Situating the landscape:

an enquiry into how the landscapes of Suffolk are experienced and historicised through the practice of analogue large-format photography

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This thesis represents partial submission for the degree of Master of Philosophy at the Royal College of Art. I confirm that the work presented here is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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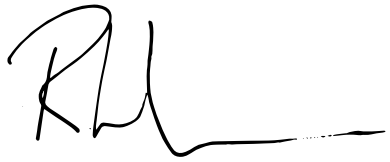

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Abstract

This research project explores the significance of affective encounters with history, and the value of using a large-format analogue photographic practice to instantiate those encounters – a form of creative historiography that does not give primacy to situating remnants of the past in a linear teleological narrative. It seeks to demonstrate how an analogue photographic practice – contextualised within an auto-ethnographic narrative – can draw attention to the 'affective' nature of the past, through its entanglement with the present. Consequently, it explores history as a relational dynamic phenomenon, which continues to shape and characterise how we experience and navigate the environments we inhabit. The research addresses two interrelated questions:

How does the large-format analogue photographic medium and its various processes and techniques shape an embodied engagement with place?

How can engaging with an embodied and situated experience of place create the possibility of historicising it through large-format analogue photography?

This research joins with the creative historiographic practices of artists like the writer W.G.Sebald and filmmaker Patrick Keiller. What the practice shares in common with these artists is an examination of landscapes shaped by social history that are discovered or revealed by walking them. The personal histories that emerge from these embodied engagements with place are subsequently narrated through recollection alongside the use of lens-based imagery. I argue for the particular contribution that can be made to creative forms of historiography through the use of large-format analogue photography.

Within this thesis three walks are narrated. Each walk departs from the same place, situated in a region of the Suffolk countryside featured repeatedly in the works of Thomas Gainsborough and John Constable. The first walk explores a region of the county previously unknown to me, via the Icknield Way path. The second is a circular walk, which retraces a region of the county that I knew well approximately thirty years ago. The third walk explores an area of the county I know only through depictions in historic works of landscape art.

The research is presented through a body of large-format photographs and creative writing, which examine how the entanglements of my sensory experience, subjective framing of landscape and social history, and my memories – combined fleetingly while walking the Suffolk countryside – are shaped by the photographic practice and/or find expression through it.

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Figure 1. Untitled

INTRODUCTION

This thesis argues for recognition of the significance of affective encounters with history in the English landscape, and the value of using a large-format analogue photographic practice to instantiate these encounters. What follows will argue that the analogue instrumentality of the practice in question can attune us to the 'affective' nature of the past, and its entanglement with the present, revealing aspects of our history that conventional historiographies do not. The argument is built on the premise that history can be approached in a relational and dynamic way – as a phenomenon that continually shapes and characterises how we experience and navigate the environments we inhabit. The thesis explores how an analogue photographic practice can engage with history considered in this way and can produce a historiography that does not privilege the situating of remnants of the past in a linear teleological narrative.

There are two interrelated questions that the research addresses:

How does the large-format analogue photographic medium and its various processes and techniques shape an embodied engagement with place?

How can critically engaging with an embodied and situated experience of place create the possibility of historicising it?

The research describes the most affecting encounters with place that were experienced while undertaking three auto-ethnographic case studies. Each case study was a walk through a pre-selected region of the Suffolk countryside, during which a body of photographs were shot using a large-format analogue camera. The photographs captured were taken without the aid of any digital apparatus or light-metering equipment. After a period of experimentation – mostly trial and error – exposure times were calculated using only judgement, based on experience.

This photographic practice is impractical, cumbersome, slow, prone to error, and expensive, and it involves using chemicals that are not environmentally friendly. Regarding this last observation, I acknowledge at the outset of this research that using certain analogue processes was conflicting. I wanted to minimise the environmental impact of the practice, and this informed some of my decision-making regarding the production of the work. The processing of the film on which all images were shot was done using the minimum amount of water and the most diluted chemical formulations possible (the use of running water was avoided). Initially, all the prints were produced on resin-coated traditional light-sensitive photographic paper, using a darkroom process. I made the decision to restrict the use of this output and instead print digitally on sustainable paper stock, using archival inks. This reduced the amount of chemicals used and paper consumed, and ensured the paper used was produced

from a sustainable source. This method of printing was obviously not an analogue process, but as the research was primarily concerned with situated experience and the practice of analogue capture, and as the prints produced remained faithful to that which was captured (i.e. no significant post-capture retouching was used), I do not believe that this method of printing meaningfully impacted the research.

As the project developed, my thinking about how to produce the prints in an environmentally sustainable way became more invested, and inspired the intention to use an adapted photogravure process.[1] The ultimate aim is to create inks, using pigments made from organic detritus obtained in the Suffolk landscape, and apply it to reusable plates coated and etched using non-toxic chemicals and techniques. To realise this intention requires research and development, which strictly speaking was beyond the remit of this project. In truth, however, it was simply impractical to explore and develop this in the time available to me. The challenges of doing a research degree, while having to manage other necessary commitments concurrently, for example working a full-time job, made it impossible to undertake any supplementary research.

All the photographs were black and white. The decision to shoot in black and white was twofold. It allowed for manual processing (i.e. processing by hand with cold water) and it again minimised the environmental impact of using chemicals to process film.

Despite its challenges, I believe that the practice is one that encourages a particular kind of attentiveness and perceptiveness – through the way it shapes the situated experience of *being there* to take a photograph and through the unique ways it can capture and express something.

The research builds on the premise that to photograph a landscape using a large-format analogue camera requires an attentiveness to that landscape's environmental and atmospheric 'affects'. At the very least, it demands some sensory awareness of what is happening within a landscape before the capturing of a legible image there is possible. To give a simple example, a change in wind direction can influence how much sunlight is reflected off vegetation like leaves and grass (if the broadest dimension of a leaf faces the sun, it reflects more light). When using light-metering technology to determine camera settings that will resolve a legible image an awareness of a change like this is unnecessary – the equipment is designed to read transmitted and reflected light levels and calculate an appropriate camera setting. When using analogue equipment, and relying on judgement, a change in wind direction can significantly impact how a scene is captured. A change in wind direction may make no perceptible

1 Photogravure is a photo-mechanical process that can resolve high-quality, detailed photographic prints, produced via pressing an etched plate, coated with ink, onto paper. It is intended that the pressed imprints produced through this process articulate the flattening of three-dimensional space and stilling of motion that derives from the photographic practice in question, in addition to producing mechanically made images in an environmentally sustainable way.

difference to ambient light levels (light transmitted directly by the sun) but a significant difference to reflected light levels (light bouncing off things). A photographer using analogue equipment, and relying on judgement, must be attentive to environmental factors such as wind direction to resolve a photographic image that is neither over- or under-exposed.

The photographic practice in question is not just a means or technology for producing images, but also a practice that hones the artist's attentiveness to the situated experience of *being there*. With this awareness, the research critically reflects on large-format analogue photography as a practice productive of embodied experiences and a historiography that is shaped by them.

The landscapes of Suffolk

The photographed subject of the research is the landscapes of Suffolk, which were explored for two reasons that are largely entangled. First, I have a personal connection to these places, having lived in the county twice – separated by a period of almost three decades. On returning to live there, I was surprised by how much the atmosphere of these landscapes had changed. I am confident that this feeling was shaped not by nostalgic memories but by material changes and effects I could see and feel.

With a period of almost thirty years having passed between the two occasions when I lived in the county, I have a particular perspective on how it has changed. However, that perspective, born out of a personal history and memory, is not something that is easily representable. Changes that are visible (and palpable) to me are not something I can demonstratively show through documentative images – i.e. there are few obvious signifiers and no 'event' I can depict that will show how these landscapes have changed. Dwelling on this led me to reflect on how I could use my personal history, and my photographic practice, to engage with and reveal something I believe to be sociologically significant, without recourse to events or obvious signifiers.

This was the impetus for me to rethink the significance of exploring the landscapes of Suffolk through my photographic practice. It led to me to think about photography less as a practice for producing pictorial objects and more as a practice that can hone, shape and reveal the character of places through the situated experiences it creates – a practice contingent on my *being there* and critically engaging with the effects of this.

Reflecting on the above inspired this practice-based research, which joins with the practices (and creative historiographies) of writers and artists such as W. G. Sebald[2] and the filmmaker Patrick Keiller.[3] What the practice shares in common with these writers and artists is an examination of landscapes

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2 W. G. Sebald's novel *The Rings of Saturn* had a significant influence on me and this research. The book's narrative is largely a continuum of recounted historical catastrophes – recalled through stories, anecdotes and documents – coloured with pathos, the uncanny, and dry humour. Beneath the repetitive telling of catastrophe and tragedy, all of which is woven into the narration of a walk through the English countryside, something else is being articulated.

The histories recalled are often supported by photographs, many of which are neither reliable or authentic. They predominantly show places or historic artefacts and are used to corroborate the narrator's storytelling. The authenticity of much of this visual supporting material is now known, through research, to be fictional. That Sebald's writing is wrongly assumed to be historiographically authentic is arguably evidenced by some of the observations and criticism that has been levelled against him by those who have sought to retrace his narrator's footsteps. For example, Mark Fisher described *The Rings of Saturn* as 'a botched walk through Suffolk' and Robert Macfarlane has admitted that tracing Sebald's footsteps through the countryside was a mistake, in trying to identify with and understand the author. Macfarlane's experience entirely contradicted the melancholic tonality of the book.

The writing brings into question the value of historiography as a reliable or objective authority on the past – with regard to describing it *as it actually was*. In the novel, the authenticity of a photograph that has been manipulated and the authenticity of a photograph that has not are indistinguishable. Knowing this complicates how indexical images in the novel are read (for example, the reproduced photograph of the liberated Bergen Belsen, which shows something of the ineffable horror of that place). However, it is not the case that the work is dismissive of history, or somehow open to denying it. I would argue the contrary.

Through his descriptions of affective encounters with people, places, and history, happened upon while walking a region of the English countryside, Sebald's narrator ultimately expresses, without words, a profound pathos shaped by a recurrence of catastrophe and tragedy.

What I took from this novel was understanding how the author's play on the authority of historical documents and narratives did not discredit or deny deeper truths about the legacies and effects of history. It is perhaps the *experience* of history and its effects that matter to the author, not the authority of documents used and presumed to represent it. W.G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn* (London: Vintage Classics, 2002).

3 Patrick Keiller's film *Robinson in Ruins* came to mind often while walking through Suffolk. Keiller's film explores the effects of late capitalism, inscribed in the landscapes of the Oxfordshire countryside, via a series of static video shots overlaid with narrated stories. The (unreliable) narration (voiced by Vanessa Redgrave) recounts a body of research discovered in the notebooks of a fictional disappeared scholar. Like Sebald's writing, there is a mixture of fiction and fact in Keiller's film, which is used to articulate something salient but subjectively experienced through encounters with place in a region of the English countryside.

The scholar quoted is Robinson, a former academic recently released from prison, who believed he could communicate with a network of non-human intelligences that had sought refuge in marginal and hidden locations. These intelligences were determined to preserve the possibility of life's survival on the planet and, so Robinson believed, had enlisted him to work on their behalf.

Through Robinson's musings, born out of his exploration and research into marginal and hidden places in Oxfordshire, ways in which the industrial and financial transformation of the landscape and its inhabitants, through the evolution of capitalism over the last century, are slowly revealed.

While describing Robinson's project, the narrator quotes Robinson as having observed that 'if he looked at the landscape hard enough it would reveal to him the molecular basis of historic events' – an observation that speaks to the practice this body of research explores.

There are also a number of tangible connections between what Keiller explores in his film and what was encountered on my walks. For example, many of the locations Robinson sets out to explore are connected by ancient pathways and Roman roads. While researching the GPSS pipeline (a joint venture underground pipeline network that supplies approximately 5 billion litres of fuel every year to military and civil air bases), Robinson followed the Icknield Way path towards Tetsworth, beyond which it continues on to east-coast oil terminals and US Air Force bases in East Anglia – which were all encountered on the walk described in Chapter 1.

Long-gaze camera shots are used to scrutinise the object of Robinson's reflections, perhaps in an effort to reveal the 'molecular structure of history', throughout the film. His use of lens-based technology in this way was something that contributed to my thinking about the use of photography from the outset of this project.

that have been shaped by social history that are discovered or revealed by walking them. The personal histories that emerge from these embodied engagements with place are subsequently narrated through recollection, alongside lens-based imagery.

In addition to my lived connection to the landscapes of Suffolk, I am also drawn to exploring them because of the place they occupy in my imagination. As an artist thinking about the landscapes of Suffolk, it is almost impossible to ignore or dismiss a consideration of the place that Suffolk landscapes have in British landscape art. Two of the most significant artists associated with the development and evolution of British landscape painting were born and worked in the region. Thomas Gainsborough (b. 1727) and John Constable (b. 1776) painted Suffolk landscapes extensively, and many of their most celebrated paintings, depicting the Suffolk countryside, are exhibited around the world in major and national galleries. Though he was less celebrated as a landscape artist, Gainsborough made two important innovative contributions to the art of landscape[4] – his treatment of new social realities; and his experimental techniques.[5] Constable, born half a century later, was undoubtedly influenced by Gainsborough, for whom he repeatedly expressed his admiration in private correspondence as well as in public speeches. Both shared in common that they hailed from Suffolk and had a strong emotional attachment to the landscapes of East Anglia, which often inspired their work.

The tone and form of Keiller's narrative differs significantly from that of Sebald's narrator in *The Rings of Saturn*. Reflecting on this difference also contributed to this research and how I would intend for it to evolve. The sense of a narrator profoundly affected by encounters with place and their histories, in Sebald's writing, was something that resonated strongly with me. Whether fiction or fact, I think *The Rings of Saturn* expresses something that transcends anecdotes, stories, and recollections of the past.
Patrick Keiller. Director, *Robinson in Ruins.* (BFI, 2010)

4 Christoph Vogtherr, 'Thomas Gainsborough: the Modern Landscape' in *Thomas Gainsborough: the Modern Landscape*. ed. Christoph Vogtherr and Katharina Hoins, Munich: Hirmer, 2018, 24.

5 Gainsborough experimented both with materials and the form of painting. For example, in the production of his paints, he would explore techniques like mixing glass particles into pigment to achieve greater luminosity and transparency; experimenting with the form of his paintings, he would, for example, build illuminated boxes into which could be inserted paintings he produced on glass panes – (prefiguring photographic lightboxes). 'The precise material composition of his drawings and paintings puzzles researchers to this day', and was a guarded secret, but it is evident that he explored the use of (what was then) unusual materials and techniques in an effort to manipulate the luminosity and atmospheric effects of his work.
Katharina Hoins, 'Experiment and variation: painting's possibilities' in *Thomas Gainsborough: the Modern Landscape*. ed. Christoph Vogtherr and Katharina Hoins, Munich: Hirmer, 2018, 136.

Although the practice-based element of this research is aligned with more contemporary practices, re-examining historic works by Gainsborough and Constable has also significantly influenced this research. Thinking about how works by these artists represented aspects of social history through their depictions of the Suffolk countryside has been an important reference. I would argue that in some of their paintings, certain themes still have contemporary significance, and examining their engagement with Suffolk has contributed to my thinking about landscape art as a form of creative historiography.[6]

The form

Each walk formed a case study and departed from the same place – a region painted by Gainsborough and Constable, where I once lived. The first walk, partially recalled in Chapter 1, explored a region of the county previously unknown to me, via the Icknield Way footpath. The second, partially recalled in Chapter 2, was a circular walk that retraced a region of the county I knew well approximately thirty years ago. The third walk, partially recalled in Chapter 3, explored an area of the county previously known to me only in my imagination, through historic works of art.

The case-study walks were undertaken following a series of preliminary walks in Suffolk. These were carried out to consider and reflect on different approaches to exploring the landscape through practice. I began with secondary research, hoping to discover compelling histories that would give me some insight into how places in the region came to be shaped, with a view to walking and photographing them later. Although interesting, it quickly became evident that I was visiting places with expectations and preconceived ideas, derived from pre-existing histories, about what I would discover there (for example, places like Orford Ness, explored extensively by numerous contemporary artists, have a well-known and fascinating past). This did not really facilitate using the practice in question as a method

6 Many of the paintings produced by these two artists were born from what could be described as a romantic experience – an experience defined by subjectivity and an appreciation of nature.
Though later in this thesis certain landscape paintings produced by Gainsborough will be considered as documents of social history, it is well known that many of his works were fictions, constructed in the studio, *entirely* inspired by his experience of the landscapes he lived among. Situated experiences of landscape were also fundamental to Constable's output. He explored Suffolk intimately, and made countless studies of its ever-changing constituent parts. In a letter to his friend, John Dunthorpe, he once commented 'however one's mind may be elevated ... still Nature is the fountain's head, the source from whence all originality must spring'. (*Gainsborough to Constable* exhibition catalogue. Gainsborough's House Society Sudbury, 1991, 9.)
Where the research that follows aligns with the works produced by these historic artists is through how their subjective, embodied experience of Suffolk landscapes served as inspiration for the production of a body of work describing those landscapes – specifically the production of certain works that could be read as documents of social history.
Where the pictorial work produced in the course of this research diverges from the paintings produced by the two artists, is in its retention of an indexical relationship to the landscape. The landscapes painted by Gainsborough and Constable were ultimately reworkings or reimaginings of what the artists had seen and experienced, expressive of something that may or may not have been evident within those landscapes. Their paintings were definitely informed by embodied, subjective experience, but they could not be viewed as direct or faithful representations or imprints of what the artists had seen. By contrast, the photographs produced in the course of this research are a direct imprint of what was before the camera, and have not been reworked. In this way they function differently from the paintings of Gainsborough and Constable, and are documentative of what was encountered while walking.

of engaging with and understanding landscapes through situated experience. I found myself seeking particular effects and was not fully open to experiencing the character of the landscapes I was walking. Presuppositions coloured my experience of place.

To counter this I explored a contrasting approach, which involved simply walking without seeking any destination (or having prior knowledge of the places explored). This became a series of (non-urban) *dérives*, which resulted in a much stronger connection to the character, atmosphere and affect of place. However, these walks presented a challenge in terms of trying to position what was experienced there within a contextual framework connecting those experiences. I struggled to find a way to narrate or situate those walks with social history, and creative historiography, in mind.

Consequently, the research settled on three variants of an approach that was informed by what I learnt from undertaking the preliminary walks. Each walk was framed, or began with, a preconceived context, but was also approached with a degree of openness and naïveté – a degree of ignorance.

Chapter 1

The first walk followed part of the Icknield Way, through a region of Suffolk previously unknown to me. The Icknield Way is a well-known historic trail, commonly thought to be a prehistoric pathway that traces a chalk escarpment used by early settlers to traverse the land, when it would have been densely populated with trees. (This is disputed, however; an alternative history argues that the path's prehistoric status was invented by medieval historians.)

The walk was undertaken in sections at different times of year, in various weather conditions. Chapter 1 focuses on the most memorable and affecting encounter with place, experienced while walking and photographing an unbroken 17-mile section of the trail. During that walk no other person was encountered, and, of all the walks undertaken in the course of this research, it was the most remote. This 17-mile stretch was both affecting and revealing in several ways. While walking and photographing the previous sections did attune me to the situated experience of being there, it did so in ways that I would argue were not significant regarding the core questions underlying this research. For this reason, this thesis is not concerned with presenting an exhaustive account of each walk.

However, what those earlier sections of the walk did reveal were certain facts about the landscape that would become familiar throughout all the walks undertaken. Markers of human history, neglect and decline, the enclosure of private property and sporadic outward expressions of wealth would become familiar sights.

Although not detailed in Chapter 1, it was significant to me that the earlier parts of this walk were often characterised by juxtapositions of land shaped by private wealth and land shaped by neglect and

decline. The contrast of one against the other seemed to me much more pronounced than what I recall of similar landscapes thirty years ago. I encountered many instances of this, which were relatively easy to photograph. However, as the repeated documentation of this was not the goal of the research, I have chosen not to present multiple examples. Nevertheless, the encounters were common and undoubtedly shaped the affective experience of being in the landscapes explored – so I acknowledge the importance of the full walks for the overall project, although they are not fully articulated.

Chapter 1 describes what the walk significantly revealed and challenged me to consider: notably, the problem of trying to define what a landscape is – as a temporary and arbitrarily framed space – and how to represent, or re-present, a subjective, fleeting, situated experience of it through photography and writing (with a view to historicising it).

The chapter also aims to express the unambiguous affect of being there ('affect' is defined below) and begins to reflect on how the photographic practice shaped this experience.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 discusses those places that were most notably affecting, experienced during a circular walk through landscapes that were previously well known to me.

The chapter discusses how the practice in question engaged me with places on this walk that have been shaped by the use of the land for public and private leisure. The chapter also touches on observations born out of personal memory, acknowledging the challenge of drawing on this to historicise the changes these landscapes have undergone.

This walk followed familiar terrain, which I once knew intimately. The change (I would argue, the decline) that is palpable in this region poses a challenge to representation. Short of going back in time and producing a thirty-year time-lapse, there is no obvious or relatable signifier in these landscapes that points to the changes I know have occurred (through personal memory) over this period. For want of a better descriptor, the changes were primarily 'felt'. They were knowable to me through situated experiences and memory.

The chapter not only recalls the situated experience of trying to photograph these landscapes, but also the potential of the photographic practice to creatively convey what I would argue are sociologically significant changes that have occurred (in my lifetime) within them.

The chapter also considers the practice against the work of several artists, both contemporary and in the past, related to the themes discussed.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 discusses what was most affecting to me about walking in the landscapes of 'Constable country' – a region formerly known to me only through the paintings of Gainsborough and Constable. The chapter discusses what was arguably the most significant revelation to me that I garnered through this body of research – the degradation of the environment and what I perceived as its loss of vitality.

The walk was undertaken in search of black poplars, after a famous work in which these trees are depicted, painted by Constable. It considers how historic works of landscape art can articulate aspects of social and natural history, and how idealistic representations might also skew certain truths about the past.

Key terms

There are three recurring terms used throughout this research that it is important to define at the outset. The first, 'landscape', is used in the sense defined by John Stilgoe, Professor of the History of Landscape at Harvard University. The second term is 'affect', which is used in the sense defined by the seventeenth-century philosopher Benedict de Spinoza. The third term is 'history', which is used in the sense of its etymological origin, *historia*.

'*Landscape*' designates the surface of the earth as it has been shaped by people deliberately and for permanent purposes.[7]

Oceans, polar ice, glaciers, rocky islets, steppes, deserts, tropical forests, and places seemingly untouched, uninhabited or seldom travelled through are, properly speaking, wilderness, not landscapes. In addition to being shaped by people, what is characteristic of all landscapes is that they are subjectively perceived – they should not be understood as demarcated spaces in any absolute sense. In other words, '[i]ndividuals conjure landscapes individually'.[8] How I engage with and perceive a landscape (at the risk of stating the obvious) is unique to me – where it begins, where it ends, what shapes, colours, and forms within it draw my attention are not necessarily in agreement with how others, occupying a similar geographical location, might perceive and demarcate that place. The boundaries of any landscape are peculiar to the one observing it – a phenomenological projection.

'Affect' 'is a power acting either from the body or upon the body, and it is also the idea of that power'.[9]

Having recourse to this term, as Spinoza defined it in his Ethics – a rationalist, speculative, metaphysical philosophy whose influence is still at work today – allows me to position the situated embodied

7 John R. Stilgoe, *What is a Landscape?* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015), Loc 31.
8 Ibid., Loc 31 & p17.
9 Anthony Paul Smith, 'The Ethical Relation of Bodies: Thinking with Spinoza Towards an Affective Ecology', in *Spinoza Beyond Philosophy*, ed. by B. Lord (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 58–61.

experiences explored through this research within a broader established theoretical framework, which recognises such experiences as critically significant.

Anthony Paul Smith, writing on Spinoza's theory of affect, has observed that affects are often dismissed as simply emotions or feelings. Too often they have been overlooked, or thought to be unimportant, for theoretical work, which has traditionally sought to focus on reason.

Affects can either increase one's power to effect change, or they can diminish one's power to effect change (which arguably means that a critical engagement with affect is ethically significant).

Neither affect nor landscape describe 'static' phenomena. 'Affect' does not describe some essence of the human experience in a way that is meant to be understood as categorical, non-continuous or un-dynamic. The term 'affect' refers to the dynamic embodied experience of a power acting on us or from us; the term 'landscape' refers to a dynamic external materiality that is never fixed, and is subjectively boundaried, upon which we act, or which acts upon us.

'*History*' is used in the sense of the Greek term *historia*, from which it is derived: a learning or knowing by inquiry, and a narrative or account of that inquiry. 'Historiography' is intended to be understood as the practice of historia, and/or the study of it.

I wish to acknowledge from the outset of this thesis that a fluidity and subjectivity underpins the use of these terms.

Figure 2. Untitled
(photographed approximately 4 miles north-west of Sudbury on a preliminary walk)

CHAPTER 1

I arrived late afternoon, with no way of knowing for sure whether this was the right place – tired of my monotonous footsteps, having walked for several hours. The mist around me was dense, and formed a grey expanse in which strange, contorted forms, barely discernible, seemed to strain forth. Looking ahead I could see very little, except for the path that had brought me here, which receded into a fold between the ground and the low-hanging mist, no more than ten metres or so in front of me. The path itself was nothing more than a sandy furrow, scored through what was mostly open heathland – a fissure running through wild, entangled scrub, seeping through the prehistoric sands compacted beneath. Having felt impelled to stop and consider where I was, I immediately felt the cold mist begin to weigh on me, and its oppressive contact stirred me into walking on. Underfoot, the loose sand was in places often ankle deep, which made progress slow and awkward. At times, it seemed as if an absurd effort were required just to propel myself forward. The uneven path, with its intermittent sand traps, regularly jolted my body away from its natural inclination, and my legs would sporadically lock in protest. Again and again, my centre of gravity was shifted. These spasms were an odd counterpoint to the enveloping stillness of this place. The absence of any breeze or discernible movement in the silhouetted forms I could just about make out beside the sandy path belied the vast expanse I imagined to be surrounding me. I could hear nothing, not even rooks haunting the deal rows[10] that bordered the far edge of the heath. My footsteps made no sound, and had it not been for a low weariness weighing me down I am not sure if gravity alone would have been enough to tether me to that place. I recognised that my grasp of time had slipped.

Seeing the strange and semi-distinct forms that I had perceived around me only moments earlier coalesce then disappear, I struggled to recognise anything from which I could take a bearing. I continued walking for a while before I found myself at a fork, where the path diverged (or converged, depending on your direction of travel). Here the roughly straight path that I had been walking banked sharply left, and a smaller path, a tributary, continued straight ahead. To my right the indistinct forms that had flanked the path had grown in stature – slowly encroaching until they became identifiable as gnarled pine trees, contorted over time by the elements. They formed the petrified border of a wood too dense for the mist to penetrate. I paused to consider the direction in which I should continue, and wondered if one, or both, would take me away from this place.

10 Planted rows of softwood trees, usually fir and pine.

Opposite the wood, to my left, the mist was thinner. I could make out a wire fence. Behind it, thickets of heather and gorse configured the grassy heath into a maze of narrow pathways, punctuated occasionally by the odd silver birch. At the limit of my vision something moved in the gorse. The thick shrub obscured whatever it was I was straining to see, so I moved closer. As I placed my foot on the bank of the path, the silence of that place snapped. The shrub quivered and I felt my body tense. In a split second, only metres from where I stood, a large mass bolted. Without moving, I felt myself momentarily elsewhere. Only after an indeterminable interval did the scene slowly recompose itself around me.

The bolting mass was a strong, elegant doe, nervous and alert. She seemed unaffected by me and leapt into a gap between the petrified pines before disappearing into the woods.

Like observing a meteor tracing an arc in the night sky, we were, for a short time, caught up in an encounter whose emergence actualised a new 'present'. Prior to encountering the doe, that locus had been elsewhere. With her emergence, what had been my present slipped into the past. A new present did not emerge because some arbitrary measure of time had elapsed, but rather because a relational encounter forced a new locus of attention, perception and engagement to emerge.

That encounter, like all encounters, has passed into the past. (Though that is not to say its affect is irrevocable – without influence on this or any other present.) Now it can only be re-imagined – partially replayed through representations, or the faculty of memory. In the form of memory, that defunct 'present' is both revocable and irrevocable. I can clearly recall the 'having happened' of the encounter, and I am convinced (though perhaps mistakenly) that I remember it clearly. But I also know that I can never recall or relive the experience of that event as it was.[11]

A document made with the intention of representing the encounter – for example, a photograph, or this text – could reasonably be thought to show that the encounter occurred – any recipient of that document might reasonably infer from it that the event did indeed happen (putting aside questions of authenticity). But however reasonable that inference might be, nothing more is guaranteed. The document cannot instantiate what I experienced. The encounter itself – that which occurred in experience, but which is no longer occurring – is irrevocable. It is to this fact that all histories point.

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11 It is misguided to have recourse to a 'real' past, 'for that past must be set over against a present within which the emergent appears, and the past, which must then be looked at from the standpoint of the emergent, becomes a different past'. Any representation of the past is mutable – no representation is immune to the possibility of any intended signification being revised, reinterpreted or re-evaluated. Conversely, the novel event is itself immutable, as it is characterised by finality. It no longer exists and therefore cannot be other than what it was.
George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 35.

Some moments later, a stag emerged from the maze of scrub, not far from where the doe had appeared, trailed by two fawns. The stag leapt over the fence, effortlessly, but the fawns were unable to follow. They skirted the perimeter of the fence that stopped them, anxiously searching for a gap and sporadically alerting the stag to their predicament. The stag stopped on the path ahead of me, agitated. As he waited, I felt an oppressive sense of anxiety fill the surrounding landscape. Happily, the two fawns found a gap and all three deer disappeared in pursuit of the doe, out of sight somewhere in the dark wood.

They had known I was present. The fawns saw me on the other side of the fence and had quickly altered course. The stag, too, had seen me, but seemed too agitated and preoccupied to react.

Through this encounter I am forced to recognise two things: one, that the affect of a place is not confined to human experience – how history has shaped this landscape is productive of something felt equally by human and non-human inhabitants; and two, our temporary encounter and relation is a kind of assemblage shaped by the experience of this place – which determines our power to act and also contributes to, or even intensifies, this place's affect.[12]

Our encounter was an event that occurred within an environment that is constitutively always changing. As constituent parts of that environment, any change in our behaviour, position, or affect describes a change in that environment (though that is not to say that such changes are necessarily perceptible or representable).[13]

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12 A key idea (borrowing from the work of Spinoza) developed and articulated in Jane Bennett's work on vital materialism, is that bodies enhance their power in or as a heterogeneous assemblage – an ad hoc grouping of diverse elements of vibrant materials, of all sorts. Bennett's intention is to form a theory of action and responsibility that crosses the human non-human divide. The encounter described above could be thought of as exactly this kind of ad hoc heterogeneous assemblage, in which both I, the deer and the vital materialism of the landscape were brought together in a way that ultimately diminished our power to act – born out of experiencing a place shaped by the effects of human social history. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett observes that treating humanity always as an end in itself and never merely as a means, does not have a stellar record of success in preventing human suffering or promoting human well-being: it is important to raise the question of its actual, historical efficacy in order to open up space for forms of ethical practice that do not rely upon the image of an intrinsically hierarchical order of things. Bennett advocates for another way to promote human health and happiness, which is to raise the status of materiality – of which we are all composed. Each human is a heterogeneous compound of vibrant matter. If we recognise that matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimised, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated. The aim becomes to distribute value more generously, to bodies as such. Though a new-found attentiveness to matter and its powers cannot solve the problem of human exploitation or oppression, it can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin, inextricably meshed in a dense network of relations. In a knotted world of vibrant matter, to harm one section of the web may very well be to harm oneself.
Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter.* Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, 12, 14, 23-24.

13 'The reflection of the organism in the environment and the reflection of environment in the organism are essential phases in the maintenance of the life process that constitutes conscious intelligence.'
George Herbert Mead, *The Philosophy of the Present* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 2002), 38.

Our encounter changed our field of consciousness – the world as it exists for the 'individual and the social organism'. It reconfigured what 'is' into what 'was'. And, once passed into the past, it can only ever be re-imagined through memory or history.[14]

If I am to historicise the landscapes I walk through, I recognise I do so through a subjective lens. I am not a passive recorder of what is encountered there. I am a constitutive part of these landscapes and productive of the very affects I experience within them. Whether intentionally or not, what follows is not just a body of represented encounters or passive recordings, it is also a portrait of me. This is not without responsibility.[15]

If we could learn from history, then it would serve life. However, history has often been exploited for quite different ends. Nietzsche saw our learning from the past as a problematic undertaking, invariably predicated on making inappropriate comparisons with contemporary life. 'Many of the differences must be neglected, the individuality of the past forced into a general formula and all the sharp angles broken off for the sake of correspondence.'[16] As long as the past is used to replicate or imitate history, it is always in danger of being 'a little altered, touched up and bought nearer to fiction'. Sometimes there is no way of distinguishing between a monumental past and a mythical romance, as the same motives for action can be gathered from one as from the other.

Should one method of surveying the past dominate all others, then the past itself 'suffers wrong'.[17]

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14 'In the historical discourse of our civilization, the process of signification always aims at "filling" History: the historian is the one who collects not so much facts as signifiers and relates them, i.e., organizes them in order to establish a positive meaning and to fill the void.
Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989), 137.

15 In the second of his untimely meditations, Friedrich Nietzsche, writing on the uses and abuses of history, argued that we would serve history only in so far as it serves life. Dissatisfied with the historical culture or fever of his age, Nietzsche outlined three ways in which he saw humankind relate to history. The first of these he named the monumental relation. The monumental relation describes how history is necessarily exploited by the 'man of action and power [...] he fights a great fight, and uses its examples, teachers and comfitors – which he cannot find among his contemporaries. For the modern man the monumental relation furnishes him with the knowledge that the great thing existed and was therefore possible, and so may be possible again'.
Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Thoughts out of Season, Part II, The Use and Abuse of History', in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Oscar Levy (London: T.N. Foulis, 1909), 20,21.

16 Ibid., 21.

17 'Whole tracks of it are forgotten and despised; they flow away like a dark unbroken river, with only a few gaily coloured islands of fact rising above it [...] it entices the brave to rashness and the enthusiastic to fanaticism by its tempting comparisons. It is only the great artistic spirits who can learn from history the one real lesson, which is how to live. Their way is obstructed, their free air darkened by the idolatrous dance round the half-understood monument.'
Ibid., 21.

The path ahead is not clear and the landscape holds within it the possibility of further confrontation – in the form of an agitated stag. Prior to this encounter, I was not fully attentive to the threats that exist in that place.

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It is beyond the scope of this text to argue whether all things have consciousness, but it is worth recognising that those things commonly thought to be without it also temporally constitute and stratify the field of consciousness for individuals and social organisms. Doreen Massey, in her book *For Space*, illustrates this by drawing on the example of Skiddaw, a mountain in the Lake District National Park. It is a simple but meaningful observation, expressed in making an argument for how space is constituted. Skiddaw is an (unconscious?) geological constituent of a place otherwise known as the Lake District – and it is often celebrated for its timeless qualities. It is of course not a timeless and unchanging constituent of either that place or a field of consciousness in which it acquires definition. '[When] the rocks of Skiddaw were laid down about 500 million years ago, they were not "here" [the Lake District] at all. That sea was in the southern hemisphere, about a third of the way south from the equator towards the south pole. The bit that we know today as the slates of Skiddaw crossed the equator about 300 million years ago'.[18] Skiddaw did not then, look like it does today. '[G]reat periods of folding and contortion, injections of igneous rocks from below, periods of differential erosion, overlay and other strata and their folding denudation'[19] created what is known today as Skiddaw. It has not been 'here' forever, nor will it be, and nor is it an unchanging, fixed constituent of any landscape. Passage and change are as immanent to its being (however it is defined as 'being') as passage and change are to any *thing* thought of as conscious. Massey's point here is that, in the same way that one cannot return to one's past *as it was*, one cannot return to nature as it was. If I seek out the landscapes of my childhood, they no longer exist as they were. '[N]ature […] too is moving on'. Not only could I never return to the state of being whoever I was when I began to write this text: I could never return to the landscape it was written in (as it was), for nature is also irrevocably changed.

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The word 'landscape' is derived from the Frisian languages, spoken on what is now the coast of the Netherlands and the north coast of Germany. The word once meant 'shovelled land' – or, more specifically, land thrown up against the sea. The word *schop* in Dutch still means 'shovel'. 'Landschop' was a word introduced to English longshoreman by mariners in the 16th century. The English retained its meaning but mangled it into the word 'landskep'. Over time it morphed again and again, into numerous different words, until it became the word 'landscape'.

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18 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2005), 133.
19 Ibid., 136.

Around 1600, literate English people began using the term 'landskep' to identify paintings that represented views across water towards land. Originally it denoted informational elevations of harbour topography and similar terrains. In the nineteenth century, geographers dragged it into a conceptual (and chiefly political) framework, known by the German term *landschaft*, which still skews the contemporary understanding of what the term 'landscape' denotes. Historically, the word means 'making land' or '*made* land'.

The boundaries of any landscape are specific to the one observing it – so one could argue that the essence of any landscape is that it is shaped by human endeavour and yet is arbitrarily located. Landscapes are formed and determined through incomprehensibly complex and dynamic relations of reciprocal affect; they are not reducible to a fixed state of being or contained by mappable boundaries.

...

Massey's observation of how change is immanent in non-conscious geologies complements a broader argument concerning the nature of space and its production 'never being finished'. Massey proposes that we refuse the convening of space into time and open our imaginations to the idea that space is a 'multiplicity of trajectories': 'The imagination of space as a surface on which we are placed, the turning of space into time, the sharp separation of local place from the space out there; these are all ways of taming the challenge that the inherent spatiality of the world presents.'[20] Massey argues, first, that we should see space as the 'product of interrelations': these interrelations are constituted through interactions ranging from the global to the 'intimately tiny'. Second, we should understand space as 'the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist […] Without space no multiplicity; without multiplicity, no space'. Space, as the product of interrelations, must be predicated on the existence of plurality. And third, space should be recognised as 'always under construction'. Space 'is a product of relations-between – relations which are necessarily embedded material practices which have to be carried out – it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed. Perhaps we could imagine space as a simultaneity of stories-so-far'.[21]

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20 Massey, *For Space*, 7.
21 Ibid., 9.

Figure 3. Untitled
(photographed near the Icknield Way)

Figure 4. Untitled
(photographed near the Icknield Way)

Figure 5. Untitled
(photographed near the Icknield Way)

I know that, where I stand, if I scratch the surface of this landscape I'll find sand. Evidence of it is everywhere. The writer and painter William Gilpin, in search of the picturesque, walked here in the 1760s and described having encountered sand, and scattered gravel, without the least vegetation. A century earlier the sands here were constantly shifting. Inland dunes would drift for miles, interrupted only by the occasional small village. The drifts were not insignificant. Historical records show that one local village was sand flooded in the 1660s. A local river was choked, and, one drift, apparently, having settled against a church, was so high it measured approximately six metres.

Today the inhospitality of this landscape is no longer perceptible in the form of drifting sand. Much of it is now lowland pine forest, planted roughly a century ago, to compensate for the loss of oaks and elms in the First World War. There is heathland too, which is protected and managed – the heathland is intended to replicate what it is thought the landscape would have looked like after it had been cleared by prehistoric settlers.[22]

After leaving the heath and mist behind, and several miles of slow progress, I find myself beneath a giant monument, which recalls Nelson's column – but which, out of tact on the part of its aristocratic benefactor, is marginally shorter. It stands on the periphery of a large country estate, through which I am prohibited from walking. I discovered this earlier when enquiring in the nearby village about the monument. The directions that brought me here were gathered there, in what became a collective effort, at a local farm shop – which also belongs to the estate. The long, well-kept drive leading up to the shop was flanked by banners staked into the ground petitioning potential shoppers to buy British and support local business.

I approached several members of staff and enquired about the monument I had first seen when emerging from the misty heath. I followed their directions and found my way to the stone monolith. My first impression of that peripheral place was one of isolation. Peripheral to what? There is a dual carriageway only metres from where I stand, and traffic rushes past. There is a private road that runs alongside the carriageway, and which I suspect leads directly back to the village from where I had come. I can see numerous signs which forbid the public from using it. There are more signs pointing to a public footpath which runs in a perpendicular direction – only that footpath is not really a footpath: it is simply a verge of grass that edges the dual carriageway and after approximately 200 metres ceases to lead anywhere.

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22 These settlers scored their way through forests of oak and elm and settled here because the soil is light, which means it is easily tilled. As the soil is light, however, it is also easily exhausted of nutrients, which would have made settling precarious, and consequently severe contractions of the population would have occurred here at various times over the centuries.

Behind the farm shop, which led me here, there is a small village church. Among the graves at the back of the church there are three modest headstones which differ in appearance from all the others. There is nothing extravagant about these graves, or their headstones: there is no ornate carving, no obvious religious symbolism. What catches my eye is the colour of the stone from which they are cut. The top of each headstone forms a peaked arch, slightly too pointed to emulate the gothic arches which can be found at the head of some of the other graves. Buried beneath one of these gravestones, in the grounds of this modest country church, is the last maharaja of the Sikh Empire. Next to his remains lie those of his first wife and son. The graveyard is a site of pilgrimage for some Sikhs. The last maharaja, Duleep Singh, was dispossessed of his empire by the British in 1849. The modern-day subdivisions of the Punjab, Kashmir, the Khyber Pass and parts of Western Tibet, are all a result of that dispossession.

Duleep Singh inherited his title as a child, at just five years of age. His succession followed the brief reigns of his two half-brothers and a cousin, all of whom died unexpectedly. Apparently, as a young boy, having witnessed at first hand the assassination of his uncle, the maharaja placed himself in the care of the British. During the Anglo-Sikh wars of 1849 the East India Company seized the opportunity to annexe the Punjab, and the maharaja was subsequently dispossessed of his throne. He was around twelve years old. On signing the Treaty of Lahore, Duleep Singh was allowed a pension of £40,000, which would be paid at the discretion of the British government.

Along with the Punjab itself, most of the treasures of the *toshakhana* (Mughal treasure house), belonging to the maharaja's late father, Ranjit Singh, were annexed by the British. The *toshakhana* contained the Koh-i-Noor (Persian for 'mountain of light'), one of the largest diamonds in the world, that had been worn by Ranjit Singh on state occasions. In 1852 the diamond was re-cut and subsequently set into the crown of Queen Victoria. Today it remains a possession of the British monarchy.[23] The estate on whose periphery I now stand was bought, expanded and developed by Duleep Singh with the pension paid to him by the British government.[24]

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23 The entirety of what was relinquished by the young maharaja will probably never be established – when years later he called for full disclosure of what had been appropriated, most of the sale catalogues that would have provided him with an inventory had conveniently disappeared. Having relinquished his inheritance, the young maharaja was then entrusted to the guardianship of Sir John Login. Under his care he would come to reject the Sikh faith and embrace Christianity. In 1853, he was baptised and a year later relocated to England, where he was assimilated into the British aristocracy.

24 In 1863 the maharaja's mother died while in England visiting her son. The maharaja sought permission from his British benefactors to return to the Punjab to cremate her remains but was prohibited from doing so, as the British feared his political intentions and the possibility of a Sikh uprising. Though the last maharaja lived in considerable style and often spent well beyond his means, his dissatisfaction with the loss of his inheritance grew. His anger peaked during a farming recession, when he was forced to mortgage his estate to the British government, on condition it would be sold after his death. He had lost his inheritance as a child in the Punjab, and then his children's inheritance in England. In 1886 he abandoned Christianity, turned his back on the aristocracy, and left England with the intention of regaining the Punjab. He was stopped at the port of Aden in Yemen, turned back and subsequently settled in Paris where he tried and failed to mobilise the support of other nations. He died in Paris in 1893, effectively bankrupt.

The estate, which was mortgaged to the British government following financial difficulties, was sold after the maharaja's death in 1893 to a member of a prominent Anglo-Irish family, who was granted an earldom. The monument beside which I stand was commissioned by the first Viscount Elveden, as a First World War memorial. The same family retains the estate today, I am embarrassed to say I cannot recall the name of a single soldier it commemorates.

I set up a tripod and place the camera on top of it. As I do so an image comes into mind, in which long furrows of sodden earth recede away towards a vanishing point located somewhere in a flat, grey and sepia-toned horizon. In the distance those receding furrows are cut across diagonally, at a near-perpendicular angle, by more furrows, which, in turn, are themselves cut across by more, and so on and so on. As the eye approaches the scene's vanishing point, it ceases to distinguish the raked lines of earth and sees only shades of grey. A few leafless trees populate the field. Their thin, wild verticality counters the flat, grey sea of earth in which they stand. Lumps of damp clay have been unearthed by the plough and lie atop the peaks of the field's furrows: they reflect sunlight like shards of glass, unlike the top- and sub-soil, creating speckled contrast in the densest part of the image. The composition is very considered: the lower two-thirds of the plate are highly symmetrical, the upper third is where the form and tone of that symmetry is countered and cut across. It is Limoges, in eastern France, sometime before 1900.[25] I could easily confuse that image with the surroundings of where I am now.

Eugène Atget is renowned for his photographs of Paris. He took approximately 10,000 photographs in his lifetime, most of which depict the city at the turn of the twentieth century. His photographs, often devoid of human figures, describe a transforming city as if it were an empty theatre set. The equipment he used was neither modern nor convenient. More modern technologies and alternative processes were available to him, but he rejected them. Atget made his photographs using a large-format view camera and dry plates, which necessitated the use of a heavy wooden tripod, which he carried everywhere. His method of making images would often have required the use of long exposures: to achieve the large depth of field, visible in many of his photographs, would have required setting a very small aperture on the camera's lens, much smaller than required, for example, on a modern SLR. Using a small aperture would have necessitated a long exposure time (probably determined by Atget's intuition from years of experience) in order to enable enough light to be projected on to the dry plate registering the scene before the camera. This could explain why many of Atget's images are unpopulated. Any movement from, for example, figures passing before the camera would simply fail to be recorded, as the reflected light from those figures would be too fleeting to be registered. However, Atget's photographs are not all empty of human figures, which raises the question: if he could record the human figure using his equipment and methods, was his consistent use of long exposure necessitated by circumstance, or was it a deliberate decision to ensure that the streets of Paris were recorded without describing their

25 John Szarkowski, *Atget* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2000 and Callaway).

inhabitants? Those inhabitants would no doubt have been present in many of the places recorded but have been rendered invisible by the photographer's method. The inhabitants of Paris, long deceased, would have affected how light reached the camera's plates. It is impossible to identify how Atget's images were affected by those ghosts, but their affect is nevertheless preserved within them. They are both traced and absent in Atget's photographs. Though his images foreground places, scenes and objects, many of which were on the brink of disappearing as Paris was changing, the quiet stillness of his photographs belie the truth that nothing is fixed or permanent.

Before he photographed Paris, Atget was known to have photographed the French countryside. The image I recall is of Limoges, entitled 'Terrain'. At first glance it appears to show a simple, and somewhat mundane, agricultural scene. A ploughed field shot in a relatively flat light, with no obvious feature to suggest why he produced the image.[26]

The image describes a place cultivated by human endeavour. It is not wild, or untouched, nor is it a landscape that could be described as picturesque. The only real detail in the image, beyond the pencil-line silhouettes of leafless trees on the horizon, is found in the contrast of the soil and clay. It is difficult to imagine what use such an image would be to a painter, as a stock image. As I set my camera down beside the Elveden war memorial, I cannot help but wonder what Atget's motive was for making that photograph.

26 John Szarkowski describes the photographer's images of Limoges as 'rural scenes that propose no obvious answer to the question of why he went there'. For Szarkowski, Atget's motive was a minor lacuna belonging to a long list of missing information about the photographer. Szarkowski speculates that 'Terrain' was probably intended to be a 'stock' image – produced then as a reference for painters to work from – which would have been much cheaper and more convenient than travelling to a 'motif' and hoping for good light. Ibid., 22.

Figure 6. Untitled
(at the site of the Elveden monument)

Here the mist has lifted. The cloud-cast sky is lilac-grey and there is a light breeze, which sways a row of assorted pines lining the far side of the dual carriageway. Cars and lorries rush by. I suspect that the monument, visible from some distance, serves as a familiar roadside landmark for many of the motorists who pass by here. Its significance as a war memorial intended to elicit remembrance (or as a cynical gesture erected by a newly anointed aristocrat) has probably been long superseded by its signification as a way-marker along the A11. Graffiti carved into the base of the Corinthian column expresses discontent in a blunt script.

Behind me is an uninviting heath, bordered on three sides by pine woods; beyond the row of pines, across the dual carriageway, are fields of arable farmland, which could be mistaken for the countryside around Limoges. Through it runs the Icknield Way footpath. That footpath is what brought me to Elveden. At this time of year many of the fields in this area could be mistaken for the one Atget photographed. I cannot help but sense an affinity between this place and that one, despite a century's passing. I also cannot help but wonder if Atget photographed that place because of something he was drawn to beyond the visible, perhaps informed by his own memories and history. Atget's photograph reveals a landscape shaped by human labour, a place that would have changed visibly with the seasons. I wonder if Atget was photographing that landscape's impermanence – as something that pertains to it but which transcends its visible form.

The place beside the Elveden war memorial is a place that is manufactured, whose character will change (though less markedly) with the seasons (a place that once resembled something like a desert). There is something about this place I *cannot* give identity to, but which I feel affects me. There is plenty here I can identify: a dual carriageway, a row of pines, crash barriers, wild grass, grey light, a gentle breeze, a slab of concrete, metal girders (erected in front of the slab of concrete, which forms in me the impression of a strange industrial grave), but there is also something else, which is what compels me to photograph it.

What Atget photographed was often on the brink of disappearing, and I find myself projecting onto his images the idea that he was a photographer who preserved the absence of what has passed into the past.[27]

27 With a photograph a tiny piece of time 'brutally and forever escapes its ordinary fate, and thus is protected against its own loss'. Philippe Dubois, cited in C. Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, Vol. 34 (1985): 84.

I place the camera on top of a solid and substantial metal tripod. The tripod is essential for minimising, as much as possible, the movement of the camera, whose bellows are both light and sizeable enough to catch the breeze like a sail. To achieve a full depth of field (in other words, to ensure that everything will be in focus from the foreground into the distance) requires setting a small aperture on the camera's lens.[28] Calculating what aperture size to use involves decision- making and numerous choices. Often the calculation is made with the assistance of technology – a light meter[29] – though it can be made using judgement based on experience. There is some latitude in the dynamic range of film emulsion, which means that an exact calculation in not always required to capture an image. For example, if a light meter indicates that an exposure time of 1/60th of a second is required to capture an image in a certain ambient light, depending on the photographic medium used it may still be possible to produce an image using a longer exposure time (e.g. 1/30th of a second) or a shorter exposure time (1/125th of a second). The longer the exposure time (regulated by using narrower aperture settings to restrict the amount of light entering the camera) the less time sensitive the process becomes.[30]

Atget did not have access to the light-metering technology commonly used in photography today. He would have relied on judgement, drawn from experience. I, similarly, rely on judgement, using only recorded notes, experience and observation as a guide to calculate the aperture size/length of time the shutter should be open for the light available. The imprint of the landscape before me, captured beside the Elveden war memorial, is born of an analogue, mechanical process and a judgement, derived from *being* in and using my senses to understand that place.

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28 The aperture is a mechanical sphincter which regulates the amount of light that can pass through the camera's bellows before hitting a silver gelatin-coated acetate negative clamped in place at the rear of the camera. Whether a broad beam of light (via a wide aperture) or a narrow beam of light (via a narrow aperture) is reflected or transmitted through the camera's bellows will determine how much of the final image is rendered in soft or sharp focus. What will be described in detail by the photograph will depend on how broad the beam of light is that hits the negative at the moment of capture in relation to how long the aperture is open, permitting light to reach the film negative.
There are some parallels between how an aperture regulates light passing through a camera and how an iris regulates light passing into the human retina – both are a circular-like sphincter whose diameter of opening can be expanded or contracted. Most modern cameras are equipped with light sensors that will react to the ambient light of any scene and automatically adjust the size of the lens's aperture to ensure that neither too much nor too little light passes into the body of the camera, similar to the way a human eye works. Where the aperture on the lens of a large-format camera differs significantly from the iris of the human eye and modern cameras is that it is a purely non-reactive mechanical apparatus – it does not automatically adjust itself according to the intensity of light transmitted or reflected into it. What exactly is too much or too little light is subjective, but in the same way that an iris controls how much light hits the human retina a modern camera set to utilise its automated functionality will regulate how much light reaches a camera's sensor or film back. The camera used to photograph the site beside the monument cannot do this; this is something it shares with the equipment Atget would have used.

29 A device which calculates how much ambient or reflected light is available to a photographer, and a device which itself can be used numerous ways to calculate an exposure time.

30 For example, using a very narrow aperture and a long exposure time of three minutes or the same narrow aperture and a long exposure of five minutes (in low-light situations), would not reveal a dramatic difference in the image recorded. However, using a wide aperture (allowing a broad beam of light into the camera), there would be a dramatic difference in the image captured when using an exposure 1/500th of a second or using an exposure of 1/30th of a second.

The capture is carefully considered; the framing of the shot is the result of my choosing what to include within it, the amount of foreground to reveal, the objects in the near to far distance (a concrete slab, metal girders/crash barriers, a dead pine tree); the absence of a far horizon obscured by a row of dark pines. The camera itself cannot be used in a hand-held way without introducing movement into the capture (blurring of the image). Consequently, the camera must be mounted on a tripod, which necessitates making decisions about where it should be placed, how high it should be set, and how near or far in relation to a subject it should be.

This camera cannot be thought of as an extension of my bodily presence in the landscape, in the way that perhaps a hand-held camera could be. It occupies its own place and does not reveal my movement or position. Whatever it captures reveals something about the decisions that I have made, but not where I was or what I was doing in that moment. The camera cannot, practically speaking, be moving at the moment of capture (it often demands longer exposure times than smaller-format cameras and is not designed to be operated in a hand-held way), nor can it be used in a way that is inconspicuous, and nor can chance or impulse be as easily exploited as might be possible with smaller-format cameras.

The photographic apparatus, its instrumentality, is always expressed in what it captures, as are my judgements and decisions about how to use it. I have chosen to forgo the use of supplementary technology and automation. What underpins this choice is the question of whether the apparatus can capture and re-present something of what I sense, as well as see. To try and answer that question relies on eliminating chance or luck, as much as possible, and acknowledging the ways in which the instrumentality of the equipment shapes what is captured.

For me a sense of anxiety emanates from the landscape beside the Elveden monument, which I think is present in the photograph captured there. But I cannot look at that photograph with any real critical distance. When I look at the photograph, I find myself wondering whether or not I see within it a reflection of my situated experience or whether I have invested it with an incipient romanticism and veiled anxiety emanating from me.[31]

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31 In his essay 'Pictures', Douglas Crimp argued that pictorial images are often characterised by something 'insufficiently understood: that they are extremely difficult to distinguish at the level of content, [...] they are to an extraordinary degree opaque to meaning'. Discussing the allure of the peripheral aspects of John Baldessari's image-based work for younger artists of that generation (c.1977), Crimp claimed that it was the 'beauty [...] incipient romanticism, and veiled anxiety that underlies the banality of [Baldessari's] pictures that interested those artists.
Douglas Crimp. 'Pictures', 'Pictures at Artists Space in New York' (September 24 – October 29, 1977), *X-TRA*, 8, no. 1 (Fall 2005): 17–30 (p.22).

Throughout this walk a multitude of affects were experienced; the most abiding, however, was one that, in Spinozist terms, I felt diminish my 'power to act', born from a sense of alienation.

Despite being surrounded by and immersed in nature, the ways in which human social history have shaped the landscapes, experienced on this walk, were palpable. Through the practice, the legacies and material traces of lesser-known histories (or histories previously unknown to me), were discovered and felt. A strong sense of enclosure, the annexing of land, colonialism, class, racism, and the alienation and subjugation of non-human life, were all perceived.

If I had been cognisant of the histories that shaped these landscapes, prior to walking and photographing them, it is quite possible I could have predicted much of what I would have felt there. However, what would never have been obvious, without the practice, is how the atmosphere and the possibility of navigating the land – a legacy of human social history – not only affects human experiences of it, but also, just as significantly, non-human experiences of it. This is not something that was obvious prior to the walk, and demonstrates how this practise is productive of a unique form of historiography. It attuned me to, and forced me to reflect on, how being there positioned me within an inextricably meshed and dense network of relations, shaped in part by both the past and the present, and gave me an experiential understanding of something that cannot be had through secondary knowledge.

Though it is a relatively obvious observation that the past has shaped the landscapes walked, and consequently their material effect, I would argue it is less obvious (and perhaps only discoverable through a practice like this) how histories are entangled, layered and interwoven, and consequently create affects, whose cause is not immediately obvious but which are undoubtedly felt. These affects define the atmosphere of a place, if one is attentive and attuned to it.

CHAPTER 2

Wilted bracken, the colour of oxidised iron, lies collapsed along the banks of a stream. It meanders in and out from beneath a thorny canopy of wild bramble, at the edge of a wide meadow. Surrounding it are shadowy corridors of oak, birch and pine, haunted by the guttural shrieks of nesting rooks.

The stream leads me to the southernmost point of another estate, where I encounter a giant stone needle pricking the empty space above. It is an obelisk, gifted by the inhabitants of Derry roughly two centuries ago, and points heavenward in memory of a long-deceased 'Earl-Bishop'. Frederick Hervey, 4th Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry, was regarded by his flock as a great benefactor and philanthropist. The monument is their testament to his generosity.

Hervey, known as the 'Earl-Bishop' or 'the Edifying Bishop', was an eccentric whose character puzzled, and evaded, even the most patient historians. He was thought of by some as a man with a 'looseness of morals' that 'shocked even the profligacy of Naples'. Yet, he was respected and honoured by his congregation, who (long before donating this monument to him) granted him enrolment among the freemen of Derry.

Not everyone found him as endearing as Derry's citizens. The Irish statesman James Caulfield (1st Earl of Charlemont), despite being 'constrained to pay a generous tribute to [the Earl for the] management of his diocese', pointedly described him as a terrible father and husband, a blasphemous conversationalist, and an addict of 'intrigue and gallantry'. How well Hervey's congregation really knew him is unknown. It is likely that they were oblivious to the great wealth his estates brought him (and the private collection of artworks it paid for).[32]

It is estimated that, in today's currency, Hervey would have received an income of millions of pounds (sterling) from his Derry seat. Why exactly the people of Derry would have paid to erect a monument in his honour is unclear. The monument's plaque suggests that it was for the benevolent and tolerant management of various religious sects that would otherwise have fallen into conflict were it not for Hervey's wise and judicious interventions. How he managed to placate and secure the dedication of his congregation while living the extravagant lifestyle his wealth permitted, and spending at least half his tenure abroad, is unknown.

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32 G.A. Chamberlain, 'Frederick Hervey: The Earl Bishop of Derry', *The Irish Church Quarterly*, 6, no.24 (1913): 271–286.

Some documentation does exist describing Hervey's extravagances and eccentricities, and it notes that no other 'prelate of the Irish establishment has so vividly stamped the impress of his personality upon the [flock] over which [...] he was called to preside'.[33]

Forming an image of Hervey from what has been written about him is a speculative endeavour. The philosopher Jeremy Bentham described him as a well-read (and -bred) individual who was liberal minded 'to the last degree', well travelled and knowledgeable.[34] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe offered a more complex image. Goethe described Hervey as a man of medium stature, perhaps on the small side, of light build and lively in his gestures, whose conversation could be 'rough and rude [...] in more than one sense one-sided and narrow'. He was stubborn, strict (as a clergyman) and a pedantic scholar. Goethe also suggested, however, that whatever was disagreeable in these qualities was offset by a knowledge of the world, men, and books, a gentlemanly liberality and 'a zeal for whatever is good'. For Goethe, Hervey was the 'cause of an extraordinary experience'.[35]

...

It is late afternoon, early in the year, and trees cast long shadows across the meadow. Sheep graze contentedly. The monument is situated approximately one mile from the grand Rotunda – a neoclassical repository of what remains of the Bishop of Derry's 'chaste and delicate' collection of artworks. These two extravagant follies firmly command the pastoral landscapes they inhabit – connected by their breaching of a horizon line drawn by the vertical limit of the tree canopies surrounding them. They exist within, and simultaneously stand apart from, that which frames them.

33 Ibid., 271.
34 Ibid., 274.
35 J. Hennig, 'Goethe and Lord Bristol, Bishop of Derry', *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, Third Series, Vol. 10 (1947): 101.

Figure 7. Untitled
(photographed on the boundary of the Ickworth Estate)

In trying to photograph the monument, and meadow in which it stands, the limitations of what my camera can resolve in a single frame are made evident. An observation by John Tagg comes to mind: 'the image is always too big and too small for its frame, saying less than is wished for and more than is wanted'.[36]

I am forced to consider and resolve how to frame the scene. With the camera's film plane set to a landscape orientation, it is impossible to capture both the verticality of the monument and the horizontal expanse of the landscape framing it without positioning myself some distance away. Moving away from the monument to a distance where it is in the frame, however, diminishes the sense of its scale.

Figure 7 comprises two portrait-oriented frames. The content of each frame is different, and they were shot at different moments in time. However, both frames share the same vanishing point.

With a large-format view camera, the relationship between the horizontal and vertical position of the lens and the film plane is not necessarily fixed. The film plane can be moved a small distance horizontally and/or vertically behind the lens (or vice versa – the degree of movements possible varies according to the make and format of the camera). Both the plane of the lens and the plane of the film can also be tilted, so they are no longer parallel to one another, and they can be shifted in many combinations of these possible movements.

Most large-format lenses project an image whose diameter exceeds the size of the film, or plate, positioned at the back of the camera. Therefore, it is possible to move the film plane a certain distance without it extending beyond the light projected or transmitted by a lens (when the position of the lens remains unchanged). The photograph that depicts Hervey's monument demonstrates this instrumentality (which is not a standard feature of smaller-format cameras).

The eye registers two separate captures, shot at different moments in time, that comprise a single image. Because the position of the lens remained unchanged when the two captures were made (only the position of the film plane in relation to the lens differed), there is a single vanishing point in the combined image, which falls into the division between the two frames.

Standing in this landscape – whose history (like all history) is partial and storied – trying to capture something of its character prompted me to question the limit of the frame and the instrumentality of the camera, which André Bazin argued 'has an affect like a phenomenon in nature'.[37]

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36 John Tagg, *The Disciplinary Frame, Photographic Truths and the Capture of Meaning* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

37 André Bazin, 'Ontology of the Photographic Image', *Film Quarterly*, 13, no 4 (1960): 4–9.

For Bazin, the originality of photography was distinct from other forms of pictorial image-making as a direct consequence of this instrumentality. Regarding the indexical photograph,[38] 'between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a non-living agent […] the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man'.[39] Bazin's point was not that photography is categorically objective, or liberated from the personality of the photographer. Rather, the subjectivity of the photographer is always offset by the instrumentality of the photographic apparatus. For Bazin, this instrumentality was to photography's advantage. He argued that therein lay the origin of its affect, like a 'phenomenon in nature'.

I can control and shape the process of capturing something with an analogue large-format camera through how I choose to use the equipment. I can manipulate perspectives and focal points in ways that are unique to this format. But this format is also defined by mechanical and optical limitations. At some point in the process of capturing an image, I am confronted by the limitations of what is possible with the camera, and either accept and succumb to what it will permit or fail to resolve an image.

The instrumentality of this analogue practice is essential to it. To overcome evidence of this instrumentality – i.e. to erase a trace of its effects evident in a print of something captured by it – requires a manipulation or reworking of what was captured. This practice only allows for the retouching of an image post-capture. I cannot 'work up' an image derived from an analogue camera in the process of capturing it. The only way I can influence the form of what is captured is through the way I use the camera. But at some point the 'instrumentality of [the] non-living agent' takes over, and I am left to imagine what the camera will resolve. In a sense, no matter how hands on I am, at some point I relinquish control over what is produced to the apparatus. Here, something unknown enters the frame.

Reflecting on John Riddy's *Horizon* series of landscape photographs brings this observation into relief – through the way in which it contrasts with photographic practices that forgo significant post-production in favour of retaining the indexical imprint of what was once before the camera.

In 2022/23, Frith Street Gallery, London, presented *Horizon*, an exhibition of nine photographs produced by Riddy from a single consistent viewpoint looking towards Blakeney Point and the North Sea, located on the Norfolk Coast Path. It is a place Riddy has visited for over thirty years and is a well-known Norfolk landscape. The series was captured over a period of two years and is described as an interrogation of time and place: 'Each resulting photograph is attached to a specific moment,

38 Photographic images with a causal or tactile connection to the object depicted – ie a direct trace or imprint of the physical world.

39 Bazin, 'Ontology of the Photographic Image'.

tracing the effects of time, weather and shifting light, describing those temporal changes in silence and stillness'.[40]

The composition of each photograph is bisected by a horizon line – the top of a shingle ridge that protects a marsh from the North Sea. The marsh fills the lower half of each image; the upper half depicts only the sky above. The ridge is flat and interrupted only by a single building (a former watch house built in the nineteenth century as a lookout for smugglers). The horizon line of each photograph exhibited occupied the same vertical position throughout the exhibition and could be followed by eye around the gallery walls on which the works were shown. For Riddy, the viewpoint in the landscape, and its description in photographic terms, was 'informed by an accumulation of his impressions and his deep familiarity with the setting'.

Although Riddy's photographs were digitally captured and printed, and the work intentionally contained within the photographic frame (literally and figuratively) – meaning that these are purely photographic works, that are not informed by a broader practice (such as walking in the landscape) – the artist has acknowledged an indebtedness to several historic landscape painters whose work was shaped by the situated experience of being in a landscape, and their 'formal experimentations'.

This indebtedness is visible in the manipulated composition that is a key constituent of the work. In the artist's words: 'I am trying to make sure that the whole print is as alive without shouting as I can possibly get it [...] 'screaming silently".[41] 1,500 images were shot and meticulously manipulated in Photoshop prior to the production of the final nine prints. Colour, tone and spatial composition were considered deeply, and it is through the manipulation of composition (as with much pictorial landscape art) that Riddy expresses something about the place he depicts.

Riddy's labour-intensive process unquestionably shapes the resonance of the final prints – their 'silent scream'. They depict a history of place expressed through fleeting visual recordings, digitally retouched. The passage of time they visualise could have been more easily recounted through a series of snapshots – captured on a smartphone, for example. But the decision to explore and manipulate their composition through a labour-intensive practice of digital editing and retouching is an essential part of the work. As with many works of pictorial landscape art, how a composition is manipulated ultimately shapes what is revealed or expressed about the place depicted.

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40 John Riddy, *Horizon*, Frith Street Gallery https://www.frithstreetgallery.com/exhibitions/215-john-riddy-horizon/
41 Ibid.

Figure 8. BLAKENEY (1)
Archival Pigment Print. © John Riddy. 2021
(www.frithstreetgallery.com/exhibitions/215-john-riddy-horizon/)

In contrast to analogue photography, and, by the artist's own admission, the practice of capturing images with his digital camera, was relatively easy.[42] The resonance of Riddy's exhibited images derives from the labour of post-production. The works do not present a singular description of place, but they do depict a geographically identical viewpoint. Through a series of static images, the fact that landscapes are not fixed, but rather are changing spaces, arbitrarily framed and always in the process of being made, is articulated. And, I think, through compositional manipulation the artist sought to express the vibrancy and affect of that place – in purely photographic terms. There are obvious signs of digital manipulation in the images. For example, the horizon line in each image is tonally much darker than would be ordinarily rendered in digital landscape photographs that have not been retouched. There is little tonal contrast between the foreground and the far distance, and an almost unnatural depth of focus. This is true of the way that both land and sky have been rendered – the prints are inconsistent with how photographic captures (analogue or digital) would ordinarily render such scenes. (For example, see Figure 16.)

42 In Conversation: John Riddy and Ben Luke. Frith Street Gallery. https://www.frithstreetgallery.com/news/110-in-conversation-john-riddy-ben-luke-frith-street-gallery- golden-square/

If an indexical photograph remains faithful to the capture it is derived from, as opposed to being the product of post-production, Bazin's argument is difficult to dispute. What is expressed, photographically, is at least in part an affect of the apparatus put to work in the production of the image. Understanding this points to a duality at the heart of my practice.

It is entirely obvious that, by comparison to what the eye can see, and the senses perceive, this apparatus is productive of something that is flattened, reductive and partial. But I would argue that at the moment of capture it is not just a reductive partial imprint that is produced, but also something expansive – beyond what the senses can perceive in the situated experience of being there. It is also productive of something poetic. The camera's instrumentality is very much productive of an affect, as Bazin observed. It is productive of an expansiveness, concomitant with, but existing beyond, what my practice can visually resolve. The affect of the 'instrumentality of the non-living agent' (my Sinar view camera) derives in part from the fact that, at the moment of capture, the camera simultaneously brings into being and synthesises an image that can be seen and an off-frame image that cannot.

In his essay 'Photography and Fetish', Christian Metz argues that at the level of content, a photograph, in its re-presentation of the world, is always partial – the 'spectator has no empirical knowledge of the contents of the off-frame'.[43] What is beyond the frame of a photograph will always remain unknown, and therefore what situates or contextualises the subject of an image will always remain open to speculation. The spectator cannot help but imagine what is off-frame; they cannot help but hallucinate or dream 'the shape of this emptiness'.

This emptiness is not nothing. The off-frame is a virtuality that always already exists – it is the causal constellation of entangled things, happenings and agencies, out of which a photograph can be formed – but it becomes intangibly concomitant and entangled with a photographic image only at the moment of capture.

What the act of photographing Hervey's monument reveals to me is that this analogue practice has an agency [beyond mine] that can shape the 'emptiness' of what is imagined as being off-frame. How that emptiness is shaped, and contextualises what is visible, derives in part from the instrumentality of the camera, not just how I use it. It is this that distinguishes this practice from those that employ post-production. In Riddy's photographs, post-production has overwritten the affect of the instrumentality of the camera, and that overwriting ultimately becomes what is seen in the frame and the stimulus for what is imagined off-frame.

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43 Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', *October*, 34 (Autumn 1985): 81–90 (p.87).

Despite the fact that both practices depict landscape photographically, there is a significant difference between Riddy's practice and the analogue practice explored here. This practice (if what it depicts remains faithful to what was captured), shapes how the off-frame is imagined through my choices combined with the instrumentality of the camera. No matter how I frame a capture, or how I might exploit analogue in-camera effects, the instrumentality of the camera is articulated, in some way, in what is captured. The photographic image derived from post-production techniques does not guarantee the affect of the camera, like a phenomenon in nature, that Bazin believed to be characteristic of photography (as he understood it).

...

This monument is the second I encountered while walking the landscapes of Suffolk. Both struck me as contrived memorials and both were positioned at the edge of large country estates, whose expansion within, and overwriting of, the landscapes in which they exist, evolved from wealth and origins that are somewhat opaque.

How the experience of these two objects notably differed was derived from the affect of the environments in which they are situated. Both felt alienating, but in different ways.

Figure 7 shows a monument on the periphery of a National Trust site in the west of Suffolk. It sits within a manicured estate, polite and enclosed. It is a site characterised by well-maintained woodlands and sheep-grazed green fields. The feeling of being in a very polite, meticulous, and *landscaped* landscape is reinforced by the way it contrasts with the open and mostly unencumbered landscapes I had walked through to arrive there. The tall, phallic, stone needle is incongruous within an already incongruous estate. Although I found myself within an abundance of nature, healthy and well-maintained, nothing about the site felt authentic or natural – nothing there would ever be left to run entirely wild and grow untamed. The surrounding farmland is, of course, also highly cultivated, managed and landscaped. But within this place the land is cultivated specifically to preserve an image of the past, which the public are invited to consume as a leisure activity.

Cultivating rural landscapes into sites of leisure activity is nothing new: it is at least several centuries old and has been examined extensively. Even modest landscape tourism can be traced in Britain back to at least 1798, following the success of Thomas West's publication *A Guide to the Lakes*.[44] Throughout Britain there are countless estates and sites that have been landscaped for the pursuit of private and public leisure. And the observation that the English countryside has often been exploited for tourism is not revelatory or in need of expansion here. However, through my own form of tourism – and a compulsion to photograph Hervey's monument, born from it – I begin to better understand how the

44 Susan Owens, *Spirit of Place* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020), 141.

camera attunes me to the land. It forces a way of understanding through the multitude of calculations it demands and imaginings about what can be captured and revealed in-frame and what cannot and is left to the imagination. It forces me to confront how I am affected by a place and simultaneously how to imagine it through the lens and instrumentality of something beyond myself – with the camera, I am simultaneously connected to and disconnected from the landscape.

...

I leave the Bishop of Derry's estate by walking into landscapes made famous by of one of his contemporaries.

Thomas Gainsborough was an artist (and a Royal Academician) who lived much of his life surrounded by the Suffolk countryside and produced a body of landscape paintings inspired by it, during the eighteenth century. Gainsborough is a significant figure in the canon and evolution of British landscape art, and some of his work influenced my response to being in and depicting the landscapes of Suffolk. Works by Gainsborough that allude to some of the economic and social realities of his era, as he perceived them, have been particularly informative. Arguably the best-known example is his 1748-50 portrait of Robert and Frances Andrews (*Mr and Mrs Andrews*), depicting a wealthy married couple in the grounds of their Suffolk estate. Though nothing like as grand as the Bishop of Derry's estate, the monetising of land, and the economic aspirations of the Andrews, as landowners, can be read in the portrait.

There is some debate among art historians about the artist's motivation for painting what he did. For example, the art historian Josephine Karg argues that it is 'impossible to extract a clear moral stance from [Gainsborough's] landscape paintings, least of all explicit criticism [...] Ambiguity became a major feature of English landscape painting in the eighteenth century and also assured the success of Gainsborough's landscape pictures'.[45] Other historians offer a different perspective: for example, John Berger, in his groundbreaking 1972 television series and book *Ways of Seeing*,[46] argued that Gainsborough's portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Andrews explicitly critiqued the growing asset class, whose wealth was derived from subjugating the land to private property and farming it.

The painting situates Mr and Mrs Andrews in the foreground of the left third of its composition; the middle and right thirds depict flourishing farmland, receding into the far distance. The composition invites the viewer to make a connection between landowners, wealth, and the landscape. There is, however, ambiguity in the work. Painted almost three centuries ago, the work functions as a form

45 Josephine Karg, 'Gainsborough's Portrayal of Social Reality' in *Thomas Gainsborough: the Modern Landscape*, ed. Christoph Vogtherr and Katharina Hoins (Munich: Hirmer, 2018), 97.

46 https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00hmb2q

of document – it renders signs as an imprint of history, and at the same time is also characterised by obstinate silence – an incapacity for the adequate transfer of signification into a concrete narrative. If this were not the case, there would be no debate about what it represents. It is arguably ambiguity that facilitates the painting's critical standing, through its capacity to stimulate discussion.

Figure 9. Mr and Mrs Andrews
Oil on canvas. Thomas Gainsborough. c.1750

An atmosphere of ambiguity, combined with an allusion to economic social realities, is also evident in Gainsborough's painting *Cornard Wood*. *Cornard Wood* depicts a woodland scene (that no longer exists), near the village of Great Cornard, near the town of Sudbury, where the artist once lived. The painting's depiction of a landscape that has disappeared makes it poignant when viewed through contemporary eyes. Cornard Wood was common land, which villagers had the right to access and use for gathering wood, grazing animals, and obtaining building materials. Unlike many of Gainsborough's landscapes, which were inventions of the imagination, this scene depicts both an actual place and, similarly to the portrait of Mr and Mrs Andrews, a glimpse of social history as the artist perceived it.

Though Gainsborough was modest in describing its style and composition, regardless of his own thoughts about the work the painting presents an atmospheric depiction of a changing era, particularly when viewed alongside the Andrews portrait.

Two-thirds of its composition (divided horizontally, the left and middle third) depicts villagers using the land for gathering wood, grazing animals and strolling. The right-hand third of the scene expresses something more ambiguous. In their juxtaposition they present contrasting atmospheres.

The area of the painting that depicts villagers includes a winding lane that leads and draws the eye through a gap in the woods to a horizon, punctuated by a church. The landscape depicted is one shaped by human activity, occurring within the distant purview of the church (and presumably, by extension, God).

The right-hand third is partitioned from the rest of the painting by a foregrounded tree and is empty of villagers and animals. At its base is a dark pond, and of the clouds that fill the sky above, the darkest hang over this third. While the central region of the painting leads the eye out of the woods towards the village of Great Henney (and its church), in the right-hand third the horizon is obscured by dense woodland, and the lighting of this area is tonally much darker than the rest of the painting. An atmosphere of enclosure and anxiety is expressed through spatial composition and lighting.

Figure 10. Cornard Wood, near Sudbury, Suffolk
Oil on canvas. Thomas Gainsborough. 1748

Figure 11. Untitled
(after Cornard Wood)

Having walked almost full circle, I arrive at a place I recall only in vague memories. Of all the landscapes encountered on this walk, this is the most uncanny.

On this near-circular walk through once-familiar landscapes, the area of the Bishop of Derry's estate is located almost diametrically opposite this place. That estate and this place are like two poles, positioned in opposition in both time and space, yet invisibly connected.

The landscape here is a palimpsest. A mile from here there was once a copse full of rooks, which no longer exists. It has been cleared to make way for luxury homes. Walking through that place, after nearly thirty years, I still recall the affect of the pocket of wilderness that was once there. The sound of the rooks, etched into my memory, is gone, and what once felt wild and untamed has been displaced.

Standing in this place, a sense of the land being somehow flattened and overwritten takes hold – though my memories of what was here before are much vaguer. Where I am standing feels like a modern-day reworking of the Andrews' estate. A twenty-first-century re-imagining of what private land ownership looks like for the asset classes. Here the land has been re-shaped into something like a hybrid of a golf fairway and a show-jumping paddock.

The Earl-Bishop of Derry, Frederick Hervey, and the painter Thomas Gainsborough were born three years apart. They would have lived, for a time, surrounded (or connected) by the same region of Suffolk countryside I have walked through to arrive here. Gainsborough's painting of Mr and Mrs Andrews depicts a growing asset class whose wealth was derived from privately owned estates of newly enclosed land – perhaps conceived in the image of much grander estates like the one formerly inhabited by Hervey.

Gainsborough's paintings of Mr and Mrs Andrews and Cornard Wood feel (to me) surprisingly contemporary and relevant when I recall them while reflecting on this landscape.

I cannot produce a series of photographs from imprints captured here over a period of time that could describe the changes that have occurred over the past thirty years. My response to this place is shaped by a knowledge that can only ever be off-frame. So to represent the affect of this place, using the camera, I think about exploiting its instrumentality, inspired by Gainsborough's approach to representing similar landscapes.

In the British Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings there is a figurative sketch drawn by Gainsborough. The drawing reveals something of a historic connection between this practice and methods of viewing landscapes used by Gainsborough and other artists of his period. The drawing depicts a young man seated at the base of a tree, with his legs outstretched before him, holding up a small oval mirror. At first glance it appears that he is contemplating his own reflection; however, he is actually using it to frame and view the landscape over his shoulder, behind him. The mirror is a Claude glass, which was considered an extremely useful device for aspiring artists, as it could reduce vast panoramas to a drawable scale.[47]

Historic landscape paintings, such as these works by Gainsborough, have pointed me to one way in which the landscapes of Suffolk have been historicised in art. Thinking about the relationship between composition, method and expression that is visible in some of Gainsborough's works helped me see possibilities for the represention of landscape. The historic use of glass lenses to crop, flatten and alter the tonality of light perceptible in a landscape, employed for the production of art, feels uncannily relevant. To exploit the instrumentality of the camera in a way that might express something about the embodied experience of being situated here, I explored the used of coloured lenses to manipulate and control how light is imprinted on a sheet of film.

The Claude glass inspired this exploration because of how, by producing a reductive and aestheticised indexical image, it re-frames what it reflects. Like a Claude glass, the filters used with the camera produce a darkened image and render a slightly unnatural effect, by knocking back certain wavelengths of light. This knocking back of light I intended as a visual analogon for what I experienced. The technique used, whose results are described by figures 12 & 14, is one that only works with analogue black and white photography. What I learnt exploring this technique was that, by manipulating how light is recorded, the practice can produce images that communicate in two ways simultaneously: through a descriptive (denotative) testimony and an aestheticised (connotative) one.

...

47 A Claude glass, named after the French painter Claude Lorrain, is an oval mirror made with darkened glass, in which reflected scenes would appear weaker than what a regular mirror would reflect. 'This had the advantage of suppressing detail so that only more prominent features of the landscape would appear. The vivid colours of nature were also muted in the reflection so that a scene appeared to be bathed in soft tonalities.' They were used not only by painters, but also by writers and tourists. The poet Thomas Gray used them extensively, and a version of the Claude glass, glazed in various colours, became known as a 'Gray glass'.
Susan Owens, *Spirit of Place* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2020), 160, 161.

Throughout this circular walk, the most affecting encounters were experienced in places shaped and defined by private wealth. These places often felt artificial and unnatural, despite being organic living environments. The challenges that arose in trying to use the camera to historicise these places, forced me to explore how the instrumentality of the analogue large-format camera could be used creatively to articulate something about the experience of being situated within them.

The limitations of physically framing a scene, with the camera, invited experimentation to explore how it could be exploited to overcome, and simultaneously announce, these limitations. This was productive of something that points to, and invites reflection on, the reductiveness and efficacy of a single image attempting to describe, historically, the essence of a place.

Reflecting on how Gainsborough explored similar landscapes in his era, also shaped by private wealth, made me consider how the framing of a scene could be exploited, through the instrumentality of the camera via exposure – manipulating the recording of light to articulate something about how a place was experienced.

The techniques and processes discussed above are effectively unique to analogue large-format photography and demonstrate its potential to represent something analogously, through aesthetic choices, without sacrificing the documentative nature of the indexical imprint derived from being there and recording what the eye saw. Subsequently, it presents the possibility of producing historiographical images that invite reflection on the affect of places, shaped by human endeavour, and whether those affects exist there over time, beyond dynamic changes that occur organically, and the pictorial means used to represent them.

Figure 12. Untitled
(photographed approximately 10 miles south-southwest of Bury St. Edmunds)

Figure 13. Study of a man sketching holding a Claude glass.
Pencil on paper. Thomas Gainsborough. 1750–1755

Figure 14. Untitled
(photographed approximately 10 miles south-southwest of Bury St. Edmunds)

CHAPTER 3

Two tracks furrow straight ahead, through what looks like a wheat field, up a gentle incline that winds right and disappears behind a small copse. It could be almost anywhere within the twenty-mile radius I have just walked. The copse, to the right of the scene in the middle distance, is dense with vegetation, but the field's crop is not quite mature – which suggests it is sometime between spring and late summer. There is, despite signs of growth and vitality, a sombreness here. There is little gradation in the sky's light, which barely illuminates the foreground of the field or the base of a copse to the right of it.

The landscape is in Roucy, Picardy, to the east and slightly north of Paris. It is depicted in a photograph taken by Chloe Dewe Mathews at dawn late in the month of May. The time at which the photograph was taken is significant. It was shot on the same day, and date, that four soldiers had been executed there a century earlier, during the First World War. The soldiers were shot for breaches of military discipline – the offences of cowardice and desertion. Such executions were routinely conducted by various armies for breaches of this nature to ensure obedience among conscripted soldiers on the battlefield.

Today, the offences of these soldiers, and their executions, have been re-evaluated. It is now understood that at least some of the soldiers executed during the First World War for the crimes of cowardice or desertion were in fact suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder – the result of prolonged exposure to the horrors of trench warfare.

The charging of soldiers with the military crimes of cowardice and desertion has been brought into question through an evolved understanding of post-traumatic stress disorder. It has also been observed that a number of these men refused to be blindfolded at their executions (undermining the characterisation that they were cowards).[48],[49]

Dewe Mathews's photograph (Figure 26) is one from a series that depicts sites where similar executions took place. Each site was methodically researched, and each photo, just as the one described above, was taken at approximately the same time of day, and date of the year, at which soldiers had been executed there a century earlier.

The photographed field is not as it would have been in 1916. There are some obvious indications of this: the hedgerow in the far distance and the copse to the right of the composition appears relatively young, and the crop is obviously less than a year old. But perhaps the most significant difference is

48 Petra Boynton, quoted in Peter Taylor-Whiffen, 'Shot at Dawn: Traitors, Cowards or Victims?' *BBC History*, 2011 https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/britain_wwone/shot_at_dawn_01.shtml

49 The British and Commonwealth military executed 306 of its own men during the First World War; it is believed the French executed 600; the Germans 48; the Belgians 13; Canada 23 and New Zealand 5.

perceptible in the imagination – once one knows that Roucy is a short distance from the position of the Western Front in 1916.

The photograph is a testament (in the sense that it serves as evidence of a specified fact) to a previously lesser-known historical event that occurred during the First World War. It locates where some of those who were executed, and never officially memorialised, lost their lives. It situates that history within a landscape, with no visible trace of the event.

There are no memorials, no obelisks pointing skyward, or objects of any kind which signify or acknowledge the conflict or executions that occurred in that place; yet those events are recalled or alluded to by the photograph.

The image itself is not without affect. Even if one were ignorant of its subject, it is difficult to read it as a simple snapshot. The composition is considered, not symmetrical yet balanced. There is a gradation of tones. The copse and distant hedgerows provide the darkest shades. The sky is the lightest region. Two-thirds of the image is occupied by a field, whose tonality is a graduation of dark and mid-tones that sits between the shades of the copse and the highlights of sky. The proportionality of the image's tones gives it a sense of balance.

The centre of the image is dominated by two tracks, which recede into the distance and disappear behind the copse. It is hard for the eye not to follow these lines and contemplate the distance, receding away from the fixed position of the camera.

Dewe Mathews' photograph and Atget's furrowed field, photographed near Limoges over a century earlier, share something that is compositionally similar. Both draw the eye towards an absence.

As I walk the landscapes where I am now, I recall these two images. Atget's reasons for photographing a field in Limoges are opaque; however, one can see that it depicts a landscape changed by human labour. It points indirectly to the displacing of wilderness, the loss of natural history. Dewe-Mathews' photograph, although its subject is very different, is performative in a similar way. It recalls a deeply problematic moment from our history, without visually depicting the event itself.

Figure 15. Roucy, Picardie.
© Chloe Dewe Mathews. (http://shotatdawn.photography)

Figure 16. Terrain (Limoges)
Albumen silver print. Eugène Atget. Before 1900

Finding myself beside a small tributary which flows into the river Stour, I reflect on these photographs and how they might connect with depictions of the Suffolk countryside painted by Gainsborough and Constable. I am following the Stour, past Gainsborough's former home, into a region of the Suffolk countryside nicknamed 'Constable country'. It is a region John Constable lived and worked in for much of his life, and that served as the source of, and inspiration for, many of his most famous works. One of these paintings, displayed in the National Gallery in London, is *The Hay Wain*,[50] which depicts an empty cart being pulled by horses through a shallow millpond, located beside Flatford Mill. The cart carries two farm labourers in the direction of hay-makers at work in a meadow in the far distance. Behind the mill there are several large, towering trees – identifiable by their dark-coloured bark as black poplars.

In his research for paintings such as *The Hay Wain*, Constable produced numerous sketches and studies along the Stour. One recurring subject he sketched were trees common to the region. These drawings are often portrait-like in their focus on the subject depicted. Some of these sketches can be viewed in the Victoria and Albert Museum's Prints and Drawings Study Room. Among them is one that is something of an anomaly. This drawing is titled *Trees at East Bergholt*. It is a detailed drawing of two pollarded trees, one foregrounded in front of the other, which sit beside a curving tow-path that runs alongside the Stour. Other trees and livestock are faintly outlined and visible in the composition, but the subject of the study is unequivocally these trees.

In terms of composition and technique, in comparison to Constable's other studies there is nothing notably unique about this drawing. What is slightly anomalous is that the trees depicted are probably black poplars. Constable's tree studies focused predominantly on elm and ash trees – some also depicted oak trees, but elm and ash were the species he drew most. Black poplars were unknown to me before I saw Constable's work. That I was unfamiliar with these trees, despite knowing certain regions of Suffolk well, suggests (to me at least) that, like elms, they have largely disappeared from the county.

50 A term for a wooden wagon used to cart hay.

Figure 17. The Hay Wain
Oil on canvas. John Constable. 1821

Figure 18. Trees at East Bergholt.
Pencil on paper. John Constable. 1817

The black poplar tree is one of the rarest native trees in Britain and is an endangered species.[51] Efforts have been made to save it from extinction, through re-population interventions by various wildlife support groups; however, it is estimated that currently fewer than 7,500 remain in Britain. The tree historically populated riverside locations and is described as imposing, with an elegant silhouette: when mature, it would live for approximately two centuries. The black poplar has also been very important to our traditional culture and way of life: black poplar timber was used extensively for many purposes. Much of Dedham Vale, which Constable depicted in many of his works, and through which the Stour runs, would have been an ideal habitat for the species. The black poplars Constable drew were mature pollards, sketched over two hundred years ago. It is unlikely they are alive today, so I walk the landscape beside the Stour in search of their disappearance.

The rarity and endangered status of the black poplar points to our environmental impact on the land – our *landscaping*. The most likely reason for its decline is the disappearance of its natural environment caused by farming. Land drainage and crop planting have changed these landscapes to the extent that the conditions once favourable to the growth of black poplars no longer prevail.

In his writing on Western landscape art, Malcolm Andrews observes that Constable's paintings are exemplary cases of pictorial naturalism, but not of social realism. *The Hay Wain*, for example, depicts an image of rural serenity that suggests agricultural stability. It is a portrait of a real place, faithfully rendered, but it describes a fiction. It is an idealised vision of the Suffolk countryside, far removed from the scenes of poverty and rioting farm labourers that characterised the region at the time it was painted.[52] Constable's black poplars, a once-familiar constituent of Suffolk landscapes, have now largely disappeared, and are preserved in a fictional misrepresentation of social history.

The painting is both a historical description of what was once in front of the artist and a depiction that, when properly contextualised, alludes to the absent presence of a historical truth about that place.

Conversely, Constable's sketches point to something more easily understood about our social history and its impact on the land. His drawing of black poplars is a latent expression of what is no longer visible in Suffolk's landscapes – it is not an idealised fictional vision of what once was, it is a record of natural history – and its disappearance as a consequence of our social history.

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51 Saving our Black Poplars', National Trust, https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/our-cause/nature-climate/nature-conservation/ saving-our-native-black-poplars

52 Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 174, 175.

Whether or not a decline in black poplars was evident in Constable's time is not easily discoverable; however, what was once in front of the artist is no longer there.

Walking beside this tributary, I know it is unlikely I will rediscover Constable's poplars swaying serenely beside the Stour. They most likely exist nowhere outside of a museum. Before walking here, I retraced my footsteps through landscapes I walked almost thirty years earlier. In my memory, those landscapes were much more fertile, more vital, more vibrant. But I find myself questioning whether there is something in those memories that is analogous to Constable's fictionalised visions of Suffolk. Have I edited and idealised the past – is the historic truth of those places absent in the images my mind has confabulated? Can walking here, with the camera, reveal or recall what I have convinced myself is gone – what has passed into the past?

To an extent, I can read the passage of time in the topography of the land. Certain changes are obvious: for example, trees and hedgerows, once chest-high, now loom over me.

There are other subtler indications of how the land has changed – for example, arable fields have everywhere encroached on public paths and bridleways. Some are now barely walkable, others have been entirely ploughed over, separated into tiny furrows. In the landscapes I once knew, many farm buildings and barns have disappeared, without trace.

As I walk past what were once farmhouses on former smallholdings, there are signs that they no longer house farmers. Parked outside is not farm machinery but the recurring sight of polished SUVs and expensive saloon cars. There is something incongruous about aspects of the landscapes here. There has clearly been an import of wealth, which punctuates the land in tiny pockets. However, the land itself feels impoverished. It appears more extensively farmed than I remember; it feels devoid of a vitality that I recall this region once had.

The edges of the fields I walk along, which flank the tributary I am following, show signs of exhaustion. There are visible clues. The edges of many of the crops here do not look healthy. Despite the use of modern farming practices, I can see evidence that blight and fungus have damaged them. But perhaps one of the most obvious differences I can perceive is something revealed through memory. The hedgerows and the grass verges here would once have been filled with perennials like cow parsley, which I remember as synonymous with this time of year. For me, this absence changes the character of these landscapes. All I see now, growing at the edge of the crops, is creeping thistle. Although I am not familiar with these particular landscapes, I very much sense how different they feel compared to what I recall from my memory of similar places. They are arid and depleted, and the recurring sight of wild thistle adds to a sense of neglect.

For the first time in my walks through the landscapes of Suffolk I feel unsure how to respond to the situated experience of being here. I feel agitated and impatient, and the equipment I am carrying exacerbates these feelings. Combined with various other necessities, like water, altogether it weighs not far off 14kg. To pick up and put down this amount of weight is not ordinarily challenging for me; however, to carry it for miles and miles over jagged uneven terrain takes its toll. The equipment is cumbersome, and strapped to me it restricts the twisting of my torso, which makes turning around an awkward and robotic effort. I am not agile with it. It prevents me from moving at my natural walking pace, and my upper body is forced into maintaining a fixed position. Walking through these landscapes I feel constricted. I find myself stopping to take photographs just to break up the labour of walking.

Figure 19. Untitled
(photographed approximately 4 miles north of the River Stour near Cavendish)

Figure 20. Untitled
(photographed approximately 3 miles north of the River Stour near Cavendish)

Thirty years ago, further upstream, I knew three or four miles of the tributary I am following well. Then it was a free-flowing stream that would wind through small dells flanked by fields of wheat, barley and oilseed rape. It would pool in places to approximately waist deep. Fish swam in those pools, and above them dragonflies and other insects would purposefully flit about. I remember it as a fluvial wildlife habitat, which here and now has largely disappeared. There are no fish, and the once waist-deep pools are barely shin high. By comparison, the dells are largely insect free.

The surrounding fields, which at this time of year were once characterised by the vibrant yellow of oilseed rape, or filled with elegant awns of gently swaying golden barley, seem now to be predominantly green or ash-coloured wheat fields. It may be that the wheat in these fields is a modified strain of what would have grown here in the past – it is very different from what I recall seeing when I was younger.

The earth is greyish and dry. The tributary I am following is where run-off from these fields collects and flows away. It is inevitable that nitrates and other pollutants used in fertilisers and pesticides have found their way into the stream repeatedly over decades. This stream is just one among a multitude of small tributaries that run though these landscapes and eventually find their way into the Stour. The environmental impact of the chemicals and sediment that has run off the land into them is incalculable.

The UK Government's Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) has reported that the biggest challenge water companies have to tackle is agricultural pollution.[53] The department has reported that 50% of nitrate pollution, 25% of phosphorous pollution and 75% of sediment pollution in our water comes from agriculture, through run-off and leaching. An excess of fine sediment can be harmful to aquatic ecology; it can directly impact invertebrates and fish, and indirectly impact the ecology by carrying pesticides, chemicals and nutrients. At the moment, however, as there is no in-river sediment standard in existence, there is no statistical information or record to describe the scale of the issue. Sediment and soil erosion, a consequence of modern agricultural practices, not only damages and destroys native wildlife and ecology: it also has a huge impact on our water quality and food supply.

Defra acknowledges unequivocally that action is needed, and modelling has been undertaken to understand the scale of reduction required in this form of pollution to reverse the damage. At the time I photographed these landscapes, however, there existed no consensus or decision on how to deliver the change needed.

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53 UK Government, Department for Envirnment and Rural Afffairs, *Water Targets – Detailed Evidence Report* (2022) 18. https://consult.defra.gov.uk/natural-environment-policy/ consultation-on-environmental-targets/supporting_documents/Water%20targets%20%20Detailed%20 Evidence%20report.pdf

Figure 21. Untitled
(photographed at the Stour river)

Figure 22. Untitled
(photographed at the Stour river)

Though a 50% reduction in agricultural pollutants would 'get us closer to achieving good ecological outcomes in many waterways' Defra acknowledges that the widespread changes in agricultural practices and land use needed to achieve this ambition are not feasible, as the impact would be too great. Instead, it is suggested that this environmental pollution should be addressed through a combination of new technologies (yet to be invented), regulatory measures, and schemes such as the Sustainable Farming Incentive. This has been designed to encourage land managers to change the way their land is used and incentivise targeted habitat creation. The apparent intention is to incentivise farmers by paying them to 'look after nature, soil and other public goods, rather than [just] farm and own land'.

At the time of writing, the scheme's implementation has been delayed. Farming subsidies, cut by 22% in 2022, were earmarked for a further 36% government cut.[54]

A rise in interest rates, adverse weather conditions and price falls for various kinds of agricultural produce, in addition to significant cuts in Government subsidies, and the end of support from the EU's Common Agricultural Policy post-Brexit, has made 2023 'the most expensive year [farmers] have ever had'.[55,56]

The diminished landscapes I find myself in while searching for the ghosts of black poplars are linked to a politics of wealth distribution. Without reference to a personal history connected to landscapes like these, it may not be obvious at first glance what has happened to the land here. However, through those memories, and the practice of walking and photographing, I can see austerity written into these landscapes. The sense of depletion I feel here is punctuated only by small enclaves of wealth – which form a strange and disconnected archipelago.

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54 Helena Horton, 'Farmers in England Unsure what to Plant as Post-Brexit Payments Delayed', *Guardian,* 25 August 2023 (https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/aug/25/farmers-england-unsure-plant-post-brexit-payments-delayed)

55 Ibid.

56 Though it may be that delays to incentive schemes are temporary, and cuts to subsidies and funding are reversible, it is hard to understand how land managers are in any way incentivised to create sustainable environments that would halt and reverse the harm agricultural practices are inflicting on the environment. There is no obvious technological solution, and, as Defra has reported, imposing the target of a 50% reduction in agricultural pollutants is not feasible as the effect would be too dramatic for land managers to sustain. Without incentives and subsidies, it is not clear how regulation could make any significant difference without collapsing agricultural production.

Figure 23. Untitled
(photographed approximately 1 mile north of Sudbury)

Trees were not the only subject of Constable's studies. He sketched clouds extensively, developing a meteorologist's knowledge of them. As his paintings evolved, so did his clouds. They became an essential part of his landscapes, and over time were used more expressively – depicted in a way that was factually accurate.

The land is relatively flat here. There are no mountains or significant hills, and the vales are shallow. In many places there is little to interrupt the horizon line that meets the sky. Consequently, the sky is big here and the cloud formations dramatic.

Constable's clouds point to another fact of these landscapes, which is that there is an irreducible gap between the artist's ephemeral experience of place and any expression or representation of that experience.

The cloud sketches record and represent vast, amorphous and sublime phenomena, which dynamically fill three-dimensional space. The studies allude to a reductiveness – that is impossible to overcome – in visually flattening, cropping and confining the sensory experience of them. They are visually engaging, descriptive and expressive, but ultimately they provide us with information that can be transcribed. What Constable (like all landscape artists) cannot re-present is the actual sensory or affective experience of an ephemeral encounter with space.

As I walk alongside the tributary, I feel here, more than at any other time in these landscapes, that the gap between what I feel and what I can recreate photographically is irreducible. No representation of an encounter with place can eliminate the space between the truth of that encounter and whatever that representation might inspire in the imagination.

As Malcolm Andrews notes, over time many artists moved away from naturalistic depictions such as those painted by Constable towards an expressivity intended to convey 'the environmental energies playing upon the sensibility of the person who exists within that landscape'.[57] With this analogue practice, however, there is only so far I can go in moving away from the idiom of naturalistic description. It is a practice contingent on recording the natural phenomenon of light, and a practice whose instrumentality informs what is captured.

In 2013, Richard Learoyd exhibited a body of photographs entitled *Outside World*. Among the works were two photographs shot at the same location (one in winter, one in summer) near Flatford in Suffolk, on the river Stour. The photographs are silver gelatin prints produced with a room-sized portable camera obscura. The camera obscura was placed on site, and, via a lens, a positive image was projected onto specialist photographic paper and an image recorded on that paper, in situ. Among the claims made for the work is that they have an object quality that defies accurate reproduction and that they are characterised by an implied narrative.

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57 Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*, 199.

The two photographs describe an environment and document ephemeral encounters with it. In one sense they are obstinately silent and in another they are a direct imprint of history – perhaps the most direct imprint a photographic technique can achieve. There is no intermediary between projected light and final print (no film or dry plate, etc.). Learoyd's process results in images that have been described as having an otherworldly beauty and being expressive of photography's power to resonate. The artist himself has described his work as defined by an attempt to disguise or displace the expression of photographic practice (i.e. the instrumentality of a camera) and to create images that resonate with a kind of pure photographic quality.

I think Learoyd's work expresses the duality of photographic art, and I think they do have a formal quality that resonates powerfully. However, I think the artist's claim for them as an attempt to remove photography's instrumentality is flawed. I would argue the very opposite. Quite simply, whatever their resonance, it is quite obviously derived from the instrumentality of a photographic practice and its labour. By the artist's own admission, each print is hard won. Often a site was revisited and photographed repeatedly. The synthesis of labour, time and equipment required to produce the images *is*, I would argue, the broader instrumentality of a photographic practice. The resonance of the images only exists because of that labour, which I believe is expressed through those images. As the artist himself has stated, there are no happy accidents in the work.

The photographs I take of these landscapes, like Constable's sketches, visually describe aspects of them, but they are also informed by the labour of walking here. These are not visually creative images. However, they document the most affecting encounters with place of all the landscapes I walked, testifying to the situated experience of being there.

...

This final walk was undertaken in search of black poplars painted by Constable, whose engagement with aspects of social and natural history in these landscapes, produced a body of work that is sometimes representationally realistic and sometimes pure invention. The aspects of his output that were more realistically representational, his studies of trees and clouds, came to mind often while walking, and made me think about the historiographical value of non-creative descriptive works, revisited over time.

The photographs that were shot on this walk are relatively straightforward, documentative images, often motivated by the contrast of a memory with a situated embodied experience. This contrasting of what I recall and what I experienced revealed to me a shocking degree of environmental decline. Through the practice of walking and shooting photographs here, I became attuned to this sensation more than any other throughout all of the walks, and I recognise the significance of this practice in

facilitating that. It not only situated me in these landscapes, and made me attentive to what I could see there, but also physically forced me to experience the shape and vitality of the land.

During the walk, I was also confronted by the observation made in the introduction regarding how representing these landscapes through the practice of analogue large-format photography differs from that of painters like Constable (who often employed invention and fiction). It made me consider how the practice's powers of description might be used historiographically, by alluding to something beyond the frame, something belonging to the past and imagined. What the photographs of Dewe Mathews and Atget, described above, share in common (albeit in different ways), is that they are descriptive works that ultimately allude to something absent or disappeared. Some of the photographs shot on this walk also allude (for me at least) to something disappeared – a vitality in these landscapes. One day they will point to something disappeared for others to reflect on – in this way they are containers of latent histories yet to be understood. This walk revealed how the practice has a historiographical agency, through recourse to its power of description and potential to allude to what is no longer there – which may only be fully recognised in time.

Figure 24. Untitled
(photographed at the Stour river)

Figure 25. Untitled
(photographed where the Stour joins the North Sea)

CONCLUSION

Through this research I often encountered objects that insinuated certain narratives about the past (monuments, memorials, plaques etc). One incidental conclusion (beyond what is discussed below) that I have drawn from this project is that I often found myself noticing and reflecting on these objects, and how they affect the spaces they inhabit. An example of such an object is seen in Figure 26, which shows a plastic re-imagining of a former abbey, in the town of Bury St. Edmunds.[58] The more I encountered them, the more I started to see objects like this as something incongruous and strange, which I think derived from their over-simplified representations and reifying of certain ideas about how something was. In response, I often photographed them exploiting some of the techniques described in Chapter 2 – separating them from their environment in an effort to articulate what I felt to be their strange (and slightly insidious) reductiveness. Figure 26 presents an image of one form of historiography brought into question by another, and is included as an addendum and example of what was also revealed (beyond the affect of landscapes) through this research project.

The preceding chapters present fragments of what I encountered walking and photographing the landscapes of Suffolk. These fragments describe a selection of places that affected me to the degree that I felt there was more to learn and understand about them. By being attentive to embodied experiences, or affects, and using that as the impetus for exploration and inquiry, there is no question in my mind that I discovered things about the Suffolk countryside that might otherwise never have been apparent.

Reflecting on this, however, raises a question: how reliable or authentic was my characterisation of a place, based on my subjective experience of it? For example, when I recall walking the Icknield Way, a fragment of which is described in Chapter 1, I recall an experience characterised by a sense of alienation and enclosure, despite often being amid wide-open spaces. The affect of entangled physical sensations, ideas, emotions, and memories, shaped my embodied experience and perception of those landscapes, and out of this complex relationship memories were formed.

How I came to trust in my feelings and ideas about the places I encountered, was by reflecting on how the practice in question shaped these encounters. The taking of photographs, with a view camera intended for the production of studio-based work, was not convenient or easy. The decision to forego the use of any supplementary equipment, and rely solely on judgement when setting up shots, required

58 The abbey was a historically significant building that changed continuously over the span of its lifetime. It was built in the 11th and 12th centuries but now only a rough outline, traced in its ruins, remains. It was once one of the largest and grandest monasteries in England and derived its name from the martyred King Edmund, who was killed by the Danes and later venerated as a saint. His remains were enshrined in the abbey, which became one of the most famous and wealthy pilgrimage destinations in England. In 1327 the abbey was destroyed during the Great Riot by local people angry at the power and wealth the monastery had accumulated. It was rebuilt and evolved over the centuries until its size and importance ultimately led to its destruction. Henry VIII closed it in 1539, after which it was systematically demolished as a demonstration of the King's power.

a degree of experience, concentration and attentiveness not often necessary with the use of more automatic and smaller-format cameras. Through this process I found, or came to recognise, when my sense of a place was tainted by some influence emanating from beyond the immediate environment.

The practice of taking a photograph would periodically shift the locus of my attention. It would disrupt my 'present', and by extension whatever I was feeling (though it was never an absolute break that occurred). This disruption occurred through, for example, setting a tripod, rebuilding the camera, making judgements about, and adjustments to, the composition of a frame.

The necessity of being attentive to the environmental qualities of a place, required to render a legible image, also recalibrated my embodied experience of that place. This became evident through, for example, re-walking a site to reposition the camera, making judgements about how light illuminates it, being attentive to the wind there, to the speed of moving clouds above and their affect on light, and viewing topography as a spread of tonal variations and outlines etc.

The photographic practice both disrupted my connection to a place, and by concentrating my sensory awareness of its environmental qualities, simultaneously *intensified* that connection. There were occasions where my feelings about a place were changed through this practice. I am confident that most of what I experienced and remember experiencing about the places I encountered, was the result of experiencing their 'character', not the result of other forces colouring my experience.

Reflecting on the above, particularly at the site beside the Elvedon monument, led me to not only trust in my feelings about the places I photographed, but also to see value in recognising and acting on those feelings. The Elvedon monument is a historical artefact, which points to both the bravery and sacrifice of men who gave their lives in war, but also to the benefaction of the man who commissioned it. It may have been a selfless gesture or it may have been a cynical one. Whichever, it stands as an incongruous and unexpected sight within the countryside. This historical artefact monumentalises a man who bought an estate from the British government, and subsequently (somewhat arbitrarily) received an aristocratic title. His connection to that estate is considerably more visible in the landscape than the last maharaja's, who occupied it before him, and whose history does not reflect well on the British government or monarchy. The monument is perhaps demonstrative of something Nietzsche was critical of.[59] The past may have been put into the service of a single man's ego, through a monument that some might argue defines the landscape in which it is situated.

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59 The goal of the 'active' man 'is happiness, not perhaps his own, but often the nation's, or humanity's at large: he avoids quietism, and uses history as a weapon against it. For the most part he has no hope of reward or fame, which means the expectation of a niche in the temple of history, where he in his turn may be the consoler and counsellor of posterity. Nietzsche, F. (1909) Thoughts out of season, Part II, The use and abuse of history, *The Compete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. Levy, O., Foulis T.N., 18.

In that place, the walking and the analogue large-format practice engaged me with history in a way that felt antithetical to the uses and abuses of it Nietzsche was critical of. It engaged me with history as an emanation, felt through embodied experience, existing beyond symbols and appearances.

At the heart of this research is an effort to see history as the product of a multiplicity of trajectories, and engage with it through embodied experiences, which are then partially narrated and re-presented (*historia*). The practice foregrounds my subjectivity; it rejects any pretence that the past is being represented from a position of objective authority. What was revealed to me at the Elvedon monument was an understanding of the value of this method. It enabled me to engage with something of that place's history, which might otherwise have been inaccessible to me.

...

When I view the photographs presented above, there is a difference perceptible to me between some of them, which has nothing to do with the way in which they were realised (captured, developed or printed, though it is important to acknowledge these processes for the significance of the work).[60] Those photographs I took, when trying hard to attune myself to the environment in which I was situated, are the photographs that, when viewed now, most strongly resonate (or recall for me) something of what I *felt* to be characteristic of those places photographed. Why exactly this should be I cannot resolve, but this was not something I had really considered beforehand. It may be that those photographs

60 This research gave me not only a deeper insight into the places I walked, and how they could be historicised through that method of engagement, but also a deeper understanding of the physical practice of photography. The practice is one that intensified my feeling of *capturing* something (using the box-like camera at times felt akin to hunting with a trap). I would stand motionless, and meditatively, in the landscape trying to attune myself to its environmental fluctuations, and then, at what felt like the right moment, I would fire the shutter.
What exactly gets captured is unknown at the moment when the shutter fires. Discovery is a slow reveal. First, the film must be developed – a process which occurs in darkness long after leaving the place where the shutter was fired. Developing requires bathing the film in a mix of water and chemicals – a process which slowly reveals an imprinted image on the film's light-sensitive emulsion. As with the process of capture, a lack of attentiveness here can ruin an image.
Once developed the film is then 'fixed' – bathed in a separate mix of water and chemicals, which prevents the film's emulsion developing further, or reacting to light. With negative films, what is produced is a dark translucent image, whose tones are inverted (light appears dark, dark appears light). When I first see a developed negative, I can only determine whether or not an imprint of light was successfully recorded; what has been captured is not (in that moment) properly understood.
To see the imprint, the negative must be enlarged (or digitally scanned to be viewed on a screen): light must be projected through it on to a light, flat object some distance away.
How the imprint on the negative is developed/revealed and subsequently enlarged/printed, is always contingent on making choices. Until I act on a choice about how to develop the film (different chemical formulations and adjustments in processing times influence how the imprint is manifest), the imprint both does and does not exist. It has a kind of virtuality; it retains within it a multitude of possible realisations. Something similar can be observed about the process of printing – how a print is rendered is only one realised possibility out of a multitude.
As my experience grew and my understanding of the processes involved became more reliable, my ability to imagine what might be realised – from capture to print – became more acute. However, I cannot say I ever knew fully what was captured at the time of shooting, or being realised during the process of development.
Something of what was photographed was always given over to the camera and the processes instrumental to it.

trigger something in my memory of a place – a memory of its affect. It may be that I was simply more invested in the process in those places, and consequently feel those images are more accurate. It could be an entanglement of these and various other reasons. However, what I have become mindful of, as consequence of recognising this, is a bias which I had not previously considered.

In the third chapter of this thesis, there are a small number of photographs reproduced from what was shot while walking along the Stour river into the landscapes at Dedham Vale. These photographs, for me, resonate the most quietly. In a sense, they were intended as something like studies of a place, detailed observations (after Constable's sketches). Yet they were probably those photographs I invested the least amount of myself in, regarding the process of production. There is a part of me that wanted to omit them from this body of research, as a result. They are not invested with the same care that perhaps other images I shot were. Yet, I realise it is important to show them precisely for this reason. In Spinozist terms, the affect of a relation either increases our capacity to act in accordance with our needs or it diminishes our power to act in accordance with those needs. What several of the photographs produced on that walk do is testify to a diminishing of self, derived from the affect of being in a place. Initially, I thought of them as 'poor' photographs, but on reflection what they actually are is an expression of a diminished capacity to act. The places in which those photographs were shot were the most affecting of all the landscapes I walked through; conversely, the images I shot there were initially, to me, the least resonant. However, I now view them as a significant form of testimony to the experience of being there.

Beyond the different histories and experiences revealed by each walk, it is imperative to conclude this research by acknowledging one attribute they shared in common. Experiencing the effects of human social history, on the natural environment, left me with an overwhelming sense of a region diminished and in a state of environmental decline.

Anthony Paul Smith, writing on Spinoza's theory of affect from an ecological perspective, observes that, although necessary to approach ecological problems rationally, what Spinoza shows us is that such an approach must be carried out with an understanding of what is outside rational perspectives. Only with this understanding may we begin to foster or aspire to more productive affects, which could strengthen any rational process attempting to confront environmental decline.[61]

Spinoza's theory, applied to something like addressing human-caused environmental decline, might open up the possibility of an approach more akin to a kind of 'custodialism', which can be differentiated from 'managerialism' through a difference of relation. 'A manager is hierarchically superior to those he manages ... while a custodian is more embedded in the social relationships within which she dwells.'[62]

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61 Anthony Paul Smith, 'The Ethical Relation of Bodies: Thinking with Spinoza Towards an Affective Ecology', in Spinoza Beyond Philosophy, ed. by B. Lord (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), 58–61.

62 Ibid.

'Changes in the ecosystems we inhabit depend on our material actions, as well as our theoretical ideas … Affects are powerful and, by looking to how they function, we may begin to find ways to foster more joyous relations with the rest of nonhuman nature.'[63]

This research has shown how a creative practice, aligned with artists like Keiller and Sebald, can be productive of historiographies that engage us with the material affects of landscapes in a way that might encourage a more 'custodial' relationship to them – inviting an attentiveness to, and arguing for, an experiential understanding of their histories and ecology.

There is also an important commonality shared by all the images produced throughout the project (and some of the artworks discussed above), which is that they historicise landscapes through both the legible testimony of what was imprinted on a sheet of film and by silently speaking of something beyond it.[64]

I think it is appropriate to think of the photographic practice as productive of both a legible testimony of *being there*, via an imprint of what was once before the camera, and a silent expression of affects derived from entangled histories that exceed pictorial representation.

For the unrepresentable to speak silently through these photographs, they do, however, require context, otherwise they risk becoming "simply images' where what is examined is ... their relationship to their origin' – i.e. the correlation of pictorial image to the physical form of the thing photographed.[65]

How this practice might be contextualised, through writing, is something the production of this thesis has led me to reflect on. There were challenges in giving written expression to what was encountered in the landscapes of Suffolk, while meeting the criteria and remaining within the parameters of a formal thesis. Going forward, I think there is scope to develop and explore, more fully, creative writing as method of contextualising the practice – which I look forward to embracing.

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63 Ibid.

64 In *The Future of the Image*, Jacques Rancière claims that '[p]hotography did not become an art because it employed a device opposing the imprint of bodies to their copy. It became one by exploiting a double poetics of the image, by making its images, simultaneously or separately, two things: the legible testimony of a history written on faces or objects and pure blocs of visibility, impervious to any narrativisation, any intersection of meaning.'
What Rancière articulates about photography (as art) is its redistribution of the relations between the visible and the sayable. The 'representative regime' is not the 'regime of resemblance' but rather a kind of alteration of resemblance 'a certain system of relations between the sayable and the visible, between the visible and the invisible'.
This aesthetic regime is not a codified expression of thought, nor is it a double of reality. It is a regime in which things both speak and are silent. This dualistic expression (silent speech) is a kind of eloquence. It is a capacity to exhibit signs written on a thing (a photograph, a text etc) as a direct imprint of history, which is more truthful than anything that could be 'proffered by mouth'. At the same time, silent speech is also characterised by obstinate silence – an 'incapacity for an adequate transfer of significations'. Rancière claims that photography became an art when its techniques were put in service of this 'dual poetics'. Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2011), 11.

65 Ibid., p111.

Despite the challenges of giving expression to the research, I hope the methods of the practice described are communicated. I believe the practice is a means of engaging with the past without 'monumentalising' it. Through a historiography that acknowledges and articulates its subjectivity – shaped by a complex constellation of forces – which recognises and values the effects of what is beyond representation, I believe something salient can be revealed. I believe this practice can attune us (both myself as a practitioner and audiences receptive to the arts) to things about our social history that might otherwise remain hidden in plain sight.

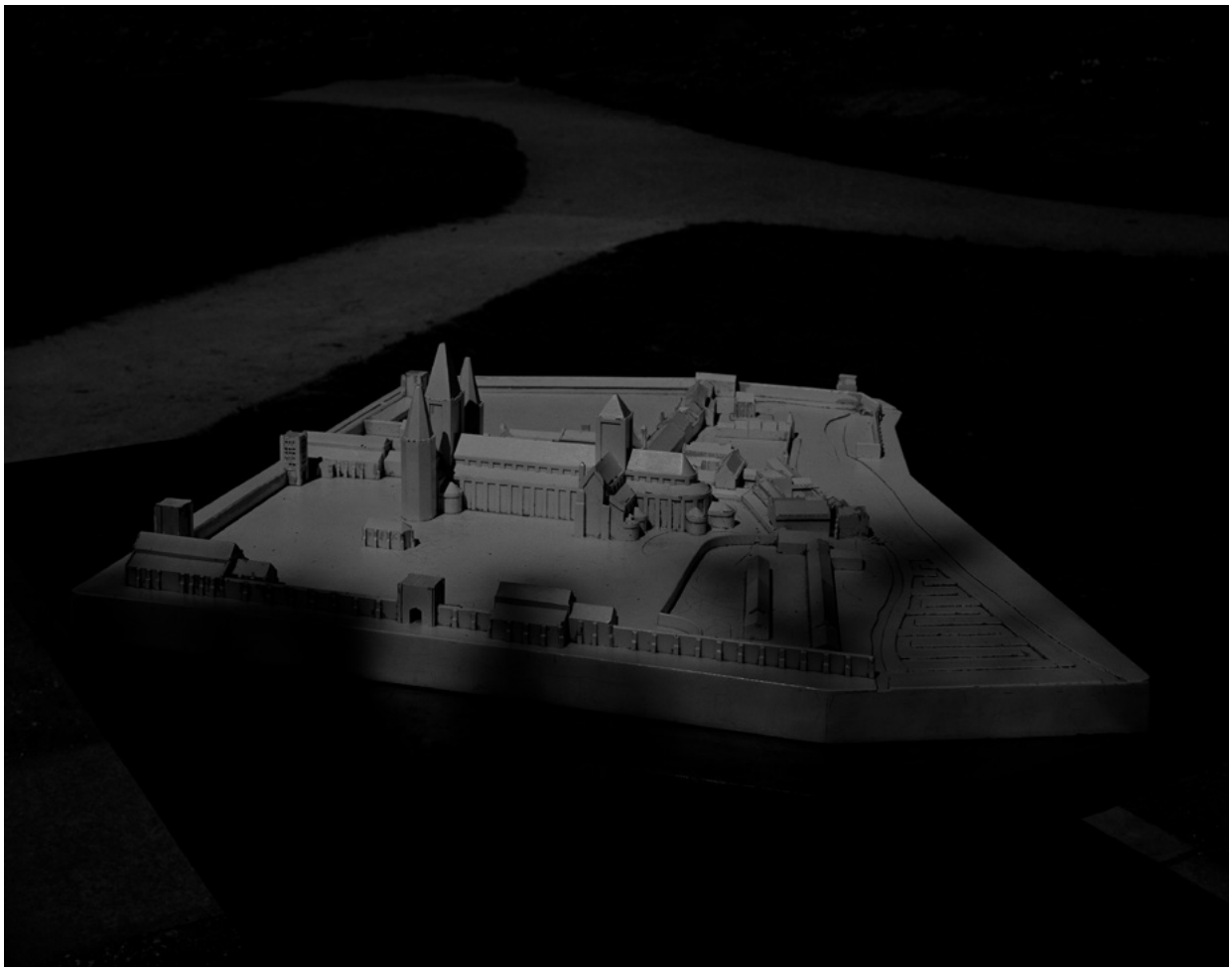

Figure 26. Untitled

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I dedicate this to the memory of my family whose freedoms and liberty were lost to *men of action* and their bloody revolution. Your history may not be seen, but it will always be felt.