a concept and an indicator of form, was discovered by a pioneering adjuster in the writing of G. W. F. Hegel. At the time of writing, all other activity has been suspended while this object [...] is pursued. Central to their thinking is the Hegelian suggestion, as they interpret it, that the present world is *vanishing*. Hegel writes that above *the vanishing present world there opens up a permanent beyond*. And it is precisely a sense of the vanishing – understood as the presence of absence – that chimes with their findings on Portland.' Hegel's theory of the Supersensible Object, interpreted by The Loss Adjusters as the idea that it is only through an engagement of absence that one can 'confront their consciousness of perception', seems to be central not only to the The Loss Adjusters' work, but also to Palmer's entire project. See Palmer, *End Matter*, (Belgium: Artangel and Book Works, 2015), 12-13 and G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York, Oxford University Press: 1977), particularly 139-211.

Matter’ in itself offers fabulations and fictions which might counterbalance extraction. At the same time, ‘End Matter’, although a vessel of fiction, is in many ways not an artefact. It manifests in an intangible audio format, that to be wholly understood can only be experienced on Portland. The book stands as a spectral semblance, evading conventional ‘object matter’. It finishes with the Loss Adjusters’ summary;

‘it would not be possible to successfully produce a book that is simultaneously *complete* and *nothing but* authentic end matter. [...] If such a text ever claims to exist it will be erroneously titled, or inauthentic, leaving the frustrated writer with no option but to disappear.’³²

Palmer, as the author herself, does of course return to London after the ‘completion’ of her project. Although this might seem like a classic move of appropriation – a London based artist embarks on a coastal sojourn to gain inspiration before subsequently capitalising on the extraction of the place in question – Palmer in some ways is not extracting a solid body of work back with her. The book is a vessel of fictions which she leaves behind, to exist on the island, to be absorbed into the rock. The fictions she creates from the stone’s absence must remain on the island to counterbalance the creativity she sought from Portland. Thus, her fictions could be said to metaphorically ‘fill’ Portland’s holes, rather than digging them deeper, as ‘End Matter’ seems to draw Portland’s meshwork together into the deep-time of its own geology.³³

A zone of extraction

Given the context of Portland, as a zone of extraction, it seems important to address the question of extractive fictioning. It is not a given that art is benevolent in a way that other activities in an area are, especially since ‘art’ crosses a class divide between the outsider who can move freely through the space (and knows the code or has access to the market) and the resident, who is often more restricted. Thus, it is important not to grant art, or fiction, as an exception to the possibility of it being extractive.

³² Palmer, *End Matter*, 74.

³³ See the map (Figure 1) for a visual example of Katrina Palmer’s stack in Portland’s meshwork.

It is also important to acknowledge my own positionality, as a participant of the academic system. Academia is undoubtedly among a system of knowledge operations that are often extractive, especially of local experience. As well as the more obvious forms of extractive capitalism, for example the way stone is extracted and processed through machines to become a commercially viable and profitable product in the market, there also exists, as Macarena Gómez-Barris notes in her 2017 publication ‘The extractive Zone’, an ‘epistemological violence’, which trains our academic vision to ‘reduce life to systems’.³⁴ This ‘epistemological violence’ also extends to other fields, including, but not limited to, the art world. Within these extractive systems of knowledge, we must regularly ask ourselves how we might work in a way that does not replicate extractive forms of generating information, and indeed whether it is at all feasible to *not* extract under the system of extractive capitalism. Thus, it is difficult to ignore the potential irony within an argument that poses fiction as a transformative process, one which might somehow ‘give back’ to an island whose resources have been taken advantage of for so long, when often, the artists are ‘kimberlins’ themselves. Although the artists often remain on the island for a short while, they also return back to London, or elsewhere in the UK, to promote themselves and their new portfolio after taking inspiration from the tapestry of history and folklore that exists on the island.

To explore this question of extractive fictioning, it is useful to ask what it would look like to work *with* a place, versus *from* a place. To visualise this difference, it seems useful to return to the ‘stack in the meshwork’ diagram. We might imagine that working *with* a place produces a stack whose layers are porous. In other words, the knot is created from strands already existing within the meshwork, which can then weave through the stack’s layers, and leave the knot enriched by the infrastructure of the stack. Whereas, when working *from* a place, perhaps some layers of the artist’s stack are not porous. A non-porous stack can still insert itself into the meshwork to draw strands together into a knot, but its layers don’t allow the strands to pass through. Instead, the stack absorbs the strands into itself and any strands that do emerge are depleted. For example, now only the last dilapidated cottage stands at the Southern end of Brandy Row, which was once a community of cottages, workshops and a farm. Nine houses, coined ‘Chesil Beach Mews’ have since emerged as a development on this

³⁴ Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press), xix.

land, with at least three being advertised as luxury holiday homes.³⁵ This new development has become one of the first gated communities on Portland. This is not a one-off for Portland, and unaffordable developments, perfect for holiday homes or second homeowners, are regularly being proposed. Statistically, the increase of house prices against average earnings is higher in Dorset than the majority of England, owing to the high proportion of retirees and second homeowners.³⁶ Developments like Chesil Beach Mews reduce Portland's meshwork, preventing the upkeep of history and enclosing the land from the locals. They prevent communication between other layers in a stack, absorbing strands of history and relationships with the land into themselves without allowing a passing through. Chesil Beach Mews constitutes an un-porous layer in a stack, engulfing Portland's lifeways. This is the logic of extraction.

To transfer this logic to fiction, or to artists, it must be assumed that there is a 'loss adjustment' as part of the ethical question. For example, it assumes that Portland loses something in order for an artist to gain work in their portfolio. But to capitalise on something, it must have a fixed exchange value. To take the history and folklore of Portland and process this into art, or something that can acquire monetary capital, assumes that this folklore has an exchange value and that as the artist 'processes' folklore into art they are also destroying this folklore in its original form. Whilst artists like Kneed or Katrina Palmer do, of course, benefit from their work on Portland, their relationship to this folklore isn't one that can be reduced to this kind of zero-sum transaction, where the artists' benefit can only come at Portland's detriment. What if these artists can simultaneously enrich the community and benefit themselves?

Of course, there are endless historical and contemporary examples of cultural appropriation, especially in the arts, where artists or organisations have exploited the experience or aesthetic of othered cultures for their own gain. Thus, my argument for the specific case of Portland is not transferrable to the way fiction and art interact within other communities. However, on Portland, this interaction between history, folklore, artists and fictions is leaky and difficult to label 'extractive'. Folklore, for example, seems to exemplify what Gómez-Barris calls a 'form[s] of life that cannot be easily reduced, divided or

³⁵ Mark Samsworth, "Entry," *b-side*, September, 2022, <https://b-side.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/This-land-Edition-01.pdf>.

³⁶ Marfleet and Lennon-Wood, *Forgotten Towns* (2022), 19.

representationally conquered'.³⁷ In other words, this kind of unique history that 'Keeps Portland Weird' is a way of life that denies an exchange value. Fiction seems to have a relationship to the meshwork that differs from other lifeways; it can be fully integrated into the meshwork, whilst not being entirely 'reduced' to it. Fiction exemplifies a form of life within the meshwork of Portland that is able to protect itself from being 'representationally conquered' by the usual means that neoliberalism uses to extract Capital from Life.

For example, b-side work tirelessly to garner the resources to explore the potential of art and fiction within this meshwork. By inviting artists into the myriad of already existing lifeways, fiction's ability to attach to and expand what is already there, rather than extract from it, becomes evident. In Kneed's case, their work will directly contribute to the recovery of the last standing cottage at Brandy Row. Or, in Palmer's case, she used her funding from Artangel to openly address the ironies of artists exploring extracted communities, using fiction as a method not only to bring awareness to Portland and its history, but also to offer a way to both physically and imaginatively traverse its holes.³⁸

Interestingly, both Kneed and Palmer use audio as a method which allows for the island itself, rather than a 'listener', to be centred as a receiver of their narratives. The audio is spatially leaky and can bounce between, and eventually be absorbed into, the island's rock. Fiction is similarly leaky in that it is also always absorbed into reality to some extent. To speak or perform a story in some ways makes that story real, not only as something that exists within 'reality' but also as something which then might have effects in reality. As a result of their 'leakiness', neither fiction nor audio could be entirely extracted from the place in which they were shared. Furthermore, both Palmer and Kneed's fictions enrich the possibility of the island's meshwork because their stacks (of working methods, history, funding, workshops etc.) are porous. This means that the strands, which already exist within Portland's meshwork, are not changed, extracted, or cut off.

³⁷ Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone*, 4.

³⁸ It is important to clarify what I mean by Palmer 'bringing awareness' to Portland. Palmer is not bringing awareness to Portland in the same way as the council and other public bodies and policy makers do, by emphasising it as a rural idyll. Their advertisement of the coastal area as an idyllic and prosperous location is an act of denial that continues to conceal deprivation and prevents meaningful change. Furthermore, Palmer is not representing Portland as a deprived and run down place of social and economic impoverishment in a way that overlooks the local community and their upheld traditions. Palmer 'brings awareness' to Portland as a place of rich history and also as a place which has faced, and continues to face, difficulties. By engaging with the community and history of the place herself, she can then, through fiction, allow a window through which Kimberlins can encounter Portland in both a truthful and magical way.

Whether or not fiction holds extractive possibilities, whether these possibilities were capitalised upon by the artists in question, and more pressingly whether I am capitalising on the extractive possibilities of fiction within my own research, are questions that held me hostage at the beginning of my project. Without this internal battle, I wouldn't have approached this thesis in the way I have. In answer to the first, fiction and art certainly have extractive possibilities, and historically have had extractive tendencies. Even on Portland today, violent fictions are weaved into the minds of some who despise the Bibby Stockholm barge, not for its poor living conditions, or for the general political and social crisis it represents, but rather owing to their own prejudices around refugees and immigrants that have spiralled into inherently damaging fictions. However, the work of art and fiction can also facilitate an interaction within Portland's meshwork that allows for an interplay of the past, present and future in a way that is not extractive, but instead holds possibility 'on the ground' for Portland's community.

The last question held me for the longest. After speaking to Leonie and Ishwari from Kneed, as well as members of b-side, I realised that if I practiced my own form of storytelling, then fiction might allow an encounter between myself and the community of Portland that otherwise might not occur. One manifestation of what Gómez-Barris labels as 'epistemological' violence is the inaccessibility of academia. Fiction offers something that rejects this fanciful pretence of academic rhetoric. Fiction can tell life without jumping through the hoops of systems of knowledge operation, without being a form of information necessarily shaped by its receiver as an 'atomised and hyper-individualised' subject, formed under the pressure of neoliberalism.³⁹ Yet fiction can still exist within these spaces. Fiction exists as windows of possibility within the defined format of this dissertation. In this sense, as a vessel of storytelling that can simultaneously reach the past and the future, fiction has the potential to alleviate 'data gathering'. Alongside researching, for which I inevitably must 'gather', I hope to tell stories which might then be shared.

³⁹ Simon O'Sullivan, 2014. "Art Practice as Fictioning (or, Myth-Science)". In: *Arts of Existence: Artistic Practices, Aesthetics and Techniques Seminar*. Unit of Play, Goldsmiths, United Kingdom. [Conference paper]. <https://www.simonosullivan.net/articles/art-practice-as-fictioning-or-myth-science.pdf>.



Figure 7: A photo of a sign attached to a wall with peeling blue paint. The sign reads ‘South Portland Working Mens Conservative Club’ and underneath ‘members & guests main entrance’. There is an illustration of a hand pointing to the entrance, next to which someone has stuck a sticker that reads ‘Not My King’ in the style of a ‘Burger King’ sticker.

The Abandoned City

She'd been recently obsessed by a blog – Geoff Kirby's 'Exploring Portland', a vast archive of hidden histories and sites of interest around the island.⁴⁰ She had come across a section called 'Forbidden City', which detailed the land of the East Weare gun batteries, all but one of which were now under control of Portland Port Ltd.

In her research, she'd discovered that the one battery not enclosed by Portland Port was locally known as the 'Abandoned city', and this was the one she planned to access. She knew it might be tough, as one writer who visited years ago wondered if they would ever

⁴⁰ Geoff Kirby's 'Exploring Portland' is a real blog and has been invaluable for the inspiration and research of this dissertation. The specific entry I mention, about the Forbidden City, can be found here: Geoff Kirby, "Forbidden City," *Exploring Portland*, (unknown date), accessed June 24, 2023, <https://www.simonosullivan.net/articles/art-practice-as-fictioning-or-myth-science.pdf>.

make it through the brambles again. A few locals did try to keep it accessible, apparently, but even then, the growth was almost entirely impenetrable.

Why had she brought shears but not changed out of her favourite skirt? It fell to just below her knee and the hem had been caught already on the old Merchant's railway path down to the cemetery, beyond which the Abandoned City could be found.

Her rhythmic chopping of brambles and bushes was strangely soothing, but her wrists ached and her back was beginning to get sore. She didn't know how long she'd been going for when she saw the edges of what she thought might be a building. As she approached, she could see it was a room, maybe once an artillery store. Without a roof, vines and shrubs fell from above. Small, barred windows were left in the stone. It was magical, almost like a dystopian scene from a video game. She felt like a character, too, as if what she was exploring couldn't actually exist thirty meters from the trodden path, and that somehow made her not exist either. No one would know she had ever been here.

Geoff Kirby had said that there were parts to this area of the Weares that he'd never been able to access because the brambles were so thick. The blog wasn't entirely clear on directions, she just knew there was something to find behind these shrubs, so she kept going.

She could see where people had cut back bushes in time gone by. New growth had almost hidden any trace of a person before her, but as she cut back the green, she uncovered old and brown brambles, cleanly cut at their stems. The wall to her right was beginning to reveal itself as a thick stone edge to what seemed to be an impenetrable building, until out of the growth emerged an entrance. A tunnel. The doorway led up some steps which were littered with shards of glass and a packet of crisps with some early 2000s branding. She stood there a while before she shook herself off and took the steps with her phone torch for guidance. The tunnel bent to the left and the darkness was so consuming that it swallowed up the light from her phone before it could illuminate anything beyond the next step. She tried to tell herself that, bar perhaps a few dead animals, there could be nothing dangerous down there. Every movement she made echoed around her. She imagined herself approaching through the tunnels only to find a swarm of crows flying directly towards her from within. She scrambled back out and when she stood up in the safety of the open air she was breathless and clammy.

About ten meters on she passed another entrance, this one into a low room that, through a small dark doorway, opened to another tunnel beyond. She took a photo and continued past.



Figure 8: A photo showing the entrance to a tunnel. Brambles and ivy grow up and over the stone walls. A block of white stone sits at a slight angle away from the wall just inside the entrance to the tunnel. Graffiti covers sections of the inner walls.

The next path led her scrambling up a steep and constricted slope. She grabbed onto branches as she went, hauling herself up. At the top she recognised a stone boulder from one of the photos on the blog. It was a seat-like structure that was apparently a ventilator for another armaments storage building that must have been below her, only accessible by the tunnels. She remembered that the writer had said that in his thirty years of exploring this area, he'd never managed to reach this stone ventilator. She and her shears – revealing parts of the Abandoned City.

There was one building that she hadn't found, though. Maybe she'd cut into the wrong hedge. From where she stood, elevated above the tunnels, she was sure she could see where it was meant to be. Geoff Kirby had posted a photo with a circle around the edge of a building to show its location. The photo wasn't dated, but it looked old in quality and colour. She was sure she was looking from a similar angle to the camera that captured that photo, but there was no building, or even outline of one, in the undergrowth and bushes that extended beyond.

She was on her way back through, frustrated, but with far more ease since she'd trodden and cleared the way, when she noticed a slight gap through to the left of the brambles. She cut until something began to emerge; a clearing appeared through a rose bush. Beyond, a circular gun emplacement was still visible amongst the wild growth of nature. A rusty metal centre piece, which presumably was where the gun was once attached, became her seat. It was late summer and the air was humid. The emplacement was home to thick bushes of rose hips, blackberries, sloes, small yellow and white wildflowers and a carpet of moss underfoot.

She was sad to think that this was the last of the five batteries still accessible. A little over ten years ago, Portland Port continued their destruction of the area and expanded their border to include battery 'D', the only other battery originally outside its fence.

She'd stayed up late one night and found herself in a google-hole of 'Forbidden City' tales. The Forbidden City was where the rest of the batteries, alongside a whole complex of military buildings, still existed – derelict and abandoned. These other structures were also built as Victorian coastal defence sites, decommissioned in 1954 and used as a Disaster Relief Exercise Site for the Navy until Portland Port bought the land at the turn of the century. She'd read stories of childhood and teenage explorations of the Forbidden City, and also of adults who have tried to return but can't find access anymore. In 2018, new bylaws were introduced, and Portland Port began to increase their security, raising secure fences, erecting motion sensor cameras, employing guards. There were stories of arrests. As much as she desperately wished to reclaim access to this history, she didn't dare risk the consequences of getting caught.

Lost land of the forbidden city was being violently claimed by Portland Port but simultaneously left to rot. They didn't want it, but they didn't want anyone else to have it either. Was it valuable or worthless to them? Supposedly battery 'E', which she was now sat amongst, was listed as a scheduled monument by Historic England and yet it was up to her, and whoever had been before, to keep this monument of history from complete dereliction. If it wasn't for the stories shared on blogs, she would never have known that just beyond the path lay this warren of hidden tunnels and hidden history.⁴¹

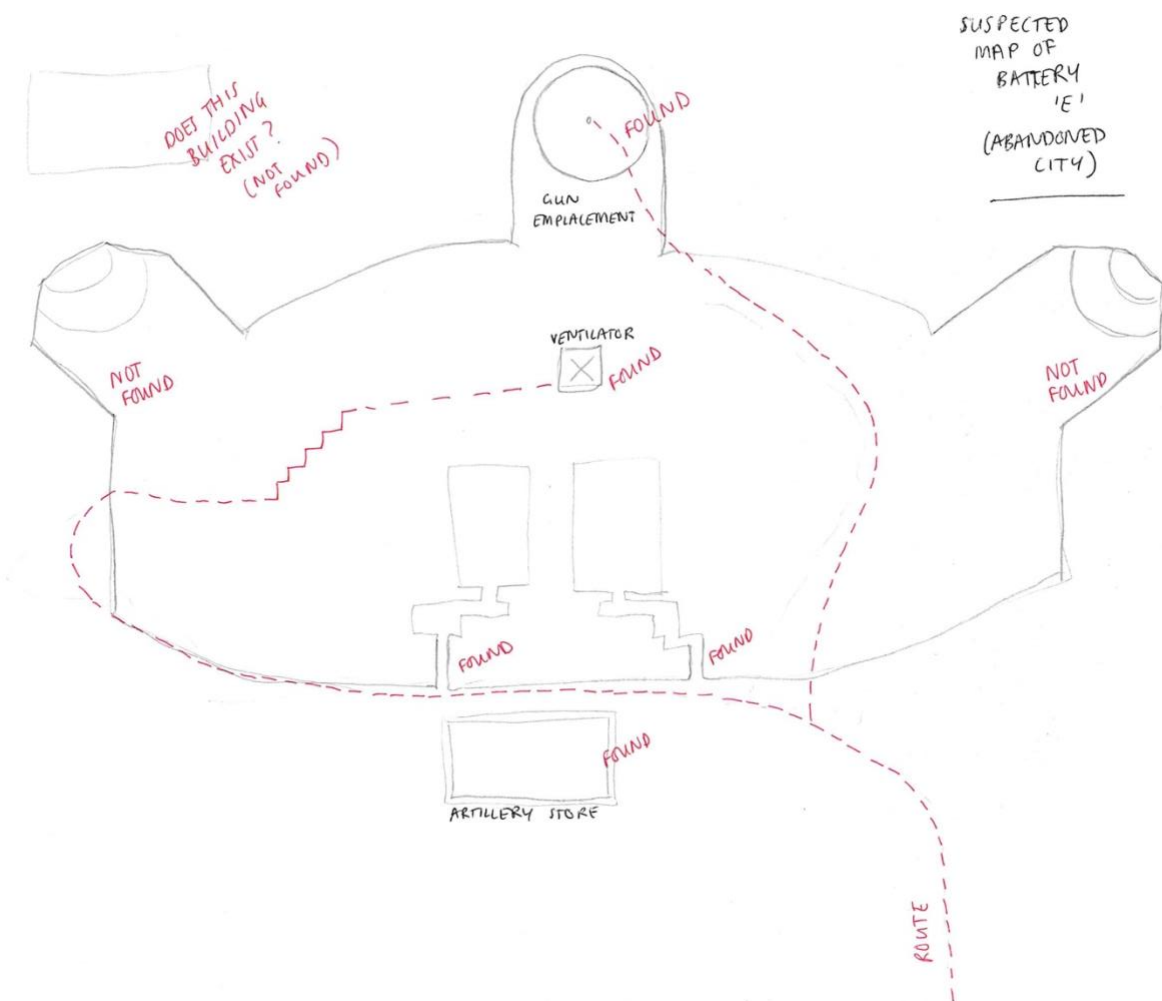


Figure 9: ‘Suspected map of Battery ‘E’ (Abandoned City)’, drawn by the anonymous character in *The Abandoned City*.

⁴¹ This story is based on events that took place in mid-August. Some of the fiction is fictional, some of the fiction is truthful, all of the fiction is real. Reading stories of the Abandoned and Forbidden cities led me to actually cut down a path to Portland’s abandoned and hidden monuments of history. By writing a story based on my own experience of discovery, I hope to keep a little piece of history alive, in writing and reality, that might otherwise have remained obscured by brambles.

*'The Past Shines in the Present'*⁴²

'She was a subjective phenomenon vivified by the weird* influences of his descent and birthplace'.⁴³

Hardy's 1897 novel 'The Well-Beloved' follows the main character, Jocelyn Pierston, from his youth on the isle of Portland to his adulthood, spent back and forth between Portland and London. Jocelyn spends his life in pursuit of 'the well-beloved', which he believes to be the spirit of the 'ideal' woman. Over the course of the novel, and Jocelyn's life, 'the well-beloved' inhabits three generations of women from the same Portland family – Avice Caro, her daughter Ann Avice, and her granddaughter Avice. Throughout the novel, the 'romantic' explorations are indefinitely tied to the 'weird influences' of the island. In the notes, Hardy defines 'weird' as 'fated, determined by destiny'.⁴⁴ In the Cambridge dictionary, 'fated' is defined as 'not able to be avoided because planned by a power that controls events'.⁴⁵ Seemingly, then, for Hardy, who was writing before the turn of the 20th century, Portland and its 'weirdness' have a significant relationship to temporality.

Earlier in this dissertation, I discussed how the slogan 'Keep Portland Weird' seems to manifest itself as a kind of practice of fictioning that creates lifeways within Portland's meshwork. This method of fictioning, as part of the larger practice of 'Keeping Portland Weird', holds the potentially to temporally traverse the meshwork of Portland, seemingly 'activating' the past whilst also speaking to the future. Writing 125 years on from Hardy, now in the full effectuation of neoliberalism, our contemporary moment is characterised by a crisis in relation to time, or to the idea of 'progress'. A lack of belief in progress, the seeming impossibility of growing into the future whilst resolving the past and also living through the present, seems to be a crisis that is already being responded to in the way that times are

⁴² The title 'The Past Shines in the Present' is taken from the title of chapter nine in Hardy's *The Well-Beloved*. See Hardy, *The Well-Beloved*, 62.

⁴³ Note, in Hardy's novel both the man, Jocelyn, and the woman to whom he refers, Avice, are from Portland. Owing to Hardy's outstandingly evident sexism, he writes '*his* descent', because, of course, Portland could never be labelled as '*her* descent', or even '*our* descent', if it was also the male character's.

⁴⁴ Hardy, *The Well-Beloved*, 152.

⁴⁵ "Fated", Cambridge Dictionary, accessed July 30, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/fated>.

stacked and nested on Portland. There's a sense that the past, present and future merge on Portland in a way that is very different to other places. To explore this dynamic further, it seems appropriate to introduce Raymond Williams' ideas about 'archaic' and 'residual' cultures.

In 'Marxism and Literature', Williams suggests that residual culture from the past is absorbed within the 'dominant' contemporary culture, and hence is obscured, becoming difficult to apprehend or practice in its previous form. Archaic culture, on the other hand, is left behind more thoroughly and hence has a more subversive potential for reactivation in the 'emergent' cultures that can resist the 'dominant' culture. Seemingly, Portland cuts across Williams' neat distinction of residual and archaic. On Portland, the encroachment of the archaic happens differently than in other areas. Portland has denied the encroaching capitalist system the power to subsume many of its historic community traditions. The past also physically persists in the exposed layers of rock which reveal ancient forests and creatures lying as petrifications. Katrina Palmer recognises this 'deep time' as something that, in Williams' terms, might be an emergent temporal agent of the 'archaic' within the dominant culture. She harnesses its potential to create a work that is not a 'fictional doppelganger' of Portland, but instead sits somewhere in between the real holes of Portland and the fictional holes that emerge in 'End Matter'. Palmer's work sits between deep-time and the future – her fictions coordinating between the archaic and the possible.

Furthermore, on Portland, what Williams names as the residual isn't obscured, instead it is practised through the method of 'weirdness'. The oral passing of history, local idioms, storytelling and the prominence of folklore become methods to 'Keep Portland Weird', making visible a residual culture. The residual culture makes sense without being absorbed into the dominant culture and this in itself also helps to 'Keep Portland Weird'. This cyclical pattern might be visualised in the following diagram, which can be read in both directions:

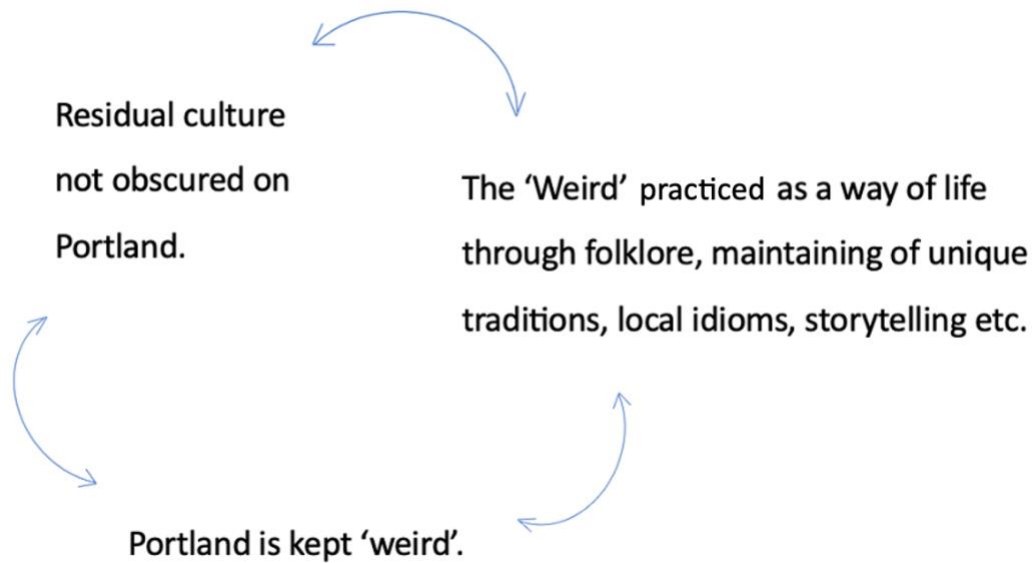


Figure 10: showing the (already existing) workings of temporality and culture on Portland.

Another author who seems important to acknowledge, owing to his direct address of ‘the weird’ in his 2016 publication *The weird and the eerie*, is Mark Fisher. His book explores these two elusive and often overlapping modes of experience – the weird and the eerie – in relation to art, literature and culture. For Fisher, the ‘weird’ might be characterised by a temporal or spatial disruption of a conventional understanding of reality or of our usual perceptions of the world around us. Fisher theorised that a kind of ‘structure of feeling’ is at work between the subjective experience and the encounter with certain places and cultural artefacts.⁴⁶ When confronted with the weird in real life (often emerging as a feeling, an atmosphere, or a sense) it often indicates capitalism failing to maintain its own illusions.

In Portland’s case, perhaps the residual culture has stayed visible because capitalism has been slower to paint a convincing façade for itself on the island. But perhaps it is also *because* of the prominence of residual culture that capitalism struggles to keep up its own illusions. The link between both of these outcomes is that Portland’s residual culture is practiced through the ‘weird’. ‘Weirdness’ is itself a practice, or a ‘form[s] of life[,] that cannot be reduced or conquered’ by capitalism, or by the ‘dominant culture’. In other words, on Portland, residual culture is practiced through the ‘weird’ which, as Fisher recognised,

⁴⁶ Mark Fisher, *The weird and the eerie*, (London: Repeater Books, 2016). See also Raymond Williams, ‘Structures of Feeling’ in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1997): 128-136, where Williams fleshes out his phrase ‘structure of feeling’.

does something to work against the usual subsuming powers of capitalism. The weird becomes a tactic of disruption that emerges from the past – it sets out a way of life which reveals and maintains residual cultures whilst also opening possibility for the future by becoming a vessel for fictions and encounters. The earlier diagram then becomes this:

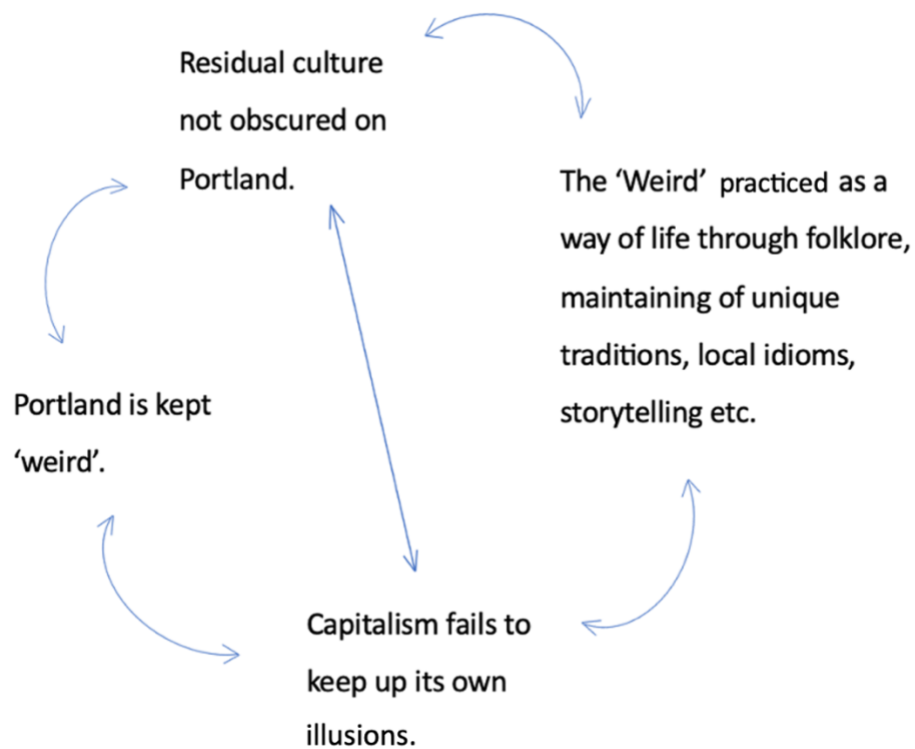


Figure 11: showing how the (already existing) workings of temporality and culture on Portland interact with the external forces of capitalism.

Ultimately, through the ‘weird’, Portland seems to have a unique relation to temporality that enhances the potential of art and fiction. On Portland, fiction is a method to practice, encourage, reflect and embody Portland’s weirdness, and this becomes a ‘practice of the weird’ that prevents an obfuscation of residual culture. In places where the weird already exists, there seems to be more of a radical potential for art and fiction. Hardy’s ‘fated’ initially seems to have a negative or foreboding connotation, but perhaps this future orientated descriptor supports the idea that the practice of weirdness can stand up to the dominant hegemony and simultaneously engage past, present and future temporalities.

Conclusion

This dissertation has elucidated fiction as an agent which is always already existing within Portland's meshwork, one which has the power to construct and repair ways of life. Fiction is both a practice and a manifestation of Portland's 'weirdness', which is itself an agent that resists the homogenisation of the island. Because of Portland's unique meshwork, other vessels of art and fiction become emergent agents of possibility which have the potential to enrich the community. The meshwork framework, as one of 'wayfaring' rather than 'connecting', immediately prevents this argument from contributing to a narrative of 'progress' or from suggesting that fiction and art can help any kind of neoliberal idea of Portland's 'growth'. Instead, it aims to show how fiction might work with(in) a place, and demonstrate the potential of fiction to create lifeways that might traverse through an extracted landscape. I have explored the various ways this happens on Portland, dedicating time to show how the 'weirdness' of Portland is unique in its ability to hold the past, present and future in its presence. Fiction and art become ways to maintain this 'weirdness', moving through the geographical and metaphysical landscape of the island and facilitating encounters as they move. Portland's special relationship to fiction, and to 'weirdness', help it to resist homogenisation, to repair and care where extraction has caused ruin, and to preserve where privatisation encloses and neglects history.

The potential for art and fiction to lead the way in respecting the rights and history of a place is central to this dissertation and is also an argument I have aimed to perform by including fiction within the finished project. Nevertheless, my research invites further questioning that extends beyond the groundwork I have presented; how might political responses to societal issues change if art and fiction were taken seriously, rather than ignored in the face of economic gain? This kind of questioning is perhaps best answered within a more statistically written research project, one which might focus on the specific effect of art and fiction on the politics and economics surrounding a place.

Ultimately, fiction and art become practices which facilitate community encounters, creating and repairing lifeways that resist subsumption into the dominant hegemony. In keeping fiction and art practices alive on Portland the folklore, tradition and history of the place is maintained, and in its maintenance, Portland is kept weird. This is a cyclical process which ultimately keeps the isle of Portland, as it is known to its residents, alive.

Epilogue

Plans for the re-use of the Bibby Stockholm barge as 'accommodation' for asylum-seekers have emerged alongside my research for this dissertation. Ultimately, to do justice to the

topic, an entire dissertation should be written about the barge and the wider crisis of the UK's inhumane asylum system. However, it is important to briefly address its future in relation to the surrounding community, and how art projects might be able to address crises as pressing as human rights in the UK.

In October, b-side will begin a new project, 'Who Do We Think We Are?', which will explore the human story of Portland and endeavour to discover stories of migration both close to the island and further afield. This project was planned ahead of the news of the barge, but seems perfectly timed to address the current political and social upheaval surrounding it. John Bibby, founder of Bibby Lane Group (the parent company of Bibby Marine Ltd, the current owners of the barge), acquired three slaving vessels as co-owner between 1805-6, and yet Bibby Marine Ltd continue to avoid and deny accusations of their connections to the slave trade.⁴⁷ This legacy seems somewhat 'close to home' in regard to the conditions surrounding the barge today. Many of the refugees on this barge will have been victims of trafficking or other forms of modern slavery and many will have fled war-torn and violent conditions. Despite this, the asylum-seekers will be living under conditions of detention – they 'will not be free to move around the port', they will only have an allowance of £9.10 per week to spend and the barge will be filled with double the capacity it was intended for.⁴⁸ Many locals feed into a racist, xenophobic and ignorant narrative surrounding who they believe to be 'illegal immigrants', upholding the narrative that 'their own people' are more deserving of accommodation, jobs and welfare.⁴⁹ It cannot be denied that evil fictions such as racism and xenophobia exist within the strands of Portland's meshwork. However, through a specific and engaged stack within their project 'Who Do We Think We

⁴⁷ "An Open Letter to Bibby Marine," Refugee Council, accessed August 10, 2023, [https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/an-open-letter-to-bibby-marine/#:~:text=In%201805%2C%20the%20Harmonie%20\(co.database%20using%20Voyage%20ID%2081732](https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/latest/news/an-open-letter-to-bibby-marine/#:~:text=In%201805%2C%20the%20Harmonie%20(co.database%20using%20Voyage%20ID%2081732).

⁴⁸ "Portland Port Update – Setting out the Facts," Portland Port, accessed August 5, 2023, <https://www.portland-port.co.uk/news/101/Portland+Port+Update+-+Setting+out+the+Facts>.

⁴⁹ For example, see this news report highlighting letters sent from anonymous far-right residents to local businesses with threats of causing damage to the barge: "Threatening' letters from far-right sent to businesses and councillors in Bibby Stockholm dispute," Dorset Live, accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.dorset.live/news/dorset-news/threatening-letters-far-right-sent-8652077>. See also another news report that documents clashes between the Say No To Racism group and the Say No To The Barge campaigners: "Row erupts between resident and protesters over asylum seekers on Bibby Stockholm barge," Bristol Live, accessed August 10, 2023, <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/local-news/row-erupts-between-resident-protesters-8660666>.

Are?', b-side have the power to change these narratives. By engaging with local people, using storytelling as practice, commissioning art, conducting communal research and offering education on migration, b-side have the potential to rid local narratives of dangerous fictions surrounding refugees and help navigate the meshwork into different territories, enriching and educating the local community for the better.



Figure 12: A photo showing the signs of protestors who were protesting the arrival of the Bibby Stockholm barge into Portland Port in July. The two central signs read 'Dorset Council 'Barged up' with Portland Port' and 'Welcome to DCC Dorset Complicit Council'.

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