Shadows on the path: negotiating geopolitics on an urban section of Britain's South West Coast Path

James D Sidaway
School of Geography, University of Plymouth, Drake Circus, Plymouth, Devon PL4 8AA, England
Received 6 May 2008; in revised form 2 May 2009; published online 2 October 2009

Abstract. The challenge of producing geographical narrative has recently been enhanced through work under the banners of affect and nonrepresentational theory. This has been registered in a range of topics in cultural, social, and political geography, and impacted in work on landscape. Such work has antecedents in several decades of humanistic geography and is immersed in more recent writings on performance and subjectivity and the critical rethinking of being, dwelling, movement, and place. With those and allied works in mind, this paper interrogates such literatures through writing about walking an urban section (through the port of Plymouth) of Britain's South West Coast Path; one of the few places where any of the twenty demarcated national trails and long-distance routes in the UK intersects a city. The existence of a rich literature on strolling in urban space opens up possibilities and connections. However the approach here is deliberately eclectic and also draws on works from/about geopolitics, natural history, and urban studies. My purpose here is to bring such literatures into closer and productive dialogue, through an account that shifts geographical and temporal scales and perspectives. This is done through the device of an evening's walk along a section of the path: negotiating spaces of capital and sovereignty. Military geography and security/insecurity emerge as master keys to how topography has been shaped here and the paper draws a series of connections between landscape, life, death, and military activities, both near and far. What the paper aims to do, therefore, is to illustrate how geopolitics affects us—to illustrate how the repercussions of militarism, war, and death are folded into the textures of an everyday urban fabric. This has implications for how other landscapes, places, and paths might be understood.

“Sun Tzu
a poet and strategist
he teaches us
that the elements of war are these
measurement of space
estimation of quantities
calculations
comparisons
chances of victory
...
always survey the ground
carefully like a mapmaker
touch rock soil sand like a farmer

... ground may be classified
as accessible entrapping
indecisive constricted
precipitous and distant

know always
that speed is the essence of war
at first be shy—then
when you see an opening
swift as a hare”

Tom Paulin (2002, page 85)

“So it’s all there in the breath of the stones. There is a geology of time! We can take the bricks in our hands: as we grasp them, we enter it. The dead moment only exists as we live it now.”

Iain Sinclair (1988, page 112)

Introduction
A revolution in landscape
This paper is about an evening’s walk along the section of Britain’s South West Coast Path that runs through the city of Plymouth. Reflections on the walk embody how
geopolitics affects us; how the repercussions of war and death are folded into the textures of an everyday urban fabric. Through a variety of tracks and inspirations from geographical and other writings, I argue that this has implications for how other landscapes, places, and paths might be understood.

In human geography and allied disciplines, increasing critical attention is being dedicated to the social relations of emotion and action under the label of ‘affect’ and more broadly to the slipperiness of representation. In respect of the former, reviewing work in humanitistic, feminist, and nonrepresentational geographies, Liz Bondi (2005, page 433) has argued that they have paved the way for:

“emotion to be approached not as an object of study but as a relational, connective medium in which research, researchers and research subjects are necessarily immersed.”

Subsequently Ben Anderson and Paul Harrison (2006, page 334) have sketched how such manoeuvres “indicate broad fields for diverse engagements.” At the same time, ‘nonrepresentational theory’ yielded a substantial enough literature to merit entries in *The Dictionary of Human Geography* (Anderson, 2009) and the *International Encyclopaedia of Human Geography* (Cadman, 2009) as well as a survey in *Progress in Human Geography* (Lorimer, 2005; 2008). In the first of his review essays, Hayden Lorimer (2005, page 83), describes how the term ‘nonrepresentational theory’:

“has become an umbrella term for diverse work that seeks better to cope with our self-evidently more-than-human, more-than-textual, multisensual worlds.”

He proposes the term ‘more-than-representational’, seeking to summarise a complex literature without erasing its nuances as a focus on how life takes shape, is sensuous, interactive, and not reducible to simple models or logics. A wariness of elevating practice (via ‘affect’) to the role of a new master concept, leads Clive Barnett (2008, page 188) to discern within the literature “a tendency to simply assert the conceptual priority of previously denigrated terms—affect over reason, practice over representation” noting how this sometimes reproduces (albeit in an inverted way) some of the very logics that this strand of geographical work seeks to problematise.

However, one grounded way in which such debates have been registered is in a shift in work on landscape. Landscape has a range of meanings—it is perhaps almost as broad a concept as nature (described as the most complex concept/word in the English language). According to Jessica Dubow (2009, page 124), the complexity of the term

“is matched only by the clamor of competing theoretical and methodological positions which have sought to understand it.”

In the original Dutch, *landschap* may have referred to the portrayal of compact, discrete spaces. But in English, where according to John R Stilgoe (2005, pages 29–30): “Landscape endures and thrives because the English language is particularly unsuited to topographical description”, its uses have broadened. Thus in geography the insights of decades of work on the historical and ecological geography of landscapes [the works of Darby (1940), Sauer (1925), and Hoskins (1955) are key early examples(1)], as *made* and subsequently on their iconography and textuality [registered in the collection by Cosgrove and Daniels (1988) and the work of Lowenthal(2) as *seen* are now being supplemented by work on landscape being inhabited, traversed, and *felt*.

---

(1) See the survey in Baker (2003) and that by Wylie (2007a) about this genre and subsequent work on landscape.

(2) See the survey and account of this work in Olwig (2003).
Embodying the latter, the experience of walking a section of Britain’s South West Coast Path forms the point of departure for what has quickly established itself as a key paper (Wylie, 2005a) in fostering this shift. John Wylie’s paper explores meanings and experiences of a coastal landscape: a subjectivity and spatiality derived from walking. With antecedents in several decades of humanistic geography and immersed in more recent work on performance and the critical rethinking of the essence of being in places, Wylie (2005a, page 234):

“details various affinities and distanciations of self and landscape which emerge in the course of walking a fairly wild, lonely and demanding stretch of the Path. The paper thus works within a particular narrative and topographic frame: it tells the story of a single day’s walking ... 4th July 2002.”

In a lively exchange, Mark Blacksell(3) (2005, page 519) admired Wylie’s poetics and enthusiasm, whilst pointing out that:

“Had it been rooted more securely in the wider literature on the coastal landscape, particularly relating to the South West Peninsula, and had it made more explicit reference to some of the political realities surrounding access to the countryside, then it would have been far easier to relate to its general case.”

Wylie (2005b, page 522) responded with a defence of talking about landscape, “in terms of the materialities and sensibilities with which we see”. Wylie (2005a, page 235) had described this project as “an experimental approach to the performative milieu of coastal walking”, which is “in the spirit of recent geographical experimentations with format, narrative and modes of address.” That paper thus appears to be concerned less with the practices and politics of the path itself than with the varied and multiple “configurations of self and landscape emergent within the performative milieu of coastal walking.”

Wylie considers affect and perception in particular, arguing these are domains that are ‘more-than-subjective’. Underpinning this are key epistemological principles: notably against the conception of individuals as discrete subjects, a refusal of any a priori separation of subject and object, perceptions and facts, mind and matter.

With all this in mind, my paper considers what happens to these principles when the walking and writing are done on an urban section of the same path? How might they then be pushed in some other directions? The existence of other—ethnographic-style—work on ways of walking [see the collection in Ingold and Vergunst (2008) and Middleton (2009)], a more explicitly geopolitical account of walking in a ‘vanishing landscape’ of Palestine as the territory is overwritten by Israeli colonisation (Shehadeh, 2007) and Joseph Amato’s (2004, page 2) authoritative history of the way that walking “is joined to a time, condition, society and culture” of the walker(s), plus critical literature on strolling in urban space all open up possibilities and politics. Texts under the label of ‘psychogeography’ have also foregrounded the politics and experiences of walking in Western (usually British and European) cities. The original situationist psychogeographies by Guy Debord and his comrades in 1950s and 1960s Paris have been popularised in the writings of the British author Iain Sinclair and subject also to occasional synthesis and academic treatment (Coverley, 2006; Murray, 2007; Solnit, 2001). Thus Merlin Coverley (2006, page 10) describes how in the 1950s in Paris (and some of the language that frequently crops up in this work reveals these origins; the references to dérive, détournement, and flâneur):

(3) Blacksell sadly died in January 2008 at the age of 65. An obituary was published in The Geographical Journal (Roberts, 2008). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to set out the nuances of Wylie’s paper as I reread and summarize here that exchange with Mark Blacksell.
psychogeography became a tool in an attempt to transform urban life, first for aesthetic purposes but later for increasingly political ends. Debord's oft-repeated 'definition' of psychogeography describes 'The study of specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals'... and, in broad terms, psychogeography is, as the name suggests, the point at which psychology and geography collide, a means of exploring the behavioural impact of urban place. And yet the term is, according to Debord, one with a pleasing vagueness'... . This is just as well, because, since his day, the term has become so widely appropriated and has been used in such a bewildering array of ideas that it has lost much of its original influence.”

In turn this work (and practice) draws on other sources and inspirations, including Walter Benjamin and Michel de Certeau and a long history of literary and scholarly works on urban modernity (amongst them the figures of Poe, Baudelaire, Joyce and Simmel). All this has inspired some contemporary geographers (Bassett, 2004; Battista et al, 2005; Bonnett, 1989; Fenton, 2005; Pinder, 1996; 2001; Wunderlich, 2008). And at their best the writing, art, and practice inspired by this are also alert to the power of the state and capital in defining the meaning and experience of the urban. Forty plus years of critical urban and economic geography excavating the urbanisation of capital form a vital backdrop; the story of all lives and cities everywhere, however these are filtered and refracted through ('personal') lenses of perception. David Harvey's work looms largest here but Doreen Massey's has also been influential (both work through and write about specific urban places: Baltimore, London, Paris). This work and political geographies (especially those on military geographies, critical geopolitics, and postcolonialism) reinforce the possibilities for narrating a walk like mine. And, whilst none of these was in my rucksack (or rather, plastic bag) as I made it, they were next to my computer as I wrote the notes and followed the departures which form the basis for this paper. Through the subsequent writing, review, and rewriting (and, as will become clearer in the arguments that follow) made through a two-year period when I have frequently rewalked sections of the path and adjoining streets, a key target of this paper has remained an aspiration to connect recent debates about nonrepresentational theory (and allied work) in cultural geography and shifts in writing about landscape with those around geopolitics, militarism, and urban change. As it proceeds, the paper wrestles with finding an adequate voice. Basing it around the experience of walking invokes (and is informed by) the literatures briefly surveyed above. When I walked, I planned to write something afterwards that could be a mode of critical geopolitics and I have since been encouraged in this task by Martin Müller’s (2008) careful reconsideration of geopolitical discourse as language and practice and by the collection on critical geopolitics and everyday life by Rachel Pain and Susan Smith (2008). However, the narrative here is deliberately eclectic and also draws on other work (natural history writings, for example), shifting scale and perspective along the way. My purpose is to bring these literatures into closer and productive dialogues. The paper therefore aims to illustrate how geopolitics affects us—to illustrate how the repercussions of military violence are folded into the texture of everyday urban life in a provincial English city and thereby how we are constantly touched by multiple overlapping tragedies operating at different scales and yet intensified in certain sites. This is done through the device of recounting an evening’s walk along a section of the South West Coast Path in Plymouth (made on 6 December 2006); negotiating spaces of capital, sovereignty, and militarism. Since the walk, the question of who I walked with and how their life and death became entangled with these has become central. Military geography and security/insecurity emerge as master keys to how topography has been shaped and the paper draws a series of connections between landscape,
life and death, and military activities, both near and far. This has implications for how other landscapes, places, and paths might be understood.

Grounding
The 630 mile (1014 km) South West Coast Path that was established in stages through the 1970s and completed in 1978, now appears as a green line on maps produced by the UK’s national mapping agency (the Ordnance Survey) and forms the object of a series of National Trail Guides commissioned by a UK state agency charged with rural conservation and development (the Countryside Agency which existed from 1999 to 2006, but is now split into a number of new agencies, including Natural England and the Commission for Rural Communities) as well as forming the subject of an illustrated history (Carter, 2005). As that history notes at the outset, the origins of the network that became the coastal path were primarily strategic, insofar as in the 18th century they formed the routes for patrols seeking to control smuggling and to reserve the benefits of trade and taxes for the Crown.

This strategic–fiscal history is the condition of possibility for the path. Without this, it would not have come into being. Thus, whilst Blacksell (2005) was justified in stressing the complex of state agencies which today govern and maintain the path, we might push such references to the state a little further and deeper. That is amongst my purposes here, in an account that rests on a walk along a section of the path made in the course of a single evening: 6 December 2006. This urban section was selected in part to contrast with the walk narrated by Wylie (2005a). My walk was made late on a winter afternoon from Plymouth's Barbican and Sutton Harbour, alongside the docks of the Cattewatter, across the Laira Bridge, ending at what has become a park within a suburb of Plymouth: Hooe Lake. This section of the path becomes the Plymouth Waterfront Walkway. One of the published accounts of walking the entire path, largely by-passes Plymouth, with brief comment on the searchlights sweeping the naval dockyard and the city centre being full of tattooed sailors as the battle over the Falklands/Malvinas was waged:

"So many great voyagers had set sail from here: Cook, Darwin, Drake, The Pilgrim Fathers, now grey warships slipped through the black water; this city waited for news from the Falklands more than any other” (Wallington, 1986, page 164).

Yet as an official guidebook (the relevant page from my well-thumbed copy is also reproduced here in figure 1) notes:

“This route [of the coastal path through the city] was developed by Plymouth City Council and is the only stretch of the South West Coastal Path to run through a city. Along the route, marked by acorns on white hoops painted on lampposts, you will come across sculptures, poetry, industrial relics as well as passing through some of Plymouth's most interesting areas” (Le Messurier, 2006, page 82).

But once away from the start on the afternoon of the walk, they were almost deserted.

The walk
“Open to the English Channel yet protected from invasion by the very narrowness of its approach; sheltered from gales by the moorland heights behind; built on rocks of varied type which ensure a corresponding variety of flora and fauna.”

Charles William Bracken (1931, page 1)

“One thing the walk certainly does is put us back into our bodies, in the simplest and most ordinary way.”

Jane Routh (2007, page 144)
From the harbour to Cattewater

The walk began at Plymouth’s Barbican. This is the harbour-side tangle of streets where—in the 1930s—a waterfront monument to the crew and passengers of the Mayflower was built. The Barbican is a celebrated place of departures: (4) the Pilgrim Fathers, Captain Cook, the Tolpuddle Martyrs deported to Australia. Today I quickly pass the tourist information office and museum and, leading down into the water, the ‘Mayflower steps’, bearing their plaques and the remnants of the (now annual) laying of wreaths each September 11th (outdoing those long enacted each 4th July).

(4) Less so of arrivals; Katherine of Aragon came ashore here in 1501, en route to cement Spain’s (ill-fated, as it turned out), relationships with the Tudors. But only the first solo round-the-world yachtsman Francis Chichester who arrived in 1967 has a plaque celebrating his arrival here. Other parts of Plymouth, along the path (notably Millbay where transatlantic liners berthed) do recall arrivals, however. Further east on the path in Devon, Brixham one of the ports of Torbay—a safe harbour before Plymouth sound was rendered thus by the offshore breakwater—marks the arrival of William of Orange on 5 November 1688 with statutes and declarations in English and Dutch. The geopolitical consequences of 1688 (English history calls this ‘The Glorious Revolution’) for Britain and Ireland—and Europe—were enormous. The fleet that delivered William later sailed around to Plymouth, which became amongst the first localities in England to declare allegiance to King Billy.
proclaiming Anglo-American solidarity. That enduring and fateful alliance (and the military-economic presence that it enables), will be in my thoughts and evident in the views as the walk proceeds. What is at first most visible this afternoon, however, is the impact of capital and state immediately around the harbour. The area is gentrified. Waterfront apartments, galleries, bars and restaurants, yachts (a marina was developed here in the early 1970s), and the two hefty wind turbines that provide part of the power for a National Marine Aquarium (part owned by an investment trust controlled by the Al Maktoum family, the rulers of Dubai) form the view. There are still some active port buildings, a customs house (bearing the European Union’s starred blue banner), and fishing boats. This latest phase of (re)development in Plymouth reworks earlier ones, including the late 1940s and early 1950s redevelopment of a city on a Second World War blitz site where over a thousand lives were lost.

I begin the walk away from the Barbican (leaving those restaurants and cafes where I often go after work to dine with my family or with colleagues and friends), via a pedestrianised swing bridge: courtesy of the Sutton Harbour Company. Sutton Harbour was the core of Plymouth before it began to grow into a major naval port. And when it did, military use became tangled with commercial uses. For example, I know that HMS Amethyst (renamed Frigate 116 after the war) was broken up here—after being decommissioned on 19 January 1957. Amethyst had sunk U-1276 in February 1945 off the coast of Ireland, a minor skirmish in the battle of the Atlantic; but one that led to forty-nine German men ending up in a war grave of a depth-charge-pierced submarine beneath 75 m of water. It is more famous (and the subject of a 1957 British movie) as the protagonist in the 1949 ‘Yangtse incident’, when F116 was captured by the People’s Liberation Army in April 1949 en route from Shanghai to the British embassy in the republican capital of Nanking before it fell to the PLA. Twenty-two British sailors were killed. In a statement, Mao Tse-tung denounced British “imperialist aggression”, since British warships had moved inland towards territory still controlled by the Kuomintang:

‘the British have trespassed on Chinese territory and committed so great a crime, the People’s Liberation Army has good reason to demand that the British government admit its wrongdoing, apologize and make compensation. Isn’t this what you should do, instead of dispatching forces to China to ‘retaliate’ against the Chinese People’s Liberation Army? Prime Minister Attlee’s statement is also wrong ... . Britain, he said, has the right to send her warships into China’s Yangtse River. The Yangtse is an inland waterway of China. What right have you British to send in your warships? You have no such right. The Chinese people will defend their territory and sovereignty and absolutely will not permit encroachment by foreign governments’ (Mao Tse-tung, 1949).

The Second World War had ended four years before, but aftermath in China (and elsewhere in East and Southeast Asia) was now drawing the UK (back) into conflict with the forces of revolution; the entanglement of Cold War, the rise of Asian and African nationalisms, and the management of British imperial decline were underway. Indeed, insofar as the Second World War contained within it a number of conflicts, such incipient Cold War and revolutionary wars were integral to its dynamics. It is in this context, for example, that Howard Dick’s (2003) ground-breaking history of the

---

(5) See Robinson (2007) on the politics of preservation re the Barbican. An archive of material on the Barbican has been made available online by Plymouth City Council (www.plymouth.gov.uk/barbicanarchive).

(6) Ernest Mandel (1986) argued that the war comprised a series of interrelated conflicts, whose key features and emphases varied in time and space; including a clash between imperialisms, a communist–capitalist clash and wars of national liberation and revolution.
Javanese city of Surabaya details how British troops had to fight their way into the city which had fallen into the hands of Indonesian nationalists, who declared Independence before the British and Dutch arrived. After Japan's surrender, furious and vengeful battles ensued; all this in 1945–46 after the Second World War had ended. Hundreds of British (and British-commanded Indian) troops and many thousands of Indonesians died:

“A city that had without much damage survived the invasion and surrender of Japan was shattered by a British army. ... Its newly won Independence was bloodily extinguished by a European power that was not its colonizer and soon withdrew ... . The only party to benefit were the Dutch, who after November 1946 were able to reoccupy Surabaya as a battered, deserted and cowed city” (Dick, 2003, page 84).

Surabaya never would recover its former primacy in the East Indies. It has faded from maps and global consciousness, no longer the sugar and shipping centre of the early 20th century, when it invariably appeared as a node on world maps. Surabaya’s relative decline, already well underway by the 1930s, was greatly compounded by the ruin of 1946 and would be reinforced through a further bloodbath when Suharto came to power (with decisive CIA support) in the mid-1960s and the large-scale Indonesian communist party base there was smashed. Plymouth too has been shattered, by aerial bombardment, in 1941. More than 60,000 houses were destroyed, over a thousand were killed. Only fragments of the prewar city remain: significantly including many of the
fortifications. In Plymouth, as in Surabaya in 1946, the foremost victims were civilians. In an article published at that time in *The National Geographic Magazine*, Harvey Klemmer (1946, page 212) describes how from March 1941 “life in Plymouth took on the characteristics of a battlefield. Sirens were going most of the time. The bombers came by night; and in the daytime, when the harassed city was catching its breath, reconnaissance planes would shoot across the Channel to gloat over the handiwork of the night before and to plot new terror for the night to come.”

There is a wealth of writing on the bombardment, including its relationship to retaliation waged on German cities(7) and the contested course of remembering and reconstruction(8) since. Plymouth physically embodies these conflicts and my encounter with the landscape was prompting me (and has even more so since) to relate them to a host of wider thoughts about war, loss, and recovery.

Today, however, the guidebook to the path simply invites walkers to: “Take some time to explore the Barbican, the old part of Plymouth, with its shops, cafés and art galleries” (Le Messurier, 2006, page 82).

The harbour is full of yachts and a diminishing, but significant, fishing fleet. There are warnings and disclaimers, a reminder that access is regulated—a limit to (or right extended by) private ownership.(9) I am then back on a public road, on one side a children's playground (I am always on the lookout for such places, where I might take my youngest daughter to play) and flats originally constructed by state agency and now largely sold off through the first wave of neoliberal housing policy: the Thatcher

---

(7) Amongst the essential references are Blacksell's (1968) doctoral thesis on *The Effects of Bombing on the Urban Geography of the Eastern Ruhr* and the writing of W G Sebald (2003) on the destruction with its grounding in Benjamin and Adorno, and Horkheimer (see Jackman, 2004) and originally published in German in 1999 with the title *Luftkrieg und Literatur*. Sebald (who died in a car crash on 14 December 2001) was also fascinated with landscape and loss and latterly has provided Wylie (2007b) with inspiration. On the bombing of Plymouth, see Twyford (2005 [1945] and Wasley (1991). Figure 2 reproduces a map of the city recording where the bombs fell.

(8) From a substantial literature, here I will cite only brief extracts from three accounts. Firstly, the doctoral thesis by Adrian Passmore (1995, page 5) interrogating the plans for the postwar reconstruction of Plymouth (written by Patrick Abercrombie with J Paton Watson); “Although the plan involves itself with necessary day-to-day questions of servicing, housing, commercial, industrial and transport provision, it is my argument that new patterns into which these assemble demand shifts in thinking and relating inhabitants’ experience of the city.” Secondly the chapter by Brian Chalkley and John Goodridge (1991, pages 62 and 81) from a landmark collection of geographical essays published in the early 1990s tracing the trajectory of a *Plymouth: Maritime City in Transition*: “The rapid progression from destruction to proposals for rebuilding was made necessary by the ferocity of the air raids which fell on the town …. Contemporary estimates reported over 10,000 incendiary bombs dropped in the first ten minutes of the attacks, which continued for three hours. … For Plymouth itself the Plan represented a fundamental turning point: no single document before or since has exerted so profound an influence on the city's geography and development.” Finally Stephen Essex and Mark Brayshay (2005; 2007; 2008) have conducted pioneering work on the interaction of personalities, agencies, and politics in the reconstruction of Plymouth. This work sets agendas for historical geographies of reconstruction in other cities. Essex and Brayshay (2007, page 435) thus note how: “existing accounts of the post-war rebuilding of Britain's blitzed cities in general, and Plymouth in particular, have been oversimplified and occasionally rather sanitised. In part, the tendency to cling to neat, tidy versions of the past reflects a desire—perhaps a need—for a heroic narrative of triumph in the face of tragedy, austerity, and adversity. In fact, it is clear that the reality of urban reconstruction in Plymouth, a city for which an extensive archive of previously neglected documents exists, reveals the realisation of a visionary plan involved the reconciliation—through pragmatic compromise and the resolution of tensions and antagonisms—of the many competing claims of a wide range of vested interests both within and beyond the city.”

(9) On such contemporary urban enclosure and its relationship to ‘redevelopment’/gentrification in the English context, see the polemical account by Paul Kingsworth (2008).
government’s ‘right to buy’ state (or as it was called ‘council’) housing. Many will have since been sold on several times. The original relationship between residents and housing allocation on the basis of the local state’s categorisations of rights and ‘need’ has long ago been displaced by exchange for money. Those houses that remain in state ownership will since have been transferred to a private management company. But right opposite are new apartments visibly larger, securer, and obviously much more costly, built for immediate sale-for-profit by a private developer in the 1990s. These spaces are tangible features of the wider sociospatial polarisation in Plymouth. The literature on waterfront gentrification and on the sheer scale and extent of gentrification comes forcibly to my mind here. As one of the most useful papers amongst this large literature has documented, established categories and assumptions of what is a suburb, what is an inner city, are being overwritten by the reworking of the relationships between commerce, people, land, and property through heightened:

“processes of inner-city regeneration, whilst displaying many of the characteristics of gentrification such as displacement and social class upgrading, also bear some of the characteristics of suburbanization. This has been described in relation to the debate about gated communities as a process of ‘forting’” (Butler, 2007, page 764).

I am quickly away from this. There is no more housing redevelopment, but there are other forts. The view opens up: land, towers, ships, and sea. This contrast reminds me of James Crowden’s (2005, page 65) short account of the genealogy of landscape:

“The word landscape has an interesting pedigree. For a start it is foreign and has nothing to do with farming. It was first used in England in 1598. The term ‘land-skip’ originated in Holland as a painter’s term to differentiate between ‘landscapes’, portraits and ‘sea scapes’. These Dutch artists did far more than just record the landscape around them: they defined it. ... They gave the natural world a status that had not previously been accorded to it. Paintings up to this point had usually been either religious or personal portraits.”

But I am now looking at what is closer to hand. As the official guidebook(10) (see too, figure 1) to the path notes here:

“Traffic is now left behind as the Coast Path winds its way above the docks of the Cattewater to re-emerge in an area full of warehouses and factories. This is the industrial side of Plymouth—not the most picturesque area, but it was here at the mouth of the Plym that the city’s name originated, and it was from here that Sir Francis Drake set off around the world in 1577” (Le Messurier, 2006, page 82).

Guidebooks famously foreground the ‘picturesque’, an ideology that was devastatingly criticised by Roland Barthes in the late 1950s (the English translation is 1972) in his critical reading of the Blue Guides. For Barthes the continual stress on the picturesque on the part of the Blue Guides robbed landscapes of their complex and contested social relations (and obscured the way that they are the class-ridden products and

(10) The Situationists and associated movements who inspire the literature cited above would find following a guidebook anathema and it is clear (in retrospect) that the guidebook shaped where I began the walk. A fresh page of the guidebook begins where the South West Coast Path crosses the Barbican; otherwise I might have started on Plymouth Hoe or outside my office at the University of Plymouth, where at the time of the walk, a memorial to the civilian victims of the Second World War blitz on Plymouth was under construction, near to the site of a bomb shelter that suffered a direct hit resulting in seventy-six deaths on 23 April 1941. For a report on the unveiling of this monument and a link to an audio file with the words of a woman who survived the bomb (though her parents, sister, and grandfather did not), see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/devon/8013886.stm
objects of struggle\(^{(11)}\). Since then Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (2000, page 309) have noted how guidebooks have proliferated, especially those to cities:

“Some of the guidebooks—Baedeker, Michelin, The Rough Guide—have become institutions in their own right, provoking Second World War air raids and wars over their judgements. More than this, guidebooks have organised city life and have become constitutive of much of what modern cities are and how both visitors and more permanent inhabitants perceive them. These guidebooks ‘order’ the city in specific ways.”

Earlier guides to Plymouth (see the survey by Essex, 1991) could reward following and rereading and the School of Geography at the University of Plymouth also produces an annotated pamphlet designed to be followed by new students, whereby the norms of academic training in geography are invoked, raising “themes, issues and questions that interest geographers in urban places and landscapes” (Charlton, 2007, page 1). The guide I carry however is organised around a line, a path, forward movement, with few pauses or detours. Here, the Coast Path guidebook marks sites and worldly histories in spite of them not being conventionally picturesque. Today, though, the sites of world history making have mostly moved elsewhere.

Lots of the industry is derelict, forms of what James Anderson, Simon Duncan and Ray Hudson (1983) mapped as ‘redundant spaces’; no longer profitable as sites of production and circulation in a new geographical configuration of capital and thus largely devalorised and visibly decaying.\(^{(12)}\) I pass warehouses, old boatyards and newer scrapyards, second-hand car dealers. And there are fences and razor wire. The manholes and drains are larger though; the underground infrastructure\(^{(13)}\)

\(^{(11)}\) In addition to the pioneering work of Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels exploring the ideology of landscape, the way that it is product and domain of struggle and labour has since been developed in the rich Marxist account of the production of landscape by Don Mitchell (2001; 2003).

\(^{(12)}\) Such derelict landscapes (and other cityscapes) have led some geographers to explore and develop a literature on haunting (see the reviews by Holloway and Kneale, 2008; Maddern and Adey, 2008). I am ambivalent about much of this work, since it sometimes too casually skirts around politics and collective and personal traumas. However Tim Edensor’s (2008, page 331) work stands out precisely for its more direct engagement with such issues. He claims that: “Confronting ghosts is a necessary check on grand visions and classifications that fix understanding of place, for they can provide an empathetic, sensual, impressionistic insight into the unseen energies that have created the city.” Nonetheless, all this work focuses on ghosts as in an allegorical way. In contrast a number of sensitive anthropologies from the postcolonial South trace the way that ghosts and spirits figure as empirical social forces, albeit ones rooted in past geopolitical struggles (see, for example, Kwon, 2008, and Lan, 1995).

\(^{(13)}\) Maria Kaika and Erik Swyngedouw (2000) term such obscure but central, infrastructures a “phantasmagoria of urban technological networks”. They are also and often directly strategic. As I walk, within view again are those military communication towers. A quarter of a century ago, the journalist Duncan Campbell (1982) documented the extensive UK network of these and of bunkers, tunnels, and ‘civil defence’ networks. Notwithstanding the eclipse of the Cold War, since then, the privatisation of infrastructure, combined with digitisation and development of the Internet have multiplied the networks and complicated the state and capital webs in which they are connected. The ‘war on terror’ [sic] requires enhanced surveillance of all electronic communications (what GHCQ, the UK agency charged with their surveillance terms SIGINT) and Campbell has gone on to document how US facilities in the UK, such as Menwith Hill in Yorkshire and the ECHELON espionage network, plug into public and ‘private’ telephone, e-mail, financial flows, and Internet communication (see, for example, http://duncan.gn.apc.org/menwith.htm). There is a comprehensive report on ECHELON by the European Parliament. It is an astounding account of the scale and quasi-legality of interceptions (see http://www.fas.org/irp/program/process/rapport_echelon_en.pdf).
is less disguised here. I step on one, briefly reflecting on what is below, along the line of Stephen Graham’s (2000, page 271) words:

“The expanding subterranean metropolitan world consumes a growing portion of urban capital to be engineered and sunk deep into the earth. It links city dwellers into giant lattices and webs of flow which curiously are rarely studied and are usually taken for granted.”

Even without the occasional acorn sign and pointer, there is no way I could stray far from this path (sometimes now a road). It is an enforced segregation. Twice I become aware that I am under camera surveillance. Here the way of seeing and walking and being seen are evidently rather different from what Wylie has described in remote rural sections of the coastal path. A few roads cut through; some bear street signs with the European flag (a signifier of regional development aid). There is one point where I pass a security guard—at the gate to one of the wharves. He says something about it being windy tonight and I respond in agreement and push on, twice across a railway line. But it seems unused. It too is derelict.

What is evident is a military landscape, both relic and active. There is a point in the narration of his walk when Wylie (2005a, page 241) pauses at a stone and plaque commemorating a sunken First World War hospital ship that lies 20 miles offshore from a remote headland. He cannot quite pin down why the words on the plaque have such affects when he pauses there, noting that “these words for some reason affected me deeply.” The observation and the affect it registers are symptomatic of a subterranean geopolitics, for like Wylie at that point, I too am here very aware “of being on an island, of being on an aqueous globe, an earth encircled by a world of ocean.” But not just any island—one that hosted the capital of a global empire bound by command of the seas (Mackinder, 1902).

Behind me there is a citadel, built after the English civil war to garrison and overlook the rebel (parliamentary) town of Plymouth. It is still a military citadel, though I know that guided tours of a section are available in the summer. Beyond the citadel, where Madeira Road that flanks it opens into public land, are the war memorial and lighthouse on Plymouth Hoe. The citadel blocks all but the top of these from sight. But I think of the thousands of names—from around the Empire—inscribed at the memorial’s base. Two warships are offshore. In further view, there are forts and artillery towers, now mostly converted to other uses (one is a gym/leisure club), but also twin huge military radio antenna towers with flashing red lights. I look forward: out to sea. For a moment—the depth, ecology, and geological history of the seas and Plymouth’s role in charting these cross my mind (Gibbard, 2007; Southward, 1980; Southward and Roberts, 1987). A helicopter rattles overhead. There is a chronological layering of defensive and strategic landscapes here. Below are wharves that were vital parts of the Allied invasion marshalled in 1944, en route to the world war’s western front in France. The whole landscape is overwritten by this military past and presence, analogous to the way that the granite mass of Dartmoor is itself fundamental to the topographical structure of Devon County (see Hoskins, 1954, pages 14–15) and the limestone this yields to the forts, barracks, wharves, and castles that punctuate Devonshire coasts. Construction of these began in earnest in the 16th century with the need for a western naval base, to counter Spanish/Catholic maritime power, in the western approaches to England. London and the ports of the southeast were too distant to counter the threat of larger and faster fleets sailing out of Spanish ports. Later, the wars with France and—in the late 19th and halfway into the 20th century—rising German military power made and remade the landscape here, or

(14) See the gazetteer of Plymouth’s fortifications by Andrew Pye and Freddy Woodward (1996).
rather it shaped the coast/port-scape as a strategic one. The epicentre of Plymouth’s military engineering activity long ago moved across to the western fringes of the city, along the Tamar estuary at Devonport. Devonport now hosts DML, sold in the mid-1980s by Margaret Thatcher’s government. At the time of my walk, the core of DML where nuclear powered and nuclear-armed submarines are serviced was run by a business linked to US Vice President Dick Cheney. I subsequently read about vast cost overruns and a history of controversies over safety at the yard (particularly for the workforce, whose numbers have been regularly downsized over the past three decades) and how many other lucrative British military contracts, for barracks, tank transport, and other infrastructures of warfare were now being awarded to the same American company (see the acknowledgements to this paper). A few weeks before the walk, there had been an extraordinary request by the British government that trading in its shares on the New York Stock Exchange be suspended, given the strategic issues at stake and that DML was up for sale again. In June 2007 it was acquired by Babcock International Group PLC, which also owns the naval dockyards at Rosyth in Scotland and runs the Clyde Submarine Base at Faslane. DML (along with Faslane) are the sites where the submarines that carry the UK’s weapons of mass destruction are periodically berthed and serviced. The future generations of nuclear missiles that the British government has announced will be developed to replace the current fleet bearing US-manufactured Trident missiles may therefore not need to come so often to Plymouth. The longer term role for DML is uncertain.

Meanwhile however, the reinvigoration of the UK military-industrial complex—and with it other new deployments (by the Royal Marines to Afghanistan, for example) made from Plymouth—have become caught up in the latest phase of imperialism, the neocon fuelled wars of the junior Bush presidency and their recasting by Barack Obama. But this section of the walk, overlooking the estuary of the river Plym, which is known here as the Cattewater, brings mostly relics of earlier imperial moments into sight. Soon I am crossing the wide (it suddenly becomes an estuary just upstream) Plym, on the Laira bridge. There is some public art on a wall near a small boatyard and a marine supply shop that is being built, including a poem: “Plymouth Delta Blues”. And there is a wharf for the aggregates that are mined nearby and shipped away for construction industries. There is no one else walking here tonight and nothing at the wharf. But, I have often seen a boat loading here—registered in Limmasol—when I have crossed the bridge by bus in the day. Then the path is suburban. Oreston and Hooe. Bits and pieces of villages, that became Plymothian suburbs.

The guidebook suggests a detour, an alternative to the main path that here runs alongside roads (marked by red acorns on lampposts). I take it: the sunken track of a former railway line. There is more vegetation, but because it is winter, and since this stretch of old railway forms a wide path, it is not an obstacle. I think of flora, taxonomies, and biogeographies. And I recall a comment by David Harvey: something about never being far away from ‘nature’ even in the largest city. Harvey charts

\[15\] For the UK government statement on this, reviewing emerging threats, strategy, and legal frameworks, carrying, in its closing pages an image of a Russian marine patrol aircraft (supplied without apparent irony courtesy of the US Department of Defense), see MOD (2006).

\[16\] At the time, I had in mind Richard Mabey’s (1996) landmark \textit{Flora Britannica}, my reading of which has since been greatly enriched by Stephen Trudgill (2001; 2008). Reading some of the literature drawn on this paper, Trudgill suggestively proposes and charts a psychobiogeography (Trudgill, 2001); broader and more nuanced than calls for an ecopsychology (Roszak et al, 1995). There is considerably more work to be done in these registers and in ways that could reconnect a heritage of work on landscape/ ecological histories and other ‘natural histories’ with the critical insights of the last two decades of work on landscape in cultural geography. It must suffice to mention here the pointers and inspiration (which I have had in mind as I finalise this paper)
how the production\(^{(17)}\) of space accompanying the urbanisation of capital yields a ‘second nature’ (see especially Harvey, 1996; Smith, 1984). Finally, another housing development under construction, near the water again, and I stumble down to Hooe Lake. This shallow expanse of water is formed from a stream that was dammed to create a scenic site here, but it spills into a tidal inlet that forms a small harbour. Around the corner there is a water treatment plant. This is not far from where I live, so I have walked around here with my daughter; on a few short circular walks from home we have already explored this area of park, coast, and path. There is an old quarry. It is clear that I have passed along the edge of several others. They were the source of vast quantities of limestone, some for domestic construction, but much for making fortifications; building the breakwater (which commenced in 1812) out beyond the Hoe to protect the entrance to Plymouth sound required 41 million tons of stone and took 29 years (Hoskins, 1955). Beyond it, the sea is often still quickly treacherous. A few weeks after my walk, two American sailors drowned after being washed overboard from the deck of their nuclear-powered submarine as it sailed from Plymouth.\(^{(18)}\) At some point, this lake became a place to abandon old boats and a few wrecks are one-quarter submerged (it is high tide).

**At the lake**

It is almost dark by the time I reach the lake and I am a bit uneasy. There is—as feminist and social geographers have charted—a complex geography of fear\(^{(19)}\) in public spaces. But as the light fades, reassuringly there are a few walkers about. This is a park, near houses, and people come out to walk (mostly with dogs) in the evening in a way that hardly happens around the Cattewater. I pull away from the path to walk back to the road and the end of the walk. As I do, there is a pedestal with a sign about how the South West Coast Path here intersects the north-to-south cross Devon path. I know from an account of the buildings\(^{(20)}\) of Devon that the house once here

\(^{(16)}\)(continued)

of David Abram (1996), Mark Cocker (2008), Richard Mabey (2007), and Nan Shepherd (1977) [and the helpful short introduction to the latter by Robert Macfarlane (2008)]. Indeed, as Mabey (2007, page 130) documents in an account of the emergence of natural history writing in the figure of the ‘naturalist’ Gilbert White (1720–93), the modes of seeing and knowing associated with the rise of the idea of landscape and natural history are intertwined in ways that bear striking parallels to some of the much more recent literatures on encountering landscape with which this paper opened:

> “White was familiar with Dutch landscape painting, and though the English Picturesque movement did not really begin until his last years, he would have understood the idea of regarding a scene in nature as if it were a picture. But he had no trouble holding this view alongside a view from, as it were, inside the frame, amongst the teeming detail of the landscape’s natural life. On one critical day, the two viewpoints merged, and helped Gilbert make a leap of the imagination which was to prove crucial to his future project, of making a new literature of nature.”

Moreover, other critical work on the history of 20th-century ecology and natural history has excavated the way that they related to geopolitics, psychoanalysis, and the social (see Anker, 2001; Bramwell, 1989; Brüggemeier et al, 2005; Kingsland, 2005), in ways that merit further reflection in geographical scholarship.

\(^{(17)}\)Henri Lefebvre’s (1991 [1974]) complex and multifaceted *The Production of Space* is also in my mind here, but so too is what Nicholas Entriken and Vincent Berdoulay (2005, page 145) call “the imaginative flexible and trial and error spirit” of Lefebvre’s writing on the Pyrenees.

\(^{(18)}\)For a detailed report on these deaths, see http://www.navytimes.com/news/2007/04/navy_submarineaccident_investigationfatal_070413w/

\(^{(19)}\)The now classic paper is by Gill Valentine (1989). However, also see Alec Brownlow (2005).

\(^{(20)}\)According to Bridget Cherry and Nikolaus Pevsner(2004 [1952]), the original 16th century mansion (partially redeveloped in the 18th century) here was demolished in 1937. Their account, republished and updated in 2004 may be consulted for detail on many of the other sites and buildings mentioned in this paper.
was demolished between the wars—clearly a time of massive economic turmoil that rendered such estates uneconomic and produced the political convulsions that would lead to a heightened and increasingly mechanised military phase in Plymouth’s defensive roles. Drake’s name crops up often around here. Although I have not checked the facts, I was told by someone we met on one of those earlier short walks with my daughter that Drake had stayed at the house. Back in the city centre, a new shopping mall, up the hill from Sutton Harbour and the Barbican, called Drake Circus opened in 2006 not long before my walk. Inspired by postcolonial departures, the artist Raimi Gbadamosi has since produced an intervention of the same title as part of an exhibition on the transatlantic slave trade, abolition, and its legacies in Plymouth and Devon.\(^{21}\)

I have often walked around here with my daughter on weekends over the preceding months and we have looked at the boats moored on the lake. The modern house I rent with my family is nearby, built on a former military fuel depot, but overlooking the Coombe and beyond to the red lights on the military communication towers. I go home. “Why did you walk home”, they ask, “why didn’t you get the bus?”

Reflections

“We are rediscovering our interest in the space in which we are situated. Though we see it only from a limited perspective—our perspective—this space is nevertheless where we reside and we relate to it through our bodies.”

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2008 [2002], page 53)

“the Mosque of Sheikh Lutfullah [in Isfahan, Iran] hides any symptom of construction or dynamic form ... Form there is and must be; but how it is created, and what supports it, are questions of which the casual eye is unconscious, as it is meant to be, lest its attention should wander from the pageant of colour and pattern.”\(^{22}\)

Robert Byron (1981 [1937], page 174)

“Who you walk with alters what you see: the view the prospect.”

Iain Sinclair (2005, page 6)

The choice of an urban port location to walk has rendered the strategic–military underpinnings of the coastal path very obvious. But other moments of strategy underpin the path’s history throughout the peninsula. And not only the South West Coast Path. Throughout the UK (and of course way beyond) paths and trails make use of relict strategic infrastructures—from the roman roads on East Anglia’s isotropic plain that are incorporated into the Peddars Way to Wade’s military roads that cross the periarctic plateaus of Rannoch Moor en route to Glencoe on the West Highland Way. They all negotiate contemporary capital (often ‘landed’) and geopolitics too—even if that is seldom so immediately and visibly evident as here in Plymouth. A military landscape is hardly ever very far away in the United Kingdom. In her pioneering account of Military Geographies, Rachel Woodward\(^{23}\) (2004, pages 3–4) is surely right in claiming that “the baseline and backroom activities” that structure armed conflicts have received far less scholarly attention than those conflicts themselves:

\(^{21}\) This was a temporary exhibition held at Plymouth Museum and Art Gallery from 22 September to 24 November 2007.

\(^{22}\) On the virtuosity of pattern, cognition, and contemplation of geometric designs in the Persian tradition, see Richard Henry (2007) and Peter Lu and Paul Steinhardt (2007).

“Military geographies are everywhere; every corner of every place ... is touched, shaped, viewed and represented in some way by military forces and military activities. ... Military geographies are representational as well as material and experiential. Military maps and information systems name, claim, define and categorize territory. Infantry and artillery and armoured regiments analyze terrain. Spy planes and satellites scan us from above, watching. Military geographies surround us, are always with us.”

The choice to foreground these has been made explicit here, like James Crowden (2005, page 67), who notes how his time in the army taught him much about landscape:

“As a soldier you view landscape in terms of defence and cover, movement, concealment and vantage points. Your life depends on it.”

Indeed, as Simon Schama (1996) and John Gold and George Revill (2000) signal, the rise of the idea and aesthetics of landscape are as linked to the culture of defence as much as (or as well as) with the ideology and practice of ownership and accumulation. However, the wider problematic of how and what to narrate (even on a single walk) and what remains obscured, passed over, or neglected and what escapes representation remain unresolved. Such questions were the starting points of this paper and part of what I sought to explore through setting out on and then setting down the walk. Writing in 1954, W G Hoskins, the leading historian of Devon (from where he drew much evidence and experience to go on to write his influential *Making of the English Landscape*) regards topography as the foundation of local history, and for him, the one-inch map provided the foundation of topographical knowledge:

“for the map, as the curious and affectionate eye wanders over its intricate pattern, speaks an historical language of its own, though a language mostly of questions. It asks some questions and answers them almost at once—though the immediate answer is not always the right one—but it asks far more and leaves them unanswered. And these unanswered questions lead us back to the other records, to the immense wealth of documents from Anglo-Saxon times onwards, both local and national, so great a store that one man alone can no longer cope with them even for a single county” (page 3).

Hoskins repeatedly struggles with this excess, undecidability, and intertextuality; the endless seams of documents, places and histories noting how the first impression from any map is

“the extraordinary mass of detail”, perhaps even more so in Devon than elsewhere, that ‘no one book [and his is 598 pages] can do justice to ... such a canvas’, that a book could be written about ‘every few square inches” (page 4).

In these contexts, walking and writing might therefore provide both a literal and a literary path, a way of organising movement, observation, and text. In a short essay that grapples with some of these themes, Mabey (2005) has noted how the analogy between walking and writing is rather complicated, however. According to Mabey, many poets and writers (amongst others he cites John Bunyan and John Clare(24)) used walks to provide narrative structure. Yet just as a narrative is not simply about placing one word after another, but of choices, exclusions, erasures, and strategies, so scenes, observations, and reflections do not arrive and become encountered and arranged in a neatly predictable order on a walk. Mabey (2005, page 77) cites works of the 18th-century poet William Cooper, noting how within it:

(24) Clare’s life, work, and walks form a point of departure for one of Sinclair’s book-length psychogeographies. This book (Sinclair, 2005) also provides the epigraph to my conclusions here and together with Sinclair’s (2002) account of walks near to the M25 motorway that encircles London an inspiration to my walk (see especially the last chapter of *London Orbital*: “Blood & Oil”).
“Scale and perspective are repeatedly shifting, so that at one moment a wild flower is in focus, the next a whole cycle of work in a distant field.” There (in a reflection on how walking affords an opportunity both to encounter landscape and to allow it to take possession of the walker) are two of the most complex and contested terms in the geographical tradition: perspective and scale.

Both carry long histories of debate, albeit cropping up and framed through a succession of paradigms. One direction in which these proceed is to foreground the sheer difficulty, indeed the impossibility, of providing a geographical account that does not at the same time erase and overwrite part of what it aims to represent. Hence Clifford Darby's (1962) struggle with the problem of geographical description, more than quarter of a century later, Andrew Sayer’s (1989) attempt to provide a provisional resolution via philosophical realism and, more successfully, Matt Sparke's (2005) post-structuralist and postcolonial inspired recognition of and exploration of how geography always involves writing over (superimposition) and writing out (erasure and exclusion) and his call to foreground and to render more explicit the politics and choices underpinning this. Simultaneously, the nonrepresentational-theory and allied work with which this paper opened embody a path into (and perhaps beyond) the problematic of geographical representation, recognising, in Lorimer’s (2008, page 557) terms;

“when the leaness of descriptive language comes up short of the affective events and textures it seeks to speak up for.”

Today we might supplement texts, maps, and what might be called ‘ground-level’ figures with satellite photos [freely available at low resolution from Google Earth, for example; though higher resolutions are reserved for military uses (see MacDonald, 2007)]. Robert Higham's (2006) account of “Landscapes of defence, security and status” in the lavishly illustrated volume on the southwest in an English-Heritage-sponsored series on England's Landscapes, contains just such an aerial image of Plymouth, depicting most of the area I walked through. Higham has added a yellow dot at each point where there are coastal fortifications around the city. There are about thirty dot symbols. Higham is quick to point out that:

“This is not a ‘real’ map of Plymouth's fortifications in any particular period, but a cumulative depiction starting in the later medieval period and ending, for convenience of illustration, in the mid-19th century” (page 107).

Convenience of illustration is also a complex political manoeuvre however. There are plenty of fortified and secured buildings in Plymouth that are unmarked. The security of thousands of families in and around Plymouth rests on the continued relatively good wages paid by DML at their facility for servicing missile-bearing submarines on the east bank of the Tamar. Though DML’s future is uncertain and such are the multiple paradoxes of ‘security’ that their security of employment (such as it is) rests on the most destructive forces marshalled by humans, fashioned into weapons at vast expense and opportunity cost (especially in terms of how that capital, energy, and enterprise might be directed for other, socially useful ends).

Although I kept well away from the dockyard and naval base (around which the path is neatly diverted), what meet the eye and shaped my walk are the spaces of capital and sovereignty. My narration of walking and landscape had to attend to social relations and mediations of property and access, industrialisation, deindustrialization, consumption, gentrification, and geopolitics. But that is not to say that it is reducible to them. For although this paper has explored such political geographies—via an

(25) There is a vast and expanding literature on mappings which I have in mind each time the word map or mapping is used here. For two primers, see Denis Cosgrove (1999) and Peter Turchi (2007). The chapter by Paul Carter (1999) in the former is especially helpful on coastlines and the ways that their marking/naming/designation represents and reproduces military power.
account of a single evening’s walking—because I have also worked and lived some of the time before and since in Plymouth, sections of the path are regularly traversed, with family, with friends, or alone.

There is, therefore, always more than one shadow on the path. The path—a round Sutton Harbour—is part of the town, so without aiming at walking the path per se, I will find myself frequently on or near to it. The restaurants and routes around the Barbican mean that this accidental, everyday encounter with the path and areas alongside it are inevitable, unless actively avoided. Amongst those with whom I have walked with there is my daughter Jasmin Leila, who died, just five weeks after the walk narrated here. I was on a bit of the path with her on the day of her tenth birthday party, a month after I had set out from the same place with another purpose; to make the walk that yields this paper. In the spirit, therefore, of negotiating geopolitics but also in the context of the slipperiness of geographical representation (and here the term *more-than representational* seems particularly apt in evoking personal geographies),

![Figure 3. A geography of danger/insecurity in and around Plymouth 2005–08: documented PVL-SA cases. Derived from NHS data. Produced by the Cartographic Resources Unit at the School of Geography, University of Plymouth.](image)

(26) The circumstances of Jasmin’s death are written of in Sidaway (2008); which describes how a bacterial infection known as PVL-SA acquired at her school in Plymouth fatally infected her. It also describes the circumstances behind a cluster of PVL-SA cases around the public hospital in Plymouth and how these relate to inadequate standards of hygiene there (which is profitably subcontracted to a private company)—a source of insecurity and danger in the suburbs and public spaces just inshore from the coastal path. This geography of danger/insecurity is mapped in figure 3.

(27) See the reflections by Thrift (2000) on the occasion of the death of his father.
we might consider how sites on the path invoke elegy: the public, emotive, display (often through formulas, rituals, and sites of remembrance) of ‘private’ grief. As David Kennedy (2007, page 2) has recently explored in a history of elegy and the different ways in which the term is used, these now find expression in a vast range of texts and cultural activities: “Loss may, in fact, be inextricable from our general experience.”

The vast concentration of war memorials on Plymouth Hoe and a set of memorials to others lost since at sea just above the Mayflower steps where the walk began are places where such elegiac acts frequently happen. These sites and acts merge geopolitics, memory, action, and the city. Moreover, it is clear that such memorialisation, which purports to make things more permanent, serves also to show just how fleeting and subject to erasure they sometimes are. As an alternative mode of memorialisation, the sort of geopolitically informed encounter with affects and meanings developed through walking, reading, and reflection might therefore be a means to simultaneously view local, landscape, personal, public, and global through the processes that (over time) produce and bind them.

Building on this and in the broad elegiac tone described by Kennedy (2007), and wider critical mood in which the paper has been compiled, I will therefore quote from the late Bruce Chatwin’s August 1980 introduction to a reissue of a classic 1930s travelogue of Central Asia, Robert Byron’s, The Road to Oxiana (first published in 1937). According to Chatwin:

“Anyone who reads around the travel books of the thirties must, in the end, conclude that Robert Byron’s The Road to Oxiana is the masterpiece. … My own copy—now spineless and floodstained after four journeys to Central Asia—has been with me since the age of fifteen.”

My copy (see figure 4), a 1981 reprint bearing Chatwin’s introduction, has also been around; I have had it since I was nineteen and many of my travels since have followed Byron’s tracks crossed with those of another British travel writer of the era, the feminist, Rebecca West, of whose classic (first published in 1942) Yugoslav travelogue, one commentator wrote that:

(28) There is an enormous literature investigating and exemplifying this and other aspects of memory, conflict, and public space. See Carl Grundy-Warr and Sidaway (2006) and Sidaway and Peter Mayell (2007) for pointers on the political geography, memorials, and erasure. On the wider relationships between memory, performance, monuments, political transformation, and public space, see the introduction to the collection by Daniel Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer (2004). For studies of the cultural intersections between war, memory, and history in the UK and elsewhere in Europe, see Richard Lebow et al (2006), Martin Müller (2002), Susan Suleiman (2006), and Patrick Wright (1985). Garvin Andrews et al (2006) have recently explored how historical representations of social life, place, and landscape in the context of geography and war in another site in Devon, England (the small port of Teignmouth that was also bombed during the Second World War) can be enhanced by recalling and documenting everyday emotions and memories.

(29) Bruce Chatwin died in 1989 at the age of 48 from an illness enabled by AIDS. For a biography, see Nicholas Shakespeare (1999). See the PhD thesis by the (unrelated) Jonathan Michael Chatwin (2008) for a sustained critical evaluation of Bruce Chatwin’s work, drawing upon an archive of his notebooks, diaries, and manuscripts stored at the Bodleian Library in Oxford.

(30) Robert Byron died in 1941 at the age of 36 when the ship on which he was travelling to Egypt was torpedoed. For context and a biography, see James Knox (2003) and for more on the genre of such British interwar travel writing and its relationships to class, gender, racism, imperialism, and nationalism, see Paul Fussell (1982). Byron’s modernist style marks a break with the earlier travel writing whilst reproducing many of the racial and imperial discourses that characterise the genre at the time.

(31) It is notable that Byron’s book was reprinted and republished in the USA in 1981 and in the UK in 1982, in the wake of increased Western attention to the cultures and geopolitics of Afghanistan and Iran, following the collapse of the ‘Saur revolution’ and the Soviet invasion of the former and the ‘Islamic revolution’ in the latter (Sidaway, 1998).
Some travel books are so rooted in time and place that it is impossible to re-read them without experiencing raw feelings of loss for worlds which have gone, in some cases never to return” (Royle, 1993, page xi).

Byron also passed through a world that was later swept away by wars and revolutions, narrating it through lenses shaped through British imperialism, writing near to its apogee. But he was becoming aware too of some of the limits of Europe’s self-conceptions of putative centrality and superiority.
In his introduction to *The Road to Oxiana* Chatwin’s words depict mountain landscapes that are *not* very far removed from Plymouth—at least not in the peculiarly compressed and warped *military space–time* that envelopes both. He also writes of lives lived, lost, and remembered and about things, events, and places that now cannot quite be reached or recovered. Thus Chatwin (1981, pages 14–15) records how:

“This is the year—of all years—to mourn the loss of Robert Byron. ... Were he alive today, I think he would agree that, in time (everything in Afghanistan takes time), the Afghans will do something quite dreadful to their invaders. ...
But that will not bring back the things we loved: the high, clear days and the blue icecaps; the lines of white poplars fluttering in the wind, and the long white prayer flags; the fields of asphodels that followed the tulips. ...

We shall not lie on our backs at the Red Castle and watch the vultures. ...

We will not read Babur’s Memoirs in his garden at Islalif. ...

Or sit in the peace of Islam with the beggars of Gazar Gagh. We will not stand on the Buddha’s head at Bamiyan, upright in his niche like a whale in a dry-dock. We will not sleep in the nomad tent, or scale the Minaret of Jam. And we shall lose the tastes—the hot coarse, bitter bread; the green tea flavoured with cardamoms; the grapes we cooled in the snow-melt; and the nuts and dried mulberries we munched for altitude sickness. Nor shall we get back the smell of the beanfields; the sweet resinous smell of deodar wood burning, or the whiff of a snow leopard at 14,000 feet. Never. Never. Never."

Acknowledgements. Earlier versions of the paper have been presented at ‘Peripatetic Practises: A Workshop on Walking’ held at Royal Holloway, University of London at Bedford Square on 31 March 2008 as well as at a seminar at the Department of Geography at the National University of Ireland—Maynooth in late April 2008 and at the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol in February 2009. I am very grateful to the audiences at these events for their support, comments, and encouragement. Three referees (one of whom chose to sign his report, two of whom remain anonymous) wrote exceptionally thoughtful and engaging reviews and rereviews of earlier versions. I have drawn on many of their suggestions and phrasings. Stuart Elden also offered editorial advice and encouragement. An earlier draft of the paper was also read by Mark Brayshay, Clive Charlton, Stephen Essex, and Richard Yarwood. I chose these readers carefully: for their close knowledge of and encounters with the places that my walk traversed. Although they have not yet read it, others have informed the paper in different ways through walking and talking with me: notably, Veit Bachmann, Tim Bunnell, Fiona Ferbrache, Robina Mohammad, Jon Shaw, and Geoff Wilson. Till Paasche helpfully pointed me to CorpWatch’s exposé of DML’s cost overruns and poor record on safety procedures (especially under the ownership of a consortium led by Haliburton since 1997), at the Devonport dockyard where nuclear powered and nuclear-armed submarines are serviced (see http://www.corpwatch.org/).

Supplement. In June 2009 this paper was presented as an inaugural lecture at the University of Plymouth. A short online supplement prepared soon afterwards is available online at http://dx.doi.org/10.1068/d5508

References


1112 J D Sidaway
Negotiating geopolitics on Britain's South West Coast Path


Blacksell M, 1968 The Effects of Bombing on the Urban Geography of the Eastern Ruhr DPhil thesis, Oxford University


Bracken C W, 1931 A History of Plymouth and Her Neighbours (Underhill, Plymouth, Devon)


Bru«ggemeier F-J, Coic M, Zeller T (Eds), 2005 How Green were the Nazis?: Nature, Environment and Nation in the Third Reich (Ohio University Press, Athens, OH)


Campbell D, 1982 War Plan UK: The Truth about Civil Defence in Britain (Burnett Books, London)


Carter P, 2005 The South West Coast Path: An Illustrated History South West Coast Path Association, Bowker House, Lee Mill Bridge, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 9EF


Cosgrove D, 1999 (Ed) Mappings (Reaktion, London)


Coverley M, 2006 Psychogeography (Pocket Essentials, Harpenden, Herts)


Darby H C, 1940 The Draining of the Fens (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge)


Essex S, Brashay M, 2005, “Town versus country in the 1940s. Planning the contested space of a city region in the aftermath of the Second World War” Town Planning Review 76 239 – 264


Fenton J, 2005, “Space, chance, time: walking backwards through the hours on the left and right banks of Paris” Cultural Geographies 20 412 – 428

Fussell P, 1982 Abroad: British Literary Traveling Between the Wars (Oxford University Press, Oxford)


Hoskins W G, 1955 The Making of the English Landscape (Leicester University Press, Leicester)

Ingold T, Vergunst J L (Eds), 2008 Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot (Ashgate, Aldershot, Hants)


Kennedy D, 2007 Elegy (Routledge, London)


Klemmer H, 1946, “A city that refused to die” The National Geographic Magazine (February) 211 – 236


Le Messurier B, 2006 South West Coast Path: Falmouth to Exmouth (Aurum Press, London)


Mackinder H J, 1902 Britain and the British Seas (Appelton and Co, New York)


Middlton J, 2009, “‘Stepping in time’: walking, time, and space in the city” Environment and Planning A 41 1943 – 1961
Murray A, 2007 Recalling London: Literature and History in the Work of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair (Continuum, London)
Paglen T, 2006, “Late September at an undisclosed location in the Nevada desert” Cultural Geographies 13 293 – 300
Paulin T, 2002 The Invasion Handbook (Faber and Faber, London)
Pinder D, 2001, “Ghostly footsteps: voices, memories and walks in the city” Ecumene 8 1 – 19
Pye A, Woodward F, 1996 The Historic Defences of Plymouth Cornwall County Council, Truro
Robinson C, 2007 Plymouth's Historic Barbican (Pen and Ink Publishers, Plymouth, Devon)
Roszak T, Gomes M E, Kanner A D (Eds), 1995 Ecopsychology: Restoring the Earth, Healing the Mind (Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA)
Sauer C O, 1925, “The morphology of landscape” University of California Publications in Geography 2 19 – 54
Schama S, 1996 Landscape and Memory (Vintage, New York)
Shakespeare N, 1999 Bruce Chatwin: A Biography (The Harvill Press, London)
Shepherd N, 1977 The Living Mountain (Aberdeen University Press, Aberdeen)
Sinclair I, 1988 White Chappell, Scarlet Tracings (Paladin, London)
Sinclair I, 2002 London Orbital: A Walk around the M25 (Granta, London)
Sinclair I, 2005 Edge of the Orison: In the Traces of John Clare’s Journey out of Essex’ (Hamish Hamilton, London)
Sparks M, 2005 *In the Space of Theory: Postfoundational Geographies of the Nation-state* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
Stilgoe J R, 2005 *Landscape and Images* (University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville, VA)
Walkowitz D J, Knauer L M (Eds), 2004 *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space* (Duke University Press, Durham, NC)
Wallington M, 1986 *500 Mile Walkies* (Hutchinson, London)
Wasley G, 1991 *Blitz: An account of Hitler’s Aerial War over Plymouth in March 1941, and the Events that Followed* (Devon Books, Exeter)
Woodward R, 2005, “From military geography to militarism’s geographies: disciplinary engagements with the geographies of militarism and military activities” *Progress in Human Geography* 29: 718–740
Wylie J W, 2007a *Landscape* (Routledge, London)

© 2009 Pion Ltd and its Licensors
Conditions of use. This article may be downloaded from the E&P website for personal research by members of subscribing organisations. This PDF may not be placed on any website (or other online distribution system) without permission of the publisher.