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Poetry, Painting and Change on the Edge of England

Keywords

Practice-led research, Poetry, Painting, Plotland, Ecocritical,

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20

21 **Poetry, Painting and Change on the Edge of England**

22

23 In this article we discuss our creative research on and with a contested coastal
24 community on one of the U.K.'s last existing plotlands¹, the Humberston Fitties in
25 North East Lincolnshire. This fifty-six acre strip of land with three hundred and
26 nineteen chalets.¹ is on the Humber estuary and lies close to Cleethorpes: a seaside
27 resort and Grimsby: a seaport now facing post-industrial decline. Our cross-
28 disciplinary collaborative practice between poetry and visual art explores open,
29 environmentally-aware engagements and methodologies with landscape and rural
30 place. We investigate the relation of social, environmental and energy politics, looking
31 out to land and sea and back to the community. Our results include original art and
32 poetry presented innovatively together in exhibitions and books, in addition to local
33 people's responses to our methodologies and the work itself.

34

35 The intention of this article is to demonstrate how working through and with
36 transdisciplinary arts in a community such as the Fitties can contribute to
37 understanding and learning about place-identity and place-value through aesthetic
38 endeavour. The learning is site-specific and symbiotic between artists and local people
39 and relates, in this article in particular, to small and large-scale socio-political and
40 environmental change. Here we aim to show how these processes and interactions
41 occur over time and to demonstrate that no place or any conclusion about place, is
42 simple or easily gained. Equally no future decision or speculation about environmental

43 sustainability, politics and class, or taste and aesthetics (all themes we consider here)
44 can be taken in isolation and without consultation with the inhabitants of a place and
45 consideration of their histories and memories. Thus this article aims to demonstrate
46 that there is a special value in creative practice-led, place-based, people-responsive
47 longitudinal research between the disciplines of art, literature and rural sociology.

48

49

50 **Threadings, bendings, tanglings: creativity and place**

51

52 Since 2011 we, Harriet Tarlo (poet) and Judith Tucker (artist), have collaborated in
53 place-based, slow-walking processes drawing on concepts of fieldwork, deep
54 mapping (Biggs 2010) psychogeography (Richardson 2015), and contemporary
55 walking practices (Heddon and Turner 2012; see also Gkartzios and Crawshaw in this
56 special section). What is key for this article in terms of principle of deep mapping is
57 Biggs' notion of this as a hybrid activity in which artistic, geographical and
58 ethnographic practices interweave, based on place-based investigation and poetic
59 ambiguity in dialogue with academic discourse. Through this he seeks to challenge the
60 frameworks within which both arts practices and academic research are currently
61 framed. (Biggs 2010). Richardson's work on contemporary British psychogeographic
62 practices also challenges this binary as she works with literary forms of
63 psychogeography within an academic context (Richardson 2015) thus providing
64 another context for our inclusive walking fieldwork. However most of the examples
65 that Richardson cites are urban whilst we work in a rural context, Heddon and Turner
66 trouble certain assumptions in some psychogeographic practices and literatures, not
67 least in relation to urban and rural walking practices and with particular relation to

68 gender. They draw attention to the fact that women have not featured in
69 psychogeography until very recently (Heddon and Turner 2012). As walking women
70 artists ourselves their consideration of the importance of the local and of
71 complicating notions of the domestic and the wilderness have particular significance
72 for our work on the Fitties.

73
74 We have also attempted to evolve a practice between poetry and visual art that
75 explores open, environmentally-aware engagements with landscape, place and
76 change. We eschew polemical responses to place, preferring to make work that
77 attempts more subtle adjustments to established assumptions and sensibilities by
78 focused engagement with sites, their human inhabitants and more-than-human
79 elements in line with ecocritical approaches (Soper 1995, Bennett 2010, Barad 2003,
80 Garrard 2004, Haraway 2008, Morton 2007). Early in our respective careers, both of
81 us were influenced by Kate Soper's book, *What Is Nature?* (1995), in which Soper
82 argues for maintaining the awareness of the difference between human and
83 nonhuman effects and constantly assessing and reassessing the positions of nature
84 and culture, rather than indulging in simplistic defence or denial of this familiar
85 Western dualism (Soper 1995 p. 11). Later critical works by the authors cited above
86 develop these ideas further into notions of human and nonhuman environment as
87 "enmeshed in a dense network of relationships," (Bennett 2010 p 13) including
88 Haraway's "natureculture," Morton's 'the mesh' and Tim Ingold's 'meshwork'.
89
90 Although marginally attempted in rural studies (Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2016;
91 Crawshaw, 2019) our work seeks to demonstrate the way in which creative practice

92 not only informs critical analysis but is also a critical tool in itself. Our practice is trans-
93 disciplinary in nature and involves extensive creative fieldwork through walking,
94 drawing, writing, photography, historical and archival research. ¹ We work
95 collaboratively with local people to generate materials via interviews and simple
96 postcards on which participants write a short memory associated with a particular
97 chalet address or place on the Fitties. We delivered these to individual chalets and
98 also set up a stall where we exchanged postcards of our work for a memory. We
99 incorporated these into exhibitions in relation to a map of the chalet park and on our
100 social media pages alongside photographs.

101

102 This project is ongoing. Since 2012, we have been working in this place, making short
103 repeated site visits and returning to our study and studio to work up the material
104 gleaned from fieldwork in place and with people. We produce poetic texts, drawings
105 and paintings which are shown in exhibition locally, nationally and internationally. We
106 experiment with a variety of forms of presentation juxtaposing image and text: open
107 form poems and paintings on canvas and watercolour paper; vinyl wall text, artists'
108 books, digital print and projection alongside the community-produced elements
109 mentioned above. This is undertaken in the conviction that "practice-led research is a
110 new species of research, generative enquiry that draws on subjective, interdisciplinary
111 and emergent methodologies that have the potential to extend the frontiers of
112 research" (Barrett and Bolt, 2010, p1). This paper introduces research as articulated
113 by artists *as practitioners* to the field of rural studies.

114

115 The Humberston Fitties is one of the U.K.'s last existing plotlands, a place that is "on
 116 the edge" in multiple ways (coastal, political, environmental, rural), and a place that is
 117 facing change. We are committed to showing the art we produce locally but also to
 118 taking it further afield.² As the environmental and ecocritical movements have taught
 119 us, it is through the micro that we understand the macro. The conversations we have
 120 had about this work in local places and further afield have demonstrated this.

121

122 We have been working in North East Lincolnshire since 2012, looking in particular at
 123 water, marsh, flood and energy. Our earlier landscape work explored not only the
 124 beach, but also the raised banks of the reclaimed marshland and referenced Darwin's
 125 renowned "tangled bank in its explorations of "threadings", "bendings" and
 126 tanglings." (Darwin, 1872, p. 429). As the editorial to the 2009 issue of *Nature*
 127 celebrating Darwin argued, that bank is now unravelling due to the threat to
 128 biodiversity (Nature, 2009). What is left are complex but impoverished remnants of
 129 plant-life, an ecology of a post-industrial, semi-agrarian, semi-wild landscape
 130 dominated by certain resilient species:

131

132
 133 under
 134 swallows' wings
 135
 136 grassland verges grown into many
 137 bendings, singings each over other vetch purples clover whites
 138 threadings, tanglings through
 139 up from
 140 salt-sand
 141 ground
 142

143

144 As can be seen above, Tarlo's landscape poetry is written in the Anglo-American
 145 open form style of poetry in which sparse use of language draws attention to

146 particulars - words are arranged across the page organically rather than in traditional
147 versification and lineation. Her poems explore the connections between poetic form
148 and landscape but they also attempt to embody human movement through place
149 and space.

150

151 In 2016 we moved beyond considering our own movement through landscape to work
152 more closely with people in the area, particularly those who holiday on and live on the
153 Fitties. We were interested in exploring an alternative, restorative form of simple
154 seaside living through found poems and small, quirky paintings, and setting these
155 beside larger works that return us to the surroundings: a salt marsh with its
156 suppressed but resurgent life.³ We interacted with the community through interviews
157 and memory and creative workshops. We expanded our work to explore social and
158 cultural connections between people and energy and to look at further ways in which
159 the Fitties lifestyle has a bearing on environmental concerns such as waste,
160 sustainability and recycling.⁴

161

162 A consideration of the relation of people and place, of human and landscape is not
163 new in our work. Tucker's densely-worked representational paintings and drawings
164 build on a contemporary re-working of the neo-romantics. Her painting practice
165 explores both how we might be inhabited, not only by our own histories, memories,
166 and experiences but also by those of others, and the ways in which places too bear
167 traces of others, both visible and invisible. Her paintings and drawings become places
168 between these psychic traces and the actual traces in the landscape just as Tarlo's
169 poems incorporate research into past inhabitants of the places she works.

170

171 *Place Figure 1 here. There's always something you need to do that you've never done*172 *before Oil on Canvas 91 cm x 122 cm*

173

174 Here however we worked firmly in the here and now using techniques that are similar

175 to oral history methods used by sociologists, historians and activists. In our case,

176 however, this material is used to compile documentary poems, a form which Tarlo

177 traces back to the 1930s American objectivists but which has been practiced by many

178 poets all over the world since then. Longer interviews are condensed into short

179 documentary poems in diverse voices, some of which are included here. These poems

180 contain only “found” text from interviews. They are an attempt to keep memory alive,

181 to dramatise it in a way that will engage people (perhaps more than pages of

182 transcribed interviews) and to contribute to the marginalization of the lyric “I”, to

183 avoid a usurpation of other people’s places into a singular poetic voice.

184

185 The paintings of the holiday chalets rarely have images of people depicted within

186 them, yet we know that these are places that are far from abandoned and are buzzing

187 with human activities. They explore how these idiosyncratic chalets are

188 simultaneously objects of identification and desire for those who own or stay in them

189 as well as exploring how they might reflect the owners’ personalities. What happens

190 when the paintings of the chalets themselves are placed next to or are surrounded by

191 the “found-text” poems? One effect is that they become animated by those voices

192 and it is almost as if the place itself starts to have a voice.

193

194 This process of engagement, along with events at the Fitties, in the U.K. and across
195 the globe, caused us to think about change. Change is of course paradoxically a
196 constant in the human and more-than-human world and these days the word
197 “change” can hardly be used without conjuring up ever-present fears of Climate
198 Change. Like all localities, this is a changing, unstable place where human
199 interventions and priorities intersect with the short and long-term, large and small-
200 scale non-human developments. But, as we shall see, change has been happening
201 particularly fast at the Fitties in recent years. How does small and large scale,
202 environmental and political change, affect people and artists in their relationship to
203 locale, and how is it intertwined in the complex threadings, bendings and tanglings
204 that make up place identity?

205

206 **plotland, behind land, edgeland**

207

208 What is the rural sociology of Humberston Fitties and why is it significant? The Fitties
209 is one of many plotland settlements which cropped up along the UK coastline, largely
210 during the interwar years, when due to agricultural depression, land was sold off very
211 cheaply, usually to ordinary city or townsfolk. Over a hundred years, it has evolved
212 into a quirky individualistic chalet park drawing residents, second home owners,
213 renters and summertime visitors. These come mainly from Northern British towns and
214 cities such as Sheffield, Doncaster and Barnsley, some as close as Cleethorpes and
215 Grimsby, a few miles away.⁵ As Sheller and Urry (2004) remind us, places to play are
216 also “places in play: made and remade by the mobilities and performances of tourists
217 and workers, images and heritage” (p. 1).

218

219 As we shall see the Fitties (and indeed Cleethorpes, its adjoining town) are just such
 220 playful places created by the particular seaside and holiday desires of their visitors and
 221 inhabitants. Some residents however do not want only to “play” there, but to live
 222 permanently. Due to its status as a “holiday park” the Fitties is only open from 1 March
 223 to 31 December each year, being closed in January and February, but many residents
 224 have been campaigning to stay there all year for decades. For reasons of place
 225 attachment and economics, many inhabitants (an estimated 20%) stay on in secret,
 226 employing blackout techniques and moving on and off site under cover of darkness,
 227 and have been willing to discuss this with us anonymously.

228

229 The word “Fitties” literally means “saltmarsh” and this place, like much of the low-
 230 lying land around the mouth of the Humber estuary, was carved out of saltmarsh.

231 In one of the first poems Tarlo wrote about the area she created the idea of “behind
 232 land” which was later used for the exhibition of the same name and for our own
 233 artists’ book:

234

235 once was still might be saltmarsh low living, low-lying behind land
 236
 237 from this defence dune openings glimpse far sea strip
 238
 239 all things seem floating
 240
 241 headland fort moored ships pale people on purple mud sand places
 242
 243

244

245 The Fitties land lies low then on a flat coast behind eroded dunes and marshy beach -
 246 in this literal sense it is “behind land”, but it is also “behind” land in the sense of being

247 “behind the times”, being a remnant of a wider vernacular, counter-cultural
 248 movement.

249

250 As our title suggests, plotlands can also been seen as classic “edgeland” sites, and not
 251 just because they are often coastal. According to Trevor Rowley, plotlands received a
 252 disproportionate amount of criticism for their size, as epitomised here by C.E.M.

253 Joad’s book, *The Horrors of the Countryside* (1931):

254

255 To my horror I found not an empty valley but a muddy road
 256 running through an avenue of shacks, caravans, villas, bungalows,
 257 mock castles, pigsties, disused railway carriages and derelict buses
 258 scattered higgledy piggedly over the largest possible area.

259 (Joad in Rowley, 2006 p 211).

260

261 Such prejudices linger and Fitties dwellers are aware of them, although they are in
 262 reality a pretty diverse group of people. This poem is created from the words of a
 263 long-term chalet-owner in her fifties reflecting on her neighbour’s life post-
 264 retirement:

265

266 When she retired, she didn’t
 267 have a lot of dosh, I said to her
 268 *Why don’t you go on the Fitties?*
 269 Her brother was agin it, thought
 270 his daft sister was being even
 271 more daft than usual. People
 272 either get it or they don’t get it.
 273 In the end, he got it. My mother,
 274 where she came from, she
 275 wouldn’t tell people I lived here.
 276 The words wouldn’t come out
 277 of her mouth. But I think it’s

278 within us, what makes us want
279 to come to the sea. It's primal,
280 really primal.
281

282 Staying with politics for now, Colin Ward, writing from an anarchist perspective, notes
283 that environmental arguments are often used to support socio-political mechanisms
284 such as the planning system:

285
286 ...unofficial settlements are seen as a threat to wildlife, which is
287 sacrosanct. The planning system is the vehicle that supports four-
288 wheel-drive Range Rovers, but not the local economy, and certainly
289 not those travellers and settlers seeking their own modest place in
290 the sun. (Ward, 2004)

291
292 In *Arcadia for All: The Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (1984), Hardy and Ward (1984)
293 recount the sorry tale of how, in post-war Britain, planning regulations and
294 compulsory purchase orders meant the demise of most plotlands. The “behind land”
295 of the Fitties then is a remnant of an almost lost way of life and we shall consider here
296 whether such lifestyles are indeed anathema to environment, as planning laws
297 suggest, or whether they might in fact hold both the histories and the future seeds of
298 less heavy-handed ways of living in place.

299
300 It is a vulnerable place then, this Eastern English edgeland, land always at risk from
301 socio-political actions. Until recently, perhaps this plotland has been protected in part
302 because of its unfashionable position on the margins on the Eastern edge of England
303 in a place where land is not as valuable as in those areas closer to London. In those
304 places it is much harder to find recognisable still- functioning plotlands, for the reasons

305 Hardy and Ward (1984) describe. Only traces remain: some such as Laindon in Essex,
306 considered in detail later in this article, are nature reserves, others are subsumed in
307 subsequent more suburban developments as we discovered on a visit to Peacehaven
308 on the Sussex coast, where the grid road pattern and some green lanes are all the
309 immediate evidence of what was one of the largest plotlands in the U.K.

310

311 In painting and writing about human presences within landscape, such as the Fitties,
312 we aim to contribute to the acknowledgement and importance of such sites, and to
313 acknowledge their complexity. Using painting to critique simplistic pastoral or bucolic
314 views of British landscape is of course, nothing new. A key, mid-century example is
315 Eric Ravilious, an artist whose landscape work also rarely included people, yet was far
316 from nostalgic. He dealt with a pragmatic version of the rural imbued with the
317 evidence of modern agriculture and the energy networks. Far from presenting a
318 preservationist or melancholic view Ravilious' work engaged whole-heartedly with
319 modernity. His vision of the "countryside" has trains, roads, railway tracks and
320 cuttings, fences, defences, telegraph poles, pylons, cement and brick works – resisting
321 so much work that aimed to romanticize the rural usually discussed in the discourse
322 of the 'rural idyll' (Woods, 2011; Murdoch et al.,2003).

323

324 Ravilious even depicted makeshift dwellings in his painting *Caravans* from 1936.
325 Although not a plotlands dweller, he repurposed "Fever Wagons," as studios and living
326 spaces. These were originally used in the Boer War and/or the Crimean War, and then
327 shipped back to Newhaven, Sussex to be used by cement workers. There have been
328 plenty of artists (George Shaw, Juliette Losq, Laura Oldfield Ford), writers (Michael

329 Symons Roberts, Paul Farley, Iain Sinclair) and academics (Shoard, 2002; Edensor,
330 2005) engaging with often urban “edgelands”. Plotlands however have not historically
331 attracted much artistic attention, perhaps as a consequence of issues of class and
332 taste. More recently, there has been a certain amount of creative responses to
333 plotlands in the south of the U.K. including Clio Barnard’s performance work *Plotlands*,
334 2008 Karen Guthrie and Nina Pope’s documentary, *Jaywick Escapes*, 2012 and Julia
335 Winckler’s community engagement exhibition *Lureland: Peacehaven Project*. Our
336 longitudinal project on the Fitties begun in 2012 and still ongoing at the time of
337 writing, is a perhaps a unique mix of aesthetic exploration, in depth community
338 engagement and consideration of the relation of people and place.

339

340

341 **From groynes to gabions: change by the seaside**

342

343 The Fitties is also environmentally vulnerable, as the “behind land” poem cited above
344 suggests with its use of the term “defence.” This can refer both to the old Second
345 World War pillboxes along the coast, but also to the generations of defences against
346 flood from groynes to gabions. The area is always at risk from flooding, erosion and
347 climate change effects. In 2013, we saw the radically accelerated re-shaping of land
348 by water of a tidal surge on the Humber estuary. A report by the Environment Agency
349 (2013) refers to the breach at Tetney Marsh nearby, and the consequent flooding of
350 agricultural land and makes reference to the flood plain close by to the chalet park.
351 The North East Lincolnshire Council also commissioned the Humberston Fitties Flood
352 Risk Assessment in the same year, which was not seen as a neutral action by many
353 chalet owners, as, at the same time, the council was threatening to increase the so-

354 called winter “Closed Season,” citing the risk of flood as a factor (Black & Veatch,
355 2014).

356

357 Although we had been painting and writing there for some years, it was only once we
358 engaged fully with the community that we became aware of factions and highly
359 charged differences of opinions on the chalet park relating to these issues. When we
360 advertised our presence on the Fitties for story and memory workshops, we got into
361 trouble with some voluble chalet owners for describing the area, as “always liable to
362 flood, to a return to its former state”. People were concerned that our words would
363 give the council ammunition in what they saw as its prejudices against the Fitties, in
364 particular its lack of support for some residents’ desire to stay there all year. This
365 highlighted the sensitivities that artists need to be aware of when working with people
366 in relation to their places and how environmental and social questions cannot be
367 separated. As the documentary poems demonstrate, place is devalued and valued by
368 different actants in the community, as well as how deep and emotional the
369 engagement with place is, how tied up with intimate, familial relations.

370

371 The 2013 surge and these subsequent reports brought back and focused people’s
372 minds on the danger of flooding. While some described and understood it as close call,
373 others point out that the Fitties has not actually flooded since the North Sea Flood of
374 1953 which struck Belgium and the Netherlands also, and caused over 300 fatalities
375 on the U.K. east coast. As a result of this flood most of the chalets are raised off the
376 ground on bricks or wooden struts, as can be seen from the paintings. It is not just the
377 chalets that could be affected by the surges, but the surrounding dunes and beaches

378 have radically changed over the years. In early photographs of the “camp” the dunes
 379 are far more extensive. Local people, including this man in his fifties, speak about the
 380 changing shapes on the beach at Humberston:

381

382 My mother’s in Cleethorpes
 383 Cemetery - 70 years between
 384 when I first lived here and
 385 when I returned. I didn’t want
 386 my mother to be alone. Nothing
 387 had changed. Used to be folk
 388 from Sheffield, all they wanted
 389 was slot machines and such.
 390 They never walked up here.
 391 Down on the beach, you notice it
 392 daily, tides eroding constantly -
 393 we’ve lost a lot of sand, the creek’s
 394 come in a lot. Years ago it was
 395 way out, the dunes were 8 or 10
 396 foot deep. Yep, we’ve lost a lot.

397

398 The dunes referred to here have long lost their glory, being replaced by sand banks
 399 and gabions, the stones in these probably imported from Norway. The creek, saline
 400 lagoons and “pioneer saltmarsh” is spreading beyond Tetney marshes and onto
 401 Humberston Beach. The spaces humans value most highly and invented groynes to
 402 protect, sandy beaches, are being “colonised” by muddy marshland and an
 403 increasingly dangerous creek. Is the saltmarsh returning, re-establishing itself and how
 404 far will it go? Perhaps over time, regardless of the decisions human beings make about
 405 the Fitties plotland, the original saltmarsh fitties will indeed return, or will there be a
 406 way of balancing encroaching vegetation, rising sea level and human habitation?

407

408 2016 was another year of radical change. In the October of that year, just as we were
 409 taking down our Cleethorpes exhibition celebrating plotland life, the news came that

410 the Fitties were to be put up for sale by the local council. In the context of austerity
411 Britain, they needed to offload assets. From the point of view of the Fitties people,
412 this was the last in a long series of betrayals. What would happen to this place? Would
413 the Fitties people take over the site themselves? Would it become homogenised,
414 modernised and managed by a large company such as the one that ran the adjacent
415 caravan park and become just another “blandscape”? Like many of our towns and
416 cities, Cleethorpes is struggling to maintain its identity in this regard - the
417 individualistic seafront, pier, boating lake and independent businesses of the town
418 exist in tension with the strip of Macdonalds, KFC, Premier Inn and Brewer’s Fayre that
419 run along Kings Road between the town and the site of the Fitties.

420

421 This raised important environmental questions too. Would a charitable organization
422 attempt to work on and with the people who live there to enhance its conservation
423 status (granted in 1996 at the request of the residents) and indeed the SSI (Site of
424 Special Scientific Interest) status of the Humber Estuary on which it is located? After
425 a brief utopian period when the residents formed a Community Interest Company to
426 purchase and manage the site for themselves, their bid was turned down in favour of
427 a larger bid from a large private company called Tingdene, part of whose business is
428 the manufacture of “park homes” and “holiday lodges.” Tingdene have officially
429 owned the Fitties since October 2017.

430

431 This radical period of change for the Fitties was mirrored in wider changes happening
432 throughout the world. In the same year, in June when we were talking to local and
433 visiting holidaymakers in the summer sunshine at the Fitties, the British electorate

434 voted to leave the European Union. Lincolnshire was one of the highest pro-leave
435 areas, voting 70% in favour of “Brexit”. The U.K., like the Fitties community, is in a
436 state of uneasy limbo after the “Brexit” vote , without clear answers, but definitely
437 heading for change. The views of the Fitties inhabitants who largely supported the
438 “Leave” campaign, seem far from anachronistic now, but rather seem to represent a
439 large percentage of the population who felt disillusioned with bureaucracy, unheard
440 and disenfranchised by both Westminster and Brussels. The Fitties is located in the
441 sort of coastal communities which the government, via the National Lottery, has been
442 targeting, with its fund of the same name since 2012, and with renewed vigour since
443 June 2016. The inherent mistrust of the establishment, the legacy of battles with the
444 council, the tendency toward anarchic, defiant individualism, the long reverberations
445 of the miners’ strike, all demonstrate that class divisions and strain in Britain are alive
446 and well.

447

448 Class, taste, place and visual environment are all inextricably linked. This has been
449 explored by Grayson Perry both through his works such as the *Vanity of Small*
450 *Differences* and his accompanying 2012 Channel 4 television series, *All in the Best*
451 *Possible Taste*:

452 People seem to be curating their possessions to communicate
453 consciously, or more often unconsciously, where they want to fit
454 into society.

455

456 The British care about taste because it is inextricably woven into
457 our system of social class. I think that – more than any other factor,
458 more than age, race, religion or sexuality – one’s social class
459 determines one’s taste (Perry 2013).

460

461 Perry is making explicit the links between power, class and what we can see; he
462 perceives that in the U.K. what we own reveals who we are and where we come from.
463 Objects and houses can stand in for us. In his television programme *Divided Britain*,
464 which featured the making of his two *Matching Pair* of “Leave” and “Remain” pots, he
465 explicitly worked with collapsing assumed binaries post-Brexit. These invite the
466 viewer to consider that, after Perry solicited source material from people on both
467 sides, it was revealed that they actually had very similar likes and dislikes and
468 understanding of what constitutes Britain. Perry knowingly draws on aspects of
469 working class taste, of which there are so many examples of unfettered, playful
470 curation of objects on the Fitties where plastic animals and birds abound.

471

472 Indeed, the whole aesthetic of plotland might be considered to be a unleashing of
473 taste that flies in the face of the establishment. Trevor Rowley notes that

474

475 In all respects plotlands stood out as the very antithesis of the
476 normal, old fashioned, village England and the values that it
477 represented. Plotland complexes were ephemeral, unsightly
478 anarchistic and an affront to good taste. In complete contrast the
479 long-established English village, was seen by middle-class observers
480 as the acceptable unit of countryside living” (Rowley, 2006, p 211).

481

482 Like Perry’s ceramics but in a different idiom, Tucker’s painting in combination with
483 Tarlo’s poetry complicate the binary outlined above. After all, what might it mean to
484 use oil paint to depict the makeshift chalets and open-form poetry to reflect the voices
485 of their owners? The close observation, engagement and time that is involved in the
486 making of these is one way of deep listening as well as deep mapping.

487

488 Since this period, influenced by the darker shadows outlined above, we became
 489 interested in the Fitties at dusk and in the night and began work on a new series of
 490 large-scale dramatic paintings and short fragmentary poems called "Night Fitties".
 491 These explore the play of light and dark and the uncanny transformations of the
 492 chalets that take place after hours as well as notions of vulnerability, occupation and
 493 emptiness. The work considers, in the shadow of recent dramatic political changes,
 494 how notions of place and identity are constructed on domestic and larger scales, as
 495 reflected by the play on flags and other indications of Englishness.

496

497

november week-night
 dark chalets under dim
 lamps glow variegated
 plants: silhouettes of
 lone lilies illuminate

woman in red top
 feeds fox at lit door
 frame intimate until
 us: lifts bowl, turns
 light off, door shuts

498

499

500

501

hearts hang inside
 cold closed summer
 houses: few vent
 smoke, few gleams
 car corners statuary

t.v. flashes window in
 window's wide sight:
 big guy in vest jumps
 up behind blown rose
 flicker white in colour

502 Please place figure 2 here Judith Tucker *We're all very close round here,*
503 2018. Oil on Canvas. 76cm x 101cm

504

505 ***Yep, we've lost a lot: local, national and international energy politics***

506

507 All this fear and uncertainty, as expressed here by the residents of the Fitties,
508 is exacerbated by our knowledge of climate change, a threat surpassing and
509 encompassing all - one that reminds us of the importance of global cooperation and
510 the dangers of division. In discussing social and environmental politics past and
511 present with Fitties people we focused on the importance of energy politics to the
512 area. From the beginning, our Fitties work had a strong sense of the Humber Estuary
513 just beyond. Here we are immediately confronted by evidence of energy. From the
514 path on the bank built to preserve reclaimed agricultural land and prevent flooding,
515 we look out over the saltmarsh to see tankers off the coast in the estuary offloading
516 crude oil at the Tetney monobuoy, run by Phillips 66, an American multinational
517 energy company, constantly pumping crude oil under and over the land. Oil is pumped
518 by a largely underground and undersea pipeline, to tastefully painted green tanks at
519 the Tetney oil terminal, before being piped over to South Killingham refinery for
520 processing. In turn these products might be exported from Immingham dock or
521 transported inland by road, rail and pipeline.

522

523 Close by we see windmills, which have increased in number over our time working
524 here, turning and producing power both on land and out to sea in the massive
525 "Humber Gateway Offshore Wind Farm. Again, we find global links - the wind farm
526 was built in part using a loan from the European Investment Bank, owned directly by

527 the 28 European Union member states. Repayments of this loan will continue many
528 years after Brexit (Willis 2016). Beyond the windmills and the monobuoy, well over
529 the horizon, over forty miles into the North Sea, are gas platforms but only just down
530 the coast, next to the ancient dunes at Saltfleetby Theddlethorpe, there is a direct
531 connection to the gas fields bringing in 10% of the UK's gas requirement every single
532 day.

533

534 Many local people work in the energy industry in one capacity or another and have
535 views about our energy sources. Here are some notes from an interview with a retired
536 male oil rig worker living in a nearby town:

537

538 *I worked off the coast twenty miles and more, that's why I know*
539 *they should build all those windmills offshore, not bother about*
540 *inland. There's wind offshore 365 days a year. They're finally*
541 *realising. We could have told 'em, like we could have told 'em how*
542 *bad diesel is for you. We used to joke we didn't have time for*
543 *safety, but safety was what it all was - running all the systems,*
544 *opening the wells, closing the wells, checking the pumps all the*
545 *time, separating out the gas, the oil, the water - regulating 24*
546 *hours a day. One summer we had a couple of osprey nesting up on*
547 *the platform all summer. We used to stand on the handrails looking*
548 *at the moon - the middle of the night stuff - you could get*
549 *philosophical.*

550

551 This interviewee was feeling that we might do well to listen to the opinions of people
552 we trust to work in such dangerous places. The osprey story was just one of several
553 stories he told of hardened rig workers observing and admiring wildlife even as they
554 continue their work as tiny cogs in the massive oil industry. It is also possible to see a
555 symbiotic metaphor here: either the unofficially nesting osprey might stand in for
556 plotlanders (particularly closed season ones) or vice versa.

557

558 Going back a few decades, this area is also intimately connected to the mining
559 industry. The construct of the British holiday is inextricably tied into the industrial
560 revolution, improved transportation, the rise of capitalism and the energy industries
561 themselves. The Northeast Lincolnshire seaside has long links with South Yorkshire
562 towns and cities to its West, especially around Sheffield. This began with mill workers
563 and other industrial workers, who, in the late nineteenth-century, celebrated wakes
564 (or feast) weeks, when the mills, factories and collieries were closed for an annual
565 overhaul, by trips to the seaside. In these early days of working class tourism, this was
566 all the holiday (unpaid at that) that they received.⁷

567

568 As the mines began to close through the 'fifties and 'sixties, culminating in the 'eighties
569 during Margaret Thatcher's leadership, some of these miners, the human waste
570 products of our old now uneconomic and increasingly unpopular energy sources, took
571 their redundancy payments, left their accommodation in Yorkshire and moved
572 permanently to the Fitties, joining the closed season community or relying on friends
573 and family for accommodation. There is a poignancy to these small chalets, remnants
574 of working class tourism, on this small piece of land sandwiched between the
575 remnants of the landbased coal industry and the current sea-based oil, gas and wind
576 industries.

577

578

579 One older female interviewee and long-term chalet-owner told us how she got to
 580 know the Fitties and became determined to make enough money to buy herself a
 581 chalet one day, eventually achieving this through shop-keeping:

582

583 As a little girl, my Dad
 584 down the mines, we came
 585 for Barnsley Feast Week
 586 fetching water from
 587 standpipes, lighting gas
 588 mantles, so careful, trying
 589 not to break them. They
 590 went up from 1 & 9 to
 591 half crown, up in flames
 592 if you touched them. It was
 593 just mud paths, dreadful
 594 when it rained but
 595 brilliant at the same time.
 596

597 This piece also demonstrates how the Fitties offered and still offers now comparatively
 598 simple living in terms of energy. The site is not on mains gas - calor gas bottles stand
 599 next to the chalets and are delivered and exchanged by lorries and many would run
 600 electricity from small windmills. Some of the older chalets still have these. The poem
 601 is often shown next to a painting of a chalet in a state of semi-repair emphasizing the
 602 mutability and flux of both structures and places and also the do-it-yourself
 603 involvement of the chalet owners, a theme developed further in the next section.

604

605 *Insert Figure 3 here Judith Tucker Renovating, 2015 Oil on Canvas 41 x 41 cm*

606

607 The council acted in line with the history of local authorities in relation to plotlands,
 608 which was, for many years to ignore them. On the Fitties it was 1938 before sewers
 609 were introduced, replacing the cart collecting the soil, electricity installed and they

610 begun to construct a road system based on the informal mud paths already
 611 established. Even then, many people didn't risk their cars on their Fitties - it was a
 612 slower place and pace of life for holiday-makers and local visitors alike, as this poem
 613 condensed from a conversation with a retired local woman:

614

615 We lived on the estate
 616 then, no one had cars then.
 617 We used to come up here
 618 with the pram. It was all dunes
 619 around here, all the way to the
 620 old bathing pool. My dad 'ld
 621 come home from work, get
 622 changed, bring sandwiches
 623 up on his bicycle and we'd
 624 have our tea in the dunes.
 625 Them were the days.
 626

627 The last line of this documentary poem is full of nostalgia and cliché, easily dismissed,
 628 yet what is being valued here is what so many strung-out individuals and families are
 629 trying now to recover in our world of so-called "frictionless capitalism," a world in
 630 which effort is regarded as a problem for those who can afford it. Today's infantilising
 631 culture and commercial advertising encourages us to dial up a pizza and have a low-
 632 paid, zero hours worker deliver it on a motorbike, rather make our own sandwiches
 633 and cycle them down to the beach to meet our loved ones after a hard day's work.
 634 The line "it was all dunes around here' was used as a title for one of the larger paintings
 635 which incorporates chalet and shed roofs, foliage and some eccentric life size models
 636 of birds, and serves as a reminder that the chalet site we now see is much altered after
 637 the 1953 flood.
 638

639 Several older people we talked to who have stayed on the Fitties since they were
 640 children clearly remember the oil lamps for lighting mentioned above, as well as the
 641 fetching of water from standpipes:

642
 643 We came for the whole
 644 Summer from Immingham.
 645 Everyone had a bridge
 646 across the dyke. We'd 8 tin
 647 buckets, we'd to traipse
 648 up and down 3 times a day
 649 to fill em up at the pump.
 650 We'd go cockling, picking
 651 samphire from the beds,
 652 watercress from the dyke,
 653 free-flowing then. Uncle Tom
 654 auctioned fish at Grimsby
 655 Docks; he had about 4
 656 languages. There he is, doing
 657 the roof repairs as usual.
 658

659 Immingham is a local commercial port town largely created in the early Twentieth
 660 Century with the building of its dock, railway and industrial factories. To summarise,
 661 Fitties people came largely from Northern cities and towns, predominantly South
 662 Yorkshire often working for the carbon energy industries. They were not well off in
 663 the main, but they were practical, on holiday as in the rest of their lives, foraging for
 664 cockles, picked samphire and watercress and collecting coal from the beaches. This
 665 kind of subsistence living extended into the ways in which the chalets were
 666 constructed, and maintained. Although for some this way of life was a temporary
 667 contrast to a working existence, for others it became a more permanent way of life.

668

669

670 **There's always something you need to do that you've never done before: recycling,**
 671 **adhocism and self-build**

672

673 In the spirit of plotlanders everywhere, Fitties people were traditionally and
674 frequently still are self-builders. As Walton notes of early plotlands, they were
675 originally composed of:

676

677 ... unplanned, self built, knots and straggles of seasonably occupied dwellings
678 featuring creative adaptations of old tram cars, railway carriages, old army
679 huts and later bus bodies which sprang up on the shoreline ... offering a
680 foothold to bohemian seekers after the simple seaside life or, increasingly
681 working class families whose only hope of affording a seaside holiday ... was via
682 this makeshift and independent route (Walton, 2000 p36).

683

684 While there are a few very old chalets left on the Fitties (such as the appropriately
685 named *LingaLonga* and *Era*), there are certainly no railway carriages left. Godfrey
686 Holmes in a 2017 *Independent* article, "A last hurrah for plotlanders, Britain's interwar
687 guerrilla housebuilders," gives a lively account of the kinds of materials used:

688

689 ...timber and felt are essential ingredients of plotland, which other
690 materials are favoured? Panels of asbestos. Corrugated iron. Iron
691 sheets now rusting as wall or covering. Hardboard: later
692 supplemented with chipboard. Clapboard. Lots of it. Chicken-wire
693 also. Car doors. Flint. Pebbles. Second-hand bricks. Discarded glass.
694 Recycled anything. (Holmes 2017).

695

696 All of these, and more, can be seen on the Fitties, especially in the older chalets and
697 in the piles of possible, potential materials stored under tarpaulins in the more
698 ramshackle of the plots. At the Fitties, inhabitants used and re-used and swapped and
699 bartered building materials, cobbling together chalets, huts and sheds from old
700 materials, often left over from the war. One writer of a memory postcard recalls:

701

702 *Our bungalow is made up of two WWII huts from USAAF Goxhill.*
 703 *Brought to the Fitties in the Fifties. Legend has it that the actor*
 704 *Clarke Gable slept in one when he was based as Goxhill.*

705
 706 We stayed in this chalet several times with its sign saying: “Did Clark Gable Sleep
 707 Here?”

708 This poem, created from words spoken by a long term male resident of the Fitties,
 709 now in his seventies, recalls in how he came to live there:

710
 711 I’m a cabinet maker, bit
 712 of all sorts really. A mate
 713 bought a place on 8th Avenue.
 714 I came to help him, never
 715 went home. People kept saying
 716 when you’ve done that can you
 717 do me this or can you do me
 718 that? In two years I’d enough
 719 to buy my own. You bought ‘em
 720 from the owners then, you bought
 721 ‘em as seen, everything in. We knew
 722 it were used in the War, billeted
 723 to soldiers, nothing more.
 724 There’s always something
 725 you need to do that you’ve
 726 never done before.

727
 728 This use of readily available materials *ad hoc*, as Joanne Lee notes, “is about doing
 729 something with what you’ve got, and doing something *now* – not waiting for the
 730 perfect time in a perfect future where perfect materials and perfect tools are
 731 available” (Lee, 2010, p 6). Lee’s essay draws on Jencks and Silver’s (1972) book on
 732 *adhocism* and argues that British allotment sheds and the Humberston Fitties,
 733 themselves, were precursors of the idea of “*retrieval adhocism*” a term coined by
 734 Jencks and applied to the 1960s and 1970s counterculture and hippy communes (Lee,
 735 2010). She notes that “for Jencks it is a particularly democratic kind of creativity, in

736 which one fashions one's personal environment from impersonal subsystems that
737 already exist." (Lee, 2010, p.1)

738

739 This adhocist approach became so highly valued that the council attempted to
740 institutionalise it in the "Chalet Design Guide" (1997) published just after the
741 declaration of conservation status. This document specified how homes are to be
742 repaired or altered, declaring that "[d]esigns will be expected to show individuality,
743 diversity of appearance, a mixture of dimensions and volumes," that "recycled
744 materials and those from sustainable sourced resources will be encouraged" and that
745 "it is the uniformity of mass produced material which should be avoided" (North East
746 Lincolnshire, 1997). At first it seems a trifle ironic that such a document should exist,
747 but the language reveals that it is not just for their quaint aesthetic appeal that we
748 value these settlements, but for their attitude to materials, for their emphasis on
749 sustainability and recycling in place long before these terms were so commonly
750 employed.

751

752 Building work on the Fitties is collaborative, individualistic and creative, often merging
753 the practical with the decorative or artistic, and frequently involving found objects,
754 objects other people dump, leave to collect, or which wash up on the beach. Talking
755 with one ex-coalminer about his spectacular display of flowers and surreal objects in
756 front of his house, he assured us that every single object was salvaged. Gesticulating
757 at the lions; pillars; squirrels; wishing wells; mushrooms; canons; footballers; balls;
758 pots; flowers and stones, he said, "Everything's thrown away, even the flowers. All this
759 stuff here's what people are throwing away." The flowers were discarded by council

760 gardeners as they replaced one display with another along local promenades and
761 roundabouts. His own display brought all materials together in an equality that could
762 be read one and the same time as a satirical take on taste, but also a radical respect
763 for these objects as on an equal level regardless of origin, not just their pasts as human
764 objects, but their own individual entities as beings, be they plastic or stone, wood or
765 plant, officially living or dead.

766

767 Recycling principles extend to all elements of life, including history. As is implied here,
768 there's much we can learn for the future from looking into the history of places, from
769 layering into our artistic fieldwork a sense of individual and collective pasts, as well as
770 archival local researches. This process, which runs parallel to the painting, drawing,
771 writing and listening that takes place in the field itself, is akin to deep-mapping
772 processes as advocated by Pearson and Shanks (2001). They call upon us "to record
773 and represent the grain and patina of place and landscape "through juxtapositions and
774 interpretations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic,
775 the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual' (p9).

776

777 We attempt to do this in our local exhibitions by showing textual and visual texts from
778 diverse sources. Before it was a plotland, the Fitties was a place where people camped
779 and indeed some older residents still refer to it as a/the camp. This poem is made
780 entirely from phrases used in newspaper reports on early camping at the Fitties before
781 the First World War, as cited by Alan Dowling in *Humberston Fitties: the story of a*
782 *Lincolnshire plotland*, pp21-3, 29:

783

784	unwonted animation	attractive incident
785	mass of driftwood	sandhill fires
786	truly Bohemian	alfresco meals
787	water from the spring	summer by summer
788	free and easy	the fun of the thing
789	reading and walking	croquet or tennis
790	wading and gathering	the benefits of outdoor life
791		

792 This poem has been shown next to a painting of a decaying chalet which was soon to
793 be demolished and a new one built on the same site. It demonstrates what
794 characterised life on the pre-war Fitties and reminds us of something of the original
795 essence of the place. In many ways these values (beyond the financial) still survive and
796 we recognise the need for them, hence the revival of the concept and indeed the
797 phrase, “well-being”. This word is used in one of our memory cards by a couple who
798 built their place from “demolition timber” after the floods in 1953: “the fitties is part
799 of your soul and well being.” Many of the people we talked to had moved to or visited
800 the Fitties in an attempt to restore this sense. Here are the words of one retired owner
801 of a holiday house on the Fitties:

802

803 I only come here
804 when the weather’s
805 good. I’ve been more
806 this year than ever
807 before. My wife’s been
808 poorly, throat cancer
809 you know. After all
810 the treatment, the
811 chemo, we came. My
812 travelling days are
813 long gone and the
814 fresh air helps her
815 to breathe easier.
816

817 We can see here the enduring sense of “the benefits of outdoor life.” Is it an
818 anachronism that the Fitties is still here or is the fact that it is, and that it was

819 designated a conservation area in 1996, reveal what we value? Will these values be
820 undermined or upheld by the current ownership? For how long will the Fitties survive?

821

822 **“restored my faith in nature & mankind”**: Fitties futures and the value of “nature”
823

824 The pre-war phrases in the poem cited above emphasise how intertwined the
825 “natural/cultural” past and present of this landscape is, thus eroding away at binary
826 ways of thinking about place as predominantly “natural” or “cultural”, “rural” or “non-
827 rural” (Casey 1993, Haraway 2003). Robert Macfarlane refers to this, acknowledging
828 when you are in a landscape that might be termed ‘wild,’ “the human and the wild
829 cannot be partitioned.” (MacFarlane, 2007, p 127) He situates this discussion, in part,
830 in the story of plotlands now deceased:

831

832 North of me here in Essex, I knew, were the so-called ‘plotland’ woods
833 of Laindon and Thundersley: young woods that had sprung up on land
834 that had been built on in the late nineteenth century, and then again
835 during the great slump in land prices of the inter-war years. Street after
836 street of bungalows, many of them self-built, had rotted back into the
837 ground, and the trees had returned – native oak, ash and hornbeam –
838 and with them had come the creatures. (MacFarlane, 2007, p 282)

839

840 Laindon is now a nature reserve, its one remaining chalet preserved as a museum.⁸

841 Unlike plotlands like Peacehaven which have been largely built up or developed,
842 Laindon has been “re-wilded.” Re-wilding is of course a controversial subject in today’s
843 environmental politics (see for example Monbiot 2013). For MacFarlane the possible
844 futures evoked by places such as Laindon may be sad on one level, but on another
845 they contain hope for our over-stretched and crowded island:

846

847 Abandoned places such as these provide us not only with images of the
848 past but also with visions of the future. As the climate warms, and as
849 human populations begin to fall, increasing numbers of settlements will
850 be abandoned. Inland drought and rising sea-levels on the coasts will
851 force exodus. And wildness will return to these forsaken places.
852 Vegetable and faunal life will reclaim them. (MacFarlane, 2007 p. 282)

853

854 As we argued above, this is a one possible, perhaps ultimately probable, future for the
855 Fitties, situated as it is in an area where all land has been “reclaimed,” or perhaps
856 borrowed is a better word, from the sea. For the present however, the Fitties will not
857 be re-wilded. It is hard to believe that Tingdene, whose company manufacture and sell
858 off-the-peg homes, will resist the temptation to populate the Fitties site, whether
859 slowly by stealth or more wholeheartedly, with their own products. These will not of
860 course be the classic self-built homes created from local resources with local and
861 individualistic identity. Already this tendency towards “blandscape” creeps into the
862 replacement chalets we see on some of the empty plots that arise on the Fitties when
863 chalets decay and collapse or are taken down. We memorialised these in paintings
864 and poems of some chalets on the brink of demolition.

865

866 Place figure 4 here Judith Tucker *Truly Bohemian*, 2016 Oil on Canvas 36” x 48”

867

868

869 The names of Tingdene products reveal the inspirations and aspirations appealed to:
870 Kudos; Hunting Lodge; Country Lodge; Dolben Lodge and Regency Classic.
871 Interestingly the places that make up the names of some of these products also reveal

872 associations far from Northern British seaside towns and very far indeed from the
 873 Northern cities where most of the Fitties dwellers hail from: Kensington; Alpine Lodge;
 874 Tresco; Savannah; Havana; Valetta and Arcadia. Tarlo has worked with the names of
 875 Fitties chalets and some of them are not so far from these in their fanciful nature but
 876 there is a vital difference between making and naming your own fantasy retreat and
 877 having one manufactured and named for you. We are reminded of the quaint booklet
 878 on Fitties style cited above: "it is the uniformity of mass produced material which
 879 should be avoided."

880

881 Tarlo collected and played "name games" with these names, grouping them into little
 882 four-line poems based around principles of sound and sense. Yes, we saw aspirations,
 883 though these could often be read with a pinch of salt in context:

884

885 Tudor Cottage
 886 The White House
 887 Cherry-Wood Chalet
 888 Le Chateau
 889

890 Other names were somewhat humbler in association; references to cabins, dens,
 891 shacks and cottages are common:

892

893 Doric
 894 The Hut
 895 The Little Haven
 896 Hideaway
 897

898 Many names are deeply personal and declarative of ownership:

899 Ann's Den
 900 Ellie's Place
 901 Eth's Den
 902 Grandad's

903

904 Others, such as “Davlins,” “Janeric” and “GerryMyra” are testimonies to love, the
905 chalet representing a fused entity, a shared dream place.

906

907 In one way, it seems a shame to unpick the associations of these name groupings here
908 especially when this causes us to neglect the sonic games also being played in their
909 composition. When exhibited interspersed amongst Tucker’s smaller, unevenly sized
910 paintings of chalets and surrounding combination of “wild” foliage and planted shrubs,
911 these poems tell their own story draw forth a sense of what people value. They
912 emphasise the individualism of people who live on and visit the Fitties, an
913 individualism balanced with a strong sense of community that still exists and is
914 referenced by many Fitties’ people, though some speak of it being eroded in more
915 recent times.

916

917 Returning to our environmental theme, many Fitties names simply evoke the peaceful
918 associations of being near nature. In particular, the sea just over the dunes is often
919 referenced:

920

921 Sea Breeze
922 Sea Way
923 Seachelles
924 Samphire
925

926 The importance of the seaside location cannot be denied as the resident who refers
927 to its “primal” qualities above suggests. One or two also reference the more-than-
928 human creatures that inhabit our world

929 The Foxhole
930 The Willow
931 Mole Hill Bank
932 Swallows Nest
933

934 Timothy Morton may have argued in his 2007 book *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* that the word “nature” with all its Romantic baggage must “wither away.” (Morton, 2007, p 1) As artists and writers engaged in the “environmental arts and humanities” we may agree, but we must not forget the discourse of the world we are living in where the word flourishes and is mobilised daily for ever-more-complex eco-ethical debates and purposes. “The State of Nature” reports brought out by leading wildlife organisations in the U.K. firmly employ it from the title onwards and provide invaluable information for activists and academics.

942

943 The word “nature” is used by many Fitties dwellers, including the woman (who describes herself as “a girl from Brum”) whose words are cited in our sub-title here: “restored my faith in nature & mankind”.. There are conservationists on the Fitties, declared and undeclared and certainly unacknowledged, the planters of trees, the installers of handwritten notices about slowing for hedgehogs, the secret feeders of foxes. There is often a poignant contrast between the animal-shaped ornaments in the gardens and the creatures living there. On one visit we glimpsed a fox darting in front of a stone crocodile dressed in England football regalia. The cement squirrel in the painting *We were all close around here* looks up quizzically at the large England flag.

953

954 We were struck by the affection and support of the wildlife on the Fitties and adjacent
955 coast. One older man told us of the triple roof on his building - as each one failed, the
956 next owner placed another one over the top. Now the spaces between are full of
957 nesting birds - "We don't disturb them" he said, "they were here before us". Others
958 are members of The Woodland Trust and the RSPB (Royal Society for the Protection
959 of Birds) and attempt to interest them in the land on and around the Fitties. One of
960 these women was active in planting on empty plots to prevent them becoming dumps,
961 and in forming "community gardens." Since Tingdene took over, a tree that she
962 planted in an empty plot next to hers, was threatened by the company but was saved
963 by a community protest. Will it one day be replaced by a Tingdene "park home" or
964 "holiday lodge"?

965

966 It is early days to judge the new owners, but it is hard to believe that this private
967 ownership will be a completely positive step either for the Fitties people, the
968 conservation status or the broader SSI status of the coastline. Perhaps there has been
969 an opportunity missed. What other different possible futures might this creative,
970 practice-led, community engaged work allow us to imagine? After all, Colin Ward is
971 well known as a pre-cursor of the transition movement with his concerns about the
972 unequal distribution of land and the need for sustainable housing. What might have
973 happened if we extended the notion of adhocism, "the doing something with what
974 you've got now" to the way we think and make communities as well as how we make
975 paintings and write about these areas? Might it be that there is more at stake here
976 than nostalgia for mid-century utopianism? Might there be more at stake than a
977 sanctuary for ex-miners, a way that a few oddbods might eek out an existence? Like

978 Climate camps, like the allotment movement, might we see in this humble patch of
979 land surrounded by the global infrastructure of various kinds of energies, of trade, of
980 tourism the possibility of recognising and understanding the need for vast,
981 organisational changes, in wider politics, in everyday life, and in environmental
982 attitudes and actions.

983

984 Alongside, and perhaps more important than our attempts to engage people in some
985 aesthetic appreciation of our work and pleasure in their own creativity and memories,
986 lie a series of place-based and eco-ethical concerns. Through exhibition and workshop,
987 we attempt to increase, or more commonly unearth, affective and effective
988 understanding and value of place. This includes the desire to consider the
989 conservation of local environments and stimulate debate about wider global issues, in
990 this case, heritage and tourism, flood risk, climate change and energy politics. It's on
991 the small and local scale though that there is also impact. In an informal conversation
992 with a resident who was setting up the community interest company, we asked if we
993 could assist in any way. She replied: "You've done your bit with the exhibition and
994 talking to everyone. People have come together and stopped arguing as much". The
995 responses to our evaluative questionnaire from local people at our most local
996 exhibition at the Cleethorpes Discovery Centre, about a mile from the Fitties
997 corroborates this: "Visiting and listening to the stories. It has been a stunning piece of
998 work and benefited so many with pride and enjoyment" and "Deeply satisfying
999 depiction of a special area. I am not a Fitties resident but a frequent visitor that
1000 recognises its special atmosphere and status. Long may it be as it is. This exhibition in
1001 its various forms is a major contribution to making this possible." Perhaps, the

1002 following more modest response, is all the more poignant for its understated
 1003 commentary on an enhancement of an everyday experience, and a fitting way to
 1004 conclude: “Really interesting combination of images and words, a lot to reflect on. I
 1005 will think a little differently of the Fitties now when I walk the dog each Sunday
 1006 morning through there.”

1007

1008 **Acknowledgements**

1009

1010 With thanks to the people of the Fitties, Humberston; to the curator and artist Linda
 1011 Ingham and the Arts Council, England for the original commission to work on the east
 1012 coast; the Discovery Centre Cleethorpes; Grimsby Fishing Heritage Centre and to
 1013 Daniel Eltingham (Research Assistant) for collating data on the project.

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1016 **Endnotes**

1017 ^{1 1} Plotlands can be briefly defined as places where individuals have historically self-
 1018 built holiday houses. There is a more detailed account of their history in the second
 1019 section of this paper, “plotland, behind land, edgeland.” In addition see our journal
 1020 article Tarlo, H. and J. Tucker, J *'Off path, counter path': contemporary walking*
 1021 *collaborations in landscape, art and poetry*. *Critical Survey*, 29 (1). pp. 105-132 for a
 1022 more detailed account of our working processes.

1023 ² The work from this project has been shown locally in Cleethorpes, Grimsby and Brigg,
 1024 nationally in Sheffield, Cambridge, London and the Isle of Wight and internationally in
 1025 Yantai, Nanjing and Tianjin in China, as well as being discussed in Brussels and Krakow.

1026 ³ For a more detailed discussion of this aspect of our collaboration see our book
 1027 chapter Tarlo, H and J. Tucker, J “Drawing closer”: an ecocritical consideration of
 1028 collaborative, cross-disciplinary practices of walking, writing, drawing and exhibiting
 1029 in In: Barry P. and W. Welstead, (eds.) *Extending ecocriticism : crisis, collaboration*

1030 *and challenges in the environmental humanities*. (Manchester, Manchester University
1031 Press) pp 47-69.

1032 ⁴ The photographer Annabel McCourt joined us in this aspect of the enterprise and
1033 contributed photographic portraits of interiors of chalets and people to the project
1034 and these were exhibited alongside the other work.

1035 ⁵ There are exceptions, as this memory postcard demonstrates: “Made the ‘girl’ from
1036 B’rum welcome & restored my faith in nature & mankind” (B’rum is slang for
1037 Birmingham).

1038 ⁷ John Walton, 1983, and 2000 has written extensively on the social history of the
1039 British seaside and Colin Ward’s *Arcadia for All* explores the plotland movement in

1040 ⁸ Footnote <http://www.essexrecordofficeblog.co.uk/tag/plotlands/>

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