

## Romancing the #BritishLandscape: Exertion as a Methodology for Re-binding with the 'Out-there'<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract



Over the last four decades computer games have become ever more immersive and their environments ever more 'real' yet the environments had remained merely picturesque backdrops to the main action of the game. However, recent years have witnessed a shift with gaming software such as *British Countryside Generator*, which provides "aesthetically recognizable rural British landscapes" (Manaugh). Moving in the other direction is the gamification of the 'real' landscape as new technologies such as global positioning systems (GPS) and interfaces such as Strava gamify our athletic endeavours.

Through his art J.M.W. Turner generated a new approach to 'seeing' nature without dividing intelligent comprehension from the sensory experience. Despite Turner's move and the potential re-readings offered by the digital there remains a reliance on binary division and static enframing of the senses in responses to landscape in the British visual arts, all of which enforces a perceived chasm between *culture* and *nature*. However, a new wave of British nature writing (e.g. Jamie) sensitively springing from the likes of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), Richard Mabey's *Unofficial Countryside* (1973) and the ecocritical vanguard of the 1990s has done much to challenge the myth that we humans are in command of, or above, nature.

Our relationship to the non-human urgently needs to be addressed on a wide front and our ties to landscape celebrated whilst being wary of the depth of the term *nature*. Through admixture of Cynic *parrhēsia*; the sense of reverie and wonder of British Romanticism; exertion; digital structuring; ecosophical principles and creative attunement, a *herniation* of the *culture/nature* divide may be achieved that leads to a deeper appreciation of how our lives are lived with(in) landscape.

**Keywords:** British Romanticism, Cynicism, herniation, landscape, *parrhēsia*.

### Resumen

En las últimas cuatro décadas los videojuegos se han vuelto cada vez más inmersivos y sus entornos cada vez más "reales", aunque sus escenarios pintorescos hayan seguido siendo simples fondos tras la acción principal del juego. Sin embargo, los últimos años han sido testigo de un cambio, gracias a nuevos videojuegos como *British Countryside Generator*, que proporciona "escenas estéticamente reconocibles de paisajes rurales británicos" (Manaugh). Por otro lado, se ha producido una *ludificación* de los paisajes "reales" en relación a las nuevas tecnologías, como los GPS y las interfaces como Strava, que también *ludifican* nuestros esfuerzos deportivos.

A través de su obra artística J.M.W. Turner generó una nueva forma de "ver" la naturaleza sin separar la comprensión inteligente de la experiencia sensorial. A pesar del avance de Turner y de las posibles relecturas ofrecidas por lo digital, en el panorama de las artes visuales británicas todavía existe una dependencia de la división binaria y el encuadre estático, lo cual refuerza la brecha que existe entre *cultura* y *naturaleza*. Sin embargo, una nueva ola de escritura británica centrada en la naturaleza (por

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ejemplo, Jamie: 2012) de la que brota la obra de Rachel Carson *Silent Spring* (1962), *Unofficial Countryside* (1973) de Ricarhd Mabey y la vanguardia ecocrítica de la década de los 90, han erosionado el mito que propugna que el ser humano controla y está por encima de la naturaleza.

Nuestra relación con lo *no-humano* necesita ser abordada con urgencia y deberíamos asimismo celebrar nuestros vínculos con el paisaje, conscientes de la hondura del término *naturaleza*. A través de la combinación de la *parrhēsia* de los cínicos, el sentido de la ensoñación y lo maravilloso del Romanticismo Británico, el esfuerzo físico, la estructuración digital, los principios ecosóficos y la armonía creativa podríamos conseguir suturar la brecha entre *cultura/naturaleza*. Y de este modo alcanzar una conciencia más profunda de cómo nuestras vidas son vividas *con y en el interior del* paisaje.

*Palabras clave:* Romanticismo Británico, Escuela Cínica, ruptura, paisaje, *parrhēsia*.

## Where Was I?

When we consider landscape in the context of the digital we will more often than not think of virtual environments: “a computer-generated, three-dimensional representation of a setting in which the user of the technology perceives themselves to be and within which interaction takes place” (“Define virtual environment” n.p.). From this we are likely to imagine goggle-clad users engaged in training simulations, ‘walking’ through a reconstruction of a long-lost heritage site or immersed in a gaming scenario.

Virtual environments have moved a long way since the early home gaming environments such as Atari’s classic late 1970s releases *Air-Sea Battle* and *Night Driver*. However, both of these managed to conjure up different takes on what a landscape is often seen to be in an art-historical context. In *Air-Sea Battle*’s ‘anti-aircraft’ variant a slender green horizon of land provides a base for the gamer’s anti-aircraft gun to shoot down the enemy aircraft that pass to and fro in the stratified blue sky above. The stratifications of the sky giving a feeling of elevation and air in what is really a classical landscape painter’s technique for depicting sky-space and pictorial depth.

Where *Air-Sea Battle* offers a side-on, arms-length, picturesque removal from ‘reality’ *Night Driver* arguably provides a more immersive experience as gamers are charged with steering their ‘invisible’ car along the road ahead of them, at night, guided only by pixel equivalents of reflective poles. To offer some context occasional roadside houses and trees are glimpsed in the headlights as gamers guide their vehicle at varying speeds via the game console’s paddle. The car is of course invisible because we view the landscape through the TV screen-windscreen but, just for a while, the driver is within the landscape, passing through the landscape skilfully and at speed but immersed in it nonetheless.

In the case of both *Air-Sea Battle* and *Night Driver* the aesthetic landscape lineage that started with the Dutch School (in, for example, the work of Jacob van Ruisdael) could be traced through them and onwards to the work of artist Julian Opie in landscapes such as *There are Hills in the Distance* (1996) and *Winter 32* (2012).

Of course gaming is but one instance when virtual landscapes are born. But it is here that we can now immerse our gaming selves in a wide range of hyper-realistic

terrains (as well as enjoy retro-thrills in modern takes on those 1970s classics). The landscapes are now so 'life-like' that Andy Kelly was moved to pen an article for *The Guardian* newspaper entitled "GTA V to Skyrim: The 10 Most Beautiful Walks in Gaming" in which the landscapes from games such as *Dear Esther* were selected on aesthetic grounds to offer a destination bucket list for the enthusiastic gamer. Even more relevant to this article is *Sir, You Are Being Hunted* from game developer Big Robot based in Bath, England.

To situate their game Big Robot developed a procedural engine, which they have called the *British Landscape Generator*. This generator "is unique in that the intention was to generate a vision of 'British countryside,' or an approximation thereof" and in order to do this the game's designers

identified a number of features in the countryside that typify the aesthetic [they] wanted, and seem to be quintessential in British rural environments. Possibly the most important element is the 'patchwork quilt' arrangement of agricultural land, where polygonal fields are divided by drystone walls and hedgerows. (Managh)

The scripting and computations that help Big Robot to generate this approximated British landscape must surely only be an accelerated virtual version of the sort of physical forces that W.G. Hoskins opened a nation's eyes to in his seminal book *The Making of the English Landscape*. The *natural* landscapes of Britain are etched, folded and piled with the traces of former or ongoing human activities. The forms of the British landscape are easily read by many now as the activity that Hoskins outlined has become mainstream and not restricted to a few geographers, archaeologists and psychogeographers. We can all now appreciate that a

commonplace ditch may be the thousand-year-old boundary of a royal manor; a certain hedgebank may be even more ancient, the boundary of a Celtic estate; a certain deep and winding lane may be the work of twelfth-century peasants, some of whose names may be made known to us if we search diligently enough. (Hoskins 14)

Gregory Chaitin's notion of *natural software* that he explores in his 2012 book *Proving Darwin* can be seen as a fusion of gaming software and Hoskinian landscape evolution. Or, rather, gaming software such as *British Landscape Generator* has finally caught up with the mathematics within the landscape making these artificial gaming environments surprisingly natural. Chaitin proposes that software has been with us all along but it was only with the invention of computer software that humans could recognise this fact (14-20). As Chaitin puts it: DNA, as the body's *natural software*, could not be discovered until computing software had been invented (19-25).

## Where Am I?

Beyond the virtual environments of gaming, warfare and training simulation the digital's presence in discussion of landscape must also be considered in regard to the proliferation of navigational aids and performance monitors on the market. We can track our movements via Global Positioning System (GPS) units and modulate our

physical endeavours via heart-rate monitors (HRMs) and power meters. These devices today enable a certain gamification as athletic activities, landscape experiences and topographical data merge in the interface of Strava (to take just one example) when outdoor enthusiasts compete against others (while they compete against themselves) over recognised 'segments' of landscape.<sup>2</sup>

GPS has (as with so many of these technologies) its origins in military contexts. It was created by the US Department of Defense in 1973 with the last of the 24 operational satellites being launched by 1994. Initially, military use was given primacy and civilian use was intentionally restricted through a limitation of the accuracy of the positioning data. Today, accuracy for civilians is in the region of +/- 5 to 10 metres (15 to 20 metres height) 95% of the time according to Britain's Ordnance Survey. The military continue to have slightly greater accuracy.

A GPS unit receives signals from a number of satellites and calculates the time difference between transmission and reception of the signal. From these differences the distance to the satellites is then calculated and a triangulation performed to locate the user on the earth's surface on both the x- and y-axes. However, in practice, the (in)accuracy levels of GPS can be noticeable—there may be inexplicable peaks or cut-offs in pace, or the route overlay may suggest that the user walked through the air of a corrie while they held firmly to the solid ground of the ridge. Of course, these inaccuracies can be worrying and they underline why we should not rely solely on such technologies when navigating complex terrain. But look again and these pockets of data-loss could also point to where the sensuousness of exertion lies hidden.

GPS data-overlay and heart-rate trace could be simple ways to see the (re)binding-with-landscape that exertion unfolds, but viewers, particularly if they were not participant in the activity, will have little knowledge of the broader context: conditions underfoot, meteorological considerations, ability levels of other participants, and so forth let alone more ephemeral considerations and the current fitness of the participant. This is an image of landscape not too distant from *Air-Sea Battle* in its lack of complexity.

Much remains hidden in this exerting but maybe this is partly due to the individual nature of the approach. We are dealing here with the 'self' and its relationship to the 'not-self' at the very least. First though we need to understand more about what exertion does. The dictionary etymology of 'exert' is a helpful starting point: "[–exert-, pa. ppl. Stem of L. *ex(s)erere* put forth, f. *ex-* Ex-<sup>1</sup> + *serere* bind, entwine, join]" (Onions 701).

So, an unbinding happens during exertion. This unbinding might be seen as a case of becoming increasingly detached from the world and moving inward as one concentrates on one's struggle. While running one can enter a sort of autopilot mode

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<sup>2</sup> "Strava is a community of athletes from all over the world [...] Strava lets you experience what we call social fitness - connecting and competing with each other via mobile and online apps [...] Strava lets you track your rides and runs via your iPhone, Android or dedicated GPS device and helps you analyze and quantify your performance. Strava provides motivation and camaraderie [...]." (Strava, "Strava | About Us," 2015. Web. Accessed 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2015. <https://www.strava.com/about>).

where the mind might drift off yet the body will remain in control of forward motion and foot placement. But there is a danger in this approach where the direct reciprocity of the exertion can be misinterpreted into a binaric opposition and so become added to those unhelpful (un)couplings of *culture/nature*; *in here/out there*; and *mind/body*.

## Defining

Stalking the shadows of this article are two figures: one is the Romantic and the other is the Cynic. Both of these figures have contested meanings, more specifically, common meanings, which do not fully explain the characters and, in some ways, even contradict the true models. A clue to the misreading of the models is the use of the lower case 'r' and 'c'—a Romantic is thus watered down to the unpractical and starry-eyed romantic and a Cynic becomes the cynic who is morosely sceptical of everything.

In contemporary British literature the Romantic figure still walks strongly albeit today with less swagger than in the early 1990s when Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* revived (and re-greened) the potential power of Wordsworth's writings to establish the "historical continuity of a tradition of environmental consciousness" (9). Within the visual arts through this period there has been a greater reluctance to identify with the label of Romanticism as historically a tendency towards quaintness, nostalgia and whimsy seems a (critically) greater failing in painting than in the literary arts.

As with many of the art '-isms' those individuals identified with British Romanticism did not choose to be so. Instead a general spirit and certain specifics of their work aligned with a rising mood of the time. British Romanticism had a lot in common with its continental cousins yet had a specific mood of its own. In simple terms Romanticism can be seen as a rebellion against a particular sort of neoclassical order and control that subjugated free expression and imagination. Raymond Lister notes that British Romanticism was highly moderated in comparison to Romanticism in other European countries (12). Maybe this moderation is tied to the, generally, less extreme nature of the British climate and the gentler scale of the landscape.<sup>3</sup>

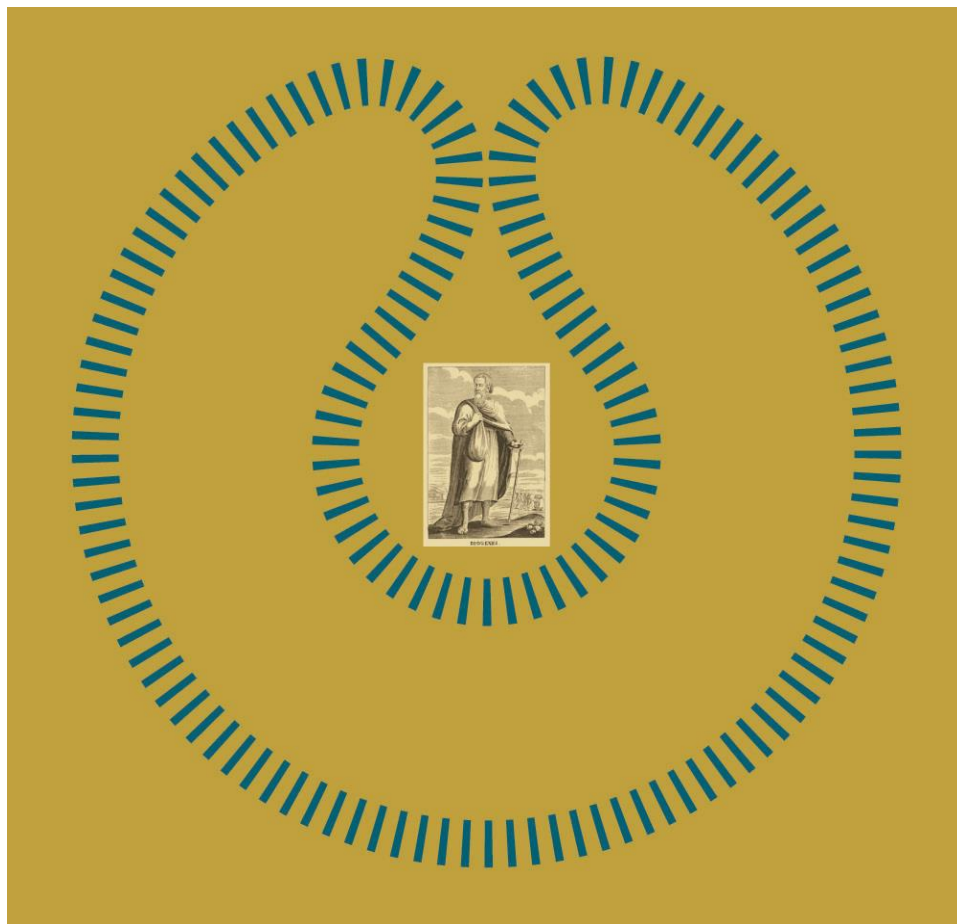
Within the context of economic globalization, rapidly shifting national boundaries, unprecedented im/e-migration and worrying trends in nationalism the tie to a British identity in the title of this article could appear problematic. However, the British landscape retains an identity beyond the nation's shores; an identity that has evolved historically and in unison with the shaping of the landscape—emulating the quintessential patchwork English rural landscape the national landscape identity holds together as a series of identifiable yet dynamically interweaving localities. Big Robot employed this landscape identity in the development of their *British Landscape Generator* but as the name implies, this identity does not preclude the generation of new versions of British landscapes.

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<sup>3</sup> This relative moderation can also be noted in comparing British Land Art with its American iteration (e.g. Robert Smithson's 1970 *Spiral Jetty* required the modelling of thousands of tons of rock in Great Salt Lake, Utah).



Further strength for the Green Romantic may be gained by an alignment with the Cynic. The Cynic was the bellwether of Ancient Greek society yet lived shaman-like just beyond its limits. The Cynic dismisses societal customs (*typhos*) and hierarchies, arguing that nature will provide all that is required to live a full life in the present. The Cynic's life becomes through training, discipline and "continuous exercise" an *oeuvre* (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 11, 73). This mode of existence for the Cynic places equal value on the body and the mind as Diogenes observes: "What concerns the body concerns the soul as well" (73). This blurring of traditional boundaries continues in the Cynic's identification with the cosmos—"the *cosmos* is not a human construct, but exists beyond human control and even conception" (Desmond 204)—and it is in this cosmos that the Cynic wanderer is at home.



Before we progress too far a gentle defining of *landscape* is required. The widely accepted etymology of the English word *landscape* comes through the Dutch *lantscap* to *landskip* and onward to the anglicised *landscape*. The standard dictionary definitions have *landscape* tied to sight: a vista or a view; a scene or a prospect. From here we proceed to the generally accepted reading of *landscape* art as a painted scene—this attitude is most highly refined in the Picturesque tradition which was enfolded within British Romanticism.

However, Tim Ingold argues in *Being Alive* that the derivation of the word *landscape* is actually founded in a notion of shaping. The suffix *-scape* has become etymologically muddled with the “verb *skopein*, ‘to look’. ‘Scape’, quite to the contrary, comes from Old English *sceppan* or *skyppan*, meaning ‘to shape’” (126). Ingold goes on to relate the activities of mediaeval land-shapers where the work was done: “close-up, in an immediate, muscular and visceral engagement with wood, grass and soil—the very opposite of distanced, contemplative and panoramic optic that the word ‘landscape’ conjures up in many minds today” (126). This notion of shaping within landscape leads us to consider how we engage and enmesh with the landscape, as we are active within it. Indeed, how the landscape shapes us as much as we it. As a background to the birth of British Romanticism the very way of the nation was changing—increasing industrialisation saw mechanisation of agricultural processes and a pull of rural workers away from the soil and into the new manufacturing towns. This shift was the tipping point that caused a reappraisal and re-valuing of the British landscape among certain members of society.

Landscape was considered a very poor subject for artists until the late eighteenth-century but the work of artists such as Richard Wilson and Thomas Gainsborough, whilst not completely shifting the stance of the art establishment, did enough to fire up the enthusiasm of a new generation of artists such as J.M.W. Turner, Thomas Girtin, and John Constable. These artists were able to consider Classical approaches yet combine them with (for instance) the approach of the Dutch School to chart a new course for British artists and a new way of ‘seeing’ the landscape. For Turner this required that “a clear classical structure [be] merged with movement of light and air” (Lindsay 108). And if this aesthetic rebellion ruffled a few establishment feathers along the way what did it matter? More important matters needed the attention of the landscape artist: “a new concept of nature, a concept that totally rejects the old mechanistic system of connexions and relationships, and which sees instead a highly complicated field-of-force in action” was needed (122).

In the course of this rebelling the Romantic artist would “examine and revel in all aspects of human activity and the phenomenon of the world in which we live; [and] cultivate every part of the human psyche and every aspect of [their] bodily sensations” (Lister 4). This does not sound much like the common image of the Romantic artist as self-absorbed and out of touch with the world—it sounds more like the sort of attuned being that David Abram writes of in *Spell of the Sensuous* where, by acknowledging:

links between the inner psychological world and the perceptual terrain that surrounds us, we begin to turn inside-out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us. (262)

Frequently for the Romantics their attunement to a situation came about through the undertaking of strenuous physical activity. In addition to the possible episode of having himself tied to a ship’s mast, and despite his often questionable health, Turner was not averse to walking twenty-five miles in a day “rapidly sketching all the good places of composition he met” (Lindsay 26). The Wordsworths and Coleridge too were happy to

be out in the world walking and wandering in all weathers, in all terrains and at all times of day. In fact, Coleridge is sometimes credited with the first rock climb when he became stranded on a rock ledge as he descended Scafell on an August afternoon in 1802.

In his book *Mountains of the Mind* Robert Macfarlane recounts Coleridge's escapade as one instance of the poet's *gambling* (81-84). This gambling involved a literal reverse of that undertaken by Petrarch's brother in the poet's recorded ascent of Mont Ventoux. For Coleridge the challenge was in the descent—he would pick a mountain at random, climb it and then descend “where it is first *possible*” to do so and not to seek out the ‘easy’ option—for Petrarch and his brother it was all about the mode of the ascent (82).

On the 26<sup>th</sup> April 1336 Petrarch set out with his brother and two servants to climb ‘Ventosum’ ostensibly to simply “see what so great an elevation had to offer” (Petrarch n.p.). However, Petrarch's account of the expedition became a vehicle for him to discuss the human preference for looking at views rather than facing spiritual calling. By ‘chance’ Petrarch carried various texts by Saint Augustine with him and he sat down at the summit to read them and, allowing the pages to fall open at random (‘gambling?’), he read the saint's direction to “not go outwards, but travel into yourself, for truth lives in the interior of the human being” (qtd. in Gipe n.p.). Implicit in this way of thinking are the directly reciprocal, restrictive and unhelpful binaries of *in here/out there* and *mind/body*.

There is another aspect of the story which is relevant: Petrarch recounts how he continually seeks out the longer yet easier route which zig-zags lazily up the mountain side, whereas his brother struggles directly upwards via a ‘short cut’. It is the choice of two ways. In his study of Cynicism Michel Foucault discusses “the theme of the two ways [which] is frequently found in Antiquity” (*The Courage* 207). The Cynics' recognised first way was through discourses and learning (*logos*) and the second way was the short cut, but it is not easy, for it is the “arduous way which rises straight to the summit over many obstacles and which is, as it were, the silent way” (*The Courage* 207). This latter can also be described as “the way of exercise, of *askesis*, of practices of destitution and endurance” (*The Courage* 207). Of course, it is this latter way that the true Cynic follows.

The direct struggle up the steepest gradient of Mont Ventoux that Petrarch's brother followed may have been the opportunity for inner struggle and understanding and so the view ‘outward’ from the top becomes some sort of reward for this process of internalising. By apparently going deeper inwards a *herniation* occurs—the ‘outside’ folds inwards and so oppositions merge to give greater clarity and colour—the view from the summit becomes ever more magnificent.

In a beautiful instance of happenstance Chaitin has subtitled one of his book chapters *Random Walks in Software Space* and as the mathematics becomes ever more complex he warns us that things will get

a bit technical, a bit tough. We are going up a steep mountain, but I will try to explain everything in words as best I can, not just with formulas. But if you can't understand something, please just skip it and continue onwards and upwards. Just look at the scenery and try to get an overall feeling for what I am doing. (27)



His Petrarchian moment over, we climb ever higher with Chaitin, to discover that he has been working for several decades to bring mathematics and biology together in the form of *metabiology*. In developing his claim Chaitin notes that “biology is actually all about constant creativity and change [...and] sex greatly speeds up creativity” (36). Furthermore, “metabiology emphasizes biological creativity, not selfishness, and it opens the door to a completely new interpretation of Darwinian evolution” (ibid). Historically the wrong characteristic (i.e. selfishness) has been applied to the Romantics.

The mid-twentieth century appearance of the neo-Romantics did not leave a lasting legacy in British art history as, frequently, their work is ascribed to an expanded little Englander mentality born from the threat of invasion by the Nazis (and abstract expressionism). Notable exceptions are Paul Nash and Graham Sutherland who remain marginally buoyant in today's art world (often, though, as a result of their more Surrealist works) and the landscapes of Ivon Hitchens that balance Modernism and Romanticism. In the 1960s any Romantic approach to landscape definitively gave way to an apparently more hard-edged, conceptual one as Land Art pushed the focus for landscape art away from representing the land towards a more physical engagement with it—replacing the position of the alienated solitary artist/viewer with a radically immersed and interconnected attitude.<sup>4</sup>

Despite being limited to oil and canvas this is what Turner was perhaps seeking when he apocryphally had himself tied to a ship's mast to make preparatory sketches for his 1842 painting *Snow Storm – Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth*. Indeed, at the time when Land Art was blossoming in Britain a re-reading of the works of landscape painters such as Turner and Constable was under way in the nation's galleries offering, as Bate would do for Wordsworth in literature twenty years later, a place in art history for “environmental consciousness,” and a radical one at that (9).

Compared with writers the visual artists who are working in and around notions of landscape, nature and environment today have a much smaller impact on mainstream consciousness, as their works are generally restricted to viewing in galleries or specialist publications. Their work is also potentially more open to mis-interpretation. Hamish Fulton is one artist who has directly addressed these shortcomings especially in his more overtly political works and group walks (e.g. Fulton 24-25 and 42-43).

In a 2012 essay Jim Mooney identifies an ecosophic angle in Hamish Fulton's practice. *Ecosophy*—a combination of ecology and philosophy—was first proposed by Arne Næss in the 1970s “to serve as an individual's philosophical grounding for an acceptance of the principles or platform of deep ecology” (38). Around the time of Næss's declaration British landscape art was most highly focussed in Land Art. Or at least that was where the rebellious artists were at work as they fought the commodification of the art object albeit in a physically scaled-down version of what artists were doing in the wider expanses of the American landscape.

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<sup>4</sup> Recognised British land artists traditionally include the likes of Roger Ackling, Hamish Fulton, Susan Hiller, John Latham and Richard Long. Fulton has, however, distanced himself from Land Art simply claiming, “I AM NOT A LAND ARTIST BECAUSE I DON'T MAKE LAND ART” (Fulton 28).

While British artists of a previous generation (such as Ivon Hitchens) retained their commitment to painterly techniques a new generation were experimenting with photography, film, sculpture (frequently using found *natural* materials), installations and walking. Many artists were using walking as a means to an end but two artists in particular were using walking as an end in itself. In 1967, while still a student at London's Saint Martin's School of Art, Richard Long created *A Line Made by Walking*.

Long made this work by simply walking to and fro in a straight line across a Hampshire field until the grass became flattened enough that the sunlight highlighted it, he then took a photograph of the line as a record of the activity. The work remained in the landscape (and in the past), free of ownership, whilst the photographic record became the object for the gallery. The simple action for this work would become the foundation for his artistic career and freed up the minds of many artists in considering what art could be—no longer did it need actual materials let alone a plinth.

Fellow Saint Martin's student Hamish Fulton was working in this way too when, also in 1967, he tied together a group of his colleagues and tutors and led them on a walk through the streets of London. For Fulton this action and subsequent student walk works would convince him that walking was the way to practice art. Where Long re-engaged with more traditional materials in a high proportion of his work Fulton maintained a strict adherence to the notion of the walk being the art—the *artwalk* manifest in the gallery only as a distilled text or photographic signpost to all that Fulton experienced during the walk.

Within Fulton's gallery presence Jim Mooney suggests that a gap (or Lacanian *béance*) between "our contemporary cultural concerns and our relatively impoverished relationship with the natural world" is highlighted (21). As Mooney goes on to suggest, the viewer can never truly experience what Fulton has but in providing these gallery signposts maybe the artist can help the viewer move towards a position where they can recognise there is a gap and begin to address this on a personal level. This personal level gap bridging is a key tenet of ecosophy where "Self-realisation through identification [connects] the individual's unfolding to that of the whole planet" (Naess 163).

In maintaining his practice via his dictum of 'No Walk No Work' Fulton undertakes walks of exceptional duration, distance and endurance. His exertions are fundamental to his work as his experience leads to a state of engagement-with. Both Fulton and Næss are mountaineers and not afraid to stretch themselves, and we could simply consider Næss in this article for an equation that he included in his treatise on *ecosophy* where well-being (*W*) unfolds from a careful balancing of bodily pain (*P<sub>b</sub>*), mental pain (*P<sub>m</sub>*) and 'glow' (*G*):

$$W = \frac{G^2}{P_b + P_m}$$

Næss goes on to say that: "the usefulness of the equation [...] depends on its ability to make people try to find out what they deeply and eagerly want and thus to make them risk some pain and discomfort in its pursuit" (81).

This belief then is what Richard Askwith is subscribing to when he writes, at the end of the first chapter of *Feet in the Clouds*, of how, after a long run, he descends the fells towards the sanctuary of his car:

Thoughts of hot baths sap my every slack-legged stride. Finally, I fumble my way into my car, collapse on the passenger seat, half-change into the dry clothes I have left there, close the door, and fall asleep.

This, I should add, is what I do for fun. (6)

Or perhaps as long-distance runner, artist and PhD student Zoe Anderson explains “this was just about me being in an extreme environment, an environment in which I was so gloriously happy that I did not want it to end, even though I was at a peak of pain, even ecstasy” (Anderson).

The ‘glow’ wins out. But in the most testing of moments in the landscape something happens. As an exchange that bridges a gap these moments are perhaps only ‘felt’ within the memory of the muscles that propel one through the landscape or as a memory recalled from the comfort of that hot bath or a public bar. But surely there is something hidden in that glow, that fun, that ecstasy (that Romantic reverie?). Robert Macfarlane, in a recent BBC Scotland TV programme about poet Nan Shepherd, notes a sensual, possibly even sexual, “fizz” to Shepherd’s writing and thinking on being in the Cairngorm mountain landscape of Scotland (“The Living Mountain”). Macfarlane goes on to observe that Shepherd was “writing in a time [c.1940] when candour about physical pleasure was regarded with real suspicion, especially from a woman” (“The Living Mountain”). Whilst her candour may not have suited her time it would have found an unlikely companion in Cynical *parrhēsia*.

In *The Courage of Truth* (record of his 1984 lectures at the Collège de France) Foucault lingers long on the notion of *parrhēsia*. *Parrhēsia* simply stated is “frankness in speaking the truth” and Foucault charts its presence through Ancient Greek culture and on into Christianity observing as he goes how its usage shifts slightly and meanings multiply with each turn yet the concept retains its kernel of meaning. In *Fearless Speech* (record of his 1983 lectures at the University of California) Foucault makes it clear that his quest is not about the essence of truth but about the activity of truth-telling and the consequences that this may have (*Fearless* 5). For truth-telling is not without its risks: in fact *parrhēsia* has risk at its very core as the parrhesiastes “risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself)” (*Fearless* 19).

This risk is undertaken by the individual through “moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy” (*Fearless* 20). However, the “parrhesiastic game” is not undertaken alone and the risk of the parrhesiastes must be matched by “the interlocutor’s courage in agreeing to accept the hurtful truth that he hears” (*The Courage* 20713). With dynamism evident in this ‘game’ *parrhēsia* can be seen as a fluid relationship process (I, not-I, not not-I) in which the weight shifts with every fresh move. The relationship evolves and, like Deleuze & Guattari’s *rhizome*, it is a living one actively “coming and going rather than starting and finishing” (28).

Given the interlocutor's complicity in the parrhesiastic game it could be seen as problematic to analogise this relationship to the one between the Romantic and the landscape (between *culture* and *nature*). However, if we can pull ourselves away from the static enframing of these terms by exertion in the landscape we can, through a herniating process, reach a situation where the stumbling blocks of *culture* and *nature* are left behind and we enter a more fluid relationship.<sup>5</sup>

Returning briefly to the digital, it is much like the processes involved in metadata tagging. Keeping in mind Chaitin's *natural software* we could consider how metadata tagging operates and organises information—how the hashtag for instance can fold into itself multiple meanings yet leave those meanings to be themselves—it is just that in the process of enfolding, new identities and new possibilities are born. The same processes are at work as the landscape becomes (re)arranged through activity at all different scales of time and space.

Perhaps like Chaitin and *natural software* we must recognise that *parrhēsia* existed long before humans—that there is a *natural parrhēsia*—and it sees the landscape demanding something of us (as much as we of it) and this demand is only opened up to us through our landscape exertions be they in the form of running and walking, or ditch-building and harvesting. With our softer lifestyles (in the West at least) we have replaced the exertions of labour with those of our pastimes.

Through physical exertion we are skewing, turning aslant, muddying the reciprocity. It is a sideways-forward movement achieved through closer appreciation of the sensual which constitutes an unbinding and this unbinding in turn frees up of our receptivity. As Nan Shepherd puts it:

one walks the flesh transparent. But no metaphor, transparent, or light as air, is adequate. The body is not made negligible, but paramount. Flesh is not annihilated but fulfilled. One is not bodiless, but essential body [...] I have walked out of the body and into the mountain. (83)

This sensual attunement is part of our parrhesiastic relationship to landscape and through this relationship “we begin to turn inside-out, loosening the psyche from its confinement within a strictly human sphere, freeing sentience to return to the sensible world that contains us” (Abram, *The Spell* 262).

Yet, still more caution is required for the:

idea that direct productive involvement with the land, unmediated by the market, results in being in some obscure sense ‘close to nature’, and the hope that such apparent immediacy is equivalent to being in a better position to *know* nature, are products of misguided desire on our part. (Reason 27)

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<sup>5</sup> In attempting to visualise this process of *herniation* one might depict a reniform shape trying to turn itself inside out in a movement that is both enveloping and pushing through. The form embraces but does not exclude. This form-process is “like a pineal gland, constantly reconstituting itself by changing direction, tracing an inside space but coextensive with the whole line of the outside” (Deleuze 100-101).

Landscape (and *nature*) does not demand anything of us. Landscape does not care about us but neither does it not care.<sup>6</sup> Landscape (and *nature*) are social or *cultural* constructs and they stand-in for what is *out there* but in this standing-in they also stand in the way of what is *out there*. Through our sensual physical exertions we begin to *herniate* the divide that we humans have created and through these exertions “place and a mind interpenetrate till the nature of both is altered” (Shepherd 6).

But when did culture peel away from nature? In the fifth century BCE the Sophists began to drag man and nature apart through their distinction of *physis* (nature) and *nomos* (custom).<sup>7</sup> The Cynics rather than reject this split acknowledge it but explain that human beings must struggle to regain their rightful place in nature (culture is a subset of nature not its opposite) and for the Cynic this is a joyful struggle rather than a Christian post-Fall suffering. As part of this struggle we humans must renounce the skins that separate us from nature: the city defences, the walls of our homes, our clothes and all the “unquestioned concatenations of customs that only lull [us] into a different sort of sleep” (Desmond 153). The true Cynic “walks abroad naked in the teeth of the wind and hardens himself to the point of feeling nothing” (Nietzsche 130).

This hardening process is vital if the Cynic is to fulfil the role of the messenger who warns humanity of its own foolishness. Paradoxically the Cynic puts himself at the limit of society through his actions but these actions are undertaken for the good of society; the Cynic delivers a truth of sorts but this truth (*parrhēsia*) hurts. Today, more than ever before, humanity has truths to face, but these truths are not of the transcendental kind; they are bloody and visceral for, “[w]e are the killers. We stink of death. We carry it with us [...] We cannot tear it away” (Baker 121).

We have been led astray by the egos of politicians and the wallets of the capitalists to a utopia from which we can only gaze through pollutant-heavy haze or rose-tinted spectacles at what we today call nature. Both of these natures are heavily mediated—nature™ or nature-lite. For the Cynic “the only ‘nature’ to be known is what one experiences here and now” but the skins we have donned insulate us from what we once knew (Desmond 138). Immediate experience becomes less valued as “we shelter ourselves from the harrowing vulnerability of bodied existence. But by the same gesture we also insulate ourselves from the deepest wellsprings of joy” (Abram, *Becoming Animal* 7). We gain a homogenized, stupefying comfort but lose the pin-sharp peaks of pain *and* pleasure.

This nature-truth is analogous to what the Cynic knows as *parrhēsia* and in our failed relationship with the cosmos comes coupled the two faces of parrhesiastic truth that concerned Foucault: the political and the ethical. At a political level we have been

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, as Edward Abbey has noted, the frightening thing about nature is its “implacable indifference” (191).

<sup>7</sup> This division was very common in Sophistic thinking of the latter part of the fifth century BCE and can be observed in the writings of Protagoras, Hippias and Antiphon amongst others. In *Romantic Ecology* Jonathan Bate offers a detailed account of the culture/nature split as it evolves through the nineteenth century and is challenged by the writings of Wordsworth and Ruskin (62-84). Bate’s influential book, published in the vanguard of British ecocriticism, is often criticised today for its omissions and idealisations but its impact is vital in the raised awareness that the world must look to something other than out-dated binary pairings be they left/right, culture/nature or rural/urban.



wronged by our leaders and led astray by our greed and this state of affairs now endangers our own individual selves. We have lost sight of how to care for ourselves in the Foucauldian sense and now think that this process requires ever-thicker insulation against the evils of the world, the evils of nature. This evil of nature comes personified in the aggression of the gulls and foxes that attack innocent chip-eating little old ladies and sleeping babies. In these shallow tabloid summaries the exploitation of the earth's resources is all but ignored until it takes place in our own backyards—even then we can always look out of the *front* window.

Literature is one way to return attention to the guts of the ecological crisis another way is art. In a 1999 review of a Hamish Fulton exhibition John Haldane expresses concern for the neglect of landscape in contemporary British art. With artists such as Andy Goldsworthy and Chris Drury Haldane identifies a “coffee-table” appeal that loses the urgency of the topic to their “highly aesthetic surfaces” (8). Alternatively, landscape art can slip towards Jamie’s “foreshortened definition of nature” where we ignore (for instance) “the bacteria that can pull the rug from under us” (24). Haldane’s hopes for landscape are lifted by the work of Long and Fulton and he focuses his attention on Fulton in particular, lamenting the lack of a major British retrospective of his work.

This lack has now been addressed (by Tate Britain’s 2002 *Walking Journey* exhibition) yet somehow “new thinking about art and the land” has not been stimulated in the way that Haldane hoped for and treatment of the land, when it is there, in British art can become trapped within the gallery walls and the associated aesthetic override or side-tracked to ‘coffee-table’ acceptability (10). A new wave of British nature writing is blossoming and reinventing our relationship with landscape and, as with the original Romantic Movement, perhaps we can hope that the visual arts will follow the literary lead.<sup>8</sup> Turner followed in Thomson’s footsteps.<sup>9</sup> Long and Fulton are pioneers but others must follow *immediately* and:

Put  
a foot on a rock. Choose  
  
one route through millions of pebbles. Follow  
clearly seen, sometimes pain-filled paths, or abandon  
people’s spoor & artefact. (Goodwin 9)

<sup>8</sup> The Recent touring exhibition *Walk On: From Richard Long to Janet Cardiff – 40 Years of Art Walking* offers further scope in the realm of British landscape art although some of the contributing artists appear overly distracted by the technology that accompanies them on their art walks. The exhibition was initiated by Art Circuit Touring Exhibitions and visited various British locations through 2013 and 2014. Artists represented included younger artists such as Tim Knowles and Ingrid Pollard as well as established figures such as Hamish Fulton and Richard Long. A substantial catalogue with essays by Tim Ingold, Alistair Robinson and Mike Collier accompanied the exhibition.

<sup>9</sup> J.M.W. Turner was deeply influenced by the poetry of James Thomson. For Turner, Thomson’s approach opened up a “mode of vision that looked always for movement, light change, contrasts of all kinds in landscape [and] the system of art-values that lay behind this mode” (Lindsay 60). Moreover, Thomson in his poetry “wants the image that impacts and expresses motion, change”—a sentiment that finds much sympathy in the ground covered by this article (64).

It is just that the work may not now find its home in the traditional gallery setting but may inhabit instead the terrain of hyperspace for where better to address the problems of pollution? Fulton himself has acknowledged that, “making exhibitions in the normal sense is a little out of date” (Tufnell & Wilson 107). Maybe landscape artists of the future will all present their *presences* via digital platforms. Fulton is almost here already as he asks himself, “Leave no trace?” and responds, “Electronically” (Fulton 28).

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