

EDGELANDS

Exploring Liminality and Identity in
the British Landscape

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Liminal Britain

This essay will explore various facets of physical and social liminality in the contexts of British arts and literature centered on the landscape, investigating notions of identity, belonging, place, and power along the way. In a post-Brexit, post-lockdown Britain, the country remains in a suspended state of limbo, the future is perhaps more uncertain than ever, and we are constantly negotiating new boundaries – politically, economically and socially.

‘Liminality’, is derived from the Latin word ‘*limen*’, meaning threshold, and refers to a ‘*transitional stage or process. - occupying a position at, or on both sides of a boundary or threshold.*’¹ The term can be broadly used in relation to physical, temporal, and metaphysical spaces, and is as much a part of our everyday lives as your morning cup of tea. It is in the foggy disorientation of waking from a deep sleep, the yellow glare of the tube train as you rattle into work. Early 21st century European anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner popularized the term in their research of liminality in social structures and behavior. Through comparative studies of small scale tribal communities, Van Gennep identifies three main transitional phases in ritual life: separation, margin, and aggregation. He suggests that within the liminal phase, identity is temporarily dissolved, and social orders are disrupted, creating opportunities for new critical perspectives and scrutiny of the self or existing cultural systems, making the liminal space a place for both creativity and destruction:

*‘Initiands live outside their normal environment and are brought to question their self and the existing social order through a series of rituals that often involve acts of pain: the initiands come to feel nameless, spatio-temporally dislocated and socially unstructured...Liminality is both more creative and more destructive than the structural norm. In either case it raises basic problems for social structural man, invites him to speculation and criticism’*²

Turner extends this theory, identifying its importance in modern, post industrial societies in his 1967 essay *Betwixt and between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage*, which explores the human impact of the liminal phase, in greater depth. Bjørn Thomassen

summarises Turner's theory that "*liminality served not only to identify the importance of in-between periods, but also to understand the human reactions to liminal experiences: the way in which personality was shaped by liminality, the sudden foregrounding of agency, and the sometimes dramatic tying together of thought and experience*".³

These two key theories will be referenced and unpacked further through postfeminist and postcolonial perspectives in the following chapters to explore the relationship between liminality, space and identity within artistic and literary contexts.

The decision to centre discussions on liminal space in the British landscape is not arbitrary. As one of the first post-industrial countries, Britain's terrain is somewhat unique, and as a result of its complex history and fast transitioning landscape— physically, politically and culturally, notions of liminality seem to speak of the confused vagueness of British/English culture and identity.

In a recent discussion on Englishness and the occult during *Bloc Projects: Harsh Light* event, British- Norwegian artist Una Hamilton Helle suggests a disenfranchisement with the 'myth' of the nation state, whereby processes of uprooting due to enclosure, industrialization, and *de*-industrialization, have eroded opportunities for community at every corner across the decades, resulting in a widespread feeling of disconnectivity between people and place, and lack of unified national identity⁴. The idyllic rural image of 'this green and pleasant land' has long been an outdated symbol of our national identity – so too has the smoky industrialist landscape of Lowry and most pertinently, the once glorified, now shamed British Empire. With these emblems of England now discarded, and fighting increasing commoditization of space and political polarization, liminal space has become a common feature of the landscape, both structurally and in the British psyche amid a crisis of national identity.

In a journal review of various contemporary texts on Britishness published in 2000⁵, Robin Cohen presents 3 main reasons for building a collective identity – 1) defensive purposes: where minorities benefit from strong identity and cohesion to offset negative prejudices through affirmation of positive self image, 2)

For dominant minorities to decide who has equal access to or is excluded from power and resources, and 3), to bring together a nation and state that is frequently ruptured. This explains why Scotland, Ireland and Wales all appear to have a stronger unified national identity, necessary for defence against English ruling. England however, being the oppressor rather than the oppressed minority, with no need for this defensive strategy, and at the height of its empire instead used Cohen's 2nd example to construct an identity so reliant on its power over others that once the empire crumbled, English identity-and by extension - *British* identity, crumbled with it.

If statues of Winston Churchill and Edward Colston are no longer emblems of national pride –can celebrations of Britishness be found in Mark Leckey's motorway bridge, or the tattered gates of Greenham common? What can a deeper exploration of the physical and cultural landscape, off the beaten track, the Britain that lurks in the shadows, tell us about contemporary national identity and belonging in the UK today?

Chapter 1

Class, the City and the Supernatural

Liminal space has become a popular subject matter for artists and writers seeking to bring attention to the overlooked or neglected aspects of the British landscape, perhaps highlighting their hidden beauty, like Edward Chell's dreamy paintings of motorway shrubbery⁶, or sharing the peculiar stories unfolding in the wastelands of Farley and Robert's *Edgelands*⁷. Aside from providing an eccentric alternative to landscape art, many works of this genre help to build a more accurate, honest, and critical picture of modern Britain. Mark Leckey's 2019 exhibition '*O' Magic Power of Bleakness*'⁸ demonstrates the potential of liminal space to act as a catalyst for transcendental experience, an archive of collective memories and histories, and a lens through which Britain's long lasting class and identity issues may be examined. The overlapping mediums of installation, sound work, moving image and illusion, create a sensory liminal experience that defies definition.

The installation comprises a life size replica of the M53 motorway bridge in Wirral, alongside two of Leckey's video works *Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore 1999* and *Dream English Kid, 1964 – 1999 AD*. The former, a dizzying compilation of subculture dance floor footage, the latter, a collection of found digital images and sounds, signifiers of the latter half of the 20th century, from the Doctors TARDIS to Lyles golden syrup – both films strongly reflective of British culture between the 1970-90's.

In the third piece, *O' Magic Power of Bleakness*, five vertical screens project a collage of monochromatic, filtered, glowing footage. Young masked figures, draped in Adidas, dance between the screens, like ghosts themselves they haunt each corner of the room, disappearing and reappearing in the alcove of the bridge, and in distorted shadows on the walls. One voice calls out with a dream to '*leave this place, to London, to anywhere*'. He is answered by ghostly whispers, inviting him '*up up up- come up in the world- everything is possible*.'⁹



Mark Leckey, *O' Magic Power of Bleakness* (2019) Tate Britain¹²

They sip lighter fluid and the chaos builds. The stars and cars and fluorescent jackets flash their lights as the echoes intensify, shouting, swearing, and chanting, the tracksuit bodies contort into bridges, and an orange lamp light twitches in the darkness when the spectacle is over.¹⁰

This tells the story of the artist's childhood encounter with pixies underneath the M53 motorway bridge, playing with the notion of a 'changeling - , a child believed to have been stolen by fairies and swapped with a duplicate who is in some way transformed'¹¹.

There are several key motifs at play here which together offer some interesting perspectives on liminality and Englishness. Firstly, the Bridge itself is the ideal symbol of liminality, a site for transition and passing. Leckey himself refers to this setting as sub temporal¹³, where time passes above, the underside traps all things in a suspended state. In this way, it acts as the perfect vessel for the artist to envelope the three films, becoming a conceptual and literal time capsule of collective and personal memory from the past five decades. An archive of social history itself, the bridge's Brutalist design reflects the changing cultural and political landscape; once hailed as a signifier for a modern utopia, then

failed utopias, and eventually the reforms of the New Labour government, it tells of an England desperate to keep re-inventing itself and the fluidity of its architectural narratives. Secondly, whilst this concrete bridge at first seems an unlikely place to find fairies, its connotations of austerity and failed utopias make it the perfect environment conducive to supernatural experience.

Dr Edwin Coomasaru (*Bloc Projects Harsh Light* panelist) points out that there is an increased interest in the occult, the supernatural, and unconventional spiritual practices during periods of economic and political uncertainty in the UK.¹⁴ Amid fears of nuclear Armageddon and the economic hardship resulting from declining local industries, it is perhaps unsurprising that a young Mark Leckey, growing up on the outskirts of Liverpool In the 1970s, should turn to the enchanted urban forest of the M53 for some mystic escapism. This supports both van Gennepe's and Turners theory that the '*spatio-temporally dislocated and socially unstructured*'¹⁵ conditions of liminal space triggers more creative or irregular behaviors in a '*dramatic tying together of thought and experience*'¹⁶, manifesting in this fantastical encounter.

The films narrative of the young boy longing for a better life is also reminiscent of Turner's notion of the '*sudden foregrounding of agency*'. His longing to escape manifests in this reverie of spirits, offering to '*bring him up in the world*'¹⁷. This epiphany through supernatural experience is borne of the 'socially unstructured' conditions of the liminal space, speaking of the aspirations of the marginalized working classes, and the relationship between liminality and spiritual rituals which lie at the root of Gennepe's research.

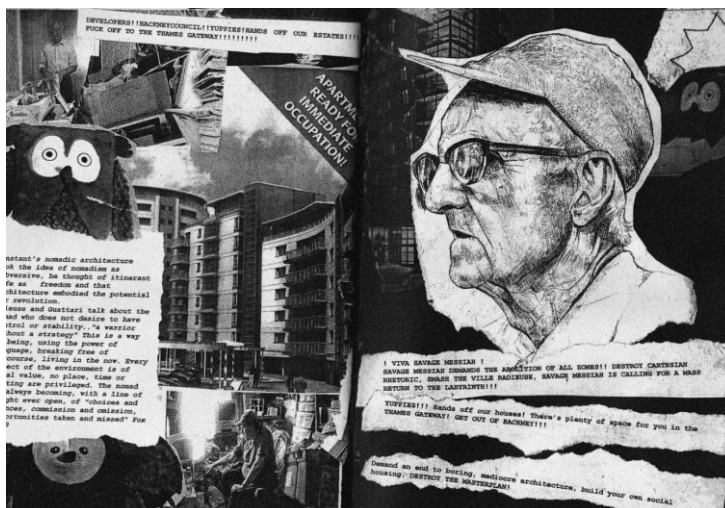
In conversation with Paul Farley on the work, Leckey suggests '*I've started thinking that maybe I constantly return to the past because it's a class issue*'¹⁸. His working class roots are evident in the work, from the accents and clothing of the figures in *O' Magic* to the returning shot of a single sleeping bag on the floor of a dingy urban flat in *Dream English Kid*. Despite its name, Leckey admits to feeling distanced from notions of Englishness, identifying more locally with Liverpool, as a border town rather than part of England.¹⁹ This speaks of the fragmentation of British identity,

however, there is a strong working class identity that emerges within the work which is unifying for many across the country. The Brutalist bridge is again associated with council housing mainly occupied by the working classes. The permanence and stability of its materiality stands in grim opposition to the impermanence of youth, and the precarious position of the working class kids that dance beneath it in a moment of ecstatic hope. Leckey has frozen this moment in time, giving these liminal spaces and transitional moments a meaningful, spiritual resonance through his nostalgic appreciation of their transformative role in his life, demonstrating Turners assertion that liminality can shape identities and create extraordinary experiences.

Laura Grace Ford's *Savage Messiah* is a psychogeographical zine series made from 2005 to 2018 that explores London's abandoned urban spaces, the old haunts of defeated punks, ravers and squatters, with a focus on London's rapid regeneration and the consequences of gentrification on its population. Influenced by the methods of earlier psychogeographers, Debord, De Quincy, and Chtcheglov, Ford similarly half celebrates, half laments the spaces she drifts through, mapping out the political and psychological ills of each post code with a melancholic nostalgia mixed with gritty realism. The artist's anger is palpable through her charged poetry, frantic scribbles and sketches, torn and hastily collaged photographs and drawings in the punk aesthetic that reflects her anti-establishment politics and anarchist attitude. Though made recently, the content builds a picture of a lost era, the London of the 70s, 80s and 90's. Her writing is a mixture of records of walks, memories, poems, newspaper clippings and stream of consciousness prose, in which she documents with urgency the transient or ephemeral remains of the city which are lost daily to privatization, enclosure and redevelopment.

In her own words, *'the book could be seen in the context of the aftermath of an era, where residues and traces of euphoric moments haunt a melancholy landscape'*²¹. Like Leckey, she is desperate to retrieve something of her past in this obsessive re-imagining of a London that no longer exists. However, she has created a thrilling record of the city in this heavily transitional phase, which looks back in order to look forward in her highly critical, political analysis of

each locality. Similarly to *O' Magic Power of Bleakness*, she illustrates the ways in which space holds traces of the past and can therefore become *temporally* liminal sites of layered histories which undergo repeated process of erasure and rewriting, just as the ground itself is upturned and built on over and over.



Savage Messiah (2019) Laura Grace Ford²⁰

Ford could be accused of romanticizing an era which arguably was in need of some regeneration to provide more jobs and better housing conditions – had this not also triggered the property inflation and heavy commoditization of space which now benefits only the richest in society through divisive gentrification and exclusionary processes akin to social cleansing. She holds this restructuring responsible for the *'bland deserts'*,²² of cultural conservatism which stifles play, protest and experimentation as *'all of the city's energy is put in to paying the mortgage or the rent'*,²³

The work tells the story of the loss of creative, working class communities resulting from rapid regeneration, almost acting as a case study for the importance of these liminal spaces which are not owned, privatized, gated or surveyed. Ford insists there is value in the cracks and chasms of contemporary London, the urban

wilderness in between. They are important sites of resistance to neoliberalism, which must be fought for not only for the communities that inhabit them, but to maintain the collective psyche of London as a place that's free to be explored, where sub and counter cultures can flourish and a deeper connectedness to the terrain and collectivism in local communities can be upheld. Heavily influenced by Blake, Ford also highlights the practice of walking, integral to the creation of her work, as an act of '*sensory derangement*'²⁴, a kind active liminal activity used as a tactic for sharpening perspectives and '*call [ing] forth an absent collective subject to occupy those new social imaginaries, those alternative worlds achingly proximate to ours.*'²⁵ Speaking on Blake's work, Ford described his ability to create a '*visionary sense of London through walking*'²⁶, allowing the mind as well as the body to drift across the city, and thus unlocking '*new social imaginaries*', and '*alternative worlds.*' Ford's politicized work offers an alternative world free from neoliberalism, whilst Leckey offers similar political critiques through supernatural allegories. This collective yet intimate way of experiencing and interacting with our surroundings, is perhaps lost in the age of the car. Isolated from the tactility of the world around us, as well as each other, it is perhaps a contributing factor to growing '*cultural conservatism*'²⁷ and the lack of collective identity that she seeks to overturn with her work.

In his introduction to the collection, Mark Fisher writes, '*Savage Messiah is about another kind of delirium: the releasing of the pressure to be yourself*'²⁸. Again there is a dissociative quality to exploring liminal space in this way, which may seem at odds with the question of discovering identities; however, it is through a *rediscovering* of the land in these neglected cracks and edges, where the breadth of variation and nuances in British identities, not defined by the capitalist totems that crowd them, can be felt more keenly. Her illustrative portrayal of these liminal landscapes reflects the wider current identity of Britain which is itself constantly in flux, fragmented, messy and difficult to define. Growing interest in these liminal spaces among British artists affirm their increasing prominence in our landscape, and Ford and Leckey have both demonstrated their role in coloring the lives of post war generations, revealing their potential for magic, mystery, and historical or political insight.

*'Sometimes the edge of the city folds back in, the liminal emerges in the centre. It is in these gaps where political life emerges as a current, where excluded voices become audible.'*²⁹

The notion of liminal space as allowing *'excluded voices [to] become audible'*, refers perhaps in this instance to the ghosts of the punks and ravers, working class communities and unconventional sub cultures like paganism, however, this relationship between liminal space and marginalized communities is worth exploring in greater depth in the context of feminist and racial issues which complicate notions of a unified British identity.

Chapter 2

Gender, and Agency

*“The female experience can be defined through liminality. Women live in the same physical space as the dominant culture but do not live in the same societal space. Women exist in a liminal space”*³⁰

Katrina A. Maura *Living In The Liminal: A Contemporary Feminist’s Experience Living in The In-Between*

This quote, taken from an article about street harassment and dominant cultures, and published on feminist blog *Fempop*, could be considered an unreliable source. Although initiated by the *Society for the Psychology of Women*, and written by a psychosexual clinician, there is little information about the writer online and the blog itself is difficult to find. However, it is perhaps fitting for a discussion on liminality to include sources which lie somewhat on the periphery of academia. The above statement remains an important interpretation of liminality through a post feminist perspective, underpinning the following exploration of the relationship between gender, liminality and agency in space.

The female experience of navigating this friction between the ‘physical’ and the ‘societal’ space is the basis of Caroline Perez’ 2019 book *Invisible Women: Exposing Data Bias in a World Designed for Men*, providing solid data to support Maura’s ideas.

*“Humanity is male, and man defines woman not in herself, but as relative to him: she is not regarded as an autonomous being. He is the Subject, He is the Absolute – she is the Other.”*³¹

Quoting Simone de Beauvoir, Perez sets out the context in which the book operates in bringing to light the hidden data biases which cause female realities to be ignored or dismissed in the design of everything from smart phones and cars, to entire transport systems and medical practices, with catastrophic consequences. Perez also points out inconsistencies in academic merit, where studies show that female authored papers are more likely to be accepted or rated higher under double blind review, and are systematically cited less often than men, meaning fewer women progress in their careers. I have encountered this gender gap in my own research. Firstly, the default male is used in van Gennep’s writing, referring to all of

humanity as ‘man’ and ‘him’. Though this is perhaps to be expected of a text written in 1967, this use of binary is in interesting opposition to his subject matter of liminality. Putting Cohen’s 2000 report under the same lens, his use of male pronouns lies in the fact that he has only reviewed texts by other men. Though he speaks at length of inclusivity and ethnic diversity in his review, his decision to only review texts by other white men is not only proof of the gender citation gap, but also perpetuates a limited (white male) perspective on the subject. As traditionally less ‘reliable’ sources are brought into the fold, it is important to hold male academics to the same standard of scrutiny, and question the so often unquestioned credibility of their narratives.

The Greenham Common Peace Protests of the early 1980s are a powerful example of how women have utilized their liminal status in order to push for political change on a nation scale. Subverting and appropriating traditional female roles, these women physically and symbolically broke into what was considered a strictly male space (both the missile base and the political sphere), and in camping out refused to return to the home that represented their domestic role in the world. This is evidenced in the art that was produced and displayed on the 9 mile perimeter of fencing that bordered the missile base.

The female only protest camp garnered global attention as women traversed the boundary between domestic and political spheres, arguably making their activism more effective. Exploiting this, women ‘*weaponised traditional notions of femininity*’,³² by using their identity as mothers and carers to reinforce their message and driving force for the protests – that this threatened the future safety of their children.

This message is clearly evidenced in the protesters artwork which appropriates historically feminine materials and symbols for creative activism. Protesters participated in weaving, embroidery, cloth painting, song writing and made banners/patchworks. Children’s clothes and toys were incorporated into artworks and attached to the fences alongside web patterns woven in wool – the web was a recurring motif used to symbolize unity and connectivity with protesters around the country, whilst wool was also used to obstruct military machinery. Thalia Campbell, one of the most prolific artist



Campbell, T. (1981-2) *Greenham Common Banner*³³

protesters, made large scale textile banners asserting the female identity central to the peace camp, incorporating symbols like doves, peace signs, and a human chain in - opposition to images of the missile base.

The fence itself already a liminal space became a site for the disruption of social order, fulfilling van Gennep's theory, whilst the women used the liminal status of their gender subversively to amplify their message and scrutinize systems of oppression which helped to create the conditions for liminal existence, fulfilling Turner's '*sudden foregrounding of agency*'.

Almost 30 years on, women's rights to public space is an ongoing issue which many female artists continue to explore today. Clare Qualmann, a multimedia performance artist based in east London uses walking both as an art practice and a form of political activism to assert women's rights in public spaces. Through her '*Nightwalking*' project with the international *Walking Artists Network* in 2010, Qualmann invites groups of women to simply go walking together after dark, exploring the city and its edgelands, dark alleys and abandoned spaces. Participants took photographs, wrote stories and made maps, building confidence, feelings of safety, and asserting their rights to exist in the space without fear. This opens a wider discussion about the kinds of spaces women are excluded from, not by way of physical barriers, but through the

perpetuation of fear of violence against women. Qualmann has further explored issues of mobility, inequality and gendered space in her project 'Perambulator' which focuses on the experience of walking with a pram, shedding light on maternal narratives and wider aspects of exclusion from public space.

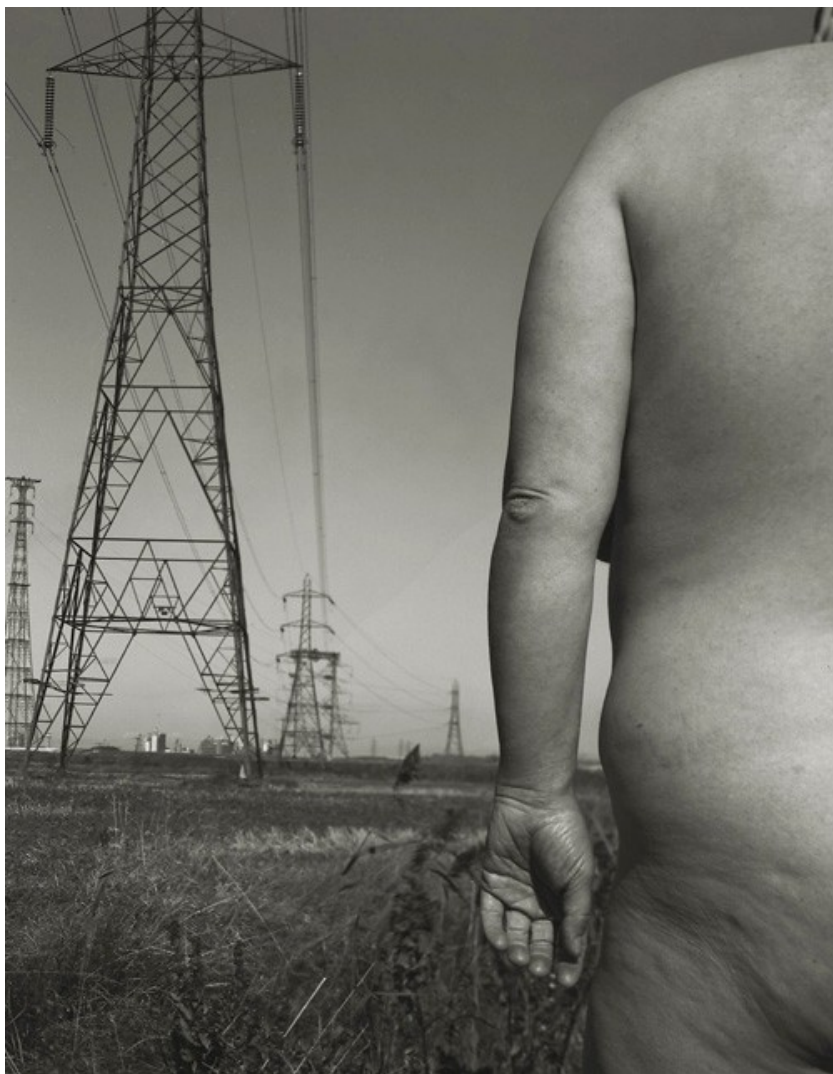
The female body remains to be a highly politicized site in itself, heavily concerned with issues of boundaries, consent, and agency in space.

Jo Spence and Terry Dennet have elaborated on this relationship between the female body and land access in their photographic series 'Remodeling Photo History', demonstrating 'the right to inhabit the landscape as inescapably tied to the right to inhabit a non-idealised female body'³⁴. In a collaborative practice between artists rather than that of male artist and female muse, Spence situates herself in the works, using her own nude figure in provoking compositions at site boundaries of privatized land. The choice to physically situate her body in these specific boundary locations is



highly illustrative of Maura's comment on women existing primarily in liminal space. A common motif of landscape painting – figures physically taking possession of the land, is appropriated here. The female figure takes precedence in the photographs but rejects typical representations of the female nude imposed by the male gaze and challenges assumptions about *'to whom active and passive roles are assigned in relation to the landscape'*³⁵.

Spence assumes both an active and passive stance in the photos, the latter much more alarming- her nude body unceremoniously splayed face down in the dirt between an open car and a locked gate. This perhaps speaks of the degradation of being excluded from public space, physical, social or otherwise but simultaneously creates a powerful image of an authentic female body physically, shamelessly, reclaiming the land, despite being vulnerable to exploitation and restrictions implemented by higher powers, in the same way restrictions are placed on land. The absence of the face in these photos strips Spence of her individual identity, as her body becomes a universal symbol of the female form and collective female experience, exposing the uncomfortable friction, or liminality, between the former, exploited and policed, and the latter, ignored and dismissed.



Jo Spence (and Terry Dennet), (1982) *Remodelling Photo History: Victimization* (above) and *Remodelling Photo History: Industrialisation* (p.15)³⁶

It is also important to note that ideas around gender have developed significantly over the last decade with the recognition of those whose gender identity lies in-between or completely outside of the male and female binaries. Many still struggle to have their true identities legally recognized by governments or their own communities and are subsequently more likely to suffer from mental health issues or become victims of hate crime. It is vitally important therefore for these communities to have access to safe LGBTQ+ spaces.

Artists Rosie Hastings and Hannah Quinlan explore this issue in their 2016 work *'Gay Bar Directory'*, a moving image documentation of over 100 gay bars in 14 cities filmed on a go-pro, their empty interiors showcased in response to the rapid closure of LGBTQ+ venues as a result of national austerity, and the decline of public spaces and state infrastructure. As working hours and living costs have changed, LGBTQ+ communities have retreated online, with dating apps replacing many of these physical spaces, diminishing visibility and excluding BAME and transgender users. With the uncontrolled spread of racist and transphobic attitudes expressed freely online, these platforms are now used to oppress factions of the communities they were made to cater for. Bringing these issues to light in this landscape of lost space, the work, in their own words, communicates *'the complicated emotional space that is under threat both from internal and external pressures and failures.'*³⁷

These internal pressures are an example of social gatekeeping in which the exclusivity of so-called feminist spaces (often dominated by cis-gendered white women) can reject those who do not identify with a notion of gender that is *'constructed and reproduced in ways that can only name the experiences of certain types of women.'* The alternative ideology of *'Fugitive Feminism'* attempts to counteract this, recognizing the intersectionality of race, gender, class, age, sexuality, and disability in gender issues and embraces these liminal identities under the transgressive umbrella of the 'fugitive', rather than *'seeking inclusion in gender relations that cannot account for Black women's myriad experiences'*³⁸.

Chapter 3

'Otherness' and Ethnicity

This chapter will attempt to explore some of those experiences of black and minority artists in the context of liminality, identity, and their relationship with the land, commenting on the exclusion of marginalized communities from certain landscapes and how this impacts individual identities and notions of Britishness.

Afua Hirsch, in her 2018 book, *'Brit(ish): on Race, Identity and Belonging'* equates her own struggles with identity with that of the nation as a whole, pointing out that the UK is unique in the lengths it will go to avoid issues of race and identity. Hirsch was raised in a predominantly white middle class community in Wimbledon, by wealthy parents, and was privately educated. As a mixed race woman of Jewish and Ghanaian Heritage, she delves deep into the uncomfortable experiences brought about by her liminal identity, seeing herself as neither fully white nor fully black, fully British, nor fully Ghanaian. Her privileged upbringing gave her a heightened awareness of her 'otherness' and an intensified pressure to adapt and ignore her own blackness. She compares this upbringing with that of her partner Sam, who grew up in a working class single parent family in Tottenham, and though materially deprived, was raised with a strong sense of black identity and Ghanaian values in one of London's most well established black-British communities – a source of great envy for Hirsch who claims, *'In terms of identity [he was] born with the equivalent of a silver spoon'*³⁹ Upon moving to Ghana hoping to feel more at home, she finds she does not attune so easily with Ghanaian life and culture having been raised in Britain. Hirsch highlights here the ways identities are established, not just by heritage but by the environments we are raised in, which dictate our sense of belonging, creating feelings of rejection when the two appear incongruent.

Ingrid Pollard's work presents an apt example of this. Pollard has long been using traditional landscape imagery to explore British culture and racial difference within her work. Her 1989 photographic series *The Cost of the English Landscape* consists of original photographs of the Lake District national park, along with

postcards, maps and tourist information, interspersed with warning signs for the local Sellafield Power station and images of the artist and other black walkers exploring the landscape.



Ingrid Pollard, *The Cost of the English Landscape* (detail) (1989)⁴⁰

This work highlights the tensions that occur where embedded notions of what the rural English landscape should look like are challenged in terms of both the infrastructure of land and the people that inhabit it. Here, Pollard contests the assumption that the black experience is confined only to urban areas⁴¹. This friction is mirrored in the contrasting language and imagery used around the promotion of the park- of William Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter against that of the power station, pointing to environmental concerns as well as anxieties around maintaining an idealized image of rural England, hinting at darker ideals of purity that extend beyond preservation of the environment. Though made in 1989, research shows this is an ongoing issue. A 2017 study by *Natural England* found that only 26.2% of black people spent time in the countryside compared to 44% of white people. Meanwhile, only 1% of visitors to UK national parks and 1% of mountaineering volunteers come from BAME backgrounds. Whilst these sites are technically open to everyone, there are invisible barriers to diversity such as travel costs, lack of adequate transport, lack of knowledge of the British countryside, lack of culturally appropriate provisions and most prominently, fear of discrimination and middle class stigma against non white visitors.⁴²

Toward remedying this, British activist group, '*Black Girls Hike*', are working to encourage more women of colour to cross these boundaries and explore the natural landscape in a safe and accepting environment. Starting out on social media, *Black Girls Hike*, is now an active and thriving community and charity, leading twice monthly walks, collaborating with outdoor brands to increase diversity, and giving black and ethnic minority women the confidence to venture out into the British countryside.

Jini Reddy delves deeper into themes of identity, belonging and the non-white female experience of the British landscape in her recently published '*Wanderland*'. This part memoir, part travel book addresses on a personal level, many of the stigmas and anxieties that inspired *Black Girls Hike*. She tackles many of the same issues as Hirsch, as both are of mixed heritage, yet had privileged upbringings in predominantly white areas. Reddy however, chooses to explore her identity on foot, to interrogate her relationship with the British landscape and culture.

*'British by birth, Indian by descent, Canadian by upbringing, and south African by [her] parents birthplace'*⁴³. Reddy is a self-proclaimed outsider, in regards to both her cultural and spiritual identity. With no sense of belonging or attachment to any one religion or cultural tradition, Reddy seeks the magical, the spiritual, and the 'other' in the natural landscape, reconciling her own feeling of otherness by making *'the outlier world my home, a desirable place to be'*⁴⁴. Throughout this journey, her triumphs in finding these *'little pockets of home all over Britain'*⁵³ are inflected with moments of anxiety and paranoia around her presence as a woman of colour in rural settings. Through connections made with the overlooked or mystified parts of the landscape on her travels, Reddy resists confinement to a single identity. No longer willing to adapt, she chooses to embrace and celebrate her 'otherness' and liminal identity with a great sense of pride.

*"Id set off driven by a need to retrieve the lost, mute and unloved parts of myself...The me who is not steeped in the tradition of this country, the me who is an outlier, who wants to be free to love and claim belonging to this land, just as I am..., I've sought to bring the other, both wild and human in from the cold."*⁴⁶

British-Nigerian artist Yinka Shonibare famously appropriates well known 18th century European paintings to comment on themes of

cross cultural identity, authenticity and colonialism. In his 1998 sculpture *Mr and Mrs Andrews Without Their Heads*, two headless mannequins dressed in west African batik, fashioned in Victorian style mimic the recognizable poses of Gainsborough's 1750 portrait of Robert and Frances Andrews.



Yinka Shonibare 'Mr and Mrs Andrews Without Their Heads' (1998)⁴⁷

The original portrait was intended as a memento of the couple's marriage and a celebration of their land power afforded by their vast estate, an iconic representation of the European gentry. Shonibare's satirical parody is a reminder of the source of English wealth in this period – through the exploitation of its foreign colonies. The batik fabric dressing the headless figures originated in Indonesia, manufactured by Dutch colonialists hoping to make a profit in the Netherlands, and surplus sold in West African markets, before becoming increasingly popular in the 20th century as a symbol of post-colonial independence.

The layers of irony here bring into question the authenticity of cultural symbols and identities and their hidden contexts. With the fabrics lack of cultural exclusivity and the figures lack of identity,

Shonibare expresses his own belief that there is no such thing as autonomous culture⁴⁸. Whilst still critiquing the relics of colonialism, Shonibare, like Reddy, prefers to celebrate the convergence of cultures, and in this way denies the work any straightforward narrative, inviting imaginative interpretation to avoid alienating audiences. Referring back to Gennep's theory of liminality as a space for both scrutiny and creativity, Shonibare's work serves as a prime example of how an artwork, playing with the themes of cross cultural identity and colonialism, with careful nuance can encompass both these things at once and is thus extremely successful in the mainstream art world.

It is important to note here that Shonibare's stance on autonomous culture too comes from a place of privilege, which separates him from stereotypes. Having been raised by wealthy educated parents in London and Lagos, Shonibare never identified with the Afro-Caribbean BLK Art Group who protested racism in the British art world, nor particularly with the Young British Artists with whom he is often associated⁴⁹. In many respects, Shonibare defies categorization, but is by no means a marginal figure in mainstream culture unlike Pollard for instance. *'You know, all of the things that are supposed to be wrong with me have actually become a huge asset. I'm talking about race and disability. They're meant to be negatives within our society. But they're precisely the things that have liberated me'*⁵⁰

For both Reddy and Hirsch, otherness and liminality created identity issues and feelings of rejection which they worked hard to overcome through their work. For Shonibare however, these factors have ultimately had a positive, 'liberating' impact on his life. Perhaps this is resulting from his views on autonomous culture which have freed him from anxieties around identity, or perhaps it is the ever powerful combination of maleness and wealth.

Many of the artworks presented here support Gennep and Turner's theories together. Certainly, *'the way(s) in which personality was shaped by liminality'* is evidenced clearly throughout in several different ways, from Mark Leckey's motorway bridge, to Reddy's multicultural upbringing.

Like the changelings in Leckey's *O'Magic*, who have *been 'swapped with a duplicate who is in some way transformed'* many

of these artists have experienced a periods of ‘namelessness’, in which they become ‘socially unstructured’, outsiders. By then exploring this marginal phase through various personal or physical journeys (‘*that often involve acts of pain*’), many have emerged with a renewed sense of identity, informed by the critical perspectives that the liminal creates space for. This results in the final phase- ‘aggregation’, manifesting in these fascinating works of art and literature which in themselves defy definition, with single works blurring the lines between genres, and uniquely combining an eclectic variety of mediums and ideas.

These examples also highlight the psychological significance of carrying out this journey from liminality to aggregation through physically traversing or inhabiting the landscape, as a kind of ritual pilgrimage on which much of Genep’s research was originally based.

Under Blake’s trance of ‘*sensory derangement*’, Reddy has trekked across the country to find where she belongs, whilst Hirsch crossed borders in Ghana, to find out where she doesn’t. Ford and Qualmann have drifted the city in search of hidden truths, whilst Spence, Pollard and the Greenham protesters have trespassed borders, breaking physical and social boundaries. Throughout these various journeys, individuals have come to recognize and embrace liminality, or ‘in-betweenness’ as an important part of their identity, which is perhaps best expressed by Hirsch in this extract:

*My identity started from a place of feeling other, and alien, it evolved in the conditions of prejudice and unfairness, and then grew and blossomed into something that I cherish, that enriches my relationship with Britain, my country, that helps me see nuances, truths, and opportunities here that I would perhaps have been blind to see*⁵¹

Whilst some conditions of liminality relating to feminist and racial issues should be remedied to improve inclusivity, in many other cases in terms of British identity, liminality can and should be embraced. These works suggest that the answers to questions of identity lie in the exploration of the landscape, and if they find that they do not belong to any one existing notion of identity – this too,

is an identity, and should be celebrated, as Cohen summarizes: *Having an elaborated, multi-layered identity is not the same thing as not having one at all*⁵² Like Fords collaged and chaotic depiction of London– Britain is, and always has been, a collage of diverse identities, overlapping, clashing and converging, new identities forming as cultures collide and borrow from each other. They are constantly *‘made and remade, invented and inherited... hybrid, multiply-located and complex... We should distinguish between complexity...and confusion.*⁵³ It may be concluded therefore that liminality itself is a defining trait of British identity, constantly changing in tandem with the textures of the social and physical landscape.

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