

Reading Place: Exploring Deterritorialised Island Matter

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Abstract

Place is one of the constant themes in contemporary fine art practice. The aim of this practice-led research is to investigate selected places in the island of Malta. It sets out to explore the potential contribution (re-) deterritorialised matter can make to contemporary fine art practice concerned with place. It investigates contested territory, appropriations, histories, politics, and stories inscribed on leaves and tree bark.

A number of strands of inquiry have arisen from this practice-led research primarily relating to territory/textuality/temporality. Evidently Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notions of (re-) deterritorialisation have been particularly significant to this research study, including the rhizome, and their propositions of smooth/striated space, and map-making.

The context of this research study has evolved from a consideration of selected places as potential sites for art practice. The significance of an embodied practice has been examined, and also how 'being-there' impinges on the research study. Familiarity with place is considered as a key aspect, since it is only through direct investigation that specific nuances are discovered and heard. The thesis describes the combined methodologies of walking and collecting. I walk and I collect, making 'maps' along the way. The study juxtaposes taxonomical systems with boundaries, enclosures with opportunities for movement, and considers the potential of found objects to communicate, and acquire value. It examines how the deep map approach contributes to place-oriented practice. It combines the real with the imaginary, and the poetic with the political, and it explores the possibilities that emerge from this intertwining.

The present study proposes a map whereby reading and making intersect, and opportunities for fine art practice can emerge. It details how an investigation of Maltese places contributed to sculptural work, art installations, photographs, and film. The research construes that artworks evoke a sense of place, and new places can be revealed with every re/reading.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Context.....	1
1.2 Aims and Objectives of Research.....	3
1.3 Mapping of Chapters	4
1.4 Overview of Practice	7
2. Walking/Collecting	10
2.1 Walk with me	10
2.2 Walk and Tell: A Story of Walking.....	17
2.3 Mapping Psychogeography.....	19
2.4 The Art of Walking.....	22
2.5 Collecting.....	26
2.6 Re-collecting Joseph Cornell’s Assemblages	28
2.7 The Art of Collecting.....	31
2.8 I Collect therefore I am (...a Collector).....	33
3. Matter and Methodology	36
3.1 (Re-) Deterritorialisation in the <i>Making</i>	36
3.2 Mapping	39
4. Review of Contemporary Practice	43
4.1 Mark Dion - Revising Taxonomy.....	44
4.2 Susan Hiller - Cultural Matter.....	48
4.3 David Walker Barker – Collecting Fragments.....	50
4.4 herman de vries – Poetry of Reality	54
4.5 Elizabeth Ogilvie – Water Flow	56
4.6 Richard Long - Art Walks.....	59
5. Place, Landscape and Environment	63
5.1 Introduction	63
5.1.1 The Place of ‘Place’	63

5.1.2 A Place to Start	64
5.2 On Place	65
5.2.1 Place and Space	67
5.2.2 Utopias, Heterotopias and Non-Places.....	70
5.2.3 Place and Temporality.....	72
5.3 Re-Considering Place	74
5.4 Landscape.....	77
5.4.1 Landscape Matters	77
5.4.2 Setting the Landscape	78
5.5 Representing Landscape	81
5.5.1 Landscape Photography and Film.....	83
5.5.2 Land Art	84
5.6 Landscape Politics	86
5.7 Environment.....	88
5.7.1 Whose Environment?.....	88
5.7.2 Nature/Culture and the Environment	90
5.7.3 Eco Considerations	91
6. The Valley.....	94
6.1 Introduction	94
6.1.1 Placing the Valley.....	94
6.2 Pear Pressure	98
6.3 De-Scroll	106
6.4 Landline/Waterline	116
6.4.1 Time Matters.....	117
7. <i>Riservato</i> – Keep Out!	127
7.1 Mapping RTO	127
7.2 RTO I.....	135
7.3 RTO II.....	145
7.4 RT-O.....	154
7.5 Defining ‘Open’ RTO Territory	162
7.6 Appropriation and Property Rights	165
7.6. 1 Enclosures and the Commons.....	167

8. Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture	173
8.1 Collecting Matter(s).....	174
8.2 Caught in the Crossfire	176
8.3 Hunting down the Legacy.....	182
8.4 To Hunt or Not to Hunt.....	184
9 Natura Colta.....	189
9.1 Open the Collection	189
9.1.1 Collecting/Placing.....	190
9.1.2 Souvenirs of Place.....	192
9.2 Collect/Thing.....	193
9.3 Beyond the Collection	198
9.3.1 The Cabinet of Curiosities.....	199
9.3.2 Locating the Cabinet in the Museum - Power/Control/Access	202
10. Conclusions.....	207
10.1 Re-Telling / Re-Making.....	207
10.2 Further Research Considerations.....	209
10.3 Contribution of Reading Place	212
10.4 Further Deterritorialisations	213
Appendix A Re/visiting, Re/viewing - Photographic and Film Documentation	215
Appendix B Artworks	230
Appendix C Exhibitions (2012 – 2016)	239
References	240

List of Figures

Figure 1 Map of places.....	3
Figure 2 Lines on the ground.....	11
Figure 3 Scattered boulders	12
Figure 4 Walking on broken glass	12
Figure 5 Wooden piece.....	13
Figure 6 Cliffs.....	14
Figure 7 Wied il-Qlejgha.....	15
Figure 8 Stream.....	15
Figure 9 Spent shotgun cartridges.....	15
Figure 10 Mtahleb.....	16
Figure 11 Foliage	16
Figure 12 Sketch <i>RTO I</i>	23
Figure 13 Prickly pears.....	26
Figure 14 Joseph Cornell, <i>Solomon Islands (Interior)</i>	30
Figure 15 Sketch <i>Natura Colta</i>	34
Figure 16 Sketch <i>RTO II</i>	43
Figure 17 Sketch <i>RT-O</i>	44
Figure 18 Mark Dion, <i>Thames Dig (Detail)</i>	45
Figure 19 Mark Dion, <i>Vivarium</i>	46
Figure 20 <i>De-Scroll</i>	47
Figure 21 <i>Landline/Waterline (Detail)</i>	48
Figure 22 Susan Hiller, <i>Genuine Essence: Homage to Josef Beuys</i>	49
Figure 23 <i>Natura Colta (Detail)</i>	51
Figure 24 David Walker Barker, <i>The Remains of a Hidden Landscape</i>	52
Figure 25 David Walker Barker, <i>Adits as Entrances</i>	53
Figure 26 herman de vries, <i>to be all ways to be (Installation view 1)</i>	55
Figure 27 herman de vries, <i>to be all ways to be (Installation view 2)</i>	56
Figure 28 Looped film of lake at Qlejgha Valley	57
Figure 29 Elizabeth Ogilvie, <i>Bodies of Water</i>	58
Figure 30 <i>Pear Pressure</i>	60

Figure 31 Richard Long, <i>A Line Made by Walking</i>	61
Figure 32 <i>RTO II</i>	70
Figure 33 Sketch <i>Landline/Waterline</i>	73
Figure 34 Full lake at Wied il-Qlejgha.....	95
Figure 35 The lake half full	95
Figure 36 Old map	96
Figure 37 Letter by Governor of Malta.....	97
Figure 38 Soft graffiti 1	100
Figure 39 Soft graffiti 2.....	100
Figure 40 Sketch <i>Pear Pressure</i>	104
Figure 41 <i>Pear Pressure</i> (2014) at Lifton Place, University of Leeds	103
Figure 42 Graffiti on bark.....	106
Figure 43 Bark scroll.....	108
Figure 44 Bark scrolls different forms and sizes	109
Figure 45 Bark scrolls in custom made display case	110
Figure 46 Bark scrolls at the National Library of Malta, Valletta.....	112
Figure 47 <i>De-Scroll</i> installation top view	112
Figure 48 <i>De-Scroll</i> installation view facing library entrance.....	113
Figure 49 <i>De-Scroll</i> installation elevated view.....	113
Figure 50 Main lake at Qlejgha valley	116
Figure 51 Lake water.....	118
Figure 52 Vegetation growing in lake water	118
Figure 53 Overflow of water	119
Figure 54 No flow	119
Figure 55 Lakebed	120
Figure 56 Collecting soil specimens	120
Figure 57 Bottled soil.....	121
Figure 58 Fine grained soil.....	121
Figure 59 Signs of eutrophication.....	122
Figure 60 <i>Landline/Waterline</i> , Lifton Place, University of Leeds.....	124
Figure 61 <i>Landline/Waterline</i> (Detail).....	124
Figure 62 RTO stencil	128
Figure 63 Stone specimens	128

Figure 64 RTO Dingli Cliffs.....	130
Figure 65 RTO Wardija.....	130
Figure 66 RTO hide	133
Figure 67 Broken chair outside hide	134
Figure 68 Grazing in Mtaħleb.....	136
Figure 69 Disused communications tower and hide in Mtaħleb	137
Figure 70 <i>RTO I</i>	138
Figure 71 <i>RTO I</i> near RTO sign.....	140
Figure 72 Jeppe Hein, <i>Please Do Not Touch</i>	141
Figure 73 <i>RTO I</i> on top of hide.....	142
Figure 74 <i>RTO I</i> from a distance.....	144
Figure 75 <i>RTO I</i> Dingli Cliffs.....	145
Figure 76 <i>RTO II</i>	146
Figure 77 <i>RTO II</i> near hide.....	148
Figure 78 <i>RTO II</i> from a distance	149
Figure 79 <i>RTO II</i> inside or outside?.....	151
Figure 80 <i>RTO II</i> on top of hide.....	152
Figure 81 Open RTO.....	155
Figure 82 <i>RT-O</i>	156
Figure 83 Tree branch	157
Figure 84 Bones	158
Figure 85 RTO placard.....	163
Figure 86 RTO sign in Mġarr	164
Figure 87 Jorge Méndez Blake, <i>The Exploration Library</i>	171
Figure 88 <i>Crossfire</i> (Detail)	176
Figure 89 <i>Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture</i>	178
Figure 90 <i>Crossfire</i> installation top view (Detail)	179
Figure 91 <i>Crossfire</i> installation elevated view	180
Figure 92 Damián Ortega, <i>Alma Mater</i>	181
Figure 93 <i>Natura Colta</i> list of objects.....	191
Figure 94 <i>Natura Colta</i>	194
Figure 95 <i>Natura Colta</i> (Detail 1).....	195
Figure 96 <i>Natura Colta</i> (Detail 2).....	196
Figure 97 <i>Natura Colta</i> (Detail 3).....	196

Figure 98 <i>Natura Colta</i> (Detail 4).....	197
Figure 99 <i>Wunderkammer</i> exhibition (2012)	200
Figure 100 Brad Cloepfil, <i>Sticks and Stones</i>	201
Figure 101 Brassai, <i>Graffiti</i>	216
Figure 102 Brassai, <i>Les Arbres des Quais avec le Pont-Neuf</i>	216
Figure 103 Alec Soth, <i>Hickman Kentucky</i>	217
Figure 104 Alec Soth, <i>Helena Arkansas</i>	217
Figure 105 Still shot from my film (1).....	220
Figure 106 Still shot from my film (2).....	221
Figure 107 Still shot from my film (3).....	223
Figure 108 Still shot from my film (4).....	223
Figure 109 Werner Herzog, <i>Encounters at the End of the World</i>	227
Figure 110 Chris Meigh-Andrews, <i>Streamline</i>	227
Figure 111 Robert Smithson/Nancy Holt, <i>Swamp</i>	228

1. Introduction

Place-oriented practice has gained a more prominent position within the remit of contemporary art in recent years. This thesis details an investigation of places in the island of Malta. It sets out to explore the potential of (re-) deterritorialised matter to contribute to contemporary fine art place-oriented practice. A personal fascination with certain places brought me to the place where I am now; I am interested in exploring places that I have considered close and yet so far. Places that have never ceased to fascinate me due to their (im-) palpable characteristics.

I initiated this research by combining fine art practice with a longstanding interest in places that seemed to harbour discrete stories waiting to be told. This chapter maps the territory of the research study by commenting on context, practice, objectives, research questions and methodologies. It presents an outline of the main chapters and reviews the places in Malta specific to the research project.

1.1 Context

The context of this research study has evolved from a consideration of selected places as potential sites for art practice. Certain places, more than others, appear condensed with myriad stories which can be unraveled, juxtaposed, manipulated and re-told. I am interested in exploring the ‘what is’ and ‘what might be’. Due to its disposition, such research necessitates a certain level of ‘groundedness’ and familiarity with place. It all starts by placing one’s feet on the ground and gradually engaging in a thorough reading of place. I have explored the potential of found matter and the possibilities it might offer for gaining insight into place.

My work consists of mixed media sculptural work and site-specific art installations.¹ I collect matter from selected places and relocate it into my studio; it becomes part of my humble collection of ‘uncollectibles’. Photography allowed me to explore

¹ My art installations adapt to the space where they are shown.

places more thoroughly, by moving slowly with camera in hand I scanned the ground for opportunities. The photographic image was initially source material until it moved centre-stage and developed into art installation.² Photographs, within this research, are aimed to replace matter of an ephemeral nature, and to document the process and performative aspects.³ My Sculptural work and installations respond to specific aspects of place. Furthermore, a film documentary was introduced to allow for a diverse representation of place.⁴ It is aimed to contextualise the sculptures and installations and to bring the viewer closer to my places.

Walking plays a key role in my practice, predominantly walking as a form of investigation. I walk and I collect, making ‘maps’ along the way. Possibilities for fine art practice emerge from the ground and through deterritorialised matter which can be manipulated, combined, photographed and arranged. Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of (re-) deterritorialisation have been particularly significant to this research, including the rhizome, and their explorations of space and mapping.⁵ The following is a list of the Maltese places being investigated.

Qlejgha Valley – (Latitude 36° 04’ 21” N, Longitude 14° 14’ 42” E).⁶

Wardija – (Latitude 36° 01’ 59” N, Longitude 14° 18’ 52” E).⁷

Mġarr – (Latitude 35° 55’ 11” N, Longitude 14° 21’ 59” E).⁸

Bahrija – (Latitude 35° 53’ 41” N, Longitude 14° 20’ 54” E).⁹

Mtahleb – (Latitude 35° 52’ 37” N, Longitude 14° 21’ 08” E).¹⁰

Dingli Cliffs – (Latitude 35° 51’ 37” N, Longitude 14° 22’ 53” E).¹¹

² *Pear Pressure* is a work entirely based on photographic documentation.

³ My *RTO* series of work involves the relocation of sculptures to their original place. The process was photographed and it became part of the artwork.

⁴ The documentary film explores all the places mapped for the research project. It is contingent to the sculptural work and installations, rather than standalone.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1987).

⁶ A natural valley modified by Sir Osbert Chadwick in the late nineteenth century to collect runoff water. During the wet season it attracts numerous visitors due to its unique cascading lake and temporary lush vegetation.

⁷ Wardija is a small ecologically protected plateau rich in flora. Traces of a British era Battery are still visible on site.

⁸ Mġarr is a typical Maltese rural village close to Bahrija, Wardija and Mtahleb. The terrain is agriculturally rich and comprises a number of valleys (*widien*).

⁹ An ancient rural hamlet and one of the highest places in Malta, it is replete with archaeological remains.

¹⁰ Also known as l-Imtaħlep this ancient place is perched on top of high cliffs overlooking the sea. It mostly consists of garigues (*xagħri*), valley systems (*widien*), shallow soil and sporadic fields.

The map shows the part of Malta where the selected places are located. (Figure 1) The places are found along the North-Western coast of the island and slightly inward. The island is geographically positioned right at the centre of the Mediterranean Sea, and due to its strategic importance it has attracted settlers as far back as 5,000 BCE. As shown on the map the area is still largely unbuilt. This is another quality that attracted me to such places, since I could explore the terrain relatively unhindered. I could dig deep to unearth the ‘hidden text’ and allow matter the voice that it had been deprived of time and time again. The deep map methodology adopted for the research project will be reviewed in the following chapter.

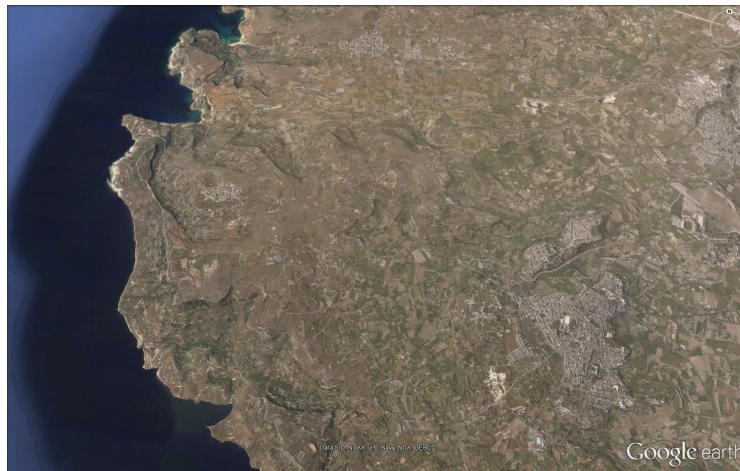


Figure 1 Map of Places. *The six places mapped are located within this part of Malta.*¹²

1.2 Aims and Objectives of Research

The research is concerned with an investigation of place through (re-) deterritorialised matter collected from six small places in Malta. The places identified are replete with Mediterranean topological features and are generally located at close proximity to each other.¹³ A number of strands of inquiry have arisen from this research primarily concerning territory, textuality, and temporality.

¹¹ Dingli Cliffs is a running rock exposure situated at the far edge of the small village of Had Dingli. It is the highest point in Malta located about 250 metres above sea level.

¹² Most places are located towards the left edge (on the map) overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. The entire country covers 316 kilometers square and the mapped places are located at close proximity to each other; only a short walk away.

¹³ The selected places are small and appear to be untainted by contemporary development.

Evidently, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's process of (re-) deterritorialisation can be observed throughout the research project.¹⁴ Walking initiates the research movement; collecting relocates matter from place to practice. As will be discussed in Chapter 3 deterritorialisation implicates change and alteration and it allows for connections and flows to emerge. Territory is where feet touch the ground and from there opportunities for exploring further territories on the ground and through artistic practice become possible. (Re-) deterritorialisation reconfigures matter; it locates it in different contexts whereby new relations could be established.

I first need to look for and identify a place, 'dwell' in it, until it becomes my territory – my place of work.¹⁵ Initially, I used to relocate frequently from one place to another in search of places. I was a nomad, a traveler in my own country, in the process discovering places I never thought existed. Gradually, I started to narrow down the focus. The continuous process of deterritorialisation led me to explore not only new geographical terrains but also different grounds for art practice. My research is grounded in practice. It inquires about place—seeking through matter. Heidegger argues that '[e]very inquiry is a seeking [*Suchen*]' and indeed my research inquires:¹⁶

- What can matter tell us about place?
- How does (re-) deterritorialised matter contribute to further our understanding of place?
- How can a sense of place be evoked in contemporary fine art practice?
- What opportunities arise for contemporary fine art practice from an investigation of place?

¹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

¹⁵ Dwelling here signifies spending time there. The notion of private/public 'property' is palpable within this thesis (see Chapter 7). My poetic appropriation is of a different nature.

¹⁶ Heidegger Martin, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1962), p. 5.

1.3 Mapping of Chapters

The thesis is divided into ten chapters followed by an appendix section. The writing is grouped according to place/practice; certain chapters follow place others follow practice. The aim is to create a flow and make connections; each chapter could be referred to at any point in time, since there is no strict order. Alongside place/practice concerns the writing follows interrelated aspects of territory/textuality/temporality. These form the basis of the individual chapters and connect chapters in a relatively non-linear manner.

In Chapter 2 **Walking/Collecting** I discuss specific parts of the methodology underpinning the research study, illustrated by a photographic walk interspersed with excerpts from my fieldwork notes, and references to walking as deterritorialisation. Then the chapter reviews literature concerning walking with a particular emphasis on psychogeography, and walking as art practice. This is followed by reflections on collecting in relation to my practice, an analysis of Joseph Cornell's assemblages, reference to Walter Benjamin's discussion about collecting, and Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome.¹⁷ The chapter discusses how walking and collecting are intertwined in the context of this research, and explicates the significance of such practices in relation to the research questions.

Deleuze and Guattari's notion of (re-) deterritorialisation is central to my practice.¹⁸ Chapter 3 **Matter and Methodology** presents another aspect of the methodology by considering (re-) deterritorialisation in relation to Ingold's 'matter' and 'making'.¹⁹ This is followed by a review of Pearson and Shanks's 'deep mapping', and Casey's embodied reading of place.²⁰ Throughout the chapter arguments by Sullivan, Barrett

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968); Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

¹⁹ Tim Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013).

²⁰ Pearson Mike and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London: Taylor and Francis Ltd., 2001); Edward S Casey, *Earth-Mapping. Artists Reshaping Landscape* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press., 2005).

and Bolt, and Ingold, in relation to practice-led research are analysed and discussed.²¹

Chapter 4 **Review of Contemporary Practice** looks at other artists whose work in one way or the other shares parallels with my own work. These include Mark Dion, David Walker Barker, Richard Long, Susan Hiller, Elizabeth Ogilvie and herman de vries.²² Diverse contemporary practice is analysed and discussed, and reference to my own practice is made throughout the chapter.

In Chapter 5 **Place, Landscape and Environment** I review literature related to each of these concepts; emphasis is made on place and space as discussed by Casey.²³ The chapter considers Foucault's heterotopias; Merleau-Ponty's place and temporality; Massey's global place; and Bachelard's minute space.²⁴ Then it discusses Casey's text concerning landscape; Mitchell and Soper's landscape politics and Ingold's perspectives regarding the environment.²⁵ The chapter also reviews landscape representation and land art.

Chapter 6 **The Valley** presents a close reading of Qlejgha valley; a place that changes drastically due to seasonal fluctuations. Three artworks emerge from the valley: *Pear Pressure*; *De-Scroll* and *Natura Colta*. The notions of 'textuality' and 'temporality' find resonance in matter collected from here. Sontag's perspectives on

²¹ Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research* (California: SAGE Publications Inc., 2005); *Practice as Research Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010); Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*.

²² herman de vries writes his own name in lower case letters.

²³ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

²⁴ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias', *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité*, (1984), 1-9; Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald A. Landes (London: Routledge, 2012); Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

²⁵ Edward S. Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); *Landscape and Power*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Kate Soper, 'Privileged Gazes and Ordinary Affections: Reflections on the Politics of Landscape and the Scope of the Nature Aesthetic', in *Deterritorialisations... Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, ed. by Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd., 2003), pp. 338-348; Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* (London: Routledge, 2011).

photography, Deleuze and Guattari's matter-flow, Bergson's time, and notions of movement according to Merleau-Ponty are considered within the discussion.²⁶

Within Chapter 7 **Riservato – Keep Out!** ambiguously 'open' reserved territory is examined. The chapter discusses the *RTO* series of work in relation to Foucault's heterotopias, and Deleuze and Guattari's smooth and striated space.²⁷ This is followed by a review of property rights, land appropriation, enclosures and the commons.

Chapter 8 **Crossfire-Concerning the Nature of Our Culture** reviews the politically charged installation sharing the chapter's same title. Notions of nature/culture are examined in relation to the political context created by the work. Barad's and Bennett's characteristics of matter are explored in relation to the practice.²⁸ The chapter discusses Scruton's concept of hunting as a noble practice alongside the significance of hunting in Malta.²⁹

Collecting plays a key role in my practice. Chapter 9 paves the way for **Natura Colta**, a sculptural work capturing all 'my places'. The chapter discusses matter by referencing De Landa.³⁰ Benjamin's and Baudrillard's perspectives on collecting are discussed in relation to the cabinet of curiosities, and museums are examined in relation to notions of power/control/access.³¹ A review of the exhibition *Wunderkammer*, held in Venice (2012), explores the contemporary cabinet of curiosities.³²

²⁶ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books, 1977); Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Dover Publications, Inc.; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*; Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*.

²⁸ Barad Karen, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28.3, (2003), 801-831; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁹ Roger Scruton, *On Hunting* (Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2010).

³⁰ Manuel De Landa, *Uniformity and Variability: An Essay in the Philosophy of Matter* (Doors of Perception, 1995) <<http://museum.doorsofperception.com/doors3/transcripts/Delanda.html>> [accessed 13 February 2016]

³¹ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*; Jean Baudrillard, 'The System of Collecting', in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), pp. 7-24

³² The *Wunderkammer* exhibition was held in Venice as part of the Architecture Biennale 2012.

Chapter 10 **Conclusions** summarises the research findings, reflects on how my practice-led research has evolved, and comments on the research's contribution, and further deterritorialisations. It also includes reflections about the role of practice in research and how practice has advanced my understanding of place.

1.4 Overview of Practice

The research project constructs what Biggs calls hybrid interweaving, based on investigation, poetic ambiguity, and a close dialogue with scholarly discourse, and critical arguments.³³ Constant sensitisation with place is necessary as much as a heightened awareness of place-matter. As I shall discuss in the concluding chapter the selected places have never been the subject of fine art research. Located perennially on the fringe, their unassuming 'extraordinariness' remains, for the most part, underexposed.

Place speaks, partly through matter. Art practice allowed for the potential of matter to be released; to be communicated. Within this thesis I argue that matter embodies fragments of place; bits of stories. Such stories tell us of place, and other places. The research project is aimed to explore the complexities of matter, and to advance our understanding of places, real and imaginary. As Biggs, following Ricoeur puts it, doctoral study in the arts is a means to deepen work poetically to create new knowledge.³⁴ The following is a list of artworks (listed according to place) that enable places to be (re-)read:

Qlejgha Valley:

- *Pear Pressure* photographic Installation
- *De-Scroll* sculptural installation
- *Landline/Waterline* mixed media sculptural work

³³ Iain Biggs, 'Hybrid Texts and Academic Authority: The Wager in Creative Practice Research', in *Thinking Through Art. Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 190-200.

³⁴ Biggs, *Hybrid Texts and Academic Authority: The Wager in Creative Practice Research*, p. 191.

Bahrija, Wardija, Mgarr, Dingli Cliffs, Mtaħleb:

- *RTO I* mixed media sculptural work
- *RTO II* mixed media sculptural work
- *RT-O* mixed media sculptural work
- *Crossfire* mixed media site specific installation

Qlejgħa Valley, Bahrija, Wardija, Mgarr, Dingli Cliffs, Mtaħleb:

- *Natura Colta* mixed media sculptural work
- *Reading Place* film³⁵

The present chapter mapped the territory of the research, and discussed the context, practice, objectives, and the main research questions and methodologies. It also presented an outline of the chapters, and the places specific to the research project. The next chapter discusses walking and collecting, and elucidates how these are implicated in the context of the research.

³⁵ *Reading Place* pieces together source footage and it is aimed to contextualise the practice.

2. Walking/Collecting

It is good to collect things, but it is better to go on walks (Anatole France cited in Chatwin).³⁶

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the implications of walking and collecting on my practice-led research. I will start by reviewing my walking methodology and proceed to contextualise and locate my movement in a wider history of walking. Then, I will move on to present and discuss literature related to collecting and explain how walking and collecting are intertwined in the process of my research practice. Excerpts from my fieldworks are interspersed throughout the chapter so as to connect my walks with the practice and theoretical discourse.

Walking and collecting are key elements here since both contribute (in-) directly to the development of the research questions. I need to walk in order to collect material for my research, thus collecting develops through bodily movement and deterritorialisation. Walking is a performative act and my movement shares characteristics relating to performance as discussed by Pearson and Shanks, most notably bodily engagement, interactivity, communication and encounter.³⁷ In the following section, I will describe how stories unfold on the move as I drift along selected places that I have come to consider my own territory.

2.1 Walk with Me

As I shall describe, research develops from deterritorialisation as soon as I turn to the landscape in search of directions. I am essentially a drifter. My practice starts with a few steps, and then gradually extends to longer walks that eventually develop into fieldworks. I follow a ground map situated in place, comprising a varied and

³⁶ Chatwin Bruce, *The Songlines* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 174.

³⁷ The performative aspect in my work is not central. Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 15.

contrasting topography. A map made of planes, valleys, springs, cliffs, rocky shores, maquis, garigues and a plethora of land features typical of the Mediterranean region. The landscape guides me; I resort to the landscape for directions and possibilities. I search the land, exploring subtly, picking up objects, annotating my encounters, making a map. The following is a photographic walk documenting a selection of finds and encounters.

It's 6:30 in the morning, packed lunch, camera, lenses, notebook, all there, stuffed inside my backpack. Sun already set. Air is humid, sticky and the ground slippery. Have to be very careful. Today, I'm heading towards the garigue then I will follow the land as it unfolds beneath my feet.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).³⁸



Figure 2 Lines on the ground. *Reflecting on Richard Long's 'A Line Made by Walking'. Not knowing which direction to heed I temporarily followed the lines striating the ground. These lines inevitably made me focus more intently on the ground, noticing particular details, nuances and place-things, scattered or partially embedded in the flaky soil bed. Paradoxically, the line opened up rhizomatic paths occasionally interrupted by natural or man-made features.*

³⁸ This fieldwork was held at Mtaheleb, a small medieval hamlet surrounded by cliffs and garigue, consisting of rugged stretches of arid land.



Figure 3 Scattered boulders. *Local soil is dotted with ancient remains and small pottery shards dating back to Roman and possibly Bronze Age periods. Large boulders like these could be fragments of early dwellings, enclosures or some type of territory markers. This is a strategic area; located on top of a high ridge it overlooks the Mediterranean Sea which can be seen in the background.*



Figure 4 Walking on broken glass. *Sharp traces of culture on (un-)natural ground. Picked up a few glass shards, many of these scattered around; clear, blue, green, brown.*



Figure 5 Wooden piece. *I decided to take a photograph instead of taking the whole thing. I do not distinguish between the physical and the photographed; both are physical up to a certain level. One comprises physical matter and form, the other is made up of physical memories. Thus, they both embody fragments of place.*

Ingold maintains that '[i]t is, in short, by watching, listening and feeling – by paying attention to what the world has to tell us – that we learn.'³⁹ Ingold describes this as 'correspondance', which means, setting up 'a relation with the world', allowing it to open up paths of deterritorialisation and potential lines of flight.⁴⁰

Already two hours of walking. Picked up some stones along the way as I passed by a derelict passage. I guess it's no longer in use. Took many photographs of RTO signs...area littered with such notices. I can see some farmers in the distance...buzzing pumps are so irritating. They pierce the silence and make me turn the other way! Just picked up a couple of used shotgun cartridges. I'm thinking of creating something out of cartridges since there are too many lying around. I also spotted a chameleon...seemed shy but was happy to concede a couple photos.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).⁴¹

Thomas A. Clark's poem 'The Grey Fold' evokes that general feeling experienced when walking in the vast landscape; moving about, not knowing where you are going. It is here that the need to collaborate with the surroundings starts to be felt to the point of becoming unavoidable.

³⁹ Ingold, Making. *Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 1

⁴⁰ Ingold, Making. *Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 7

⁴¹ This fieldwork was held in Mtahleb.

You are the one
walking alone
intermediary between
earth and sky

– The Grey Fold, Thomas A. Clark (2011)⁴²

Walking is revealing. In the process of deterritorialisation the earth's surface is gradually revealed beneath one's feet. Likewise, en route, the landscape is revealed and the result is an unfolding, described by Deleuze as development and growth.⁴³ Deleuze's unfolding can be considered alongside Manning and Massumi's description of 'thinking, *with your movement*'; an experience that is 'all movement-texture, complexly patterned, full of change and transition, teemingly differentiated' [original italics].⁴⁴



Figure 6 Cliffs. *Semi-arid terrain overlooking the Mediterranean Sea.*

⁴² Thomas A. Clark, 'The Grey Fold', in *The Ground Aslant (An Anthology of Radical Landscape Poetry)*, ed. Harriet Tarlo, (Exeter: Shearsman Books Ltd., 2011) pp. 39-52.

⁴³ Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold*, trans. by Tom Conley (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 1993), p. 9.

⁴⁴ Furthermore, Manning and Massumi add that every movement is 'a performed analysis of the field's composition from the angle of its affordance for getting-ahead'. Eric Manning and Brian Massumi, *Thought in the Act* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 10.



Figure 7 Wied il-Qlejgha. *In winter the place is lush with vegetation. (see Chapter 6).*



Figure 8 Stream. *Water injects life; it nourishes, cleanses and it implies the flow of time (see Chapter 6).*

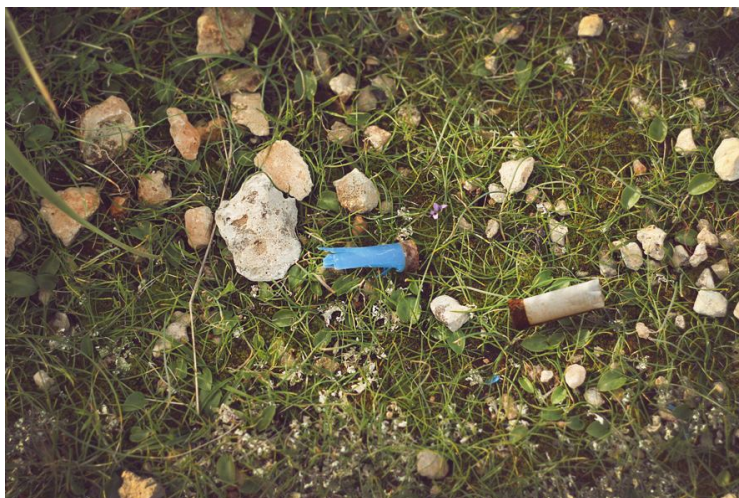


Figure 9 Spent shotgun cartridges. *Common encounters in rural Malta.*



Figure 10 Mtahleb. *Terrain replete with history.*



Figure 11 Foliage. *The delicate foliage and tiny bright petals of a creeper appropriate the surface of the water (see Chapter 6).*

On my way I take notes, photographs, video, and I collect objects from place.⁴⁵ The landscape is not always kind to me. At times the terrain is difficult and rugged, slippery and unstable or downright dangerous. Such walks are never straightforward since turns, junctures, obstacles and other land features permeate my movement. Yet, all this generates the impetus to move further; and deeper, to explore heights and crevices, depths and planes. The land problematises my walks and at the same time it provides me with the matter required for my investigation. Here we could consider Smithson's assertion that in such situations 'you're not presented with any

⁴⁵ I consider myself a collector (see section 2.8).

kind of obvious object’; there is always another reading and ‘[t]he object is always defeating itself in terms of objectivity’.⁴⁶

In the following section I will present a brief history of walking in order to contextualise and locate my own walks. The focus will shift from a generalist description to a more specific analysis concerning walking as a political act, and walking in the context of artistic practice.

2.2 Walk and Tell: A Story of Walking

Walking goes back a long way. People have walked for various reasons and walking to merely get from one place to another is just one of them. Walking generates movement and such movement could transform into a political act, a pilgrimage, a form of transgression, a protest or into artistic practice. The following review starts by considering the practical aspects of walking and describes how the body is implicated in such movement. Gros argues that ‘[w]alking means precisely resigning yourself to being an ambulant, forward-leaning body’; walking implicates the body in deterritorialisation.⁴⁷

Walking, as Solnit demonstrates, is such a common and yet powerful act as it does not only engage the limbs but the entire body and mind. Solnit considers ‘walking’ as a generic umbrella term, but walking in terms of investigation occupies a special place within the common term.

The bodily history of walking is merely practical, the unconsidered locomotive means between two sites. To make walking into an investigation, a ritual, a meditation, is a special subset of walking, physiologically like and philosophically unlike the way the mail carrier brings the mail and the office worker reaches the train.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Dated 1969-1970. Robert Smithson, ‘Four Conversations between Dennis Wheeler and Robert Smithson’, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 196-233 (p. 220).

⁴⁷ Frederic Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, trans. by John Howe (London: Verso, 2014), p. 187.

⁴⁸ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 3.

Solnit sustains that '[w]alking, ideally, is a state in which the mind, the body, and the world are aligned, as though they were three characters finally in conversation together, three notes suddenly making a chord'.⁴⁹ Walking allows us to familiarise ourselves with the terrain and by gradually scanning it with our senses we construct information along the way.⁵⁰ Casey contends that ground movement, including pauses, brings one closer to several landscape features.^{51 52} Thus, it can be argued that walking is a form of mediation between physical, intellectual and aesthetic levels of experience.

During walks the landscape, like a poem, reveals itself in stanzas from one instance to the next, literally step by step. Every step is a revelation. Furthermore, the landscape presents itself gradually even if standing still; it envelops the walker. More landscape is discovered as one moves and accumulates footage.

Circumambulation by walking is the bodily counterpart to the circumambience of landscape as perceived. Whether moving or standing still in a landscape, one is constantly surrounded by things that come from every which way – as also happens in a cityscape such as an arcade or shopping mall.⁵³

The first energy one feels when walking is one's own, that of the body in motion.⁵⁴ Walking can generally be described by two types of discourse, 'the Romantics and Naturalists, tramping through rural locations; and the avant-gardists, drifting through the spectacular urban streets of capitalism'.⁵⁵ Thoreau describes his own movement in the wilderness as unplanned drifting.

When I go out of the house for a walk, uncertain as yet whither I will bend my steps, and submit myself to my instinct to decide for me, I find, strange and whimsical as it may seem, that I finally and inevitably settle southwest, toward some particular wood or meadow or deserted pasture or hill in that direction.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 5.

⁵⁰ Ingold writes that 'these are eyes tuned not to the discrimination and identification of individual objects but to the registration of subtle variations of light and shade, and of the surface textures they reveal'. Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 88.

⁵¹ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*.

⁵² Casey's argument has parallels with Ingold's assertion that knowledge of the world is gained by moving about in it and attending to it. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 55.

⁵³ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. 8.

⁵⁴ Gros, *A Philosophy of Walking*, p. 104.

⁵⁵ Deirdre Heddon and Cathy Turner, 'Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.2, (2012), 224-236 (pp. 225-226).

⁵⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2006), p. 15-16.

Several walkers, real and fictitious, preferred the city over the wilderness. The walker, stroller, observer, loungeur and many other accompanying associations have been personified in the virtual figure of the *flâneur*. According to Bassett the *flâneur* emerged as a distinctive figure in early nineteenth-century Paris, and his actions were mainly characterised by movement and observation.⁵⁷ Baudelaire can be credited with providing the first description of the *flâneur* in 1863 and later Benjamin was to offer an analysis of the *flâneur* and his relationship to modernism.⁵⁸ The city stroll took a different route with the emergence of Surrealism, the Dada movement and the Situationist International.⁵⁹ I borrow specific methods from Dada and the Situationist International as part of my practice-led research.

2.3 Mapping Psychogeography

Walking as an aesthetic and ideologically motivated practice can be traced back to the Lettrist group, around 1950s, a forerunner of the Situationist International. Coverleys argues that a number of practices backed by a radical political agenda were subordinated by the Situationist International among them psychogeography.⁶⁰

Perhaps, the most prominent characteristic of psychogeography is the activity of walking which ‘is seen as contrary to the spirit of the modern city’, as it cuts across established routes to explore the marginal and forgotten areas often overlooked by the city’s inhabitants.⁶¹ Debord describes one of the basic Situationist practices known as the theory of the *dérive* as ‘a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances’ involving ‘playful-constructive behavior and awareness of

⁵⁷ Keith Bassett, ‘Walking as an Aesthetic Practice and a Critical Tool: Some Psychogeographic Experiments’, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 28.3, (2004), 397-410 (p. 398).

⁵⁸ Baudelaire first mentioned the *flâneur* in ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (published in 1863 in installment form in *Le Figaro*). The *flâneur* is described as one who wants to be part of the crowd, who wants to live in the heart of the multitude amid the ebb and flow of movement. Walter Benjamin presented an analysis of the *flâneur* in the ‘Arcades Project’. Melvin Coverley, *Psychogeography* (Harpending: Pocket Essentials, 2010), p. 58.

⁵⁹ Coverley notes that the practice of automatism practiced by the Surrealists and the Dada movement was also extended to walking. Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 74.

⁶⁰ Psychogeography is the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment on individuals. Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 93.

⁶¹ Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 12.

psychogeographical effects'.⁶² Debord maintains that persons engaged in a *dérive* 'let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain and the encounters they find there', thus they would be following an unpremeditated path.⁶³

Evidence of psychogeography can be discerned in my own walking methodology, since it is largely reliant on drifting and it often considers the exploration of marginal areas. I document my walks in various ways and I generally allow the terrain to guide me. Psychogeography informs my research also in terms of spatial politics, and in how walking may be considered in the development of artistic practice. The Situationist's International seemed to be more concerned with the city and the vibrancy generated by its inhabitants, while my own walks are specifically restricted to rural areas that appear largely untouched by contemporary development.

Another characteristic of the Situationist practice is *détournement*. Debord and Wolman maintain that '*détournement* not only leads to the discovery of new aspects of talent', but is also 'a powerful cultural weapon in the service of a real class struggle'.⁶⁴ The Situationist's application of *détournement* was varied, ranging from literature, politics and film to urban architecture. 'Romantic writers, Lettrists, Situationist and modern writers have all played a part in the development of psychogeography'.⁶⁵

Psychogeography, as Bassett notes, is still evident particularly but not solely in the work of Iain Sinclair, a wanderer and prolific writer.⁶⁶ Sinclair, 'has been keen to expose those obscure places that lie at the margins, but he has also traversed the

⁶² 'Under the stewardship of Guy Debord, psychogeography became a tool in an attempt to transform urban life, first for aesthetic purposes but later for increasingly political ends'. Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 10; Guy Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive', *Situationist International Online* <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/theory.html>> [accessed 20 May 2016].

⁶³ Debord, 'Theory of the Dérive'.

⁶⁴ Debord and Wolman (1956) defined two categories of *détournements*. The minor *détournement* is the *détournement* of an element which draws all its meaning from the new context in which it has been placed. The deceptive *détournement* is the *détournement* of an element which derives scope from the new context. Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, 'A User's Guide to *Détournement*', *Situationist International Online* <<http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/presitu/usersguide.html>> [accessed 20 May 2016].

⁶⁵ Maisie Ridgway, 'An Introduction to Psychogeography', *The Double Negative* <<http://www.thedoublenegative.co.uk/2014/12/an-introduction-to-psychogeography/>> [accessed 6 June 2015].

⁶⁶ Bassett, *Walking as an Aesthetic Practice and a Critical Tool: Some Psychogeographic Experiments*.

centre' as part of his urban wanderings.⁶⁷ Similarly, Patrick Keiller's work has resonance with psychogeography; his films have been described as modernist, surrealist, political and aesthetically defamiliarising.⁶⁸

It is pertinent to note the gender-bias that appears to appropriate psychogeographical territory. Literature concerning the subject is anything but gender-balanced and the male-dominated path can be traced back to a distant past. Solnit mentions that in 19th Century England, walking was considered as an integral part of courtship and '[m]erely walking in the wrong time or place could put a woman under suspicion'.⁶⁹

The simple act of walking, especially in certain areas and time of day was construed as inevitably sexual. Solnit argues that throughout the history of walking she has been tracing the principal figures have been men. She states that 'there are biological and psychological explanations for these states of affairs, but the social and political circumstances seem most relevant'.⁷⁰ Contemporary authors like Sally Munt have questioned the notion of the male *flâneur* by imagining how spatial representation would be reconfigured if this essentially male figure had been a lesbian.⁷¹ The male *flâneur*'s dominant urban space is being contested and smoothed to accommodate the multiple realities characteristic of a rhizomatic social space.⁷²

Walking is a practical pursuit and a number of artists transformed walking into creative practice. In the following section I will review and discuss a number of walking artists and describe how they have developed their artistic practice through movement.

⁶⁷ Coverley, *Psychogeography*, p. 112.

⁶⁸ 'Keiller's work is a collision of historical materialism, modernism and surrealism, politically militant and aesthetically defamiliarising'. Keiller's films include *Robinson in Space* (1996) and *Dilapidated Dwelling* (2000). Owen Hatherley, 'How Patrick Keiller is Mapping the 21st Century Landscape', *The Guardian*, 30 March 2012. <<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2012/mar/30/patrick-keiller-robinson-tate-exhibition>> [accessed 6 June 2015], (para 3 of 8).

⁶⁹ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 233.

⁷⁰ Solnit, *Wanderlust*, p. 235.

⁷¹ Sally Munt, 'The Lesbian Flâneur', in *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, ed. by Iain Borden and others (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000).

⁷² Munt's essay 'The Lesbian Flâneur' contributes to Deleuze and Guattari's ideas about smooth space since it encourages rhizomatic movement and flows, unlike striated space which is segmented.

2.4 The Art of Walking

Numerous artists transformed walking and social engagement into a form of art.⁷³ '[W]alking-as-art has been proposed as a radical method of reconceptualising the way in which images in and of public space are produced' (e.g. Debord's *Naked City*, Acconci's *Following Piece*, Long's *A Line Made by Walking*, and Abramović and Ulay's *Great Wall Walk*).⁷⁴ Walking can be transformed into a space for art making. 'Artists, too, have their own reasons for being interested in travelling on foot at a relatively *moderate* rate' [original italics].⁷⁵ We can consider a number of 'art walks' to exemplify how movement might become a form of art. Elspeth Owen's walking events trouble assumptions of scale and she often undertakes long-distance walks (e.g. *Looselink*, 2005), 'rarely knowing in advance, where she is going'.⁷⁶ Collaborating artists and partners Dan Belasco Rogers and Sophia New of plan b, use GPS to record their journeys (*You, Me and Everywhere We Go*), their walking practices, and the differences between their movements.⁷⁷

Walking *per se* is not a form of art in the context of my research project but the main source from which matter for artistic practice is derived. My walks are generally orientated in rural areas. Places that for the most part appear to be untainted by contemporary development. However, the quasi-pristine landscape should not distract us from the veiled politics, since like a developed city the countryside is not immune to such maneuverings. The landscape 'is an instrument of cultural power', it embodies "the natural histories" of its own beholders', thus, it cannot be immune to politicisation, consequently what takes place there may be politicised too, even 'down-to-earth' movement.⁷⁸

⁷³ Andrea Phillips, 'Cultural Geographies in Practice: Walking and Looking', *Cultural Geographies*, 12.507, (2005), 507-513; Solnit, *Walking*.

⁷⁴ Phillips, *Cultural Geographies in Practice: Walking and Looking*, p. 508.

⁷⁵ David Evans, *The Art of Walking*, ed. by David Evans (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd, 2012), p. 13.

⁷⁶ Heddon and Turner, *Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility*, p. 230.

⁷⁷ Heddon and Turner, *Walking Women: Shifting the Tales and Scales of Mobility*, p. 232.

⁷⁸ 'Down-to-earth' movement refers to the common practice of strolling.

Walks may become politicised (e.g. Francis Alÿs's *The Green Line*, 2004), transgress boundaries or take the form of protests.⁷⁹ Walks may also involve guest walkers (e.g. Simon Pope's *The Memorial Walks*, 2007) or take the form of marches and projects involving participatory processes (e.g. Melanie Manchot's *Walk Square*, 2011), or 'as a means to gather and occupy, to claim and hold significant public spaces'.⁸⁰ Thus, walking in the context of artistic practice presents multiple trajectories and lines of deterritorialisation: it can be transformative, collaborative, contested, transgressive and poetic.⁸¹

Politics infiltrate the local landscape. Oozing from cracks and through the soil, landscape politics exert pressure and sway my movements. As I shall discuss, aspects of my own practice are influenced by the local political context. The *RTO* series and *Crossfire-Concerning the Nature of Our Culture* are considered politically charged works. (Figure 12)

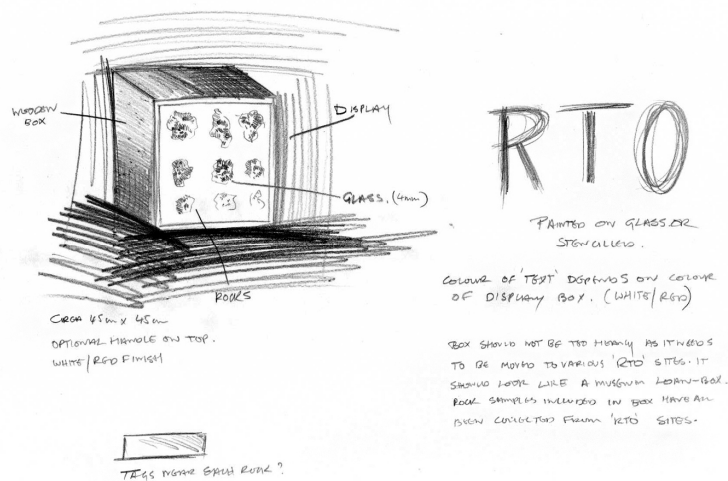


Figure 12 Sketch *RTO I*. Portable sculpture reminiscent of museum display cases. It responds to ambiguously reserved territory in certain parts of Malta.

⁷⁹ Evans, *The Art of Walking*, p. 30.

⁸⁰ 'Guest walkers' included writers (like Iain Sinclair), many of whom write about landscape, who accompanied the artist on a walk. Evans, *The Art of Walking*, p. 79.

⁸¹ In September 2015 I attended two lectures by Fulya Erdemci curator of the 13th Istanbul Biennale, where she discussed the protests and events held in Taksim Square in Istanbul in 2013 and the relation of such events to the Istanbul Biennale (Events were triggered on 28 May, with trees being uprooted in Gezi Park). Erdemci explained how people began to walk from Tünel towards Taksim amidst written slogans and graffiti.

Natura Colta represents a discreet take on museum and ecological politics, similarly, but perhaps less obvious, a ‘colonial’ constituent can be discerned in *Landline/Waterline*. As I walk I cross borders, I transgress, appropriate and demarcate my territory leaving behind an ephemeral trail which is not to be mistaken for what the walk really represents.

Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., The trajectories it ‘speaks’. All the modalities sing a part in this chorus, changing from step to step, stepping in through proportions, sequences, and intensities which vary according to the time, the path taken and the walker. These enunciatory operations are of an unlimited diversity. They therefore cannot be reduced to their graphic trail.⁸²

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, De Certeau exemplifies the complexities of walking in the city, since he introduces various modalities and descriptive links with cultural practices. However, it is not the scope of this research to delve into such practices, since they certainly merit a separate study of their own. Nonetheless, it is pertinent to mention De Certeau’s analogy of walking with rhetoric. He argues that ‘[t]he walking of passers-by offers a series of turns (*tours*) and detours that can be compared to “turns of phrase” or “stylistic figures”’, and similarly he compares ‘[t]he art of “turning” phrases’ with ‘an art of composing a path (*tourner un parcours*)’ [original italics].⁸³ This brings us to the work of Deirdre Heddon and Misha Myers *Stories from the Walking Library* (2012), a walk across Belgium while carrying a mobile library that was comprised of more than ninety books.⁸⁴ The experience of reading, writing and walking allowed Heddon and Myers to, among other matters, consider how reading ‘affects the experience of the journey and the experience of walking; how journeying affects the experience of reading; how reading affects the experience of writing; and how a walk, as a space of knowledge production, is written and read’.⁸⁵ As Ingold puts it, these kind of practitioners are ‘itinerants, wayfarers, whose task is to enter the grain of the world’s becoming and

⁸² Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press., 1984), p. 99.

⁸³ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 100.

⁸⁴ The Walking Library (comprised more than 90 books) took place in Belgium and it was made for the Sideways Arts Festival; it was ‘aimed to connect ecology and culture through using “slow ways” or “slow paths” of Flanders’. Deirdre Heddon and Misha Myers, ‘Stories from the Walking Library’, *Cultural Geographies*, 21.4, (2014), 639-655 (p. 639).

⁸⁵ Heddon and Myers, *Stories from the Walking Library*, p. 639.

bend it to an evolving purpose'.⁸⁶ The books served as literary companions for Heddon and Myers and they added further stories to their wayfaring; knowing on the move.

Following anthropologist Tim Ingold, we recognize ourselves and our fellow walkers on this journey as wayfinders, knowing as we go. In place of 'factual' data and classifications, therefore, we offer stories – 'occurrences' or topics that are knots in the complex and always-in-process meshworks constructed as we move *along* them. [original italics]⁸⁷

The Walking Library was a collaborative practice, since volunteer Walking Librarians joined Heddon and Myers along their journeying. During the walk, part of the Sideways Arts Festival, books were installed for the public to browse, and public reading and writing sessions were also held at the various festival hubs scattered along the journey.⁸⁸

The book as much as the landscape, forms on the move because reading, as much as writing – and walking – is a creative performative process that brings together intellectual comprehension and physical action.⁸⁹

'Writing' can also be perceived through my own practice more specifically in the form of territory-marking. *Pear Pressure* and *De-Scroll* respond to natural/cultural 'text' on prickly pears and eucalyptus bark respectively, and investigate alternative readings of territory and place.⁹⁰ (Figure 13) Such 'text' implicates peoples' stories intertwined with the stories of place that can be seen unfolding through movement, aptly described by Heddon and Myers as complex 'meshworks'.

⁸⁶ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 25.

⁸⁷ Heddon and Myers, *Stories from the Walking Library*, pp. 640-41.

⁸⁸ Heddon and Myers, *Stories from the Walking Library*, pp. 643-44.

⁸⁹ Heddon and Myers, *Stories from the Walking Library*, p. 651.

⁹⁰ *Pear Pressure* and *De-Scroll* respond to messages written (in the form of graffiti) on prickly pears and eucalyptus bark originating in Qlejgħa Valley. As will be discussed in Chapter 5 the messages are left by strollers who frequent the place which is a favourite spot among locals.



Figure 13 Prickly pears. *People inscribe messages on prickly pear leaves.*

Walking may be many different things, separately or combined. In the context of my practice-led research, walking defines the main aspects of my methodology, since the research is initiated on the ground in the form of a few loose footsteps. As I walk I collect raw material, non-natural objects, text, notes, photographs, video and experiences. Thus, collecting is complementary to walking and, as I shall discuss within the next section, collecting is integral to my practice-led research.

2.5 Collecting

Accruing matter becomes an archive of fragments of place. Things evoke place; ‘thingliness’ embodies fragments of place. Heidegger argues that ‘[n]othing can be discovered about the thingly aspect of the work until the pure standing-in-itself of the work has clearly shown itself’.⁹¹

Heidegger seems to imply that the artwork becomes accessible when it is removed ‘from all relation to anything other than itself’; a claim that may appear to disturb Casey’s notion of re-implication.⁹² However, paradoxically, Heidegger’s view

⁹¹ Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. trans. by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 19.

⁹² Casey argues that re-implication occurs when place is closely represented in the work, or differently but still retaining aspects that allow it to be recognisable, or in a manner that evokes contemplation of place. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 19; Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*; p. 30.

reinforces this notion. Although removed from place the work still embodies place qualities (see Chapter 3).

Fragments of place are reterritorialised in the artwork. 'World-withdrawal and world-decay can never be reversed', Heidegger maintains.⁹³ Deterritorialised matter can be considered a dissolution or disruption of 'place-thing'. Place will never exist as it was, it is temporal, and always in a state of flux.⁹⁴ Deterritorialisation implies change, difference, multiplicities and becomings.

We can argue that things are imbued with spectres of place, whereby place evoking particles, that constitute matter, are continuously vibrating to keep aspects of place alive in the artwork. Having established that the place no longer exists (as it was), neither in the artwork nor in the world, how can we contextualise the work and how are we supposed to encounter it? Heidegger explains that the work develops and stands in new relations that are formed through dislocation.

Where does a work belong? As a work, it belongs uniquely within the region it itself opens up. For the work-being of the work presences in and only in such opening up.⁹⁵

Things constitute vibrant matter that transforms into an assemblage which Bennett describes as 'ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts'.⁹⁶ In the assemblage we can discern Heidegger's region 'opening up' as demanded by the work. Deleuze and Guattari argue that assemblages are constituted by diverse lines of deterritorialisation. They explain that some lines 'open the territorial assemblage onto other assemblages', and similarly '[o]thers operate directly upon the territoriality of the assemblage, and open it onto a land that is [...] yet to come'.⁹⁷

⁹³ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 20.

⁹⁴ The artwork is like a collection of place fragments; it is always open and disposed to acquire more.

⁹⁵ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 20.

⁹⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 23.

⁹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 556.

Assemblages may incorporate a plethora of things and can be said to constitute a space of becoming, a space characterised by dynamism and change.⁹⁸ In the following section I will be discussing Joseph Cornell's assemblages, and the manner in which he transformed his humble yet diverse collection of things into artworks.

2.6 Re-collecting Joseph Cornell's Assemblages

Joseph Cornell's work comprises a series of assemblages often in the form of intricate fantastical worlds constructed in wooden boxes. According to Robert Motherwell, Cornell maintained that everything can be used however; one does not necessarily know it at the time.⁹⁹ It seems that Cornell never travelled abroad and lived his entire life in New York.¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, his constructions and assemblages evoke undefined, remote terrestrial regions and independent magical worlds.¹⁰¹ In Heidegger's terms they open up new worlds.¹⁰² Cornell's boxes can be considered 'non-enclosures', since they collapse boundaries.¹⁰³

Collecting opens up new worlds and territories where past and present coexist in an interplay of memories and experiences both real and imaginary. Benjamin describes collecting as a chaos of memories and those memories are precisely what make the object so appealing and fascinating, rather than its functional or utilitarian value.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, according to Benjamin, what makes collecting alluring is the thrill of

⁹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari define assemblages as territorial and their territoriality 'originates in a certain decoding of milieus, and is just as necessarily extended by lines of deterritorialization'. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 556.

⁹⁹ Motherwell writes that the items that Cornell collected 'were filed in cardboard boxes and large manila envelopes for future use in his constructions'. Review written by Robert Motherwell for the opening of Joseph Cornell's 1980-81 retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Robert Motherwell, 'Joseph Cornell', *MoMA*, 16, (1980), 1-2 (p. 2).

¹⁰⁰ Motherwell, *Joseph Cornell*, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Review of Joseph Cornell's 1982 retrospective exhibition at The Art Institute of Chicago. Anne Rorimer, 'Joseph Cornell', *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago*, 76.1, (1982), 1-3 (p. 3).

¹⁰² Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*.

¹⁰³ An exhibition of Joseph Cornell's work entitled 'Wanderlust' was held at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 2015. The title of the exhibition seems to encapsulate Cornell's urge to wander through his work.

¹⁰⁴ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 60.

acquisition and ownership although the things collected may not have a particular value of their own.¹⁰⁵

Cornell sets his collections free by enclosing them in boxes. This might sound like an oxymoron. If we consider the box as an open world in Heideggerian terms, we can argue that the freedom of things is achieved when they are reterritorialised inside the box. Thus, the box is an opening, not a closing.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Benjamin argues that to a book collector, ‘the true freedom of all books is somewhere on his shelves’.¹⁰⁷

For inside him there are spirits, or at least little genii, which have seen to it that for a collector – and I mean a real collector, a collector as he ought to be – ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them.¹⁰⁸

Fabijancic remarks that although Cornell’s boxes set limits on the number and size of objects, they, however open up interpretive possibilities by setting things in juxtaposition.¹⁰⁹ His work shares parallels with the Surrealist movement since he often juxtaposes unrelated found objects and images within imaginary contexts. The memories and experiences evoked through the assemblages create a space that could be inhabited by the viewers. ‘[A]ll of the boxes are textual in the sense that their objects tell stories, are embedded in various narratives, or depend on the narrative’ of viewers.¹¹⁰ Cornell’s boxes reconstitute the present from fragments of the past.¹¹¹

From this point of view, Cornell does not salvage the past in the sense of saving it or retrieving it or returning it intact to a present moment. Instead, he assembles signs of the past into a new mysterious set of relations which trigger in viewers potentially limitless new connections.¹¹²

¹⁰⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 60.

¹⁰⁶ Cornell’s boxes have parallels with Foucault’s heterotopia (1967). See Section 5.2.2.

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁹ Tony Fabijancic, ‘The Sadness is in You: Memory in the Boxes of Joseph Cornell, William Gibson, and E. L. Doctorow’, *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*, 28.3, (2012), 233-242 (p. 237).

¹¹⁰ Fabijancic, *The Sadness is in You: Memory in the Boxes of Joseph Cornell, William Gibson, and E. L. Doctorow*, p. 234.

¹¹¹ Rorimer notes that time and place are constant themes in Cornell’s work. Rorimer, *Joseph Cornell*, p. 3.

¹¹² Fabijancic, *The Sadness is in You: Memory in the Boxes of Joseph Cornell, William Gibson, and E. L. Doctorow*, p. 234.

Cornell's *Solomon Islands (Interior)* (1940-42) is comprised of juxtaposed fragments that evoke a sense of place. The title of the work is suggestive of an exotic remote place that Cornell never visited except through this work. A map (not shown in the image) covers the collection; however, it does not show Solomon Islands but another group of islands. The box is divided into small compartments reflecting a fluid categorisation of objects which include shells, twigs, leaves, maps and other ephemera. Cornell uses objects and a map to take us to places where neither he and perhaps nor us have ever been to. (Figure 14)



Figure 14 Joseph Cornell, *Solomon Islands (Interior)*, 1940-42.

Cornell was an artist and collector, his work relies largely on humble collections. 'With his passion for the ordinary – the thimble, the seashell or the postage stamp, for example – Cornell creates rarified private worlds, microcosms of another order'.¹¹³ The work of Mark Dion and David Walker Barker has resonance with Cornell's work and thus, the analysis presented here should serve as a context for contemporary practice, including my own (see Chapter 4).

My work, *RTO* series and *Natura Colta* incorporate encased ordinary collections but they are not comparable to Joseph Cornell's, since they do not delve into such fantastical worlds.¹¹⁴ However, my work does open up the territory beyond the enclosure; this can be perceived in the way inside and outside are brought together

¹¹³ Rorimer, *Joseph Cornell*, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ The *RTO* series and *Natura Colta* unlike Cornell's work comprise place specific objects.

within a conceptually open space. In the following section I will discuss the relation between collecting and art practice. I will then explain how this rhizomatic permutation contributes to the research questions.

2.7 The Art of Collecting

Benjamin argues that collecting rests on ‘a dialectical tension between the poles of order and disorder’.¹¹⁵ Collecting engenders a certain chaos. It would be useful to define chaos, to understand what chaos represents in this particular context.

According to Deleuze and Guattari ‘[c]haos is defined not so much by its disorder as by the infinite speed with which every form taking shape in it vanishes’.¹¹⁶ Thus, chaos is being described as a formless movement in the sense that its form is always in a state of flux. It is essentially rhizomatic since it resists any type of direction and forms of classification.

‘Art transforms chaotic variability into *chaoid* variety’ [original italics].¹¹⁷ We can argue that chaos breeds multiplicities and promotes lines of flight and deterritorialisation but how do collections fit into this chaos? How are we to arrange things in an orderly manner without restricting the chaos that brings us the vision? Benjamin argues that order emerges from an apparent disorder, what he describes as habitualization. ‘For what else is this collection but a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order?’.¹¹⁸ As will be discussed in Chapter 9, museums and public collections are located on a totally different plane, since they are generally characterised by different types of classifications and taxonomical indexes, unlike their whimsical predecessor, the *Wunderkammer*.

Even though public collections may be less objectionable socially and more useful academically than private collections, the objects get their due only in the latter.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 60.

¹¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. by Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 1994), p. 118.

¹¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 204.

¹¹⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 60.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 67.

The private collector possesses tacit knowledge of the items at hand and their value and meaning develops from this mutual relationship. Benjamin argues that ‘the phenomenon of collecting loses its meaning as it loses its personal owner’.¹²⁰ The collection becomes the territory of its owner who may erect boundaries around it. The collector lives through the collection and if the collection changes hands meaning-making is impinged on; ‘only in extinction is the collector comprehended’.¹²¹ Moreover, the background of an item adds up to what Benjamin describes as a ‘magic encyclopedia’; what we can consider a ‘place-thing’ association.¹²²

We can argue that collecting is an art form in its own right; however, collections can also be transformed or incorporated into artworks. Chapter 4 discusses the work of Mark Dion, Susan Hiller, David Walker Barker, and herman de vries, who consider themselves artists/collectors. They often incorporate fragments of collections within their artworks and generally their work, either partially or totally, revolves around specific collections. The collector gets to know the items by acquiring them, connecting with them, researching about them, and living in them. The collection has to be open and accessible. To order is to close – to arrange is to inhibit access. Order in this respect signifies closure and lack of experimentation. Art needs access to collections thus, openness is key. ‘Art enables matter to become expressive, to not just satisfy but also to intensify – to resonate and become more than itself’.¹²³ Order is arborescent and root-like while chaos is rhizomatic.

Art and chaos work in-counterpoint to form a complex and orderly chaos. ‘[I]f art battles against chaos it is to borrow weapons from it’.¹²⁴ Moreover, ‘[a]rt struggles with chaos but it does so in order to render it sensory’.¹²⁵ Grosz asserts that art is a strange coupling, the coming together of chaos and order.¹²⁶ Art re-orders chaos. Thus, for collections to become-other there needs to be disruption, at least

¹²⁰ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 67.

¹²¹ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 67.

¹²² Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 60.

¹²³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), p. 4.

¹²⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 204.

¹²⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, p. 205.

¹²⁶ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, p. 9.

temporarily, in order to allow chaos to reign and reterritorialise into something new and ordered.

Chaos is not the absence of order but rather the fullness or plethora that, depending on its uneven speed, force and intensity, is the condition both for any model or activity and for the undoing and transformation of such models or activities. This concept of chaos is also known or invoked through the concepts of: the outside, the real, the virtual, the world, materiality, nature, totality, the cosmos, each of which is a narrowing and specification of chaos from a particular point of view'.¹²⁷

Benjamin likens collections to a chaos of memories, while Deleuze and Guattari maintain that arborescent systems are like organised memories.¹²⁸ An ordered collection is like an arborescent system, similar to the inaccessible taxonomic collections held captive in museum showcases. For collections to become-other they have to denounce the rigidity of classification which hinders rhizomatic movement since '[b]ecoming is a rhizome, not a classificatory or genealogical tree'.¹²⁹

Having established the processes that open up collecting to artistic practice, I will now move on to discuss my own methods of collecting. In the following section I will discuss why I consider myself a collector, and explain how the commonplace things that comprise my eclectic collection contribute to the research questions.

2.8 I Collect therefore I am (...a Collector)

I collect natural and man-made objects.¹³⁰ I am not a collector in the strict sense of the word, but still, I collect things. The material accruing in my studio transforms into vibrant matter through artistic practice and in the process themes for investigation emerge. My collection is eclectic, humble, random and unstructured. It is essentially a collection of things that have been discarded either by nature or by

¹²⁷ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, pp. 26-27.

¹²⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

¹²⁹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 263.

¹³⁰ 'Though we may *occupy* a world of objects, to the occupant the contents of the world appear already locked into their final forms, as though they had turned their backs on us. To *inhabit* the world, by contrast, is to join in the processes of formation. It is to participate in a dynamic world of energies, forces and flows.' [original italics] Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 89.

humans. Discovery is ongoing. First I encounter my finds on the ground then I re-discover them inside my studio in the process of artistic practice. *Natura Colta* references all the selected Maltese places included within the research project; it is comprised of objects collected from each place (see Chapter 9). (Figure 15)



Figure 15 Sketch *Natura Colta*.

I collect soil, stream water, stones, animal bones, spent shotgun cartridges, snail shells, broken glass, seeds and all sorts of things. I also collect notes, sketches, photographs, video and memories. But what can we learn about place and territory from commonplace items? My collection comprises things that evoke a sense of place. I collect fragments of place. The collection that clutters my studio connects inside and outside; they connect through dislocation. Deleuze and Guattari assert that ‘[t]he territory is just inseparable from deterritorialisation as the code from the decoding’.¹³¹

Collecting can be equated with learning about the material-at-hand. The tactile qualities of the material are experienced by manipulating it and experimenting with it, thus, it is crucial to save the material and keep it within reach. Collecting entails establishing a relation with the material, conversing with and listening to it; decoding it. The collection is not merely an accumulation of material but also an accrual of knowledge about place that awaits translation.

¹³¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 556.

The collection is open and chaotic but is re-ordered in the artwork. My own artistic practice develops on the ground, and throughout this research project I argue that we can acquire knowledge about, and familiarity with place through art practice.

Walking and collecting are intertwined in the context of my research. The plethora of things I collect can be considered as remembrances of my walks. Walking is comparable to collecting, since both implicate modes of accumulation. Walking accumulates distance and footage. Analogously, footage accumulates memories and experiences. Collecting entails moving from one place to another, delving into unexplored territories. It is spatial and temporal. It necessitates both a foothold in the past, and the present: walking takes us along similar paths.

This chapter considered a number of primary and secondary research questions including: How can collections transform into matter of inquiry? ; How can an open collection contribute to artistic practice? ; How is movement implicated in collecting? ; What can we learn about place from accumulated matter? ; In what ways can the experience of place be evoked in art practice? ; How does deterritorialised matter contribute to further our knowledge of place? The following chapter continues to develop on the methods (walking/collecting) discussed here.

3. Matter and Methodology

3.1 (Re-) Deterritorialisation in the *Making*

In the previous chapter, it was discussed how my research is initiated on the ground—walking and collecting. The present chapter resumes the discussion about the multiple methodologies and bricolage hybrid praxis that underpin my research project.¹³² The first part of the text reviews Deleuze and Guattari's notion of (de-) reterritorialisation, and related aspects. This is followed by a review of deep mapping in conjunction with additional theoretical models.

This research is characterised by different approaches, pieced together, which give impetus to (re-) deterritorialisation and rhizomatic movement. Borrowing from various fields which include art, philosophy, social sciences, archaeology, history, and geography, my research is concerned with place. It explores the complex associations of matter and place, and identifies opportunities for contemporary fine art practice. The first step is to be in place; 'one's place is where one puts down one's feet'.¹³³

Although there tends to be an alignment between practice-led research and qualitative research methods, practice-led research has its own distinctive research approach and strategies.¹³⁴ Sullivan argues that '[t]o create, the researcher has to enter into the realm of imagination, to take on the possible, as well as the plausible, and probable'.¹³⁵

¹³² Robyn Stewart, 'Creating New Stories for Praxis: Navigations, Narrations, Neonarratives', in *Practice as Research. Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010), pp. 123-133.

¹³³ Allen Carlson, *Nature and Landscape. An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 83.

¹³⁴ Brad Haseman, 'Rupture and Recognition: Identifying the Performative Research Paradigm', in *Practice as Research. Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010), pp. 147-157 (pp. 147-148).

¹³⁵ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research*, p. 115.

Handling of materials and studio practice opened up possibilities for movement. Writing contributed to further movement; it located the artworks within a critical discourse and from this, additional speculative possibilities continued to emerge. Bolt explains that for Heidegger knowledge arises from the handling of materials and processes; theoretical knowledge is possible through handling.¹³⁶ Extracts from my fieldwork notes are interspersed within the thesis. These serve as a second voice which is quite different from the structured and rigorous writing that elucidates the theoretical arguments. This strategy facilitated the movement between making and writing. I made a number of practice journals as a reflection and documentation of the process.

Ingold places the maker as a participant amongst active materials.¹³⁷ ‘Thought gathers in the work. It is the event of the work’s unfolding’, Manning and Massumi argue.¹³⁸ In practice-led research, matter is always in a state of becoming; in between states. It is a continuous conversation between matter and maker, and the latter has to sensitise one’s self with the matter at hand to be able to identify opportunities for movement.

From the point of view of creative research, materials are always in a state of becoming. They are not to be imagined as crystalline, dry or elemental but as colloidal, humid and combinatory.¹³⁹

Ingold claims that the maker in the process of making ‘joins forces’ with the materials, ‘bringing them together or splitting them apart, synthesizing and distilling, in anticipation of what might emerge’.¹⁴⁰ In Bolt’s words, through handling the maker may take the work elsewhere.¹⁴¹ My research is grounded in practice. It develops through (re-) deterritorialised matter and it considers matter as an entry point into place. My practice is considered alongside Deleuze and Guattari’s notions of (de-) reterritorialisation and lines of flight.

¹³⁶ Barbara Bolt, ‘The Magic is in Handling’, in *Practice as Research. Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010), pp. 27-34 (p. 30).

¹³⁷ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 21.

¹³⁸ Manning and Massumi, *Thought in the Act*, p. 65.

¹³⁹ Paul Carter, ‘Interest: The Ethics of Invention’, in *Practice as Research. Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010), pp. 15-25 (p. 19).

¹⁴⁰ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 21.

¹⁴¹ Bolt, *The Magic is in Handling*, pp. 32-33.

This is how it should be done: Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, and potential movements of deterritorialisation, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there, try out continuums of intensities segment by segment, have a small plot of new land at all times.¹⁴²

Movement is key here. I did not follow a map; I made a map. Territories were established through movement and every territory was connected to the next to form an open map. 'A territory is established only once qualities/properties come to have their own resonances...territory is the spatiotemporal configuration of these rhythms and forces'.¹⁴³ Territory is where the potential of matter can increase, movement picks up momentum, connections are established and lines of flight are generated. It does not have firm borders and it 'is a malleable site of passage'.¹⁴⁴ Thus, the map consists not of separate territories but of a homogenous territory characterised by unremitting flows and connections.

The homogenous territory shares the qualities of each territory. Patton defines deterritorialisation as 'a complex process involving at least a deterritorialising element and a territory which is being left behind or reconstituted'.¹⁴⁵ When a territory is established movement begins; then another territory is established and they are connected, so on and so forth. This claim shares parallels with O'Sullivan's assertion that '[o]ne requires some kind of territory before deterritorialising'.¹⁴⁶

Deterritorialisation is always bound up with correlative processes of reterritorialisation, which does not mean returning to the original territory but rather the ways in which deterritorialised elements recombine and enter into new relations.¹⁴⁷

Matter is deterritorialised and change occurs. As matter is reconfigured deterritorialised flows conjugate.¹⁴⁸ Matter constituting particles continue to develop

¹⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 178.

¹⁴³ Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁴ Kylie Message, 'Territory', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. by Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 274-276 (p. 274).

¹⁴⁵ Paul Patton, 'Deterritorialisation + Politics', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. by Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 70-71 (p. 70).

¹⁴⁶ Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 33.

¹⁴⁷ Patton, *Deterritorialisation + Politics*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁸ In the process matter is decontextualised and this opens a space for further rhizomatic movement. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 12.

and cross paths. Parr argues that Deleuze and Guattari describe the process of deterritorialisation in different ways.¹⁴⁹ Deterritorialisation can be understood ‘as a movement producing change’ and thus, ‘[t]o deterritorialise is to free up the fixed relations that contain a body all the while exposing it to new organisations’.¹⁵⁰ This is analogous to Smithson’s idea of entropy.¹⁵¹

Movement is rhizomatic; ‘[n]omadic waves or flows of deterritorialisation’ create alterations.¹⁵² Deleuze and Guattari maintain that ‘any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be.’¹⁵³ Rhizomatic movement is associated with mapping and smooth space.

3.2 Mapping

The previous section presented a close reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s (re-) deterritorialisation and related notions of change inducing movement. The following part of the chapter delves into mapping and examines how this approach has been involved in my practice-led research.

I had begun the day with my usual pedestrian approach: set a small goal and let the destination find me.¹⁵⁴

Casey argues that mapping the land departs from notions of generic or cartographic mapping since it is a matter of moving and going through the land.¹⁵⁵ As is emphasised throughout this research project ‘being-there’ is key in developing a relationship with place and matter.¹⁵⁶ For my research I chose a deep map approach

¹⁴⁹ Adrian Parr, ‘Deterritorialisation / Reterritorialisation’, in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. by Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 66-69 (p. 66).

¹⁵⁰ Parr, *Deterritorialisation/Reterritorialisation*, p. 67.

¹⁵¹ Robert Smithson, ‘Conversation in Salt Lake City’, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 297-300 (p. 298).

¹⁵² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 60.

¹⁵³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ William Least Heath-Moon, *Prairie Earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1991), p. 279.

¹⁵⁵ Casey maintains that this is not fixed or sedentary mapping. Casey, *Earth-Mapping. Artists Reshaping Landscape*, p. xv, 14.

¹⁵⁶ ‘What matters is to move in the midst of matter, to become attuned to it and to enter into intimate embrace with it’. Casey, *Earth-Mapping. Artists Reshaping Landscape*, p. 178.

due to its capacity to make the restricted vast. Biggs explains that a deep map evokes materials, perspectives and temporalities of place.¹⁵⁷

[T]he deep map attempts to record and represent the grain and patina of place through juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional [...]¹⁵⁸

I used to go to the same places repeatedly; walking, touching, getting the feel of textures, and listening intently. I made a map, and an archive. McLucas in *There are ten things that I can say about these deep maps* indicates that a deep map has at least three basic elements: a graphic work which can be horizontal or vertical, a time-based media component like a film or performance and an open archival system.¹⁵⁹

I liked the clarity of line in a place that seemed to require me to bring something to it and to open to it actively: see far, see little. I learned a prairie secret: take the numbing distance in small doses and gorge on the little details that beckon.¹⁶⁰

Casey sustains that mapping represents movement in what Deleuze and Guattari call smooth space, drifting; it is opposed to movement in striated space like cartographic mapping, gridlike and homogeneous in character.¹⁶¹ Mapping consists of a subtle scanning of the land at a tacit level as opposed to surveying.¹⁶² Deleuze and Guattari assert that a rhizome is ‘a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing’ they utter [original emphasis].¹⁶³ Foster notes that different forms of mapping are now implicit in the work of many contemporary artists.¹⁶⁴

Biggs maintains that in a deep map geographical and ethnographic practices play a large part; imaginative juxtapositions and interweaving of distinct approaches and

¹⁵⁷ Iain Biggs, ‘Deep Mapping: A Brief Introduction’, in *Mapping Spectral Traces*, ed. by Karen E. Till (Blacksburg: Virginia Tech College of architecture and Urban Studies Virginia Tech, 2010), p. 5.

¹⁵⁸ Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 64.

¹⁵⁹ Clifford McLucas, ‘There are Ten Things that I can say about these Deep Maps’, *Clifford McLucas*, <<http://cliffordmclucas.info/deep-mapping.html>> [accessed 18 April 2016].

¹⁶⁰ Heat-Moon, *Prairie Earth*, p. 27.

¹⁶¹ Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘smooth’ and ‘striated’ space are discussed in Chapter 5. Casey, *Earth-Mapping. Artists Reshaping Landscape*, p. xvi.

¹⁶² Casey, *Earth-Mapping. Artists Reshaping Landscape*, p. 12.

¹⁶³ ‘A field, a heterogeneous smooth space, is wedded to a very particular type of multiplicity: nonmetric, acentred, rhizomatic multiplicities that occupy space without “counting” it and can “be explored only by legwork”’. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 13, 409.

¹⁶⁴ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Massachusetts: MIT Press Ltd., 1996), p. 185.

documentary perspectives.¹⁶⁵ These aspects are grounded in place yet they take up paths of their own.

The deep map allowed me to familiarise myself with place; it encapsulated the notion of *Dasein* as explicated by Heidegger.¹⁶⁶ As Tucker argues, to the viewer, who has never experienced ‘my places’ directly, the artworks appear as ‘connected/separate objects’.¹⁶⁷ Aspects of place can be encountered through the work. It is what Casey refers to as re-implication.¹⁶⁸

This research borrows albeit loosely specific strategies pertaining to ‘grounded theory’.¹⁶⁹ Glaser and Strauss proposed that grounded theory should be built from the ground up.¹⁷⁰ In this research, it is through practice that theoretical considerations emerge and continue to evolve. Qualities of grounded theory can be detected in the way matter emerges from the ground and in how it is selected. The researcher has to become acquainted with the matter at hand to be able to decide how the practice will develop and in what manner.¹⁷¹ The ground on which grounded theory develops is fluid and this shares parallels with the fluctuating ground investigated through this research.¹⁷² Long-time engagement in a research site is necessary to become familiar with the various aspects which are being investigated.¹⁷³ It must be emphasised that practices pertaining to grounded theory have been manipulated to fit the character of this research; thus certain methods might appear antithetical.

¹⁶⁵ Iain Biggs, ‘Deep Mapping as an Essaying of Place’, *Iain Biggs* (Bartlett School of Architecture, 9 July 2010) <<http://www.iainbiggs.co.uk/text-deep-mapping-as-an-essaying-of-place/>> [accessed 21 May 2016]

¹⁶⁶ The notion of *Dasein* is further discussed in Chapter 5. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 140.

¹⁶⁷ Judith Tucker, ‘Resort: Re/visiting, Re/visioning, Re/placing’, *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 5.1, (2006), 95-106 (p. 98).

¹⁶⁸ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. 26.

¹⁶⁹ Grounded theory is a type of methodology developed by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss in 1967.

¹⁷⁰ Stefan Timmermans and Iddo Tavory, ‘Advancing Ethnographic Research through Grounded Theory Practice’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, ed. by Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2007), pp. 493-512 (p. 493).

¹⁷¹ Grounded theory allows researchers to distinguish between noise and music. Timmermans and Tavory, *Advancing Ethnographic Research through Grounded Theory Practice*, p. 496.

¹⁷² Norman K. Denzin, ‘Grounded Theory and the Politics of Interpretation’, in *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, ed. by Antony Bryant and Kathy Charmaz (London: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2007), pp. 454-471 (p. 458).

¹⁷³ For example, I do not walk along a predetermined route but I allow the ground to suggest possible routes; similarly, I collaborate with matter, allowing it to indicate what it wants to be. Timmermans and Tavory, *Advancing Ethnographic Research through Grounded Theory Practice*, p. 498.

Art research entails a complex and poetic intertwining of real and imaginary contexts. ‘The critical visual artist, in the enactment of his or her thinking, operates between the real and the semblance, able to mitigate against the disappearance of the real into virtualisation’.¹⁷⁴

Macleod and Holdridge argue that ‘art is always in translation, because it is matter: it is materially realised ideas’.¹⁷⁵ Further possibilities for the exchange of new knowledge may occur when practice is combined with theory. Davy sustains that theory releases the potential of practice and its role ‘is to uncover the possibilities that remain inherent within practices and thereby liberate them towards futures already latent within them’.¹⁷⁶

[M]aking informed choices about creative purposes involves selecting, adapting, and constructing ways of working and ways of seeing, and to do this one has to construct the tools of inquiry from an array of practices.¹⁷⁷

The discussion here concerned the movement and reconfiguration of matter and the exchange of knowledge that occurs through combined practice and theoretical discourse. The arguments presented here demonstrate how within this research project, practice and theory talk to each other.

The current chapter should be considered alongside the discussion started in the previous chapter. Both chapters combine the practice and theoretical approaches that underpin this research project. The main theoretical structure of this research hinges on Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of (de-) reterritorialisation. Mapping combined with Grounded Theory reveal the nuances of place and matter. Such methods complement walking and collecting. The following chapter presents a review of contemporary practice. It examines the work of a selection of artists that has resonance with aspects of my own work.

¹⁷⁴ Ken Neil, ‘Repeat: Entity and Ground. Visual Arts Practice as Critical Differentiation’, in *Thinking Through Art. Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 60-72 (pp. 60-61).

¹⁷⁵ Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge, ‘Introduction’, in *Thinking Through Art. Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 1-14 (p. 8).

¹⁷⁶ Nicholas Davy, ‘Art and Theoria’, in *Thinking Through Art. Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.20-39 (p. 21).

¹⁷⁷ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research*, p. 102.

4. Review of Contemporary Practice

Within this chapter I will review selected contemporary practice in order to further establish a context for my research. Through these artists I have gained a better understanding of my own position. The artists selected for discussion are: Mark Dion, Susan Hiller, David Walker Barker, herman de vries, Elizabeth Ogilvie, and Richard Long.

The selection of work which is being considered here is based on reference to place, aspects of collecting, walking, systems of taxonomy, and nature/culture relations. Mark Dion, David Walker Barker, herman de vries and Susan Hiller transform collections into artworks and thus, their context is of particular interest. My work, for example *RTO I* and *RTO II*, which take the shape of pseudo-museum cabinets, are comprised of ordinary stone collections. (Figure 16)

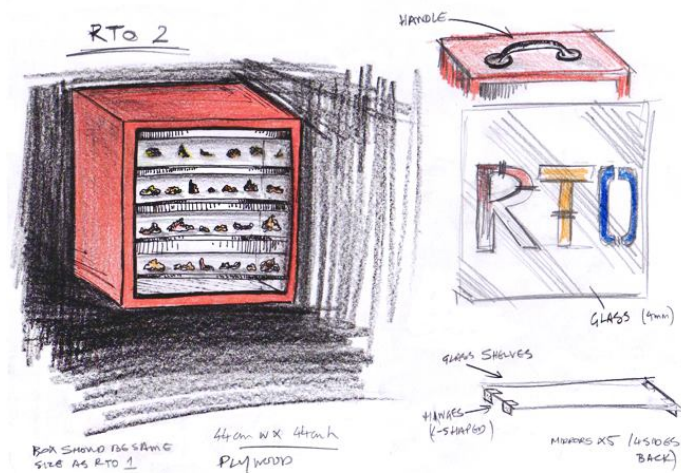


Figure 16 Sketch *RTO II*.

RT-O is evidently more eclectic in nature since it comprises a diverse collection of natural objects. (Figure 17) The *RTO* series responds to territorial boundaries in the Maltese rural countryside juxtaposed with the boundaries restricting access in museums. Unlike the other *RTO* display cabinets, *RT-O* (open *RTO*) is an open cabinet and thus, viewers are presented with the option of handling the objects and reconfiguring the collection.

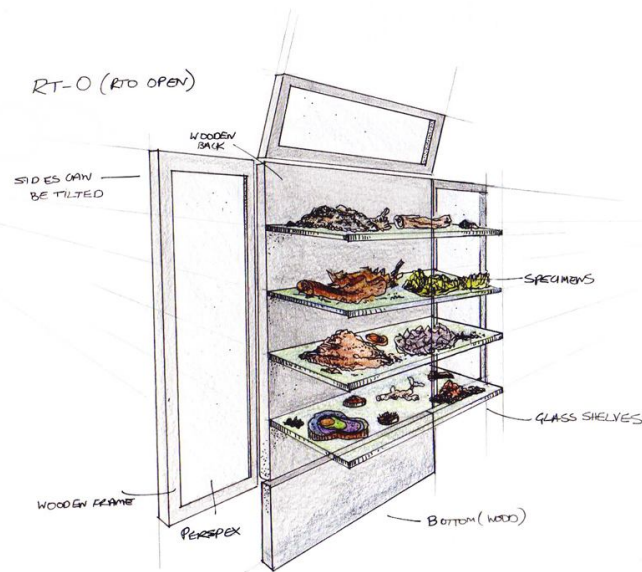


Figure 17 Sketch *RT-O*.

My collections are strictly non-taxonomic; objects are placed according to fluid categorisations, for example, matter or shape. The objects are intended to encourage viewers to construct their own meanings; they serve as a starting point and allow for a diversification of readings.

4.1 Mark Dion – Revising Taxonomy

I would like to consider Mark Dion’s collection-based artwork entitled *Thames Dig* (1999). (Figure 18) This work has parallels with my *RTO* series and with *Natura Colta*. Dion and a team of volunteers recovered objects from the river Thames in London which include decorated potsherds, shells, metal objects, contemporary plastic telephone cards, and glass bottles, among other objects. A diverse ‘spectrum of artifacts dating from all periods was displayed’ in a mahogany cabinet, similar to the ones used in museums.¹⁷⁸ The display, which included old and contemporary objects, did not follow a strict taxonomic system.

‘Dion’s process of making, of collaboration, collection and installation of things in new relations and associations’ resonates with mine, also in the way it ‘asks

¹⁷⁸ James Putnam, *Art and Artifact. The Museum as Medium* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2009), p. 40.

questions of institutional practices and the institutions that are performed through them'.¹⁷⁹ His taxonomical categories are fluid and made to question the strict regimes encountered in museums, however, Dion's found objects are loosely categorised according to form and material. Although he did not follow strict museological procedures such collection seems to be arranged according to set parameters which is very different from the manner I positioned unrelated objects forming part of *RT-O* and *Natura Colta*. Such works are mostly concerned with connecting separate objects rather than displaying variants of numerous objects of a similar kind. Dion's cabinets and enclosures are generally more imposing unlike mine which tend to be less invasive and more discreet. He includes quite a large number of objects in order to evoke earlier museum showcases. My cabinets are generally much smaller in size and at times these have to be portable, for example *RTO I* and *RTO II*.



Figure 18 Mark Dion, *Thames Dig* (Detail), 1999-2000.

Enclosures seem to elevate the value of objects, however, Dion deconstructs the power/knowledge structure by including anomalous objects and pseudo-taxonomic arrangements within a restricted space. Back to my own work, stones in *RTO I* and *RTO II* appeared to acquire value when placed inside a display case, and this made me reflect further on the politics of the museum (see Chapter 9).

¹⁷⁹ Duncan Grewcock, *Doing Museology Differently* (London: Routledge Ltd., 2013), p. 156..

In 2007 Dion staged an exhibition in homage to Carl Linneaus ‘whose binomial classification system democratized botany and zoology, enabling amateurs and professionals alike to collect and classify specimens’.¹⁸⁰ *Systema Metropolis*, held at the Natural History Museum in London, consisted of four installations comprising natural and inanimate material recovered from different locations in London.

In his work *Vivarium* (2002), Dion encloses a dead maple tree ‘darkened by time and laid horizontally under a sort of greenhouse roof’, surrounded by life.¹⁸¹ (Figure 19) The decaying wood, Vettese exclaims, nourishes an entire ecosystem comprising moss and insects and this chain of life and death ‘suggests a reading of history in which everything is for the best: the maple is dead’ but history goes on.¹⁸² Like Smithson, Dion investigates ‘what happens after the work is made: composition giving way to decomposition’.¹⁸³ Furthermore, McClister tells us that for Dion, ‘entropy is always explicitly matched by the natural process of rebirth’, where new structures bloom on the ruins of the old, containing within ‘fragments of the original site’.¹⁸⁴ ‘Nature is historical’, Heidegger maintains.¹⁸⁵ It has been colonised and exploited, and it is ‘the very soil of history’.¹⁸⁶

Vivarium showcases history in the form of a tree not by preserving the trunk but rather by allowing it to disintegrate. Dion’s work is about the preservation of decay rather than the preservation of the object itself. The object becomes history in disappearance. Both *Vivarium* and *Thames Dig* relocate matter within custom-made enclosures. Ironically, *Vivarium* presents us with a dead tree enclosed inside a greenhouse-like structure, generally used to grow crops. A micro ecology now thrives inside the greenhouse and as it grows what is left of the tree continues to shrink and vanish. *Thames Dig* is also concerned with conservation but unlike *Vivarium* it speaks of static objects, discarded and forgotten in the depths of the river Thames. The tree, a towering structure that rises above the ground will be returned

¹⁸⁰ Colin Martin, ‘Art Shadowing science’, *Nature*, 448.5, (2007), (p. 26).

¹⁸¹ Angela Vettese, ‘The Inevitability of Hunting’, in *Mark Dion Concerning Hunting*, ed. by Dieter Burchart and Verena Gamper (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), pp. 11-20 (p. 12).

¹⁸² Vettese, *The Inevitability of Hunting*, p. 12.

¹⁸³ Neil McClister, ‘Mark Dion’, *Bomb*, 85, (2003), 8-11 (p. 9).

¹⁸⁴ McClister, *Mark Dion*, p. 9.

¹⁸⁵ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 440.

¹⁸⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 440.

to where it belongs, unlike the other artwork which reveals hidden and concealed objects by moving them towards the surface.



Figure 19 Mark Dion, *Vivarium*, 2002.

In my work entitled *De-Scroll* I attempt to preserve the bark of the tree and to transform it into an artefact, allowing the viewer to read through its multiple (his)stories (see Chapter 6). (Figure 20) Unlike Dion, I do not want the tree to rot away as this would mean erasing the existing 'text'. However, it must be noted that the properties of bark are altered overtime, thus a similar but very slow process of decay is taking place. *De-Scroll* is concerned with the preservation of bark and it is shown within a totally different environment to the one favoured by Dion. The bark sculptures, in the form of fragile scrolls, generate new layers of 'text' and possibilities for re-writing the history of the place.



Figure 20 *De-Scroll. Eucalyptus bark scrolls.*

The bark scrolls were shown in the form of an imposing large-scale installation within the main reading hall at The National Library in Valletta, in 2015 (see Chapter 6). All existing antique display cases inside the library were appropriated by bark scrolls, creating a vast site-specific installation.

Hunting Blind – The Slob (2008) and *Hunting Blind – The Ruin* (2008) are two works by Dion which concern hunting. He reconstructs a series of hunting hides, removed from their original context in order to highlight their sinister side – ‘that their inhabitants see while not being seen’.¹⁸⁷ From inside we can peep outside without being seen and this makes it easier to control the territory and potential game. The interiors of the hides that Dion built tell the stories of a hunting culture.¹⁸⁸

Dion’s hunting-themed work has parallels with a large-scale installation I made entitled *Crossfire-Concerning the Nature of Our Culture* (2015) (see Chapter 8). The politically-charged sculptural installation consisted of thousands of spent shotgun cartridges. It responded to the local historic Spring Hunting Referendum, and the dichotomous relationship between nature and culture which is imbricated with the history of local hunting.

¹⁸⁷ Jacop Wamberg, ‘Hunt, War and Knowledge’, in *Mark Dion Concerning Hunting*, ed. by Dieter Bucchart and Verena Gamper (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), pp. 53-58 (p. 55).

¹⁸⁸ Verena Gamper, ‘The Amateur and the Hunter: Science’s Complementary Figures’, in *Mark Dion Concerning Hunting*, ed. by Dieter Bucchart and Verena Gamper (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2008), pp. 33-39 (p. 39).

4.2 Susan Hiller – Cultural Matter

Initially, I was collecting organic objects, and then I started to include man-made objects. One of the earliest works I made entitled *Landline/Waterline* consisted of a collection of bottled soil and water specimens arranged on shelves in separate compartments. (Figure 21) It is an archive of place in the shape of a sculptural installation that takes viewers back and forth in time.

In total, forty-eight bottles have been included as part of the installation. Half the bottles contain soil samples while the other half contains water samples. Every single bottle carries a small tag with information about that particular sample. The artwork is intended to investigate the temporality of the valley, and how it impinges on the landscape.



Figure 21 *Landline/Waterline* (Detail). 4 wooden shelves containing small glass bottles filled with soil or water and labeled accordingly. Specimens collected between 2013 and 2014.

I would like to consider Susan Hiller's work since she also collects organic matter and objects, and displays them in cabinets. Hiller takes pride in picking up the mundane and commonplace material that nobody else ever bothers to look at, let alone collect and transform into a work of art.

There is something elusive, uncanny, fascinating beneath the surface of what at first seems easy to understand, or ordinary, or banal. I like to work with materials that

have been culturally repressed or misunderstood, what's been relegated to the lunatic fringe or what's so boring we can't even look at it anymore.¹⁸⁹

'I particularly like the way that the mundane becomes special as soon as you pay attention to it' Hiller confesses, and claims to be particularly drawn to 'the way the shapes of things shift when you look hard at them'.¹⁹⁰ She allows matter to speak and is intrigued by the 'hidden value' of objects. Hiller's work 'raises issues about the nature of collecting, which, in turn, has implications for the role that objects can be made to play in cultural and personal memories'.¹⁹¹ The objects and fragments collected by Hiller acquire particular significance when made to function as part of a critical and multilayered narrative.



Figure 22 Susan Hiller, *Genuine Essence: Homage to Josef Beuys*, ongoing from 1969.

In her work entitled *Genuine Essence: Homage to Josef Beuys* (ongoing from 1969) she places various glass bottles of different sizes, filled with water collected from 'sacred' sources around the world, inside a felt lined cabinet.¹⁹² (Figure 22) Clearly, the use of felt refers to Josef Beuys's affinity with the material. At times she employs

¹⁸⁹ Susan Hiller talk at the 'The Great Divide' science-art conference, organised by Denise Robinson at the Bristol Science Centre, 12 August 1999. Susan Hiller, *The Provisional Texture of Reality*, ed. by Alexandra Kokoli (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2008), p. 27.

¹⁹⁰ Hiller, *The Provisional Texture of Reality*, p. 27.

¹⁹¹ Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2007), p. 132.

¹⁹² Susan Hiller, 'Selected Works', *Susan Hiller* (2012) <http://www.susanhiller.org/otherworks/homage_beuys_more.html> [accessed 21 May 2016]

various first-aid boxes of different forms and sizes, turned into cabinets, inside which she places her bottles all labeled accordingly. She is mostly interested in making visible what is suppressed in these objects and materials. Water, in such case, represents the beliefs of people who assign value to it. She is mostly concerned with exposing the hidden potential in these experiences. Hiller maintains that '[t]he relationship between finding and making is very intricate'.¹⁹³

The objects I collect acquire meaning when juxtaposed with different contexts and narratives. The soil and water specimens in *Landline/Waterline* gained the ability to communicate time when enclosed in glass bottles, and placed within compartments. *Landline/Waterline* tells of the valley's temporality and rather than exposing the purity of water, as in Hiller's case, it acquires meaning through the floating particles and debris that accumulate in lake water over time. The water's impurities in such case can be likened to text on a page and these allow for a temporal reading of place. *Landline/Water* references time through the accumulation of residue in lake water and colour changes over a period of time. Furthermore, each specimen references the same place rather than different places or cultures as in Hiller's work. Time appeared to flow through the work. I wanted the bottles to be identical, and the compartments, like the ticking of the clock, structured and equidistant. However, similar to film edits, *Landline/Waterline* is not chronological; it disrupts time, cuts it into pieces and re-assembles it to form a non-linear narrative.

The glass bottles, unlike in Hiller's case, are not crammed inside a cabinet but are rather dispersed albeit equidistantly. Her bottles come in different shapes and sizes evoking the multicultural sources of the fluid matter inside. While Hiller's collection of glass bottles appears solid and tightly knit the bottles in *Landline/Waterline* are made to convey movement in space and time. The work invites the viewer to walk; it has no starting point and neither a point of arrival. Viewers may engage in a reading of place at different points in time.

¹⁹³ Talk delivered on 4 December 1998 at the University of East Anglia. Hiller, *The Provisional Texture of Reality*, p. 68.

4.3 David Walker Barker – Collecting Fragments

I would now like to review the work of British artist David Walker Barker. I visited Walker Barker's studio in September 2014 together with Dr Judith Tucker who made the initial contact. He is intrigued by commonplace objects; however he also owns a vast collection of fossils and minerals. Collections allow for separate objects to connect and speak with each other. For example, speaking of my own work, *Natura Colta* incorporates all kinds of discarded matter collected from different places; separate objects engage with each other, they form connections which give rise to further readings (see Chapter 9). (Figure 23)



Figure 23 *Natura Colta* (Detail).¹⁹⁴

Natura Colta imbricates the natural with the cultural; it is a conglomeration of discards arranged non-taxonomically within a custom-made cabinet. Like Walker Barker I am interested in reading place. Rummaging through histories, unearthing sediment, reterritorialising it into the studio, and displaying it in cabinets. I consider this movement from ground to cabinet important, since it allows for diverse contextualisations and correspondences. Most of my work is political as much as it is poetic; it exposes and challenges the tensions that stir the ground. Walker Barker's work is more poetic and less political. Stories associated with relics retrieved from the mines and the harsh realities which these relics evoke are often poetically represented in his work. The tensions and struggles of the mines are lost somewhere

¹⁹⁴ *Natura Colta* (2015) brings together things collected from the six mapped places.

underground and on the surface his work evokes a poetic past enshrined within a revered space.

Walker Barker collects both the precious and the mundane; I would like to consider his work entitled *The Remains of a Hidden Landscape*, since it shares aspects of my own work. (Figure 24). The work consists of a weathered wooden cabinet and a series of aged bottles and small bags, containing diverse matter tightly secured and crammed in restricted compartments.



Figure 24 David Walker Barker, *The Remains of a Hidden Landscape*, completed 2005.

Similarly, *Adits as Entrances* (completed 2005) is another work that incorporates small glass bottles neatly arranged in tailor-made compartments and classified according to the artist's non-taxonomic system. (Figure 25) Both cabinets are heavily loaded with histories, and their shape and aesthetic resemble that of shrines. Landscapes have acted as a studio for him over many years, the artist maintains.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, he says that '[t]hey are the first places though not the only ones I visit in seeking directions and themes for the art works that I produce'.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁵ David Walker Barker, *In Search of a Hidden Landscape* (London: Hart Gallery, 2006), p. 13.

¹⁹⁶ Walker Barker, *In Search of a Hidden Landscape*, p. 13.



Figure 25 David Walker Barker, *Adits as Entrances*, completed 2005.

Biggs (2005) describes Walker Barker's studio as a place similar to a museum archive but perhaps more active.¹⁹⁷ His work, similar to mine, can be described as a documentation of place; it is loaded with place stories. His stories are nostalgic and seem to speak of the past fondly, as a distant golden epoch, evoked also by the cabinets' finishing. He makes matter. As an alchemist he is continuously experimenting with substances to create surprising effects and textures, promoting rust, and faking the passing of time through controlled ageing processes. His work can be decorative, seductive, sentimental and overloaded. It is about memory and the collective consciousness of entire communities. My work is unembellished and it is more about the now. In a personal communication David Walker Barker describes himself as:

An artist and collector with interests in aspects of geology, landscape evolution and its human resonance. Much of my artwork is concerned with the extraordinary relationship between geological and human histories and the narratives that emerge from these connections. Themes have developed representing a sense of underlying natural processes and the human appropriation of natural material into a cultural realm. Such contexts have provided references for a range of paintings, drawings, painted constructions and for cabinets housing collections of geological specimens and artefacts, excavated from the landscape contexts that I explore, and fabricated

¹⁹⁷ Iain Biggs, *David Walker Barker: Contained Histories* (London: Hart Gallery, 2005).

objects made to accompany them' (Personal Communication with Walker Barker).¹⁹⁸

A number of parallel strands emerged from my conversation with David Walker Barker, and having had the opportunity to visit his studio, or open archive, made me ponder on possibilities for further practice. Of particular interest to my own approach is the idea of including found objects within custom-made cabinets that could further open up the reading of the work.

4.4 herman de vries – Poetry of Reality

I encountered herman de vries's work at the Venice Biennale 2015 in The Netherlands Pavilion. I was well into my research when I discovered his work, which I welcomed, since it resonates with certain aspects of my own work. de vries collects matter from places of particular significance to him, thus place plays an important part in his work.

I consider natural matter at par with cultural matter; both offer possibilities for poetic, political, real and imaginary explorations. The story-telling aspect of naturally occurring matter can be enhanced through manipulation and juxtapositions. For example, bark collected from Qlejgha valley has been formed into scroll-like sculptures to enhance its 'textuality' (see Section 6.3).

to be all ways to be (2015) was the title of herman de vries's exhibition at the 56th Venice Biennale. (Figure 26) He showed a plethora of found objects including leaves, twigs, pottery shards, shells and other specimens, in the form of a mural. His work revolves around discovering the poetry of reality. He collects objects from nature and shows them directly as they are. By de-contextualising matter, by isolating it from its surroundings, de vries reveals and emphasises its inherent attributes. de vries's collected objects are estranged from their place of origin and the objects' rich and intricate shapes seem to be his primary concern. His

¹⁹⁸ David Walker Barker, personal communication with Trevor Borg, 12 January 2015.

installations resemble ornate tapestries whereby unrelated objects mingle with each other. His unscientific collections evoke archaeology, botany, anthropology, and geology. He does not manipulate matter to expose or tell about the politics of place, since it is more the characteristics of matter itself that he seems to be mostly concerned with. His approach to matter is emphatic and he manages to establish a strong connection with it but the original context remains largely hidden.



Figure 26 herman de vries, *to be all ways to be* (Installation view 1), 2015.

de vries's work at the Biennale questions 'existing definitions and positions with regard to nature and culture'.¹⁹⁹ He mixes organic and man-made objects with photographs and text to create poetic juxtapositions. At the Biennale he included some of the earth rubbings from his 'earth bank' which contains thousands of coloured samples he made with his hands.²⁰⁰ A number of stones placed on top of vertical wooden scantlings invited the viewer to look more closely. (Figure 27) The stones appeared to acquire value due to their elevated position; they became matter of reverie. de vries exposes the nuances of matter and its particular characteristics in a repetitive way, since it is through repetition that differences may be revealed. The

¹⁹⁹ La Biennale di Venezia, *All the World's Futures* (Venezia: Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia, 2015), p. 27.

²⁰⁰ Karen Wright, 'herman de vries: "other artists work with mechanical things. I work with nature"', *Independent* (The Independent, 21 May 2015) <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/herman-de-vries-other-artists-work-with-mechanical-things-i-work-with-nature-10267144.html>> [accessed 19 April 2016]

work resembles a map detailing textures and contours rather than conflicts or acts of resistance.



Figure 27 herman de vries, *to be all ways to be* (Installation view 2), 2015.

What is of particular interest to my own work is the way de vrie chooses to display his objects; boxed, free-standing, on the floor or attached to a wall. I have explored different setups to display my finds, and a number of works (e.g. *Pear Pressure* and *De-Scroll*) have been adapted to different contexts. The context and methods of display can impinge on the reading of the work as evidenced in the National Library installation (see Section 6.3). The work's meaning has the upper hand here rather than the formal aspects of the objects as in de vries's context. His grid arrangements reference modernism. Such reference to formal aspects is also evident in the uniform and structured layout of his work which is also categorised according to matter and form. My own work privileges place and the manner in which the work is set up allows for alternative readings of place.

4.5 Elizabeth Ogilvie – Water Flow

I encountered Elizabeth Ogilvie's work during a keynote presentation given by Dr Iain Biggs at the University of Leeds in 2013. I chose to reference Ogilvie because she uses video to poetically engage with natural matter. In her show *Bodies of Water*

(2005-2006) she captured the movement, ripples, flow, and sounds of water, to tell a story, and by doing so she exposed the rich qualities of such matter. Ogilvie is mostly concerned with the fluid textures formed by watery ripples rather than in capturing the underlying tension which might be causing these ripples.

My own film, shown at the University of Leeds in September 2014, captured the flow of water passing through Qlejgħa valley, and also the valley as it is transformed during the dry season (see Chapter 6).²⁰¹ A number of close-up shots showed the intricate layers and patterns created by cascading lake water; rhythmic movements and capillary waves combined with delicate and harmonious sounds. The shots of water were followed by valley shots taken during the dry season and thus, water has been included in order to heighten the flow of time rather than for its shifting textures.



Figure 28 Looped film of lake at Qlejgħa Valley.²⁰²

The looped film was shown alongside other works including *Pear Pressure* and *Landline/Waterline*, both works embodying water directly or indirectly (Figure 28). Bottled water specimens comprise a major part of *Landline/Waterline*, which is the same source of running water shown in the film. The fluid presence of water is less evident in *Pear Pressure*, yet water is vital for the fleshy succulent's leaves. The

²⁰¹ The looped video includes footage of Qlejgħa valley showing the transformation of the place over a period of time until the water in the lake dries out.

²⁰² Exhibited at Lifton Place, University of Leeds – September 2014.

film allowed water to flow inside the gallery, and this added movement and further layers of ‘text’. Water adds fluidity to the film, and it has the ability to create movement within an otherwise static shot.

I continued to document each and every place with my camera. The amalgamation of technology with raw matter opened up possibilities for further practice and rhizomatic movement, and it contributed to additional matter explorations. A film of a longer duration entitled *Reading Place* was made, and it comprises footage and sound captured from all the research places (see Appendix).

Gale tells us that over the years Ogilvie has worked with several poets, notably Douglas Dunn, and she continues to explore the interlocking cycles of nature and culture with a sense of continuity.²⁰³ *Bodies of Water* (2005-2006) is the title of an exhibition of works by Ogilvie held at Dundee Contemporary Arts. (Figure 29)

While studying details of water pattern, Ogilvie builds up an intimacy with this movement. In the exhibition *Bodies of Water* her aim was to share this intimacy with others, describing the way water moves. In so doing, her installation heightens the senses of others in an attempt to create an awareness of what it is to be human.²⁰⁴

Ogilvie considers water poetically, each ripple like a stanza flows gracefully into the next. Her consideration of such fluid substance is totally different from the manner in which water is represented within my film. Water in Ogilvie’s work is the main protagonist and it represents itself; in my own film it references the flow of time and the transient nature of the valley. It is also a source of documentation since it captures the changing nature of a restricted type of ecology.

Ogilvie’s projections can be considered as fluid sculptures that are continuously changing. She patiently investigates the complex simplicity of such fleeting matter and its delicate yet forceful characteristics. In Ogilvie’s hands water changes states; it becomes smoke, clouds, shifting into infinite forms and configurations. ‘Playing

²⁰³ Iain Gale, *Nor any Drop to Drink* (Dundee Contemporary Arts, 22 January 2006) <http://www.elizabethogilvie.com/proj_uploads/IainGale2006.pdf> [22 May 2016]

²⁰⁴ Wendy Gunn, ‘Drawing with Water’, in *Elizabeth Ogilvie Bodies of Water* (Dundee: Dundee Contemporary Arts, 2005-2006), p. 25.

with water is an important part of her investigation'.²⁰⁵ As a result her large projections of watery ripples transform the space inside the gallery into a fluid environment. She studies and observes water; 'her role is to enable water to act in itself'.²⁰⁶ Strang maintains that 'engagement with water is the perfect example of a recursive relationship in which nature and culture literally flow into each other'.²⁰⁷ Through her work Ogilvie allows water to flow inside the gallery to create a symbiotic relationship between the fluid and the concrete.



Figure 29 Elizabeth Ogilvie, *Bodies of Water*, 2005-2006.

Gunn maintains that '[t]aking and isolating water from its natural habitat, highlights its fundamental qualities and points back to its place of origin'.²⁰⁸ This is what Casey calls a re-implacement.²⁰⁹ Ogilvie's exploration is mostly focused on the intricacy of the substance's endless forms and the chromatic interplay and poetic spatiality enhanced through the moving images.

My film documents different aspects of place among these the presence of water. It captures Maltese places at various points in time. It brings to our attention things that might go unnoticed; it makes place more visible. The film is not comparable to 'being-there' but it might reduce the distance, since it has the ability to focus on certain details (see Appendix A).

²⁰⁵ Gunn, *Drawing with Water*, p. 24.

²⁰⁶ Gunn, *Drawing with Water*, p. 25.

²⁰⁷ Veronica Strang, *The Meaning of Water* (Oxford: Berg, 2004), p. 5.

²⁰⁸ Gunn, *Drawing with Water*, p. 32.

²⁰⁹ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*.

4.6 Richard Long – Art Walks

The walking/collecting aspect is here being represented through the work of Richard Long who transformed the act of walking into artistic practice. While Long's practice is embodied in walking, in the context of my own practice, walking is a means to map and to collect (see Chapter 2). Deleuze and Guattari's notions of (re-)deterritorialisation can be discerned in Long's work as much as in mine.²¹⁰ Walking for Long becomes the artwork and this is very different from walking in the context of my own artworks.

Walking allows for a thorough exploration of place. My walks have been documented through objects, photographs, footage, and notes, and thus walking connects all strands of documentation. Walking may also be necessary within the space where the artwork is shown. For example *Pear Pressure* entices the viewer to walk and read. (Figure 30) Similarly, *Landline/Waterline* connects walking/reading/temporality.



Figure 30 *Pear Pressure*. Photographs of graffiti scratched on prickly pears.²¹¹

Walking could become a form of territory-making, and it can leave traces behind. *Pear Pressure* captures the 'textual' traces of walkers crossing the valley; 'text' and

²¹⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 60.

²¹¹ Exhibited at Lifton Place, University of Leeds - September 2014.

‘territory’ find their intersection in walking. Such traces are ephemeral so a camera was used to preserve these traces, and to allow for further re-reading.

Richard Long’s work can be divided into different categories: indoor works, outdoor works, ‘textworks’ and walks.²¹² Long’s indoor works include lines, circles and other arrangements made out of stones and wall-based mud paintings, while his outdoor works comprise traces of movement and materials found on-site. Long’s outdoor work ‘involves minimal impact on the environment’ and his interventions in the landscape are striking, but soon disappear completely.²¹³ Through his work he explores how art and culture interface with nature, and he works in conjunction with the ecology of the place.

Long’s ‘textworks’ and walks are harder to define as they seem to avoid fixed categorisation and are often intertwined. *A Five Day Walk* (1980) is a short paragraph describing the number of miles the artist covered on each day of his journey between two locations in England. *Crossing Stones* (1987) sees the artist carrying:

A STONE FROM ALDEBURGH BEACH ON THE EAST COAST CARRIED TO
ABERYSTWYTH BEACH ON THE WEST COAST. A STONE FROM
ABERYSTWYTH BEACH ON THE WEST COAST CARRIED TO
ALDEBURGH BEACH ON THE EAST COAST. A 626 MILE WALK IN 20
DAYS. ENGLAND WALES ENGLAND 1987.²¹⁴

Long plays with text and he literally takes the letters of the alphabet on long walks. He transports the viewers (readers) from one place to the other, luring them to walk with him. ‘[T]he most important connection is always with an outside’, O’Sullivan argues, and the link with the outside is omnipresent in Long’s work.²¹⁵ Long’s work entitled *A Line made by Walking* (1967) is an artwork created on the move as the

²¹² Dominic Rainsford, ‘Solitary Walkers, Encountering Blocks: Epistemology and Ethics in Romanticism and Land Art’, *European Journal of English Studies*, 7.2, (2003), 177-192 (p. 185).

²¹³ Rainsford, *Solitary Walkers, Encountering Blocks: Epistemology and Ethics in Romanticism and Land Art*, p. 186.

²¹⁴ Original text in block capital letters. Richard Long, ‘Crossing Stones’, *Richard Long* <<http://www.richardlong.org/Textworks/2011textworks/27.html>> [accessed 22 May 2016]

²¹⁵ O’Sullivan, *Art Encounters. Deleuze and Guattari*, p. 19.

artist recorded his bodily movement on the ground. (Figure 31) ‘His walks become “artwalks”, artwalks which become artworks’, according to Malpas, and for Long, ‘(art)walking is (art)working’.²¹⁶ His art is often proof of his presence in a real place, where he actually was present.²¹⁷



Figure 31 Richard Long, *A Line made by Walking*, 1967.

Long’s walking interventions inscribe ‘textual’ traces in situ; he does not collect or accumulate matter but distance. Evidently, such work is very different from my own since my footsteps on the ground are untraceable. Long reads and writes on the ground; his walks bear the transient traces of culture that will soon become appropriated and erased by nature. He forces his bodily interventions on nature but then he allows nature to have the last word and to remove the ephemeral work created by him. Long walks and makes artworks at the same time. Each and every footstep represents an artwork in the making. *A Line made by Walking* takes the form of a structured walk unlike my drifting which is non-linear. Long is not particularly concerned with an investigation of place. Walking is the very essence of his art and he is mostly concerned with the formal aesthetics of movement.

²¹⁶ William Malpas, *Land Art in Close-Up*, 2nd edn (Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2007), p. 194.

²¹⁷ Rainsford, *Solitary Walkers, Encountering Blocks: Epistemology and Ethics in Romanticism and Land Art*, pp. 186-7.

Of particular relevance is Long's walking as performative practice, and the intersection of text/territory through walking. Long privileges performative aspects and his movement is integral to the act of making; it is palpable and it comprises the work itself. The relocation of *RTO I* and *RTO II* outside could remotely relate to Long's crossings with stones, on a performative level. Within this research walking intertwines with collecting, and it can be considered a key aspect of the deep map approach. Following a review of contemporary practice the next chapter will discuss literature related to 'Place, Landscape and Environment'.

5. Place, Landscape and Environment

5.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, and evidenced in all other chapters, place is privileged throughout this research project. In this context, place is inescapable, it is omnipresent, extensive and literally ‘all over the place’. Thus an analysis and (re-) consideration of place is fundamental to understanding the practice-place aspects that characterise the research milieu.

The first part of the chapter deals with the essential elements that locate ‘place’ at the centre of this research by presenting salient and peripheral questions. Next, the chapter discusses significant turns of fate in the development of place (and space) followed by selected theoretical considerations.

5.1.1 The Place of ‘Place’

The aim of this research is to inquire about selected places through fine art practice, while recognising the contested nature of such term. The following questions have been formulated and developed on the basis of the main questions presented in Chapter 1.

- How does contemporary fine art practice contribute to an understanding of place?
- How can a sense of place be evoked in contemporary fine art practice?
- What is the relation between place (space), landscape and environment?
- In what way(s) is time connected to place and how does it flow into practice?

5.1.2 A Place to Start

A fixed definition of place is next to impossible. Place and space have repeatedly been intertwined; at times one dominating the other, at other times used interchangeably without much distinction.²¹⁸ However, some form of delineation of place and space is necessary in order to understand more clearly what is implied by these terms in the context of place-oriented visual research.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to delve into the history of place but it is crucial to map out the leading trajectories that have shaped and characterised the term up to the present time.²¹⁹ Casey argues that to exist in any way is to be in some kind of place, furthermore the prospect of an unknown place is quite unsettling for some people and tends to be avoided.²²⁰ For Descartes, place is not nothing, it is a hybrid entity, 'as volumetric, it is like a thing; as situational, it is unthinglike and purely relational'.²²¹ The relational aspect of place is crucial in determining how place develops a propos other factors.

An experientially grounded notion of place has been favoured throughout this research mainly due to the underlying practice-led methodology. De Certeau argues that '[t]o walk is to lack a place'.²²² However, I have come to perceive walking as a type of appropriation. Walking as appropriation is place-based; unlike the alienated movement of the city's passers-by it is not a mode of transit. Yi-Fu Tuan maintains that 'place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place'.²²³ Walking is characterised by pauses, place unfolds with each pause and subsequent movement; as it unfolds place increases and grows as Deleuze would put it.²²⁴ We can consider walking in the context of this research as

²¹⁸ According to Casey '[w]hat makes the early modern epoch such a crucial moment is that by the end of the epoch this high regard has vanished, with the result that the more or less irenic cohabitation of place and space ceases to be a viable option.' Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. 135.

²¹⁹ For a detailed history of place see Casey's (1997) *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*.

²²⁰ Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*.

²²¹ Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. 161.

²²² De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 103.

²²³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 6.

²²⁴ Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 9.

bodily emplacement; a form of dwelling. To walk in a place is to spend time there; to dwell.

A place owes its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there – to the sights, sounds and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience. And these, in turn, depend on the kinds of activities in which its inhabitants engage. It is from this relational context of people’s engagement with the world, in the business of dwelling, that each place draws its unique significance.²²⁵

The research project involved six very small places situated at close proximity to one another (see Chapter 1). As shall be discussed in the following chapters, upon repeat visits certain place related aspects began to emerge. Places were transformed into sites of art practice and further opportunities and potentialities for creative practice continued to evolve.

5.2 On Place

This part of the chapter argues for an embodied practice which favours a direct investigation of place. According to Casey ‘nothing we do is unplaced’ and thus, all that we do is up to a certain degree place-oriented. I want to think of my practice as place-oriented since it develops from place and it would not be the same if it were grounded in other places.²²⁶ Place-oriented practice benefits from ‘being-there’, and a ‘grounded’, albeit fluid approach.

For Heidegger Being-in-the world is an essential characteristic of *Dasein*. He argues that ‘Being-in-the world is a state of *Dasein* which is necessary *a priori*, but it is far from sufficient for completely determining *Dasein*’s Being’ [original italics].²²⁷ According to Heidegger ‘[i]n *Dasein* there lies an essential tendency towards closeness’ [original italics].²²⁸

²²⁵ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, pg. 192.

²²⁶ Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. ix.

²²⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 79.

²²⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 140.

De Certeau maintains that place is like a palimpsest. It encompasses past and present; it is comprised of imbricated strata which are available for analysis.²²⁹ Place is ‘something not merely characterizable but actually experienced in qualitative terms’ and thus, ‘for example, color, texture, and depth, are known to us only in and by the body that enters and occupies a given place’.²³⁰ According to Casey, Kant was the first philosopher to argue about the significance of an embodied presence in place.²³¹ Furthermore, Casey also credits Husserl’s kinesthetic sensation which motivates a particular perception of how places and things appear according to bodily movement.²³²

Like Husserl, but in a more focused manner, Merleau-Ponty holds that it is through the body that we come to experience the world. Our body inhabits space and time, ‘I cannot forget that it is through my body that I go toward the world’, maintains Merleau-Ponty.²³³ As Casey asserts, being in place is not just a matter of fitting into place.²³⁴ Furthermore, Casey echoing the words of Merleau-Ponty states that by virtue ‘of the lived body, I can be said to know, at a preobjective and yet fully efficacious level, the places that populate my ongoing experience’.²³⁵ This notion shares parallels with Heidegger’s view of *Dasein*. Human presence is key to place, thus place cannot be established without the intervention of humans.

Places do not occur naturally but are created by human beings through some mark or sign of human presence. A wilderness in itself is placeless, for it has no human center or point of convergence around which nature can gather and become bounded.²³⁶

It appears that being physically there is an essential attribute of place.²³⁷ But can one be in the ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ place? Miwon Kwon argues that there is no such thing as

²²⁹ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 200.

²³⁰ Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. 204.

²³¹ ‘Kant discovered the bond between body and place in his search for an “ultimate ground of the differentiation of regions in space”-to cite the title of that diminutive but pivotal essay of 1768’. Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. 205, 210.

²³² Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. 219.

²³³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 330.

²³⁴ Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. 232.

²³⁵ Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. 232.

²³⁶ Robert Pogue Harrison, ‘Hic Jacet’, in *Landscape and Power*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell, 2nd edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 349-364 (p. 350).

²³⁷ Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*.

‘right’ or ‘wrong’ place.²³⁸ It is rather how we perceive and relate to the place that generates such a sensation. According to Kwon, the feeling of being ‘out of place’ resides in the relation the individual has with that place. From experience, I did feel at times that I was in the wrong place while doing fieldworks; at other times the exact same place felt like the right place to be in at that time.²³⁹ Right and wrong have nothing to do with place; but with how place is perceived at that particular point in time.

A place that instigates a sense of instability and uncertainty, lacking in comfort, a place unfamiliar and foreign, might be deemed “wrong”. And by extension, a place that feels like “home” might be deemed “right”. But *this* is wrong. The determination of right and wrong is never derived from an innate quality of the object in question, even if some moral absolutes might seem to preside over the object. Rather, right and wrong are qualities that an object has *in relation* to something outside itself. In the case of a place, it indicates a subject’s relation to it and does not indicate an autonomous, objective condition of the place itself.
[original italics]²⁴⁰

We cannot discuss place without delving into space. In the words of Yi-Fu Tuan ‘[s]pace is transformed into place as it acquires definition and meaning.’²⁴¹

According to Casey, for Heidegger ‘the relationship between place and space is not reciprocal’ and he argues that ‘[t]here is no return to place from space, but from place space is (eventually) generated’.²⁴² ‘In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place’; the terms are sometimes used interchangeably.²⁴³ The next section will proceed to review the closely related notion of space.

5.2.1 Place and Space

Kant argues that space is linked to intuition; at times he replaced place with space and his ultimate judgment is that there is only one unified space, and if we speak of diverse spaces, we mean only parts of the same unique space.²⁴⁴ Morgan notes that

²³⁸ Miwon Kwon, ‘The Wrong Place’, *Art Journal*, 59.1, (2000), 32-43.

²³⁹ I felt out of place when traversing ambiguous *RTO* territory and when I could hear shots being fired in the vicinity.

²⁴⁰ Kwon, *The Wrong Place*, p. 38.

²⁴¹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 136.

²⁴² Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, p. 275.

²⁴³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 6.

²⁴⁴ Casey, *The Fate of Place. A Philosophical History*, pp. 192-193.

in ‘Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Regions in Space’, Kant, similar to Heidegger, refers to *Gegend* which he defines as general space.²⁴⁵ Furthermore, Kant collapses the importance of *Gegend* by stating that distances and space can be appreciated by indexing them to our body.²⁴⁶

In the essay ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’, Heidegger argues that the artwork opens up a space. For Heidegger, the work sets up a world, ‘[r]ising-up-within-itself the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force’ [original italics].²⁴⁷ ‘As a work, the work holds open the open of a world’; it allows a space for spaciousness.²⁴⁸

Mitchell maintains that ‘[s]pace has connotations of abstraction and geometry, while place resonates with particularity and qualitative density.’²⁴⁹ De Certeau contends that place ‘implies an indication of stability’, but space exists when velocities and time variables are taken into consideration; ‘space is composed of intersections of mobile elements’.²⁵⁰

From a societal point of view, Lefebvre argues that every society creates its own space, and this has implications for appropriation and demarcation of territory. ‘Space is social morphology: it is to lived experience what form itself is to the living organism, and just as intimately bound up with function and structure’, according to Lefebvre.²⁵¹ Chapter 7 discusses the RTO series of artworks and interrogates an ambivalent type of appropriated space ubiquitous in certain parts of Malta. Other types of fleeting appropriations will be explored through different forms of practice included within this research.

²⁴⁵ Diane Morgan, *Kant Trouble* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 41.

²⁴⁶ Morgan, *Kant Trouble*, p. 41.

²⁴⁷ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 22.

²⁴⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, place is revealed through the work of art. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 23.

²⁴⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘Preface to the Second Edition of Landscape and Power. Space, Place, and Landscape’, in *Landscape and Power*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell, 2nd edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. vii-xii (p. ix).

²⁵⁰ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 117.

²⁵¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p. 94.

Every space is already in place before the appearance in it of actors; these actors collective as well as individual subjects inasmuch as the individuals are always members of groups or classes seeking to appropriate the space in question.²⁵²

Furthermore, Lefebvre maintains that space can be used to exert power, since it allows the state and its institutions to organise it ‘according to their specific requirements’.²⁵³ The space proposed by Lefebvre is comprised of a triadic organisation, what he calls perceived, conceived and lived space.²⁵⁴ Martin defines Lefebvre’s (social) space as ‘a unitary, fused object produced through the simultaneity of these triadic interactions’.²⁵⁵

Deleuze and Guattari bring to our attention two particular types of space: striated and smooth space.²⁵⁶ They provide an intricate description of how both spaces should be envisioned. Striated space is constituted by parallel elements (for example horizontal and vertical), intertwining and intersecting, delimited and closed, whereas smooth space is solid; continuous, unlimited in direction and non homogeneous.²⁵⁷ The striated space and the smooth space find resonance in the mapping approach presented in Chapter 3, and the boundaries delineating the local countryside as discussed in Chapter 7.

What interests us in operations of striation and smoothing are precisely the passages or combinations: how the forces at work within space continually striate it, and how in the course of its striation it develops other forces and emits new smooth spaces. Even the most striated city gives rise to smooth spaces: to live in the city as a nomad, or as a cave dweller.²⁵⁸

Other types of spaces and places have come to the fore in the recent past and a number of key thinkers have attempted to problematise or add further scope to the understanding of both concepts. The following section discusses Foucaultian utopias and heterotopias, and Augé’s notion of non-places.²⁵⁹

²⁵² Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 57.

²⁵³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 85.

²⁵⁴ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 39.

²⁵⁵ Deborah G. Martin, ‘Placing Lefebvre’, *Antipode*, 47.5, (2015), 1279-1299 (p. 1286).

²⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

²⁵⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 524-525.

²⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 551.

²⁵⁹ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*; Marc Augé, *Non-Place. An Introduction to Supermodernity*, 2nd edn (London: Verso, 2008).

5.2.2 Utopias, Heterotopias and Non-Places

Foucault describes utopias as ‘sites with no real place’ and which ‘present society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down’; however they are unreal spaces²⁶⁰. From utopias he extrudes another breed of existing places called heterotopias. The latter places can be described as places ‘outside of all places’, and due to their heterotopology ‘it may be possible to indicate their location in reality’.²⁶¹



Figure 32 *RTO II*. Artwork relocated into RTO territory.

Heterotopias are defined by certain characteristics and precise functions for example the capability ‘of juxtaposing in a single real place several places, several sites that are in themselves incompatible’.²⁶² This juxtaposition can be perceived in *RTO II*, whereby the outside is reflected inside a portable museum display case (see Section 7.3). (Figure 32) ‘Heterotopias are most often linked to slices in time’, and with places such as museums and libraries that indefinitely accumulate time.²⁶³ This aspect appears to emerge from the *RTO* series of artworks, *Landline/Waterline* and the setting up of *De-Scroll* at the National Library in Valletta. Heterotopias may also be linked ‘to time in its most flowing, transitory, precarious aspect’.²⁶⁴ Local

²⁶⁰ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, p. 3.

²⁶¹ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, p. 4.

²⁶² Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, p. 6.

²⁶³ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp. 6-7.

²⁶⁴ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, p. 7.

territory appropriated temporarily for hunting purposes appears to have resonance with this type of heterotopia (see Chapters 7 and 8).

Foucault argues that in general, heterotopic sites are not freely accessible like public spaces, since entry is either compulsory, as in the case of a barracks or prison or else entry permission has to be granted.²⁶⁵ Moreover, less common heterotopias include places that seem to be open but which generally hide curious exclusions, and entry into such places is only an illusion.²⁶⁶

The role of a heterotopia can also be that of creating ‘a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory’.²⁶⁷ A floating barge may also be considered a heterotopia as Morgan notes, since it is a floating extension of the land and it is both fixed and temporary.²⁶⁸ The juxtaposition of heterotopias with ambiguous reserved territory in the Maltese countryside will be discussed in Chapter 7.

Augé introduces another layer which he calls ‘non-places’. Place and non-place, according to Augé, are like opposites and the distinction between them ‘derives from the opposition between place and space’.²⁶⁹ A non-place opens up a space through which individuals may discover place without actually ‘being-there’.

If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place. The hypothesis advanced here is that supermodernity produces non-places, meaning spaces which are not themselves anthropological places and which, unlike Baudelairean modernity, do not integrate the earlier places: instead they are listed, classified, promoted to the status of places of memory, and assigned to a circumscribed and specific position.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, p. 7.

²⁶⁶ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp. 7-8.

²⁶⁷ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, p. 8.

²⁶⁸ According to Morgan, heterotopias may also be linked to utopias as is the case of the floating barge turned into a refuge for the homeless roaming the streets of Paris. Morgan’s discussion revolves around the floating asylum, the ‘Louise Catherine’, moored on the Seine in Paris. Diane Morgan, ‘The Floating Asylum, the Armee du Salut, and Le Corbusier: A Modernist Heterotopian/Utopian Project’, *Utopian Studies*, 25.1, (2014), 87-124.

²⁶⁹ Augé, *Non-Place. An Introduction to Supermodernity*, p. 64.

²⁷⁰ Augé, *Non-Place. An Introduction to Supermodernity*, p. 63.

Augé argues that '[t]he non-place is the opposite of utopia: it exists, and it does not contain any organic society'.²⁷¹ According to Augé in 'today's world, places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together'.²⁷² My film (see Appendix 1) can be considered a non-place in Augé's terms, since it familiarises non-Maltese viewers with places included within this research project; it establishes a distanced 'being-there'.

By juxtaposing the various definitions presented within this chapter, an 'actual' image of place might become more accessible.²⁷³ Here we must consider another strongly related aspect – temporality. The following section discusses place and temporality; it creates a context for *Landline/Waterline*, an installation which responds to the temporality at Qlejgha valley (see Chapter 6).

5.2.3 Place and Temporality

As one walks, every step 'is ineluctably bound to place, that is, the particular place it is passing through at the time'.²⁷⁴ In Casey's words, "[a]t the time" goes together with "in the place".²⁷⁵ We have seen how place acquires its character through the involvement and engagement of people. Certain types of places did not exist until a few decades ago while other types are now hard to find, since they are no longer needed.²⁷⁶

By looking at the space around them people can see time, '[t]hey live time, after all; they are in *time*' [original italics].²⁷⁷ In places where nature is abundant and where contemporary development is minimal time is nonetheless palpable. For example Qlejgha valley, a place where a series of modifications were carried out during the nineteenth century, today might appear like a place where time has stopped flowing.

²⁷¹ Augé, *Non-Place. An Introduction to Supermodernity*, p. 90.

²⁷² Augé, *Non-Place. An Introduction to Supermodernity*, p. 86.

²⁷³ The word 'actual' here denotes actuality rather than accuracy.

²⁷⁴ Casey, *Earth-Mapping. Artists Reshaping Landscape*, p. 66.

²⁷⁵ Casey, *Earth-Mapping. Artists Reshaping Landscape*, p. 66.

²⁷⁶ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*; Augé, *Non-Place. An Introduction to Supermodernity*.

²⁷⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 95.

However, upon multiple revisits, it becomes evident that the place is reconfigured according to season. The valley turns from a lush carpet of green into a desiccated space over a period of months. Time is not merely reflected in colours and textures but it can also be apprehended through sounds as the flow of lake water gives way to the deafening sound of cicadas.

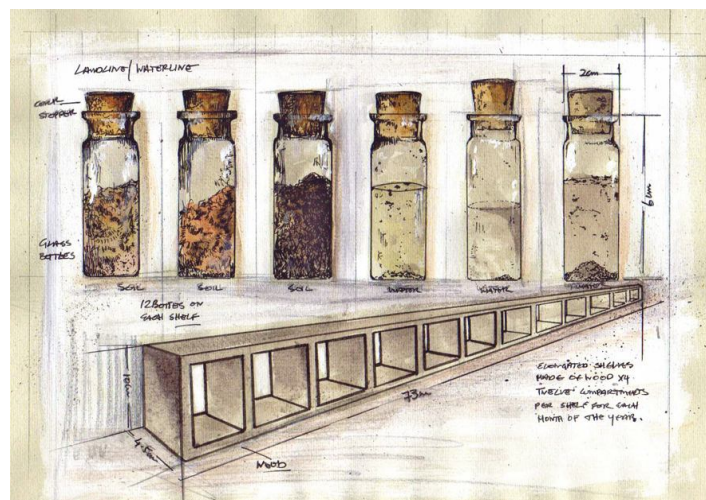


Figure 33 Sketch *Landline/Waterline*.

Lefebvre, arguing on a similar note, states that ‘in nature, time is apprehended within space’ and he cites the seasons, cold and heat, elevation of the sun and the position of stars as indicators of time.²⁷⁸ *Landline/Waterline* responds to the temporality of the valley; it reterritorialises place and time into a restricted space as discussed in the next chapter. (Figure 33)

Merleau-Ponty maintains that we inhabit space and time and thus, both aspects should be considered in relation to each other.²⁷⁹ Time is an essential element in Foucault’s notion of heterotopia and Augé’s non-places which essentially are the result of supermodernity. The next section discusses the place of place at the present time. What does place constitute of at this point in time? How is place being re-conceptualised?

²⁷⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 95.

²⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 140.

5.3 Re-Considering Place

Place is never fixed or static, and it responds to diverse ongoing fluctuations. The character of place, Massey explicates, is not only the result of what goes on within it, but is also an outcome of the juxtaposition of flows, relations and connections from outside.²⁸⁰

Places as necessarily open to the outside, and that very openness being a significant part of what makes them what they are. My own view is that places have always been like that; in other words, that this is a conceptual point. But the new forms of globalization as they impacted upon localities in the developed world have reinforced the argument in practical ways.²⁸¹

Massey does not concur with notions of smooth and striated space because she believes that ‘there never was a place that was a container’.²⁸² Moreover, notions of place envisioned as a concept of boundaries and containment should be abandoned, according to Massey, because ‘it divides the global multitude’. She is of the idea that a non-striated smooth space does not hold either and what we have to do is take responsibility for the striations, boundaries, the definitions and the categorisations that exist.²⁸³ In the context of *RTO* territory I would argue that boundaries might not be visible or evident but they are nonetheless felt.²⁸⁴

Massey believes that to integrate place with space we ‘*have* to accept the implication of the local in the construction of the global’ since the global ‘is made in places and there is hardly a place on the planet that in some way isn’t party to that making’ [original italics].²⁸⁵ Massey’s unbounded place is not embraced by one and all as Pogue Harrison’s claim indicates - ‘A place is defined by its boundaries, its intrinsic

²⁸⁰ Doreen Massey, ‘The Responsibilities of Place’, *Local Economy*, 19.2, (2004), 97-101 (p. 98).

²⁸¹ Massey, *The Responsibilities of Place*, p. 98.

²⁸² Sophie Bond and David Featherstone, ‘The Possibilities of a Politics of Place beyond Place? A Conversation with Doreen Massey’, *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 125.3-4, (2009), 401-420 (p. 416).

²⁸³ Bond and Featherstone, *The Possibilities of a Politics of Place beyond Place? A Conversation with Doreen Massey*, p. 417.

²⁸⁴ *RTO* (for *Riservato*) indicates reserved or appropriated territory in certain rural parts of Malta. See also Chapter 7.

²⁸⁵ Bond and Featherstone, *The Possibilities of a Politics of Place beyond Place? A Conversation with Doreen Massey*, p. 412.

limits, its distinctly local 'here' that remains fixed in space even as it perdures in time.'²⁸⁶

Antonsich following Amin maintains that 'places still matter, but no longer as bounded sites of geographical proximity'.²⁸⁷ This idea has resonance with Ingold's argument that places are centres without boundaries.²⁸⁸ Massey's 'global sense of place' promotes the idea of unboundedness, intersections, flows and movements.²⁸⁹ However, Massey argues that the need exists to explicitly question the construction of place by asking 'what does this place stand for?'.²⁹⁰

Place possesses this ability to escape fixed definitions. Bachelard poetically delved into tiny places like nests, miniatures, corners, and houses.²⁹¹ For Bachelard, miniature is vast, and this finds resonance in *Landline/Waterline*, whereby small bottles allow for a reading of time, which is uncontainable.

Thus the minuscule, a narrow gate, opens up an entire world. The details of a thing can be the sign of a new world which, like all worlds, contains the attributes of greatness.²⁹²

A deep map can be generated from restricted spaces. I like to think of my place-oriented practice as spanning vertically more than horizontally; opening up rhizomatic paths that suggest new places, unbounded and as yet unexplored. It seeks to expose hidden places, and it considers places that appear to have stories that are waiting to be told.

Artists have been directly considering place and site for many years but perhaps the breakthrough came with minimalism and land art movements of the nineteen sixties, and the public art programmes that prevailed in the seventies. A number of artists created specific works outside the boundaries of galleries and museums to draw on

²⁸⁶ Pogue Harrison, *Hic Jacet*, p. 350.

²⁸⁷ Marco Antonsich, 'Grounding Theories of Place and Globalisation', *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Social Geografie*, 102.3, (2010), 331-345 (p. 331).

²⁸⁸ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 192.

²⁸⁹ Massey, *The Responsibilities of Place*.

²⁹⁰ Bond and Featherstone, *The Possibilities of a Politics of Place beyond Place? A Conversation with Doreen Massey*, p. 411.

²⁹¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).

²⁹² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p.155.

the specificities of the site for example *Tilted Arc* (Richard Serra 1981-1989) and more recently *Cabane Éclatée aux 4 Couleurs* (Daniel Buren 2014). I do not set up my work permanently in the original place; however, *RTO I* and *RTO II* were temporarily returned to place as discussed in Chapter 7.

Works like these are intended to engage with and reconfigure the space that accommodates them, but to the dwellers these may appear as spatial ‘disruptions’. After several battles and court hearings, the controversial *Tilted Arc* installed in the Foley Federal Plaza in Manhattan, New York City, had to be destroyed. Serra was against the relocation of the huge steel sculpture and according to Kwon, he argued that ‘first and foremost, site-specific art has an inviolable physical tie to its site’ and thus, ‘to remove the work is to destroy the work’.²⁹³

Place-oriented practice does not necessarily have to be bound to a particular place. For example, *A Nonsite* (Robert Smithson 1968) and *Vivarium* (Mark Dion 2002) relocate fragments of place into a new space. This type of work shares parallels with my own work as discussed in Chapter 4. Both Smithson’s and Dion’s work rely on objects collected from a particular place then reterritorialised into an unfamiliar space. Thus, viewers may experience the place without actually being there physically. This kind of continuous relationship between a place and a person is what many critics declare to be lost, and needed, in contemporary society’.²⁹⁴

Morley argues that ‘[h]istorically, cultures have been thought of as being rooted in space, in stable patterns of interaction of people doing the same things in the same places’.²⁹⁵ Furthermore, Morley asserts that since identities are intrinsically associated with place, people ‘can come to feel threatened by the presence of that which they deem foreign’.²⁹⁶

Kwon argues that ‘[t]he phantom of a site as an actual place remains, and our psychic, habitual attachment to places regularly returns as it continues to inform our

²⁹³ Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another* (Cambridge: MIT Press Ltd., 2002), p. 73.

²⁹⁴ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, p. 163.

²⁹⁵ David Morley, ‘Belongings. Place, Space and Identity in a Mediated World’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 4.4, (2001), 425-448 (p. 428).

²⁹⁶ Morley, *Belongings. Place, Space and Identity in a Mediated World*, p. 438.

sense of identity’.²⁹⁷ However, it appears that there is consensus that the ‘present’ place is characterised by certain aspects. Antonsich maintains that ‘[o]penness, connectivity, mobility and exchange emerge’ as key features from the accounts of prominent authors.²⁹⁸

Place is privileged throughout this research project. A discussion encapsulating aspects of place and space is indeed necessary since it provides a context for this practice-led research. Having reviewed place, space and a selection of related aspects the chapter will move on to discuss the equally ambiguous notion of landscape.

5.4 Landscape

Landscape ‘is not “land”, it is not “nature”, and it is not “space”’.²⁹⁹ Ingold’s depiction indicates that the term is so complex that perhaps it is more appropriate to start by asserting what landscape is not, rather than what *it is*. The landscape is here being considered as a means to understanding place. Thus, it is useful to determine the place of landscape in the context of this research, and to discuss how specific research questions develop in relation to landscape matters.

5.4.1 Landscape Matters

Landscape encompasses qualitative and aesthetic elements; it is an intrinsic part of being-in place. For example, landscape impinges on the state of *Dasein*, on people’s engagement with place. A small island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, Malta’s geographical position is strategic for hunting. The ambiguous boundaries in open *RTO* sites and the proliferation of shotgun cartridges are largely determined by the favourable nature (in terms of hunting) of the landscape.³⁰⁰ Since no mountains

²⁹⁷ Kwon, Kwon, *One Place After Another*, p. 165.

²⁹⁸ Antonsich, *Grounding Theories of Place and Globalisation*, p. 333.

²⁹⁹ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 190.

³⁰⁰ Open landscape close to cliff sides and overlooking the sea is considered ideal for hunting.

and rivers are present on the island, wetlands are almost inexistent, and the change from wet to dry season is sudden and drastic (see Chapter 6). Thus, it is here being argued that by interrogating elements of landscape we can learn further about place.

A number of key questions emerge from a consideration of the landscape, and these are tied to questions presented earlier concerning place. While place and landscape inform my practice it is through practice that such concepts acquire further meaning. These are the main questions motivating this discussion.

- What can landscape tell us about place?
- What opportunities arise within contemporary fine art practice from our understanding of landscape?

By referring to practice and theory the next part of the chapter will discuss specific aspects of landscape. The discussion will explore how landscape can become a critical component in the investigation of place and how it can inform contemporary fine art practice.

5.4.2 Setting the Landscape

Prior to delving further into landscape discourse, it is useful to consider that landscape is distinct from land yet related, as suggested by Ingold.³⁰¹ Land is quantifiable, just like the weight of an object and it may be perceived as the lowest common denominator of our world.³⁰²

But where land is thus quantitative and homogenous, the landscape is qualitative and heterogeneous. Supposing that you are standing outdoors, it is what you see all around: a contoured and textured surface replete with diverse objects – living and non-living, natural and artificial.³⁰³

³⁰¹ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 190.

³⁰² Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 190.

³⁰³ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 190.

Ingold's description of landscape resonates with Casey's since they both describe landscape as a differentiated conglomeration of aesthetic qualities. Mitchell, expresses a similar idea since he argues that '[l]andscape is a medium in the fullest sense of the word'.³⁰⁴

Landscape is indeed an extraordinary sort of thing. Composed of particular objects – of animate and inanimate entities, of discrete shapes and colours, of distinctive configurations of many kinds – it exceeds any of them. Indeed, it even exceeds their totality.³⁰⁵

I resort to the landscape for guidance; it is not a representation of the landscape what I am after but indications for fine art practice. My practice is collaborative. The land provides the matter, it suggests how and what it wants to be while the landscape provides the script.

'The landscape is not "nature"', Ingold reiterates and '[t]he landscape is not "space"'.³⁰⁶ 'If the body is the form in which a creature is present as being-in-the-world, then the world of its being-in presents itself in the form of the landscape', a process that can be described as one of embodiment.³⁰⁷ Landscape is a medium for exchanging meaning and for communication between the human and the non-Human.³⁰⁸ Inevitably, this can give rise to certain tensions. *Crossfire: Concerning the Nature of Our Culture* responds to this particular aspect of landscape where binary oppositions collide (see Chapter 8).³⁰⁹

Biggs maintains that according to cultural geographers 'landscape is experienced in an embodied way through a complex weave of senses: including sight, sound, smell, touch and social organization and experience.'³¹⁰ Biggs is here bringing together both the qualitative and communicative aspects of landscape.

³⁰⁴ Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, p. 14.

³⁰⁵ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. 6.

³⁰⁶ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 191.

³⁰⁷ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 193.

³⁰⁸ Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, p. 15.

³⁰⁹ Hunters claim that their practice brings them closer to nature and the environment; they transform the landscape to be able to enjoy their love of nature more fully.

³¹⁰ Iain Biggs, 'Recovering Landscape: An Art between Seeing and Hearing', *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 5.1-2, (2006), 29-37 (p. 29).

Soper tells us that ‘landscape may be said to be culturally formed’.³¹¹ Thus, like place, landscape is shaped by the presence of people and their (in-) direct engagement with it. Soper, rather paradoxically notes that the beauties of landscape sometimes cannot, of course, be preserved except by restricting human access to them.³¹² Dorrian and Rose present a number of tensions that reflect modes of interpretation, politics, power relations, access, historicity and the reading of landscape.³¹³

The first of these is the tension between the material and the subjective. The operation of landscape can be seen in terms of a screen between a material potentiality and a subject making meaning, feeling and fantasy from it.³¹⁴

The second tension is that between inside and outside. It is often evident that landscape works to produce or reiterate a clear distinction between inside and outside.³¹⁵

Landscapes can also often hold together a past and a present, a present and a future, or all three together. They are often understood as repositories of the past, holding history in their contours and textures.³¹⁶

Finally, and most elusively, landscape can also mediate between the representable and the nonrepresentable.³¹⁷

The landscape impinges on my practice. I resort to the landscape in search of opportunities for creative practice and to further my knowledge about place. *Crossfire* and *Landline/Waterline* are two examples indicative of the landscape’s power to define place, and of the implications this might have on place-oriented research.

³¹¹ Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995), p. 137.

³¹² Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 243.

³¹³ Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose, ‘Introduction’, in *Deterritorialisations...Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, ed. by Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd., 2003), pp. 13-19 (pp. 16-17).

³¹⁴ Dorrian and Rose, *Deterritorialisations...Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, p.16.

³¹⁵ Dorrian and Rose, *Deterritorialisations...Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, p.16.

³¹⁶ Dorrian and Rose, *Deterritorialisations...Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, p.17.

³¹⁷ Dorrian and Rose, *Deterritorialisations...Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, p.17.

5.5 Representing Landscape

The representation of landscape can be traced back to ancient times. It is beyond the scope of this research to present a detailed history of landscape art, however, it is useful to explore specific representations of landscape relevant to the present research. Casey argues that humans have represented landscape for at least nine thousand years and we can look at the map-painting at Çatal Hüyük in ancient Anatolia (6200 B.C.), or the enduring petroglyphic maps in Valcamonica northern Italy as examples.³¹⁸

*The truth is that representation is not a contingent matter, something merely secondary; it is integral to the perception of landscape itself – indeed, part of its being and essential to its manifestation. [original italics]*³¹⁹

Landscape has been represented on rocks, in paintings, in gesture, in words, in photographs, digitally and in many other ways; according to Casey ‘such continual and diversified representing is ingredient in the experience of landscape itself’.³²⁰ In much medieval and Renaissance painting the landscape is relegated to a decorative element, as a background or filler visible through windows and doors of an interior.³²¹ ‘Landscape detail was meant to be ancillary to the central theme, not a substitute for it’.³²² Casey notes that it was not until the late fifteenth century that it became to be represented as the main element of a painting rather than a mere backdrop.³²³

Landscape representation developed into a distinct branch and has accommodated multiple functions along the years, ranging from innocent and romantic depictions of scenic beauty to politically charged terrains. Carlson argues that the idea that encourages the viewer to look at nature as if it was a painting, and the concept of art as the mirror of nature culminated in the eighteenth century with the theory of the

³¹⁸ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. xiii.

³¹⁹ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. xv.

³²⁰ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. xiv.

³²¹ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. 3.

³²² Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press., 1992), p. 76.

Evernden, Neil (1992), *The Social Creation of Nature*, Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

³²³ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. 4.

picturesque.³²⁴ J.M.W Turner was among the key European exponents of the genre and this can be attested from his important series of engraved topography entitled Picturesque Views in England and Wales.³²⁵

Turner's later landscapes, especially his sketches, accumulate tension and some of them also expose a violent streak through the sublimity of natural phenomena that instill both a sense of beauty and fear in the viewer. Hill maintains that Turner reconfigured the aesthetics of landscape art, as 'he liked to get as deeply immersed and bemired in the experience as possible', so that his depictions of the landscape would not 'stand in for and replace the genuine attainment of being in the world'.³²⁶

Modern art movements introduced new forms of representation and thematic considerations. A number of artists like Cézanne became almost obsessed with particular landscapes, often close to their place of dwelling. Certain landscapes, for example the Provence region in the case of Cézanne, are depicted in many a painting. Merleau-Ponty tells us that for Cézanne, 'a painting contained, in itself, even the odor of the landscape'.³²⁷ One of Cézanne's main preoccupations was the location of the viewer; 'to resist relocation in some imaginary space apart from the world of the depicted scene and thus to keep the viewer as it were at work in its actual presence'.³²⁸ The work of Cézanne and many other modern artists continued to reshape landscape representation more so with the introduction of new media like photography and film.

³²⁴ Allen Carlson, *Nature and Landscape. An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 4.

³²⁵ David Blayney Brown, *Watercolours Turner* (London: Tate Publishing, 2007), p. 8.

³²⁶ Essay retrieved from Land2 website - <http://land2.leeds.ac.uk/> (creative practice-led research network LAND2 was started in 2002 by Iain Biggs (UWE Bristol) and Judith Tucker (Leeds). David Hill, 'Beyond Landscape?', *Land2* (Leeds: University of Leeds, 2016) <<http://land2.leeds.ac.uk/texts/beyond-landscape/>> [accessed 23 May 2016] Essay retrieved from Land2 website - <http://land2.leeds.ac.uk/> (creative practice-led research network LAND2 was started in 2002 by Iain Biggs (UWE Bristol) and Judith Tucker (Leeds).

³²⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 332.

³²⁸ This has resonance with Casey's notion of re-implacement. Charles Harrison, 'The Effects of Landscape', in *Landscape and Power*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell, 2nd edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 203-239 (p. 231).

5.5.1 Landscape Photography and Film

The work of the early landscape photographers was mainly personal work or intended for a small audience, however, by mid-to-late 1850's a large market for landscape photographs began to emerge.³²⁹ The commercial aspect, according to Snyder, was one of the main motives guiding photographic production at the time, when landscape prints became highly popular.³³⁰

Landscape photography began to diversify and soon different preoccupations started to come into view. For example, the photographs of Carl Watson merge the natural and the industrial (mines, railways), while Timothy H. O'Sullivan's photographs represent the landscape as an unmarked, unmeasured and wild place in which man is not yet.³³¹

What previous artists and art movements sought to capture with their pencils, ink, brushes and cameras, filmmakers translated into moving images and sound. Chris Welsby is one such artist who captures on film elements like natural forces (wind, light) which are then edited into experimental film.³³² Welsby, who has been experimenting with landscape films since the nineteen seventies, explores his concerns in a cinematic manner combining the mechanistic nature of technology with the chance-like qualities of nature.³³³

It is not my primary intention to represent landscape. I allow the landscape to have a hand in my work. I work with different media ranging from soil to film. When

³²⁹ Joel Snyder, 'Territorial Photography', in *Landscape and Power*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell, 2nd edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 175-201 (p. 179).

³³⁰ Baudelaire was very critical of photography, he considered it purely material and argued that if it is allowed to supplement art it will soon have supplanted or corrupted it. Snyder, *Territorial Photography*, p. 181.

³³¹ According to Snyder Carleton Watson found an effective means of obliterating natural wilderness and industrial technology by incorporating both elements in his photographs (e.g. *Malakoff Diggins, North Bloomfield, Nevada County* 1871); Timothy O'Sullivan captured landscapes in their most natural form yet antipicturesque in most of their details (e.g. *Fissure Vent of Steamboat Springs, Nevada* 1867). Snyder, *Territorial Photography*.

³³² Gareth Polmeer, 'Transient Landscape', *Millenium Film Journal*, 61, (2015), 60-69 (p. 61).

³³³ 'Natural forces drive structural elements and editing procedures, as in *Wind Vane* (1972), in which a camera is mounted on a tripod with wind vanes attached so that it is rotated by the breeze'. Polmeer, *Transient Landscape*, p. 61, 62.

ephemeral material is involved (e.g. *Pear Pressure*) I conserve it with my camera; traces of presence through absence.

‘[L]andscapes can be deciphered as textual systems’.³³⁴ However, Crouch and Malm warn ‘that interpreting landscape through strictly visual and textual methods is incomplete’.³³⁵ They suggest that landscape is considered directly, and this finds resonance in Heidegger’s notion of *Dasein* (See Chapters 2 and 5).

The represented landscape can be a/political and non/ideological as much as the real landscape. Bunn argues that if we are to consider landscape as a category of ideological control, its representation should depict those realities. However, certain realities are often lost or distorted.³³⁶ According to Casey ‘an artistic representation is never a transparent window onto its own subject matter’.³³⁷ I have been constantly aware that an accurate reading of place and landscape is not possible through art objects. Photographic and filmic documentation might help to introduce more layers of ‘text’ and make reading more accessible.

5.5.2 Land Art

A number of artists transformed landscape itself into a work of art. This part of the chapter reviews land art and the implications of landscape as a site for art making. Unlike what I do, land artists often construct and present their work directly on site rather than showing their work in a separate place.

Malpas explains that ‘[l]and art gains much of its power from particular places’ and it appears that most land artists work away from built-up areas.³³⁸ This characteristic shares parallels with my own practice. Similarly, both for me and the land artist the

³³⁴ Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, p. 1.

³³⁵ David Crouch and Charlotta Malm, ‘Landscape Practice, Landscape Research: an Essay in Gentle Politics’, in *Deterritorialisations...Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, ed. by Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd., 2003), pp. 253-263 (p. 261).

³³⁶ David Bunn, ‘Our Wattled Cot. Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle’s African Landscapes’, in *Landscape and Power*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell, 2nd edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 127-173 (p. 143).

³³⁷ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. 17.

³³⁸ Malpas, *Land Art in Close-Up*, p. 19.

material at hand is more than plain materiality, it has essence and presence. The bark I collected and reshaped is not a mere natural left-over; it is vibrant matter treated with respect.

‘For the land artist, the whole planet is an artist’s studio’, Malpas argues, and landscape is crucial.³³⁹ Landscape is equally fundamental for my practice; however, my consideration of landscape is different in many ways. Land artists often establish their art on site rather than in galleries or museums; site and art work are interwoven.³⁴⁰ The work may remain part of the site permanently. For example Smithson’s (1970) *Spiral Jetty* - consisting of a large-scale earthwork built on the shore of the Great Salt Lake in Utah from materials found on site, including salt crystals and basalt rock. In contrast Michael Heizer chose to remove material by digging the ground to create *Double Negative* (1969-70).³⁴¹ Land art may also be impermanent or ephemeral destined to disintegrate and fade away due to the nature of the materials used such as soil, ice, ash, pollen and dust. *Pear Pressure* consisted entirely of photographic documentation, since the actual material was ephemeral, and similarly, bark used to make *De-Scroll* was coated with matt varnish for protection, and conservation purposes.

According to Malpas, ‘[f]or much land art exists only in photographs, memories, words, various texts which are not land art itself’; moreover processes like chemical reactions and decay continue in most of them.³⁴² These are characteristics that can be perceived in my own work, for example in *De-Scroll*, whereby the bark dries up, darkens, becomes more brittle and it is then returned to the earth.³⁴³ However, it is Smithson’s ‘nonsites’ that come closest to my own practice. While Smithson often searched for ‘disrupted’ sites outside the city, at times he brought back the rubble and exhibited it in piles or containers inside the gallery.³⁴⁴

³³⁹ Malpas, *Land Art in Close-Up*, p. 17.

³⁴⁰ Martin Hogue, ‘The Site as Project: Lessons from Land Art and Conceptual Art’, *Journal of Architectural Education*, 57.3, (2004), 54-61 (p. 54).

³⁴¹ Malpas argues that in ecological/green terms this can be seen as a violation. Malpas, *Land Art in Close-Up*, p. 86.

³⁴² Malpas, *Land Art in Close-Up*, p. 22.

³⁴³ I have relocated a number of bark sculptures back to the valley, to decay and nourish the soil which in turn sustains the eucalyptus tree that provides the material.

³⁴⁴ Smithson asserts that the best sites are those that ‘have been disrupted by industry, reckless urbanisation, or nature’s own devastation.’ Robert Smithson, ‘Frederick Law Olmsted and the

5.6 Landscape Politics

Given the way landscapes seem to articulate many issues, it is hardly surprising that landscapes are contested and debated.³⁴⁵ Soper describes the landscape as an ideological concept and she sees relations of class physically inscribed in it.³⁴⁶ Soper argues that 'landscape is a matter of politics in virtue of its cultural and socio-economic context'.³⁴⁷ It is evident that different tensions operate within landscape and these can be hidden or overt. Besides the aesthetic element of landscape representation there is also a political countenance, and this can be observed even in the way artists choose what to include in their representations and what not. From Anselm Kiefer's landscapes we can discern that 'the landscape can no longer be represented innocently' because landscape is impregnated with history and conflict.³⁴⁸

The main concern here is to examine how landscape politics may impinge on the research project. Throughout the research I have been constantly aware that the landscape is far from innocent and I considered this fact both as a challenge and an opportunity. Contestation is palpable in the *RTO* series of art works and given the characteristics of the landscape this is hardly surprising. Besides the obvious tension associated with this territory, which is contemporaneously both hunttable and public, *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture* brings together the politics of a historical national referendum. Moreover, it also embodies the ambivalent relationship between nature and culture. Past and present collide in *Crossfire* and notions of us and them instill further tension into the work.

Dialectical Landscape', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 157-171 (p. 165); Casey, *Earth-Mapping. Artists Reshaping Landscape*, p. 6.

Minnesota Press.

³⁴⁵Gillian Rose, 'Contested Landscapes', in *Deterritorialisations...Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, ed. by Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd., 2003), pp. 270-271 (p. 270).

³⁴⁶ Soper, *What is Nature?*, p.234.

³⁴⁷ Kate Soper, 'Privileged Gazes and Ordinary Affections: Reflections on the Politics of Landscape and the Scope of the Nature Aesthetic', in *Deterritorialisations...Revisioning. Landscape and Politics*, ed. by Mark Dorrian and Gillian Rose (London: Black Dog Publishing Ltd., 2003), pp. 338-348 (p. 338).

³⁴⁸ Andréa Lauterwein, *Anselm Kiefer Paul Celan Myth, Mourning and Memory*, trans. by David H. Wilson (London: Thames and Hudson Ltd., 2007), pp. 133-134.

The colonial landscape is undoubtedly political. *Pear Pressure, De-Scroll, Landline/Waterline*, a large quantity of photographs and parts of the film derive from the same valley. The valley indicates where a river used to be in ancient times but it also documents the transformations carried out in the nineteenth century when Malta was still a British colony. Sir Osbert Chadwick, a renowned engineer, had been entrusted by the British government to transform Qlejgħa valley into a natural reservoir. The man-made additions (dams, pumping rooms) are visible to this day, and the valley thrives due to Chadwick's water retention system (see Chapter 6). The landscape still bears traces of colonisation and these are apparent in the soil, trees, and the entire ecosystem.

Mitchell maintains that landscape greets us as a space where we find or lose ourselves.³⁴⁹ Moreover, it can be seen as something that holds utopian fantasies or fractured images of resistance.³⁵⁰ If the landscape is erased or reshaped the history of the place is forgotten. *Natura Colta* brings together objects from landscape in a poetic act of remembrance.³⁵¹ The objects, enclosed in an antique-style cabinet, tell us of place. They tell us of the experiences and people's engagement with their surroundings and of the existing or impending environmental threats. Thus, it conserves also what we would rather forget.³⁵²

Landscape is now more precious than ever—an endangered species that has to be protected from and by civilization, kept safe in museums, parks, and shrinking 'wilderness areas'.³⁵³

The next part of the chapter examines an aspect that is closely related to landscape. The emphasis will now be on the environment; a ubiquitous and loaded term that is becoming evermore significant. The discussion is principally concerned with the implications of the environment on this practice-led research.

³⁴⁹ W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Introduction', in *Landscape and Power*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell, 2nd edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 1-4 (p. 2).

³⁵⁰ W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Imperial Landscape', in *Landscape and Power*, ed. by W. J. T. Mitchell, 2nd edn. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), pp. 5-34 (p. 10).

³⁵¹ The poetic aspect relates to deep mapping. See also Chapter 3.

³⁵² See Chapter 9.

³⁵³ Mitchell, *Imperial Landscape*, p.20.

5.7 Environment

The distinction between landscape and environment is blurred and frequently both terms are treated as synonymous.³⁵⁴ My research considers the environment as a tangibly experienced aspect of place. Each place that I have investigated presents a unique environment, and I was part of it.

What can we learn about place by investigating the environment? I consider this a tributary of the main research questions. The environment plays a significant role within the research as it is considered alongside the concepts of place and landscape. This part of the chapter argues that by exploring different aspects of the environment it may be possible to further our understanding of place.

5.7.1 Whose Environment?

It can be argued that the environment envelopes everything - we are part of the environment. When we speak of 'our' environment we are already qualifying and quantifying the term. This has implications of ownership and otherness that further complicate the concept of environment. 'If we ask, "*whose* environment?" Or "the environment of *what*?", no pertinent answer is forthcoming' [original italics].³⁵⁵ Carlson tells us of Sparshott's distinction between public and private environments – we mostly think of public environment since what people do for themselves is no else's business.³⁵⁶ However, as evidenced in open RTO sites public/private distinction can be problematic (see Chapter 7).³⁵⁷ This type of territory is caught in between the 'distorted' views that people hold of the environment.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ Carlson argues that we can take the raw aesthetic resources that are available in the environment to compose a landscape. Carlson, *Nature and Landscape. An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics*, p. 85; Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 193.

³⁵⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 326.

³⁵⁶ Carlson, *Nature and Landscape. An Introduction to Environmental Aesthetics*, p. 83.

³⁵⁷ As discussed in chapter 'Riservato – Keep Out!' it is often difficult to decipher whether open RTO sites are formally public or private.

³⁵⁸ See Chapter 8.

“‘[E]nvironment” is a relative term - relative, that is, to the being whose environment it is’ according to Ingold.³⁵⁹ Lefebvre tells us that the environment is an ambiguous concept because it is always in a state of flux.³⁶⁰ ‘If environments are forged through the activities of living beings, then so long as life goes on, they are continually under construction’ and thus, ‘the environment is never complete’.³⁶¹

During fieldwork I kept documenting the fluctuations occurring in the environment (place and landscape). For example, messages accumulating on prickly pear leaves and on eucalyptus bark, a sign of human presence and activities in that particular environment. Similarly, the fluctuations in the ecosystem from one season to the next indicate nature’s manner of altering the environment.

The lake was full to the brim and the deafening noise of cascading water dominated the valley. The ground I walked on a couple months before is now submerged; it has become a lake-bed. The grass flanking the sides of the lake is very slippery and I walk with caution, trying to keep the balance while attempting to take in the entire landscape at one go. This is fleeting environment; soon the lake will be no more.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).³⁶²

Yi-Fu Tuan asserts ‘that culture and experience strongly influence the interpretation of environment.’³⁶³ A hostile environment for some (e.g. RTO territory) can be welcoming to others.³⁶⁴ ‘Every aspect of the environment is imbued with symbolic meaning and value’, according to Strang, ‘and the landscape is a medium for the expression of these’.³⁶⁵ Lavoie asserts that a distinction has to be drawn between the terms environment and landscape although both are imbricated with socio-cultural processes.³⁶⁶ ‘Social processes are also processes of interaction with the environment as a whole’.³⁶⁷

³⁵⁹ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 20.

³⁶⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 368.

³⁶¹ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 20.

³⁶² Fieldwork held at Qlejgha valley.

³⁶³ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 55.

³⁶⁴ During the hunting season hunters and strollers vie for the same space which is public but hutable at the same time.

³⁶⁵ Veronica Strang, *Uncommon Ground* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing PLC., 1997), p. 177-178.

³⁶⁶ Caroline Lavoie, ‘Sketching the Landscape: Exploring a Sense of Place’, *Landscape Journal*, 24.1, (2005), 13-31 (p. 13).

³⁶⁷ Strang, *Uncommon Ground*, p. 176.

The environment can be indicative of place. It tells us of what goes on in there; about the past, present and perhaps the future. Nuances of place can be discovered through the environment, and it can reveal both the overt and the finer ‘text’. Reflecting on my practice I discovered that new environments have emerged from the artworks, for example, *Natura Colta* (re-) creates an environment that brings together aspects of all the environments encountered during the research. The next section discusses nature/culture and the environment.

5.7.2 Nature/Culture and the Environment

Frequently the environment and nature appear on the same level more so if the environment is being interpreted in a favourable way. Yet, culture seems to seep through the cracks of an ever eroding environment. Soper upholds that we cannot act irresponsibly towards the environment and still expect that our actions will not impinge on the planet or ourselves.³⁶⁸ Evernden argues that we often look to nature for insight into the state of the environment.³⁶⁹ Perceived in this manner nature appears like a unit of measurement for the environment. ‘To ask what is the nature of something is to ask about its character or essence’, and this can be easily applied to an environmental context.³⁷⁰

Following fieldwork in selected places it became apparent that the environment impinges on how we perceive landscape and place. We are directly implicated in the environment, and thus its state influences and shapes our perception of place. I have stated how at times I felt that I was in the wrong place. A palpable sense of uneasiness oozing from each and every crack in the ground appeared to infect the environment with a certain kind of hostility.³⁷¹ In contrast, there were times when I felt that the environment was contributing to make my perambulations more tranquil.

³⁶⁸ Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 144.

³⁶⁹ Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature*, p. 7.

³⁷⁰ Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature*, p. 19.

³⁷¹ I often felt uneasy walking in open RTO territory in the midst of gunfire.

Ingold, following Lewontin, maintains that the environment is shaped and organised by the organism.³⁷² Moreover, ‘meaning is immanent in the relational contexts of people’s practical engagement with their lived in environments’.³⁷³ ‘[A] person’s social relations are carried on in the same space as, and are continuous with, relations with other constituents of their environment, that is with non-persons’.³⁷⁴ This necessitates an approach that moves us away from a strict anthropocentric perspective which is beyond the scope of this research.

Ingold warns that the environment ‘should on no account be confused with the concept of nature’; environments are fundamentally historical and we should be wary of simplistic expressions like ‘natural environment’.³⁷⁵ We tend to associate environments that appear to be untouched by culture with nature; thus culture often appears as a break in the natural cycle.

Reflecting on my own practice, I notice that a number of what can be considered environmental challenges emerge from the places that I have been investigating. The following section discusses a number of such challenges in the context of my own practice.

5.7.3 Eco Considerations

A deep map, as discussed in Chapter 3, necessitates a heightened sensitivity to place, landscape and environment. Certain aspects of my practice have advanced my understanding of environmental issues, and this has been useful to gain further insight into place.

I do not consider my own practice ‘environmentalist’ although it is environmentally sensitive.³⁷⁶ This can be discerned from the manner it collects and exposes matter

³⁷² Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 193.

³⁷³ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 168.

³⁷⁴ Ingold asserts that ‘[t]here is, then, no radical break between the domains of social and ecological relations.’ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 107.

³⁷⁵ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 20.

³⁷⁶ Environmental art (e.g. Josef Beuys - *7000 Oaks* opened in 1982; Lothar Baumgarten – *Terra Incognita* 1969-84) is primarily concerned with raising awareness about the environment.

related to the environment. However, any reference to the environment is often ensconced alongside other considerations. It is up to the viewer to decide which ones to pick up.

A number of differentiated eco-considerations emerged from practically all the places that I have investigated for my research. For example, Qlejgħa valley presented various environmental challenges like eutrophication and overgrowth of weed (due to excess fertilisers used in adjacent fields), although as Garrard argues, '[a] weed is not another kind of plant, only the wrong kind in the wrong place.'³⁷⁷

Another matter of ecological concern is soil pollution.³⁷⁸ Lead, plastic and brass remnants from fired cartridges are ubiquitous in RTO territory. Pollution is indicative that 'too much of something is present in the environment, usually in the wrong place'.³⁷⁹ Environmentalists also consider hunting as a threat to biodiversity. Another activity quite distinct from hunting is trapping. This type of activity requires the transformation of sites which significantly disturb the ground; vegetation is removed, hides are constructed and material is often dumped to level the terrain.³⁸⁰

The state of the environment impinges on the characteristics of place; this is what this part of the chapter has been arguing all along. Like place and landscape the environment necessitates embodied experience. It can be argued that the environment and what it encompasses refine our perception of place.

This chapter discussed the key terms 'Place', 'Landscape' and 'Environment' with a special emphasis on aspects related to my research project. The next chapter

³⁷⁷ Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004), p. 5-6.

³⁷⁸ Lefebvre (1991: 326) argues that humans have always polluted the places where they have settled with refuse. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 326.

³⁷⁹ Thousands of cartridges have been collected from local soil to make *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture*. Although the aim was not to reduce soil pollution many did interpret the work in such a way. Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 6.

³⁸⁰ The removal of vegetation often erodes the soil and in order to be able to create a level surface so that clapping nets can be laid, soil, sand or gravel are dumped on the land. James Debono, 'The Environmental Cost of Trapping', *Maltatoday*, 16 September 2009 <<http://archive.maltatoday.com.mt/2009/09/16/t9.html>> [accessed 27 January 2015], (para 6-7 of 14).

explores Qlejgħa valley, and discusses how my practice responds to particular aspects encountered there.

6 The Valley

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter the emphasis will be on artworks responding to aspects encountered at Wied il-Qlejgħa.³⁸¹ I have been investigating the valley for a number of years; it has always intrigued me and I wanted to go deeper. I wanted to consider how the valley can be explored through fine arts practice. Two specific aspects that have emerged from the deep map and which were explored further are ‘textuality’ and ‘temporality’.

The following section introduces the valley and describes how the place has been considered as a site for fine art practice. The stories of the place are deemed useful since they create a context for the practice, and continue to generate possibilities for further (re-) deterritorialisations.

6.1.1 Placing the Valley

Until a few weeks ago the valley was in full bloom; now it is turning into a dry place. Change is drastic here, and abrupt. I have to be quick to capture the ‘now’ before it is gone. But the valley is resilient. It will hold on. The time will come when the water will flow again, and poplar leaves will keep in balance those tiny drops of rain.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).

The *wied* appears as a hybrid landform between the river valley of the humid north and the ‘wadi’ of the arid south; it is typical of the Mediterranean region.³⁸² Visually these landforms ‘resemble river valleys rather than wadis...[but] [t]he one feature of

³⁸¹ *Wied* is the Maltese term for valley.

³⁸² Plural of *wied* is *widien*. Ewan W. Anderson, 'The Wied: A Representative Mediterranean Landform', *GeoJournal*, 41.2, (1997), 111-114 (p. 112).

the wied which tends to be closer to the wadi than the river valley is the cross-profile'.³⁸³



Figure 34 Full lake at Wied il-Qlejgha.



Figure 35 The lake half full.

Wied il-Qlejgha is located in the North Western part of the island in the vicinity of the other research places. (Figure 34) The valley in question underwent modifications during the time when Malta was under British rule and the work was entrusted to the distinguished geologist and hydrologist Mr. Osbert Chadwick. Modifications largely consisted of man-made water reservoirs intended to collect

³⁸³ Anderson, *The Wied: A Representative Mediterranean Landform*, p. 113.

run-off and when full these resemble a lake with streams especially after heavy rainfall.

In Malta however, '[no] wried other than the occasional short length of spring fed channel, has permanent flow'.³⁸⁴ Due to various factors, including urban development and pollution, '[t]he Maltese Islands have a mere remnant of their former wetlands'.³⁸⁵ The lake at Qlejgħa valley is temporary and as the wet season retreats the lake turns into one muddy field. (Figure 35) The fluid characteristics of the valley impinge on the micro ecosystem and the place is dramatically transformed over a period of months until the wet season creeps in and the cycle starts all over again.



Figure 36 Old map. A map of the valley and thereabouts dated 1898.

³⁸⁴ Anderson, *The Wied: A Representative Mediterranean Landform*, p. 112.
³⁸⁵ S. M. Haslam, 'Wetland Loss in the Maltese Islands' (2007), 2-23 (p. 21).

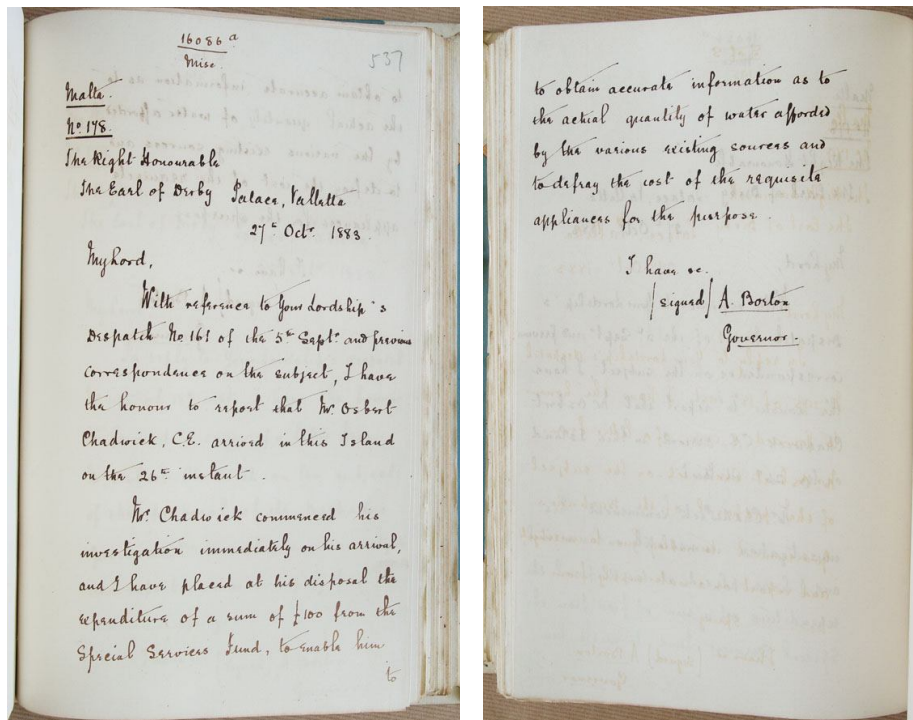


Figure 37 Letter by Governor of Malta. Letter indicating the arrival of Mr Osbert Chadwick in Malta. The Governor of Malta Arthur Borton is here informing The Earl of Derby that Mr Chadwick had arrived in Malta on 26 October 1883. According to the letter Mr Chadwick commenced his investigation of the local water system immediately on his arrival. One hundred pounds sterling were allocated from the Special Services Fund to enable him to obtain accurate information about the existing water sources and to advise about further costs.³⁸⁶

In a report dated 10 November 1887, Chadwick and Schinas recommended that a water management system passing through Qlejgħa valley had to be built, and they deemed the project to be of utmost importance.³⁸⁷ They estimated that a water management system in the valley could collect up to twenty million gallons of water every year.³⁸⁸ Chadwick built a dam and a system of reservoirs in the valley in the 1890s, and this benefitted agriculture as well as the ecosystem of the place which is extremely rich considering its small size.

³⁸⁶ Rabat, National Archives of Malta, Despatches, No. 178.

³⁸⁷ Chadwick was a consultant to the British Government and Schinas was the resident engineer. Their report discussed rainfall in Malta between 1886-87 and it considered existing water courses and water management systems and the construction of new ones. The report was addressed to the vice-secretary of Government. Osbert Chadwick and Georgio Schinas, 'All' Agente Segretario Di Governo', (Ufficio d'Idraulica, 1887), p. 3.

³⁸⁸ Chadwick and Schinas, 'All' Agente Segretario Di Governo', p. 7.

The water management system is still in place. Although the exigencies of modern agriculture have destabilised and skewed certain aspects of the valley's eco system, Chadwick's project still sustains the flora and fauna throughout the wet and dry seasons.³⁸⁹ Even when the lake is dry water is still retained in the soil where water previously flowed, sustaining the flora of the place during periods of drought. Haslam notes that '[i]n damp river beds, those with fine-textured soil, retaining water, bear the most wetland vegetation'.³⁹⁰

Wied il-Qlejgħa attracts many contemporary visitors who continue to add further layers of 'text'. This reminds us of Ingold's assertion that people determine the character of place (see Chapter 5).³⁹¹ The hybrid landform dates back to ancient times; it has been further shaped by nature and culture and it is constantly undergoing transformations. The reservoirs evoke the colonial past.

Being able to ramble is the ultimate indication of being at home in an environment; having free passage and moving, according to whim, with naturalness like the passage of breezes or rivers also masks the artificiality of the colonial presence.³⁹²

The place is a bricolage of possibilities. The prospect of a deep map appeared to generate further possibilities and thus, an investigation of place was initiated. I considered particular aspects of the valley especially its transient nature. What opportunities arise for fine art practice from an investigation of place? A closer reading of place revealed finer 'text', ephemeral and transient like the valley itself. I explored this path further.

6.2 Pear Pressure

This section discusses how exploration and recording of something as seemingly transient as scratched 'text' on leaves revealed surprising insights into place.³⁹³ The

³⁸⁹ The valley is home to various species of flora including Aleppo Pine, Eucalyptus, White Poplar, Opuntia Ficus-Indica and Alisma-Plantago Aquatica. Painted frogs, hedgehogs, chameleons and numerous insects inhabit the valley.

³⁹⁰ Haslam, *Wetland Loss in the Maltese Islands*, p. 13.

³⁹¹ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 192.

³⁹² Bunn, *Our Wattled Cot. Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle's African Landscapes*, p.139.

work interrogates the strollers' tendency of inscribing words and symbols on the fleshy tissue of prickly pears growing along the passage adjacent to the main lake at Qlejgha valley. Hence, the question: What opportunities for art practice emerge from an investigation of the 'textuality' of place? The term 'textuality' refers to traces of nature and culture inscribed on surfaces which might reveal bits and pieces of stories.

I have been visiting the place for a number of years but my focus has mainly been the lake for which this valley is renowned. I never realised what was happening on the 'fringe'. Adjacent to the lake is a very narrow passage emblazoned with a thick wall of prickly pears; its main function is to shield the fields on the other side. The plant which is not indigenous to Malta thrives in the Mediterranean climate. It grows abundantly and forms dense and tangled structures often serving as boundaries between neighbouring fields.

Strollers initiated the habit of 'posting' messages on the prickly pear 'wall' much like they do on social media. (Figures 38 and 39) Whenever I visited the valley I could notice fresh inscriptions. When 'text' is formed by the removal of material, scored or etched, it can be described as reductive writing.³⁹⁴

This chapter argues that soft graffiti can further our understanding of place and generate insight into the social and cultural aspects of place. The messages inscribed are mostly comprised of names and dates alluding to relationships, births, current dates ('I Was Here' type of message) and other personally significant memories. Nicknames, band names, politics and other vague symbols occasionally cropped up but these were far less common.

³⁹³ Prickly pear is the common name for *Opuntia ficus-indica*.

³⁹⁴ Tim Ingold, *Lines: A Brief History* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 43.



Figure 38 Soft graffiti 1



Figure 39 Soft graffiti 2

I mapped the valley when it is most quiet; often early in the morning. I photographed each and every message, over time amassing hundreds of images on my computer. The subject matter remains the prerogative of the 'authors' who

unawares of my practice post ‘text’ on this organic ‘wall’. The ‘authors’ succumb to the habit of their peers and with a pointed or sharp object and a small amount of pressure they inscribe ‘text’ on fresh prickly pear leaves. Hence the title *Pear Pressure*.

I took close-up shots, filling the space within the photograph with ‘text’. ‘With the close-up, space expands’.³⁹⁵ The actual leaves are not disturbed; if detached from the shrub they will desiccate and die unless they are re-planted. Due to the ephemeral qualities of the matter the project is entirely based on photographic documentation. Thus, the ‘photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence’.³⁹⁶

Every message was photographed numerous times; from various angles and elevations and with different exposures and shutter speeds. This was necessary to capture the ‘ideal’ shot; the best moment. The ‘text’ was not always fully exposed due to the newer leaves obstructing the older ones. At times it was difficult to capture the message clearly.

Sontag describes photography as ‘the inventory of mortality’.³⁹⁷ Messages are not erased as the leaf dies out because they are reterritorialised in the photograph. Most leaves rot due to the wounds (writing) inflicted on their skin, something I could witness upon repeat visits to the valley. Derrida maintains that ‘[w]hat writing itself, in its nonphonetic moment, betrays, is life’.³⁹⁸ In the context of *Pear Pressure* such a statement is both paradoxical and revelatory. Writing can be considered a remembrance of life; however, it is also a betrayal - writing as an act of violence.

The selection process was rigorous; hundreds of digital photographs waiting to be chosen. When I was selecting photographs I was taken back to the valley.

Photographs evoke memories. ‘Memory is not an inventory, but is the act of memorizing [and] this is also the *work* of the photograph...’ [original italics].³⁹⁹

³⁹⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 236.

³⁹⁶ Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 16.

³⁹⁷ Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 70.

³⁹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 25.

³⁹⁹ This can be linked to the notion of souvenir as discussed in Chapter 9. Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 42.

Images were digitally edited on computer and cropped to Polaroid size (approximately 7.9cm by 7.9cm); only one version of each message was printed, using photographic matte paper and including a white Polaroid border all around. It is hoped that the retro Polaroid aesthetic will further expose the transient nature of prickly pear ‘text’.⁴⁰⁰

I am attracted to the valley when it is practically deserted. Reflecting on my collection of photographs I realised that what I have is a collection of re-collections.⁴⁰¹ The photographs show that ‘[e]ven when there are no people around their traces are everywhere’.⁴⁰² These are people stories imbricated with the history of the place; an unfolding narrative that is both private and public. The dichotomous notions of private and public are inescapable throughout my investigation of place.

The photographs were arranged one next to the other separated by five centimeter intervals. Around one hundred and eighty-five photographs were used. There is no particular order to this work; it is reconfigured according to the space and decisions are taken on the spot. It is non-chronological and multidirectional. The aim was to produce a spatial, visual narrative that flows along walls, floors and ceilings, round the perimeter of windows, doors and other features found inside the gallery. The layout conveyed the growth patterns of the shrub which is capable of spreading beyond its allocated space. (Figure 40)

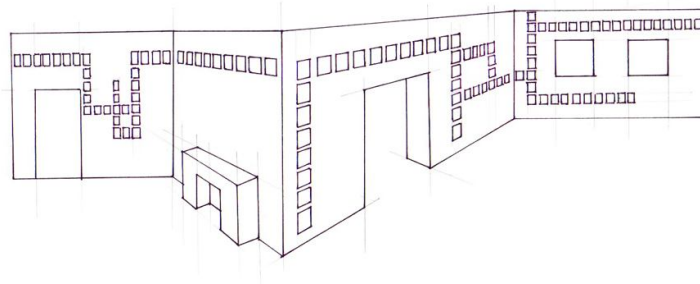


Figure 40 Sketch *Pear Pressure*

⁴⁰⁰ Polaroids tend to fade over time. I tried to achieve a non-saturated chromatic texture similar to the original Polaroid prints.

⁴⁰¹ ‘Like the collector, the photographer is animated by a passion that, even when it appears to be for the present, is linked to a sense of the past’. Sontag, *On Photography*, p.77.

⁴⁰² Geoff Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005), p. 223.

Pear Pressure was shown at Lifton Place, University of Leeds in September 2014. Considered in the context of Deleuze’s and Guattari’s notion of mapping the proliferation of messages on prickly pears takes on new significance. ‘It [writing] has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come’.⁴⁰³ The photographic installation took the form of a narrative, a ‘textual’ map of the valley, and the viewers could walk along the valley by engaging with the map. The narrative has neither beginning nor end; like the rhizome it is antigenealogy.⁴⁰⁴ (Figure 41)



Figure 41 *Pear Pressure* (2014) at Lifton Place, University of Leeds.

‘A photograph could also be described as a quotation’; it decontextualises the subject.⁴⁰⁵ Benjamin maintains that ‘[t]o quote a text involves the interruption of its context’. These interruptions can be considered as lines of deterritorialisation. New contexts emerge; the reader ‘invents in texts something different from what they [author] “intended”’.⁴⁰⁶ Gibbons asserts that ‘photographs have as much transformative potential as they have evidential powers, and the two can most often be said to work hand in hand with one another’.⁴⁰⁷ Based on the photographic evidence viewers can conjure up narratives and join in the conversation as it

⁴⁰³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 5.

⁴⁰⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 12.

⁴⁰⁵ ‘The taste for quotations (and for the juxtaposition of incongruous quotations) is a Surrealist taste’. Sontag, *On Photography*, p.75, 71.

⁴⁰⁶ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 169.

⁴⁰⁷ Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory*, p. 37.

unfolds.⁴⁰⁸ The reader combines text ‘fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings’.⁴⁰⁹

The ‘text’ in *Pear Pressure* is made from a series of grooves. Brassai notes that ‘a groove is infinitely more powerful than a line. It slows the hand, it focuses concentration and requires effort, liberating the life-giving force that wells up from a child’s inmost being’.⁴¹⁰ Moreover, for Brassai, ‘the material plays an active, creative role in everything incised on it’.⁴¹¹

The ‘groove’ can be considered a kind of ‘scarification’ on the surface of the skin; a scar in soft tissue. Skin was one of the earliest means of expressing identity and life experiences in both a permanent and a temporary form.⁴¹² Instead of using one’s own skin visitors to the valley are resorting to the soft succulents’ skin to reveal snippets of their identity.

Keefer tells us of C.H. Armitage’s classification of five purposes of scarification; one of them being identification with a tribe.⁴¹³ The scars inflicted on prickly pears perhaps indicate the need to belong and to connect with others, and to temporarily appropriate place. Scarification can be one of the rites of passage denoting a move from one phase to another in a person’s life.⁴¹⁴ This shares parallels with the ‘text’ inscribed by strollers which frequently points to significant events in their lives. Keefer defines scarification as a silent but visible way of communication.⁴¹⁵

⁴⁰⁸ Photographs in *Pear Pressure* work in relation to one another; they converse and create a continuum.

⁴⁰⁹ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 169.

⁴¹⁰ Brassai, *Brassai Graffiti* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002), p. 42.

⁴¹¹ See also Chapter 9. Brassai, *Brassai Graffiti*, p. 42.

⁴¹² ‘Scarification involves making deliberate incisions into the epidermis, and interference with the healing process to produce a noticeable effect. Methods that are employed range from using a sharp pronged object to lift a portion of skin, into which fine cuts are made, generally in a line, to using a razor for the creation of a single usually long incision’. Katrina Keefer, ‘Scarification and Identity in the Liberated Africans Department Register’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 47.3, (2013), 537-553 (p. 539).

⁴¹³ Keefer, *Scarification and Identity in the Liberated Africans Department Register*, p. 541.

⁴¹⁴ Fiona F. Moolla, ‘The Body Unbound: Ritual Scarification and Autobiographical Forms in Wole Soyinka’s Aké: The Years of Childgood’, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 47.1, (2012), 27-46 (p. 27).

⁴¹⁵ Keefer, *Scarification and Identity in the Liberated Africans Department Register*, p. 541.

The reductive process of scraping-off tissue from a live surface often encourages rot, decay and possibly death, depending on the ‘wounds’ being inflicted. Nature goes into auto-destruct mode as if it wants to have the last word. There are times when the leaf becomes too weak to hold its own and consequently succumbs to gravity. The leaf detaches from the plant, and if it manages to settle on a discrete layer of soil, it may take root and grow into a new plant. Through this cycle we can discern a natural process of reterritorialisation.

When seeds and leaves drop to the ground, do they not continue the life stories of the trees from which they fell? Thus the ground, too, is no mere surface, upon which trees stand like an army of soldiers on parade.⁴¹⁶

‘The surface and that which takes place at the surface is what “renders possible” – in other words, the event as that which is expressed’.⁴¹⁷ *Pear Pressure* takes place on the surface. It reterritorialises surface ‘text’ onto architectural surfaces. It appropriates walls, floors, ceilings and corners; it moves in all directions. The surface makes the work possible.

The work tells us of social and cultural activity and people’s engagement with the valley. Further layers of ‘text’ are continuously added and erased and the fluid configuration of *Pear Pressure* is an attempt at capturing this textual interplay. The viewer is implicated in the work as much as the original authors.

The room at Lifton Place was filled with ‘text’ and to read the ‘text’ one had to walk around the room; new possibilities emerged as one drifted in an unplanned manner. Like a map, the work ‘is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real’. The work is also a work-in-progress; it is always disposed to acquire more.⁴¹⁸

Further into the valley I noticed that another kind of ‘text’ was present. One of the old eucalyptus trees had a large amount of ‘text’ inscribed on its bark; a collage of

⁴¹⁶ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 87.

⁴¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. by Constantin V. Boundas, trans. by Mark Lester with Charles Stivale (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), p. 214.

⁴¹⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 13.

inscriptions starting from the base of the tree up to two metres high.⁴¹⁹ Unlike, prickly pear leaves bark is more durable since it is not comprised of water, thus as will be explained in the following section, the material could be relocated and manipulated in the studio.

6.3 De-Scroll

The chapter will now focus on *De-Scroll*, a work responding to a different type of textuality encountered at Qlejgha valley. The work explores transient ‘text’ inscribed on a specific eucalyptus tree located a few minutes away from the prickly pear ‘wall’.⁴²⁰ This appears to be the only tree with ‘text’ inscribed all over its bark probably due to its accessibility and proximity to the main path. (Figure 42)



Figure 42 Graffiti on bark.

I considered graffiti scratched on eucalyptus bark as another possibility to explore the ‘textuality’ of place. The camera allowed me to read the previous ‘text’ more closely and thus, I adopted the same approach for bark ‘text’. Moreover, I wanted to investigate how the manipulation of bark might allow for further ‘text’ to emerge.

I noticed eucalyptus ‘text’ later in my research when I started delving further into the valley. The smooth wide trunk appears to invite strollers to incise their messages and to celebrate their presence within the valley. Like a book; the aged eucalyptus

⁴¹⁹ The ‘text’ on the eucalyptus appears to reach up to the height of a human being.

⁴²⁰ Eucalyptus trees, mostly native of Australia, thrive in places where there is an abundant source of water.

imbricates the story of the place with the stories of its visitors. In De Certeau's words '[r]eading frees itself from the soil that determined it. It detaches itself from that soil'.⁴²¹ I began to collect bark that had come undone and that was accumulating at the base of the tree; a few pieces had man-made 'text' inscribed on the surface. Bark layers are like palimpsests - repositories of 'text' accumulated over a period of time. In this case natural and cultural 'texts' were juxtaposed together. The material is intriguing – fragile, textured, stained and leathery. A plethora of characteristics suggestive of 'textuality' - 'mute reflections all have corresponding words which indicate them'.⁴²² (Re-) deterritorialisation might give these 'mute reflections' a voice. It is a matter of opening up the 'text' and making it more pronounced.

All I want is to show you some of what is in a name, to cut it open to reveal how meaning accumulates like sap rings in a tree trunk, each year deepening the name, thickening it.⁴²³

I found myself working with pieces of bark; discarded organic matter. Bark is mundane and rich, soft and brittle, moist and dry, light and dark. The more I held it in my hands and looked hard at it the more it appeared to gain the ability to communicate. I kept breaking the scraps further, gaining familiarity with the material, touching, smelling and trying to understand what it wants to be. I put the bark pieces which had man-made 'text' on the side; like ancient graffiti they had to be preserved. The 'text' messages were similar to the ones seen on prickly pears. However, the grooves were tighter and smaller perhaps due to the hardness of the bark. Unlike the soft fleshy leaves more pressure and hand coordination were required to incise the bark. Heaps of bark accumulated in my studio; although the matter appeared to have a lot to say it did not say it straight away.

While doing fieldwork in the valley I noticed how the form and colour of bark was being altered. What initially appeared as commonplace matter discarded by nature and culture was still vibrant. In actual fact matter was being reterritorialised; it was now functioning as a shelter for insects and mould, it was keeping the soil moist and

⁴²¹ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 176.

⁴²² Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 30.

⁴²³ Heat-Moon, *Prairy Erth*, p. 326.

nourished. Matter loaded with ‘textuality’ in a state of becoming. I realised that I can make things with this matter. It was a matter of correspondence.⁴²⁴

Ingold argues that ‘the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to, the fluxes and flows of the material with which we work’.⁴²⁵ Reflecting on my practice I wondered if this was a respectful collaboration with matter. According to Deleuze and Guattari ‘matter-flow can only be *followed*’ [original italics].⁴²⁶ Place provided the material and it facilitated its flow. It is a matter of being in place; moving about and experiencing the flow and identifying lines of deterritorialisation. ‘To follow the flow of matter is to itinerate, to ambulate’.⁴²⁷

Following experimentation with different configurations I decided to start rolling up the material into a scroll-like form.⁴²⁸ This particular form appeared to be more conducive to ‘text’.⁴²⁹ The process turned into a matching game; a quest for similitude. I wanted to bring together pieces that resonate with each another; for example colour, texture, thickness and grain. I gradually built up different layers of bark that had similar properties until I obtained the required overall thickness. The process was slow and intricate. (Figures 43 and 44)



Figure 43 Bark scroll.

⁴²⁴ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*.

⁴²⁵ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 6.

⁴²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 451.

⁴²⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 452.

⁴²⁸ In order to be rolled up into a scroll the bark had to be soaked. Wet bark in the valley began to roll up on its own and this was suggestive of the possibilities of the material.

⁴²⁹ The scroll-like form also appeared to preserve the ‘text’; it embraced it.

Bark has been used as a writing surface for thousands of years. Various examples of bark scrolls from diverse cultures are still in existence. Among them the Wiigwaasabak birch bark scrolls of North America, the Novgorod letters of old Russia, and numerous Indian Buddhist bark manuscripts. I used bark to construct delicate sculptures reminiscent of such ancient scrolls. The form seemed to enhance the textuality of the material.



Figure 44 Bark scrolls different forms and sizes.

I showed a pair of bark scrolls at Lifton Place, University of Leeds in September 2014. Complementing the sculptures was a short film that showed a number of earlier scrolls stuck vertically to a wall one next to the other. Meditative acoustic chords resonated in the background as the camera panned from side to side, up and down. Both bark scrolls were displayed in a wooden custom-made display case that also served as a safe enclosure for relocating the sculptures from Malta to England and back. Bark scrolls appeared more loaded with ‘text’ when placed inside the display case.⁴³⁰ (Figure 45)

Individual pieces vary from one piece to the next; many have a smooth texture, others are rougher, more elaborate or seem better ‘preserved’. A number of bark scrolls appear to be more loaded with ‘text’; others are leaner. Various sculptures bear traces of stains, as if they had been buried or ensconced somewhere deep beneath the ground for ages. The peeling crust and the cracks in the bark appear to

⁴³⁰ Display cases are frequently incorporated as part of my art works e.g. *RTO* series and *Natura Colta*.

reveal further layers of ‘text’. Sculptures are generally between forty-five and sixty centimeters long and every piece is comprised of either one or two cylinders; certain forms evoke particular cultures.



Figure 45 Bark scrolls in custom-made display case. *Bark scrolls alongside looped film (2014) at Lifton Place, University of Leeds.*

Following the first showing of *De-Scroll* at Lifton Place, I decided to continue making bark sculptures. I was now looking for a different and more spacious venue in order to explore the implications of space on the sculptures. I wanted to investigate how space may reconfigure and revision the ‘textuality’ of the collection. After a period of research for potential spaces the National Library of Malta, in Valletta, was chosen as the host for the next *De-Scroll* exhibition. As a repository of ‘texts’ the library could create an intriguing context for an installation comprised of numerous bark scrolls.

The showcases in the library’s main reading hall were used for the large-scale installation which was comprised of one hundred bark scrolls. The National Library of Malta was built by the Knights of St John; it contains unique historic books and manuscripts.⁴³¹ The imposing building was completed in 1796 but the Knights did not manage to relocate the archives to the Bibliotheca, since two years later they were expelled from Malta by Napoleon. In 1812 the British relocated the National

⁴³¹ The National Library of Malta is solely a research and reference library.

archives into this building as the Knights had envisioned. Thus, we can trace in the valley, and the library, a similar colonial past.

I discovered that in the entire library there exists only one scroll and thus, an installation of numerous bark scrolls in such a space would temporarily bridge the gap. It took me two years to make one hundred scrolls. It is a slow and meticulous process whereby one has to continuously listen to the material at hand, and allow it to indicate the path towards its becoming.

The installation occupied all the antique display cases in the main reading hall. Enclosed behind glass, reflecting rows of bookshelves that reach up to the ceiling, the scrolls appeared 'in place'. It can be argued that in the library the scrolls were in their natural setting as much as the bark in the valley. (Figures 46-49) The collection of sculptures exuded 'textuality'. The library setting appeared to enhance the 'textuality' of the work, and it created a smooth space from which further 'text' could emerge. Bark pieces that had inscriptions on them were displayed in a dedicated showcase. These pieces acted as a reference point for the viewer. The viewer had to make connections by engaging with multiple readings and 'textual' juxtapositions. This aspect of the work emerged in relation with the context created by the library.⁴³² The only existing scroll in the bibliotheca, dating back to the fifteenth century, was exhibited alongside the bark scrolls.⁴³³

It can be argued that these sculptures are analogous to signs; indicative of place. Bark tells us of the eucalyptus tree growing in the valley and it may indicate its age too. It tells us of the people who visit the place and it reveals snippets of their stories. The sculptures embody nature and culture. Perhaps less evident are the historic, political (colonial), anthropological and ecological layers of 'text' imbricated with matter.

⁴³² At Lifton Place this aspect was missing. Undoubtedly, the library setting appeared to enhance the 'textuality' of the work.

⁴³³ It is a fragment of a Hebrew biblical scroll on parchment and it became part of the National collection in 1955.

The question is not yet what a given sign signifies but to which other signs it refers, or which signs add themselves to it to form a network without beginning or end that projects its shadow onto an amorphous atmospheric continuum.⁴³⁴



Figure 46 Bark scrolls at the National Library of Malta, Valletta.



Figure 47 *De-Scroll* installation top view.

⁴³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 124.



Figure 48 *De-Scroll* installation view facing library entrance.



Figure 49 *De-Scroll* installation elevated view. *The display case on the right includes bark with inscribed messages.*

Deleuze and Guattari associate trees with linearity and striations, ‘[w]e’re tired of trees’ they utter.⁴³⁵ *De-Scroll* allowed the rhizome to emerge from the tree. For Deleuze and Guattari ‘there exist tree or root structures in rhizomes; conversely, a tree branch or root division may begin to burgeon into a rhizome’.⁴³⁶ ‘To be rhizomorphic is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses’.⁴³⁷ *De-Scroll* created a smooth space that allowed ‘text’ to move in all directions. The

⁴³⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 17.

⁴³⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 16.

⁴³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 17.

work mirrored the valley; it imbricated multiple possibilities, streams, flows, connections and variations.

The display cases can be considered trees and the work the rhizomes sprouting in all directions.⁴³⁸ The collection opened up the work to endless readings to those who wanted to read. *De-Scroll* responds to ‘textual’ territorialisation; it imbricates multiple narratives of being in place. The installation can be considered a reterritorialised map of the valley inside a library context; an ongoing conversation between bark and book⁴³⁹. Both bark and book derive from the same source – trees. Visitors to the library could trace the histories of the valley through the remnants of trees. *De-Scroll* juxtaposed the tracing with the map and attached the rhizome with the tree. ‘Plug the tracings back into the map, connect the roots or trees back up with a rhizome’.⁴⁴⁰

Žižek argues that in Deleuzian terms the work of art provides the context that enables us to understand a given historical situation.⁴⁴¹ The viewer is enticed to re-imagine and re-vise the histories of the place through the work. Merleau-Ponty asserts that ‘[e]very cultural object certainly refers back to a natural background against which it appears and that can, for that matter, be confused and distant.’⁴⁴² *De-Scroll* allowed viewers to piece up place from pieces of bark. ‘The background continues beneath the figure, is *seen* beneath the figure even though it is covered by it’ [original italics].⁴⁴³

Dr Judith Tucker and I gave a talk during the launch of the exhibition; we highlighted the process behind the work and considered the work in relation to the

⁴³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari posit: ‘But conversely, and without symmetry, the stems of the rhizome are always taking leave of the trees, the masses and flows are constantly escaping, inventing, connections that jump from tree to tree and uproot them: a whole smoothing of space, which in turn reacts back upon striated space’. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 557.

⁴³⁹ ‘In a book, as in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialisation and destratification’. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 4.

⁴⁴⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 15.

⁴⁴¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), p. 15.

⁴⁴² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 26.

⁴⁴³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 26.

library context.⁴⁴⁴ Following the exhibition a number of bark scrolls were returned to the valley. This is a symbolic act of giving back. ‘Metabolised and decomposed by the processes of life, materials drawn from the earth are eventually returned to it, fuelling further growth’.⁴⁴⁵ The bark will decompose and nourish the soil which in turn nourishes the tree. The tree will produce and shed more bark and thus, the cycle of nature is retained.

It can be argued that a reading of *De-Scroll* can be considered, to a certain extent, an act of appropriation. Kaul argues that ‘[t]he stories people tell about places are everyday acts of knowing and owning them’.⁴⁴⁶ Thus, if we consider the work as a collection of fragments (of place), each reading represents a retelling of place. ‘In that sense, a “telling of place” can simultaneously be an act of appropriation, a claim to ownership and belonging...’.⁴⁴⁷ However, in the context of *De-Scroll*, this could be any ‘place’, including the valley. This is what Heidegger calls an opening.⁴⁴⁸ The work interrogates aspects pertaining to a particular place and in the process it makes available imaginary places that can be appropriated by the viewer.

The installation at the National Library was a continuation of the exhibition held at Lifton Place. Inside the library it was shown that the ‘textuality’ of the work continues to develop in relation to the context. The library appeared to enhance the ‘textual’ properties of matter; it gave matter the impetus to flow in multiple directions and to accumulate further ‘text’ along the way.

Matter thus resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and travelling in every direction like shivers through an immense body.⁴⁴⁹

What does *De-Scroll* add to my investigation of place? I considered how materiality and context can be manipulated to create further ‘text’. The bark scrolls acted as a starting point that allowed the active viewers to conjure up their own place-stories. It

⁴⁴⁴ The exhibition was open from 24th October till 15th November 2015.

⁴⁴⁵ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 77.

⁴⁴⁶ Adam Kaul, ‘The Village that wasn’t there. Appropriation, Domination and Resistance’, in *Ownership and Appropriation*, ed. by Veronica Strang and Mark Busse (Oxford: Berg, 2011), pp. 239-259 (p. 240).

⁴⁴⁷ Kaul, *The Village that wasn’t there. Appropriation, Domination and Resistance*, p. 240.

⁴⁴⁸ The work opens up a space. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 23.

⁴⁴⁹ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 276.

appears that reterritorialisation revealed parts of ‘text’ that would otherwise remain hidden. The library installation addressed the main research question about the contribution of (re-) deterritorialised matter to further our understanding of place.

In relation to the ‘text’, it is evident that temporality plays a key part. People are attracted to the valley when it is lush, when the lake is full. People cease going to the valley as soon as the flow of water stops. The following section responds to the valley’s temporality. *Landline/Waterline* investigates the aspect of time through a collection of soil and water specimens.

6.4 Landline/Waterline

The chapter will now move on to discuss *Landline/Waterline* a work responding to the temporality of place more specifically to the seasonal fluctuations occurring at Qlejgha valley. (Figure 50) The longevity of the project was determined by a full cycle spanning a whole year during which the valley underwent considerable environmental variations.⁴⁵⁰



Figure 50 Main lake at Qlejgha valley.

Landline/Waterline addresses a key research question – What can we learn about the temporality of place from (re-) deterritorialised matter? Moreover, it asks – What

⁴⁵⁰ The samples were collected between 2013 and 2014.

opportunities emerge for fine art practice from a temporality of place? The following section considers deterritorialised matter as a means to further our understanding of place temporality.

6.4.1 Time Matters

Time is embodied in the landscape and it can be argued that the physical characteristics of the landscape represent temporal evidence. *Landline/Waterline* is comprised of a collection of soil and lake water specimens enclosed in glass bottles. Diverse in their similarities these specimens tell us of the passing of time encountered in the valley, and this reminds us of Lefebvre's assertion that nature is an indicator of time (see Section 5.2.3).

I walked repeatedly along the lake and I could observe the diversity of colours and textures of the soil ranging from greyish brown, almost muddy, to dark Sienna. The ground looked like a collage of sorts; an earth-work. For Smithson '[a] consciousness of mud and the realms of sedimentation is necessary in order to understand the landscape as it exists.'⁴⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty maintains that the qualities of the thing such as its color and hardness are telling.⁴⁵² I set out to collect specimens at random intervals over a twelve month period, what can be considered time-matter.

A body, that is, an independent material object, presents itself at first to us as a system of qualities in which resistance and colour – the data of sight and touch – occupy the centre, all the rest being, as it were, suspended from them.⁴⁵³

The valley passes through different stages throughout the year and the landscape is altered accordingly. During the wet season the main lake that cuts across the valley is full to the brim. (Figure 51) The lake nurtures the rich ecosystem which is, however, very delicate and fragile (Figure 52).

⁴⁵¹ Smithson, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the Dialectical Landscape*, p. 170.

⁴⁵² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 318.

⁴⁵³ Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 259.



Figure 51 Lake water.



Figure 52 Vegetation growing in lake water.

The man-made lake consists of a series of cascading reservoirs; when the main reservoir is full water spills into the next one. (Figure 53) The roar of water rushing through the valley dominates the place, and the sound it makes as it drops into the next reservoir is loud but rhythmical. Yet, it is temporary. (Figure 54) In summer the lake was gone and I could walk across the lakebed while doing my fieldwork. (Figures 55 and 56) The soil bed still retained a high level of moisture and in a few weeks instead of the lake there was a lush grassy carpet. In total I collected forty-eight specimens, half soil half water.



Figure 53 Overflow of water. *When the lake is full water cascades from one reservoir to the next.*



Figure 54 No flow.

Upon repeat visits to the valley I could notice that the colour of the soil beneath my feet was changing. Even the sound that it made as I stepped on it seemed to change. Initially it was almost inaudible and damp becoming crisper as the wet season faded and the valley basked in the scorching sun.



Figure 55 Lakebed. *The lake replaced by a carpet of grass.*



Figure 56 Collecting soil specimens. *Lakebed turned into a field.*

Landline/Waterline was first shown at The Tetley, Leeds as part of ‘The Imaginary Museum’ collective.⁴⁵⁴ The show referenced the book ‘Museum Without Walls’ by Andre Malraux and to keep within the notions explicated by the author, rather than showing the actual work, artists were tasked with providing an image of it. Each image was created as a multiple edition postcard. The images were displayed on a custom made rack and allowed viewers to create their own imaginary museum from postcards. The postcard juxtaposed the temporality of the valley with the temporality of the photograph. (Figure 57)

⁴⁵⁴ The exhibition was held between 7th and 23rd March 2014.



Figure 57 Bottled soil. As shown on the postcard reproductions.



Figure 58 Fine grained soil.

The valley is rich in soil types and each type embodies ‘text’ within its texture and colour. (Figure 58) The specimens had to be protected; custom made elongated shelves were introduced and the work was then set up in my studio where matter kept altering.⁴⁵⁵ Every month is symbolically represented as a compartment in each of the four shelves; one shelf for every season. The bottles, measuring *circa* six centimeters (height), are firmly secured by cork tops so as to preserve the properties of the matter contained within. A label is attached to each bottle describing the characteristics of the specimen. Changes have been observed in various soil and water specimens over a number of months. The shelves’s finishing is similar to

⁴⁵⁵ Each of the four shelves measures 74cm width by 10cm height.

Natura Colta, since the work is intended to evoke museum displays. Bachelard claims that it is often through concentration in a restricted space that the dialectics of inside and outside draws its strength.⁴⁵⁶ '[M]iniature can accumulate size', he asserts, '[i]t is *vast* in its way' [original italics].⁴⁵⁷ The miniature bottles contain valley-time; they contain the uncontainable.

Strang maintains that '[t]he most constant "quality" of water is that it is not constant, but is characterised by transmutability and sensitivity to changes in the environment'.⁴⁵⁸ From one season to the next the characteristics of water are altered and this is evident in *Landline/Waterline*.⁴⁵⁹ (Figure 59) Lake water gradually showed obvious signs of eutrophication, evidence of what Soper calls 'the "pulling power" of rural ideology'.⁴⁶⁰ As the rain gradually subsided water became murkier and more contaminated. Haslam argues that when pollutants increase and water decreases, pollution is concentrated.⁴⁶¹ These gradual alterations can be regarded as time indicators; Strang maintains that water is 'specific to a unique physical and cultural time and space'.⁴⁶²



Figure 59 Signs of eutrophication.

⁴⁵⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 229.

⁴⁵⁷ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 215.

⁴⁵⁸ Strang, *The Meaning of Water*, p. 49.

⁴⁵⁹ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. 34.

⁴⁶⁰ Eutrophication manifests itself as a velvety growth on the surface of the water, also known as algal blooms, and it can be exacerbated by the use of fertilisers in neighbouring fields. In Soper's words 'we may say that a certain idea of "nature" becomes more desirable, and the desire for it more manipulable'. Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 196.

⁴⁶¹ Haslam, *Wetland Loss in the Maltese Islands*, p. 9.

⁴⁶² Strang, *The Meaning of Water*, p. 49.

We can read and interpret time by looking at the soil and water samples. Every bottle is indicative of time and the entire collection, in its totality, represents an accumulation of time – past, present and future. The change in colour and moisture content, the flaking soil, condensation, and the accumulation of sediment at the bottom of the bottles indicate that *Landline/Waterline* keeps accumulating time.

For every moment that arrives, the previous moment suffers a modification: I still hold it in hand, it is still there, and yet it already sinks back, it descends beneath the line of presents.⁴⁶³

The work was shown at Lifton Place, University of Leeds in September 2014. However, the original artwork has been replaced by four nearly full size embossed prints.⁴⁶⁴ Complementing the prints was a looped film showing the various environmental fluctuations occurring in the valley including the deafening sounds of waterfalls and cicadas. *Landline/Waterline* formed an imaginary straight line, one shelf next to the other. (Figure 60) Viewers had to walk the length of the work to observe matter enclosed in bottles; to encounter the temporality of the valley.

Each moment of the movement embraces its entire expanse and, in particular, its first moment or kinetic initiation inaugurates the link between a here and a there, between a now and a future that the other moments will be limited to developing.⁴⁶⁵

‘In every movement of focusing, my body ties a present, a past, and a future together’.⁴⁶⁶ The apparent linear setup of the shelves takes up space and the perceived distance (length) should encourage movement; each compartment opens up a space and ‘[i]n its countless alveoli space contains compressed time’.⁴⁶⁷ The line is comprised of points in time(s); however, as Merleau-Ponty argues, ‘[t]ime is not a line...’.⁴⁶⁸

Landline/Waterline is non-chronological; specimens were placed randomly so as to disrupt the notion of linearity. (Figure 61) Merleau-Ponty sustains that time is not an

⁴⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 439.

⁴⁶⁴ Due to the fragility of the work it was decided to produce large format prints instead of relocating the original work to Leeds.

⁴⁶⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 141.

⁴⁶⁶ ‘The lived present contains a past and a future within its thickness’ (Merleau-Ponty 2014:288). Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 288, 249.

⁴⁶⁷ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 8.

⁴⁶⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 440.

actual succession that could be limited simply to recording but is born of our relation with things.⁴⁶⁹ The viewer could connect points in time through one's own movement; thus, the viewer could make up time.

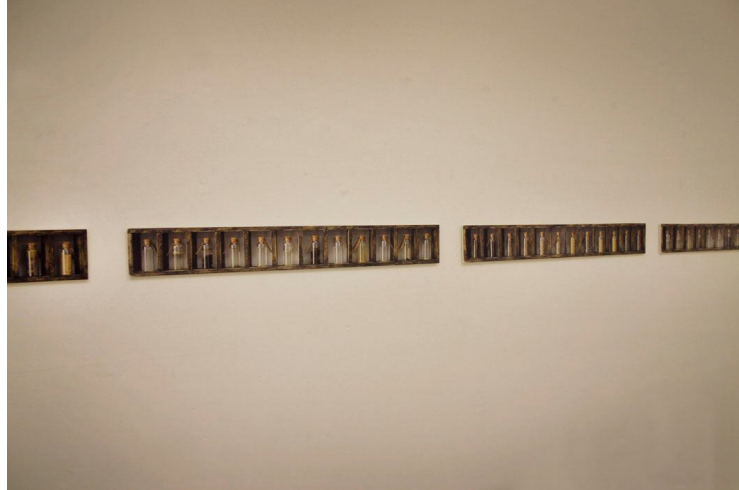


Figure 60 *Landline/Waterline* Lifford Place, University of Leeds.

There are no connected objects without an act of connecting and without a subject, there is no unity without a unifying, yet every synthesis is simultaneously taken apart and remade by time, which, in a single movement, puts it into question and confirms it because it produces a new present that retains the past.⁴⁷⁰



Figure 61 *Landline/Waterline* (Detail). Soil, water, wood, glass, cork, labels. 48 bottles circa 6cm height. 4 shelves each 74cm W × 10cm H × 4.5cm D.

⁴⁶⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 434.

⁴⁷⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 250.

The work allowed the viewer to perceive the past, present and future through matter and movement.⁴⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty pronounces ‘[t]hrough my perceptual field with its temporal horizons, I am present to my present, to the entire past that has preceded it, and to a future.’⁴⁷² The present constitutes ‘time while passing in the time constituted’.⁴⁷³

At each moment in a movement, the preceding instant is not forgotten, but rather is somehow fit into the present, and, in short, the present perception consists in taking up the series of previous positions that envelop each other by relying upon the current position.⁴⁷⁴

The bottles may appear repetitive but a closer inspection reveals that each bottle encloses matter distinct from the previous and the next. Different soil colours, textures, organic residue and foggy fluids. From a distance the work appears as a series of elegantly arranged bottles stacked on shelves ‘but the fact that one can pass by degrees from one thing to another does not prevent their being different in kind’.⁴⁷⁵ ‘Difference inhabits repetition’, Deleuze argues.⁴⁷⁶ Enclosed in each bottle is a fragment of place in solid or liquid form; ‘place is not replicated but transmuted in the work’.⁴⁷⁷

Landline/Waterline responds to the temporal fluctuations of place. The work disrupts temporality; it does not follow a chronological order. Similar to *Natura Colta* and the *RTO* series it transposes non-taxonomic approaches onto museum-like displays. From this juxtaposition new possibilities for understanding place and temporality can emerge.

⁴⁷¹ ‘But the truth is that our present should not be defined as that which is more intense: it is that which acts on us and which makes us act, it is sensory and it is motor;—our present is, above all, the state of our body. Our past, on the contrary, is that which might act, and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation of which it borrows the vitality’ (Bergson 2004: 320).

⁴⁷² Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 346.

⁴⁷³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 100.

⁴⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze share a similar position. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 141.

⁴⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. by Paul Patton (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2004), p. 2.

⁴⁷⁶ Bergson maintains that ‘[t]he true effect of repetition is to decompose, and then recompose, and thus appeal to the intelligence of the body’. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, p. 137; Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 97.

⁴⁷⁷ Casey tells us of Emerson’s text *Nature*, published in 1836, in which he refers to the ground as firm water. Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps*, p. 36, 19.

The work discussed throughout this chapter addressed the questions: What can we learn about the ‘textuality’ and temporality of place from (re-) deterritorialised matter? What opportunities arise for fine art practice from an investigation of ‘textuality’ and temporality of place? The artworks presented here should provide alternative models for considering such aspects of place. Fine art research considers what might emerge from an intertwining of the actual and the imaginary. Rather than being solely concerned with ‘what is’, it is also concerned with ‘what might be’. The next chapter investigates a specific type of territory which can be both public and private, and it is also fiercely contested. What follows is an investigation of ambiguously reserved (RTO) territory in specific parts of Malta.

7 *Riservato* – Keep Out!

7.1 Mapping RTO

He took a pencil from his desk and waved it towards me. ‘If I give you this gift,’ he said, ‘that means I’m territorial here.’ But it also means, ‘I have a territory and I am no threat to yours.’ All we’re doing is fixing the frontier. I say to you, ‘Here I put my gift. I’m not going any further.’ It would be an offence if I put my gift too far.⁴⁷⁸

Walking and making are intertwined within this research. Making can be considered a process of growth.⁴⁷⁹ In the context of my practice-led research growth is rhizomatic since it connects points; it brings into play sign and non-sign states, and is implicated in deterritorialisation.⁴⁸⁰ The context of this study unfolded over a number of years out of a longstanding interest in the local landscape, its characteristics and varied features, along with the materials that it makes available as a result of ‘*Dasein*’.⁴⁸¹

Initially, my work comprised (found) raw material in its physical state as well as photographs of a wide range of ephemera, then, after some time I also began collecting un-natural material. As my research progressed, photographs and video, initially considered merely as source material, began to take centre-stage and in exhibition contexts I have juxtaposed them alongside sculptures and installations. Such multi-modal approach strengthens the dialectics of place. New territories become accessible with implications for further practice.⁴⁸²

Walking in the context of this practice-led research revealed a plethora of possibilities for investigation and art practice. Ironically, a boundary in the landscape opened up into multiple paths of deterritorialisation. An obstacle in the

⁴⁷⁸ Chatwin, *The Songlines*, p. 113.

⁴⁷⁹ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 21.

⁴⁸⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 23.

⁴⁸¹ *Dasein* here refers to being-there at a particular time. According to Heidegger *Dasein* is also temporal. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 429.

⁴⁸² For example, when sculptures were shown alongside photographs and video their meaning and interpretation began to develop in different directions, thus, opening up further themes for consideration.

form of a crude three letter sign (RTO) on a partial boundary wall in the countryside made me explore new paths, both on the ground and back into my studio. (Figures 62 and 63) RTO, meaning *Riservato*, the Italian equivalent for reserved, denotes ‘Private Property – No Entry’.⁴⁸³



Figure 62 RTO stencil. *Making signage for RTO sculptures.*



Figure 63 Stone specimens.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸³ RTO signs are at times seen alongside other signs denoting similar warning messages – ‘No Entry’; ‘Keep Out’; ‘Private’; or ‘*Tidholx*’.

⁴⁸⁴ Initially I started collecting stones as symbolic mementoes from ‘open’ RTO territory. Collecting is a method of appropriating and in a way this act can be considered a form of catharsis; a way of coming to terms with an apparent limited access to place. I wanted to move on and explore new ground; *terra incognita*.

RTO signs are ubiquitous in the landscape predominantly in the North-Western part of Malta which appears to be relatively uncontaminated by contemporary development. (Figures 64 and 65) Walking, in certain parts of the island, is inevitably characterised by a propensity for contingent detours and *cul-de-sacs*. RTO territory can be classified in two main types: legally owned or leased; and ambiguously or temporarily appropriated land. The latter type appears more problematic and is often riddled with tension – social, cultural, political and ecological.⁴⁸⁵ Roaming such territory can be dangerous and risky. In response to the second type I initiated my *RTO* series of cabinet sculptures.

Spotted numerous RTO's today – all photographed. In certain areas the signs seem to be more concentrated. I have also collected a bag full of cartridges. Some of them are too rusty and I would probably discard them. I'm not being selective at the moment.

*(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).*⁴⁸⁶

To walk is to connect; walking generates imaginary lines. Such connectivity can be considered as an imaginary rhizomatic meshwork, comprised of multiple nodes that converge and cross each other at different points. Interconnectedness is foregrounded in practice, and the implications of this on the research project are multifarious.

⁴⁸⁵ Open or temporary RTO territory is generally not fully enclosed.

⁴⁸⁶ Fieldwork carried out in Wardija. Spent shotgun cartridges are very common in the local countryside and the prospect of creating an artwork out of them, or incorporating them into an artwork became almost inevitable. I will be discussing *Crossfire*, an installation comprised of spent shotgun cartridges, in a separate section.



Figure 64 RTO Dingli Cliffs.⁴⁸⁷



Figure 65 RTO Wardija.⁴⁸⁸

Separate walks come together to form one long walk; blurring, connecting, reconstructing and pushing territorial boundaries in a manner that can be considered transgressive. Furthermore, deterritorialisation brings the outside into the artwork; it connects the artwork and the viewer with an outside. To a similar degree, all artworks are interconnected and may be regarded as parts of a whole. Walking in the context of this research project connects past, present and future. For example, soil, stone, bark and rust embody ‘pastness’; however, through artistic practice matter

⁴⁸⁷ Encountered this crude RTO sign at Dingli Cliffs, the highest point in Malta standing at about 253 metres above sea level. The cliffs overlook the Mediterranean sea and the small uninhabited island of Filfla. A short walk away is Baħrija, another place which is also part of my research project.

⁴⁸⁸ Another RTO sign directly painted on a boulder in Wardija. This is one of the earlier RTO signs I encountered during my fieldworks.

acquires vibrancy and becomes present. The present accumulates time and becomes past. However, since interpretation is ongoing there is no closure, and thus, there is always a window open onto the future; Smithson calls this ‘backward looking future’.⁴⁸⁹

The *RTO* series originates from multiple deep maps held in Mġarr, Mtaħleb, Wardija, Baħrija and Dingli Cliffs. The places are small even by Maltese standards; situated at close proximity they generally comprise maquis, rocky cliffs, garigues and valleys. A number of such places are located at the periphery of ancient hamlets; some are perched on cliff tops, relatively distant from the tentacles of the urban sprawl. Yet, the landscape is far from innocent. Contestation of land is rife and many a time it is difficult to tell whether RTO territory is legitimately owned or temporarily appropriated for the pleasure of the few.

Bugeja maintains that in mediaeval times, although poor, the Maltese were extremely conscious of their right to the use of public land and they were adamant not to lose this privilege to anyone.⁴⁹⁰ In 1492, Bugeja argues, many public ways were illegally privatised and strong representations were made since it became impossible to go about the island.⁴⁹¹ Thoreau regarded land appropriation and boundaries as a restriction to walking freely on what should be public land.

But possibly the day will come when it will be partitioned off into so-called pleasure-grounds, in which a few will take a narrow and exclusive pleasure only, - when fences shall be multiplied, and man-straps and other engines invented to confine men to the public road, and walking over the surface of God’s earth shall be construed to mean trespassing on some gentleman’s grounds.⁴⁹²

You are out in the countryside and suddenly you realise that you are no longer *in* place but *out* of place. It can be argued that appropriated land is comparable to dispossession. It is not merely a matter of contestation of space but a political concern of power/control/access. This has resonance with Massey’s argument

⁴⁸⁹ Robert Smithson, ‘Entropy and the New Monuments’, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 10-23 (p. 15).

⁴⁹⁰ George Cini, ‘Rambler asks Parliament to Protect the People’s Rights’, *Times of Malta*, 23 March 2004, <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20040323/local/rambler-asks-parliament-to-protect-the-peoples-rights.127029>> [accessed 24 February 2015], (para 6-7 of 15).

⁴⁹¹ Cini, *Rambler asks Parliament to Protect the People’s Rights*, (para 7).

⁴⁹² Thoreau, *Walking*, pp. 14-15.

where, '[t]hat space of agonistic negotiation that is the political should be recognized as including negotiation also with that realm that goes by the name of nature'.⁴⁹³

Rightfully owned land marked with an RTO sign is generally enclosed and the boundaries are often clearly demarcated by continuous walls and fences. However, 'unofficial' RTO's are generally less obvious, open, and stumbling unknowingly into one of them is not a rare occasion.⁴⁹⁴ Bugeja argues that the Maltese countryside is littered with crude notices and warnings most of which unauthorised and the legitimacy of such territory is often blurred.⁴⁹⁵ Pathways are also at times closed-off Bugeja maintains and this renders certain areas including historical sites inaccessible to the public.⁴⁹⁶

Boundaries and enclosures are doubtless restrictive and problematic to my drifting; however, over time, I figured out how to translate this limitation into creative practice. The *RTO* series is restricted to five very small sites situated very close to each other.⁴⁹⁷ I began collecting mementoes (from open RTO territory) in the form of small stones not larger than the palm of my hand. In the process I kept documenting the crude signs and warnings by means of my camera.

It appears that RTO signs are more prolific along garigues and cliffs and there is a very obvious reason for this, since they generally indicate that the place is being used as temporary hunting or trapping grounds.⁴⁹⁸ (Figures 66 and 67) That also explains why such territory is only temporarily appropriated since it is mostly in use during the hunting season; remaining largely abandoned when the permitted time-

⁴⁹³ Doreen Massey, 'Landscape as a Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains', *Journal of Material Culture*, 11.1-2, (2006), 33-48 (p. 20).

⁴⁹⁴ Walking in the countryside shows that the proliferation of RTO's cannot be discounted, thus, I had to be careful while treading such territory.

⁴⁹⁵ Lino Bugeja, 'The Future of Rambling in Malta', *Times of Malta*, 1 December 2010 <<http://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20101201/opinion/the-future-of-rambling-in-malta.338709>> [accessed 24 February 2015], (para 4 of 8).

⁴⁹⁶ Bugeja, *The Future of Rambling in Malta*, (para 1).

⁴⁹⁷ RTO territory is scattered all over Malta and is not exclusive to the places that have been mapped.

⁴⁹⁸ Most hunters yearn for a place of their own. An intimate space where they can practice their passion unhindered, where they can painstakingly transform the landscape according to their needs. These are places they know better than their own home, a repository of situated knowledge which in turn gives them a heightened sense of 'being there'.

window expires.⁴⁹⁹ Another indicator of the specific usage of such land is the abundance of RTO signs that can be seen in close proximity to hides (*dura*), many of which are evacuated as soon as the hunting/trapping season is over when they become mere relics in the landscape.⁵⁰⁰

It's seven in the morning. Some more unorthodox hides. Managed to photograph one from the inside – broken office chair, soda can, damaged vacuum flask, empty cigarette packet, and a filthy baseball cap. Rusty oil drum and two planks of wood in the vicinity.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).⁵⁰¹



Figure 66 RTO hide.⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ It appears that certain areas are leased by the owners to the hunters only for the duration of the season.

⁵⁰⁰ A *dura* is a hide and it normally consists of a small single room with a permanent (concrete) or temporary (corrugate iron) ceiling. Sometimes it also incorporates a window and a makeshift patio. The structure is not normally closed. Activity resumes a few weeks before the season reopens so that the land is transformed in good time for hunting and trapping purposes. No time is lost by the enthusiasts especially now that the time-window has shrunk considerably due to European Union regulations.

⁵⁰¹ Fieldwork was carried out in Mtaħleb.

⁵⁰² This shoddy hide has been spotted in Mtaħleb also known as L-Imtaħlep; located at an elevation of about 80 metres above sea level. Mtaħleb is a small ancient hamlet with indefinite boundaries situated between Dingli Cliffs and Bahrija. The place is literally dotted with RTO signs. The roof of the hide is made from corrugated iron indicating that it is supposedly a temporary structure.



Figure 67 Broken chair outside hide.⁵⁰³

Locally, appropriation of what is considered public land has been met with stern opposition over the years, contestation escalating in more recent times. Bugeja, argues that common space is forever being taken away from the enjoyment of the people and he warns that gradually more tracts of land are becoming inaccessible.⁵⁰⁴ While, most strollers resolve to keeping away from such territory, there were instances when similar enclosures were met with a degree of resistance. Over time, friction appears to be seeping through, as age old practices meet contemporary societal needs.

As will be discussed in the following chapter, the diminishing countryside was one of the salient issues that cropped up during the local abrogative referendum held in April 2015.⁵⁰⁵ It is pertinent to mention that hunting in designated public areas is permitted by law during the stipulated time-window; however, there is widespread belief that supposedly public land is being appropriated and dotted with illegitimate RTO signs, to discourage the public from accessing common areas where hunting is allowed. Having considered the context of open or ambiguous appropriation of land in the local countryside, I will now move on to review and discuss my own artistic practice.

⁵⁰³ A broken chair lying on the ground next to a hide. The grassy overgrowth is gradually covering the relic and a wild creeper is already climbing up its hind legs. This is one of the rudimentary 'field-furniture' found inside or close to hides. Instead of chairs, bricks or chunky wooden or plastic crates are sometimes used.

⁵⁰⁴ Cini, *Rambler asks Parliament to Protect the People's Rights*, (para 2).

⁵⁰⁵ The abrogative referendum was held on 11 April 2015 after thousands of signatures were collected in a bid to abolish spring hunting in Malta.

7.2 RTO I

It's half past one in the afternoon and the countryside is buzzing with insect activity. A couple of farmers can be seen in the vicinity harvesting their land. I've decided to take the narrow path that will take me to the vast garigue dotted with hides. RTO signs are abundant here. A farmer walks by with a sizeable herd of sheep and goats trailing behind him. All munching, occasionally looking at me to make sure I am not infringing their space. The man told me they are extremely timid and tranquil. The scene evokes a sense of 'pastness' and nostalgia.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).⁵⁰⁶

The practice that will be discussed here addresses the following questions: How can boundaries advance our understanding of place?; How can boundaries open up to contemporary fine art practice? These questions will be considered in relation to the *RTO* series of artworks.

The arid Maltese landscape, especially around garigues and rock cliffs, presents the walker with abundant limestone chips, worn out and stained by the typical reddish soil. Inexorably, I had to develop something out of this abundant 'hard matter' because it was so characteristic of the places I was mapping. I began playing around with different specimens, arranging them in diverse configurations and sorting them according to their respective formal characteristics as an archaeologist or geologist would do. In the process, I was becoming more acquainted with the vibrancy of such matter since '[t]he more we learn about matter, the more forces we discover in it'.⁵⁰⁷

Ingold asserts that '[i]n the art of inquiry', one should be mindful that 'the conduct of thought goes along with, and continually answers to the fluxes and flows of the materials with which we work.'⁵⁰⁸ The simplicity and over abundance of stone conceal the deep time embodied in the matter, and the complex, and extensive geological processes involved in its formation. I wanted to look for, enhance, conserve and expose such properties, as if it was precious stone. But what makes

⁵⁰⁶ Fieldwork held in Mtaħleb.

⁵⁰⁷ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 92.

⁵⁰⁸ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 6.

stone precious? The collection grew, and scattered in plastic boxes inside my studio it resembled a typical behind the scenes collection of a natural history museum.

Complementing my finds, stored on my computer, was a growing collection of digital photographs of places I was mapping. (Figures 68 and 69) Sontag maintains that '[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed'.⁵⁰⁹ The places where I work become my own territory and photography is one way of taking them; however, since they were already appropriated a kind of tension began to emerge in the form of re-appropriation. Moreover, we can argue that photography is deterritorialisation in the sense that the places it captures can be relocated anywhere, and we can revisit places by looking at photographs – a kind of simulated 'being-there'.

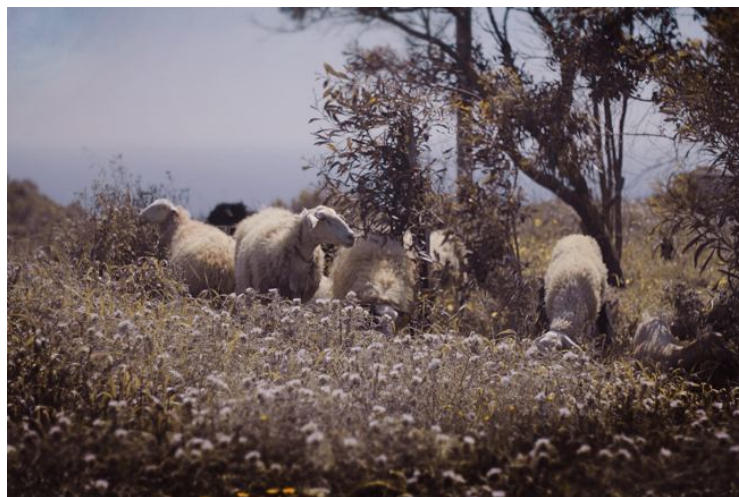


Figure 68 Grazing at Mtaħleb.⁵¹⁰

Photography is a form of documentation; photographs give information, 'they make an inventory'.⁵¹¹ Photography is also a form of collecting. 'The photograph is a thin slice of space as well as time', and, thus, a collection may be regarded as an accumulation of time and space.⁵¹² Shown alongside sculptures and installations, my

⁵⁰⁹ Evernden points out that Sontag's analysis of photography is rather negative since she associates it with aggressiveness, voyeurism, predatory seeing and objectification. Neil Evernden, 'Seeing and Being Seen: A Response to Susan Sontag's Essays on Photography', *Journal of Material Culture*, 68.1, (1985), 72-87.; Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 4.

⁵¹⁰ A flock of sheep temporarily appropriating common space in Mtaħleb.

⁵¹¹ Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 22.

⁵¹² According to Pearson and Shanks '[t]he camera is a clock for making images'. Another aspect of photographic time may also be perceived in the added actuality which they describe as 'a return of

photographs are intended to contextualise the practice and to heighten the sense of place through what can be considered an ‘ambiguous’ *Dasein*.⁵¹³ Thus, viewers will be able to experience the places out there within the restricted space inside the gallery; part of the ongoing process of reterritorialisation.



Figure 69 Disused communications tower and hide in Mtaħleb.⁵¹⁴

The *RTO* series developed in response to the endemic habit of erecting loose boundaries often accompanied by crude signs restricting access to certain parts of the local countryside, and to the implications of power/resistance that come along with that. Gradually, my fieldworks intensified and my drifting around supposedly restricted territory became more and more frequent. Over time, the boundaries in the landscape were interfering with my practice and the need to transgress became almost inevitable. An RTO sign in the landscape is equitable to those ubiquitous ‘Do Not Touch’ signs in museums, since both notices are restrictive of access, and both embody authority/power. After an initial period of sketching in my studio I decided to construct wooden enclosures in the form of portable display cabinets, reminiscent of museum loan-boxes. The need for portability developed from the practice. Since

what is no longer the same’. Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 41.; Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 22.

⁵¹³ The term ‘ambiguous’ refers to ‘being-there’ in a non-physical way. ‘Ambiguity hides nothing from *Dasein*’s understanding, but only in order that being-in-the-world should be suppressed’. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 221.

⁵¹⁴ Broken tip still dangling dangerously amid piercing squeaks. On the left is a dilapidated hide, almost in its entirety. A few other hide relics can be seen on the right and in the background. There are no walls to demarcate boundaries but RTO signs are abundant.

my practice is place-oriented the need to relocate the artworks back to the original territory became almost a necessity.

The RTO series of artworks question real/imaginary boundaries by attempting to unravel the significance of such systems, and to give a physical shape to this unraveling. I made the first cabinet (*RTO I*) very early in my practice-led research. It incorporates nine palm-sized stones, collected from open RTO territory.⁵¹⁵ (Figure 70) The stones have been arranged in grid format reminiscent of cartographic maps. The grid has resonance with Deleuze and Guattari's striated space, since '[t]he distribution of matter into parallel layers' can be perceived in the constructed delineations in the landscape.⁵¹⁶ The grid also denotes a form of control and restriction and thus it can be perceived as an impediment to rhizomatic movement. In stark contrast, '[s]mooth space is a field without conduits or channels', akin to the non-appropriated space outside RTO territory.⁵¹⁷ Besides its parallelism with land segmentation, the grid can also be equated with prevalent museological methods of classification and categorisation as will be discussed in Chapter 9.



Figure 70 *RTO I* - Wood, glass, stones, chrome, copper, acrylic.

45cm W × 45cm H × 13cm D.⁵¹⁸

⁵¹⁵ 'Open' RTO territory is either fully open or partially enclosed, however, accessible. Generally the area is littered with crude RTO signs.

⁵¹⁶ Deleuze Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 408.

⁵¹⁷ Deleuze Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 409.

⁵¹⁸ Nine stones arranged in a square grid serving the function of symbolic mementoes. The boxed collection reflects typical museum display cabinets, however, the specimens are obstructed by a bold RTO sign. In a museum context that would be equivalent to a 'Do Not Touch' sign.

The box-like portable enclosure in the middle of an appropriated patch of land enabled multiple negotiations of space, generating what we can consider a re-appropriation. This prompted further questions and considerations: What implications are there in the re-appropriation of territory and how could this generate multiplicities and folds?; How does (re-) deterritorialisation impinge on appropriation?; How can a sense of place be evoked in the artwork? How can the artwork respond to reserved territory?; What are the implications of juxtaposing different appropriations and how does this impinge on the investigation of place?; How do enclosures generate and open up new lines of deterritorialisation? These questions support and complement the main research questions.

Mindful of the fact that the cabinet had to be relocated I decided to go for a manageable size, fitted with a handle, not heavy yet sturdy enough to resist some rough handling. Walking with *RTO I* in hand is not comparable to the previous walks since movement is now restricted by the physical artwork.⁵¹⁹ Furthermore, my movement now follows a pre-determined path; I know where I am heading. Perhaps, we can consider the 'loaded-walk' a tracing of a previous map; a (re-)constructed walk with a clear itinerary along hybrid space where the smooth is juxtaposed with the striated.

RTO I is made out of wooden chip-board and it has a white finish to blend in with the limestone-rich Mediterranean landscape. The cabinet is relatively discreet so as not to impinge too much on the aesthetic of the local landscape. *RTO I* is completely sealed and the front protective glass displays a bold RTO sign as per original signs in the landscape. The painted RTO sign further connects the artwork with the territory; it is like an access code that permits the artwork to reclaim its original place.

A sign to mark something indicates what one is 'at' at any time. Signs always indicate primarily 'wherein' one lives, where one's concern dwells. What sort of involvement there is with something.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁹ This type of movement or loaded walk contains the traces of a performance.

⁵²⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 111.

Confronted with an RTO sign in the landscape *Dasein* is only partial. Thus, to complete *Dasein* transgression is necessary. The notion of ‘being-there’, yet at a distance, may also be perceived in museological territory where power is exerted, thus, restricting access to collections both physically and intellectually. By relocating the cabinet back into RTO territory I want to investigate the implications of ‘outsideness’ on the artwork. (Figure 71) Revisiting impinges on ‘being-there’, since the stones are located in, and at the same time dislocated from their original place.



Figure 71 *RTO I* near RTO sign.⁵²¹

To a certain degree, it appears that ‘being-in’ place, yet inside a cabinet, is further alienating the stones from the original territory. The cabinet does not merely present us with a physical obstacle; a partition, but also with a conceptual boundary, a de-contextualisation and a constant reminder of up-rootedness. This has resonance with the constructed space encountered in museums which is institutionally intended to promote art and artifacts in a pseudo-realistic or illusionary context.⁵²² Ingold argues that the more objects are removed from their contexts, ‘the more they appear as static objects of disinterested contemplation (as in museums and galleries)’.⁵²³

⁵²¹ The encased stones still appear to retain the link with the territory but the display cabinet is a stark reminder (like the RTO sign on the wall) that access is restricted.

⁵²² Yi-Fu Tuan argues that in museums one encounters objects that ‘are torn from their cultural matrices in different parts of the world and put on pedestals in an alien environment’. Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 194.

⁵²³ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 346.

Several erased RTO signs are still visible on the crudely plastered wall of a small solitary room. It doesn't look like a hide and probably it's not. A fresh sign reads RTO 2012, perhaps indicating the year of appropriation. On the right a partial boundary wall consolidates the message.

(Excerpt from my fieldwork notes)

The work by Danish artist Jeppe Hein, entitled *Please Do Not Touch* (2009), interrogates the boundary that separates the viewer from the artwork. Made from red neon tubes the text-based work appears to increase the distance, thus making itself less accessible. Like Hein's other work, it challenges 'the normally passive viewer'; and it requires 'us to react to a message that needs conveying, by any means necessary'.⁵²⁴ (Figure 72)



Figure 72 Jeppe Hein, *Please Do Not Touch*, 2009.

RTO I and *RTO II* (see next section) engender inaccessibility by means of an enclosure and a locally familiar abbreviation that spells 'No Entry', 'No Access'. These cabinets juxtapose the inaccessible space in the countryside with the enclosed space inside museum displays where physical access to collections is prohibited. In Chapter 9, I will discuss how private collections and cabinet of curiosities became implicated in the striated space of the public museum – a space where histories are constructed and identities are formed through institutional relations of power and control.

⁵²⁴ Ossian Ward, *Ways of Looking. How to Experience Contemporary Art* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd., 2014), p. 64.

Augé argues that '[t]he allusion to the past complicates the present'.⁵²⁵ What emerged from this relocation is a symbiotic relationship between past and present – what can be considered a 'historical-present'. The landscape is a repository of history since the demarcation of boundaries and contestation of land date back hundreds of years. The portable enclosure can be considered a re-creation of the historical boundaries into the present. The encased stones are comparable to an accumulation of time; implicating the history of the place outside in the new space inside, the temporality of the artwork becomes actuality.⁵²⁶ The historical-present attributed to *RTO I* has parallels with museological territory. Analogous to artefacts in museums, the stone collection in *RTO I* belongs to the past, it embodies the past in the form of deep geological time, yet it is still present-at-hand in the present.⁵²⁷ *RTO I* appears to inhabit a temporal space, an interstice comprised of both past and present, a space engendered by time.⁵²⁸

The past leaves its traces; time has its own script. Yet this space is always, now and formerly, a *present* space, given as an immediate whole, complete with its associations and connections in their actuality. [original italics]⁵²⁹



Figure 73 *RTO I* on top of hide.

Arrived at Mtaħleb very early in the morning. I looked around and all seemed tranquil; I decided to go a step further. I placed the sculpture on top of a hide and

⁵²⁵ Augé, *Non-Place. An Introduction to Supermodernity*, p. 56.

⁵²⁶ Pearson and Shanks *Theatre/Archaeology*.

⁵²⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 431.

⁵²⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 110.

⁵²⁹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 37.

moved back to examine how the relocation impinges on the space. The dense foliage on the left and the elegant fennel strands on the right conceal my presence.

(Excerpt from my fieldwork notes)

Present space has a history. It is loaded with social processes, perhaps in the case of RTO they are more socially restrictive ones. RTO represents historic time since it perpetuates ancient cultural practices, yet, as Lefebvre argues, as a space engendered by time, it is always actual and synchronic, it is comprised of links and connections produced by time.⁵³⁰ Heidegger maintains that '[a]nything that "has a history" stands in the context of a becoming'.⁵³¹ '[E]ven nature is historical', and it 'is historical as a countryside, as an area that has been colonized or exploited'.⁵³² The dynamic relationship between past and present is reenacted in *RTO I*, an assemblage comprised of what can be considered estranged raw material, and '[i]n the space created by this estrangement, a *vital materiality* can start to take shape' [original italics].⁵³³ The added layer generated by the encasement appears to reconfigure the spatial and temporal dynamics of both the original reserved space in the landscape and the space inside the display cabinet.

When *RTO I* was repositioned on top of a hide (*dura*) it gained visibility, yet, it appeared to lose territorial ground. (Figure 73) The privileged repositioning (on top of a hide) did not appear to disrupt the 'historical-present', but it undoubtedly enhanced the transgressive qualities of the project.⁵³⁴ Upon further analysis, the photographed repositioning showed that the lack of contact with the ground appeared to supplement the estrangement of the encased raw material from RTO territory. (Figure 74) The elevated position of the artwork extended the distance of the raw material from the ground and the panoptic view commanded by the artwork appeared to reconcile the apparent limits of RTO territory with the boundaries generated by the encasement. As I moved further away from the artwork the

⁵³⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

⁵³¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 430.

⁵³² Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 440.

⁵³³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, p. vii.

⁵³⁴ I had to be very careful when relocating the box close to the hide since it was peak spring hunting season. Movement in RTO territory at this time of year is met with suspicion and at times also disapproval. At that particular moment the hide was unmanned so I took the opportunity to move closer and relocate the box on top of it. I was not feeling comfortable so I had to be quick in setting up my camera, take some shots and quickly move on to another spot.

encasement seemed to engulf the raw material. This indicates that boundaries and enclosures may be shaped by perception, instigating questions in regard to ‘real’ as opposed to ‘imaginary’ limits.



Figure 74 *RTO I* from a distance.⁵³⁵

Visible boundaries, such as walls or enclosures in general, give rise for their part in appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity.⁵³⁶

RTO I considers the fluid delineation of boundaries in the countryside, where apparent reserved territory is not clearly defined, has neither beginning nor end, and is situated in between neighbouring RTO territory. RTO territory is essentially striated; however, it opens up into multiple rhizomatic intersections, it connects with other points on the ground to generate an assemblage comparable to a complex and intensive network system.⁵³⁷

RTO territory picks up intensity at the centre where customarily the RTO sign is located, as part of or close to a hide. Movement in RTO territory is comparable to alterations, since it transgresses boundaries and connects territories.⁵³⁸ (Figure 75)

⁵³⁵ I picked up the sculpture and walked a further 100 metres north towards a different hide. Once again no restrictive enclosures except for the ubiquitous RTO sign. I placed the sculpture on top of the hide and gradually began to move back, still facing the hide, until both structures (hide and RTO I) gradually became embedded in the landscape.

⁵³⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 87.

⁵³⁷ Here three types of signs can be perceived namely: ‘*indexes (territorial signs), symbols (deterritorialized signs), and icons (signs of reterritorialization)*’ [original italics]. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 72.

⁵³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 60.



Figure 75 *RTO I* Dingli Cliffs.⁵³⁹

Such ambiguously appropriated territory in the Maltese countryside is neither accessible nor closed. Boundaries exist, albeit blurred; they still inject the land with tension and uneasiness. The land here is political and charged with power on one side and resistance on the other. *RTO I* interrogates the overt and concealed spatial politics at play within RTO territory.

To further problematise the assemblage, I sought to reconfigure the inside spatial configuration by introducing a series of mirrors as can be seen from the next artwork. *RTO II* can be considered a more explicit response to RTO territory since it is meant to re-appropriate the land outside in a more explicit way. Furthermore, due to the pseudo-taxonomical arrangement of the raw material, and the introduction of glass shelves, it seeks to implicate the museum more fully into the landscape.

7.3 RTO II

Walking engenders familiarity with place. Although this had become my territory, at times I still felt estranged and misplaced. A perennial sense of urgency was keeping me back, knowing that at any point in time my footsteps could be interpreted as a form of transgression. The fleeting encounters with RTO territory, the apprehension,

⁵³⁹ RTO signs directly painted on rock in Dingli Cliffs. There are no boundary walls but moving beyond the marked rock is inadvisable since it is considered trespassing. I placed *RTO I* inside a crevice, thus, it became implicated in the constructed 'natural' boundary.

the need to transgress and to get out of there at the same time are implied in the red finish dominating *RTO II*. (Figure 76)



Figure 76 *RTO II* - Wood, glass, mirror, stones, chrome, copper, polymethyl methacrylate, acrylic. 45cm W × 45cm H × 13cm D. *RTO II* comprises four glass shelves loaded with stone specimens contained inside a wooden display case. The interior of the cabinet is lined up with mirrors and as the photograph shows the place outside is reflected on the inside; it is re-appropriated. The cabinet's setup resonates with typical museum displays.

The artwork consists of a portable wooden display case protected by a glass front. The interior comprises a structured arrangement of stones on glass shelves, bearing close resemblance with museum display cases; albeit the non-taxonomic nature of the collection. The stones are not rare; on the contrary they are specimens of a non-valuable ubiquitous matter (limestone) which forms the bedrock of the Maltese islands. The stones are small, *circa* 20mm; arranged linearly on five layers of glass they appear to gain value inside the display case. The interior is covered with a layer of mirror and this makes it appear spatially limitless. The stones multiply, transforming the inside of the showcase into a clutter. The front glass displays a stenciled red RTO sign, similar to one of the better made signs I encountered in the countryside; it is clinical and defined, in contrast with the proliferation of hand-painted signs. Like its counterpart the second showcase is fitted with a chrome handle for portability.

The explicit redness of *RTO II* immediately translates into matter of concern and in contrast with *RTO I* its chromatic qualities are intended to make it stand out

irrespective of its location in space. It is often difficult to decipher whether entry into open RTO is actually a transgression or not, however, no matter the situation, the presence of a bright red display case in the middle of such territory instills a palpable sense of anxiety.

The introduction of mirrors in *RTO II* amplifies, distorts and complicates the interior spatial architecture of the cabinet. Furthermore, the mirrors appropriate the territory outside by generating an image of it within the encasement; blurring the boundaries that separate inside and outside. This shifting of limits can be considered a revision in spatial textuality. Further to this, each displaced limit is a decoding.⁵⁴⁰

Lefebvre argues that '[i]n and through the mirror, the traits of other objects in relationship to their spatial environment are brought together'.⁵⁴¹ Furthermore, Lefebvre contends that the mirror informs us about space and it speaks of space. Mirrors duplicate the outside, they reduce the distance and juxtapose multiple spatialities within a liminal space which is neither 'in' nor 'out-' side. The fluidity of inside and outside reflects the ambiguous boundaries encountered in the landscape which are, nonetheless, restrictive. *RTO II* combines and juxtaposes inside and outside by means of mirrors. Foucault argues that mirrors abolish the distance; reality and illusion become indistinguishable.

[B]y duplicating itself in a mirror the world abolishes the distance proper to it; in this way it overcomes the place allotted to each thing. But which of these reflections coursing through space are the original images? Which is the reality and which the projection? It is often not possible to say, for emulation is a sort of natural twinship existing in things; it arises from a fold in being, the two sides of which stand immediately opposite to one another.⁵⁴²

Foucault argues that there are essentially two main types of spaces: Utopias and heterotopias (see Section 5.2.2).⁵⁴³ Utopias are sites with no real place, fundamentally unreal spaces and here Foucault includes the mirror which he

⁵⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen R. Lane (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2009), p. 232. Penguin Books Ltd.

⁵⁴¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 186.

⁵⁴² Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 22.

⁵⁴³ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, p. 3.

describes as a placeless place.⁵⁴⁴ Heterotopias are defined by a number of principles among them the ability to juxtapose in a single place several incompatible sites, their disposition to temporality, their ways of penetrability, and the function that they have in relation to particular spaces.

Foucault argues that ‘between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror’.⁵⁴⁵ *RTO II* engenders aspects of both utopias and heterotopias, yet, it is neither one nor the other, but perhaps a concurrence of both.



Figure 77 *RTO II* near hide.⁵⁴⁶

The relocation of *RTO II* into RTO territory appears to reconfigure the space. (Figure 77) The artwork is loaded with transgressive qualities; furthermore, it questions its own presence within the reserved space. It is a forced juxtaposition and it resists boundaries by introducing further boundaries. The outside is projected inside the cabinet but the projection is un-fixed. It is always in a state of flux since it can be altered by merely shifting the cabinet.

⁵⁴⁴ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp. 3-4.

⁵⁴⁵ ‘In Dutch painting it was traditional for mirrors to play a duplicating role: they repeated the original contents of the picture, only inside an unreal, modified, contracted, concave space. One saw in them the same things as one saw in the first instance in the painting, but decomposed and recomposed according to a different law’. In the case of such paintings ‘the mirror is saying nothing that has already been said before.’ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp.8, 4.

⁵⁴⁶ I placed *RTO II* near the same structure at Mtaħleb. As expected, *RTO II* stood out prominently due to its redness. It violated the space more forcefully and it seemed to heighten the anxiety of the transgressive act. The landscape and the clouds hovering above were projected inside the display cabinet.

The mirrors in *RTO II* add further layers of temporality on top of the deep geological time embedded in the collection of stones. The mirrors allow time to flow from the outside; they reterritorialise time and project it within the cabinet in the form of a time-lapse. In the process, the temporality associated with open RTO territory will also be mirrored inside the display case. Thus, one may infer that *RTO II* engenders temporality, like heterotopias it is linked to slices in time.⁵⁴⁷ RTO territory accumulates time and it is also linked to time in its flowing and transitory aspect.⁵⁴⁸

RTO territory, even if accessible, appears to erect conceptual boundaries in the landscape. For example, places like Mtaħleb and Mġarr comprise stretches of land dotted with RTO signs, yet, more often than not, very few debilitating boundaries can be detected. Notwithstanding this, RTO territory is loaded with a spectral presence, the soil feels hostile beneath one's feet, there is perpetual tension and insecurity oozes from the bedrock and infiltrates the entire space. The farther one goes from the perceived centre the lesser the intensity, until it breaks down completely as RTO territory gradually fades into the distance. (Figure 78)



Figure 78 *RTO II* from a distance.⁵⁴⁹

⁵⁴⁷ Open RTO territory is generally restricted during the hunting season and is much more accessible when the season expires, since most sites are abandoned. The numerous dilapidated and collapsed hides, and the ruinous state of the few scattered structures on site attest this. Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp.6.

⁵⁴⁸ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp.7.

⁵⁴⁹ I walked about 300m further south and saw a pile of stones forming a partial low-level enclosure. I placed *RTO II* carefully on the ground and moved back to be able to capture the artwork in context with a wide-angle lens. Several coloured shotgun pellets can be seen lying on the ground to the right.

The type of RTO territory discussed in this chapter is penetrable, yet, that does not make it any less political. As Foucault points out, territory is no doubt a geographical notion but first of all it is a political one; an area controlled by power.⁵⁵⁰ The type of RTO territory in question is conceptually isolated and the crude signs dotting the area indicate that the territory is not freely accessible. Yet, one can often ‘walk into’ the said space and consequently ‘walk out’ of it, and the fact that no physical boundaries may be visible one does get the impression that the space is perhaps public. Although I am referring to this type of territory as ‘open’ territory, conceptually it is ‘(en)closed’. Open RTO territory encapsulates certain traits pertaining to the opening and closing system of heterotopias as indicated by Foucault.

Heterotopias always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable. In general, the heterotopic site is not freely accessible like a public place.⁵⁵¹

RTO II responds to and reconfigures the indistinct boundaries of open RTO territory; it generates spatial multiplicities and it deconstructs the distance between outside and inside. It is ‘an oscillation between the interior and the exterior’, whereby the interior reflects and re-appropriates the territory outside.⁵⁵² (Figure 79) Concrete space transforms into vastness and vice versa. Such spatial reconfiguration has parallels with Bachelard’s assertion that concrete and vast are not opposite terms.

[I]t must be noted that the two terms ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ pose problems of metaphysical anthropology that are not symmetrical. To make inside concrete and outside vast is the first task, the first problem, it would seem, of an anthropology of the imagination. But between concrete and vast, the opposition is not a true one.⁵⁵³

In *RTO II* ‘the dialectics of inside and outside multiply with countless diversified nuances’ and this further contributes to the development of rhizomatic multiplicities.⁵⁵⁴ RTO territory may appear unobstructed, open, yet it never allows full access. In reality, it is more restrictive than it appears since it is ‘rooted’ in local

⁵⁵⁰ Stuart Elden, *The Birth of Territory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 9.

⁵⁵¹ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp.7.

⁵⁵² *RTO II* is comparable to a window since ‘it has two senses, two orientations: from inside to outside, and from outside to inside’. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 209.; Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 12.

⁵⁵³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 215.

⁵⁵⁴ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 216.

culture, it appropriates the collective consciousness and understandably one may be wary of walking into it. Transgression in RTO territory does not mean gaining full access to the site; it is more comparable to a museum whereby one is allowed entry but cannot physically handle the artifacts.⁵⁵⁵



Figure 79 *RTO II* inside or outside?⁵⁵⁶

The encasement appears to open up to the vast space outside, yet it is limited like open RTO territory. The colour of the sculpture has undoubtedly augmented the transgressive qualities of the project since it penetrates the space and unashamedly reclaims the territory.

⁵⁵⁵ This can be considered a partial being-there.

⁵⁵⁶ *RTO II* within a gap of a damaged hide in Mtahleb. The RTO sign on the wall has been repainted several times and this could be an indication of re-appropriation. Nature is clearly taking over this cultural relic.



Figure 80 *RTO II* on top of hide.

The territory is haunted by an uncertain distance; one feels like being there and not being there at the same time. It is a vague excludedness that can only be experienced by standing right there, in the middle of that reserved space perhaps where you are not supposed to be. (Figure 80)

There are others [heterotopias], on the contrary, that seem to be pure and simple openings, but that generally hide curious exclusions. Everyone can enter into the heterotopic sites, but in fact that is only an illusion – we think we enter where we are, by the very fact that we enter, excluded.⁵⁵⁷

Let us now consider Foucault's discussion regarding the function of heterotopias in relation to all the space that remains, creating either a space of illusion or on the contrary, another real space.⁵⁵⁸ Open RTO territory is both illusory and real; it exists in reality, yet, one would not know if it is physical or constructed. This can be compared to a boat which is essentially a floating piece of space. For example, Le Corbusier's floating asylum (commissioned by the French Salvation Army) creates a real space where the homeless may find refuge; it is both fixed and temporary according to Morgan.⁵⁵⁹ RTO, like the floating barge, creates heterotopias that are also utopian.⁵⁶⁰ RTO resembles a utopia in the sense that it is a space where possessors, unhindered, may engage in personally meaningful practice. However,

⁵⁵⁷ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp.7-8.

⁵⁵⁸ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, pp.8.

⁵⁵⁹ Diane Morgan, *The Floating Asylum, the Armée du Salut, and Le Corbusier: A Modernist Heterotopian/Utopian Project*.

⁵⁶⁰ Diane Morgan, *The Floating Asylum, the Armée du Salut, and Le Corbusier: A Modernist Heterotopian/Utopian Project*, p.98.

similar to the floating asylum, a dystopian element may be perceived in RTO territory; it can be considered a symbolic type of hijacking.⁵⁶¹

Open RTO territory is like a boat, ‘a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity’.⁵⁶² Seen from above it resembles a chain of unmovable islands; inert space. RTO territory is fixed, yet, temporary; it is part of the land but conceptually cut-off; it is private but perhaps public; it is accessible, yet, restricted; and it is a space for refuge but also a space to be avoided. Foucault’s notions of heterotopias replay in many ways aspects relating to open RTO territory.

RTO II develops strategies for reading and interpreting appropriated space in multiple ways. According to Lefebvre ‘[i]t is possible, and indeed normal, to decipher or decode spaces’.⁵⁶³ We can consider space a palimpsest comprised of layers upon layers of text. The juxtaposition of text generates Deleuzian multiplicities that present ‘a kind of potential for bifurcation and “variation” in an open whole’.⁵⁶⁴

The presence of mirrors pervading the encased space produces re-reflections and re-fractions, it unravels intensities and activates lines of flight, and it gives rise to contingent themes and further potential for investigation. The *RTO* series combines sculpture and an element of performance (walking with showcases) by means of photography. Photographs are implicated in the performative act.⁵⁶⁵ Fleeting moments are memorised in photographs and revisiting photographs is akin to revisiting place and engaging in the same act all over again. Photographs allow me to critically reflect on my work as new possibilities continue to unfold.⁵⁶⁶ New

⁵⁶¹ Hijacking in this context refers to dispossession. Diane Morgan, *The Floating Asylum, the Armée du Salut, and Le Corbusier: A Modernist Heterotopian/Utopian Project*, p. 112.

⁵⁶² Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*.

⁵⁶³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 160.

⁵⁶⁴ John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2000), p. 54.

⁵⁶⁵ Photographs become part of the pseudo-performance since they capture and reveal particular aspects impossible to decode in real-time.

⁵⁶⁶ Pearson and Shanks maintain that ‘[t]he heterogeneity of photowork, with all those possible interconnections, may break the predictability of *mise-en-scène*.’ Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 53.

knowledge can be derived from photographs, however, one has to bring a certain amount of knowledge to bear on them.⁵⁶⁷

Having discussed the context and development of *RTO II* I will move on to analyse and discuss the next artwork. *RT-O* can be considered more explicit, since it dismantles the physical boundaries that separate inside from outside. In the process it blurs such dichotomous notions as open/closed; public/private; vast/concrete; power/resistance. *RT-O* continues to question the ambivalent space in open RTO territory and the space of the museum, retaining the display case structure albeit with collapsed sides. In the process it investigates how enclosures impinge on the perceived value of objects, and how collections can influence our understanding of place.

7.4 RT-O

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun,
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

— Robert Frost *Mending Wall* (1914)⁵⁶⁸

RT-O (RT-Open) is a more direct and explicit response to open RTO territory since it deconstructs physical boundaries and subsequently takes the form of a fully exposed display case. 'Open' RTO territory is that space which is deceptively accessible, thus, comparable to an open showcase inside a museum. Viewers are programmed not to touch exhibits and resolve to keep at a safe distance from artifacts and display cases. *RT-O* interrogates the spatial ambiguity in open RTO territory by juxtaposing it with the space of a fully-exposed museum display case. (Figure 81)

⁵⁶⁷ Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment*, p. 7.

⁵⁶⁸ Robert Frost, 'Mending Wall', *Poets.Org* (New York: Academy of American Poets) <<http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/mending-wall>> [accessed 12 August 2015]



Figure 81 Open RTO. *No boundaries in sight. Abundant limestone, a couple dismantled hides and unused pylons tainting the otherwise clear skies.*

As discussed in Chapter 3, research is embodied in practice, '[i]nvention begins when what signifies exceeds its signification—when what means one thing, or conventionally functions in one role, discloses other possibilities'.⁵⁶⁹ *RT-O* can be considered a non-enclosure since it creates a reserved, albeit undefined space. Its role and function go beyond that of a familiar museum display case and it exceeds (or perhaps it fails in museological terms) the protective function that it is normally intended to serve.

RT-O comprises an elongated display case finished in neutral grey which is neither explicit nor too discreet. It has two collapsible see-through sides covered with polymethyl methacrylate (Perspex) and a solid wooden top and bottom. All sides can be tilted to fully expose the collection, thus, making it physically available to the viewers. The collection is spread on four glass shelves each holding a variety of natural matter (e.g. stone, fossils, branches, snail shells, animal bones and seeds) collected during fieldwork.⁵⁷⁰ (Figure 82)

The interior architecture of the showcase is larger than the structure itself, it is uncontainable and it literally spills and flows all over the place. The 'openness' of

⁵⁶⁹ Paul Carter, 'Interest: The Ethics of Invention', in *Practice as Research. Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, ed. by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt (London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2010), pp. 15-25 (p. 15).

⁵⁷⁰ At this phase of my research I was only collecting natural material. Gradually I started collecting man-made objects as can be seen from subsequent artworks (e.g. *Crossfire*, *Natura Colta*).

the showcase impinges on the artwork's museological qualities, since objects appear to lose their cultural value now that physical access is unrestricted. Inevitably, objects are now prone to (mis)handling. Further to this, I shall be referring to and discussing more thoroughly the implications and ramifications of power/control/access in museums in Chapter 9.



Figure 82 *RT-O*. Wood, glass, steel, specimens, copper, polymethyl methacrylate. 60cm W × 120cm H.⁵⁷¹

When the sides are fully tilted the showcase transforms into a rack of shelves and any distinction between inside and outside disintegrates completely. *RT-O* is not intended to appropriate outside space but is made to engage outside with inside through a process of ‘becoming-other’. Similarly, Bachelard contends that ‘[o]utside and inside are both intimate—they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility’.⁵⁷² This has resonance with Lefebvre’s assertion that inside and outside bear the mark of the other.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ *RT-O* consists of a collapsible display case; sides are supported by copper hinges and can be tilted to fully expose the non-taxonomic collection arranged on four separate glass shelves. The specimens can be touched and moved from one shelf to the other.

⁵⁷² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, pp. 217-218.

⁵⁷³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 209.

RT-O's architecture can be described as a spatial spillover; one that inevitably entails significant reconfiguration of space; a decoding. Deleuze speaks of 'disparation', whereby, instead of dividing space into distinct parts, space is dispersed or scattered 'to allow the chance for something new to emerge'.⁵⁷⁴ According to Deleuze, becoming-other 'contrasts with the imitation of anything prior as well as with stories with fixed beginnings or ends'.⁵⁷⁵ What emerged from the practice is that the collapsible boundaries of the artwork appear to enhance that sense of place. Perhaps this could be attributed both to the lack of physical boundaries separating the viewer from the collection, and due to the haptic aspect that is now possible.

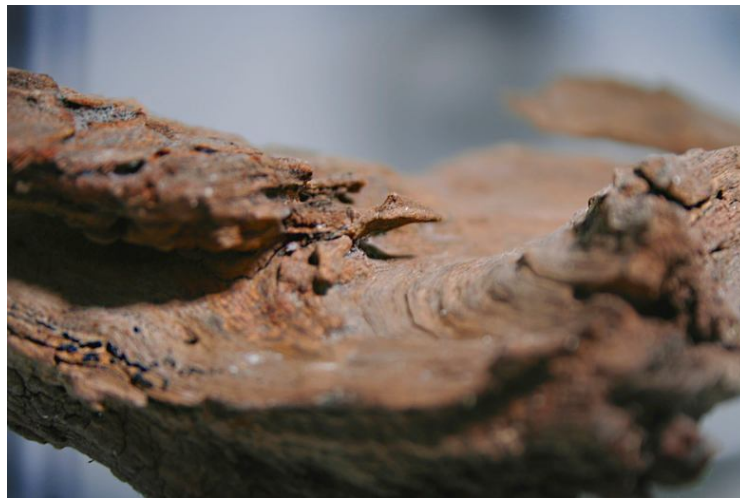


Figure 83 Tree branch. *Specimens include parts of dead trees, animal bones, seeds, stones, fossils, soil, cork and snail shells.*⁵⁷⁶

The location of the specimens on the shelves can now be altered without restraint. (Figure 83) The lack of closure makes possible any type of relocation, an aspect that further deconstructs all notions of taxonomy and categorisation. Such aspect has parallels with Heidegger's opening up.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, p. 55.

⁵⁷⁵ Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, p. 98.

⁵⁷⁶ A colony of insects emerged from the crevices indicating micro appropriations.

⁵⁷⁷ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*.

RT-O is open and accessible from all sides, thus, objects may be touched and displaced freely by the viewers without an apparent need to transgress.⁵⁷⁸ The notion of ‘displacement’ has resonance with museological territory; however, in stark contrast with *RT-O*, displacement in museums embodies the power and authority of the institution rather than the power placed in the hands of the viewer.

The museum, after all, consists wholly of displaced objects. Treasures and oddities are torn from their cultural matrices in different parts of the world and put on pedestals in an alien environment.⁵⁷⁹

We can argue that *RT-O* juxtaposes the roles of collector, curator and viewer since anyone is allowed to re-order and handle the specimens in the collection. Such approach entails a radical opening up of the collection; fully exposed, yet retaining attributes of a ‘collection’. (Figure 84) Similarly, ‘open’ RTO territory although accessible still appears to retain particular restrictions that come along with tangible boundaries and rigid enclosures.



Figure 84 Bones.

Writing about the lack of access in the Maltese countryside, Bugeja argues that illegitimate obstructions should be removed and private land must be clearly demarcated.⁵⁸⁰ Fluid boundaries complicate and blur any definition of transgression

⁵⁷⁸ Similar to open RTO in the countryside, *RT-O* is not fully open, thus, to a certain degree, transgression is unavoidable.

⁵⁷⁹ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 194.

⁵⁸⁰ Bugeja, *The Future of Rambling in Malta*.

since one cannot be sure whether transgression is real or perceived and consequently to what extent.⁵⁸¹ ‘Open’ RTO territory engenders a liminal space; it is both real and imagined.⁵⁸² Like the collapsible display cabinet, it is an open enclosure. The space inside the display cabinet is now integrated as part of the larger gallery space and walking inside the gallery is comparable to walking ‘through’ the collection; it becomes an act of participation and presence (presentness).

Outside and inside are never totally distinct since one exists through the other. Now that the dichotomy of inside/outside has been (hypothetically) erased, it can be argued that the ‘otherness’ implied in the existence of the two poles has also been abolished.

The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is, as usual, anything but simple exteriority. The meaning of the outside was always present within the inside, imprisoned outside the outside, and vice versa..⁵⁸³

A strong link with Chapter 2 emerges from *RT-O*, where I have discussed traits of open collections. We can argue that collections have parallels with archiving since both are comprised of and preoccupied with the accumulation and preservation of material. In the process of visualising and making the artwork it became apparent that the ‘openness’ of the pseudo-display cabinet would impinge on the archival properties of the work. While *RTO I* and *RTO II* are physically sealed, *RT-O* is fully exposed, seemingly vulnerable, uncontrolled and abject, by established museum standards.

The open approach gives rise to speculation and inferences and appears to disturb the implicit textuality of the archive. This generates further questions that can be considered supplementary to the main research questions: To what extent is closure implicit in the archive?; How does openness impinge on the archive?; What can we learn from a more accessible archive?; What kind of space does an open archive inhabit?

⁵⁸¹ Open RTO is generally difficult to define since the land ‘outside’ and the land ‘inside’ spill rather fluidly into each other.

⁵⁸² The lack of a clearly defined enclosure complicates the nature of the territory since it creates an in-between space which is neither open nor closed, neither inside nor outside. I resort to the territory for answers but no answer is forthcoming. Instead I am presented with more questions.

⁵⁸³ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 35.

RT-O, like the previous RTO assemblages, is non-taxonomic, it resists classification but is penetrable, reminiscent of non-enclosed RTO territory in the landscape. Derrida argues that there is no such thing as a closed archive since the archive is characterised by a propensity to acquire more. ‘The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed’.⁵⁸⁴ New material emerging from fieldworks is constantly being introduced into *RT-O*, thus, intensifying the reading of places which were mapped for my practice-led research. Derrida ‘moves us away from the idea that an archive simply accommodates, monumentalizes, violates or amortizes the event’.⁵⁸⁵ Thus, it can be argued that *RT-O* is equivalent to a dynamic archive; it allows movement and lines of deterritorialisation.

The open display comprises naturally occurring material found in close proximity to ‘open’ RTO territory. Specimens appear to gain value as the showcase’s sides are folded and closed, thus, becoming further aligned with museum ideologies. We can argue that enclosed structures imbricate space with power. The restricted spatial architecture of the display cabinet and similarly the curbed land outside evoke a sense of power and dominance. Lefebvre argues that in principle, dominated space and appropriated space, ideally at least, ought to be combined.⁵⁸⁶

Confronted with a wide open cabinet-like structure, whereby handling and movement of objects are possible, the viewer has two main probable routes: either to keep at a discreet (safe) distance or; to physically and conceptually engage with the objects. Such uncertainty is comparable to movement in ‘open’ RTO territory, whereby transgression may be perceived either as real or illusory.

In the absence of boundaries objects are demystified and brought closer to the viewer. Thus, the viewer may share the same intimate proximity with objects and place as I have done during the fieldworks. This can be considered a form of re-mapping. In addition, contingent to the collapse of boundaries, objects are reterritorialised into a smooth space. O’Sullivan maintains that for Deleuze and

⁵⁸⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever*, trans. by Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 68.

⁵⁸⁵ Simon Morgan Wortham, *The Derrida Dictionary* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), p. 19.

⁵⁸⁶ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 166.

Guattari it is important to connect with an outside, since here a rhizome can be formed with something else.⁵⁸⁷

Turning now to specific objects in the collection, it appears that their perceived value diminishes with the dismantling of boundaries. Tree branches, stone, fossils, bones and seed seem to become once again ordinary specimens as they once were. There are a number of considerations to be made in this regard. Spatial restrictions appear to augment the value of collections. In addition, it appears that physical and conceptual boundaries distort our perception of things and thus, restrict and influence interpretation and meaning. A consequence of boundaries is striated space where collections are segregated and categorised into rigid compartments with limited room for potential multiplicities; spatially it is homogeneous and still. With the collapse of boundaries a liminal space is created; an *intermezzo* where the branch, the stone, the fossil and the seed can move in different directions; where there is no room for stillness.

The aim here is to rattle the adamantine chain that has bound materiality to inert substance and that has placed the organic across a chasm from the inorganic. The aim is to articulate the elusive idea of a materiality that is *itself* heterogeneous, itself a differential of intensities, itself *a* life. In this strange, *vital* materialism, there is no point of pure stillness, no indivisible atom that is not itself a quiver with virtual force. [original italics]⁵⁸⁸

RT-O can be likened to a disrupted museum display, fragmented, incomplete and unorthodox by museological standards. It contains products of the earth and it re-maps the earth's sediment which is far from organised. Thus, reflecting the places I map, *RT-O* comprises a collection of sorts, similar to what Smithson called a 'jumbled museum', where '[e]mbedded in the sediment is a text that contains limits and boundaries which evade the rational order'.⁵⁸⁹

This section has reviewed the *RTO* series of artworks. This body of work responds to the vague demarcation of territory in the local rural landscape. What follows is an

⁵⁸⁷ O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari*, p. 19.

⁵⁸⁸ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 57.

⁵⁸⁹ Robert Smithson, 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth Projects', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 100-113 (p. 110).

outline of what ‘open’ RTO territory signifies in the context of this research project, juxtaposed with local property laws and the views of prominent rambler.

7.5 Defining ‘Open’ RTO Territory

531. (1) A person who, on probable grounds, believes that the thing he possesses is his own, is a possessor in good faith.

531. (2) A person who knows or who ought from circumstances to presume that the thing possessed by him belongs to others, is a possessor in bad faith.
Civil Code of Malta⁵⁹⁰

At the outset, I have to point out that a plausible definition for what I am here referring to as ‘open’ RTO territory is outright challenging. This section is intended to contextualise ‘open’ RTO territory and to describe the significance and meaning the term has acquired through my artistic practice.

What is mine is first of all my distance; I possess only distances. Don’t anybody touch me, I growl if anyone enters my territory, I put up placards.⁵⁹¹

The RTO territory discussed throughout this chapter belongs in five different places as indicated in Section 7.1. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage in legal research in regard to public and private property. A crude sign indicating that a patch of land is ‘reserved’ or ‘private’, in the context of this research project implies that the land in question is not publicly accessible. Whether such property is legal or otherwise is completely irrelevant to the development of this chapter.

Occupancy consists in taking possession of a corporeal thing which is not, but can be, the property of any one, with the intention of becoming the owner of it.
Civil Code of Malta⁵⁹²

⁵⁹⁰ Malta, *Civil Code*, Cap. 16 Article 531,

<<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8580>>.

⁵⁹¹ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 352.

⁵⁹² Malta, *Civil Code*, Cap. 16 Article 561 (1),

<<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8580>>.

‘Open’ RTO territory consists of patches of land, supposedly out of bounds, and access to which is restricted by crude RTO signs (or similar e.g. Keep Out, No Entry) or other forms of loose boundaries (Figure 85). Grech tells us that locally, there are several cases of illegal acquisition of public land and access to it is denied to members of the public.⁵⁹³ Restricted access could have profound repercussions on countryside walks. Thus, ramblers are demanding that landowners affix ownership documents on structures blocking access to the countryside so that people would know whether it is private or public property.⁵⁹⁴ Here we can consider Rose’s argument that vague claims to land ownership are not beneficial; if no one knows whether the land can be safely used, it may end up being used either by too many or by none at all.⁵⁹⁵ The Civil Code states: ‘Vacant property belongs to the Government of Malta’ and this could be one possible explanation for the proliferation of RTO signs.⁵⁹⁶

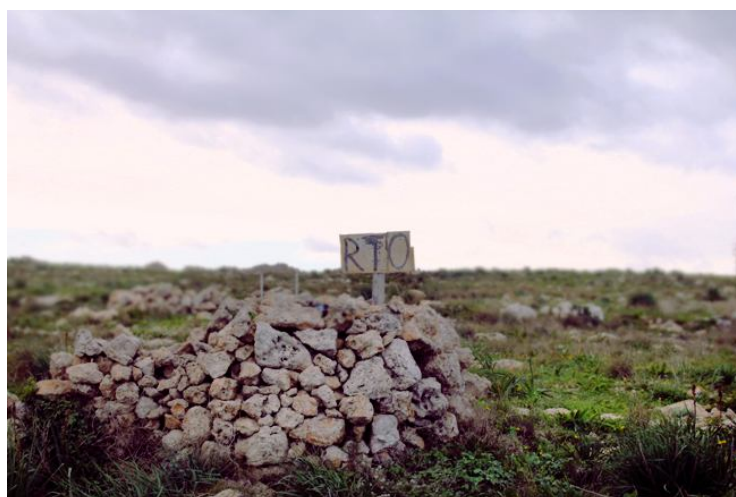


Figure 85 RTO placard.

⁵⁹³ Herman Grech, ‘Easy Access to Public Footpaths’, *Times of Malta*, 8 February 2013 <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20130208/editorial/Easy-access-to-public-footpaths.456662>> [accessed 2 August 2015], (para 7 of 14).

⁵⁹⁴ Patrick Cooke, ‘Walking Group Calls for Landowner Proof’, *Times of Malta*, 31 January 2013 <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20130131/local/Walking-group-calls-for-landowner-proof.455583>> [accessed 2 August 2015], (para 1 of 18).

⁵⁹⁵ Carol M. Rose, ‘Possession as the Origin of Property’, *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 52.1, (1985), 73-88 (p. 78).

⁵⁹⁶ RTO signs give the impression that the land is continuously in use even though it is unused for certain periods of time. Thus, the possessor would not lose the claim of that property. Rose raises questions as to whether continuous usage of land entitles the user to claim full ownership. Rose, *Possession as the Origin of Property*, pp. 79-80.; Malta, *Civil Code*, Cap. 16 Article 327, <<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8580>>

Vella points out that at times, upon site inspection, land leased for agricultural purposes results in rocky garigue which is unfit for cultivation.⁵⁹⁷ According to a Times of Malta article entitled ‘Walks on the Wild Side’, it is difficult to distinguish between legitimate barriers and abusive ones; to know whether a path is really private or not.⁵⁹⁸ Thus, the article continues, citizens are forced to give up exploring the countryside for fear of trespassing.⁵⁹⁹ Cooke tells us that on a trip to the countryside, away from a road around the coastline, mostly uncultivated land was blocked off by walls and crude signs prohibiting access.⁶⁰⁰

To the walker, irrespective of rightful ownership or otherwise, an RTO sign means that one’s presence within the territory is unwarranted. Such land is here being referred to as ‘open’ RTO territory; it appears to be privatised but for unspecified reasons is not fully or properly enclosed. (Figure 86) The next section considers ‘open’ RTO territory in regard to texts by seminal writers and thinkers concerning property, appropriation, enclosures, and the commons.



Figure 86 RTO sign in Mġarr.

⁵⁹⁷ Alex Vella, ‘Intriguing Public Land Issues’, *Times of Malta*, 3 January 2012 <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120103/opinion/Intriguing-public-land-issues.400850>> [accessed 2 August 2015], (para 6 of 12).

⁵⁹⁸ Herman Grech, ‘Walks on the Wild Side’, *Times of Malta*, 5 June 2015 <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150605/environment/walks-on-the-wild-side.571198>> [accessed 6 June 2015], (para 8 of 11).

⁵⁹⁹ Such ambiguously held claims could ‘encourage contention, insecurity, and litigation—all of which waste everyone’s time and energy and may result in overuse or underuse of resources’ Rose, *Possession as the Origin of Property*, pp. 81-82.; Grech, *Walks on the Wild Side*, (para 8).

⁶⁰⁰ The author is referring to Dingli Cliffs, one of the places included in my research project. Cooke, *Walking Group Calls for Landowner Proof*, (para 5).

7.6 Appropriation and Property Rights

Having defined open RTO territory the discussion will now focus on property rights. Understandably, it is beyond the scope of this practice-led research to engage in a thorough analysis of property rights. However, in order to contextualise the practice it is necessary and indeed relevant to consider, even if briefly, a number of considerations in this regard.

Proudhon maintains that '[p]roperty is robbery [theft]!'.⁶⁰¹ According to Morgan, this argument is 'grounded in an analysis of land as a natural resource' and the need for sustainability.⁶⁰² Since this research develops out of an island context such argument has more relevance to it and merits being unpacked further.⁶⁰³

Undoubtedly, land is one of humankind's most precious resources especially in the context of geographically restricted countries where the density of the population is high. Proudhon sees the greed for property as some kind of illusion. There will come a time when citizens will realise that land ownership is not a right.

Yet, nevertheless, sooner or later, the conversion will be effected and property be violated, because no other course is possible; because property, regarded as a right, and not being a right, must of right perish; because the force of events, the laws of conscience, and physical mathematical necessity must, in the end, destroy this illusion of our minds.⁶⁰⁴

Proudhon is remarkably aware of the 'doubtful' nature of property and he considers use and abuse in this regard as necessarily indistinguishable.⁶⁰⁵ In the context of RTO such ambiguity is not uncommon. This argument has parallels with *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture*, an installation which I am going to discuss in the following chapter. The installation coincided with the politically charged 2015

⁶⁰¹ Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government* (Middlesex: The Echo Library, 2008), p. 34.

⁶⁰² Diane Morgan, 'The Flat Management of "Crises" on our Spherical Planet: Anarchist Order for a Sustainable Future', in *Yesterday's Tomorrows: On Utopia and Dystopia*, ed. by Pere Gallardo and Elizabeth Russell (New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), pp. 59-71 (p. 60).

⁶⁰³ Malta is a small island *circa* 316 kilometers square.

⁶⁰⁴ Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, p. 56.

⁶⁰⁵ Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, p. 51.

Spring Hunting Referendum, where the issue of appropriated countryside was one of the battle cries taken up by the ‘No’ camp.

Land usage and first possession seem to be the two more common justifications used in deciding who the possessor of a contested tract of land should be. Proudhon refers to the notions of *jus in re* and *jus ad rem*. The former refers to the right by which one may reclaim the property acquired, where ‘possession and property are united’, while the latter refers to the right to a thing, which gives one the claim to become the proprietor of a ‘naked property’.⁶⁰⁶ Rose argues that according to common law ‘first possession is the root of title’.⁶⁰⁷ However, she maintains that it is not enough for a claimant to say, “It’s mine” through some act or gesture; in order for the “statement” to have any force, some relevant world must understand the claim it makes and take that claim seriously’.⁶⁰⁸ It may well be that ‘suitable use is also a form of notice’.⁶⁰⁹

Proudhon, tells us of Reid’s assertion that the right to what the earth produces, before it is occupied and appropriated, was in ancient times compared to the right which every citizen had to the theatre; every man might occupy an empty seat, and acquire a right to it while the entertainment lasted; but no one had a right to dispossess another.⁶¹⁰

In the context of ‘open’ RTO territory, land usage could be ambiguous and objectionable to sections of the population.⁶¹¹ The at times controversial nature of land usage often associated with this territory may instill resistance. Furthermore, as already stated, in certain places there is no clear-cut definition of what constitutes public and private land. Bugeja notes that abusive structures and RTO signs are sometimes installed to give the impression that the land is legally owned.⁶¹²

⁶⁰⁶ Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, pp.51-52.

⁶⁰⁷ Rose, *Possession as the Origin of Property*, p. 75.

⁶⁰⁸ Rose, *Possession as the Origin of Property*, pp. 84-85.

⁶⁰⁹ Rose, *Possession as the Origin of Property*, p. 78.

⁶¹⁰ Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, pp. 59.

⁶¹¹ For example, ramblers argue that public paths and land should not be appropriated and the countryside must remain openly accessible throughout the year. Tension escalates when public paths are physically obstructed and common space enclosed prohibiting access all year round.

⁶¹² Bugeja, *The Future of Rambling in Malta*.

Proudhon's radical ideas are suspicious of property titles that permanently deprive citizens from supposedly common space. He equates land with all other basic natural resources of common necessity that should be accessible to anyone without prejudice or discrimination. Unlike other natural resources land is non-renewable; thus, possession is transversely correlated to dispossession.

Consequently the earth—like water, air, and light—is a primary object of necessity which each has a right to use freely, without infringing another's right. Why, then, is the earth appropriated?⁶¹³

The purpose of this section is to contextualise open RTO territory and to foreground this local habit in Proudhon's radical theories. It interrogates the space that opens up between theory and actual land appropriation, and considers how this might impinge on my place-oriented practice.

A review of property rights has to consider enclosures and the commons. Enclosures are present in my practice in the form of display cabinets. On the ground enclosures represent a sure sign of property. They surround and protect and serve as boundaries in the landscape; they distinguish public and private space; inside and outside. Enclosures are associated with territory and according to Elden '[t]erritory comprises techniques for measuring land and controlling terrain'.⁶¹⁴ The section that follows will review enclosures and the commons.

7.6. 1 Enclosures and the Commons

A key problem for Proudhon is humankind's urge to own a fraction of the earth's crust; that space which is gradually shrinking due to human greed. Paradoxically, private space is becoming more common while common space is becoming less common. According to Linebaugh '[e]nclosure is the historical antonym and nemesis of the commons'.⁶¹⁵

⁶¹³ Proudhon, *What is Property? An Inquiry into the Principle of Right and of Government*, pp. 80.

⁶¹⁴ Elden, Stuart (2013) *The Birth of Territory*, p. 323.

⁶¹⁵ Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), p. 1.

Perhaps enclosures are necessary and not as detestable as one would envision. Enclosures may evoke order and safety. Enclosures separate but link people into a network. In support of this is an old saying that goes like, ‘good walls make good neighbours’; in contrast Linebaugh argues that enclosures are expressive of concepts of unfreedom and suppression.⁶¹⁶

These settlers, as their numerous letters to newspapers prove, believed that civilization followed not a free-range steer but rather a moldboard plow, and they believed that a good fence was not just an earmark of civilization but a precursor of it.⁶¹⁷

Linebaugh writes that in England alone, between 1725 and 1825, more than six million acres of land were appropriated by dominant landowners.⁶¹⁸ This resulted in the termination of open-field villages and common rights that contributed to the late eighteenth century’s crisis of poverty.⁶¹⁹ Enclosures are often associated with lines since they delineate territory, and territory, as Ingold points out, is controlled by a ‘ruler’ which is also an instrument for drawing straight lines.⁶²⁰ There are different types of enclosures; for example hedge, fence or wall, however, enclosures in general are intended to restrict movement and access to territory.⁶²¹ Land appropriation may involve relatively unorthodox approaches which could appear less obtrusive in terms of visibility; yet, they present a strong symbolic appropriation penetrating deep into the ground and beyond physical realms.

To walk straight from one RTO sign to the next is like drawing a straight line on the ground with one’s feet, and in the process acknowledging the enclosure by creating an imaginary perimeter around it. In contrast, drifting along ‘open’ RTO territory can be considered rhizomatic; now RTO ‘points are not locations but dislocations, segments out of joint’.⁶²²

⁶¹⁶ Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, p. 142.

⁶¹⁷ Heat-Moon, *Prairie Earth*, p. 280.

⁶¹⁸ Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, pp. 144-145.

⁶¹⁹ Garret Hardin published ‘The Tragedy of the Commons’ in 1968 in which he stated that in a pasture open to all, in the commons, herdsmen will try to keep as many cattle as possible. This inherent logic of the commons, he argued, generates tragedy, whereby each man would want to increase his herd without limit in a world that is limited. Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, pp. 146-147.

⁶²⁰ Ingold, *Lines*, p. 160.

⁶²¹ Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, pp. 142.

⁶²² Ingold, *Lines*, p. 167.

Place appears to impinge on the type of enclosure. In Illinois, America, hedges similar to the ones cultivated in England were being used to enclose the land instead of walls. In 1839, Professor Jonathan Turner, a scholar, botanist and activist began working with a native plant, the *Maclura Pomifera* to serve as a hedge to divide and enclose sections on the prairie.⁶²³ According to Heath-Moon, the same plant the French called *bois d'arc*, that provided Indians with bows and clubs to defend their territory, now served as fencing for white settlers. The hedge was considered in America as a thing that defines, delimits and enforces.⁶²⁴

Locally, farmers and hunters use *Opuntia Ficus-Indica* as a type of hedge; commonly known as prickly pear, although not endemic to Malta the succulent plant thrives in warm climates. The plant allows greater coverage in terms of height, than that permitted by law for the building of walls, and it can be more deterring due to its sharp spines.

Linebaugh walks us from the rural landscape to the city along fortifications, courts and ports. '[S]urrounded by walls, the city expressed antagonism with the countryside', Linebaugh argues, and it is believed that the word 'town', deriving from Anglo-Saxon means inclosed or shut in.⁶²⁵ According to Linebaugh, the city-state does not precede the commons, which in contrast can be seen in open relation with land, forest, mountain and rivers. Common spaces and common-fields were at certain points in time perceived as potential spaces for enemy attacks especially when walls were no longer economically viable.⁶²⁶

Linebaugh exclaims that any discussion about the commons should consider human beings, countries, substances of earth like air and water, the biosphere and outer space.⁶²⁷ This resonates with Proudhon's claim that land should belong to all of humanity, just like the other natural resources that the earth makes available to us

⁶²³ Also called Osage Orange or Hedge Apple. Heat-Moon, *Prairy Erth*, p. 281.

⁶²⁴ Heat-Moon, *Prairy Erth*, p. 282.

⁶²⁵ Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, pp. 25.

⁶²⁶ Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, pp. 27.

⁶²⁷ 'Commoning is primary to human life. Scholars used to write of 'primitive communism'. 'The primary commons' renders the experience more clearly. Scarcely a society has existed on the face of the earth which has not had at its heart the commons; the commodity with its individualism and privatization was strictly confined to the margins of the community where severe regulations punished violators.' Linebaugh, *Stop Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, p. 13, 237.

all. ‘The commons is invisible until it is lost’; until it becomes conspicuous by absence.⁶²⁸

The earth is our common denominator yet we have managed to transform it into a divisive plane. We distinguish the common from the public, we understand common solidarity in contrast to individualism – communing is exclusive and it requires participation; ‘it must be entered into’.⁶²⁹ Similarly, barriers and enclosures define social spaces since they categorise people into territories.⁶³⁰ Enclosures can be thought of as the taxonomy of society.

Busse and Strang argue that structural inequalities are widening, the ownership of things is increasingly contested, and the commons are rapidly being enclosed and privatised.⁶³¹ Paradoxically, enclosures engender gaps and this can be traced in the way common resources are distributed and owned. Enclosures and boundary walls frequently make an appearance in contemporary art, and a number of artists have been engaging with such structures in a plethora of ways.

The work of Mexican artist Jorge Méndez Blake entitled *The Exploration Library* (2008) is comprised of a red brick enclosure. (Figure 87) It is one of a series of sculptural monuments; raw architecture full of poetic resonance.⁶³² Méndez Blake examines the way society is constructed or ordered and in his work he often references literature and architecture. Enclosures in Méndez Blake’s work have a different purpose to the enclosures in my work (e.g. *RTO I, RTO II*), since I juxtapose them with museum systems and fluid taxonomical methods.

⁶²⁸ Linebaugh, *Stop Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, p. 14.

⁶²⁹ Linebaugh, *Stop Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*, pp. 14-15.

⁶³⁰ Strang, *Uncommon Ground: Cultural Landscapes and Environmental Values*, p. 149.

⁶³¹ Mark Busse and Veronica Strang, ‘Introduction Ownership and Appropriation’, in *Ownership and Appropriation*, ed. by Veronica Strang and Mark Busse (Oxford: Berg, 2011), pp. 1-19 (p. 1).

⁶³² Leah Ollman, ‘Review: Jorge Mendez Blake’s works Land with Poetic Resonance’, *Los Angeles Times*, 21 June 2012 <<http://articles.latimes.com/2012/jun/21/entertainment/la-et-cm-jorge-mendez-blake-review-20120618>> [accessed 26 April 2016], (para 1 of 6).

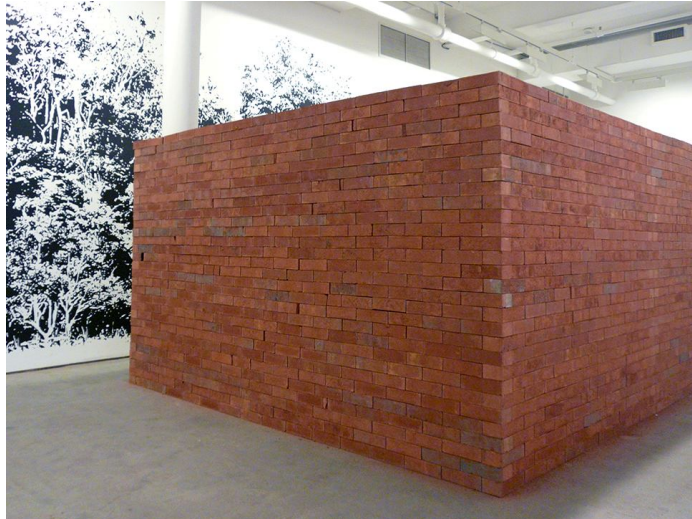


Figure 87 Jorge Méndez Blake, *The Exploration Library*, 2008.

‘Open’ RTO territory is where enclosures are almost imperceptible and what appears to be common is uncommonly ambiguous. Ground gained is ground lost. The *RTO* series interrogates the space in between. It is neither open nor closed, it is neither inside nor outside; it is neither private nor public; it is *terrain vague*.

Between things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but a perpendicular direction, a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle. [original italics]⁶³³

In this part of the chapter I have explored juxtapositions of art practice and contested territory. This exploration enabled me to understand how restricted territory can open up to artistic practice, and to consider how possibilities for practice may emerge from a political/poetic intertwining.

A place is defined by its boundaries, its intrinsic limits, its distinctly local ‘here’ that remains fixed in space even as it perdures in time.⁶³⁴

The first part of the chapter discussed ‘open’ RTO territory synonymous with Maltese rural areas. Then the focus shifted onto the *RTO* series. The artworks respond to a habitual system of land appropriation and consider boundaries as mechanisms that exert control, classify, enclose and restrict access. Through my practice I juxtaposed the territory outside with museological territory, and gradually

⁶³³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 28.

⁶³⁴ Pogue Harrison, *Hic Jacet*, p. 350.

I opened up my display cases to reflect the (a-)typical nature of 'open' RTO, to understand and investigate how boundaries may impinge on collections.

A theoretical framework has been woven in order to contextualise the practice and to generate further themes for consideration. Then, I considered a definition of 'open' RTO territory based on my research practice and in relation to the theoretical arguments considered throughout the section. This was followed by a review of property rights, enclosures and the commons.

The next chapter discusses *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture*, a large-scale sculptural work consisting entirely of spent shotgun shells. The artwork converges with the *RTO* series and it considers different approaches to the demarcation of territory.

8. Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture

The previous chapter reviewed the ambiguous ‘open’ RTO territory. Such territory is characterised by ambivalence and tension emanating from opposing camps both claiming their right to it. It is a space dominated by crossfire in social, cultural, political and environmental terms. This chapter develops as a consequence of ‘open’ RTO territory.

The following questions will be directly addressed within this chapter: How can (re-) deterritorialised matter further our understanding of place? What opportunities arise for fine art practice from such investigation and (re-) deterritorialisation? *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture* is the title of my installation comprised of *circa* 9,000 spent shotgun cartridges responding to the historic Spring Hunting Referendum held in Malta on 11 April 2015.⁶³⁵ Shotgun cartridges were arranged on the floor alongside each other to form the eight-pointed cross which is a significant symbol of Maltese identity.

The artwork interrogates the contested ground where nature and culture meet and exchange fire. It seeks to open up and problematise notions of identity, legacy, violence and anthropocentrism. It develops out of the ashes and it breathes new life into apparent lifeless matter.

Nature and culture are key terms in the context of *Crossfire*. Hence, the title of the installation, *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture*. In an interview with Karen Barad, Adam Kleinman outlines an intriguing list of what he considers allied dichotomies.

The nature/culture divide is the bedrock for an impressive array of allied dichotomies (for example female/male, animal/human, primitive/modern,

⁶³⁵ The exhibition was open between 30 March and 9 April 2015. It had to close two days before the Referendum according to local election regulations.

natural/unnatural, real/constructed, substance/form, matter/spirit, physical/mental, stuff/meaning, innate/learned, given/made) and associated inequalities.⁶³⁶

Anthropologist Tim Ingold considers the nature/culture dichotomy as a stale concept and instead he attempts to replace it ‘with the dynamic synergy of organism and environment’.⁶³⁷ It can be argued that the urge to control, appropriate, transform and exploit nature is embedded in our culture. Soper maintains that ‘while we shall always have to live with the consequences of our cultural transformations’, nature only minimally determines ‘the modes in which we respond to its limits and potentials’.⁶³⁸ Nature ‘may “recommend” certain types of action’, it determines the effects of our actions, ‘but it does not enforce a politics’.⁶³⁹ Barad tells us that ‘[n]ature is neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performances’.⁶⁴⁰

Crossfire transgresses contested territory.⁶⁴¹ It is comprised of repetition; thousands of cartridges placed alongside each other. As Deleuze states ‘repetition is a transgression’.⁶⁴² *Crossfire* refuses to acknowledge boundaries; it engenders difference. The following section elucidates the process behind the voluminous ‘collection’.

8.1 Collecting Matter(s)

When I first started collecting cartridges the referendum was not yet on the cards, and I never imagined that such matter would acquire national importance in a relatively short span of time. I could sense that this matter had more to say and although fired it was still vibrant. Barad says that ‘[m]atter, like meaning, is not an

⁶³⁶ Adam Kleinman, *Intra-actions* (Mousse Magazine No. 34, June 2012)

<https://www.academia.edu/1857617/_Intra-actions_Interview_of_Karen_Barad_by_Adam_Kleinmann_> [accessed 27 May 2016] (p. 80).

⁶³⁷ Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 16.

⁶³⁸ Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 142.

⁶³⁹ Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 142.

⁶⁴⁰ Karen Barad, ‘Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28.3, (2003), 801-831 (p. 827).

⁶⁴¹ The work is not about the plight of living creatures. It is not about what is being shot. The work interrogates the contested territory between the two camps, and it develops from the previous chapter.

⁶⁴² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, p. 3.

individually articulated or static entity.’⁶⁴³ She argues that ‘to figure matter as merely an end product rather than an active factor in further materializations, is to cheat matter out of the fullness of its capacity’.⁶⁴⁴

I do not consider found matter as ready-made since matter is always in a state of becoming. Bennett tells of Sullivan’s claim that we can never throw away a vital materiality because it continues its activities even if it is discarded (see Chapter 9).⁶⁴⁵ Jane Bennett termed this vibrant matter; furthermore, she describes this thing-power as ‘the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle.’⁶⁴⁶

With the help of a retired hunter I managed to accumulate thousands of cartridges. He knew exactly where to find freshly fired ones, he used to collect cartridges for me and call me every now and again to pick them up from his place. His help was invaluable and he remained interested in the project right till the end – it was a strange yet solid collaboration.

Cartridges typically come in a range of colours, mostly bright, and the spent cartridge is generally still sealed from one end with a characteristic brass coated cap. Some caps were still glistening, others rusty, indicative of a long exposure to the outside elements, occasionally also evident in the cartridges’ faded and brittle plastic body. (Figure 88) A few cartridges were found partially filled with soil revealing that the space inside had been appropriated and transformed into a safe nest by colonies of snails and other crawling insects. This could be considered a re-appropriation of micro RTO territory. ‘[N]on-human animals also have a sense of territory and of place’ Tuan argues.⁶⁴⁷ The nest, considered to be one of the marvels of animal life, attests this.⁶⁴⁸ In the same manner insects breathe life into an

⁶⁴³ Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter*, p. 821.

⁶⁴⁴ Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter*, p. 810.

⁶⁴⁵ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁶ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, p. 6.

⁶⁴⁷ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 4.

⁶⁴⁸ Bachelard maintains that ‘the world is a nest, and an immense power holds the inhabitants of the world in this nest’. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 104, 92.

otherwise destructive matter; nature's own way of re-appropriating culture at the opportune moment.



Figure 88 *Crossfire* (Detail).

Already, we can discern how matter acquires a past and a present, and how this translates into multiple narratives irrespective of cultural intervention. Karen Barad says that '[m]atter is not immutable or passive', it does not require the mark of external forces to complete it, since it 'is always already an ongoing historicity'.⁶⁴⁹ The object's materiality has a history.⁶⁵⁰ In the following sections I will describe how past and present come together through the vibrancy of discarded matter.

8.2 Caught in the Crossfire

Crossfire provoked reactions about the nature of our culture, and as De Certeau maintains, it did not limit itself to telling about a movement but made it.⁶⁵¹ *Crossfire* joined the debate and contributed to it. At the outset, it was evident that the main challenge would be to create a politically charged artwork that resists any form of allegiance. It had to be affiliated neither to the 'Yes' nor the 'No' camp. *Crossfire*

⁶⁴⁹ Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter*, p. 821.

⁶⁵⁰ Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 100.

⁶⁵¹ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 81.

responded to the spatial and temporal dynamics of territory by situating itself at the interstice of two opposing camps.

In the last few weeks leading to the referendum the landscape was dominated by the crossfire, both camps trying to garner the support required to win them the cause while repeating the customary mantra that every vote counts. Victor Axiak, Professor of Biology at the University of Malta, and leading environmentalist, argued that a 'No' vote is necessary if the country wants to align itself with contemporary environmental regulations.⁶⁵² Besides, the usual environmental rhetoric, one of the strongest claims made by the 'No' camp had been that hunters should give back unofficially appropriated public land to the people.⁶⁵³ Thus, safe access to the countryside fared high on the agenda and such claims gained more currency given the restricted availability of pristine land on a small island like Malta.⁶⁵⁴

A 500 hundred year legacy was on the brink of being curtailed. The 'No' camp argued that our cultural identity stands to lose if those opposed to hunting would have it their way. Hunters depicted their passion as a cultural object, it had to be preserved and like the eight-pointed cross it was symbolic of the nation's legacy. The eight-pointed cross is the foremost symbol which identifies the Knights of the Order of Saint John. Commonly known as the Maltese cross its presence is still very strong in Malta.⁶⁵⁵ It is a symbol of nobility, it had to be acquired, defended and carried around with pride.

The prospect of implicating the Maltese cross in this controversial issue seemed intriguing and appropriate. I had already been experimenting with smaller versions of the Maltese cross made out of shotgun pellets and as the referendum date was

⁶⁵² Victor Axiak, 'The Future Must Surely Come', *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 15 March 2015, p. 21.

⁶⁵³ Herman Grech, '10 Reasons to Vote No on Saturday', *Times of Malta*, 8 April 2015
<<http://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150408/blogs/10-reasons-to-vote-no-on-saturday.563082>>
[accessed 11 May 2015], (para 10 of 12).

⁶⁵⁴ The issue of reserved territory in the countryside links *Crossfire* with the RTO series. Grech, (para 10).

⁶⁵⁵ The eight-pointed cross epitomises the historic and cultural legacy of the knights and it is an intrinsic part of local identity. It is everywhere, from door knobs to national sports kits, coasters, pendants, and it appears in numerous important paintings of the Order.

declared, the idea appeared to gain more currency and timeliness.⁶⁵⁶ After exploring various forms I resolved to make the eight-pointed cross, since besides the evident references to local identity it also evokes historical memories of crossfire, most notably the Great Siege of Malta. The installation represented the space in between; it raised questions about identity and violence and sat in the middle where opposite polarities meet and exchange fire. *Crossfire* is the keyword here. (Figure 89)



Figure 89 *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture*. Spent shotgun cartridges (circa 9,000).

Crossfire was set up at St James Cavalier, Centre for Creativity in Valletta. The space inside the hall was appropriated by a sea of shotgun cartridges. Over 9,000 spent cartridges were used to make *Crossfire*, all rigid and straight, standing upright on the floor embracing each other for stability.⁶⁵⁷ Seen from the side they appeared like an army of soldiers marching into unknown territory. Barad tells us that ‘*matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency*’ [original italics].⁶⁵⁸ Similarly, Ingold’s words share striking parallels with the implicit structure of the artwork and the way it acquired relative stability from corresponding parts. (Figure 90)

⁶⁵⁶ ‘Quite clearly, the properties of the material are directly implicated in the form-generating process.’ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 45.

⁶⁵⁷ Spent shotgun cartridges are extremely light and not stable when placed in an upright position. However, since the cartridges are very close to each other, slightly touching, they acquire strength and stability.

⁶⁵⁸ Barad, *Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of how Matter comes to Matter*, p. 822.

They gradually acquire a feel for each other, they *settle*, holding each other in place evermore tightly as the work advances asymptotically towards closure without ever absolutely reaching it. The task of the maker is to bring the pieces into a sympathetic engagement with one another, so that they can begin – as I would say – to *correspond*. [original italics]⁶⁵⁹

An eye-level view of the installation revealed a multi-coloured outline solidly filled with shimmering brass caps. Seen from an elevated angle the eight-pointed cross transformed into a gold icon reminiscent of the Middle Ages. *Crossfire* was exposed, it was solid but fragile and it avoided and resisted all type of closure. It stemmed from RTO territory yet it refused to acknowledge boundaries. It thrived on the amalgam of dichotomies namely ‘nature/culture’, ‘yes/no’, ‘reject/collect’, and ‘past/present’.

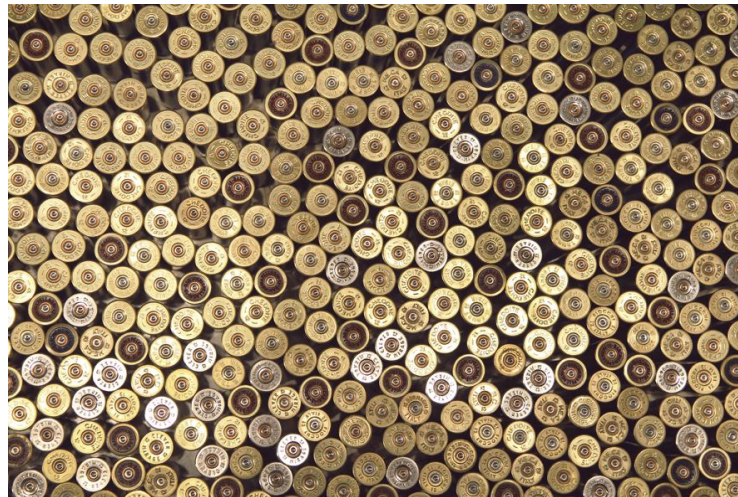


Figure 90 *Crossfire* installation top view (Detail).

The installation attracted viewers from both camps, and it was extensively reviewed by a number of prominent local art critics in the art sections of printed and online newspapers and magazines. At one point a group of avid hunters were viewing the work; they took photographs with their mobile phones whilst attempting to guess the number of cartridges used in making the installation. ‘Good concept!’ one of them uttered, ‘don’t forget to vote yes!’ A couple of hours later a ‘No’ activist posted on social media a photograph of *Crossfire* he took with his mobile phone followed by the following (#)tags: ‘Violence/Identity/Social Change’. This is evidence that

⁶⁵⁹ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 69.

contemporary art infiltrates media spaces such as the Internet.⁶⁶⁰ Such anecdotes indicate that the artwork has been successfully appropriated by both camps since viewers read the ‘text’ they habitually relate with whilst omitting that which they do not want to see. I concur with Derrida’s claim that ‘if a text always gives itself a certain representation of its own roots, those roots live only by that representation’.⁶⁶¹



Figure 91 *Crossfire* installation elevated view.

The floor-based layout has resonance with how the cartridges are found randomly discarded all over the ground. (Figure 91) Ingold maintains that ‘[a]s culture rises from the land, branching out into its many lines, so history rises up from the ground of nature.’⁶⁶² Similarly, De Certeau affirms that ‘[r]eading frees itself from the soil that determined it’ and this movement is carried out through the interpretation of the viewers – ‘[i]t detaches itself from that soil’.⁶⁶³ This arrangement allowed the installation to be viewed both at eye-level and at lower or more elevated angles. The level of viewing impinged on the dynamics of the artwork, and people could choose a desired point of view, literally.

The territory occupied by *Crossfire* could be appropriated by anyone notwithstanding their allegiance, thus, the work is intended to avoid closure and

⁶⁶⁰ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, p. 26.

⁶⁶¹ Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 101.

⁶⁶² Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 135.

⁶⁶³ De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 176.

evoke questions rather than providing answers.⁶⁶⁴ Moreover, the artwork had an environmental side to it, since cartridges littering the countryside were collected and re-used. If we are to consider used cartridges as pollutants or dirt then we would be contending with Evernden. ‘But what is dirt? Not soil, but a contaminant, “matter out of place”’. Moreover, it is dangerous matter, at least when out of place’.⁶⁶⁵ Borrowing from Edward Casey, in the context of *Crossfire* we can consider re-implaced matter as a type of de-contamination. Kate Soper notes that ‘[i]t has been suggested that heritage is to “cultural” preservation what environmentalism is to the preservation of “nature”’ and the installation can be considered, up to a certain extent, an ambivalent amalgam of both.⁶⁶⁶

I have considered the practice of other artists who make constructions based on objects and repetition. I welcomed Damián Ortega’s repetitive constructions like for example *Alma Mater* (2008). (Figure 92) Although the work is comprised of different types of stones it is nonetheless repetitive in character. Its form suspended in space; different parts connect and new forms of understanding emerge.⁶⁶⁷



Figure 92 Damián Ortega, *Alma Mater*, 2008.

Ortega’s work is based on (de-) constructions which he often keeps suspended. He is an artist and collector and his work has a political tinge. The combination of

⁶⁶⁴ The territory occupied by *Crossfire* resembles ‘open’ RTO territory.

⁶⁶⁵ Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature*, p. 5.

⁶⁶⁶ Soper, *What is Nature?*, p. 199.

⁶⁶⁷ Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research*, p. 72.

different/repetitive objects and the political tinge in his work have parallels with aspects of my own work.

The place where I showed *Crossfire* is considered one of the major art spaces in Malta, situated right at the entrance of the capital city Valletta. St James Cavalier was built by the knights as a defense structure aimed at counteracting land attacks directed toward the fortified city.⁶⁶⁸ Thus, the installation can be considered site-oriented since the artwork's relationship with the location is delineated as a field of knowledge and cultural debate.⁶⁶⁹ The relocation of cartridges from the countryside to St James Cavalier contributed to the research questions, since it emphasised the proliferation of hunting (locally), and it highlighted the significance of such activity. Certain considerations might not have emerged if the spent shotgun cartridges were left to disintegrate outside.

The work was open-ended and it allowed for diverse readings. The viewer's perspective played an important part and reconfigured the work accordingly. *Crossfire* complicates the notion of contested territory; it echoes the undefined and ambiguous 'open' RTO territory in the countryside. However, by resisting boundaries the work opens up a space that encourages movement in completely different directions.

Hunting is grounded in local culture and historically it has been associated with the Knights of Malta. The next part of the chapter discusses how the knights' passion for hunting has been juxtaposed with the present controversy surrounding hunting, whereby an apparent noble sport has been transformed into a binary issue.

8.3 Hunting down the Legacy

The Knights of the Order of Saint John led by Grandmaster Philippe de Villiers de L'Isle-Adam set foot on Maltese soil in 1530. The knight's legacy in Malta is

⁶⁶⁸ The original function of the place, turned Centre for Creativity in the year 2000, provided the perfect setting for my work.

⁶⁶⁹ Kwon, *One Place After Another*, p. 26.

omnipresent, and local culture and history owe much to them. The Order's conspicuous achievements culminated in the 1565 Great Siege of Malta, commanded by Grandmaster Jean Parisot de Valette who also founded the new capital city of Valletta. The grandmaster was also an avid hunter. Blouet writes that under Valette (1557-68) a small hunting lodge was built in Buskett valley.⁶⁷⁰

Blouet (1972) tells us that over the next two hundred years many knights were attracted to this valley for hunting purposes although the possibilities for hunting on Malta were extremely limited.⁶⁷¹ Grandmaster Valette, like many other knights, was part of the hunting community and continued to transform the Buskett grounds to suit his hunting needs.⁶⁷² Considered a pastime of rulers and noblemen, hunting became gradually more ingrained in the island's cultural identity. Scruton describes it as 'a ceremony, an act of communion, a part of courtliness and kingship'.⁶⁷³ Hunting is similarly described by William Somerville in his poem 'The Chace'.

The price of manhood, hail thee with a song,
And airs soft-warbling; my hoarse-sounding horn
Invites thee to The Chace, the sport of kings;
Image of war, without its guilt...

— The Chace, William Somerville (1773)⁶⁷⁴

Eventually, having survived the Great Siege, Grandmaster Valette lost his life a few years later when he got sunstroke while practicing the sport he so much enjoyed.⁶⁷⁵ This ironic twist of fate did not discourage succeeding Grandmasters from engaging in fully fledged hunting activities. In 1585/86 Grandmaster Hughues Loubenx de Verdalle built Verdala Palace, originally as a summer residence in Buskett gardens,

⁶⁷⁰ Buskett or *Boschetto* is the Italian word for small woodland. The valley also known as *Ta' Dejr is-Saff* is located two miles away from the old capital Mdina. Brian Blouet, *The Story of Malta* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 119.

⁶⁷¹ Blouet, *The Story of Malta*.

⁶⁷² Thomas Freller, *The Palaces of the Grand Masters in Malta* (Sta Venera: Midsea Books Ltd., 2009).

⁶⁷³ Scruton, *On Hunting*, p. 40.

⁶⁷⁴ William Somerville, 'The Chace A Poem', *Hathi Trust Digital Library*, 12-15 <<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t16m34v3k>> [accessed 24 November 2015] (p. 2).

⁶⁷⁵ Albert Victor Laferla, *The Story of Man in Malta* (Valletta: A. C. Aquilina and Co. Publishers, 1972).; Alexander Sutherland, *Achievements of the Knights of Malta VI-2 (1846)* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2010).

later transformed into a hunting abode. Freller tells us that the choice of place was certainly determined by the nearby woods of Buskett, which enabled the knights to satisfy their need for hunting.⁶⁷⁶

Writing in Mark Dion's monograph titled 'Concerning Hunting', Angela Vettese describes that the hunter shows tendencies to control and transform the territory around him.⁶⁷⁷ She notices that 'nothing is unknown, but observed, defended with weapons as if from a bunker, and therefore possessed in one way or another'.⁶⁷⁸ This resonates with the knights' manner of approaching their constructed hunting grounds. Falzon observes that the choice of landscape is still crucial for successful hunting nowadays; however, this comes with various implications, notwithstanding that the hunters see themselves as stewards of the local landscape.⁶⁷⁹

Spatially, hunting in Malta is particular in that it is not practiced exclusively in segregated spaces. The ubiquity of hunters does not mean, however, that they do not seek to create their specialised spaces.⁶⁸⁰

Having briefly outlined, for historic and contextual purposes, the legacy of hunting in Malta, the chapter will now consider aspects of hunting in relation to the installation. This review should create a context for the work and locate it more prominently within hunting related discourse.

8.4 To Hunt or Not to Hunt

But is hunting finished? Many think so; many hope so; many fear so.⁶⁸¹

To hunt or not to hunt – that is the question. Falzon argues that hunting is strongly linked to Mediterranean culture and '[a]t least 10 million of them [hunters] are

⁶⁷⁶ Freller, *The Palaces of the Grand Masters in Malta*.

⁶⁷⁷ Vettese, *The Inevitability of Hunting*, p. 17.

⁶⁷⁸ Vettese, *The Inevitability of Hunting*, p. 17.

⁶⁷⁹ Ingold maintains that we must take hunter-gatherers understandings seriously, since they have a particular relationship with the environment and their knowledge is based on direct experience. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment*, p. 40.; Mark-Anthony Falzon, 'Flights of Passion', *Anthropology Today*, 24.1, (2008), 15-20.

⁶⁸⁰ Falzon, *Flights of Passion*, p. 16.

⁶⁸¹ Scruton, *On Hunting*, p. 128.

consumed by a lifelong passion, a folly that appears all but incomprehensible to the causal observer'.⁶⁸² However, as Scruton demonstrates, such practice is not exclusive to the Mediterranean basin since it is equally strong in other parts of Europe, for example the United Kingdom.⁶⁸³ Scruton writes that hunting 'has marked our landscape both physically and morally, so as to distinguish it from every other landscape in the world.'⁶⁸⁴ The methods used, and the natural trophies that hunters yearn for, change from one place to the other, while reasons for engaging in hunting are deemed culture-specific.

Hunting in Malta can be considered a relatively abundant practice in terms of number of hunters. In 2008 it was estimated that there was 'a staggering 75 hunters per square kilometer of huntable land' in Malta, and considering the restricted size of the island and the density of the population, one can easily realise why the ongoing friction in regards to this practice.⁶⁸⁵ Open RTO (*Riservato*) territory comprises a considerable chunk of huntable land.

According to Falzon the Maltese hunter's position is ambiguous but that does not mean that they lack political and social clout – on the contrary, comprised of thousands of individuals their voting power is very significant and they have consistently played to their advantage.⁶⁸⁶ Furthermore, as already discussed in the previous chapter, 'hunters are ubiquitous in the Maltese countryside and see themselves as being in control of all that it holds'.⁶⁸⁷ In the referendum, unsurprisingly, both the government and the opposition declared their position in favour of the 'Yes Camp', whose aim was to retain spring hunting and to protect the interests of the so called minority. In political terms this was seen primarily as a matter of vote hunting.

The profusion of spent shotgun cartridges on local soil cannot be discounted and the implications of such material on my practice-led research are unequivocal. I collected and ingenuously experimented with a box-full of cartridges so as to

⁶⁸² Falzon, *Flights of Passion*, p. 15.

⁶⁸³ Scruton, *On Hunting*.

⁶⁸⁴ Scruton, *On Hunting*, p. 141.

⁶⁸⁵ Falzon, *Flights of Passion*, p. 15.

⁶⁸⁶ Falzon, *Flights of Passion*.

⁶⁸⁷ Falzon, *Flights of Passion*, p. 17.

determine how the destructive material could translate into creative practice and in the process themes began to emerge.⁶⁸⁸ Following a long period of impasse and a consistent accumulation of spent cartridges in a corner of my studio, it was becoming evident that such material had a lot to say and the challenge was to give it the voice it requires.

The controversial campaign leading to the referendum located nature and culture on completely opposite poles and a palpable binary distinction dominated the entire landscape. Malta's tiny population was faced with the prospect of achieving a historic milestone; a possibility to fire another shot at what is deemed by many an unnatural pastime. Thus, a minority matter became in democratic and political terms a matter of majority.

After enough signatures against spring hunting were garnered the date of the national referendum was made public. It was to be held a few days before the spring hunting season would normally open. In Malta, all hunting related issues are deemed controversial and politically charged, thus considered matter of national importance.⁶⁸⁹

The hunting lobby had been facing wide criticism in the past years especially since Malta joined the European Union in 2004, when it had to restrict a number of longstanding privileges enjoyed by hunters. As expected, among them decisions concerning the controversial spring hunting season. Hunters had already manifested their frustration towards such directives, and they publicly confessed their hurt and felt they were being deprived of something that was legally theirs, while also accusing the media of being against them.⁶⁹⁰

There is no denying the fact that hunting is intrinsically part of local culture and this niche practice is not exclusive to Malta. However, hunting practices and methods may vary from one culture to the other. Locally, hunting as sport dates back to the

⁶⁸⁸ A large number of shotgun cartridges were collected from 'open' RTO territory.

⁶⁸⁹ The politicisation of hunting is not exclusive to Malta. See Scruton, *On Hunting*.

⁶⁹⁰ Herman Grech, 'When Only Sparks Fly', *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 12 October 2008 <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20081012/interview/when-only-sparks-fly.228512>> [accessed 28 May 2016]

Knights of Saint John and its popularity has not waned, since their departure from the island in 1798.

The spring hunting referendum revolved around a contentious matter; one that is imbricated in local culture, firmly embedded in politics, and yet impinges on nature. It is a matter concerning the nature of our culture, where both aspects seemed to be in conflict but contemporaneously intertwined. A dichotomous situation, whereby one had to choose an allegiance and the installation inhabited that interstice, precisely where opposite poles meet. Thus, the artwork was far from neutral. The thousands of shotgun cartridges that appropriated the exhibition space were not welcomed by those who would rather keep such destructive matter far away from the public's attention.

The work inhabited an interstice created by two opposing camps and it kept its balance and stability through the tension that dominated both sides.⁶⁹¹ I played to this ambivalent situation by making an installation that could generate and embrace multiple points of view.

On 12 April, a day after the referendum, it was announced that the 'Yes' camp had managed to secure the largest amount of votes by a razor thin margin.⁶⁹² Spring hunting was to be retained. The spring hunting season opened on 14 April but had to be closed a few days before schedule due to numerous law infringements. *Crossfire* was open for viewing from 30 March to 9 April 2015.

The political installation provoked reactions to a highly controversial 'matter' for Malta. The historic referendum was made possible due to the thousands of signatures garnered by those who opposed hunting; it was met with strong opposition and counter-arguments. *Crossfire* transgressed contested territory and refused to acknowledge boundaries; it elevated discarded matter to matter of cultural

⁶⁹¹ 'Indeed, everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate'. Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 39.

⁶⁹² Steve Mallia, 'Yes Wins Referendum by 2,220 votes – Gozo Key to Hunter's Victory', *The Sunday Times of Malta*, 12 April 2015. <<http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20150412/local/yes-wins-referendum-by-2220-votes-gozo-key-to-hunters-victory.563629>> [accessed 28 May 2016], (para 1 of 19).

and political significance. The installation exposed the power of connected objects. The following chapter reviews *Natura Colta*, a sculptural work encompassing objects collected from each place mapped.

9. *Natura Colta*

This chapter discusses *Natura Colta*, a work which brings together an eclectic collection of objects. *Natura Colta* evokes the cabinet of curiosities, considered the precursor of the museum it was mainly the pride of many a wealthy collector starting from the Renaissance. From the practice the chapter then moves on to discuss how cabinets of curiosities became implicated in the institutionalised entity of the museum. This is followed by a discussion about power, control and access in museums along with a number of other interrelated aspects.

9.1 Open the Collection

Collecting constitutes an essential part of my practice-led research. My humble collection of organic and man-made discards is like an unorganised library of place stories. Furthermore, stories continue to unfold through the artwork evoking a sense of place based on facts and speculation.

Objects are our ballast. They help to keep us grounded. They make us feel secure in our own histories. They are chosen by intuition and curated and ordered in ways that answer only to our own wandering logic.⁶⁹³

Natura Colta connects place-stories. It is like a wandering book, rhizomatic with no beginning or end. This part of the chapter argues that the practice of collecting discarded matter can advance our understanding of place and allow for a discovery of ‘other’ places. The discussion addresses primary research questions: What can matter tell us about place?; How can objects evoke a sense of place?

The choice of objects in the collection can be considered unsystematic. No specific criteria have been applied other than the fact that all places had to be represented.⁶⁹⁴

⁶⁹³ Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, *Wunderkammer*, ed. by Octavia Giovannini-Torelli (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), p. 10.

⁶⁹⁴ *Natura Colta* is made up of objects retrieved from Mgarr, Wardija, Mtahleb, Dingli Cliffs, Baħrija and Qlejgha Valley.

The following section examines the development of *Natura Colta* and the manner in which it brings together commonplace objects into its fold.

9.1.1 Collecting/Placing

In Chapter 2 I have mentioned how during my fieldwork I collected all sorts of objects which I relocated into my studio. While a number of objects became artworks other remained part of the general collection; chaotic and dispersed. The aim of *Natura Colta* is to condense the chaos without restricting it too much; to bring together all the objects in an orderly chaotic manner.⁶⁹⁵ The outer structure of the artwork is modeled after the cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer*. Like the earlier cabinets (e.g. Ulisse Aldrovandi's cabinet) it does not distinguish between natural and cultural objects.⁶⁹⁶ The space inside is segmented into smaller compartments each brimming with matter; however, the inside should be regarded as a unified space. Deleuze presents a fascinating perspective on matter and its intricacies and complexities.

Matter thus offers an infinitely porous, spongy, or cavernous texture without emptiness, caverns endlessly contained in other caverns: no matter how small, each body contains a world pierced with irregular passages, surrounded and penetrated by an increasingly vaporous fluid, the totality of the universe resembling a 'pond of matter in which there exist different flows and waves'.⁶⁹⁷

The cabinet keeps matter relatively in place.⁶⁹⁸ It has a front door made from wire mesh through which we can glimpse. It connects inside and outside and is much less restrictive than glass.⁶⁹⁹ The antique finish reminiscent of cabinets of wonder reminds us that the arrangement is non-taxonomic in contrast with museum displays. Like the spent cartridges in *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture*,

⁶⁹⁵ See Chapter 2 Section 2.5

⁶⁹⁶ Ulisse Aldrovandi (1522-1605) was an academic at the University of Bologna and he collected and researched natural and cultural objects. Anthony Alan Shelton, 'Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World', in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), pp. 177-203 (p. 185, 182).

⁶⁹⁷ Deleuze, *The Fold*, p. 5.

⁶⁹⁸ Sectioning is random and does not imply categorisation. I am continuously moving the objects when newer ones are added to the collection.

⁶⁹⁹ I have decided to use wire mesh after seeing old book shelves at the National Library of Malta having similar front doors. Books seemed neither inside nor outside and they could be easily touched.

objects appear to gain strength from their counterparts; they resonate when placed alongside one another - part of a collection.

Objects have been randomly arranged irrespective of their aesthetic and material qualities.⁷⁰⁰ (Figure 93) The only constraint was the size of the objects since they had to fit inside the cabinet. The collection acquires knowledge about place through detritus; ‘there is much to learn by listening in to the quieter, subversive voices rising out of that “unacceptable residue” lying in culture’s shadow’.⁷⁰¹

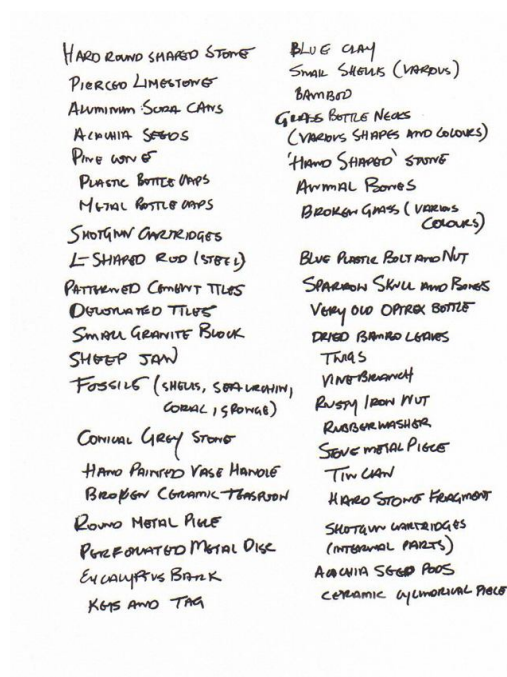


Figure 93 *Natura Colta* list of objects.⁷⁰²

The next section explores the characteristics of specific objects (souvenirs) and elucidates how places can be explored through them. The objects piece together fragments of place; by looking harder at them we can decode stories that make them so ‘extra-ordinary’ and unique in their simplicity.

⁷⁰⁰ A number of items have been placed in glass bottles (e.g. snail shells, clay).

⁷⁰¹ John Elsner and Roger Cardinal, ‘Introduction’, in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), pp. 1-6 (p. 5).

⁷⁰² This is not a complete list because due to the large number of items only the more significant ones have been included.

9.1.2 Souvenirs of Place

Natura Colta is one of the later sculptural works that I have made; it is a unifying artwork and it can be perceived as a window onto place. For Benjamin, every book in his collection filled him with thoughts - images and memories of places.⁷⁰³ Similarly, I consider my collection of items as a re-collection of places.⁷⁰⁴ Schor maintains that for Benjamin books were more like souvenirs since they carried a palpable nostalgia for the cities from which they had been acquired.⁷⁰⁵ Schor tells us of Susan Stewart's distinction between the souvenir and the collection. The souvenir is imbued with a context of origin and longing; it authenticates a past or remote experience rather a need or use value.⁷⁰⁶ In the context of this work, objects can be considered souvenirs; they also appear to provide insights into the dynamics of place.

MacCannell maintains that collections bring together different examples of a type of object.⁷⁰⁷ *Natura Colta* does not do that; it is unified in diversity and thus can be considered a hybrid collection of souvenirs.⁷⁰⁸ A number of items had a utilitarian value until they were thrown away (e.g. ceramic teaspoon, perforated metal disk).⁷⁰⁹ For Baudrillard 'the object pure and simple, divested of its function, abstracted from any practical context, takes on a strictly subjective status. Now its destiny is to be collected'.⁷¹⁰ In the context of *Natura Colta*, to be 'collected' is to become part of an assemblage; to acquire 'thing-power' as shall be explained in the following section.⁷¹¹

⁷⁰³ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 67.

⁷⁰⁴ While to me the items in the collection recall memories of place the same cannot be said for the viewers.

⁷⁰⁵ Naomi Schor, 'Collecting Paris', in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), pp. 252-274 (p. 255).

⁷⁰⁶ A collection is composed of objects taken out of their original context and reconfigured into the self-contained context of the collection itself (Schor 2004: 256). Schor, *Collecting Paris*, p. 256, 255.

⁷⁰⁷ Schor, *Collecting Paris*, p. 256.

⁷⁰⁸ While *Natura Colta* decontextualises objects it does not bring together variations of the same type of object. Unlike the collections of bark scrolls, shotgun cartridges, soil and water samples it acquires all kinds of things.

⁷⁰⁹ As discussed in Chapter 8 a vital materiality continues its activities even when discarded. Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 16.

⁷¹⁰ Baudrillard, *The System of Collecting*, p. 8.

⁷¹¹ The objects' main function as part of the collection is to provide insight into place.

9.2 Collect/Thing

Bennett distinguishes between object and thing and tells us that for Spinoza each thing strives to persevere in its own being.⁷¹² Bennett describes her own encounter with a pile of debris that had accumulated in the grate over the storm drain - ‘stuff exhibited its thing-power: it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying’.⁷¹³

This window onto an eccentric out-side was made possible by the fortuity of that particular assemblage, but also by a certain anticipatory readiness on my in-side, by a perceptual style open to the appearance of thing-power.⁷¹⁴

The argument that is being advanced here is that when we stop and look hard at commonplace objects they appear to acquire ‘thing-power’. It can be argued that collecting is a form of enhancing the ‘thingliness’ of objects; unleashing ‘an energetic vitality inside each of these things [...] generally conceived as inert’.⁷¹⁵

‘Position is the gateway to movement’ Manning and Massumi argue.⁷¹⁶ The fluid positioning of things in the cabinet conceives rhizomatic movement and lines of deterritorialisation. Place-stories are joined in things. In Deleuze and Guattari’s words they ‘[c]onjugate deterritorialized flows’.⁷¹⁷

Things incorporate human contexts besides having their own vibrancy; an immanent corporeality.⁷¹⁸ Multicoloured plastic bottle caps, crushed soda cans, fragments of cement tiles, iron bits and broken bottles; things that tell us of human (dis-) engagement with the environment.

⁷¹² Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 2.

⁷¹³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 4.

⁷¹⁴ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 5.

⁷¹⁵ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 5.

⁷¹⁶ Manning and Massumi, *Thought in the Act*, p. 35.

⁷¹⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 12.

⁷¹⁸ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.



Figure 94 *Natura Colta*. Wood, wire mesh, copper hinges, various matter. 44cm W × 60cm H × 12cm D.

Similarly, shotgun cartridges, iron rods, a broken stove burner, and a rusty perforated metal disc appear to point to other possible contexts.⁷¹⁹ However, we can only speculate and conjecture about possible backgrounds. (Figure 94) Matter makes reading place possible but it does not necessarily indicate which place(s). Moreover, matter and place are not static. According to De Landa, even inorganic matter has the ability to self-organise.⁷²⁰ De Landa argues that for Deleuze and Guattari all structures are matter-energy in flux which they have termed machinic phylum.⁷²¹ The phylum can be defined as matter in motion and in continuous variation De Landa maintains, and this behaviour can be described in terms of metallurgy as indicated by Deleuze and Guattari.⁷²²

In short, what metal and metallurgy bring to light is a life power to matter, a vital state of matter as such, a material vitalism that doubtless exists everywhere but is ordinarily hidden or covered, rendered unrecognizable, dissociated by the hylomorphic model.⁷²³

Natura Colta creates a space for matter-energy to evolve and consolidate; matter appears to adhere through movement and dislocation. (Figure 95) For example,

⁷¹⁹ Steel rods are used in trapping as loops for stretching the net and holding other paraphernalia in place. See also Chapters 7 and 8.

⁷²⁰ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 6.

⁷²¹ Paper by Manuel De Landa presented at the ‘Doors of Perception 3’ conference, Netherlands Design Institute, Amsterdam, 7-11 November 1995. De Landa, *Uniformity and Variability: An Essay in the Philosophy of Matter*, para 13.

⁷²² De Landa, *Uniformity and Variability: An Essay in the Philosophy of Matter*, para 14.

⁷²³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 454.

construction debris (broken tiles, stone, granite, iron pieces and broken ceramics), hinting at illegal dumping, appeared as a crack or defect in the environment. In the cabinet, alongside other things, these became a matter of flows and connections. It was no longer matter out of place.⁷²⁴ De Landa tells us how in metal, the more fluid and movable the dislocations (component crystals) the tougher the material is.⁷²⁵

Another intriguing find comes in the form of a sheep jaw; teeth still intact. This evidences the presence of livestock, and thus it describes a particular type of engagement.⁷²⁶ The jaw prompted me to search further, and a few meters away I could see more bones. I picked them up and on my way I noticed a rusty tin can. If it were not for the bones I would probably have missed the tin can. Who knows how many more things I have missed?



Figure 95 *Natura Colta* (Detail 1). Animal bones, round elongated stone, hand shaped stone.

For Heidegger the thing ‘is that around which the properties have gathered’.⁷²⁷ These properties tell us of culture, nature, matter and place among other aspects. Bottle caps, pieces of tile, shotgun cartridges and a sheep jaw acquire ‘thing-power’

⁷²⁴ Matter out of place has been discussed in relation to the environment and *Crossfire*. See Chapters 5 and 8.

⁷²⁵ De Landa, *Uniformity and Variability: An Essay in the Philosophy of Matter*, para 10.

⁷²⁶ A few months later while doing fieldwork in the same place I encountered a friendly flock of sheep trailing behind an elderly shepherd. He spoke fondly of his sheep and he called a few of them by name, however, they were too timid and shy to move too close to a stranger like myself. See Section 7.2.

⁷²⁷ Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 5.

when they join forces; together they piece a puzzle. (Figure 96) Such things tell us of the more transitory properties of place. They can also reveal specific environmental characteristics that can further advance our understanding of place.

Lead comes out of cartridges, breaks down into tiny particles and settles on the soil. Matter deposited in garigues and uncultivated ground seeps through the rocks and soil, it reaches the sea and the water table. Vibrant matter is in a continuous state of flux and its vitality cannot be discarded nor discounted.



Figure 96 *Natura Colta* (Detail 2). Keys and tag, small granite block, patterned cement tiles, hand decorated ceramic piece, ceramic tea spoon, cylindrical ceramic fragment, mosaic tile pieces, tin can, bamboo, glass bottle neck, shotgun cartridge internal parts.



Figure 97 *Natura Colta* (Detail 3). Blue clay; dried bamboo leaves, acachia seed pods (in glass bottles), old Optrex bottle, snail shells, broken bottle necks.



Figure 98 *Natura Colta* (Detail 4). *Acachia* seeds, twigs, sparrow skull and bones (centre); vine branch, broken glass, metal piece (left); aluminium soda can (right).

While certain objects appear to be synonymous with specific places other finds are ubiquitous wherever you go in the local countryside. However, at close inspection, particular details can give away further information about place. (Figures 97 and 98) The bedrock is made up of dead marine organisms and this can be evidenced in the abundance of fossils, especially in places close to the sea where the soft limestone is constantly being eroded.

Snail shells were found in all places; however, certain forms may belong to particular places. The round shell is the more common and ubiquitous type while truncated and cylindrical types appear to be more bound to wetter places. Other varieties may be indicative of an abundance of calcium (thicker shell). Similarly, bark, twigs, leaves and seeds also point to the nature of the place, its function, its geographic specificities, and cultural presence. While certain species of trees may be linked to specific terrains and geographical locations, others can be indicative of farming, hunting, appropriation and colonisation (see Chapter 6).

9.3 Beyond the Collection

Natura Colta can be considered an interplay of hiding and revealing; a site where ‘[i]nterpenetrating narratives jostle to create meanings’.⁷²⁸ My practice of collecting, analysing, documenting and interpreting commonplace matter shares parallels with archaeology. Like archaeology, it is about basic and mundane things; unearthing and recovering traces of things and processes which are not given much notice.⁷²⁹

Archaeology is heterogeneous and includes ‘practices like collecting, walking and intervening in the land’.⁷³⁰

The collection can be likened to a map - it is open and connectable, detachable, it can be reworked, it has multiple entryways and is comprised of performative aspects.⁷³¹ What appear as unrelated things are ‘placed’ in a random manner; they speak with each other and with the viewer. In this smooth and rhizomatic space a new kind of discourse may take ‘place’, generating further possibilities for meaning making. Different components interact and will tend to display similar collective behaviour if the interactions are non-linear.⁷³² *Natura Colta* is never complete; it does not reach a closure. It is always disposed to acquire more.

Rather doubtful, Bennett maintains that ‘[p]erhaps the very idea of thing-power or vibrant matter claims too much: to know more than it is possible to know’.⁷³³ *Natura Colta* creates a space for speculation and hypothetical conjecturing. It complicates matter. The fluid non-taxonomic approach does not restrict possibilities; it generates deterritorialisations.

‘Collecting is the desire of the Museum’ and this is hardly surprising considering the strong link with cabinets of wonder.⁷³⁴ The following part of the chapter discusses

⁷²⁸ Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 23.

⁷²⁹ Mark Dion and David Walker Barker (see Chapter 4) often incorporate archaeological finds in their practice. Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 10.

⁷³⁰ Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, p. 50.

⁷³¹ *Natura Colta* reflects the mapping process. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 13-14.

⁷³² De Landa, *Uniformity and Variability: An Essay in the Philosophy of Matter*, para 11.

⁷³³ Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. 13.

⁷³⁴ John Elsner, ‘A Collector’s Model of Desire: The House and Museum of Sir John Soane’, in *Cultures of Collecting*, ed. by John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2004), pp. 155-176 (p. 155).

the cabinet of curiosities and how it became systematically transformed to fit the institutionalised space of the museum.

9.3.1 The Cabinet of Curiosities

The habit of accumulating objects that stimulate the imagination can be traced back to the cabinet of curiosities or *Wunderkammer*, appearing in Europe in the sixteenth century.⁷³⁵ The cabinet of curiosities was the early ancestor of the modern museum. At the time, the lack of information about apparent curious objects helped in no small way to fuel speculation and conjecture. This in turn imbued the objects with a certain aura of mystery and a palpable urge among collectors to insatiate the curiosity that ensued. The cabinet represented an accumulation of material and cultural capital, thus, power and status.

The precious collections accumulated and treasured by well-off individuals and collectors of the highest order, were often kept safely in tailor-made cabinets and arranged in non-taxonomic fashion according to the owners' whim. Very often, the owners of such curious cabinets possessed a keen interest in natural history. Ferrante Imperato, an apothecary of Naples, was one of the earliest known collectors of rare and precious objects, going back to the sixteenth century. He owned a fine *Wunderkammer* consisting of a wide range of specimens including minerals, gems, fossils, birds and plants. As Putnam observes, '[t]he collections were usually displayed in multi-compartmented cabinets and vitrines and arranged in such a way as to inspire wonder and stimulate creative thought'.⁷³⁶ However, the *Wunderkammer* was only to be enjoyed by a selected few, and this kind of exclusivity and elitism that impeded public access can be traced in the development of early museums.

⁷³⁵ Putnam, *Art and Artifact. The Museum as Medium*, London.

⁷³⁶ Putnam, *Art and Artifact. The Museum as Medium*, London, p. 10.

Bennett maintains that earlier collections fulfilled a variety of functions among them the dissemination of knowledge and the display of aristocratic power.⁷³⁷ Here we can already notice that the *Wunderkammer* and the earliest existing museums were politically charged and reflected the social status of their owners and selected audiences. Two ubiquitous principles shared by *cabinets des curieux* and early museums have been identified by Bennett as that of ‘private ownership’ and that of ‘restricted access’ – reserved territories owned by the few for the few. Cabinets of wonder did not become extinct with the birth of museums.⁷³⁸ The cabinet of curiosities lives on; it has re-invented itself but still retains its essential imaginative characteristics.

The *Wunderkammer* was revisited by a group of architects at the 13th International Architecture Biennale in Venice in 2012. (Figure 99) The project consisted of thirty-five contemporary custom-made cabinets of curiosities. Thirty-five different architects from around the world were invited ‘to fill a box with objects that inspire them’.⁷³⁹ The exhibition was held inside the Casa Scaffali at the Arsenale grounds, inside a small shed that ‘had for years been used to house seeds and gardening equipment on the shelves lining its interior’.⁷⁴⁰

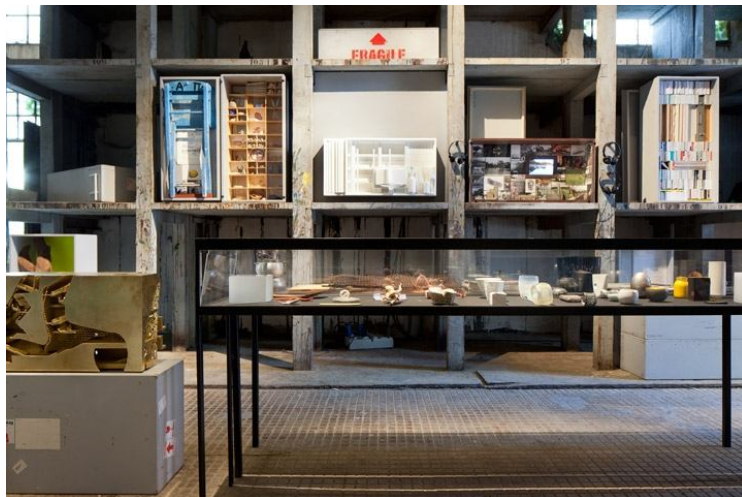


Figure 99 *Wunderkammer* exhibition (2012)

⁷³⁷ Tony Bennett, ‘The Exhibitionary Complex’, in *Culture/Power/History. A Reader in Contemporary Social Theory*, ed. by Nicholas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley, and Sherry B. Ortner (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 123-154 (p. 137).

⁷³⁸ Bennett, *The Exhibitionary Complex*.

⁷³⁹ Williams and Tsien, *Wunderkammer*, p. 16.

⁷⁴⁰ Casa Scaffali translates as ‘house of shelves’. Williams and Tsien, *Wunderkammer*, p. 18.

The shed was turned into a large cabinet of curiosities. I particularly welcomed Taryn Christoff/Martin Finio's *Boxed Woods*, Brad Cloepfil's *Sticks and Stones*, Stephen Inio's *Distracted*, and Thomas Mayne's *The Importance of Dialogue: Seven Public Spaces*. However, I would like to consider Brad Cloepfil's *Sticks and Stones*, since it seems to resonate more with my own work. (Figure 100)

Our inspiration for this project is rooted in the land, the innate qualities of the material, and, equally, in the possibilities of making, memory, and infinite space.⁷⁴¹



Figure 100. Brad Cloepfil, *Sticks and Stones*.

The cabinet consists of acrylic mirror, sticks turned on a lathe, rocks and minerals, petrified wood, and obsidian. Cloepfil states that the materials included in the cabinet derive from Oregon, his home, and he describes them as records of change.⁷⁴² Further layers of 'text' were added to the sticks in the form of grooves. This type of groove shares parallels with the grooves in *Pear Pressure* and *De-Scroll*. The nature of the material, how it is enclosed, the mirror, and the reference to place, can be traced in my own work. Having reviewed the cabinet of curiosities the next section discusses the movement of the cabinet to the museum.

⁷⁴¹ Williams and Tsien, *Wunderkammer*, p. 108.

⁷⁴² Williams and Tsien, *Wunderkammer*, p. 108.

9.3.2 Locating the Cabinet in the Museum - Power/Control/Access

In order to understand how the cabinet of curiosities became implicated in the museum we must first take a look at the embryonic stages of this historic process. Hooper-Greenhill maintains that public museums are essentially products of the enlightenment, and their birth coincides with the Modern period when the knowledge that emerged in earlier times was being corroborated by reason and rationality.⁷⁴³ When the *Wunderkammer* entered the institutional milieu of the museum, whimsical and fanciful arrangements started to be controlled and suppressed by rigid scientific classifications based on empirical knowledge.

Private collections and cabinets of curiosities were already being classified and catalogued in the seventeenth century.⁷⁴⁴ Thus, the organisation of knowledge according to particular taxonomic models had already started prior to the cabinet's move into the public realm. When private collectors started to donate their collections to various entities, to the cities, cataloguing gradually increased.⁷⁴⁵ Collectors, at times, catalogued their own collections or arranged for them to be catalogued upon being bequeathed to the city.⁷⁴⁶ Transfer of rich private collections to the public gallery became 'an expression of the worthiness of an individual life'.⁷⁴⁷ Private individuals projected their wealth and knowledge through public exhibition.⁷⁴⁸

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries pre-existing museum models arranged in the form of privately owned cabinets developed into open public museums.⁷⁴⁹

Museums were established to show 'those things which could be observed,

⁷⁴³ Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, 'Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 6.1, (2000), 9-31.

⁷⁴⁴ Maria Zytaruk, 'Cabinets of Curiosities and the Organization of Knowledge', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 80.1, (2011), 1-23 (p. 14).

⁷⁴⁵ Shelton, *Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World*, p. 186.

⁷⁴⁶ Shelton, *Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World*, p. 186.

⁷⁴⁷ Shelton, *Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World*, p. 187.

⁷⁴⁸ Shelton, *Cabinets of Transgression: Renaissance Collections and the Incorporation of the New World*, p. 187.

⁷⁴⁹ Hooper-Greenhill, *Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning*, p. 14.

measured, classified, named, and which presented a universally valid and reliable picture of the world'.⁷⁵⁰ In short '[t]he museum was a place of inculcation' maintained by the high for the uncouth who needed to know and to learn.⁷⁵¹

In Malta, museology can be traced back to the first half of the seventeenth century, and most probably private collections were based on the cabinet of curiosities thriving in Italy.⁷⁵² The practice of donating private collections to the state, like for example the National Library, was quite common.⁷⁵³ Typically, such collections comprised of ancient artefacts, statues, coins, fossils, taxidermy specimens, bones, and glass vessels. A number of museums in Malta benefitted from the generous bequests of private collectors and the Order of the Knights of St John.

A very important development, in Malta, took place in the first half of the nineteenth century, when 'the study of antiquities ceased to be an exclusive hobby of aristocrats'.⁷⁵⁴ British archaeologists, artists, military officers and researchers were becoming more interested in Maltese prehistoric remains and were also granted permission to excavate sites.⁷⁵⁵ The first national museum in Malta opened in 1905, and the wide interest shown in this museum 'was proved by a constant flow of donations'.⁷⁵⁶ Gradually, a number of museums specialised in different sectors were established.

Over time, in various parts of the world, significant private collections were transferred into public ownership and were administered by the state for the supposed benefit of the general public.⁷⁵⁷ Besides its main function as both a national and a universal archive the modern museum of the nineteenth century became a repository of power/knowledge, and it was tasked with the dissemination of information related to a wide range of disciplines (art, natural history, geology,

⁷⁵⁰ Hooper-Greenhill, *Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning*, p. 13.

⁷⁵¹ Stephen E. Weil, 'The Museum and the Public', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 16.3, (1997), 257-271 (p. 257).

⁷⁵² Kenneth Gambin, *One Hundred Years of Heritage, 1903-2003* (Sta Venera: Midsea Books Ltd., 2003), p. 9.

⁷⁵³ Gambin, *One Hundred Years of Heritage, 1903-2003*, p. 11.

⁷⁵⁴ Gambin, *One Hundred Years of Heritage, 1903-2003*, p. 13.

⁷⁵⁵ Gambin, *One Hundred Years of Heritage, 1903-2003*, p. 14.

⁷⁵⁶ Gambin, *One Hundred Years of Heritage, 1903-2003*, p. 20.

⁷⁵⁷ Bennett, *The Exhibitionary Complex*, p. 137.

archaeology, ethnography) with the aim of converting ‘raw humanity to civil society’.⁷⁵⁸ The role of the public was important since they were witnesses to an exhibition of power by the state, and to augment the effect and to monumentalise such authority museums were typically located at the centre of cities.⁷⁵⁹ Museums relayed information according to prescribed classifications and taxonomical indexes and this indicates that museums served as an apparatus of control and hegemony.⁷⁶⁰ Bennett considers early museum designs as spaces intended as civilising agencies besides their function as organs of public instruction.⁷⁶¹ Thus, in Deleuze and Guattari’s terms the museum engendered a striated space.

McPherson maintains that though museums now tend to be more open in their layouts, many still display artefacts in glass cases, thus out of the viewers’ control while instructing their audiences not to touch the objects.⁷⁶² Collections are available but often inaccessible. The relationship viewers have with museum objects is anything but straightforward, it is complex, rhizomatic, open and multilayered because ‘[t]he subjective response to museum objects and the material qualities and cultural significance of the objects are intertwined’.⁷⁶³

André Malraux in his famous essay (1947) on the *museé imaginaire* explored the idea of an open museum. Hetherington writes that for Malraux an appropriate response for the museum in a modernist culture, long criticised for its re-appropriation of history for political ends and for the removal of artefacts from their authentic context, would be the photographic book.⁷⁶⁴ Hetherington argues that the

⁷⁵⁸ Hooper-Greenhill argues that the modern museum was divided into a private and public space. Private spaces were reserved for the gathering of knowledge and were separate from public spaces for knowledge consumption. Scholarly research was carried out in the private spaces and the public spaces were available to the mass of the general public. Hooper-Greenhill, *Changing Values in the Art Museum: Rethinking Communication and Learning*, p. 14.

⁷⁵⁹ Bennett, *The Exhibitionary Complex*.

⁷⁶⁰ Lefebvre argues that ‘cataloguing, classifying, decoding – none of these procedures gets beyond mere description’. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 162.

⁷⁶¹ Bennett, *The Exhibitionary Complex*.

⁷⁶² ‘Museums are no longer simply exhibition spaces’; rather they have become sites where people participate and interpret rather than just receive ready-made information. Gayle McPherson, ‘Public Memories and Private Tastes: The Shifting Definitions of Museums and their Visitors in the UK’, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 21.1, (2006), 44-57 (p. 45, 47).

⁷⁶³ Lynn Froggett and Myna Trustram, ‘Object Relations in the Museum: A Psychosocial Perspective’, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 29.5, (2014), 482-497 (p. 483).

⁷⁶⁴ Malraux was in favour of museums as he thought that audiences could learn from the objects and artworks in the museum and they could see them in new ways which could be followed by new

museum without walls in the form of a photographic book extended the effect of the museum to broader collections and a wider audience, providing less controls and more accessibility in an apparent democratic fashion.⁷⁶⁵ The museum without walls collapses the spatial boundaries enclosing museum objects, however, it increases the distance between viewer and object.

Museum cabinets restrict physical and cultural access to objects; glass panels prohibit touch and imbue objects with a certain aura. However, ‘museums are not monolithic, static institutions’.⁷⁶⁶ Museums are spatial and temporal; they allow a certain degree of movement, they accumulate time, and Foucault considers them heterotopias.⁷⁶⁷ ‘Museums have never stilled or settled’ according to Grewcock.⁷⁶⁸ Museums depend on people’s engagement. Their narratives unravel in counterpoint with the new information that is continually being introduced by the viewers; themselves part of the plot, notwithstanding the overt and the veiled control mechanisms.

Many museums nowadays are acknowledging this and are reconfiguring the setup so as ‘to create physical and intellectual space for more than one interpretation scheme’.⁷⁶⁹ Two other important aspects related to museums are the formation of cultural identities and the (re-) collection of memories. Worts and Pearce maintain that museum objects function as symbols of identity, relationship, social group and society, among others.⁷⁷⁰ Many people visit museums to learn about their past and present, to discover the historical and artistic legacy of their nation, to connect with their ancestral roots and to understand who they are and where they come from. This, in turn, transforms museums into even more powerful systems of power/knowledge; they are located in a privileged position from which they can ‘re-write’ the past, and at times ‘re-writing’ entails the omission of ‘text’.

developments Kevin Hetherington, ‘Museum’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 23.2-3, (2006), 597-603 (p. 598).

⁷⁶⁵ Hetherington, *Museum*.

⁷⁶⁶ Duncan Grewcock, *Doing Museology Differently* (London: Routledge Ltd., 2013), p. 5.

⁷⁶⁷ See Section 5.2.2.

⁷⁶⁸ Grewcock, *Doing Museology Differently*, p. 5.

⁷⁶⁹ Mark Carnall, Jack Ashby and Claire Ross, ‘Natural History Museums as Provocateurs for Dialogue and Debate’, *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 28.1, (2013), 55-71 (p. 56).

⁷⁷⁰ Yi-Fu Tuan maintains that ‘the passion for preservation arises out of the need for tangible objects that can support a sense of identity.’ Tuan, *Space and Place*, p. 197.; Froggett and Trustram, *Object Relations in the Museum: A Psychosocial Perspective*, p. 483.

Natura Colta brings together unrelated objects, placed randomly in compartments that do not reflect taxonomic models of classification. We can consider objects as entry points into place; we can read place through the objects. Relationships with objects and among objects are (re-) made with every reading. The cabinet resembles a book, it makes reading possible.

We can argue that collecting facilitates reading; it generates flows and connections between objects. We stop in front of display cases to decipher objects. It could be a stone or any other commonplace object, yet the collection has this ability to make the ordinary special. Collecting is mapping; it puts objects on the 'map'.

The present chapter discussed *Natura Colta* and reviewed a selection of literature concerning the cabinet of curiosities and the origins of museums. What follows is a concluding chapter that will present an analysis and discussion based on the outcomes of this practice-led research.

10. Conclusions

The concluding chapter includes considerations and reflections on my practice-led research. Rather than bringing the research to a closure this chapter is aimed to summarise the development of the research, comment on the findings, include more speculative possibilities, and map further deterritorialisations.

10.1 Re-Telling / Re-Making

I am interested in exploring found matter and its ability to tell about place. Within this research it was discussed how walking and collecting find an intersection in matter. The objectives were to explore how (re-) deterritorialised matter could allow for a creative reading of place. The research questions considered ‘What can matter tell us about place?’ The exploration of matter, collected from different places, provided insights into hidden/visible ‘text’; social and cultural practices; histories, appropriations, temporality, and the state of selected Maltese places. The thesis argued that matter becomes most revealing when it is identified, collected, explored and manipulated. The exploration of matter gave rise to a number of strands of inquiry concerning territory, textuality, and temporality.

As I reflected on my practice it became evident that deterritorialisation was contributing to further layers of reading. If the bark had not been manipulated and given a scroll form, it would not have worked the way it did (see Chapter 6). Artistic practice gave shape to different readings. Stones collected from RTO territory spoke of boundaries when encased, and similarly stories emerged from messages inscribed on prickly pears when these were photographed and placed on walls.

Movement releases the potential of matter, and this called for another main research question: How does (re-) deterritorialised matter contribute to further our understanding of place? Matter in motion complicates grounded notions; it disrupts linearity and provokes differentiated readings. The bark accumulating at the base of the tree was muted; it had a lot of potential but appeared voiceless. In the form of

scrolls, inside the library, it spoke about place and people's stories; it conversed with the books. Similarly, through (re-) deterritorialisation spent shotgun pellets gained firepower, time flowed from water and soil, stones spoke of boundaries, and stories emerged from scratched graffiti. In order to determine what matter wants to be, and what it wants to communicate, a strong familiarity with place was necessary. Situatedness and 'being there' proved invaluable in the search for possibilities back in the studio. Often, practice occurred following sensitisation and a strong rapport with place, usually a long time after the material had been collected.

One of the main aims of the research project was to investigate place through contemporary fine art practice. Thus, another main research question asked: How can a sense of place be evoked in contemporary fine art practice? It has been argued that matter embodies fragments of place; it is place-specific. The artworks discussed within this thesis incorporate natural and cultural matter, thus such approach has resonance with Casey's notion of 're-implacement'. As I pondered on the practice, it became evident that matter was an indicator of place; it evoked place. However, matter also served as a starting point, and as an indicator of other places, imaginary, and totally unrelated. Such aspects open up the research to further explorations whereby the readings of the viewer could be considered more fully as part of the deep map and this might be an opportunity for further research.

The research asked 'What opportunities for contemporary fine art practice arise from an investigation of place?' My artworks attest to the potential of place as a site for art making. Matter and place-stories provided a fertile ground for art practice and they gave rise to an overlaying of possibilities and readings. The chosen methodology allowed for a plethora of considerations; material/immaterial, natural/cultural, personal/social, past/present, political/environmental, real/imaginary. Here Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome has been particularly useful. The movement of matter from place to practice was constant throughout the research. Artistic practice evolved in parallel with the stories emerging from place. Collected objects were not merely considered as material for art practice but also as access points to understanding the character of place. The object was never disguised. The contribution of 'deep map' approaches combined

with ‘Grounded Theory’ allowed for a constant dialogue between context/matter/practice.

10.2 Further Research Considerations

As discussed in Chapter 2, I have come to consider walking as a form of collecting in its own right; scanning the ground and acquiring information about place.

Walking contextualises matter and imbues it with a ‘louder’ voice. That is different from working with matter which is not one’s own find; for this reason I do not consider matter within this research as ‘ready-made’. It becomes part of a process and it is always in-between, continuously changing. It is what Bennett describes as vibrant matter. Walking, collecting, handling, and making, created possibilities for movement and development. Writing created further movements; it helped the practice to develop on various levels. I contend with Collins borrowing from Derrida, that ‘artwork and discursive texts are both writing’, since writing is anything that generates signification; ‘the play of movements, neither linear nor centred, which gives to signs of all kinds their possibilities’.⁷⁷¹

In Chapter 5, I explored the ‘textuality’ of place. I further understood the significance of prickly pear and bark graffiti when I used them to appropriate a different place, outside Malta. In Leeds, ‘text’ was all over the place, and the gallery became my territory. In Deleuze and Guattari’s words, I put up a placard to denote my territory.⁷⁷² It was my way of making an RTO, and this fuelled further questions as regards territory and appropriation, thus opening up potential paths for deterritorialisation. By considering the places that I have mapped as ‘my own’, I was poetically appropriating these places. Thus, one could argue that reterritorialisation is a form of appropriation. It is similar to walking in ‘open’ RTO sites, connecting points—appropriating and reterritorialising.

⁷⁷¹ Jeff Collins, ‘Derrida’s “Two Paintings in Painting”’: A Note on Art, Discourse and the Trace’, in *Thinking Through Art. Reflections on Art as Research*, ed. by Katy Macleod and Lin Holdridge (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 213-225 (p. 218).

⁷⁷² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, p. 352.

The mapping of place was discussed in Chapter 3. Reflecting on my research I realised that the ‘map’ was continuously being re-made; it was a recurring process of ‘becoming-map’. The viewer makes a map. Viewing is re-making on various levels. The work is re-made every time it is viewed. Maker and viewer are continuously exchanging their roles; they ‘try things out and see what happens’.⁷⁷³ I experienced ‘maker/viewer’ moments continuously throughout this research. Re-making was heightened each and every time I setup my own work in a different context. New meanings continued to emerge when artworks were reconfigured according to specific contexts.

When I installed *Pear Pressure* I became aware of the embodiment it entailed. I had to move continuously; crouch, go up and down the ladder, move back and forth, think, move sideways. I collected the photographs from the ground, stuck them to the walls to make a map, whilst moving continuously, then stopping, and moving back to analyse the wall of prickly pears that was growing inside the new space. Every photograph stuck was a re-telling; a narrative in the (re-)making. The viewer could experience similar movement/making whilst viewing the work, and engaging with it. The work gained more significance when the fleeting messages were no longer in existence in the valley and the only presence of such messages was through these images. The photographic installation became the only form of documentation of such inscriptions and here the significant contribution of the deep map became more evident.

Places, real or imaginary, can be explored with every reading. Thus, each place a heterotopia, a place reveals another place.⁷⁷⁴ This also evokes Massey’s global place (e.g. Malta-Leeds-Malta).⁷⁷⁵ Movement makes/connects; it links a here and a there.⁷⁷⁶ These complexities keep the work open and allow for a re-telling of place. When I showed my work locally and outside Malta viewers could explore such places since there were no boundaries. Such reflections find resonance in the *RTO* series and similarly in *Natura Colta*, works that question and deconstruct boundaries.

⁷⁷³ Ingold, *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, p. 7.

⁷⁷⁴ Foucault, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*.

⁷⁷⁵ Massey, *The Responsibilities of Place*.

⁷⁷⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 141.

The notion of ‘temporality’ was also investigated from an artistic perspective. The familiarity I gained with the places I was mapping allowed for a deeper understanding of temporal fluctuations. Familiar places became strange within a few weeks. Green turned to brown, lake turned to ground. I considered these changes in relation to Bergson’s and Merleau-Ponty’s texts and juxtapositions of time/matter/movement.⁷⁷⁷ The work eventually developed into a fluid response to time’s non-linear nature which became more evident as I moved the glass bottles from one compartment into the other. What initially was documentation of soil and water samples surprisingly turned into a time-based work.

The research made me think what ‘being-there’ might mean for the viewer who has never been to ‘my places’. The estranged viewer cannot recognise ‘my place’; it can only be imagined. How might *Crossfire* evoke the uneasiness of appropriated territory in Malta, in the midst of the hunting season, to anyone who has never been here? Probably, it never will (see Chapter 8). It was both a challenge and a space for rhizomatic movement. The footprint of the installation, and the thousands of used cartridges that appropriated the floor space indicated that the matter involved could not easily be discounted. To view the work one had to move carefully around its perimeter; there was not much room for maneuver. The space was restricted and the ground fluid; one false move could spell the collapse of the work. One had to walk slowly and stealthily. Hunting is a highly controversial and political issue locally, and this tension had to be evoked within the work. The large amount of ‘dangerous’ matter created a certain uneasiness which is also palpable in territories contested by hunters and non-hunters. The ground was ridden with tension; inside and outside. To bring the viewer closer to ‘my places’ a documentary-like film was introduced (see Appendix A). The film consists of archive footage collected during fieldwork, pieced together. It also includes sound to allow for a spatial understanding of place. Each place mapped is represented in the film; thus the viewer is presented with further layers of information to allow for a thorough reading of place.

⁷⁷⁷ Bergson, Matter and Memory; Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.

Deleuze and Guattari's model of the rhizome allowed me to develop an open approach right from the beginning.⁷⁷⁸ My walks were generally unplanned and I drifted along the terrain. Collecting was also eclectic; I collected all kinds of matter as discussed in Chapters 2 and 9. Collecting was not dictated by taxonomic systems; it was relatively random and assorted. The choice of places was also rhizomatic. I walked and I mapped with no particular itinerary in mind. It was not rare to start in one place and end in another; nowhere in Malta is far away.

The rhizome can be detected in the studio practice and the openness of this approach allowed for unpremeditated possibilities to emerge. The spring hunting referendum was never on the list, however, as soon as it was announced I realised that I had to act fast. I made an artwork from used shotgun cartridges that had already been accumulating in my studio, which responded to this national event (see Chapter 8).

I have appropriated differentiated strategies that might evoke a sense of place within a contemporary Fine Art context. These strategies intersect and develop through walking/collecting; matter/movement; matter/making; movement/making. Casey's texts created the main context for these strategies.⁷⁷⁹

The work has resonance both for a Maltese and non-Maltese audience. It complicates notions of place and identity. Fragments of place-stories within the work can be appropriated by anyone, and the viewers can create their own contexts from such stories. Reading and imagining intersect within the work.

10.3 Contribution of *Reading Place: Exploring Deterritorialised Island Matter*

In this section I would like to interrogate where the originality of this research project lies. It comprises a constellation of disciplines each contributing in specific ways to the research project. *Reading Place* is concerned with an original artistic

⁷⁷⁸ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*.

⁷⁷⁹ Casey, *Representing Place. Landscape Painting and Maps; Casey Earth-Mapping. Artists reshaping Landscape*.

investigation of selected Maltese places through (re-) deterritorialised matter and this originality is evident in all aspects of the thesis. A number of original contributions emerge from the research relating to various aspects including methodology, Fine Art, context and documentation.

The research presents a bricolage methodology since it borrows from various fields outside those generally considered the realms of Fine Art. In particular it combines and juxtaposes methods pertaining to social sciences, most notably Grounded Theory, which can be discerned from the manner in which matter and context emerge from the ground. The constant dialogue between matter and context finds resonance in Grounded Theory particularly in the way it heightens sensitivity to ‘stories’ discovered on the ground. Grounded Theory gives me the facts. Such approach was combined with deep mapping, which allowed for a more poetic/political intertwining and a visually driven narrative comprised of art objects which include sculptures, installations, photographs and film. The scientific aspects of Grounded Theory have been combined with the openness of the deep map to create ambiguous contexts and opportunities for further explorations.

The originality of this methodology lies in the intertwining of the real with the semblance and in the manner it makes factuality more significant by locating it in uncertain territory. Furthermore, methods loosely derived from other disciplines have been juxtaposed with the methods mentioned before. The fluidity of this novel methodology allows for the artist, social scientist, archaeologist and geographer to be performed contemporaneously. The eclectic methodology creates a strong and seamless amalgam of practical and theoretical aspects. It exposed matter(s) in various forms and created an appropriate context whereby artistic investigation could thrive and move in different directions.

The key concerns in my work have not been interrogated in such ways before. Hunting and appropriation have not been foregrounded in quite such an intense way as in my own art practice. Although I am aware that other artists (see Chapter 4), outside Malta, have considered related or similar themes, my own work interrogates such aspects from a totally diverse approach to practice. Furthermore, with regards

to the local context, *Crossfire* and the *RTO* series have been the only artworks ever to explore notions of hunting and boundaries respectively.

The places mapped have never been subjected to artistic research so I thought I would give them a chance. The research delves into unknown territory since it considers places which have never been explored in such ways before. The novel methodology combined with the exploration of territory never considered for artistic research creates unique contexts for knowing and making. The methodology presented here can be applied to other places outside Malta and by other artists working in different settings.

The research also reveals original approaches in terms of context by considering alternative spaces for setting up art installations, for example the National Library of Malta. The prestigious National Library built by the Order of the Knights of St John is a unique place where antique manuscripts dating back hundreds of years are kept and preserved. It is the first time ever that a contemporary art installation has been set up inside the historic bibliotheca and this has opened up opportunities for further artistic considerations. *De-Scroll* created a bridge between past and present by juxtaposing the historic collection with contemporary fine art practice. The significance of this concerns the ongoing dialogue that artistic practice is set to generate, and the aim of such alternative contexts contributed to the opening up of new ways of reading and interpretation. When the same work was shown in different contexts its meaning and interpretation changed and this could be considered in relation to the deep map which is never closed but always disposed to be reconfigured.

The research's original contribution is also evident in the way matter is set to explore aspects of place. Matter interrogates about facts emerging through Grounded Theory approaches. It is never disguised rather its characteristics preserved. It allows for place issues to be interrogated and take shape and thus it also serves as a critical voice. Grounded issues find their way into practice through moving matter in its diverse forms. The juxtaposition of different forms of art from photographs to sculptures, installations, sound and film, all feeding into the same deep map separately and collectively, combined with an extensive theoretical framework,

contribute to the originality of this thesis. The research project deepens the notion of mapping and provides for a thorough analysis and understanding of quasi imperceptible grounded issues.

In more general terms the research develops and builds on existing methodologies by appropriating strategies from other disciplines and applying them to methods already familiar to Fine Art research. The research strengthens the deep map approach and connects it more fully to other disciplines beyond the realm of Fine Art, and thus establishing a more nuanced understanding of certain issues, both past and present. It combines and explores through innovative ways methods and territories that have never been combined before and these can be considered as platforms for further research.

10. 4 Further Deterritorialisations

In future, I will allow my practice to take me to unfamiliar places. The deep map/Grounded Theory approach will be juxtaposed with newer territories, and further methods from neighbouring disciplines might be added in future. Furthermore, I am considering various spaces to show my site-specific art installations, like for example *De-Scroll* and *Pear Pressure*. The fluidity of such installations has the potential to spread further and I would be exploring a diverse range of settings where these could be set up.

My work allows for a plethora of readings. Future research is set to continue to enrich the deep map by considering also the interpretation of the viewers as part of the documentation process. Such approach will contribute to keep the work open and the role of the viewer as maker will acquire further significance.

I intend to delve deeper into photography; to explore further its various possibilities in the context of deep mapping. I am intrigued by the intersection of documentary photography and essaying/storytelling. The possibility of merging still images with

sound is definitely worth exploring further, since it might open up opportunities for alternative approaches to storytelling.

The potential of film and sound is set to develop more fully in future. New investigations will consider the potential contribution of multi-channel films and alternative sound arrangements. The amalgam of sculptures and sound will be explored and developed in relation to the investigation. I also intend to delve further into non-linear poetic/political reflexive documentary storytelling. The research opened up opportunities for future developments and it created a context that could serve as a platform for other types of research within and outside Fine Art.

Appendix A. Re/Visiting, Re/Viewing – Photographic and Filmic Documentation

A 1.1 Introduction

This section explores the potential of photographic and filmic documentation as significant approaches to deep mapping. Photographs and film are aimed to bring the viewers closer to ‘my places’. The camera captures the overt and what might go unheeded; in the context of deep mapping it allows the researcher to further unearth and expose the nuances of place. The following section discusses the role of the photographic image within my research project.

A 1.2 Photographic Documentation

The photographic image is an essential component of the deep map; it documents encounters and experiences. The object of documentation is to create a model for a recontextualisation of ‘being-there’. Here I argue that re/visiting and re/viewing may be possible through photographs and film.

Soil, rice grass, limestone, carob trees, garigue, clouds, rust: I’m outside and setting up the camera to start documenting. I arrived at 7:15 am, few clouds, and the ground is still soaked with dew. Droplets, hanging from leaves, glisten in the morning light. I haven’t yet decided what to take. I might go for a short walk around the area first.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).

Both photograph and film possess the ability to record the ineffable texture of things. Brassai’s photographs of places and of Paris’s graffiti throw us into place since they seem to reveal things that are only visible if one is physically there.⁷⁸⁰

⁷⁸⁰ Brassai’s real name was Gyula Halász.

(Figure 101) Dyer describes Brassai's photographs of the Paris arcades as evoking a sense of being taken deeper and deeper into the city.⁷⁸¹ (Figure 102) Similarly, I would like to think of my photographs as an entry point into place.



Figure 101 Brassai, *Graffiti*, 1933.



Figure 102 Brassai, *Les Arbres des Quais avec le Pont-Neuf*, c. 1945.

⁷⁸¹ Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment*, p. 51.

A contemporary photographer whose work shares with my own is Alec Soth. His work embodies the deadpan aesthetic. In Soth's own words his early work emerged from walking and wandering around.⁷⁸² '[T]here's beauty in just going for a walk' Soth maintains.⁷⁸³



Figure 103 Alec Soth, *Hickman, Kentucky*, 2002.



Figure 104 Alec Soth, *Helena, Arkansas*, 2002.

⁷⁸² Alec Soth and Francesco Zanot, *Ping Pong Conversations* (Rome: Contrasto Srl., 2013), p. 13.

⁷⁸³ Soth and Zanot, *Ping Pong Conversations*, p. 61.

Soth's photographs often possess the qualities of a documentary; he documents what he encounters. (Figures 103, 104) Past and present emerge from the textures of his photographs. Soth argues that photography is 'about this wish to possess time, but you never can, you can't preserve a moment'.⁷⁸⁴ According to Bazin photography's instantaneity forces it to capture time piecemeal.⁷⁸⁵

Sontag asserts that '[o]ur very sense of situation is now articulated by the camera's interventions'.⁷⁸⁶ The photograph speaks on our behalf. It reveals things that we often disregard or are almost imperceptible.⁷⁸⁷ For Walton 'photographic pictures are transparent'.⁷⁸⁸ Walton argues that photographs depict whatever is in front of the camera and are in this sense more transparent than paintings.⁷⁸⁹ Allen does not fully corroborate Walton's claim and he engages in a detailed discussion about the perceptual qualities of the photographic image.⁷⁹⁰ However, it would be beyond the scope of this research to delve into a detailed discussion about photographic theory.

While photographs within this research project serve the purpose of documentation they may also constitute an artwork in its own right. *Pear Pressure* is entirely based on photographic documentation of ephemeral material (see Section 6.2). The artwork is comprised of a collection of photographs depicting messages inscribed on prickly pear leaves. A rather similar approach can be perceived in the *RTO* series (see Chapter 7). The performative aspect of this body of work consisting in the relocation of display cases has been documented through photographs.

It's 8:30am, camera set up on tripod, focus on tiny stream oozing down the valley, washing the slippery stones, nourishing the mossy growth that covers them. I want to capture the flow, and the sound of water. All this will go in a few weeks. As I look

⁷⁸⁴ Soth and Zanot, *Ping Pong Conversations*, p. 139.

⁷⁸⁵ Andre Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol 1*, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), p. 96.

⁷⁸⁶ Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 11.

⁷⁸⁷ Benjamin, *Illuminations*.

⁷⁸⁸ Kendall L. Walton, 'On Pictures and Photographs: Objections Answered', in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 60-75 (p. 67).

⁷⁸⁹ Walton, *On Pictures and Photographs: Objections Answered*, p. 68.

⁷⁹⁰ Richard Allen, 'Looking at Motion Pictures', in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 76-94 (p.84).

through the viewfinder I notice the beautifully eroded limestone, water formed its own path, soft, pale, lichens, drift.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).

The present section analysed the role of the photographic image as a means of documentation within my research project. Another method of documentation pertinent to the deep map is the film. Filmic documentation possesses the ability to capture movement and sound. The next part of the chapter examines how film has been incorporated within the deep map, and the transfer and final exhibition.

A 1.3 Film Documentation

The film does not replicate the text. ‘Films are not visual translations of discursive narratives, but non-discursive images that are incommensurable with the verbal terms that may be used to describe them’.⁷⁹¹ Within this research project film can be considered a bridge between documentation and art object. (Figure 105)

Encountering place on film is not comparable to ‘being-there’ but it might create a context for the viewer to read place from a distance. Bazin argues that the camera is a spectator.⁷⁹² The film allows the viewer to wander, to explore Maltese places, to search and to find, to make up stories, and re-imagine places.

⁷⁹¹ Ronald Bogue, ‘The Landscape of Sensation’, in *Gilles Deleuze Image and Text*, ed. by Eugene W Holland, Daniel W Smith and Charles J. Stivale (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), pp. 9-26 (15).

⁷⁹² Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol 1*, p. 92.



Figure 105 Still-shot from my film (1)

Source documentation has been edited and shown alongside artworks. I have exhibited bark scrolls and *Landline/Waterline* together with a short film entitled ‘The Valley’ in Lifton Place, University of Leeds.⁷⁹³ The film blurred distinctions between inside and outside; here and there.

Following the exhibition at Lifton Place I continued to collect photographs and footage. Different lenses were used for wide-angle and close-up shots. The viewer became fore-grounded in the footage and this was achieved with the inclusion of high depth of field shots. This type of shot allows the viewer to choose and change one’s own focus from a wide range of objects on screen. As Bazin notes, it is a ‘way of getting the most out of a scene’ and it may bring the viewer ‘into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality.’⁷⁹⁴

A shallow depth of field was used to direct the attention of the viewer towards particular subjects or movement. This was achieved by blurring the background and isolating the subject. This type of images imbued the film with a poetic overall aesthetic.

Today I decided to walk with camera in hand, no tripod, 50mm lens. This lens allows me to focus on details and blur the backgrounds. The subject is kind of detached from the background, it pops out of the image. The subject is emphasised, decontextualised. As I ponder on the various possibilities of the shallow image I find

⁷⁹³ The exhibition was held in September 2013 as part of my PhD transfer.

⁷⁹⁴ Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol I*, p. 35.

myself distanced from place. The camera dis/connects. Now, I have to get back to place...

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).

Familiar subjects may appear strange when filmed close up. Enlarged subjects, in reality much smaller, may appear unrecognisable at first glance. The close-up allows the viewer to observe more intently and as Benjamin notes, it reveals new structural details.⁷⁹⁵

Another aspect of the film concerns movement. Initially, the shots were more static and any form of movement came from the subject. (Figure 106) At the time I still considered footage as source documentation. I then started to introduce movement to make shots appear less static and to suggest the flow of time.⁷⁹⁶



Figure 106 Still-shot from my film (2)

The film is essentially a documented walk spanning the entire period of my research project. Besides camera movement the passage of time was also conveyed through the editing process. Bazin notes that '[m]ontage could suggest the time involved'.⁷⁹⁷ Time-lapses and jump cuts were used to disrupt temporality. The narrative is non-chronological and shots taken at different points in time were joined together to indicate rhizomatic movement in time and space. Film-maker and theorist Andrey

⁷⁹⁵ Benjamin, *Illuminations*, p. 236.

⁷⁹⁶ Camera movements include pan, tilt, track, arch shots and gliding.

⁷⁹⁷ Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol 1*, p. 27.

Tarkovsky fittingly describes the film process 'as sculpting in time'.⁷⁹⁸ The cinema 'makes a molding of the object as it exists in time and, furthermore, makes an imprint of the duration of the object.'⁷⁹⁹

Duration and time in film have been the basis of Deleuze's notions of the movement-image and the time-image in cinema.⁸⁰⁰ Deleuze considered cinema as an expression of Bergson's ideas, creating movement-images whereby duration is expressed in relation to movement.⁸⁰¹

The movement-image may be defined as a temporal gap, a cut between two shots which signals movement gained by a succession of instants equidistant from one another.⁸⁰² Movement-images express a spatialised version of time.⁸⁰³ Deleuze's time-image designates images that Bergson described as imbued with duration which is neither successive nor chronological.⁸⁰⁴

Bazin observes that '[t]he camera must be equally as ready to move as to remain still.'⁸⁰⁵ I frequently combined camera movement with subject movement to highlight the passing of time, for example the flow of lake water at Qlejgha valley. I also filmed as I walked to convey time and movement through distance.

I am therefore puzzled when I am told that people cannot simply enjoy watching nature, when it is lovingly reproduced on the screen, but have to look for some hidden meaning they feel it must contain.⁸⁰⁶

⁷⁹⁸ Andrey Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, trans. by Kitty Hunter-Blair (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), p. 63.

⁷⁹⁹ Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol 1*, p. 97.

⁸⁰⁰ David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinemas* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), p. 25.

⁸⁰¹ Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinemas*, p. 26.

⁸⁰² Tom Conley, 'Movement-Image', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. by Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 174-176 (p. 174).

⁸⁰³ 'So far, then, montage is apparently an essential component of the movement-image. Even so, for Deleuze there is a certain sense in which the fixed shot of early silent cinema is still considered a movement-image.' (Martin-Jones 2011: 35). Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinemas*, p. 35, 26.

⁸⁰⁴ Tom Conley, 'Time-Image', in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. by Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 280-282 (p. 280).

⁸⁰⁵ André Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol 2*, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), p. 33.

⁸⁰⁶ Tarkovsky *Sculpting in Time*, p. 212.

My film follows a non-linear narrative which developed through the footage. While on site I collected as much footage as I could, including different shots of the same subject. The order of the shots was determined during the editing and I constantly kept cutting and inserting segments pertaining to different points in time. (Figures 107, 108) ‘Assembly, editing, disturbs the passage of time, interrupts it and simultaneously gives it something new.’⁸⁰⁷

During shooting, therefore, I concentrate on the course of time in the frame, in order to reproduce it and record it. Editing brings together shots which are already filled with time, and organises the unified, living structure inherent in the film; and the time that pulsates through the blood vessels of the film, making it alive, is of varying rhythmic pressure.⁸⁰⁸



Figure 107 Still-shot from my film (3)



Figure 108 Still-shot from my film (4)

⁸⁰⁷ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, p. 121.

⁸⁰⁸ Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, p. 114.

Tarkovsky posits; '[ti]me itself, running through the shots, had met and linked together'.⁸⁰⁹ For Deleuze the narrative is a product of montage.⁸¹⁰ Working with footage resembles working with matter. Footage shares with bark, soil, water, bones, spent shotgun cartridges, stone and other vibrant matter. It can be collected, manipulated, joined, and reconfigured.

Editing a picture correctly, competently, means allowing the separate scenes and shots to come together spontaneously, for in a sense they edit themselves; they join up according to their own intrinsic pattern. It is simply a question of recognizing and following this pattern while joining and cutting.⁸¹¹

Another attribute of place that was given significant attention is the sound. 'The sound never serves simply to fill out what we see.'⁸¹² Sound helps open up a space within the film. According to Caquard *et al.* '[s]ound can create depth and space the way that the image can only suggest'. Ambient sounds and wave vibrations imbue the footage with spatiality. I used a directional microphone to capture clean sound.⁸¹³

Sound and map are now being linked together.⁸¹⁴ Caquard *et al.* discuss how sound can enhance the map for example in cybercartography where sound effects can be associated with places.⁸¹⁵ Sound effects embody a sense of space; '[t]hey can contribute to improve our understanding of places by enriching our multisensorial reading of space'.⁸¹⁶

⁸⁰⁹ Referring to his own film *Mirror* (1975).. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, p. 117.

⁸¹⁰ Martin-Jones, *Deleuze and World Cinemas*, p. 27.

⁸¹¹ 'Obviously editing exists in every art form, since material always has to be selected and joined. What is different about cinema editing is that it brings together time, imprinted in the segments of film. Editing entails assembling smaller and larger pieces, each of which carries a different time. And their assembly creates a new awareness of the existence of that time, emerging as a result of the intervals, of what is cut, carved off in the process; but the distinctive character of the assembly, as we said earlier, is already present in the segments.' Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time*, p. 119, 116.

⁸¹² Bazin, *What is Cinema? Vol I*, p. 140.

⁸¹³ At times high pitched sounds were difficult to capture (e.g. cicadas, roaring water) and it was necessary to isolate the sounds by means of a directional microphone. Sebastián Caquard and others, 'Designing Sound in Cybercartography: From Structured Cinematic Narratives to Unpredictable Sound/Image Interactions', *International Journal of Geographical Information Science*, 22.11-12, (2008), 1219-1245 (p. 1222).

⁸¹⁴ Caquard and others, *Designing Sound in Cybercartography: From Structured Cinematic Narratives to Unpredictable Sound/Image Interactions*, p. 1219.

⁸¹⁵ Caquard and others, *Designing Sound in Cybercartography: From Structured Cinematic Narratives to Unpredictable Sound/Image Interactions*, pp. 1226-1227.

⁸¹⁶ Caquard and others, *Designing Sound in Cybercartography: From Structured Cinematic Narratives to Unpredictable Sound/Image Interactions*, p. 1227.

On my way back the sun was rising, early start today. Cicadas, bees, rustling leaves, poplar. These sounds are ubiquitous. Microphone attached to a pole, moving closer to source, changing direction, height, range. Sounds of place, and nature, sounds of time and space.

(Excerpt from my Fieldwork Notes).

Diegetic sound may emphasise a specific shot or reveal the presence of something which is not visible on screen. For example cicadas never appear in the film but their sound at times is deafening. Another characteristic of sound is that when juxtaposed with an 'image drawn from different levels of the narration, one may complicate and delay the matching of sound to a source which is to be made visible'.⁸¹⁷

If sound and image are not synchronised a temporal disruption might occur. Thus, asynchronous juxtapositions of sound and image complicate the narrative's linearity.⁸¹⁸ This shares with *Landline/Waterline* whereby the viewer gets to experience the valley's temporality in a non-linear and non-chronological manner.

Sound can enhance the impression of movement.⁸¹⁹ It might indicate that something within the film is in motion - even if hidden from view. For example the sound of roaring water suggesting movement in the background even when the image on screen shows a static tree. Similarly the crackling sounds of dried leaves and twigs might evoke the sound of walking.

I will briefly discuss a selection of artists and film-makers that have influenced my work on various levels helping me gain a better understanding of my own position. My film combines poetic observational and reflexive documentary approaches.⁸²⁰ It evokes the poetic film in terms of atmosphere and 'it is less concerned with deriving its structure from events'.⁸²¹ Instead it pieces together instances of 'being-there'; a bricolage walk spanning over a number of years.

⁸¹⁷ Edward Branigan, 'Sound, Epistemology, Film', in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 95-125 (p. 109).

⁸¹⁸ Multiple temporalities can be included in the same shot.

⁸¹⁹ Branigan, *Sound, Epistemology, Film*, p. 99.

⁸²⁰ Michael Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, 4th edn (Burlington: Focal Press, 2004), pp. 55-56.

⁸²¹ Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, p. 86.

Carroll tells us that the current usage of the term documentary appears to belong to John Grierson; this used to be his favourite term to describe his practice.⁸²² According to Carroll the term has since been used by many to cover various types of work provisionally assigned as the non-fiction film.⁸²³

The sense of exploration as suggested by Robert J. Flaherty in his film documentaries has been a reference point for my own film.⁸²⁴ My approach to places that had become familiar kept being renewed as if it was my first exploration. I wanted to convey a sense of exploration through the film to entice the viewer to walk and search with me.

Arne Sucksdorff made poetic documentary films; his films depict diverse natural contexts and settings. Through his poetic documentaries Sucksdorff regularly exposed the dichotomous relationship between nature and culture and what he deemed the incompatibility between the two.⁸²⁵ Sucksdorff's fluid camera movement and tracking as well as his close-up shots appear to translate documentary into poetry; through his lens a tiny flower dancing in the breeze becomes woodland and fills the entire screen.

Werner Herzog frequently resorts to natural settings, at times extreme, to make film documentaries. His work possesses a particular structure often incorporating a succession of events.⁸²⁶ Herzog's films have been described as 'documentaries in the process of becoming essays'.⁸²⁷ (Figure 109) My film can be considered a bricolage of events; however presented non-chronologically. The film is rhizomatic and the narrative does not have a beginning or an end. Viewing can be started and resumed at any point within the film.

⁸²² Noël Carroll, 'Fiction, Non-fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis', in *Film Theory and Philosophy*, ed. by Richard Allen and Murray Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 173-202 (173).

⁸²³ Carroll, *Fiction, Non-fiction, and the Film of Presumptive Assertion: A Conceptual Analysis*, p. 173.

⁸²⁴ Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

⁸²⁵ Films like *A Divided World* (1948). Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film*, p.189.

⁸²⁶ Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, p. 81.

⁸²⁷ Elif Akçali and Cüneyt Çakırlar, 'A Form of Proto-Cinema', *FIAF International Index to Film Periodicals Database*, 97, (2016), 50-59 (p. 58).



Figure 109 *Encounters at the End of the World* (2007), Werner Herzog.

In May 2016, I had the opportunity to meet and attend a talk by pioneer video artist Chris Meigh-Andrews at the University of Malta. I welcomed his work and his innovative applications of sculptural videos. Meigh-Andrews's video installation *Streamline* (1991) shares with *Landline/Waterline* (Chapter 5), and with footage taken at Qlejgħa valley. What is more intriguing is the fact that his 'stream' is artificial; it is reconstructed and does not exist in reality. (Figure 110)



Figure 110 Chris Meigh-Andrews, *Streamline*, 1991.

Streamline, Meigh-Andrews explains, is concerned with ideas about movement and about narratives which could be expressed through a temporal dimension.⁸²⁸ Nine screens installed inside the gallery showed a paper boat moving along a stream. The boat's movement from screen to screen was synchronised and it relied on accurate timing. Viewers could follow the boat's traces by moving along the length of screens. This installation explored the ability of video to represent movement and time.

I had the benefit of viewing Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt's *Swamp* (1971) at the 56th Venice Biennale.⁸²⁹ The six-minute film shot by Holt depicts the movement of the artists in a swampy field according to Smithson's directions; in Smithson's words '[i]t's a film about deliberate obstructions or calculated aimlessness'.⁸³⁰ (Figure 111)



Figure 111 Robert Smithson/ Nancy Holt, *Swamp*, 1971.

Smithson posits, 'I am also interested in projection sites. Where and how movies are shown strikes me as important'.⁸³¹ When I showed my looped film at Lifton Place in

⁸²⁸ Chris Meigh-Andrews, 'Streamline', *Chris Meigh Andrews* <<http://www.meigh-andrews.com/installations/1990-1995/streamline>> [accessed 14 May 2016]

⁸²⁹ La Biennale di Venezia. *All The World's Futures* (2015). The film was accompanied by a series of sketches by Smithson which helped heighten the encounter. Sketches included *Floating Island – Barge to Travel Around Manhattan Island* (1971) and *The Hypothetical Continent of Lemuria* (1969).

⁸³⁰ Interview with Gregoire Müller (1971). Robert Smithson, '...The Earth, Subject To Cataclysms, Is A Cruel Master', in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. by Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 253-261 (p. 261).

⁸³¹ Smithson, ...*The Earth, Subject To Cataclysms, Is A Cruel Master*, p. 261.

Leeds the space was reconfigured; it became a Maltese place. The film appeared to collapse the distance.

The space where the film is shown allows inside and outside intertwining. Viewers may become engaged in an imagined walk. Jancovich and Faire, referencing Catherine Russell's claim, link the interior of the viewing space to an exterior space in which to wander.⁸³² The space also shares with Foucault's heterotopia (see Section 5.2.2). Since the early days of cinema, 'films allowed audiences to travel where it would be otherwise have been impossible for them to go'.⁸³³

My film can be considered a collection, a map, a documentary and a diary. With regard to film-making it has been argued that '[w]hen you examined your collection diligently, you will actually see the outlines of the collector...'.⁸³⁴ My film presents juxtapositions of diverse place-stories. It can be considered a filmic deterritorialisation of *Natura colta* since it maps all the places considered within the research project.

The film allows for a diverse reading of place. It takes the viewer for a walk along selected places in Malta. The viewer will be shown specific characteristics of place at various points in time, and the camera occasionally focuses on particular aspects to bring the viewer closer to place. Hours of footage were carefully selected, categorised, edited, and combined. The film creates a context for the artworks; it engenders 'being-there' through distance. It makes wandering, exploring, discovering, and imagining possible.

⁸³² Mark Jancovich and Lucy Faire, *The Place of the Audience* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), p. 44.

⁸³³ Jancovich and Faire, *The Place of the Audience*, p. 60.

⁸³⁴ Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*, p. 129.

Appendix B Artworks

B 1.1 *Pear Pressure*

B 1.2 *De-Scroll*

B 1.3 *Landline/Waterline*

B 1.4 *RTO I*

B 1.5 *RTO II*

B 1.6 *RT-O*

B 1.7 *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture*

B 1.8 *Natura Colta*



B 1.1 *Pear Pressure* (2014) at Lifton Place, University of Leeds. Photographic installation.



B 1.2 *De-Scroll* (2015) at the National Library Valletta. Sculptural installation comprising 100 bark scrolls.



B 1.3 *Landline/Waterline*. Soil, water, wood, glass, cork, labels. 48 bottles *circa* 6cm height. 4 shelves each 74cm W × 10cm H × 4.5cm D.



B 1.4 *RTO I*. Wood, glass, stones, chrome, copper, acrylic. 45cm W × 45cm H × 13cm D.



B 1.5 *RTO II*. Wood, glass, mirror, stones, chrome, copper, polymethyl methacrylate, acrylic. 45cm W × 45cm H × 13cm D.



B 1.6 *RT-O*. Wood, glass, steel, specimens, copper, polymethyl methacrylate. 60cm W × 120cm H.



B 1.7 *Crossfire – Concerning the Nature of Our Culture* (2015) at St James Centre for Creativity Valletta. Installation comprising 9,000 spent shotgun cartridges.



B 8 *Natura Colta*. Wood, wire mesh, copper hinges, various matter. 44cm W × 60cm H × 12cm D.

Appendix C Exhibitions (2012 – 2016)

The Imaginary Museum The Tetley, Leeds (7 – 23 March, 2014)

The exhibition included work by different artists related to taxonomies, museum methods and display, exhibition, and archiving, reproduced on postcards, and displayed on a custom made rack. My work consisted of printed reproductions of *Landline/Waterline*.

Transfer Exhibition Lifton Place, University of Leeds (September 2014)

The exhibition was part of my PhD Transfer. I showed sculptural works, photographic documentation, and two looped videos.

Larroque Arts Festival Galerie la Vieille Poste, Larroque (24 – 31 July, 2015)

Visual narrative consisting of photographic documentation of places.

Crossfire Concerning the Nature of Our Culture St James Centre for Creativity, Valletta (30 March – 9 April 2015)

Art installation.

Past! Present. Future? A Research Project St James Cavalier Centre for Creativity, Valletta (11 December 2015 – 31 January 2016)

An exhibition based on archiving of artworks held by St James Centre for Creativity which included a selection of works shown within the venue during the past fifteen years. Documentation of *Crossfire* as a looped presentation was shown on a screen. I gave a presentation about the installation.

Spatium Clausum Mediterranean Conference Centre, Valletta (22 – 23 October 2015)

I was commissioned by Valletta 2018 European Capital of Culture to create a work as part of the ‘Cultural Mapping: Debating Spaces and Places’ conference. Site-specific installation consisting of four looped films, large scale projection, four-channel sound sculpture, and photographs. I mapped the area around the historic building in Valletta where the conference was being held. I also gave a paper entitled ‘*Spatium Clausum*’.

De-Scroll The National Library, Valletta (24 October – 15 November 2015)

De-Scroll consisted of one hundred bark sculptures installed in display cases. I gave a paper as part of the exhibition.

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Works of Art

Alec Soth, *Helena Arkansas*, 2002, photograph

Alec Soth, *Hickman Kentucky*, 2002, photograph

Brad Cloepfil, *Sticks and Stones*, acrylic mirror, laurelwood sticks, rocks and minerals

Brassaï, *Graffiti*, 1933, photograph

Brassaï, *Les Arbres des Quais avec le Pont-Neuf*, (c. 1945), photograph

Chris Meigh-Andrews, *Streamline*, 1991, installation consisting of 9 screens and 9 video players

Damián Ortega, *Alma Mater*, 2008, installation mixed media

David Walker Barker, *Adits as Entrances*, completed 2005, mixed media sculptural work

David Walker Barker, *The Remains of a Hidden Landscape*, completed 2005, mixed media sculptural work

Elizabeth Ogilvie, *Bodies of Water*, 2005-2006, video installation

herman de vries, *to be all ways to be*, 2015, installation mixed media

Jeppe Hein, *Please Do Not Touch*, 2009, neon tubes

Jorge Méndez Blake, *The Exploration Library*, 2008, mixed media installation

Joseph Cornell, *Solomon Islands*, 1940-42, display cabinet, various objects

Mark Dion, *Thames Dig*, 1999-2000, wooden cabinet, various objects

Mark Dion, *Vivarium*, 2002, greenhouse, dead tree

Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967, performance

Susan Hiller, *Genuine Essence: Homage to Josef Beuys*, ongoing from 1969, felt-lined wooden cabinet, glass bottles, water, labels

Filmography

Encounters at the End of the World, dir. By Werner Herzog (Discovery Films, 2007)

Swamp, dir. By Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt (1971)