OBSERVING A STATE OF

DOMINICA PIATEK

EDGELAND EXISTENCE

An exploration of relationships with marginal landscape and a proposal for a journey at the intersection of industrial heritage and land based practices.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY OF PROJECT

The edgelands are an unofficial landscape on the margins of our city, often overlooked and disregarded. Constantly in flux, these spaces challenge the perception of what a landscape can be. The aim of my major project is to cultivate a culture of engagement with the edgelands, something that has not been considered of value in the UK but has developed in European countries such as Germany. The fate of the edgelands is unknown, there is a growing interest from developers who invest in large areas of the green belt, hoping this land is released by the local authority for housing development. These landscapes are deemed by many as unattractive; however, the qualities of these spaces display key elements of our history, industrial heritage, ecology and society all in one overlooked space. The surrounding edgelands provide an opportunity for a range of activities that often operate outside of established structures. Foraging, walking, and other forms of ‘unofficial’ land use can be seen as operating in the cracks of more formalised systems that shape the landscape. Such practices illustrate the complexity of the landscape, rather than seeing these differing elements as separate or conflicting, my major project focuses on viewing these spaces as part of a larger ecosystem of relationships that will inevitably shape the landscape over time. In order to protect the value of the edgelands I have explored the potential of Crayford old mill as a base for engagement. The old mill acts as a checkpoint on a journey that intersects industrial heritage and land-based practices; it functions as a centre for engagement and becomes an active archive of the unofficial landscape.

Key Collaborators: Bexley Wildlife, Tom Keeley, Lucy Daw, Elise Blackmore, Elliot Wedge, Donna Zimmer, Thames 21, Soft Agency

Exploring the Edgelands

EDGELANDS

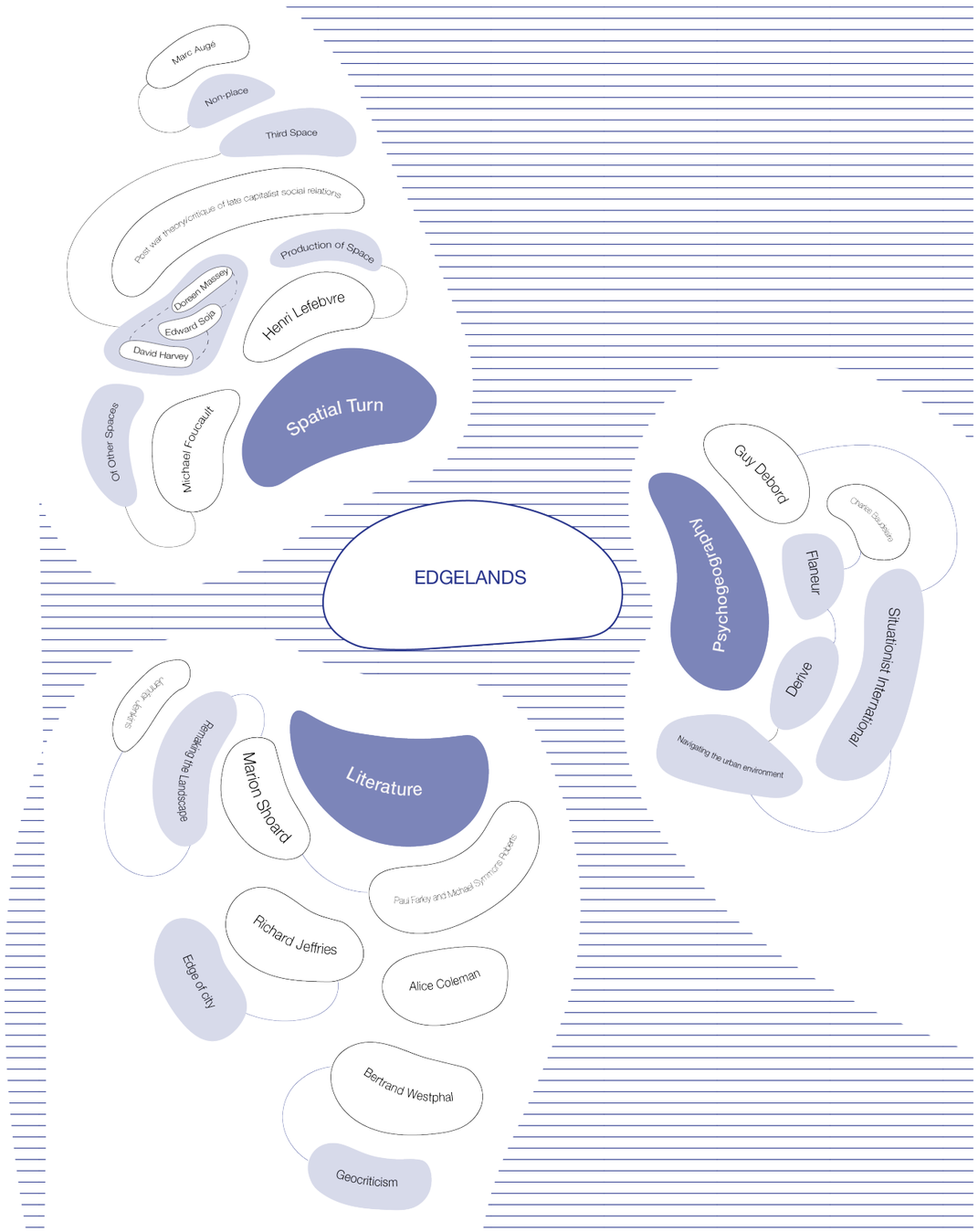
An active observer of changes in the British landscape, Marion Shoard coined the term ‘edgelands’ in an essay published in 2002 (Lives Retold, 2020). Shoard defined them as the ‘interfacial interzone between urban and rural’ (Shoard, 2002). These are areas on the periphery of cities, they are a treasury of unsightly but necessary buildings and a haven for rare species of nature. In these spaces exists an overlooked England, complex and unexamined spaces that lay bare the workings of the city (Farley and Roberts, 2011). You can observe London’s edgelands by following the river Thames out and towards the sea, the landscape changes gradually. As Canary Wharf fades, glitzy riverfront apartments populate the banks along with empty public spaces, sterile and orderly, not one person in sight. An exquisite miscellany revealing itself in a landscape which unfolds slowly presenting a complete sensory experience. There is a unanimous feeling of anticipation and serenity, as your eyes continuously meet curious silhouettes on the horizon. Many alternative terms for the edgelands have been used in literature, novelist and essayist Richard Jeffries explored the London edgeland over a century earlier in Nature near London in 1883. Alice Coleman, an academic in the field of Land Use referred to the space between wildscape, farmscape and townscape as the marginal fringe and the ‘rurban’ (Coleman, 1969). Bertrand Westphal in his book ‘Geocriticism’ explains that there has been this proliferation of new terms to furnish a postmodern poetics of the urban margins. The list including outer cities, edge cities, technopole, technoburbs, silicon landscapes, postsuburbia, and the metroplex, so much vocabulary (Westphal, 2007). Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts add to the list further, the general terms “interfacial zone”, “rural-urban interface”, “peripheral zone” and “marginal zone” have been much used (Kabo, 2014). An ‘edgelands text’ is characteristic of a combination of flexible strands; psychogeographic approaches, journeys of trespass, reflections which do not overwrite the edgelands with their own narratives. This non-invasive relationship is beautiful in a way that it allows one to observe and experience the spatiality of the edgelands without the desire to alter them. Instead allowing the edgelands to form their own spatiality and author the shifts that occur. Perhaps we need to observe this relationship and reflect on it as designers. Often vast in area, though hardly noticed; an unexplored space, absent from our periphery; it is the ignorance that allows it to flourish. How do we preserve this relationship while also exploring the untapped potential of the edgelands.

Since the publication of Farley and Roberts’ book, it is clear that the term edgelands can no longer be contained to a single textual form of theoretical framework. It has become relevant in a range of mediums ranging from photography to poetry as well as blogs and film. The genre of edgelands has really been taking shape over the past decade becoming ‘the space of our time.’ It is a direct result and reflection of our current system and a hope for the future. In order to follow the evolution of edgelands it is important to understand the spatial turn in the humanities and the social sciences. The “spatial turn” is often associated with particular late twentieth-century theoretical texts such as Michel Foucault’s “Of Other Spaces” (1967, published 1984) or Henri Lefebvre’s The Production of Space (1974); as well as several highly influential cultural geographers, including David Harvey, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey (Stock, 2015). From the beginning of Modernism until the Second World War, cultural theory focused mainly on discourses of temporality. However Post-war theorists began to move away from temporality towards the spatial. A lot of the early work related to the spatial turn looked at the importance of space to political thought and power relations, and provided a critique of late capitalist social relations, especially within the field of urban space (Kabo, 2014).

An often overlooked and early instance of the spatial turn is psychogeography. An intersection of psychology and geography; it focuses on our psychological experiences of urban spaces, and reveals forgotten, discarded, or marginalised aspects of the urban environment. This approach to geography was first explored in 1955 by the French Marxist theorist Guy Debord (Lyons, 2022). Inspired by the French nineteenth century poet and writer Charles Baudelaire’s concept of the flâneur – an urban wanderer – Debord suggested playful and inventive ways of navigating the urban environment in order to examine its architecture and spaces (Tate, 2022). Exercises typical of a psychogeographer include using maps of different cities to navigate your own, cutting up maps and rearranging them, and the art of dérive or unplanned journeys setting it apart from more traditional studies of space (Ridgway, 2014). Due to its capacity for disrupting the systems of late capitalism by observing the individual’s psychological comprehension of space at a micro level, rather than macro-scale spatialities, psychogeography became central to the avant-garde revolutionary movement, the Situationist International, of which Debord was a founding member

(Kabo, 2014). The edgelands can be considered as a space that can't be defined, not a city not the countryside, neither inhabited nor wild, neither clearly outlined by history and memory, nor a hyperreal representation (Kabo, 2014). This liminal existence has been referred to as a 'thirdspace'. According to Third Space theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Edward Soja, and Henri Lefebvre, third space refers to these "in-between" spaces; space in between what is real and imagined (Gunter, 2018). Otherwise referred to by Augé as a 'non-place', places such as airports, hotel chains, supermarkets, and transport networks; a result the systems of supermodernity, the hyper-globalised and hyperreal universe of the contemporary mode (Kabo, 2014). Non-places can be considered as the ultimate postmodern spatiality and the space of our time. The lack of presence in these spaces provides an external position, which allows a complete freedom to explore the possibilities produced when existing models of space and our system as we know it are compromised. The edgelands are the beginning of an alternative conceptualisation of the spatial, one which is 'disorderly, unruly, constantly evolving, unfixed' (Shoard, 2012). There needs to be a deeper understanding of these spaces and the narratives they spark in the context of architecture and space. This could influence how we utilise the edgelands as a form of spatiality in informing a critical approach towards the further development of the genre and its influence on humanities and the social sciences.

Image taken at Crossness on Thames Path January 2022 by Dominica Piatek



NETWORK OF KNOWLEGE

The Eerie Landscape: Water and the Land

When exploring edgelands literature and its development I have also come across themes that examine more specific elements within the genre. Mark Fisher (2016) argues that a proper understanding of the human condition requires examination of transitory concepts such as the Weird and the Eerie. In his writing he explores how the weird and the eerie are quite different in how they apprehend the strange. As Fisher writes, 'the weird is constituted by a presence – the presence of that which does not belong. The eerie, by contrast, is constituted by a failure of absence or by a failure of presence. There is something where there should be nothing, or there is nothing where there should be something' (Thacker, 2019). The weird and eerie are, ultimately, ingrained in the fabric of the social, cultural, and political landscape. 'Capital is at every level an eerie entity: conjured out of nothing, capital nevertheless exerts more influence than any allegedly substantial entity.' For Fisher, the weird and the eerie constitute the poles of 'capitalist realism,' prompting us to re-examine not only presumptions concerning human agency, intentionality, and control, but also inviting a darker, more disturbing reflection on the strange agency of the inanimate and impersonal materiality of the world around us (Thacker, 2019).

When exploring themes of the eerie in relation to the edgelands and liminal space, I came across literature that looks at the relationship between water and landscape. Fluxed between the material and immaterial, the past and the present, marsh, mire and estuary are border territories (Rodwell, 2019). These 'borders do not correspond to national boundaries, and papers and documents are unrequired at them' (Macfarlane, 2016).

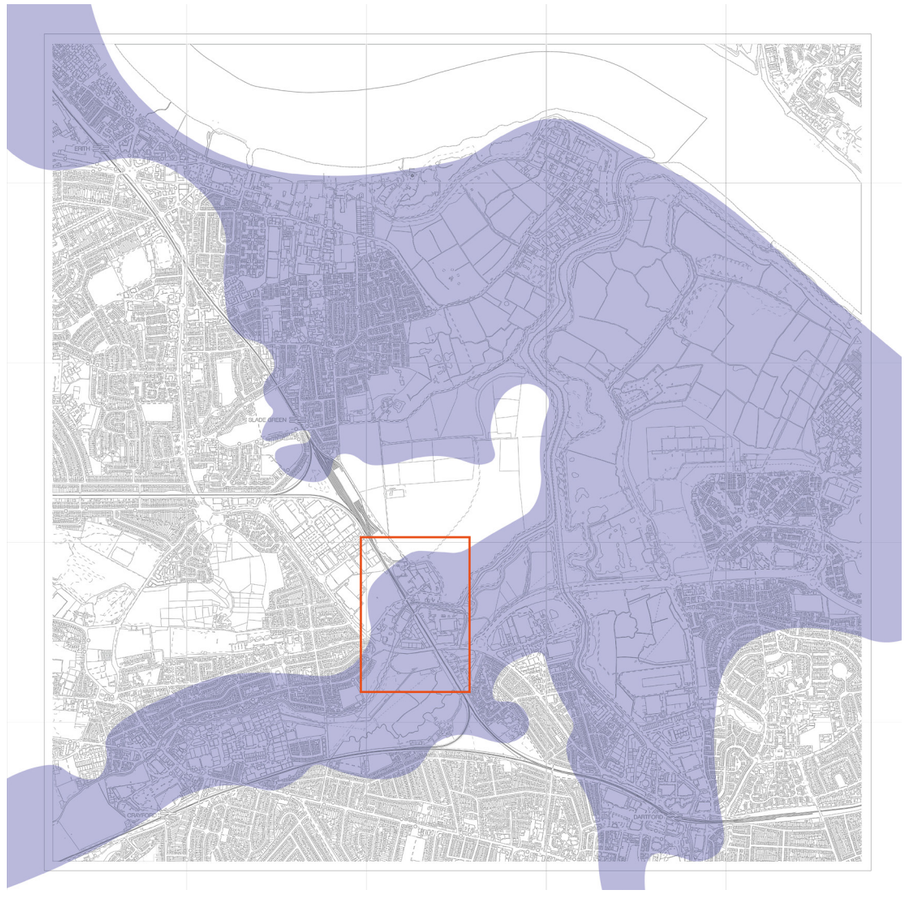
The river Thames represents a sort of rebellious presence beyond the control of human actions. It exists as a liminal space within which normal conditions are suspended, it is in constant flux. Charles Dickens in his work looked at the river Thames as a boundary and the consequent symbolic importance of river crossings. It is unpredictable as a space often used as a symbolism in literature, exploring ideas of rebirth and death, as well as change in identity (Bouvard, 2012). Marshes, mires, fens, bogs, and wetlands; these are also liminal landscapes. Places of making and unmaking where water cedes to land and land to water. The world here is never topographically still. The eerie nature of these spaces is often reflective in folklore and literature which tell stories of Will o' the Wisp, Jack o' Lantern, Spunkie, Pinket or Ignis Fatuus (Rodwell, 2019).

Image taken at Crossness on Thames Path January 2022 by Dominica Piatek

The Eerie Landscape: Water and the Land

'As global sea levels continue to swell, a new study has found that 200,000 homes and businesses in England could be completely submerged in water by 2050. In fact, sea levels around the English coast are forecast to be around 35cm higher by 2050' (Joyner, 2022).

The relationship between water and land has always been in a constant state of change. The river Thames is tidal; a natural phenomenon that is shaped by the gravitational forces of the moon. Its tides have a significant impact on the life and landscape of London, and will continue to shape our relationship with land and nature. The edge of South East London and Kent already experience the effect of rising sea levels and will continue to be affected, with a large area predicted to be below the average annual flood level by 2050.



Land projected to be below annual flood level in 2050 *https://coastal.climatecentral.org*

Image taken at Barnes Cray April 2023 edited by Dominica Piatek

Wasted Space: Dirt to Dust

These edgeland spaces which I have been exploring often are seen as wasted space in the city. A direct result of our capitalist system rejected and forgotten. The Enclosure Movement in England was a push in the 18th and 19th centuries to take land that had formerly been owned in common by all members of a village, and change it to privately owned land (CELDF, 2021). The 'wasteland,' originally referred to productive pasture and foraging land on the outskirts of a village's agricultural fields, and it was reframed as 'wasted spaces' by advocates of enclosure. Due to these changes, the meaning of 'waste' was also inverted to refer to inefficient land use rather than a productive common (Liboiron, 2013). This history of the English enclosure movement is a key part in Marx's discussion of primitive accumulation, the process in which capital as a mode of production emerged out of a non-capitalist world, 'dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt' (Goldstein, 2012).

Throughout the history of modern architecture there is a recurrence of visions depicting efficiently organised, sanitised cities. A lot of the key projects in the history of the modern city have failed to acknowledge, the variety of ways that dirt, degradation and disorder are themselves a product and fundamental part of the city (Campkin, 2013).

There are often racist, classist, and capitalist underpinnings of the progressive era's sanitation movement to "clean up" the city of dust, disease, and urban immigrants and industrial workers. The move to a universal infrastructure where efficiency demands that all waste is taken away from sight (Liboiron, 2013). Mary Douglas explains that 'we can abstract pathogenicity and hygiene from our notion of dirt, we are left with the old definition of dirt as matter out of place' (Douglas, 2001). Where we see dirt there is a system behind it, it is the result of a systematic approach to the ordering of matter. There are certain designers and architects who have worked with the idea of dirt, often creating an 'aestheticised industrial dirt'.

Dirty House by Adjaye architects for instance can be identified as an architect-designed building for wealthy clients. Campkin (2013) suggests that Adjaye responds to the urban degradation that forms the context his practice, from a distance. He celebrates the aesthetically diverse city even as he continues to participate in its elimination (Campkin, 2013). It is interesting

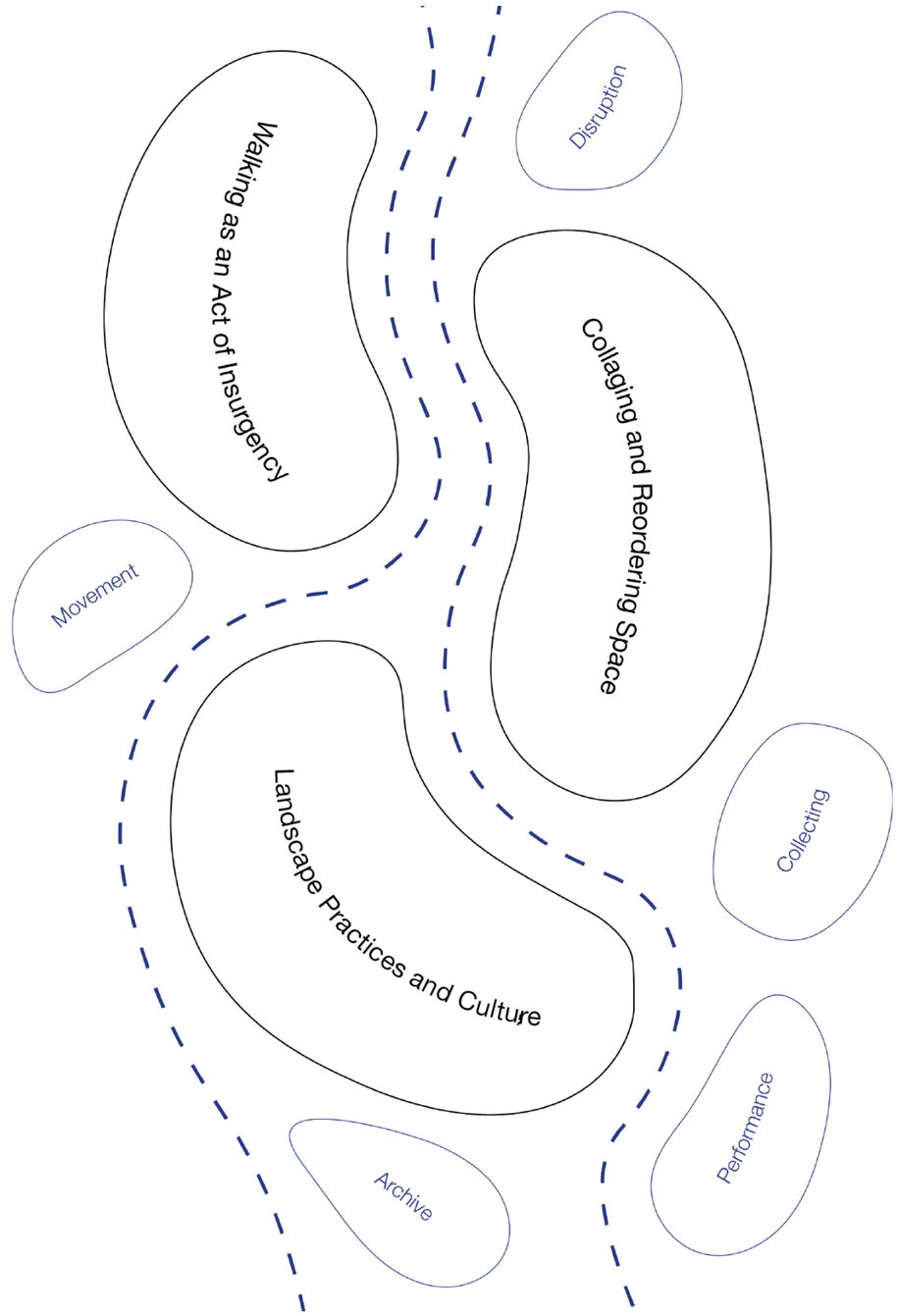
to discuss how spatial designers should deal with waste and dirt, it seems difficult to understand how this could be navigated as it is a topic not usually explored in our city that strives for neat public space with clean nature.

Image taken at Crayford marshes on Thames Path January 2022 by Dominica Piatek

Land Use and Ownership

Following on from the reading on The Enclosure Movement in England, I became more fascinated by land use and ownership in our cities and landscapes as we know it today. I began to question why there are so many wastelands in a system where land holds so much value. Over the past few decades, there have been huge shifts in land from public to private ownership throughout Britain. Since Margaret Thatcher was elected prime minister, one-tenth of the entire British landmass, or about half of the land owned by all public bodies, has been privatised (Lyons, 2022). It is important to consider who owns our country; our land is a scarce resource and ownership of it often confers wealth, power and influence. The individuals who own land decide on how it is used; and that has huge implications on where we build our homes, how we grow our food, how we protect ourselves from flooding, how much space we set aside for wildlife (Shrubsole, 2016). In order to achieve any significant land use change in England we need to contend with England's highly concentrated pattern of land ownership. Guy Shrubsole calculates using DEFRA and Land Registry data that 1% of the population own half the land in England. I would like to explore ways in which the edgelands can be used as an alternative space for discussion on land use, and our rights to land. To contend with the scale of land use change needed in order to tackle the nature and climate crises, and to grapple with how England's land is concentrated in the hands of a small number of landowners, a more strategic approach to land use planning is needed (Shrubsole, 2016).

Image taken at Crossness on Thames Path January 2022 by Dominica Piatek



DEVELOPING METHODS

Walking as an Act of Insurgency

Walking is a key method for research I have used throughout my major project, it has provided an alternative perspective for understanding and reading space. When one begins to move through a space the environment around them is altered, shifted and transformed. Space in many ways defines the form and function of the built environment and there are ways in which walking complicates this notion of space. Walking is a fleeting act, whether planned or not it is almost always improvised, evolving and changing to accommodate to

Image taken at CSM Symposium March 2023 by Lucy Daw

the environment and experience (Anderson and Karmon, 2015). Once done, the act of walking disappears, leaving a memory of the experience, but not the physical experience itself. This state of mind in which one recalls this physical act is unique, always personal and diverse, each one of us captures the sensual experiences differently. Henri Lefebvre in Production of Space (1974) famously explored the notion of space as a direct result of activity, there is not only one social space but many and all can be interpreted differently. From the perspective of the 21st century, the practice of walking can be viewed as a form of resistance to the speed and growth of the modern project (Poteka and Doupona, 2021). It offers an alternative template for discussion, allowing us to experience the unfolding of a landscape through slow movement. It is impossible to understand the qualities of edgelands and wasted space without inhabiting them, the feeling of the eerie and absent is a unique feeling that allows us to enter a particular state of mind. One in which we observe the landscape as a visitor, we do not feel the need to change this landscape but engage with it on a physical level. I often feel that it is easy to misunderstand the qualities of such spaces when we look at them on a map from a strategic perspective, walking through the landscape allows us to feel these spaces and build a relationship with them. The symposium allowed me to test my methods of walking in order to offer a journey and critical analysis of my site.

Image taken at CSM Symposium March 2023 by Lucy Daw

Collaging and Reordering Space

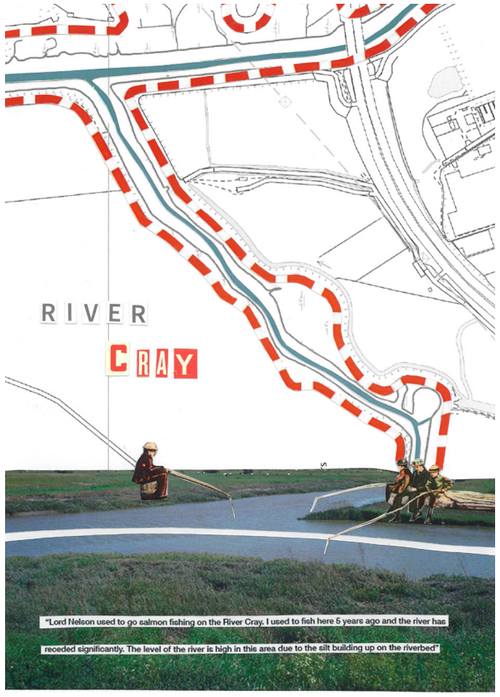
Collaging has become an important part of my practice, in particular 3D material collaging. This method allows for speculative and temporary transformation of space with the focus on returning the space to its original form. The spaces I will be looking at are very complex and layered, so it is important to approach them in a way which will allow me to unpick and understand the many components. It is often easy just to observe the surface of these landscapes, yet it is important to dig deeper and consider a multitude of layers both visible and invisible.

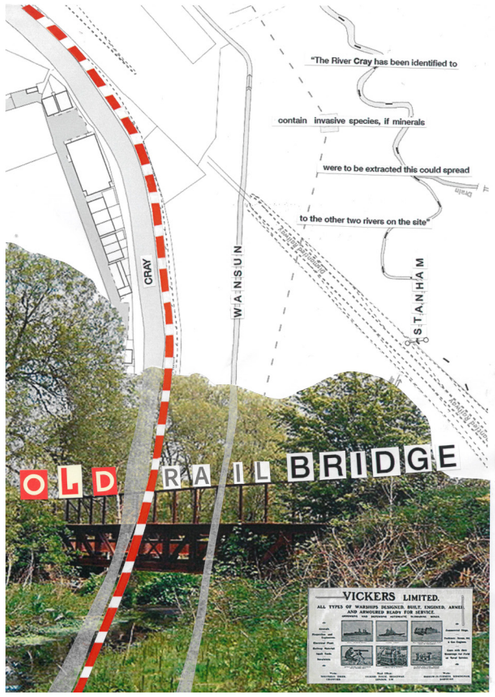
The practice of collage has the capacity to capture spatial and material characteristics of the built environment (Collins & Gowrley, 2022). The method of collaging allows us to design in a way that explores the unique characteristics of the spatial and material, it produces and effect reminiscent of the original and a reorganisation of the existing. Collage can initiate and estimate the creation of architectural space by representing the meaning of an object into space (Ramadhaniar and Lukito, 2020). The meaning of a design has the potential to add value to the existence of a building because with the meaning of the design; buildings can develop into a cultural heritage building that is not lost as time moves on. By using the collage method in the design process, the meaning of a building can be arranged so that the building can continue to maintain its existence (Ramadhaniar and Lukito, 2020). This provides a framework for reordering the built environment as opposed to changing it completely.

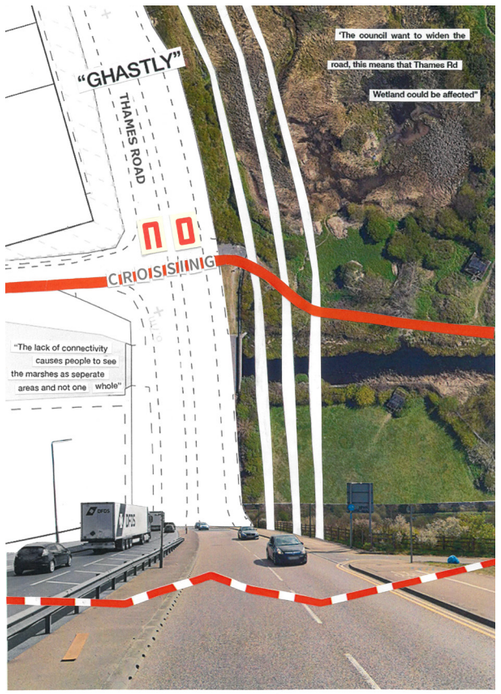
The method of collage has helped me to reveal underlying patterns and relationships on my site that might not be immediately apparent. The process of creating these collages is in itself a form of critical analysis.

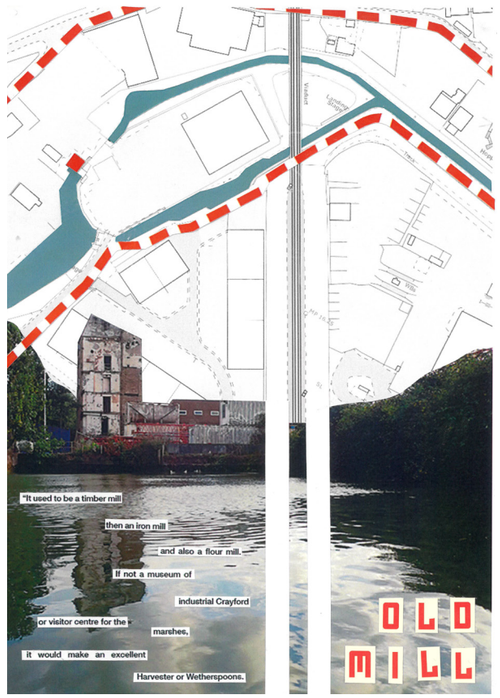
Images of scanned collages exploring points in the marshes February 2023 ⟶

“CRITICAL COLLAGE”



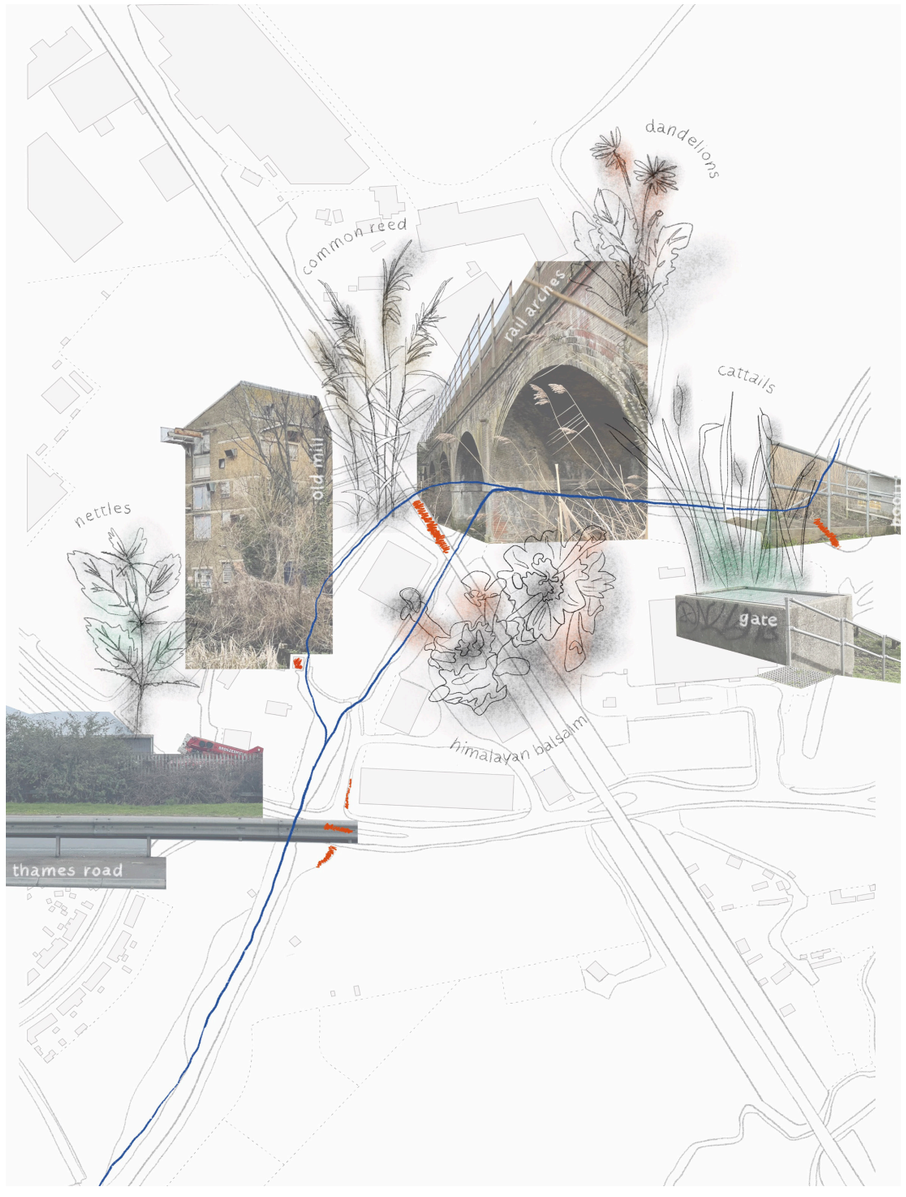






Landscape Practices and Culture

Landscape Practices on the edgelands as a method can help to reveal the hidden potential of these liminal spaces. By combining a range of activities such as ecological restoration, engagement with the community, and creativity, we can transform the edgelands from sites of neglect into thriving areas of cultural and ecological significance. Foraging can be seen as an act of resistance to the capitalist system that has privatized and commodified natural resources.



Images of scanned plants foraged in April 2023, top left to bottom right: himilayan balsalm, stinging nettle, common reed, dandelion

By taking control of their own food sources and developing a deeper connection with the land, foragers challenge the dominant narratives of ownership and control over nature. Dave Hamiltion in his book “Where the Wild Things Grow” (2021) talks about how edgelands are more accessible for a lot more people than rural areas. If you forage this land you’re connected to it, and if you’re connected to it you want to protect it (Association of Foragers, 2021).

Dartford | Crayford Marshes Overview

WELCOME TO THE MARSHES _ The landscapes is littered with traces left by a violent and toxic history of humanity, and it continues to be affected as the waste of our city spills out towards the marshes. The invisible infrastructure of our city can be seen as a processional space, where nature enters into a confrontation with the force of our capitalist system. As the River Thames flows away from central London, past the relics of industry, reclaimed saltmarsh and floodplain housing, the River Darent joins the Thames from the south. The Darent's curves mark the invisible boundary between London and Kent; these are the Crayford and Dartford Marshes.

The marshes are a transitional landscape, subject to change yet always defined by the water which flows around and through them. Walking here invokes memories of a forgotten WW1 airfield and ammunition works. Hospital ships once lay offshore, remembered only in old photographs. The ships were replaced by Joyce Green hospital, built on drained marshland and treating smallpox. Most traces of the hospitals are now lost, but some overgrown brick ruins remain. With no passage across the Thames or Darent, few people walk these footpaths, despite impressive views of the Thames Estuary. Crayford Marshes have also been the site of important archaeological finds, including rhinoceros bones, and evidence of an Iron Age settlement has been uncovered, there is also evidence of a neolithic forest. The presence of the freely flowing river brought thirsty industries such as tanning, while barges were

SITE

built at Crayford Creek. Crayford marshes is a key wetland site on the Thames corridor. Its position on the south side of the river means it is a key stopping off location for birds on the spring and Autumn migration. The confluence of the river Thames and Darren is a key point, it can be seen as a sacred spot in pagan mythology, and a trading route in medival times (Tokelove, 2020).

Image from Google Earth January 2023

Crayford Old Mill: A Site of Intersection

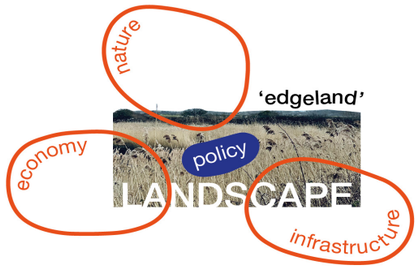
Crayford Flour Mill was a water powered corn mill, it was first built in the 19th century and used the water power of the River Cray to produce flour. It was a significant landmark in the area and played a big role in the produc-

Image taken in Barnes Cray 2023 by Dominica Piatek

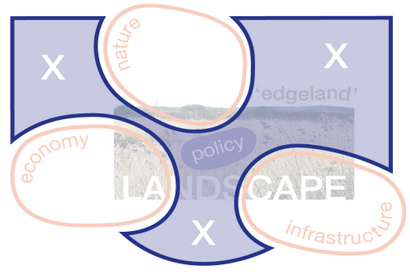
tion of flour for the wider region. The mill operated for many years but fell into disrepair and was no longer operational. In the early 20th century, the mill was purchased by Vitbe, they specialised in producing a flour that was high in protein and fiber. The mill was refurbished and modernised with new

PROPOSAL

equipment, it continued to operate until the 1970s, it was then closed and partially demolished. Today, little remains of the original structure however, the legacy and history of the mill continues to be remembered by locals.



THE SITE IS LAYERED AND COMPLEX; A RESULT OF CENTURIES OF HUMAN INTERACTION WITH LAND



THE PROPOSAL SITS IN BETWEEN THESE LAYERS IN THE UNSEEN CRACKS OF THE LANDSCAPE

The surrounding edgelands provide an opportunity for a range of activities that often operate outside of established structures. Foraging, walking, and other forms of 'unofficial' land use can be seen as operating in the cracks of more formalised systems that shape the landscape. Such practices illustrate the complexity of the landscape, and the ways in which different social, economic, and ecological systems overlap in this particular space. Rather than seeing these differing elements as separate or conflicting, my major project focuses on viewing these spaces as part of a larger ecosystem of relationships that will inevitably shape the landscape over time.

Giving the community more access to this space can allow them to form a deeper connection with the land, in turn helping them to have more influence on how the future of the landscape is formed. By implementing these activities, and this journey the mill can become a catalyst for change and a symbol of the potential that the edgelands hold for the future.

OPERATING IN THE CRACKS OF THE LAND

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