

# Landscape narratives and the construction of meaning in the contemporary urban canal-scape

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Birmingham City University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2012

BIRMINGHAM INSTITUTE OF ART & DESIGN, BIRMINGHAM CITY  
UNIVERSITY IN COLLABORATION WITH BRITISH WATERWAYS  
AND THE ARTS & HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL

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# Abstract

The research explores the ways in which individuals within a diverse urban society perceive and interact with the regenerated urban canal-scape examining the process and dynamics by which individuals construct personal meanings relating to the canal landscape with emphasis on the central canal area (Brindleyplace) of Birmingham, UK.

Specific phenomenological and performative methodologies are developed to elicit qualitative, self-reflexive landscape responses focussing on the use of walking in the landscape, combined with narrative-representational approaches, both vision and language-based. Data are collected using a series of in-situ and ex-situ studies including: collaborative 'Walking-and-Talking' exercises; semi-structured interviews, or 'Conversations'; self-reflexive exercises such as diaries and a remote postcard study and participant-observation exercises based on group activities in the canal-scape.

Findings suggest that individuals' landscape perceptions are constructed through experiences and memories of other landscapes, both physically known and those only imagined. Participants display congruencies and divergences regarding notions of iconic landscape components and perceptual themes which may be contrary to the established norms of canal-scape meaning. The study stresses the use and importance of individual narratives as indicators of how participants think about and use the landscape as part of their life activities, how they perceive it, how they project themselves onto it, construct meanings around it. Results indicate that the locomotive-narrative methodologies developed in response to the research parameters are highly conducive to the evocation and expression of multi-modal landscape perceptions, including references to memories and associations.

Research was carried out in collaboration with British Waterways and funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council under a Collaborative Doctoral Award.

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# Acknowledgements

I would have been unable to complete this thesis without the sustained support, guidance and enthusiasm of my supervisors Prof. Richard Coles (BIAD) and Glenn Millar (British Waterways). Thanks are due to Richard for his open-mindedness, to Glenn for his special insights, and to them both for meeting me in cold canal-side locations.

I am deeply grateful to all the participants who made time to share their personal stories with me and who helped make undertaking this research so surprising and enjoyable.

The Arts and Humanities Research Council (Collaborative Doctoral Award Scheme), British Waterways and Birmingham City University all provided essential funding, allowing me to make a career-change for which I am grateful.

Thanks to Mark Cowell (BIAD) and Roger Butler (Co-originator of the research proposal) for their useful insights. I am grateful to Prof. Darren Newbury and Dr. Anne Boulton for their invaluable PG Cert courses and their continued interest in my research. Thanks are also due to Yanyan Wang, Yvette Burn, Julia Burdett and Jerome Turner for their advice, administrative help and technical support.

My family has been hugely supportive during the last four years - many thanks to them for listening to me and for distracting me when it was necessary. Finally, I would like to thank my partner Matiss for his patience, encouragement and his belief that I could finish this.

# Introduction

The research originally arose from a desire to understand more fully how a diverse urban society perceives and interacts with the regenerated canal and was formulated and enabled through the partnership of Birmingham City University with British Waterways and the Arts & Humanities Research Council in the form of a Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA07/222). British Waterways are responsible for the maintenance of 2,200 miles of canals and rivers in the UK<sup>1</sup>, including the canal sites discussed in this thesis.

However, this research is not and was never intended to be an exercise in visitor studies, nor is it an exposé of British Waterways' policies. Replication of those approaches, though valid and useful in a different context, would be extraneous as British Waterways already employ them for measuring values, attitudes and efficiency. This research thesis is an exploration of the ways in which individuals think about and use the canal landscape; how they incorporate it into their lives, how they perceive it, how they project themselves onto it and construct meanings around it. As such it was anticipated that the process of enquiry would yield results both specific to the canal and more general in nature regarding notions of landscape perception.

## Aims and objectives

Research aimed to:

- investigate the ways in which a diverse urban population interacts with and perceives the regenerated urban canal-scape (in central Birmingham)
- identify the process and dynamics by which individuals construct personal meanings relating to the canal-scape

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.britishwaterways.co.uk/home>

Objectives were to:

- collect and analyse the associated individual narratives of the urban canal-scape
- explore, develop and apply qualitative methods for eliciting individual responses
- identify and review a range of literature pertinent to the study
- identify congruencies and divergences between individuals' landscape perceptions

## Context

The research data were acquired in various canal sites between September 2007 and September 2010, but the focus of this research thesis is on the regenerated urban canal-scape in central Birmingham, emanating from the central 'node' of Brindleyplace (regenerated in 1994) (Plate 1).

It became evident early on in the research process that eliciting such opinion-based information as 'landscape perceptions' would require a qualitative, phenomenological approach via in-depth, individual, narrative representation, hence the title of the thesis. Despite the notion of narratives as methods of interpretation and representation (Mason 2004), the best and most respectful way to understand what someone thinks is to ask them (Gauntlett & Holzworth 2006). However, individuals may be unable to explain, or even wish to consider, why they behave or think the way they do. For these participants demanding answers to a series of research questions may elicit disappointingly unconsidered responses, since the participants themselves may be uncomfortable with the question or may have never considered the question before (Gauntlett & Holzworth 2006). In order to avoid such situations, semi-structured collaborative, dialogic techniques were developed in which the participant and researcher talk around a subject to uncover opinions and rationales<sup>2</sup> (McKay 2002; Kuhn 2007). The results of these different techniques are

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<sup>2</sup> McKay found that her most successful interviews were those based on the mutual *"exchange of autobiographies...rather than probing their lives with a predetermined series of questions. At those*

presented in a series of chapters so that it is possible to understand the approaches used and consider the findings.

Qualitative methods focus on eliciting opinion-based data from individuals and so seem to rest on the intangible and un-testable; the complexities of opinion and idiosyncrasy that form the individual's personality are in a state of constant flux. There exist a number of potential problems which the qualitative researcher may face and personal experiences of this and prior research studies suggest that participants are both essential to, and the main drawback of, qualitative research. For example, participants may change their minds and retract earlier statements; they may omit information; they may subconsciously tailor their responses to please the researcher; they may be un-cooperative for various reasons; they may also be led by badly worded questions, or confused by the breadth of choice in an open-ended question. These are all reasons not to undertake a qualitative study. However, it is for these reasons that qualitative approaches are challenging, informative, surprising and ultimately useful for organisations such as British Waterways, for whom interaction with the public is an essential aspect of their function. Any methodology that may lead to better communication with such complex beings as people must be encouraged.

The diversity of this mixed-method research approach and the individualism of the research participants ideally requires consistency in the landscape studies. In this study a 'constant' is presented in the form of the canal landscape itself. Here certain landscape components provide this, namely the water; the canal furniture such as locks, gates, signage and moorings; and the canal structure, being a cut with either a towpath or bank and crossing points in the form of bridges and the tunnels underneath them. Similarly, restricting the main part of the study to the central Birmingham canal area was deemed appropriate rather than trying to compare

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*moments where I gave them some details of my own story I found that respondents were most reflective and critical of their own experiences"* (McKay 2002:188). This 'self-disclosure' is a crucial part of a "dialogic and collaborative feminist research process", 'feminist' on the understanding that there is no authority or elite, merely different viewpoints (McKay 2002:194).

responses in different cities, especially since it is a well-used location, clean, well-maintained, freely accessible by walking, with a range of associated features, including locks, canal basins, mooring points, varied facilities, heritage and new buildings. Canals are not necessarily linear structures, as although the canal network includes branches and linear arms of water, intersections, reservoirs or termini require more expansive bodies of water (as is the case with the study area). Thus, initial research involved a period of familiarisation with both relevant critical theory and the canal landscape itself. Prior to eliciting participants' perceptions of the landscape, I sought to reflect on my own role as researcher, my tendencies and reactions. I embarked on a series of lone walks around the study sites, during which time I made written notes, sketches and took photographs. I developed a method of analysing the subsequent texts for evidence of multi-modality, or whole-body sensory experiences, including any recollections, thoughts or feelings. This method of self-analysis is a form of autoethnography in that it is reflexive and *"takes the researcher / author as the subject of research"* (Dumitrica 2010:19; McKay 2002:196).

## Organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organised in a series of chapters initially reviewing literature as a background to the study. As indicated the nature of the study requires various approaches to be explored in relation to the information gathering techniques to build up an increasingly in-depth exploration of interaction. These chapters include both the presentation of the results and initial observations on the findings. This is followed by specific exploration of individual and group narratives, followed by discussion and conclusions. Summary details of each chapter are given below.

Chapter Two is a review of relevant literature discussing notions relating to landscape, sensory perception, memory and identity. The discussion uncovers the theoretical framework of the research which includes the key notion that a *"place achieves concrete reality when our experience of it is total, that is through all the senses as well as with the active and reflective mind"* (Pink 2009:15).

Chapter Three is a discussion of the methodologies developed and performed with participants, and details issues including; positioning the research; key research techniques; analytical framework; the study sites; and identifying research participants.

Chapter Four explores the findings of the self-reflexive 2008 Representation Walk, in which participants undertook a walk through the canal-scape, making visual representations, which they later reflected on in relation to their understandings of their own identities. The narratives from this study suggest that familiar landscapes are an important aspect of the construction of personal identities.

Chapter Five explores the performance of the only 'remote' study undertaken for this research; the *Postcards from the Cut* study, which involved the production of a postcard depicting six views of the canal-scape in central Birmingham.

Respondents were invited to choose an image that they would send to somebody who has never visited the city, and explain their reasons for their choice. The findings suggest that there exist certain iconic canal-scape components, but also many less iconic responses which are not reflected in the heritage and leisure-based interpretations of the regenerated urban canal-scape.

Chapter Six explores the results of the 2010 Sensory Walk, a 'locomotive-narrative' study in which participants walked through the landscape, narrating their passage into digital sound recorders. The study suggested that the methodology was conducive to the narration of multi-modalism in the form of recollections relating to the present landscape and associated, absent landscapes, and to the recollection of sensory perceptions.

Chapter Seven discusses the individual landscape narratives of three participants; Kareema, Farzana, and Ian. The narratives demonstrate the multiplicities of

meanings converging on the canal-scape, and the importance of multi-modalism in landscape perceptions.

Chapter Eight explores two group landscape narratives which emerged from the data from the *Postcards from the Cut* study. The Birmingham Canal Navigations Society and The Guiding Stars are two groups local to Birmingham that each demonstrated evidence of shared landscape perceptions and preferences.

Chapter Nine is a discussion of the wider research findings and is organized as a series of questions and answers, drawing on the findings of the research undertaken between 2007 and 2010.

Chapter Ten provides brief conclusions, evidence of contribution to knowledge and some recommendations relating to future research or potential canal-scape interventions.

Figures and plates including images, tables and maps, can be found at the end of each chapter.

Appendices include tables of data, relevant supporting documents and a paper discussing the 2007 Sound Walk (Millman, Z.K., Coles, R.W., and Millar, G. (2008): 'The canal environment soundscape in Birmingham – a pilot study, Proceedings of the Institute of Acoustics Spring Conference, v30 (2)).



## Literature review

The literature discussed in this chapter concerns the various, seemingly disparate, themes of place, memory, identity, art and the senses. In many cases throughout the literature these themes are linked through the central notion of this research, that is, the concept of individual perception and the construction of meaning.

## Place and landscape

The notion of 'place' and how we create, interpret and maintain it is a divisive subject. It would be useful to be able to divide place theorists into two categories such as modernist and traditional, or, as Osment does with reference to landscape architects in particular, the romantic modernist view of *"development with reference to historically derived landscapes"*, and the geographer/social science view in which place is *"an expression of the social, economic and natural processes that created it"* (Osment 2002:16-18). In the first approach the meanings, or 'identities', attached to a place are considered an intrinsic, immutable aspect of the visual and physical qualities of the landscape, and history, heritage and their preservation are key. For these writers the notion of 'genius loci' or local character is highly regarded as a cornerstone of the landscape architect's profession. For example, McDonald feels the visual and physical form of landscape is *"systematically overlooked in the quest for embodied (invisible) meaning and significance"*, however, the meanings we attribute to the visual and physical forms of landscape are subjective and based in cognition since it would be very difficult to perceive a purely visual/physical landscape without the act of cognition (McDonald 2001 :12). In the second approach place identity is a subjective, ever-changing human construct, so that depending on the identities of the individuals within (or indeed away from) a place, a place may connote multiplicities of meanings, that is, a place may mean multiple things to different people simultaneously. The difference between these approaches is the notion of time, specifically the point at which history ceases to be the past and becomes the present. In other words, the notion that for some a place's history is

finite, while for others, history is continually being created. This research study is underpinned by the idea that past and present continually shape one another, implying that landscape identity too is in a state of flux and constant re-creation (della Dora 2008:219). The importance of human affect is also significant. For those who believe in the ever-changing identity of landscapes, the affect that humans have is important and in this sense landscapes become “*task-scapes*” created through human action and cognition or “*meaning-making*” (Ingold 1993:162).

Girot is particularly hard to place within this debate. He espouses ideals in favour of both *genius loci* and a ‘new’ way of thinking about landscape. He criticises modern cities which have “*dispersed and camouflaged the natural substrates of their sites [where] waters have been covered or diverted, topographies erased or manipulated, forests shredded or fragmented*” (Girot 2006:92). Conversely Girot also criticises the dominance of “*permanence*” which “*present landscape thinking has chosen to cling exclusively to*”, and suggests this is the result of a “*prevalent fascination*” for the picturesque tradition (Girot 2006:91). In order to change the “*laissez-faire aesthetic*” of the city which is shaped through an ad-hoc process of demolition and development, Girot calls for

“*a language of the present, with strong new landscape identifiers, capable of integrating the complexity and contradiction of each place [based on] differentiated readings of the urban landscape*” (Girot 2006:94).

Thompson’s defence of *genius loci* as a fundamental tenet of landscape architecture, despite its lack of a “*sound philosophical basis*”, is similarly confused (Thompson 2003:12). He states that although some detractors believe this naturalistic approach creates “*dull and unimaginative landscapes*”, the main focus of the landscape architect should be preserving and enhancing the natural landscape; the suggestion being that to do otherwise would result in the creation of an excess of similar landscapes which overlook natural beauty and uniqueness (Thompson 2003:12). Thompson’s argument suggests that the uniqueness of a place is

immutable, but of course, if landscapes are formed under similar socio-economic conditions they are bound to look similar, in both their 'creation' and their 'interpretation' by landscape architects (Osment 2003). Thompson and Osment's ideas both refer to the visual and physical similarities between landscapes alone, and don't consider the multiplicity of identities produced by a changing or incoming population for instance.

Diaz-Moore's discussion of the relationship between the city of Spokane, Washington State and the river running through it is an interesting example in defence of genius loci.

*"Spokane's best times have happened when its citizens have cherished the river and its bountiful natural settings" (Diaz-Moore 2006:33).*

The city developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a dependence on the river for transport and commerce, but the advent of the railway system, the motor car and the rise of electricity saw the river polluted and cut-off from the city. In the 1970s the river was reclaimed to create 100 acres of riverside parkland, with wildlife, cycling and walking trails. Diaz-Moore's article could be considered an unhelpful reading for a number of reasons. Firstly, he talks of Spokane's *"best times"* as having been linked to the city's acknowledgement of the river running through it, but it is unclear as to what those *"best times"* refer; perhaps Spokane's economy, the health or education of citizens, or reported crime for instance? Secondly, the state of the nation during the period to which he refers cannot be underestimated; the depression of the 1920s and 1930s, war, civil unrest and political upheaval all occurred during this period and would conceivably have affected the city for a number of reasons. Thirdly, at a time when the country was gripped by industrial revolution, to resist technological advancements and continue to use the river for the transport of goods may have been short-sighted. Consequently the problems faced by the city are more likely the result of a series of national political and cultural changes, than the result of 'turning their backs' on nature. In the 1970s the

river and its banks were re-claimed as parkland for leisure purposes which, although it returned the river to a prominent position within the city, was far removed from its previous role as the backbone of industry. In terms of this research study, the main problem with genius loci is the notion of the 'original' meanings of landscapes, that is, how far into the past does one place the 'original'? Despite Diaz-Moore's bias in respect of genius loci, his notions of narrative storytelling and "*placetelling*", that is, the connections between stories and place, are useful (Diaz-Moore 2006:33). If places are "*spaces that can be remembered*", then "*how we remember is through stories*" (Diaz-Moore 2006:33).

*"Narrative imagining – story – is the fundamental instrument of thought...It is our chief means of looking into the future, of predicting, of planning, and of explaining...Most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking is organized as stories."* (Diaz-Moore 2006:35)

In a different vein, Bohl takes a more structured approach to place by advocating the use of "*exchange opportunities*", that is, value measured by the number of potential social encounters available (Bohl 2006:10). Similarly, Gehl approaches landscape design in relation to opportunities for the 'basic functions' of sitting, standing and walking, upon which he believes all other human activities are based, that is, by allowing such basic functions to occur, social interaction and more complex interactions are encouraged (Gehl 1996). Whilst this approach is a useful way of thinking about the urban environment in particular, it may lead us to underestimate the value that places with fewer exchange opportunities hold for those who inhabit them. For example, a lonely area of hillside may be just as meaningful to the few who inhabit it, as a busy high street is to its residents.

## Place-making

Conceptions of landscape have changed over time. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the term 'landscape' held specific, romantic connotations allied with poetry, music and visual art and linked with perspective and viewpoint. One did not

move through a landscape so much as travel to a pre-determined spot in order to view it, sometimes through tinted and angled glass or mirrors; landscape was distanced and manipulated to fit within the parameters of contemporary visual aesthetic taste (della Dora 2008). Indeed, the dominance of the eye is still acknowledged in post-industrial landscape theory; *“the landscape is organized, pulled together, by the very look upon it”* (Jean-Luc Marion in Wylie 2006:461). At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the notion of the ‘cultural landscape’<sup>1</sup>, that is, environments shaped through human endeavour and interpretation is prevalent, although the term ‘cultural landscape’ is redundant when we consider that all landscapes are cultural in the sense that they are perceived and created through human interaction (Ingold 1993). While landscape definitions vary, Lyndon’s approach considers various contributory factors, including the notion of landscape representation; landscape is

*“the natural world given shape by people through cultivation and construction or through representation and verbal description”* (Lyndon 2000:4).

Lyndon suggests that we should think of landscape as a *“guide to thinking”* (Lyndon 2000:4), but Wylie defines landscape further in saying it *“is neither something seen, nor a way of seeing, but rather the materialities and sensibilities with which we see”* (Wylie 2005:243), meaning that landscape is not immutable or universal, rather it is the result of the way we each see, informed by our individual experiences and identities. Landscape is not only an affect of being in the world, but it also affects how we are in the world; landscape is part of a ‘loop’ in that *“the places where we spend our time affect the people we are and can become”* and vice versa (Hiss 1998:40).

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO defines ‘cultural landscapes’ as *“the “combined works of nature and of man” ...illustrative of the evolution of human society and settlement over time, under the influence of the physical constraints and/or opportunities presented by their natural environment and of successive social, economic and cultural forces, both external and internal.”* (UNESCO 1996: Operational Guidelines, February: 10-12, Paragraphs 35 to 42).

Gray takes up de Certeau's preference for a landscape theory *"that privileges the practices through which those who use spaces make them into meaningful places"* and suggests that *"space is a situational context constructed by and for human action, and places are centers of ...human significance and emotional attachment"* (Gray 2003:228). For example, the hill farmers Gray follows perform place-making activities through walking the round of the hirsle (hill farm), tending sheep, (re)naming places, and by imbuing spaces with meaning, personal experiences and memories (Gray 2003:227; Gilmartin 2002:38). Gray's emphasis on the importance of lived experience and his use of participant-observation and narrative methods informs this research study, in that

*"meaning should not be reduced to that which can be thought or said, since meaning may exist simply in the doing"* (Gray 2003:227).

For Tuan the land is a *"'repository of memory' for the farmer [whose] muscles and scars bear witness to the physical intimacy of material dependence"* (Tuan 1974:97). Similarly, place is linked to *"Topophilia – human love of place"* and although

*"Topophilia is not the strongest of human emotions [when] it is compelling we can be sure that the place or environment has become the carrier of emotionally charged events or perceived as a symbol"* (Tuan 1974: 95).

Tuan relates Topophilia to the notion of patriotism, which he defines literally as *"the love of one's terra patria or natal land"* (Tuan 1974: 95). As with Gray's Scottish hill farmers, the patriotism to which Tuan refers is a local feeling, based on *"the intimate experience of place"*, and is distinct from imperial patriotism (for one's nation) which *"feeds on collective egotism and pride"* (Tuan 1974: 96).

Landscapes are 'polysemic', meaning that a multiplicity of meanings or landscape identities converge on a place simultaneously (Ashworth & Graham 2005) and that

each of these is the result of the *“profusion of selves”* that resides in each perceiving individual (Fernando Pessoa in Wylie 2006:460). This notion is fundamental within this research study and informs the methodological focus on the individual. It is not unusual for different conceptions of place to emanate from within the same community; for example, the historic landowner and the hired farm hand differently identify the landscape they share, based on their individual experiences of the landscape (Tuan 1974:97). A landowner may see the landscape from an *“elitist aesthetic”* viewpoint, while the peasant’s experience is based on a *“close-up” landscape of open field and drove-way* (Bender 1993:2).

### Space and behaviour

Gehl writes that good city planning should *“integrate, invite and open up, rather than close in activities”* and through this the *“incidence of activities is influenced: that is, how many people actually come”* (Gehl 1996:131). A high number of users and *“events”* does not constitute a high quality public environment; it is more important *“which activities”* are encouraged to occur (Gehl 1996:131). Creating spaces for people to pass through is not sufficient; people must be encouraged to linger, move about, interact socially and take part in activities. The *“basic activities”* upon which all other activities are based, include *“walking, standing and sitting, as well as seeing, hearing and talking”*, and focus on allowing these activities to happen enables other, more complex ones to develop naturally (Gehl 1996:133). Gehl’s treatise details how these basic activities can be encouraged, from taking notice of people’s sensitivities to pavement surface, especially those with walking difficulties (Gehl 1996: 137), to the use of ramps instead of steps wherever possible to reduce interruption in walking rhythm (Gehl 1996: 147), to the inclusion of surfaces such as steps, planters and walls which people can use as secondary seating (Gehl 1996:163).

Gehl introduces the idea of the *“edge effect”* whereby people tend to stand around facades or in transitional spaces between larger spaces, with a view of both (Gehl 1996: 159). For example, de Jonge observed individuals’ seating preferences in

restaurants, where diners refused to sit in the middle of a restaurant if there were seats available by a wall or window (Gehl 1996:159). The reasons for this phenomenon are twofold; firstly, placement at the edge of a space offers the best opportunity for surveying the view; and secondly, placement at the edge helps the group or individual *“keep their distance from others”* as individuals feel safer when their backs are protected (Gehl 1996: 151). It is clear from Gehl’s work that humans display certain animalistic behaviours; they prefer to be sheltered on their most vulnerable side (their back); like animals they prefer not to walk across open spaces; and choose where to sit based on the ability to safely observe their surroundings. Appleton calls this ‘Prospect-Refuge theory’ (1975:70-71) as it allows for the individual to *“see without being seen”* (1975:70-71). Kaplan & Kaplan agree that too large a public space is overwhelming and difficult to monitor, while too small a space is uncomfortable and makes leisure activities difficult (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:152-3). The first recorder of the phenomenon was Viennese architect Camillo Sitte (1843-1903) who observed that people tended to cross large squares uneasily or else take large de-tours. He believed that only small, enclosed squares took account of *“our natural craving for protection from the flank”* (Costa Meyer: 1996 143).

Appleton questions *“what is it that we like about landscape, and why do we like it?”* (1975:70-71). He explores why humans find aesthetic pleasure in certain types of natural environment, and the usefulness of ‘Habitat’ theory against Prospect-Refuge theory.

*“[A]esthetic satisfaction, experienced in the contemplation of landscape, stems from the spontaneous perception of landscape features which...act as sign-stimuli indicative for environmental conditions favourable to survival, whether they really are favourable or not. This proposition we can call habitat theory”* (Appleton 1975: 69).



In other words, we prefer visual landscape components which are seemingly protective or nurturing. Prospect-Refuge Theory is based on the idea that animals like to hunt with a clear view, but with enough cover to approach their prey until they are close enough to attack. Animals also need to feel that they can quickly escape from a predator by reaching a place where the predator cannot follow them, so seeing and hiding are key aspects of survival and influence habitat choices (Appleton 1975: 70). For Appleton the difference between Habitat Theory and Prospect-Refuge Theory is vital; because where Habitat Theory posits that humans' aesthetic pleasure is based on observing an *"environment favourable to the satisfaction of his biological needs"*, Prospect-Refuge theory places importance on the ability to see without being seen in order to achieve those biological needs, *"so the capacity of an environment to ensure the achievement of this becomes a more immediate source of aesthetic satisfaction"* (Appleton 1975: 73).

Kaplan & Kaplan discuss the restorative capacity of nature, or green space (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:1). It is worth noting that the work of each of these writers is predicated in the visual. For instance Appleton saw links between animal and human behaviours, but failed to consider the importance of the other senses on animals', and logically humans', landscape preferences. In contrast Kaplan & Kaplan state that although people are particularly aware of visual information this *"does not mean that people interpret the information in visual terms exclusively; rather, visual stimuli are effective in conjuring associated information"* (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989: 5). The word 'nature' connotes many settings, but Kaplan & Kaplan's definition includes *"parks and open spaces, meadows and abandoned fields, street trees and backyard gardens [...]landscapes or places with plants"* (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989: 2). Their notion of *"nearby nature"* lends another meaning to canal towpaths which may be the 'nearest' nature accessible by a large proportion of the urban populous (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989: 5), since it is estimated that over half the British population lives within five miles of a canal (Glaves et al 2007). The knowledge that nature can be found nearby is enough to cause satisfaction, regardless of whether individuals access it (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:160-1); for example, studies in

hospitals suggest that patients recover faster after surgery when nature is visible from their beds (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:1). The *“immediate outcomes of contact with nearby nature include enjoyment, relaxation, and lowered stress levels”* (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989: 173). Bussey’s work on urban woodlands also demonstrated the restorative affects of nearby nature when she found that local communities derive *“physical and spiritual benefits [...] from visual and physical contact with them”* (Bussey 1996:2).

### Landscape and identity

The authors considered here discuss landscape in terms of the affect it has on individuals’ identities, and the affect those identities have on individuals’ perceptions of the landscape. This research study is based on the notion that landscape identity is subjective, personal, open to bias and multiplicities of understanding, and supplemented by memories and associations; in short that there are as many landscape identities as there are individuals to construct them, making the act of meaning-making a producer-oriented one by placing the onus on the perceiving individual rather than in the intrinsic characteristics of the landscape. Precursors to this notion include Barthes’ notions of the ‘death-of-the-author’ and ‘birth-of-the-reader’ (Barthes 1967), and Foucault’s idea that the author is the *“ideological figure”* through whom we *“fear the proliferation of meaning”* (Foucault 1969:925). Earlier still, the picturesque writer and painter Gilpin wrote that certain landscapes were *“ever propitious to the excursions of the imagination”* (Gilpin 1776:33). The producer-oriented approach, though long-established, is not widely held, demonstrated in the still narrow ways in which the heritage industry interprets our landscapes for us, as with the ‘English’ romance of the Lake District for instance (Tolia-Kelly 2007), or with the portrayal of the British countryside as a *“White space”* which is *“exclusionary to a black presence in the rural scene”* (Tolia-Kelly:2007:335). What is evident from these interpretations is the extent of our collusion in the dominance of such interpretations, even when an alternative narrative would be particularly appropriate. For example, Tolia-Kelly’s methodology introducing Asian interpretations into the canon of British landscape art at the Lake

District serves to reiterate the dominant discourse by placing too much emphasis on translating 'other' ideas for the benefit of the canonical language of art.

*"To introduce new viewing positions on the map by listening to historically repressed voices complicates any neat framing of the canon, engages it in an unfamiliar and uncomfortable dialogue, and resituates it" (Zeynep 1996:202)*

Therefore, by introducing the 'other' to the established, dominant interpretation, the latter is re-framed, forcing the dominant group to re-consider their own identity. Tolia-Kelly criticised the established artistic canon for offering traditional, White, tutored, British interpretations of the landscape. In working with a trained artist (part of the artistic canon) to translate the works the group produced into a format with which the establishment could identify, Tolia-Kelly reiterated the established landscape interpretations. Similar behaviour can be observed with research participants in the field, in that they often seek to familiarise themselves with the 'established' or 'official' interpretation-as-fact, subsequently subsuming their own identity and ideas within the perceived 'history.' In practice this means that there is a small window of time during which the individual's 'original' landscape identity exists, after which time it is re-constructed within the established one.

The theme of fear, particularly urban fear underpins much of the discourse on landscape and identity, since fear of the other or unknown affects how individuals respond to their surroundings, and thus how individuals perceive themselves within their surroundings. Costa Meyer offers a useful discussion of the relationship between women, landscape and agoraphobia, which is an "*urban pathology*" mainly affecting White, affluent women (around 85% of American agoraphobics are women, most of whom are White and affluent) (Costa Meyer 1996:141). She argues that the urban aspect of this fear is indicative of the ways in which space helps to constitute personality, as with Gehl and Appleton's observations about the links between space and behaviour discussed earlier in this chapter. The literal definition

of agoraphobia is a fear of the marketplace, but it is most commonly described as a fear of open spaces and is associated with spaces within the public realm, such as shopping centres, crowds, streets and squares. Freud theorised the condition as a *“female malady”* predicated on *“a romance of prostitution”* (Costa Meyer 1996:145), on the understanding that as the street represented freedom of choice and thus escape, the sexually repressed and affluent woman found it threatening. Freud makes a number of assumptions, most notably that affluent women are sexually repressed and that they both fear and crave sexual attention, although Freud’s writing era (circa 1900-1929) should be taken into account. The idea of the romance of prostitution is troubling, not least for the emphasis that Freud places on the physical and capitalistic consumption (by men) of the female body as a commodity, to be desired and owned. He continues that *“desire, thwarted by prohibition, transfers itself by metonymy to a nearby object”*, meaning that as buildings themselves have no intrinsic meaning women superimpose their desires upon them as ‘symbolic substitutes’ (Costa Meyer 1996: 146). If this were the case, whether the building was also a shop is irrelevant; it is more likely that the urban aspect of the fear derives from the larger numbers of people present in urban settings as opposed to rural ones and also to the layout of the city’s streets being conducive to fears for one’s safety as with Appleton’s Prospect-Refuge Theory (Appleton 1975:70) where individuals prefer to inhabit a spot that enables them to see without being seen. The affluence of sufferers indicates class structure and ethnicity in addition to gender, as only White, married women of a certain class status could afford to remove themselves from the workforce (Costa Meyer 1996:150). Alternatively, removing herself from the public sphere indicates a woman’s *“rejection of the commodification of public space for the sole purpose of consumption”* (Costa Meyer 1996: 149). The suburban consumption of the post-war period, but especially since the 1950s saw

*“the growing recognition by advertisers that women who were freed from domestic drudgery by appliances, [...] were ‘free’ to choose clothes, automobiles, and endless domestic appliances”* (McDowell 1983:66).

So, rather than being a fear of the street as a symbol of repressed sexuality, agoraphobia can be read as a reaction to women's roles as instruments of consumer society and objects of the male gaze (physically from male passers-by and metaphysically in terms of social structures) that follows women in public spaces (Torre 1996:241). In terms of the relevance of this discussion for this research project, it highlights the notion that gender, or rather, gender expectations and experiences felt as a result of being gender-ed (personally and by others), affects how individuals perceive landscapes. It is clear that landscapes may be conducive to feelings of both fear and security in individuals, although gender is not necessarily the key factor.

Fear of the 'other' or unfamiliar may be projected onto people as well as places (Torre 1996: 391). For example, Edholm discusses the peripheralisation of women in 19<sup>th</sup> century Paris where they were the object of urban fear (Edholm 1993:12-13). Feared for their 'other-ness', working-class women were the epitome of unregulated and available female eroticism as they worked and lived in the streets. The removal of Paris's winding slums to make way for the straight, wide boulevards created spaces conducive to the wanderings of the flâneur<sup>2</sup> and affluent women and was *"as much an attempt to suppress, supplant, and make invisible the hated 'other', as to create the conditions for modern capitalist production and consumption"* (Saltz 2008; Edholm 1993:12-13). Edholm's female-oriented stance is the result of her research on the life of one working-class female artist's model during the period of Paris' re-development, but it is likely that the re-development of the Paris slums dispersed the urban poor of both sexes. Similarly, Zeynep suggests that fear of the native, Muslim inhabitants of French-colonised Algiers was responsible for the re-development of the historic harbour to make way for a grand square in the *"style of the conqueror"* during the 1830s (Zeynep 1996:202). The juxtaposition between the aesthetic and scale of the new buildings with the existing buildings would *"establish*

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<sup>2</sup> The flâneur was a *"gentleman stroller of city streets"* - an independently wealthy, male stroller, walking for experience's sake (Saltz 2008).

*a visual order that symbolized colonial power relations*” and displace the existing inhabitants (Zeynep 1996:202).

Low also discusses the use of buildings, in this case contemporary gated communities, to *“facilitate avoidance, separation and surveillance”* of the ‘others’ who represent violence and crime (Low 2003:391). While crime rates fall, the fear of crime rises (Low 2003:39) and adding gates and security measures further *“encodes class relations and residential...segregation”*, as it maintains the unfamiliarity with the ‘other’ that is the cause of fear (Low 2003:387). The *“key obstacles to mobility [include] poverty, institutional exclusion, racist harassment and feeling out of place in certain city spaces”* and although affluent and poorer communities may exist in close proximity, this is no indication of increased social interaction (Phillips et al 2007:228).

Women’s bodies are bounded by spatial restrictions, enforced through physical (restrictive clothing and footwear) and societal expectations (ideologies that encourage women to think of themselves as potential victims), however, McDowell criticises authors who suggest a *“direct link between the unmet needs of women in the built environment and male domination in the design professions, ignoring the wider social structures that also contribute to women’s oppression”* (McDowell 1982:59-61). As with Costa Meyer’s discussion of the female-oriented agoraphobia, McDowell suggests that feminine spaces within the male-interpreted world include the home and the shopping mall. Women’s self-imposed restrictions relating to the usage of, particularly urban, space may be founded in fear of attack (McDowell 1982: 59), rather than the Freudian fear of one’s desire for the *“romance of prostitution”* (Costa Meyer 1996: 145). Despite the progress made by women in ‘reclaiming the streets’ there are still *“strong pressures exerted on women to physically restrict themselves”* (McDowell 1982:59). This (female) researcher’s own trepidations at walking some of the towpaths within the study sites are in part the result of the fear of attack, even to the extent of altering the research methodology to encompass and address the fear.

As an example of women's refusal to be bounded by spatial restrictions, Torre cites a group of Argentinian women who reclaimed and re-appropriated a public square during the 1970s through a ritualised silent procession protesting the 'disappearances' of their missing (murdered) children under Peron's regime (Torre 1996:241). *"By introducing direction, orientation, occupation, and by organizing a topas through gestures, traces and marks"* (Lefevbre in Torre 1996:249) the women used their bodies in a sustained silent march to produce space that ran counter to the established and official usage of the square and their own usage as women. This example demonstrates how the *"loop of the performative"* (in which individuals repeat familiar actions for fear of appearing unusual if they do not) can be ruptured through unconventional physical displays, that is, their silent, circular protest march was unusual in the context of the square and their poor, female status (Ahmed 2004:32; Torre 1996).

## Notions of identity

This section deals in the main with literature relating to the notion of ethnic identity, although many of the ideas are also relevant to other forms of identity including gender, social, cultural, religious and political identities. Issues discussed here include; how identity is created through the accumulation of memory, interaction with others, and through individual choice; how identity is perceived by society and the media; and how identity is expressed by the individual through narrative and performance. Isajiw gives a useful definition of identity:

*"a manner in which persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems, and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those systems."*  
(Isajiw 1993:8)

Isajiw also suggests four ways of thinking about ethnic identity that serve as a useful basis for understanding the general discussions surrounding this subject: as something given i.e. ascribed by birth; that immigrant communities are more 'ethnic' when living outside the country of their ancestors; as a choice; and as a matter of perception, or as a way of 'othering' (Isajiw 1993). Young discusses the 'essentialist' viewpoint in which identity is fixed and ascribed at birth, and the 'anti-essentialist' viewpoint in which identity is fluid and subject to personal choice (Young 1999:). *"Men and women look for groups to which they can belong...and they find it in an identity group"* (Young1999:187), however

*"it is a choice predicated on the strongly held, intensely conceived belief that the individual has absolutely no choice but to belong to that specific group."*  
(Young1999:187)

Furthering the idea of the flux and complexity of identity, Fludernik suggests identity should be regarded *"in the plural – identities- to acknowledge the multiplicity of roles and their contextual relevance"* (Fludernik 2007:261). Spivak & Gunew discuss this in relation to tokenism whereby some immigrants speak for all immigrants:

*"[...] 'speaking as' involves a distancing from oneself [...] what I am doing is trying to generalize myself, make myself a representative [...] there are many subject positions which one must inhabit"* (Spivak & Gunew 1994:193).

Sibley agrees that personality is based on *"the idea of change throughout life, resulting from continuous engagement with the environment"* (Sibley 1995:5). Put another way, *"although [individuals] generally believe they have a clear identity, that identity is an accumulation of performative stances and memories of past experiences which creates a continuity of self-understanding between roles and between contexts"* (Fludernik 2007:260). Kuus progresses the notion of identity as *"something we do"*, criticising identity theories which consider identity as *"something we have"* in the sense that we 'act out' rituals and performances of identities (Kuus



2007:91). Therefore identity should be re-framed as a performative act, something that individuals create in doing or reacting to situations, rather than a pre-existing standpoint. So why do individuals talk about their identities as something fixed, in terms of their roles as 'mother', 'woman' or 'Muslim' for instance? Kuus argues that although we talk about identity it

*“does not mean that it should be conceptualized as something that all people have, seek or construct” [because although identity] “can crystallize at certain moments as a powerful reality, [we should not] reify it by adopting categories of practice as categories of analysis” (Kuus 2007:92).*

In this respect Kuus' argument seems short-sighted. An individual may talk about identity/identities as a short-hand for the multiplicities of their personality, equally one's identity is not always at the forefront of the mind, sometimes only being expressed when answering the question 'what is your identity?', at which the individual aligns his or herself with the closest approximation. Additionally, an individual may act according to their understanding of the appropriate behaviour of their identity group. Over time behaviour is modified to fit the individual's understanding of that identity group, and so reiterating both the individual's and the group's identities in a self-perpetuating cycle. In such circumstances, the individual performs the identity, but from the basis of a pre-existing 'identity-hood'- exactly what Kuus discounts.

In seeking to understand the global rise in nationalistic politics, Young discusses Anthony Giddens' notion of *“ontological insecurity”* which posits that individuals' lack of a secure self-identity is due to *“diversification of lifestyles [...] and the immigration of people from other societies [leading to] repeated attempts to create a secure base...to reassert one's values as moral absolutes”* (Young 1999:187). In contrast Young suggests that friction is caused not by the *“immigration of people from other societies”*, but by the inevitable 'othering' by which groups define themselves:

*“[...] human beings define themselves in terms of essences which, by definition and practice, exclude others, and which purposively truncate human choice and creativity with their notions of fixed natures and destinies...Identity is always defined exclusively”* (Young 1999:187)

Hancock applies Bourdieu's theories of practice and the body to race and identity by arguing that

*“race is not something that one is as a static identity or predetermined category by physiology or biology, but rather a set of competences and embodied knowledge that one enacts in practices grounded in particular social and historical contexts”* (Hancock 2005:427)

Hancock's reflexive study into others' changing reactions to his (White) racial identity while dancing in the African-American Steppin' dancehalls of Chicago supports the idea that sensory experience alone cannot be responsible for creating meaning and identity. Cognition, with its associations and memories, and social structures, which place restrictions on the body are also incorporated into the way we experience our surroundings. The initial incongruity between how his body moved and how he looked racially led to confusion and finally acceptance within the confines of the Steppin' world. The *“arbitrary socially constructed distinctions”* between Black and White dancers were perpetuated when the Steppers were surprised that Hancock could dance as they did, in a way that White people are unable to (Hancock 2005:436).

*“It is in and through the body that social classifications and values are inscribed in the body. As these [...] become normalized and institutionalized and ‘turned into a permanent disposition’, they become misrecognized as inherent on those bodies”* (Hancock 2005:436).

Hancock's work demonstrates that individuals' perceptions of the world are shaped by experience and social expectations, and the performances that the human body

enacts throughout its interactions are as much shaped by social constraints and expectations as by the physical landscape and personal abilities.

In her article on the residential habits of Muslim communities, Peach highlights reductive attitudes to identity in the way that *“Muslims in the British media are often represented in an ethnically un-differentiated way”*, that is, Muslims are portrayed as the same despite the differences in ethnic origin, language and region of origin that help differentiate between traditions (Peach 2006:353). Indeed, *“others (those who do not fit the dominant embodiment of the national citizen) also have subjectivities constructed across many registers, which do not necessarily work in harmony”* (Spivak & Gunew 1994:193). Peach found that *“there is considerable residential separation between Muslims of different ethnic origins”* and this notion is supported within this research study in relation to the Somali Muslim community in Birmingham who feel separated from their generally Pakistani Muslim neighbours by virtue of their Blackness (Peach 2006:367).

The discussion moves to the notion of the expression of identity through narrative and performance, which is particularly useful for this research methodology. Mason suggests that narratives, with their plotlines, characters and transformations, can be used as interpretive devices (Mason 2004). Daiute outlines ways in which a narrative can be interrogated including, as reporting, evaluating, constructing meanings of, and critiquing events, and *“as socially positioning the speaker”* (Low 2000:401). Narratives (conversations and monologues) contain clues to individuals' viewpoints and experiences through the use of language and context, and in this way offer insight into individuals' identities. Billig's notion of the *“dialogic unconscious”* uncovers both what is expressed and what is omitted by the individual, either through choice or unconsciously (Low 2003:400-1).

*“I assume that some of the evidence I am looking for is ‘repressed’, that it is hidden not only from the interviewer, because it is socially unacceptable to*

*talk about class and race, but from the interviewee as well because these concerns are also psychologically unacceptable*" (Low 2003:400-1).

Billig interrogates a narrative on the basis that omissions are implicated in what the individual expresses, however, this practice is subject to the inherent bias of the researcher who may *"read between the lines"*, the types of information elicited by the interaction and the relationship created by the interaction itself, which Billig suggests can be *"repressive"* (Low 2003:400-1). Since such *"conversational stories"* are *"always interactive, negotiated"*, the narrative under interrogation will have been shaped by both the participant and the researcher (Norrick 2007:127). The collaboration of the researcher does not invalidate the narrative, as interactions are useful in understanding how individuals feel about their own and others' identities, but it does necessitate the acknowledgment that the narrative is a negotiated joint venture. Norrick accepts that the stories that are told depend on who the conversation is between – women friends, relatives, colleagues or strangers – and are told for a variety of simultaneous reasons such as *"sharing personal news, entertaining listeners, revealing attitudes, constructing identity, inviting counter-disclosure"* (Norrick 2007:127). Crucially, *"boundaries of propriety and intimacy"* are only crossed with the *"cued approval"* of the story's recipients, so that interactions fall within a *"framework of expectations"* (Norrick 2007:139). Fludernik suggests that conversational narratives are based on *"protecting face"* whilst the narrator strives to convince others of *"his or her character or personhood"* (Fludernik 2007: 260). In this way the conversational narrative can be viewed as an act of performance, whereby the narrator establishes and reiterates their own identity with the compliance of others in the conversation. Monologues can also be viewed as performative acts, although the point at which meaning is understood may shift from the performing to the reading, as with transcripts of monologues.

## Aspects of memory

This section discusses the importance of memory in the consideration of landscape narratives and the construction of meaning, suggesting that it is through memories that humans retain the experiences of landscapes in order to form narratives around them. As discussed in the literature relating to sensory perception, our experience of the world is processed through a combination of cognition and bodily response, and the authors considered here show that such experiences shape and are shaped by memory.

### Memory-making

The discussion begins with the question of how memories are constructed and what they consist of. Connerton offers some useful outlines of the individual's construction of memory, which he divides into 'personal', being life-events, 'cognitive', being learnt things such as the layout of a city, and finally 'habit', being physical, bodily memories of actions (Connerton 1992:22). Connerton believes that 'personal' memory is most important in constructing our conception of self or identity; however the distinctions between these memory-types may not be as clearly defined as Connerton suggests. For example, one may recall the layout of a city (cognitive) from having visited it on holiday (personal), or one may remember how to ride a bicycle (habit) from having been taught by a relative (personal), that is, it is difficult to separate a memory from the method by which the original event was experienced. It is perhaps more useful to think of memory in terms of 'bodily', being all physical memories and 'cognitive', being all intellectual memories, however, the distinctions between these so often blur as to make all distinctions virtually redundant. For example, an individual may remember the sound made by her feet whilst walking along the towpath just as much as she may remember the route she took, so at what point are these two memories separated from one another? The very blurring of the so-called distinctions between the bodily and the intellectual led, in part, to the use of the 'whole-body' or holistic approach to sensory perception and

the experience of landscape within this research study, and which is discussed in greater detail in the literature on sensory perception.

So where does the memory dwell? For Marot, rather than existing in a storehouse in the mind, the memory is more a process of continual reconstruction (Marot 1999:30). Kavanagh writes of the sub- or unconscious, which has *“no vocabulary as we would understand it, but [is] experienced through mainly pictures, images and sounds which, without much ado, change their meaning or merge into one another”* (Kavanagh 1999:7). Annis’ idea of the *“dream space”* or *“a field of subrational image formation”* relates to the museum visit, however it is relevant to all spaces, since the *“imagination, emotions, senses and memories”* are all implicated in the formation of the dream space (Kavanagh 1999:3).

*“ [Memories] are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated. But precisely because these memories are repetitions, because they are successively engaged in very different systems of notions, at different periods of our lives, they have lost the form and the appearance they once had”* (Marot 1999:30)

Marot explains further that memories are a *“memory of a memory”* which we process or classify using *“systems of logic, of meaning, of chronology, of topography”* in order to create a *“ ‘general system of the past’ that calls up the role and place of each particular memory.”* (Marot 1999:30).

The discussion moves to how memories are triggered by the landscape, in the sense that memories of other landscapes and times can be associated with any landscape by an individual. From her conversations with post-migration Asian women in Britain, Tolia-Kelly found that not only can objects and landscapes *“refract a memory”*, but *“memory is effectively part of the landscape”* (Tolia-Kelly 2004:284). For these women, the gardens they planted here and the ornaments in their houses were a reminder of the landscapes and people of their youth. Even seemingly

unlikely places can hold associations for people, as in the case of another post-migration resident in a British urban context for whom high rise buildings offered extended views across the city and with them, memories of his mountainous homeland in Kurdistan (O'Neill & Hubbard 2010). Another example can be found in the *"memory traces of comparative Trinidadian landscapes"* which were apparent to the author V.S. Naipaul in the English countryside, where *"the black and white cows up on the downs remind him of the design on the condensed milk label from his childhood"* (Bender 1993:6).

If memories can be triggered by the landscape, how does this happen? Kaplan & Kaplan suggested that *"visual stimuli are effective in conjuring associated information"*, but the other senses are also implicated (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989:5). For example, Proust wrote of the power of the other senses, particularly taste and touch in relation to the *"sudden recollection of the past, triggered off by tasting a Madeleine cake dipped in tea, or by tripping over uneven paving stones"* (Bales 2001:1). Thus any experience may instigate the sudden recollection of a memory. This idea is further explained:

*"tasting the Madeleine and herbal tea arouses an involuntary sensation common to both the present and the past experience...this sensation places the involuntary memory...outside the contingencies of time"* (Jordan 2001:113).

In other words, our perception of time is not always linear; the past and present may suddenly combine via a common sensory trigger. Connerton offers a useful metaphor for our perception of time when he suggests that *"time is not linear but cyclical"* and that only writers of memoirs are able to recall their lives in terms of a linear structure (Connerton 1992:20). He reasons that this is because an individual's narrative is only one part of an interconnecting series of narratives which includes those of our ancestors and other influences (Connerton 1992:21), enabling a *"juxtaposition of diverse space-time relations"* (Thoma 2006:92).

If landscape can instigate memory recall, can such a phenomenon be described as “*embodied memory*”? (Powles 2005:332). This term appears in a number of texts, however owing to the ambiguity of the word ‘embodied’, this term is not used in this research to describe the phenomenon of memory recall instigated by landscape experiences. The word is too suggestive of something (a meaning, a memory) being already existent in the landscape, as though waiting for someone to come by in order to receive it. Rather, the onus of meaning-making should be placed on the perceiving individual, as with the idea of ‘the death-of-the-auteur’ in which the individual completes the meaning of what they are observing via their own understanding (Barthes 1967).

The instigation of memory recall is not limited to the presence of stimuli; absences are also implicated, for example in the now-absent buildings that one may remember from a childhood landscape. In some cases a building, for example, may become what Nora terms a “*lieu de memoire*”, which he explains as “*any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which...has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community*” (Nora 1996: XVII). In the case of a building, it may have been de-contextualised through having been moved from its original site to give it more significance, or else its surroundings may have been eradicated and re-developed, thus affording it a significance that is perhaps un-due or was never intended (Crinson 2005). Nora’s *lieu de memoire* refers to the national memorial of the French people, and Crinson’s to urban buildings; however the idea can be applied to the instigation of memory recall in the landscape. For example, finding that something we were expecting to re-encounter is now absent has a jarring effect on the individual that may result in the now-absent thing, whether it is a view, a sound, a familiar route etc, being re-configured as a memory-place; something that is imbued with significance as a symbol of the lost associations.

For Leger & Van Hoof loss is a positive force that causes reflexivity, as



*“it is through the very shock of ruptures, incongruencies and discontinuities that one is reminded (in negation) of the sense of wholeness and place.”*

(Leger & Van Hoof 2005:114)

So when one can no longer walk in the landscape one remembers, this leads to disorientation and unrealised expectations. This can be explained through the idea that *“psychology tells us that we first perceive by contrast”* (Treib [1987] 2005:74), so not only do we notice absences first, but memory also helps create *“the presence of absence, for we must know or remember what has been before we can fully comprehend what is now”* (Treib 1987 [2005]:84). For each absence an individual encounters (of a building, a person, a tree etc) there is a memory or trace of their presence for the individual.

The understanding that objects, including things in the landscape, may be used as mimetic devices or memory aids is an ancient idea. Ancient Greek orators practiced the art of memory, or *“ars memorativa”*, to enable them to remember speeches and stories (Marot 1999:10). Orators placed parts of a speech along an imagined walking route through the different rooms of a familiar building or space, to be recalled during the imagined walk around the space. By imagining walking the route the orator would be able to recall the parts of the speech associated with each place in turn (Marot 1999). This practice was taken up by the Romans, as with Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratorio*, or rules for oration, in which he focuses on the *“memory house”* (McGuffrey: 2007). Whilst the Greeks and Romans tended to use architecture or urban spaces such as squares as their memory houses, landscapes were and are used in a similar manner and across cultures; medieval English pilgrims, ancient Chinese wayfarers and Australian Aborigines all imbue the landscape with stories which are recalled by association (Ingold 2010). Bender also refers to the Australian Aborigines who *“superimpose creation myths upon the land, thereby turning a temporal sequence into a spatial grid”* which reaffirms their myths through walking and singing, but is also a *“topographic map”* (Bender 1993:2-3). Marot suggests that

the city, or any planned space, not only serves as a metaphor for memory frameworks, but it is also *“in itself one of the most complete and effective of these frameworks.”* [Marot 1999:10]. For 18<sup>th</sup> century English tourists in the Aegean, the *“memory places [or] theatres”* were the mountain peaks they had travelled to view in search of the picturesque (della Dora 2008:222), the appreciation of which was predicated on the power of association or the *“picturesque eye”* (Gilpin 1776:11). Travellers carried texts of classical works and Romantic poetry in order to trigger associations (Dixon Hunt 1992; Stock 1993).

The difference between Proust’s encounter with involuntary memory or sudden recall and the practice of *ars memorativa*, is consciousness. In the former case recollections were unexpected and unintentional, while in the latter case memories are purposely emplaced for later recall, in a *“repository of memory”* (Tuan 1974:97). The traditional practice of creating *“memory vessels”* is another form of *ars memorativa*, in which decorative pots or chests are filled with, or covered in, memory-laden items<sup>3</sup>. Time-capsules are used in a similar way, and individuals often keep memento boxes of items such as photographs, letters and souvenirs. What is clear is that memory and place are so entwined as to be co-dependent; a place without associations is merely a space, and memories are grounded in places.

Rituals and ceremonies can also be acts of memory-making, as discussed earlier in relation to Lasay’s use of a grape planting ceremony and Torre’s writing on ritualistic walking in the Plaza de Mayo (Lasay 2006; Torre 1996). Wong details a similar project in which post-migration residents undertook a tree-planting ceremony called A Forest of Memory, in Cashel Forest, Scotland; the participants dedicated the trees to relatives who had died in conflicts (Wong 2003). The ritual of planting and naming created personal sacred spaces; it was a performative act of place-making, and by extension, memory-making. Performative acts are not constrained to moving through physical landscapes; both Kuhn and Thoma discuss photography

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<sup>3</sup> [www.ghostsofchance.com](http://www.ghostsofchance.com); [www.amesgallery.com](http://www.amesgallery.com).

and *“photographic memories [as] a performative oral tradition”* (Kuhn 2007:285). For both authors, photographs are used ethno-mimetically as the basis for eliciting biographical narratives. Kuhn’s collaborative work with participants highlights the *“discursive”* nature of memories, in that we are compelled to share our memories with others upon viewing a photograph (Kuhn 2007:283). Photographs have the power to *“[capture] a single moment [making it] an eternal present”* (Treib 2008:197). Photographs can help produce memories (Thoma 2006), as with tourists who take photos in order to remember the places they visited, and, as Tuan notes, the image that *“fail[s] to register is lamented as though the [thing] itself has been deprived of existence”* (Tuan 1974:95).

### Inherited memory

Tucker talks of *“inherited or postmemory”* comparing the layering used in paintings with memories; *“each new layer...is always infected and coloured by the underlying one”* (Tucker 2006: 95-96). Postmemory refers to inherited loss and distance (from a beloved homeland) that is passed from migrated parents to their children. This idea relates to ‘collective memory’, that is, the stories that we are told and which help construct our identities and place us within our communities (Connerton:1992). For example, Tucker states:

*“I do not know what it is to be a refugee, but I do know what it is to be the child of a refugee, and thus to inherit the insecurities of the rootless and some sense of what permanent exclusion from the land of one’s birth can mean”* (Tucker 2006: 100).

So postmemory is distinguished from memory by a *“generational break and from history by a profound personal link”* (Tucker 2006:95-96). For example, the novelist V.S. Naipaul was born in Trinidad of Indian descent and educated in England, so while

*“Trinidad ought to be Naipaul’s primary landscape, the place of his rootedness – a misplaced conception based on a European notion that equates home and childhood with a sense of roots...in reality his childhood landscape lacks roots. His family harks back to India”* (Bender 1993:5).

Conversely, for the residents of Rarotonga Tucker’s postmemory is anathema; while a generational break exists, it is not recognised in daily life. Rarotongans have inclusive notions of selfhood, in which there exists a confluence of identity between ancestors, the individual and their descendants (Campbell 2006). The result being that in land disputes over boundaries, witnesses will talk of themselves ‘landing’, but be referring to the actions of their ancestors in the 15<sup>th</sup> century as their own actions in the 21<sup>st</sup> (Campbell 2006).

Kuchler divides landscapes into *“landscapes of memory”* which are more often found in a western context, and *“landscapes as memory”* which are more often found outside a western context, for instance in the islands of Papua New Guinea (Kuchler 1993:86). Landscapes of memory include landscapes constructed for the purpose of remembering, such as the Forest of Memory (Wong 2003), in which a (western) landscape is an *“aide memoire of a culture’s knowledge and understanding of its past and future”*, whereas landscapes as memory are places where memory is lived, a part of daily life and continually (re)constructed (Kuchler 1993:85). Kuchler’s argument suggests that landscapes as memory do not exist in the western context, but Gray’s work with the hill farmers of the Scottish Borders would suggest otherwise, since for these people the landscape and memories attached to it are continually lived through and reconstructed (Gray 2003). It could be argued that the two types of memory landscape can exist simultaneously, as with those individuals who perceive landscape both in terms of its posterity as a record of human existence and as a place where new experiences and memories can be formed and re-visited.

## Art, landscape and memory

The term ‘associationist aesthetics’ is used to describe the idea that a (visual) landscape can conjure associations in the mind of the viewer, including memories of other places and events, both real and imagined (Crook 1989; van Eck 2000). Della Dora links current concerns with memory and landscape *“to an older historical geography of 19<sup>th</sup> century erudite travellers haunted by a collective imagined classical past”* (della Dora 2008:218). It was fashionable amongst amateurs of the picturesque to narrate, or read aloud from Romantic poetry or Classical works when they had reached their destination (della Dora 2008). In this way the picturesque amateur was able to conjure the past using his or her imagination in a form of performative practice (Dixon Hunt 1992). In order for any in situ association to be possible without the use of texts, the viewer needed to possess a ‘picturesque eye’, that is, enough aesthetic education to furnish one with a reserve of literary and artistic associations into which one could delve when faced with a landscape (Gilpin 1776). As Crook suggests, the *“principle source of grandeur in architecture is association”*, meaning that the ability to appreciate what we see stems from our experience (Crook 1989:16). In this way the picturesque can be termed a *“reflexive art form”* as the viewer strives to complete the scene through narration and imagination, hence the strong links between painting and poetry in the picturesque movement (Dixon Hunt 1992:178-80). The contemporaneous usage of the Claude glass is further evidence of the picturesque’s dependence on associationist aesthetics and the notion that the onus of meaning-making lay with the viewer.

*“[If] there was ever a picturesque moment in practice, it occurred whenever a tourist looked into his Claude glass”* (Dixon Hunt 1992:174).

The Claude glass is a convex, tinted mirror which is used to observe the scene behind the viewer; the mirror *“concentrated for its owner all picturesque possibilities”* by tinting and drawing in disparate elements via the convex surface (Dixon Hunt 1992:178). Imagine the scene; a tourist sits across a valley from the ruined castle she wishes to view, and with her back to the scene, looks into the

glass whilst reading aloud from an ancient Greek text. Rather than being a practice that captures the inherent picturesque beauty of the scene (Casey 2002), this was a practice wholly based around the performative, personal, associationist re-presentation of the landscape: the production of a re-constructed landscape.

### The picturesque viewpoint

What constitutes the picturesque is as vague today as it was at the height of its popularity during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. In current usage the word is generally a synonym for ‘quaint’ and is often used to describe rural landscapes that are considered typically pretty and include such things as rolling hills and thatch-roofed cottages. From studying the chief writers of the movement we can begin to build an understanding of the different aspects of the picturesque. Price places the picturesque somewhere between the orderliness of ‘beauty’ and the wildness of the ‘sublime’ (Price [1810] 1971). From Gilpin’s earlier descriptions of picturesque beauty we can assume that variety of surface, wildness, composition, water and ruins are all important elements of the picturesque (Gilpin 1776). However, Price maintains that picturesqueness is not necessarily roughness (Price [1810] 1971). Viewpoint and perspective are important in the creation of a picturesque scene. Gilpin felt that *“high places, and extended views have ever been propitious to the excursions of the imagination”* and indeed, in conversations with participants of this research, the term has been generally applied to views from an elevated position such as from bridges, or views across the landscape, unhampered by close buildings (Gilpin 1776:33). The contemporary writer Edensor’s book *Industrial Ruins*, which includes canal-side factories and warehouse buildings, states that such ruins belong to a *“modern gothic”*, and not the picturesque, as the darkness and decay they display is a gothic trait (Edensor 2005:8), however, their nature also suggests the picturesque – a contemporary ‘urban picturesque’. Perhaps the difference in this case is that of vantage point? Edensor explores the ruins with his camera, inside and out, so that he regards them at close quarters. In the descriptions of architecture in Victorian Gothic novels such as Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*,

architecture is described at close quarters from within the buildings as the protagonist, Jane, explores the gloomy and empty rooms of Thornfield Hall.

*“I lingered in the long passageway [...] narrow, low, and dim, with only one little window at the far end, and looking, with its two rows of small black doors all shut, like a corridor in some Bluebeard's castle [...] the laugh was as tragic, as preternatural a laugh as any I ever heard; and, but that it was a high room [...] I should have been superstitiously afraid”* (Bronte 1847:94).

Conversely, descriptions of picturesque architecture place the viewer at a distance from the buildings in question, often viewing them from across water or valleys. For example, whilst at Loch Fyne, Gilpin noted the only interest in the scenery of that area being *“the ruined castle upon a low peninsula”* surrounded by a bay of the loch and mountains *“rising from the water's edge”* (Gilpin 1776:2-3). In picturesque paintings the subject of the painting (perhaps a ruined castle or Classical structure) is often viewed from an elevated position, often through the pictorial device of a partially obscuring layer, such as foliage, in the foreground (Plate 2). Partial views contribute to the mysterious qualities of landscape (even urban landscape which may not have extensive greenery) (Watson 2008), as do light and shadows, and views of inaccessible places (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989). Edensor also alludes to the power of exploring secret gardens in his nostalgia for childhood drawings and in his advocacy of the potential for the *“unexpected”* in industrial ruins (Edensor 2005: 4). If the picturesque is dependent on the *“excursions of the imagination”* (Gilpin 1776:33) and ‘associationist aesthetics’, then the potential for magic and mystery is also a key aspect of the picturesque landscape (Crook 1989; van Eck 2000).

The origins of the picturesque movement lie in the paintings of 17<sup>th</sup> century Baroque artists such as Claude Lorrain and Nicholas Poussin, indeed, the word derives from the French ‘pictoresque’ and the Italian ‘pittresco’, meaning *“after the manner of painters”* (Crook:1989:14). During the 18<sup>th</sup> century the term came to the attention of the *“touring classes”*, and remained popular into the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Crook:1989:14).

Gilpin's *A Dialogue Upon the Gardens of Stow* (1748) is the first printed example of "*looking at architecture and nature as if they were paintings*", and he defines the picturesque as "*that which is suited to pictorial representation*" (van Eck (2000:245). The vagaries of this assertion are apt, since what constitutes picturesque beauty varies depending on the narrator and bears resemblances to beauty, the sublime (van Eck 2000) and grandeur (Gilpin 1776). While Crook regards the picturesque as a primarily architectural movement, focusing on "*landscape buildings*", that is, buildings placed in a landscaped garden or grounds by way of an enhancement (Crook 1989:16), others have seen its influence in the Romantic traditions of poetry, painting and even tourism (Dixon Hunt: 1992; della Dora: 2008). Dixon Hunt argues that the picturesque was not as popular an art form as we now hold it to be, rather that it was a 'necessary stage' in landscape design, albeit one which continues to influence today's designers. Dixon Hunt writes that critiques tend to focus on 'postfacto' writers such as William Gilpin (1724-1804), Uvedale Price (1747-1829) and Richard Payne-Knight (1750-1824), rather than on "*how people behaved as amateurs of the Picturesque*" and the psychology of the art form (Dixon Hunt 1993:173-4). The practice of the picturesque has changed since its inception as a method for producing imaginative pastoral paintings, often including Classical themes, to a method for designing landscapes including gardens and parks, to a way of thinking about landscape for the tourist or traveller in search of the picturesque (Dixon Hunt 1993:190). The assertion that Gilpin, Price and Knight were 'postfacto' writers is misleading; the picturesque was still being practiced during their lifetimes, indeed the fact that they wrote of their own experiences of landscapes demonstrates that they considered the landscape in a picturesque manner.



# Senses and Sensory Perception

The literature discussed in this section refers to the importance of sensory perception in landscape perceptions, beginning with soundscape studies before moving on to general sensory arguments.

## Soundscape studies

The World Soundscape Project (WSP) pioneered the idea of ‘soundscapes’ and brought to light the affect that sounds have on individuals. Advocating a *“hi-fi”* soundscape, in which individual sounds are clearly heard over low ambient sounds, the WSP foresaw *“universal deafness”* owing to the *“apex of vulgarity”* they felt had been reached during their lifetimes (Schafer 1973:3). The WSP hailed the soundscapes of previous ages for their quietness, their lack of *“continuous noise”* and for contemporaneous individuals’ abilities to identify (natural) sounds however, the privileging of certain sounds over others, in particular those considered ‘natural’ or ‘historical’ undermines the *“subjectivity and social consciousness of those who experience and inhabit”* the landscape (Arkette 2004:160). The negative perception of sound as noise is not a modern phenomenon; people have complained about noise from cities for over two thousand years, evident in the descriptions of city-sounds in Buddhist scriptures from 500BC, the sounds of people and animals of which Goethe complained, or the sounds that industrialisation and increased population brought to Victorian London (Thompson 2002:115-7).

Architectural practice and scholarship in the arts, humanities and social sciences is *“underpinned by ocular-centricity”* in that much of the language of these practice areas, their resultant designs and methodologies are based in the stronghold which the visual has over the way humans perceive their surroundings (Adams & Guy 2007:133). In the case of sound, one of the pre-occupations of the contemporary landscape architect is screening out *“undesirable noise”* and the building materials that may be employed to this effect (Anderson 2002:61). For example, Nash believes that many modern sounds are a nuisance and too loud, and concludes that

humans have lost their senses through modernisation (Nash 2006:284-285). Adams and Guy are leading exponents of the recent movement towards the use of sensorial experience in the perception and design of the built environment, and they have called for *“an architecture of the senses...to challenge the dominance of the eye”* (Adams & Guy 2007:133.) Their approach is indebted to Schafer’s writing in that it privileges sound over the visual and other senses, and in citing Richard Sennett’s notion of the relationship between the *“increasingly technological nature of cities and the poverty of public life”* (Adams & Guy 2007:134), they can be placed in opposition to Arkette who criticises academics such as Schafer for treating historic sounds like an *“endangered species”* (Arkette 2004:161). Wrightson also occupies the pro-sound ‘camp’ when he writes of modern humans’ inability to differentiate natural sounds, unlike the inhabitants of Papua New Guinea who are able to recognise over one hundred bird calls (Wrightson 2000:100). Wrightson also suggests that sound is a *“mediator between the listener and the environment”* (Wrightson 2000:100), suggesting that rather than possessing a fixed meaning, space is *“defined and moulded by the subjectivity and social consciousness of those who experience and inhabit it”* (Arkette 2004:160). Wrightson suggests that sound possesses meaning apart from that created through its perception and demonstrates his pro-sound credentials by overlooking the other senses as receptors through which humans experience the environment. Both Arkette and Wrightson take up Corbin’s idea that space is extended through sound, as with the village bells of rural 19<sup>th</sup> century France signalling home to the traveller (Corbin:1999), but while Arkette’s understanding relates to imagining a larger space by increasing the volume of one’s music (Arkette 2004:165-6), Wrightson’s understanding is based in linking people across distance by extending the *“acoustic horizon”*, which is a surprisingly visual euphemism given the author’s pro-sound position (Wrightson 2000:11).

## Sound in Art

A number of artists are employing sound and its relationship with place and memory-making in their work. Lasay’s audio performance projects involve

recreating a sonic environment and manipulating it in order to inspire the recall of memories and associations outside of the original environment. Recordings were made of children's sound activity during a vine planting ceremony, then manipulated and amplified and played back to them via headphones, creating a *"biocultural feedback system"* (Lasay 2006:59). The recordings were used in a remembrance-session at a later date. As an example of place and memory-making this was a complex system of ritual (the performance of the vine-planting ceremony) and recall (the remembrance session) that utilised the sensory elements of sound and touch. The inclusion of the artist's input in recording and manipulating the sounds the children produced raises some questions about the ethical aspects of interfering with the children's perception of the ceremony and the elements they retained for later recollection. This project was undertaken with a group of children with developmental learning disabilities, and Lasay implies that the project was an exercise in 'soundscapes-as-therapy'. Without hearing the recordings it is impossible to understand the extent to which Lasay 'manipulated' the sensory environment, for instance, emphasis may have been placed on certain sounds over others –the sounds of chatting and digging are detailed, but if other sounds were not recorded, or not amplified, the potential for recall, and thus the memory-making aspect of this project, not to mention the memories the children were to retain, may have been compromised. Lasay does not describe the memories that were inspired by the *"ritualistic interaction with the environment"*, so that the article has a potential for insight into the interaction between memory, place and the sensory, which is not forthcoming (Lasay 2006:59).

The artist Kirsty Stansfield's performative work helps audiences create personal, temporally and site-specific soundscapes. She uses stringed boxes containing electric pickups which enable the audience to interact with soundwaves to create their own soundscapes through bodily movement (Mulholland 2007). In this way *"the soundbox acts as a body language amplifier, permitting gestures and traces to echo in space"* (Mulholland 2007:130).

## Visual and acoustic stimuli

Two studies exploring “*the interaction between visual and acoustic stimuli*” (Yang & Kang 2005:64) found that there exists a general preference for “*natural and rural rather than urban and man-made*” images and sounds (Carles et al 1999:194). Both approaches employed the use of quantitative data and high-specification sound equipment, but while Yang & Kang’s experiments took place in urban squares in Sheffield, Carles’ were laboratory based and included the use of combinations of recorded sounds and landscape images of rural places or urban green-spaces. Sound preferences are more distinct between age groups than between males and females (Yang & Kang 2005). Sounds are also regarded more positively when they are congruent with the image, for example, the sounds of children playing alongside the image of an urban park are regarded as pleasant because participants expected to see and hear images and sounds that supported one another, whereas unexpected sounds can be “*deleterious to the landscape*” (Carles 1999:192). The notion that frequent exposure to certain sounds correlates with increased tolerances to those sounds has an implication for this research, as does the idea that sound preferences impact on individuals’ desire to use a space (Yang & Kang 2005). For instance, non-locals are more likely to find the surrounding speech sounds in a space more annoying than locals, which can lead to people feeling out of place in a space, resulting in avoidance of the space (Yang & Kang 2005). “*Soundmarks*” or sound landmarks are first noticed over louder ambient sounds (Yang & Kang 2005:62). Other evidence suggests that an individual’s like or dislike of such soundmarks is based on their relative frequencies in relation to the surrounding ambient sound level, but may also be related to the congruence of the soundmark with both the surrounding ambient soundscape and the landscape as perceived visually (Carles 1999:191-192).

The exploration of Japanese sound aesthetics in Johnson’s writing highlights the notion that (sound) perception is linked to cultural difference and experience, as with Yang & Kang’s sound preferences in urban squares, suggesting that sounds and their associations are not all universally perceived, understood or even

communicated (Johnson 1999). Johnson uses the example of a type of large earthenware pot which is commonly submerged in Japanese gardens into which water drips to create echoes. The written character for the sound this creates *“translates easily into the English equivalents ‘water’ and ‘cave’ respectively...the middle character has several meanings, each of which connotes the sounds of a zither”* (Johnson 1999:301). Another example is the placing of iron pieces in the boiling kettle of the tea ceremony to connote *“the echoes of a cataract muffled by clouds, of a distant sea breaking among the rocks”* (Johnson 1999:300). Although these ‘sound events’ are not considered musical they do offer an aesthetic experience, and in these instances the sounds are considered reward enough for the effort of undertaking the seemingly incongruous actions which create them. The main implication of Johnson’s work for this research is that of the non-universality of associations. The traditional *“five-sense sensorium is a modern Western construct”* (Pink et al 2010:11), a way of ordering the most obvious of our sensory faculties for experiencing the world, and while it would be reductive to suggest that all Eastern cultures perceive their surroundings differently to the Western ‘classical’ tradition, it is worth considering that local conditions will have a bearing on the way individuals perceives their surroundings. However, there is evidence of similarities across cultures with respect to certain sound preferences; in particular that of the sounds of water which are so important within Japanese garden design and for participants in (Western) laboratory testing, in which the sounds of a stream *“consistently increased the scores of both urban and rural images”* when perceived simultaneously (Carles 1999:195).

Despite recognising ocular-centricity in the humanities and social sciences and recognising the need for an *“architecture of the senses”* (Adams & Guy 2007:133), there is a tendency towards sound-studies in place of the visual, making auricular-centricity imminent. Woodiwiss agrees that

*“to privilege vision over the other senses and intellect (ocularcentrism) as both the chief provider of reliable sense data and the best mode of checking*

*its accuracy is mistaken, since what we see is as much affected by the positions in time, space and social life in which we look...as any other activity"* (Woodiwiss 2001:1-2)

This would seem to be advocating the use of all the senses in our perception of the world.

While the senses of smell and taste are generally overlooked (Hamilakis 2002:122), some have reiterated the link between these and the evocation of memories (Sainsbury & George 2006:411), which Proust demonstrated by the *"sudden resurrection of the past, triggered off by tasting a madeleine cake dipped in tea"* (Bales 2001:1). The evocation of memories via sensory triggers is an important aspect of this research, and was initially based in observation-participation within the landscape rather than the literature, although memory is explored elsewhere in this literature review; the sense of touch is considered more often, especially in relation to locomotion or walking in the work of Wylie for instance (Wylie 2005; Wylie 2006). Adams and Pink both use walking as a method for perceiving place (combined with sound and video respectively), in which the locomotive aspect is a tool to aid in the experience of sounds, rather than a distinct method of sensing and contributing to place-perception (Adams et al 2007; Pink 2007; Pink et al 2010). The use of the other (non-visual) senses does not make visual studies irrelevant, but the use of all the senses in the experience of one's surroundings is more realistic than focusing on one sense (Hiss 1998) as all the senses *"feed cognition"* (Sainsbury & George 2006 :411). Ingold suggests that the senses are not distinct activities, rather they are all *"different facets of the same activity: that of the whole organism in its environment"* (Pink 2009:27). Pink, supporting many of the strands of enquiry and methodological conclusions reached within this research, stresses the importance of considering all the senses, or *"multimodality"*, in addition to the faculties of memory and imagination (Pink 2009: 101). Pink utilises Merleau-Ponty's work on perception as a basis for her approach because he *"placed sensation at the centre of human perception"* (Pink 2009: 26).

*'My body is not a collection of adjacent organs but a synergic system, all of the functions of which are exercised and linked together in the general action of being in the world'* (Merleau-Ponty 1962 in Pink 2009:26).

In further support of the use of multi-modality, Pink also cites the work of neurobiologists who discovered through brain-scanning that

*"cross-modal interactions are the rule and not the exception in perception, and that the cortical pathways previously thought to be sensory-specific are modulated by signals from other modalities"* (Pink 2009:28).

In other words, the sense organs and their respective sensory faculties do not operate alone, but rather are single aspects of a holistic sensory perception. In light of this finding, Pink suggests we should think of *"our perception of social, material and intangible elements of our environments as being dominated by no one sensory modality"* (Pink 2009:28).

### The locomotive body

For phenomenologists and psycho-geographers the contact one makes with the ground is *"crucial"* to the experience of our surroundings, *"especially the way the feet touch the ground"* where *"the self is pressed up against the landscape...part of it, emergent from it and distinct from it, like a blister on a toe"* (Okely 2006: 279; Wylie 2005:240). While there is a tradition of walking situated in the urban context, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century Parisian flâneur to the unstructured ambles or 'dérive' of the Situationists, even to the modern tourist's ability to join a walking tour of historic buildings in most cities, the work of researchers studying walking in the rural context would belie Pink's assertion that *"the practice of walking is generally situated in the urban context"* (Pink 2010:4). Gray chooses to walk in the hills of the Scottish borders; Wylie along the south west coast path; and Tolia-Kelly in the Lake District (Gray 2003; Wylie 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2007). Wherever walking is practiced, the

walker is subject to his or her own bodily experiences framed through the subjectivities of his or her personal understanding.

Tolia-Kelly and Pink both employ 'ethno-mimesis' as the basis for their research, by combining the performative act of walking and the "*subsequent production of art forms to represent experience*" (Tolia-Kelly 2007; Pink 2007; O'Neill & Hubbard 2010:3). For example, Tolia-Kelly's work on racial identity and the English landscape saw the author leading existing groups of post-migration, Asian, urban residents on walks around the Lake District (Tolia-Kelly 2007). The participants later represented their personal perceptions of the landscape through collages in order to contribute to the existing archive of landscape responses, introducing a new set of cultural responses to the artistic canon. By taking the groups to the landscape, rather than asking them to respond to images for instance, the participants appropriated the landscape for themselves through their own locomotive bodies. The use of representation-making activities is a way of uncovering the intangible aspects of perception, rather than a way of privileging the visual (O'Neill & Hubbard 2010). For Tolia-Kelly the landscape of the Lake District is an embodiment of Englishness, derived from the art-historical Romantic traditions and crucially excluding the histories of migrant residents (Tolia-Kelly 2007). Her research responds to, and challenges, the idea that Black people do not visit the countryside, or that

*"environmental discourses around 'non-native belonging' in the English landscape are in tune with cultural discourses that are exclusionary to a black presence in the rural scene"* (Tolia-Kelly 2007:335).

The main criticism of Tolia-Kelly's methodology lies in the final phase in which a "*trained artist*" responds to the participants' collages and pictures, finally using his works to form an exhibition (Tolia-Kelly 2007: 335). This phase undermines the aesthetic input of the group by implying that 'amateur' works are not exhibition-worthy, and gives further credence to the traditional canon of landscape responses which the author aims to challenge through the research. By allowing the original



responses, made by post-migration Pakistani and Indian participants, to be re-worked and translated by an artist trained within the parameters of the ruling (White English) artistic elite's art-school system, Tolia-Kelly does both the participants and the exhibition's audience a disservice; the former by implying their efforts are unworthy and incommunicable; the latter by implying an inability to understand new or different responses.

Pink describes a series of visits to a community garden project where 'walking with video' was used as a phenomenological research tool (Pink 2007). Pink's research links with contemporary sensory theories; in particular Feld's idea that "*as place is sensed, senses are placed; as places make sense, senses make place*"; Lee and Ingold's idea that "*the locomotive aspect of walking allows for an understanding of places being created by routes*" and de Certeau's emphasis on the appropriation involved when walking in the city (Feld 1996:91; Lee & Ingold 2006: 68; de Certeau 1984). Interviews with participants necessitated the use of plans, maps and photographs as the garden was described to her, creating an imagined space. Upon walking the garden, along routes prescribed by the participants, Pink's own experience supports the notion that walking (or locomotion) is a formative aspect of sensing and creating place. As an introduction to sensory-theory Pink's article is informative, offering an over-view of current theory. It is also evidence of the inter-relational aspect of much of this theory, as notions of place-making through bodily contact, cognitive associations and the links between imagined and 'real' space are included. Despite the brevity of discussions in these areas, there exist implications for future investigation in relation to this research. The notion of 'real' and imagined space is one such issue.

### Rhythm and motion

Edensor (2010) and Wylie (2005) both consider the eurhythmic results of walking. When the walking body reaches a point where monitoring its progress along the route is no longer necessary, as rhythm occurs which allows the mind to wander (Edensor 2010). Edensor's proviso in this respect is that the walking body be

trained, suggesting that all but the most athletic walker using a familiar route are closed to a wandering mind (Edensor 2010). Surely conjecture is also possible during an arduous walk where the body is continually “*up against*” nature and progress is difficult; the need to consider one’s bodily movements, and the phenomenon of association triggered by sensorial experience are not mutually exclusive (Wylie 2005:240). Indeed, Ingold asserts that the mind and the physical world are so strongly linked as to be inseparable (Ingold 2010).

A number of authors consider the effects of movement on the creation of place, that is, that a sense of place can be created through journeys (Edensor 2010; Kusenbach 2003; Gray 2003; Ingold 2010; Sheller & Urry 2006). Edensor and Ingold both adopt Sheller & Urry’s notion of “*dwelling-in-motion*” produced through the act of walking (Jamal & Robinson 2009:649; Edensor 2010; Ingold 2010). Kusenbach refers to the notion of feeling at home whilst moving which she observed during ‘go-alongs’ (walks) with residents on familiar routes around their neighbourhoods (Kusenbach 2003). In Gray’s observations of Scottish hill farms the shepherd’s regular route around the hill is overlaid with memories of events and anticipations of actions, and in this way the shepherd comes to know the land and the animals and his own place within the continuum of the hillside (Gray 2003). This research study has involved the use of non-residents in some instances, that is, individuals for whom the specific canal site is not familiar, or at least, not habitually used. Data from dialogues with these varied individuals suggest that place is not necessarily created through familiarity with a space; rather that the experience of other places contributes to feelings of attachment and understanding in an unfamiliar landscape. De Certeau’s notion of “*the presence of absences...what appears designates what is no more*” (DeLyser 2001 :31) not only applies to what is missing from a place, but what was never there, indeed, what is somewhere else and linked to a place by imagination and memory .

## Vision and language

The parallels between vision, language and how one understands landscape are explored by Ingold (2010) and della Dora (2008) in particular, and Woodiwiss' writing on structural linguistics and much of the literature relating to memory and landscape demonstrate that many of the initially disparate themes under consideration in this research are linked by a few basic theories regarding experience, perception and cognition (Woodiwiss 2001).

For some, walking in the landscape is synonymous with reading, since both involve vision and cognition (Ingold 2010). Ingold cites the practices of medieval pilgrims for whom places in the landscape were associated with the stories of the Bible, so that a visit to those places would enable recollection of the stories (Ingold 2010). For Aboriginal Australians, walking the routes of their territories is an act of remembrance, triggered by 'reading' the landscape components and recalling the creation-songs linked to them (Ingold 2010; Chatwin 1987). For the ancient Greeks "*ars memorativa*" was a common method of training for the art of rhetoric, as the ability to orate required an advanced capacity for memory (Marot 1999:10). By imagining the emplacement of concepts and narrative within the architecture of a familiar building or landscape, one would 'walk' around the space, reading the rooms and artefacts within, and so recall the speech (Marot 1999:10). 19<sup>th</sup> century travellers also 'read' mountains as one would read a book or a memory room – by "*jumping from peak to peak as though it suggested an order*" (della Dora 2008:223). These ideas are supported by Ingold's assertion that for the medieval scholar at least, 'ekphrasis' (the ability of words to conjure images) was not limited to words, but also extended to architecture and landscapes (Ingold 2010).

The literature discussed in this chapter derives from diverse subject areas and covers topics ranging from identity politics, to psycho-geography, to memory studies and art history however, these trans-disciplinary texts have influenced the multi-disciplinary approach to the research to maintain the central focus on multi-modal perception, or the confluence of bodily sensation and cognitive functioning.

# Methodology

The completion of this research study was dependent on the co-operation of a number of individuals and organisations in terms of time and resources, logistics and availability of information, necessitating a “*contingent*” approach to methodology and data acquisition (Till 2009<sup>1</sup>) (Fig.3.1). The contingent approach in the context of this research study is a way of responding to the problems and opportunities that arise when undertaking research with people. Whilst the contingent researcher continues to actively research and source information and participants, he/she also practices pragmatism, flexibility, curiosity and recognises the effect of serendipity (Till 2009). For example, when identifying participants for this research study, I formed an acquaintance with a man who later introduced me to a key research participant. In this respect the contingent researcher is an optimistic researcher, always finding value in any relationship or set of data and thus practising the central tenet of the Grounded Theory method that ‘all is data’ (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The approaches detailed in this chapter are varied, sometimes unusual, and even unique. The development of new, mixed-method approaches to the study of individuals and the landscape has become an aspect of the research remit and its contribution to knowledge, and is a result of a reflexive response to the necessities of the contingent research environment (Pink 2009:9). A reflexive research project is not necessarily “*a stable, tightly defined, unchanging research project conducted by a singular researcher, with one stable identity*”; both the researcher and the participants are in constant flux through time and location (Crang 2003:497). This research methodology is in reality research methodologies; a combination of approaches borrowed and adapted from research across many disciplines, plus those developed in reaction to pilot studies and fieldwork and those that have evolved pragmatically over the years as the result of new developments and relationships.

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<sup>1</sup> From a lecture entitled ‘The Contingent Researcher’ by Jeremy Till, Dean of the School of Architecture and the Built Environment, University of Westminster, 6<sup>th</sup> July 2009.

## Positioning the research

The research methodologies employed in this study are influenced by a number of theoretical frameworks, most notably phenomenology, ethnography, Grounded Theory and non-representational theory. Rather than aligning this research from the outset with any one of these frameworks, useful elements have been borrowed and adapted from each according to the requirements of the study to produce a mixed-methodology. By its nature, the mixed-method approach is unique to each researcher, which is why positioning the research within the canon of critical theory is essential.

### Phenomenology

Less a theoretical framework than a philosophical discipline, phenomenology most closely resembles the overarching mixed-method approach used in this study.

Phenomenology is the study of experience and appearances from a first-person narrative perspective, and *“calls for a heightened receptivity of all the senses”*; in that sense it is the basis of this research study’s individualist, multi-modal approach (Mautner 2005:464; Leach 1997:83). The term was first used by Lambert in 1764 to describe a theory of sensory experience and the appearances of things (Mautner 2005:464) and many contemporary phenomenological studies are primarily concerned with sensory experience, that is, the experiences of seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting. For example, the works of Schafer (1974), Wylie (2005; 2006) and Adams & Guy (2007), which have been influential for this research, are redolent of the sensory-based aspect of phenomenology in their use of sound and touch in particular. The ‘true’ form of phenomenology is based on the work of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and is concerned with more than bodily, sensory experiences in that it *“studies the structure of various types of experience ranging from perception, thought, memory, imagination, emotion, desire, and volition to bodily awareness, embodied action, and social activity, including linguistic*

*activity*” (S.E.P.<sup>2</sup>). Although any alignment with Husserl’s phenomenology is post-facto, it is his form of phenomenology that this research most closely resembles, as this research employs a combination of sensory methods and considers to varying degrees the roles of memory and association, imagination, cognition and linguistic structures. Phenomenology is present in both the way that we perceive the landscape and in the methods developed to elicit the research data. For example, phenomenology is present in the multi-modal approach to (landscape) perception, that is, the combination of memory, association, imagination and musing that is considered alongside the traditional five-sense Western sensorium as the body moves through the landscape. The phenomenological multi-modal, or whole-body sensory perception method incorporates locomotion, perception, narrative and memory to create what Pink calls the *“ethnographic place”*<sup>3</sup>, but which is termed the participant’s ‘landscape identity’ in this research (Pink 2009:42).

## Ethnography

The mixed-methods approach developed for this research study incorporates aspects of ethnography. Ethnography is the description of the nature of peoples (ethnos) in writing (graphy) and primarily involves the use of two of the data collection methods used in this study, namely interviews and participant observation, or action research (Pink 2009:10). Pink suggests that ethnographers frequently also use *“digital visual and audio technologies”* (Pink 2009:10), which is mirrored in the use of audio recording equipment within this research methodology. The research also supports Pink’s assertion that the use of a *“range of participatory research techniques that are often developed and adapted in context and as appropriate to the needs and possibilities afforded by specific research projects”* suggests that *“there is now no standard way of doing ethnography that is universally*

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<sup>2</sup> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy; <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/phenomenology/>

<sup>3</sup> *“Ethnographic places are not the same actual, real, experienced places ethnographers participate in when they do fieldwork. Rather, they are the places that we, as ethnographers, make when communicating about our research to others. [It] involves the combining, connecting and interweaving of theory, experience, reflection, discourse, memory and imagination. Moreover, it can never be understood without accounting for how its meanings are constituted in relation to readers and audiences through their participation”* (Pink 2009:42).

*practised*” (Pink 2009:8). The main difference between ethnography and this research methodology is the focus on the individual. This research does not seek to group people together to ascertain a shared response to the canal landscape, rather it seeks to explore the multiplicity of responses; if shared responses occur they are an interesting phenomenon, but are not the aim. The history of ethnography as a colonialist methodology, which *“arose in the Western world as a form of knowledge about distant cultures which were impenetrable to analysis consisting only of fleeting contact or brief conversations”* is a potential cause for concern (Barnard & Spencer 2010 :2). The notion that *“[d]espite its good intentions (to gain deeper understanding), ethnography is still a colonial method...”* suggests a reductive tendency to generalise participants which is not useful given the individualistic nature of this research study (Barnard & Spencer 2010: 2; Surin 2005). The notion that ethnography is increasingly popular in social and applied research because we live in the age of the *“observation society”* highlights the relatively passive focus on observation that differentiates ethnography from other approaches such phenomenological ethnography (Barnard & Spencer 2010:3) Classic ethnography involved spending large portions of time observing and perhaps living with the peoples being studied, however this sort of fieldwork is *“impractical and inappropriate”* in this research context (Pink 2009:8). Nonetheless, ethnography’s focus on a range of narrative techniques ranging from small-talk to formal interviews provides scope for interaction and lends authenticity to the conversational aspects of qualitative studies that may be dismissed as un-rigorous by some.

This research methodology resembles the work of Pink who practices a form of multi-sensorial ethnography, or ‘sensory ethnography’, that *“accounts for how this multisensoriality is integral both to the lives of people who participate in our research and to how we ethnographers practise our craft”* (Pink 2009:1). Pink’s approach responds to the multi-modal way that individuals perceive the landscape, that is, through all the five senses plus the faculties of memory, association, musing and imagination, by firstly recognising this multi-modality and secondly using multi-

modal techniques to elicit landscape perceptions. Sensory ethnography differs from traditional ethnography in that it *“insist[s] that ethnography is a reflexive and experiential process through which understanding, knowing and (academic) knowledge are produced”* (Pink 2009:8). Pink’s distinction suggests that sensory ethnography resembles phenomenological ethnography in that they both rely on the acknowledgment that the researcher’s presence and engagement with the participant shapes the data elicited through the research process (Pink 2009:25). Pink’s approach also mirrors this research methodology in the way that it places importance on the locomotive body, that is, the affect that the sensing, moving body has on landscape perceptions (Pink 2009:25).

### Phenomenological ethnography

The methodologies used in this research project are mirrored in the phenomenological ethnographic works of Kusenbach (2003) and Irving (2005) in which the movement of *“living bodies”* contributes to our understanding of *“perceptual space[...]as places[...]of special personal significance”* (Kusenbach 2003: 456). Both writers use what is termed in this research as ‘Walking-and-Talking’, as a method of phenomenological ethnography in which individuals are accompanied on a walk which they also narrate. To exclude phenomenology as a research tool on the basis that it is inaccurate and predicated on opinion, merely serves to emphasise the very elitism and privileging of scientific data that phenomenology seeks to challenge (Kusenbach 2003: 457). Sociologists can be divided into two factions; firstly, the *“positive, Neo-Kantian tradition”* (including phenomenologists and ethnomethodologists) for whom the fact that they *“share the capacity for language with their human subject matter is the source of their great advantage over natural scientists [as] it enables them to see or understand the social in itself or from the inside”*; and secondly, the *“sceptical tradition [of] the logical positivists and Marxists [for whom] the fact that we share language with our objects of study is the source of great problems ... because language is also the carrier of preconceptions, values and therefore sympathies and interests which can be the sources of bias”* (Woodiwiss 2001:2). Problematising personal opinion in this



way, while allowing phenomenologists to defend this method of research, rather supports the ocularcentric practice of recognising only those things that can be experienced and checked visually (Woodiwiss 2001). For the purposes of this research project, the latter ‘faction’ is the most able to mitigate the effects of personal opinion on research, as by engaging linguistically we attempt to uncover meaning through discussion, to contextualise individuals’ understandings of places.

## Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory (GT) is a system whereby the researcher starts, not with a hypothesis as with standard research methodologies, but with data collection. The data are then codified into categories upon which a theory can be formed (Glaser & Strauss 1967). GT is the inverse of the traditional research method in which methodologies are aligned with a theoretical framework, a hypothesis is posited and data are collected accordingly to test that hypothesis (Glaser & Strauss 1967). The joint originators of this method, Glaser and Strauss, later separated their approaches, creating the Glaserian and Straussian paradigms (Devadas et al 2011). The Glaserian paradigm is based on the notion that ‘all is data’, while the Straussian paradigm takes a more scientific approach, by starting with a research problem followed by research questions (Devadas et al 2011). The methodologies employed in this research study are most similar to the Glaserian branch of GT in that they not only treat participants’ responses as landscape responses and evidence of multiplicities of landscape identities, but also those of the researcher and those within a variety of media sources. As with Glaserian GT, this research study was not based on an hypothesis, but rather a desire to explore and the knowledge that the contingencies of the data collection process would reveal research questions and directions over time.

## Performative Theory

For Goffman *“performance (refers to) all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers”* (Goffman 1969:19),

whilst Grimes defines performance as a *“showing of doing”* (Grimes 2003:35). Dirksmeier & Helbrecht helpfully define some of the key foundational theories of this approach. The ‘performative turn’ is the *“exercise of verbal, bodily and multi-modal performances of artistic or social practices”* and is therefore *“the exercise of singular or temporary events”* (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008:2). It also requires a shift from the emphasis on representation to performance techniques (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008:2). By their nature these research performances are temporary, ‘one-time only’ and their representation, through recording results in a loss of the *“temporal immediacy”* that makes performances unique (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008:2). The notion of the loss of meaning through representation or reproduction is not new to performative theory; in 1936 Walter Benjamin expressed a similar concern in relation to the ‘simulacra’ created through mass reproduction of images of art in books when he said that *“[e]ven the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be”* (Harrison & Wood 2000:513), making this a persistently modern dichotomy. The Walk-and-Talks used for data collection are performative turns in the sense that they are the exercise of bodily and verbal performances of social practices (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008:2).

### Non-Representational Theory

Non-Representational Theory (N-RT) is a theory of practices focusing on repetitive physical expressions, such as gestures and rituals, as ways of transmitting knowledge and *“conceives the entire research process as a performance”* (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008:23). N-RT is concerned with the methodology of the performance, rather than merely outcomes in the form of representations of the performance (i.e. the process of undertaking the interview itself rather than the resulting transcripts); it refuses to *“give representations a primary epistemological status by which knowledge becomes only ‘extracted’ post hoc from reality”* (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008:22). N-RT may be problematic for this research study in that many of the methodologies utilise drawing, photography and narration in collaboration with the performance of walking, thus creating representations.

However, the ethos of this theory with its emphasis on the performance of interaction and ritual is useful, particularly when considered alongside performative theory.

## Key Research Techniques

### Lone walks

Lone walking through canal landscapes was used as a familiarisation technique and developed into the core method of experiencing landscape, upon which other methods were set. A lone walk is just that; a walk taken by a lone individual in the landscape. Early consultation with British Waterways (BW) determined that this research study would not be a study of boaters' habits and opinions as BW had previously undertaken such studies. My observations suggested that the majority of users at regenerated canal sites were towpath users engaged in leisure (dining or strolling with friends) or routine visits (walking to work or for errands), so walking through the landscapes as a participant-observer allowed me to perceive it as do the majority of users. Walks were 'contingent' as they were the result of having spare time or the opportunity to travel to a site. I used a small digital voice recorder to make sound recordings of each of the early walks, recording the ambient local sounds and those of my own peripatetic body. Written notes and photographs were taken in-situ on some occasions, followed by further note making once at home, detailing recalled experience (Wylie 2005).

Lone walking is a form of ethnography in that it is observational, focusing on people (and evidence of people's actions) in addition to places. The lone walking method also shows similarities with both Grounded Theory, as the walker sets out without an hypothesis and the only aim being exploration (Glaser & Strauss 1967), and with the Situationist practice of *dérive*, as movement is unplanned and influenced by the constraints and opportunities available within the landscape itself (Debord 1956). The lone walker is also a reflexive participant-observer, interacting with the canal and contemplating his or her personal observations. The reflexive aspect of the

method lends itself to reverie, as do its distinct phenomenological aspects, such as the rhythms created through walking over the ground and the sensory perceptions of sight, smell, hearing and touch in particular which may result in recollections and associations (Wylie 2005; Edensor 2010, Pink 2009; Kaplan & Kaplan 1989). The performative element of the lone walking method is a point for discussion. Literature on the subject is divided over whether or not a lone action is performative, that is, is an audience, complicit or not, necessary in the production of a 'performative turn'? (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008). On the canal towpath a walker is rarely completely alone as other users are momentarily present or else the towpath passes populated areas of housing for instance. Walks were recorded and represented, either during or after the event, suggesting lone walking is a performative technique, however through its representation the lone walk loses the immediacy that ensures it is a 'pure' performance (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008).

## Conversations

The need to talk with participants across a range of sites and circumstances necessitated the development of an (indoor) interview technique flexible enough to elicit qualitative data from the widest range of people, whilst ensuring that participants felt comfortable with the scenario. The Conversation technique is essentially a semi-structured interview, in that the researcher devises a general series of issues or questions around which dialogue can grow. The participant is made aware prior to the Conversation that it will be an informal chat designed to help the researcher understand how the participant thinks and feels about canals. The talk is unstructured and develops naturally through dialogue as a negotiated and collaborative effort, with the resulting narrative influenced as much by the researcher as the participant (Norrick 2007; Low 2003).

The Conversation technique informed the Walking-and-Talking technique and was later used either in conjunction with this technique, or where a walk with the participant was impossible. I developed a method to diffuse any 'interview anxiety' whereby I used visual aids in the form of pre-printed maps or leaflets about canal

sites or asked participants to draw a simple diagram or map of the area from memory. In this way participants focused on the images or text between us, rather than the potentially daunting prospect of sitting opposite one another across an empty table. In this respect both researcher and participant become engaged together in the act of imagining the landscape, with the participant leading the researcher around the imagined site, often tracing the route with their fingers and commenting on the 'landscape' as they would if engaged in a physical walk around the actual site (Pink 2007). In this sense the Conversation-with-visual-aids is a useful technique where a walk is impossible, as through the act of describing a route and tracing it with their fingers on the maps, the participant takes an imagined journey, recalling sensory experiences and associations in a phenomenological 'locomotion-by-proxy'.

### Walking-and-Talking

Walking-and-Talking combines the performative, collaborative and negotiated aspects of the indoor Conversation and the reflexive, phenomenological aspects of the Lone Walk. In Walking-and-Talking, the researcher and participant walk through the landscape, chatting around the subject of the immediate landscape, allowing observations and thoughts to surface and be expressed.

The benefit of this technique for both the research aims and the involved parties is that being in the landscape and moving through it allows for the apprehension of the constant flux of naturally occurring experiences, that is, participants are able to comment on and discuss their surroundings as they move in order to make sense of what has occurred. Additionally, this technique is less ominous than a face-to-face conversation, particularly when the participant may be nervous about talking to a stranger, enabling both parties to relax. The locomotive and dialogic aspects of the method are equally important whilst neither aspect becomes overtly apparent. Each unique participant produces different results. Rather than problematising differences between participants, the technique demonstrates that whichever way personal narratives are elicited, participants converse on the landscape components and

events they experience and the thoughts that occur to them in association with the landscape - things that both please and repel them. This method is flexible enough to be useful with a range of participants, as through the performance it will be altered to fit their interests and abilities.

## Analytical framework

The research developed in line with the 'contingent' approach and Grounded Theory in that rather than an initial hypothesis, it was based on an aim to collect data around the general issue of canal-scape usage and individuals' landscape perceptions. Following a 'contingent' approach to research, through the formation of serendipitous networks and relationships that led me to diverse methods for collecting a variety of data, necessitated a similarly 'contingent' approach to analysis. The methodology evolved in response to the outcomes of each study during the research period (2007-2010); a process indicative of ongoing analysis, both of the results themselves and the usefulness of the methodologies employed. Pink acknowledges the difficulty of analysing "*sensory ethnographic research*" when using a traditional method whereby a period of data collection is followed by a period of systematic analysis, *since "the seeds of analytical thought may start to germinate in the qualitative researcher's mind as soon as she or he begins the process of learning and knowing about other people's experience"* (Pink 2009:119). Indeed, each interaction with a participant where I made a sound recording resulted in the transcription of our narrative plus a summary of the interaction, including the key aspects of the narrative as I perceived them and their possible meaning and influences.

Each narrative was interrogated in the same manner as one would analyse an interview transcript using Grounded Theory i.e. line by line, image by image, describing the results and posing questions as they occurred. Evidence of different types of responses was highlighted, such as the different bodily senses, examples

of memory recall or musing (Appendix 1). In this way a series of trends and differences emerged from which conclusions were drawn and methodological modifications developed in order for me to elicit the data I was interested in uncovering. Analysis “*as a process of abstraction*” is predicated on self-reflexivity and an awareness that the researcher’s presence and collaboration elicits certain data (personal interests or noticeable trends for instance) and certain ways of ‘reading’ those data;

*“Analysis is both a way of knowing engaged in by the researcher during the research and it is part of the reflexivity of the sensory ethnographer who seeks to understand other people’s ways of being in the world but is simultaneously aware that her... involvement is part of a process that will eventually abstract these experiences to produce academic knowledge”*  
(Pink 2009:120-121).

For example, the Sound Walk pilot study (2007) (Appendix 2) marked the beginning of a “*process of abstraction*” which resulted in the final Sensory Walk (2010) (Pink: 2009:120). The pilot study was undertaken in response to a call for papers on the theme of sound-scapes to be presented at the Institute of Acoustics’ Spring Conference in 2008. The pilot study enabled me to expose individuals to the landscape and observe their responses within a fairly tight remit – that of experiencing and perceiving the sounds of the canal-scape – but also allowed me to test the logistics of walking with a group and observing responses. The results suggested that memory influences how individuals perceive landscapes and further reading indicated that memory is a foundational aspect of personality. I later modified the methodology to include aspects relating to how the participants felt their experiences (and hopefully their memories) had influenced their perception of the landscape. The modified methodology was used for the Representation Walk study (2008). Rather than re-visiting soundscapes, I changed the remit of this study to include visual sense as I was hoping to determine whether vision is more evocative of memories than sound.

These studies influenced the Sensory Walk (2010) methodology, as the data and my further reading suggested that we perceive the five senses of the “*traditional western sensorium*” (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch) holistically, and that memory is so heavily implicated in the landscape as to make it “*effectively part of the landscape*” (Adams & Guy 2007:133; Tolia-Kelly 2004:284). The Sensory Walk responded to the need to elicit a multi-modal sensory response to the landscape which allowed participants to express their thoughts as they moved – a phenomenological and auto-ethnographic development that would have been impossible without the earlier studies.

## The Study Sites

British Waterways helped identify three initial study sites on which to focus the research. Selection criteria included: the size of the site; how recently canal regeneration was undertaken; regeneration typology; researcher accessibility; and landscape typology. Rather than studying lengths of canal corridor as they change through urban to rural zones, specific sites or nodes were identified for study within the West Midlands. Three distinct nodes of regeneration with fairly clear boundaries were identified at Brindleyplace in Birmingham (Plate 1), Coventry Canal Basin and Trail (Appendix 3), and Stourport-on-Severn Basins (Appendix 3). At Brindleyplace the site is bounded by four city landmarks: the National Indoor Arena; The Mailbox; the International Convention Centre; and Broad Street. At Stourport the Basins provide the site structure, adjacent to both the town and the River Severn. Coventry Canal Basin is surrounded by the ring road system and housing, while the route of the arts trail extends along the canal for 5 ½ miles to create a “*greenway*” or linear parkland area for walkers and boaters alike (Coventry Canal leaflet, 2008).

### Focusing the research sites

During the course of the research it became evident that the majority of the narratives collected derive from the wider Birmingham area, resulting in the need to



narrow the focus of the research to this site. Identifying participants at the Stourport and Coventry sites was problematic, despite their initial selection on the basis of accessibility and regeneration typologies. In contrast to the low interest displayed by potential participants at Stourport and Coventry, relatively positive responses were encountered at Birmingham. Despite the change in focus, the studies undertaken at both Coventry and Stourport were beneficial as they enabled me to familiarise myself with the canal network, highlighted the distinctions between canal sites and allowed for the testing and development of research techniques such as Walking-and-Talking, Conversations and self-reflexive exercises.

### Additional Study Sites

Identifying participants at the original study sites of Birmingham, Stourport-on-Severn and Coventry was problematic, largely due to the ‘my canal’ phenomenon. This phenomenon includes those instances where participants possess such a strong canal-landscape identity that they disregard the validity of the main research site and/or the suggested research itself, in favour of a familiar canal site and/or existing activity. I, as a “*contingent researcher*”, extended the study sites in a few instances in order to take advantage of the opportunities that arose (Till 2009). The inclusion of these additional sites occurred serendipitously as relationships were formed with participants who despite being unable or unwilling to help with research at the main study sites, offered to participate at the sites most local to them or those with which they were already involved through work and hobbies.

The contingent nature of the research necessitated the inclusion of additional canal sites. I participated in ‘reminiscence’ workshops at Fradley Junction, near Lichfield, where I also undertook some Walking-and-Talking interviews with British Waterways staff as part of my early canal familiarisation. At Titford Pool in the Oldbury/Smethwick area of the Black Country I undertook participant-observation during a canal clean-up day with members of the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society. At Tipton in the Black Country and at Aston in central Birmingham I took part in two organised canal walks.

The main study site at Brindleyplace was extended along the canal network (Fig.3.2). For example, in the 2007 Sound Walk pilot study participants walked towards the Farmer's Bridge locks in order to chart their changing perceptions of sound. In 2009 I tested the use of multi-modal or whole-body sensory perception along an unexplored route during a lone walk in the direction of Edgbaston. On various occasions the study site extended into Ladywood, including during a lone walk; during a Walking-and-Talking interview with a participant who chose the route according to his personal canal narrative; and as part of the 2010 Sensory Walk when two participants deviated from the suggested route.

Conversations with participants uncovered references to other canal sites around Birmingham such as those at Smethwick and Winson Green; participants recalled other landscapes, both current and past, whilst simply talking of their experience of the canal site at Brindleyplace.

## Identifying Research Participants

Identifying and securing participants for the research study was as 'contingent' a task as developing the methodologies used to elicit narratives from them. At each of the study sites individuals and organisations emerged as I made visits and sourced relevant publications. I initially planned to take a comparative approach to the data, interviewing British Waterways' staff and representatives from canal-related organisations, or those who had been involved with the regeneration of the study sites, comparing their narratives with those of canal users such as residents, local business owners, visitors and canal-interest groups. I envisaged the participation of a number of willing groups at each site with whom I could perform data gathering exercises such as group walks and focus groups. As the research progressed it became evident that the logistics of such a structured approach to sourcing participants were untenable. Finding individuals willing to participate in exercises was difficult as individuals were often too busy, did not understand the relevance of

the research methodology or, as in the case of groups, were unwilling to participate in exercises that deviated from their standard use (or non-use) of the canal landscape.

Participants for the 2007 Sound Walk pilot study and 2008 Representation Walk study comprised existing student groups drawn from the Birmingham City University BA Landscape Architecture programme. These studies enabled me to hone the research methodology and develop the research based on the subsequent emergent findings. The use of student participants for the pilot studies is an acceptable method with precedents in the works of Kaplan & Kaplan (1989) and Crang (2005) for example. The focus of these studies, as with the remainder of the research, was on the individual; his or her landscape perceptions and personal landscape narratives. Any prior knowledge of the canal landscape or interest in landscape studies which students may possess is mitigated by the under-pinning notion that 'all is data', i.e. that all participants' perceptions of, and responses to, the landscape are valid data (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

Participants for the 2010 Sensory Walk were largely drawn from across Birmingham City University. The majority of participants were university staff and post-graduate students, although two participants were sourced from outside the university; the wife of one participant and the friend of another participant.

The *Postcards from the Cut* study attracted participants from a wider range of sources, owing largely to the fact that it was a 'remote' study, that is, participants completed and returned a postcard at their own leisure without the need to physically participate in a walk. The postcards were distributed to participants using a network of contacts in Birmingham who then collected the postcards and returned them to me. Two groups, the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS) and The Guiding Stars (GS), returned around thirty responses each and provided an opportunity for comparison owing to their shared group responses and distinct memberships. The remainder of the participants were individuals sourced through

contacts including colleagues, family and friends who distributed them amongst their own networks. In this way the distribution of the postcards took on an additional performative process as they were passed back and forth between participants, carrying narrative responses.

The majority of the additional data, some of which are discussed in the chapter entitled 'Individual narrative studies', were the result of experimental interventions with individual participants from a wide variety of sources over the course of the research study (2007-2010). During this time I endeavoured to devise research methods and scenarios to which groups and individuals would be amenable. These narrative studies employed a range of methods including Conversations, Walking-and-Talking, and self-reflexive exercises such as written and visual diaries, participant-observation exercises, and lone walks; however they are united by their focus on individual narratives in response to the canal landscape.

The final approach to sourcing participants was accomplished in a less structured way than originally intended, through introductions from existing contacts in the 'contingent' manner characteristic of this research study. Fig.3.1 is a representation of the network of contacts I created in order to undertake this research study, although the diagram does not begin to express the relationships and many hours of conversation we entered into. Fig. 3.3 details the research projects and participants relating to the Birmingham study sites.

The individuals who participated in this research study did so with their informed verbal consent. In all cases participants were informed of the purpose of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage was made explicit. Specific consent was agreed to record interviews and data were stored securely on a password encrypted personal hard-drive. Some participants from earlier studies agreed to participate further in the research and additional briefing and consent was undertaken at each stage of the research. Throughout the research, participants were de-briefed as part of the methodology after each phase of the research. For example, as part of the

2008 Representation Walk study, participants were de-briefed following the initial exercises, and subsequently briefed regarding the next phase.

Participants were made aware that any representations they made (verbal, written and visual) may be used as data and that all such data would be presented anonymously. All the participants' names quoted in this thesis are pseudonyms which I have attributed to them. Owing to the nature of the conversations, participants sometimes shared personal information. Only information relevant to the research is presented in the thesis and always anonymously.

All outdoor studies were undertaken in the public realm involving routine walking activities in accessible locations. Participants were informed of the physical requirements of the walks, their locations and an approximate time-frame. Walks were timed to last approximately 45 minutes, but participants were free to walk at their own pace.

This research study is an extended performative piece of temporally and site-specific investigation, its foundational network of contacts and events unique, but suited to the real-world conditions of researching people and society. The methodologies used in this research are experimental and developmental, but the data they elicit suggest they remain valid methods for uncovering the multiplicities of meanings converging on the urban UK canal-scape via a series of narratives. Each narrative, however small, tells the story of an individual's landscape identity; what the canal landscape means to them, how it is used and how it is incorporated into the perceptual loop of an individual's life.

# Representation Walk

During the second year of the research (2008/9) a study was performed with first year undergraduate students from the Birmingham Institute of Art & Design (BIAD) BA Landscape Architecture programme. This methodology developed from the 2007 Sound Walk pilot, in particular the use of the tri-partite method of eliciting responses before, during and after the walk. The Sound Walk pilot uncovered instances of memory recall and the evocation of other landscape experiences, suggesting the influence of memories on individuals' landscape perceptions and necessitating a further study to explore this phenomenon. The tri-partite method required initial information from participants as a way to frame their responses. In line with the notion of participants' self-expression and analysis, the study would require participants to be self-reflexive – something that was lacking in the previous pilot (Gauntlett & Holzworth 2006). The use of visual representation as a narrative form through participants' drawings and photographs was incorporated in order to test the practicality of the use of artistic methods in research.

New undergraduates to the BA Landscape Architecture programme are required to explore the notions of making place and creating identity. A module was created around the Brindleyplace area as a study site, with the students' submissions providing the data for this study. As students are required to produce plans and designs during the course of their studies, the module assessment was marked on a combination of image-making and narrative responses, with students encouraged to make sketches and take photographs during the canal walk. This meant that the study was focused on analysis of visual and verbal representations. The students were made fully aware of the research component and although the module was slightly altered to produce the opportunity for data acquisition (as with focusing on the canal landscape), the module was designed in accordance with standard teaching and assessment criteria. My role at sessions was mainly that of an observer.

The participants included 10 males and 4 females ranging in age from 18 to 50+, with the majority being in their early to mid- twenties. Participants were mostly White UK, with two Asian UK and two Cypriot participants. The majority of the participants had moved to Birmingham from elsewhere in the UK, generally from small cities or rural areas. Many of the participants came from an arts background, having studied art and design at A-Level or Foundation Level. Some of the group had undertaken previous undergraduate study, while others were first-time undergraduates. The majority of the group had some prior knowledge or experience of UK and European canals, although the two Cypriot students had neither knowledge nor experience of canals. The majority of the group had never visited the Brindleyplace area of Birmingham and the few participants who originated from the city were not very familiar with the area.

## Part One: Initial Exercises

### ‘10 Questions’ and ‘Ideal Landscapes’

In order to elicit a basis of data from each participant, they were asked to complete two exercises prior to the walk. The majority of the data these exercises produced are taken from my own observational notes as many of the participants did not submit these exercises in their final portfolios, perhaps thinking they were simple ice-breaker exercises rather than useful research tools. The first exercise, called ‘10 Questions’, was a written exercise in which participants were asked to complete a repeated statement which read “*My name is...and I...*”. The object of this exercise, which was re-worked for use in the final Sensory Walk study, was to ascertain the terms in which participants consider their own identities and what information they choose to share as expressions of those identities.

The second exercise, ‘Ideal Landscapes’, explored visual representation and participants were asked to draw their ideal landscape and then present it to the group. The object of this exercise was to elicit personal representations of

‘landscape visualisations’, that is, for the participants to attempt to reproduce the images in their mind conjured by the phrase ‘ideal landscape’. Not only does this exercise demonstrate what participants feel constitutes an ideal landscape, but it also shows how they visualise and express their perceptions of the landscape using artistic devices such as viewpoint, perspective and scale.

### The initial exercise responses

In response to the ‘10 Questions’ exercise, the majority of participants listed a series of key pieces of information, including their hometown, personal interests, aspirations and their current state of mind. Despite the majority of participants mentioning their hometown or country of origin, only a few elaborated on this information by linking it to their families or ancestry. Those participants who did elaborate did so in relation to their names, for instance Phil has five middle names – those of his five uncles, and Rob’s names reflect his Welsh and Scottish ancestry.

In response to the ‘Ideal Landscapes’ exercise, participants tended to turn their paper into the ‘landscape’ position with the longest sides horizontal to the table, suggesting a common association of landscapes with wide views (Plate 3).

Participants tended to draw a rural-style landscape and placed a representation of themselves within it.

### Part Two: The Walk

The group met near the fountain in the central square at Brindleyplace on an October morning (the same starting point was used for each of the walks). The walk was divided into two one-hour long segments. For the first hour the participants walked together in the area between the National Indoor Arena and The Mailbox, starting at Brindleyplace and running in a general circuit of the area (Fig.4.4). During this time the group made comments and observations on their experiences of



walking in this re-developed area. For the second hour the participants explored the same area alone or in small groups, in order to make sketches and notes, take photographs and experience the landscape for use in their subsequent representational portfolios. Research data from the walk itself are in the form of my own observational notes of the group discussion as we moved through the landscape (Appendix 4).

The object of the first hour of the walk was to introduce the participants to the study site in a familiar group context so that they felt comfortable enough to explore the area alone during the second hour of the walk. This area is interesting partly for its variety of levels and the views from them: towpath level; the various bridges, steps, ramps; and the high point of Brindleyplace which is level with the surrounding city streets. I watched how the participants navigated the space when they were left alone. The initial walking route took participants across water, up and down steps, along towpaths and under bridges, but purposely did not explore all of the possibilities of direction and level, particularly in the Gas Street Basin area, as it was hoped that participants would further explore the site during the second half of the walk.

## Responses to the walk

During the first half of the canal walk, when the participants walked as a group around the study site, certain shared perceptions of the canal landscape were uncovered. The participants tended to talk about the canal landscape in terms of the “good” views available at certain places on the route, such as bridges and other elevated positions. At a number of stops along the walking route the participants enjoyed leaning on the railings of bridges or standing at the edges of high places in order to look down or along to the horizon. A male participant commented that the view from one bridge facing the direction of the National Indoor Arena was “*classic canal*”. When asked to elaborate, he replied that it was “*picturesque*”. A female participant observed that although she initially liked the view of the towpath from the

bridge above it, when later standing on the towpath she felt “*uncomfortable*” and found it unpleasant.

Cleanliness and general maintenance were unanimously highly regarded and the participants contrasted this landscape with that of the canal at Aston near the university which contains some graffiti and ‘tagging’; there is no graffiti in the managed Brindleyplace area and the group felt this was a positive aspect of Brindleyplace. The participants generally disliked the water when viewed at close proximity, and commented on the “*polluted*” and “*dirty*” appearance of the water. The canal water in this area is in fact relatively clear and pollution free compared with its pre-development state, the darkness of the water being the result of a layer of silt on the bottom and the dark colour of the structure of the ‘cut’ itself.<sup>1</sup>

Whilst walking around Brindleyplace the participants discussed the opportunities available for leisure, in particular dining and drinking. The oldest participant (aged 50 +) said that she would not visit the area in the evenings for the purposes of dining as she has only seen younger people there and felt that the area was not aimed at people of her age group. Conversely, the youngest participants (aged approximately 18-21) felt that they would not visit the area for drinking because it is aimed at older and more affluent people than they are as students.

During the second half of the walk participants were given time to explore the area alone in order to make representations. The participants engaged less with the exploratory possibilities of the Basin than anticipated, rather preferring to focus their attention in the Brindleyplace area further along the canal. The Basin offers a number of opportunities to cross water, change level and change viewpoint such as crossing the small, steep bridge over the Worcester Bar; or continuing along the walkway through the moored boats; or walking round the Basin itself onto the opposite towpath (Plate 4).

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<sup>1</sup> Conversations with Glenn Millar at British Waterways confirmed that a great deal of water maintenance was undertaken at Brindleyplace, including the removal of harmful chemicals remaining from the canal’s industrial era.

At certain places the participants' behaviour modified in response to their movement through the landscape (Plate 5). For example, at the Water's Edge (the area of bars above the towpath and opposite the International Convention Centre) the group moved towards the railings in order to look over them (Fig.4.8). When the group neared the Mailbox they walked up the ramped bridge, rather than continuing along the towpath (Fig.4.9). When the group arrived in Gas Street Basin they commented on their increased awareness of space and spread out, but on the narrower bridges and towpaths the group was unwilling to stop for extended periods (Fig.4.10).

### Part Three: Visual/narrative representations

The portfolio submission was the culmination of the teaching module for the students, and also provided the majority of the data for this study in the form of visual and narrative representations of their personal responses to the canal landscape at Brindleyplace. The portfolio consisted of a final A2 poster of images and annotation accompanied by their developmental work from the module, with a written piece. Guidelines for the portfolio encouraged participants to explore the subject and their own responses to it.

The object of the portfolio was to elicit participants' reflections on their own representations as they related to their individual identities. Participants were prompted to ask themselves certain questions, such as *"is my interpretation of the landscape affected by my personal identity?"* and *"what role do my memories, associations and expectations have in the way I see the landscape?"*<sup>2</sup> Through reflexive working the participants became aware of how their identities shape their experience and perception of landscape, hopefully causing them to question what they may have previously disregarded as universal perceptions. This way of working benefitted the by allowing them to create an understanding of their own landscape preferences and design tendencies, while the walking model, based on Merleau-Ponty's notion that the *"body is at the forefront of our awareness and perception of the world"*, cements the notion that physical experience of the

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<sup>2</sup> Excerpts from the briefing notes all Representation Walk participants received.

landscape should be the starting point for any design project (Thoma 2006:83). In terms of the benefit of this method for the research, the need for continuous reflection runs through the literature on qualitative methods, but allowing participants to express their own experience of the landscape using their own language extends the reflexive cycle (Gauntlett & Holzworth 2006) (Fig.4.11).

### The visual/narrative responses

The portfolios were analysed in terms of the narrative (written language) and visual (all types of images) representations present in each participants' work (Appendix 5). The data show that each participant's narrative and visual responses combined to create a distinct landscape perception or identity. Two participants' responses are explored in more detail in Plate 6 and Plate 7 at the end of this chapter.

The most commonly cited narrative themes included: social interaction (including the presence of others and opportunities for watching); buildings (generally modern); and other canals (including Birmingham and similar cities, the Norfolk Broads and in Europe) (Fig.4.16). The most common visual themes by subject included: green spaces (such as trees, vegetation, gardens and parks); and bridges and tunnels (those around Brindleyplace) (Fig.4.17). The disparity between the narrative and visual representations may be the result of the power of images to convey what is more difficult in words, so that the striking contrast between the green space and the buildings at Brindleyplace is best expressed through an image representing each element, while the "*sociable*" feeling that one participant described is perhaps less easily conveyed through an image as it would need to convey the sounds and smells of people at lunch and the proximity of others.

The participants' visual representations demonstrate a variety of approaches to viewpoint. Whilst all types of viewpoint were used by the group (including downward looking, ground-level or upward looking views, views along, across and at angles to the water, aerial, close-up and long-range views), some viewpoints were more

commonly used than others. For example, views along the canal were very commonly represented, as were views from elevated positions such as bridges and the different levels at Brindleyplace (Plate 8). Aerial views in the form of maps and site plans were commonly used, particularly to represent the wider study site area (Plate 9).

Certain places within the landscape tended to be similarly represented by different participants. For example, Broad Street Tunnel was often depicted from the outside looking along and through showing light on the other side (Plate 10). Vegetation in the area, usually in the form of flowers, was generally used to foreground and frame images (Plate 11).

There were some notable similarities between participants' use of colour in sketches. Rather than using nuanced layering of colours and tones to more accurately represent the landscape, participants tended to favour a limited palette of block colours (Plate 12). For example, the canal water was most often portrayed as blue in their drawings, despite their inclusion of photographs depicting the black/green/brown appearance of the water in the same portfolios. The trend in favour of block colours also extended to the depiction of narrow boats (generally red), trees (generally bright green) and tunnels (black) (Plate 12).

The majority (10/13) of the participants included personal recollections in their narrative representations, sometimes with photographic examples. Some recollections referred to prior visits to the study site, and others to associated landscapes. Crucially, in each case the recollections related to other landscapes made meaningful through associations with participants' home towns, families or holidays; the aspects of their identities that many participants felt were most important in the '10 Questions' exercise. Some recollections were general landscape associations, as with Adrian who compared the Birmingham canal landscape with that of the rural canals near his home in Gloucestershire. Other recollections were more specific, experience-based memories as with Kareema who recalled childhood memories of accompanying her parents to the area around the canal prior to its re-development in order to run errands. The landscape

components that elicited recollections were different for each participant. For example, one participant sat on a set of steps near some trees and was reminded of his childhood tree-house, while another was reminded of childhood continental holidays in relation to the tree-lined Central Square at Brindleyplace. Whatever the trigger, it was clear that the canal landscape elicited as many recollections as there were individuals to recall them.

## Observations

### Observations of the participants' behaviours

In observing the participants exploring the landscape I noticed a number of behaviours which are supported in the literature. The participants' experiences of this landscape were highly visual; a key aspect of their engagement with their surroundings focused on opportunities for watching others. During the second half of the walk the participants spent their time in the busier Brindleyplace area, and were much less interested in the less busy area around Gas Street Basin. This behavior echoes Jacob's notion that people are attracted to a space by the sight of other people (Jacobs 1961), in that a used space seems safer and it also offers the opportunity of indirect social interaction with others (Gehl 1996). Another reason for the participants' avoidance of Gas Street Basin may lie in their earlier references to the pollution in this area. Many of the group felt that the Gas Street Basin area was dark, and empty of both people and opportunities for activities. They also perceived the water as dirty, despite it being the same water as moves through the Brindleyplace area on the other side of Broad Street Tunnel. When the group visited Gas Street Basin the sun was not shining and it was perhaps the lack of sunlight that had a negative effect on their perceptions of the landscape in this area, since the water would appear dull, rather than sparkling.

The participants tended to spread out in wider areas and preferred not to stop in narrower areas. When they stopped to view the landscape from elevated positions such as bridges, they found lingering uncomfortable and stood at the edges of the space. I observed the group walk up the ramp to the metal bridge which connects the Mailbox with Gas Street Basin. When questioned, they replied that it had seemed the obvious route, despite the alternative being to continue along the towpath which takes a right turn just after the point where the ramp and towpath meet. These responses to the experience of being in the landscape are supported by Gehl's work on the affects of space on human behaviour. Gehl believes that the basic activities of "*walking, standing and sitting, as well as seeing, hearing and talking*" (Gehl 1996:133) should be made possible in order to encourage more advanced activities. People spread out to fill spaces, so where space is limited they will treat it as a thoroughfare and the opportunity for stopping is reduced, hence the group felt uncomfortable stopping on the bridges (Gehl 1996). People also tend to follow the 'easiest' walking route, that is, the route that offers the least resistance in the form of uneven surfaces that could interrupt their rhythm, and hence the ramped bridge seemed the obvious route for the participants to take (Gehl 1996:147).

Prospect-Refuge theory posits that all animals, humans included, favour a position that allows the individual to "*see without being seen*" as this reduces the risk of attack (Appleton 1975:70-71). When one participant said that she felt uncomfortable on the towpath near the bridge, she felt over-looked and vulnerable. When the group looked over the railings to the towpath below they were occupying a strong position; during this time the same participant said that she liked the action of looking over the railing. The picturesque understanding that "*high places and extended views have ever been propitious to the excursions of the imagination*", (Gilpin 1776:33) helps explain the tendency for participants to seek high places from which a 'view' can be seen. This was more recently reiterated by Pallasmaa who noticed the pleasure to be found in looking down from an elevated position, particularly the sense of distance or otherness that this affords the viewer (Pallasmaa 2005).

## The participants' representations

The participants' representations convey their individual perceptions largely through subject matter, rather than style of representation; certain shared stylistic approaches were evident, particularly in relation to viewpoint.

Elevated viewpoints were often combined with views along the canal to create "*picturesque canal*" or "*classic canal*"<sup>3</sup>. Whether participants consciously created images in this style is unclear, but it is unsurprising that participants familiar with a Western tradition of landscape depiction would deem this type of view pleasing and therefore choose to photograph or draw it. Prospect-Refuge theory also supports the participants' tendency to represent the view from above; since the participants naturally converged in these positions in order to be able to survey the area, it follows that they would represent their experience (Appleton 1975). The picturesque movement favoured a distanced viewpoint, set high, as from a hill, in order that the viewer could experience the scene as the picturesque traveller would (Lucas 1992). As canals take such a strong linear form owing to their function as transport routes, it is perhaps unsurprising the participants chose to represent the canal as a vertical line leading to the horizon, indeed one participant wrote: "*Brindleyplace has no views except along the canal*"<sup>4</sup>. The line to the horizon is redolent of the individuals' walking route and photographs in particular were most likely captured en-route. The line also suggests the continuity of the canal network, that is, the notion that the canal experienced at any point is only a small section of the vast UK waterways network. The line also echoes the idea of the 'man-made' landscape cutting through the 'natural' landscape (Ingold 2007).

The common use of the aerial view in representations of the site may be similarly explained as an elevated position allowed participants to distance and place themselves in relation to landmarks, so that once on the towpath they could forge a route with the knowledge their previous elevated position allowed them (Pallasmaa 2005). The plans may also have provided some use as memory aids, in that

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<sup>3</sup> Barney, referring to the view from a bridge at Brindleyplace.

<sup>4</sup> Adam, referring to the views available at Brindleyplace.



participants could recall their route and their experiences there by tracing their route on the plan with their fingers taking their place within the imagined landscape made real by the plan in an act of 'locomotion-by-proxy'.

In the 2007 Sound Walk pilot study it became apparent that participants anticipated hearing certain sounds based on their previous (positive) canal experiences, that is, they hoped to hear the sounds they associated with their canal ideal and many participants were subsequently disappointed when the sounds they anticipated were not forthcoming (Millman et al 2008). A similar effect was observed in the Representation Walk participants, this time relating to visual expectations. The participants focused their representations on the aspects which supported their existing canal ideals, in some cases altering the scenes they depicted or changing angles in order to include the landscape components they favoured; responses which mimic the manipulation of the landscape in picturesque representations (della Dora 2008). For instance, Claire grew up in a northern canal town and drew an industrial urban canal scene during the 'Ideal Landscape' exercise. The images she included in her portfolio focused on the themes of industrial heritage (architecture and canal furniture) and social spaces, and her images tended to include references to these themes (Plate 13). Christos, who grew up in Cyprus, focused his image making on green spaces and leisure spaces. Vegetation was not present at some places in the Gas Street Basin area, so Christos altered his representation to include vegetation in the form of trees and planting (Plate 6). Similarly, the modern boat captured in Peter's original photograph of the Norfolk Broads does not support his desire to represent that landscape as a natural one, so it is effectively removed as an important component in his manipulated image (Plate 7). In so doing, these participants represented the canal landscape they wished to see, superimposing their imagined, memory-scapes of other places over that of the urban canal landscape at Brindleyplace, in the same way that the picturesque traveller would use optical devices to crop or extend real views into more pleasing ones (Lucas 1992).

Most of the participants grew up and were educated in the UK, except Christos and Phoebe who grew up in Cyprus, a country with no canal tradition. On an early walk along the canal in Aston, Christos asked another participant to explain what the canal was, to which the man replied that it was an *“historic transport route”*. Christos had visited the canals of Venice, but he had no experience or knowledge of the UK canal network. Both Christos (Plates 6 & 11) and Phoebe (Fig.4.36) tended to focus their representations on the green/nature and leisure/social aspects of the landscape, paying little or no attention to ideas of heritage or regeneration. This further supports the notion that experience and subsequent expectations influence individuals’ landscape perceptions (Pink 2009; Tolia-Kelly 2007).

The participants’ unanimous preference for the *“social”* Brindleyplace area (including the canal between the National Indoor Arena and International Convention Centre) over the *“dull and barren”* Gas Street Basin area was striking, but responses suggest that it is linked to the individual life-styles of the participants. The two Cypriot participants had no experience or knowledge of the industrial heritage of the area, but were drawn to the potential for leisure and green space in Brindleyplace. The older female participant who favoured the Malthouse pub did so in regard of its heritage value. Despite the presence of original buildings in this area, there is no visible ‘heritage industry’, that is, no visitors’ centre or canal museum and little educational signage. Boat tours of the immediate area are available in converted narrow boats. The participants felt that there was little signage in the area to guide visitors. Consequently there is limited invitation to linger and little to hold the attention of a visitor anticipating heritage value, aside from seeing the original buildings, now converted into pubs and restaurants (only one of which has outdoor seating and a main entrance on the canal side).

Another interpretation of the participants’ disappointment with the Gas Street Basin area is linked to the way the group observed and moved around the landscape. According to the majority of the participants’ expectations (based on their comments and representations of the canal landscape), the canal should have been a picturesque, idyllic landscape, based on notions of heritage, wildlife, leisurely walks

and boating. They began their engagement with the area in Brindleyplace with a distanced viewpoint, looking along and down at the canal from the elevated position of the bridges. The distanced viewpoint resulted in a contemplation of the landscape as a picture or scene and its inhabitants as objects or players within it; neither considered real or impacting on the viewer as anything more than a view (Lucas 1992; Pallasmaa 2005). Moving onto the towpath forced closer interaction with the landscape and the people therein, that is, they were given *“a human significance which outweighs any value they may have as picturesque objects”* (Lucas 1992:89). Consequently, the picturesque, distanced view was abandoned, and with it, the romantic notion of the canal landscape as an urban pastoral or mysterious oasis (Lucas:1992).

The participants each represented themselves uniquely, aligning their identities via the subject matter they focused on and the narratives they created around their representations. Many of the participants included references to associated landscapes, that is, landscapes which are important to them and which were recalled in response to the canal landscape at Brindleyplace (Plate 14). For example, Kareema chose to represent the canal in relation to how she remembered it from visits before it was re-developed. She included images of unchanged components or focused on components which emphasized her memories of the area, thus representing her perception of the landscape's identity in terms of its longevity and relating that to her own lifetime. Simon focused his image-making on places which reminded him of other, familiar landscapes, demonstrating his eagerness to assimilate his new home with his childhood home. Greenery and shelter were key themes for Simon, and in his 'Ideal landscape' sketch, he depicted a park-like space with himself sitting under a tree, suggesting that Simon's perception of the canal's landscape identity is based on its appeal as an urban green space refuge. Tom included references to the associated landscapes of home and holidays and focused on the social aspects of Brindleyplace. Tom's self-reflexivity is evident in his written narrative, and like Simon, he looked for familiar components:

*“part of my identity is that I come from an urban place that also has canals. Even though the ones in my city have not been regenerated, as here, it just makes the place seem familiar to me”* (Tom, aged 27)

The study served to highlight the importance of individual identities on the creation of landscape perceptions. In support of the Reflexive Cycle model (Fig.4.11), early reflection on their identities as individuals revealed that landscapes, particularly home landscapes, were of great importance as participants stated these even before they spoke of their families. Visiting and experiencing the canal landscape challenged their preconceptions and forced new reflection, which was subsequently represented in terms of comparisons with associated landscapes. Despite the similar backgrounds of many of the participants (White, male, affluent, young), it was their individual personalities, experiences and recollections which produced the differing approaches to the canal landscape seen in the portfolios. During the group canal walk participants demonstrated shared perceptions through their comments and actions, but their portfolio submissions were far more individualistic in nature, suggesting that groups create a shared, negotiated response which insufficiently expresses the nuances of the individual's perceptions. This is further evidence of the importance of regarding participants as individuals, rather than categorising them according to demographic groupings (Gauntlett & Holworth 2006).

## The *Postcards from the Cut* study

The *Postcards from the Cut* study was developed as a method of obtaining a large number of written landscape responses to visual stimuli, without the use of the questionnaire format. The postcard features six photographic images of Birmingham's central canal landscape arranged in a grid (Plate15). The postcard also included the instruction: "*Imagine you're sending a postcard of Birmingham's canals to someone who's never visited. Tell us which of these photos you would choose, and why?*". Individuals were invited to respond to the instruction in addition to providing three pieces of personal information on the reverse; their age, gender and ethnicity. The resulting responses provide a large number of individual landscape responses to the central Birmingham canal landscape, showing individuals' preferences for certain views and the reasons for their choices.

## Methodology

*Postcards from the Cut* was developed from two previous landscape-related postcard techniques seen at the 2009 AHRC *Living Landscapes* conference<sup>1</sup> and also in the consultation of children regarding the regeneration of Stourport-on-Severn Basins<sup>2</sup>. At Stourport children were asked to draw a picture of Stourport's canal landscape in order to uncover the landscape components they regarded as most meaningful to their experiences of the town. The resulting images of rides at the Shipley's Amusement Park, the water, boats and trees are, for the children, Stourport's iconic landscape components, and it was this aspect of the

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<sup>1</sup> Iain Biggs and Sarah Blowen, '*Borderland postcards – responding to postcards from the physical and cultural borders of Europe*', AHRC Living Landscapes conference, Aberystwyth, 18-21 June 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Red Kite Environment Ltd undertook a consultation of local children prior to the regeneration of Stourport-on-Severn Basins. Children were asked to draw a picture of Stourport on a blank postcard. Red Kite Environment also undertook consultation work at Fradley Junction near Lichfield where they prompted participants to produce hand-drawn postcards in order to discover locals' landscape preferences.

consultation's objective that was borrowed for this research (Plate 16).

Understanding the specific landscape components participants consider iconic is one aspect in uncovering the myriad perceptions of the canal-scape, as the meanings and associations linked to those iconic components become the meanings and associations linked with participants' understanding of the landscape itself. At the *Living Landscapes* conference delegates were asked to make an open response to the images on a series of postcards around the theme of 'borderlands'. The original idea for *Postcards from the Cut* was to allow respondents to explore by extending an open invitation for responses to the images, in any format; people were to 'tell me something' in the form of a story, an opinion or a drawing. Previous requests for open responses from participants, particularly in the 2008 Representation Walk, had resulted in a low response rate and requests for clarification, suggesting that the open response method is potentially confusing and may result in low participation rates. Owing to the limitations of the postcard format (i.e. limited space and no researcher present to clarify instructions), the open response method was developed into a specific instruction to mitigate the affect of confusion on the response rate.

By providing respondents with a common scenario – that of choosing a postcard – they are encouraged to perform a familiar and hopefully enjoyable action, as the likelihood is that respondents will have experience of choosing and sending postcards to represent their holiday landscapes. The scenario of sending the postcard to “*someone who's never visited*” Birmingham's canals is also familiar as many respondents will have visited holiday destinations which their families and friends have not. On the reverse of the postcard respondents were asked to provide three additional pieces of personal information; their age, gender and ethnicity. The small size of the postcard and the desire to allow respondents to express their individuality necessitated an open-response method, as opposed to a 'tick-box' method. Rather than placing themselves within imposed categories of gender, ethnicity and age, respondents were able to choose their own by simply writing responses in the spaces provided (Gauntlett and Holzworth 2006).

The *Postcards from the Cut* study represents the most quantitative aspect of the wider research, as it involved extrapolation of the data in the form of quantifiable trends. For example, 56.25% of respondents were female and 43.75% of the female respondents preferred image 3 of Gas Street Basin. This study also includes hypotheses of the responses to each image, derived from data from the 2007 Sound Walk and 2008 Representation Walk studies and other individual narratives in the form of Conversations and Walk-and-Talks (Figs.5.10-5.15).

The *Postcards from the Cut* methodology was narrative in that respondents shared written responses based on personal experience and opinion. Many respondents included stories about their experiences of the canal landscape, while others used the scenario of sending a postcard to someone who has never visited Birmingham's canal landscape as the basis for narrative creativity, that is, they extended the scenario to incorporate characters and motives.

The methodology was also performative in that respondents took part in a one-time-only event, incorporating the ritual actions of receiving a postcard, choosing and writing, then returning it (Dirksmeier & Helbrecht 2008). It is hoped that these actions mimic some of the familiar feeling of sending a postcard such as the sharing of information, experiences and observations with an absent friend or relative, but also the desire to write something succinct and meaningful. The postcard's design mimics the commonly seen postcards of canal views showing four or six annotated images of an area (Fig.5.16). The commemorative aspect of the methodology is intrinsic in the souvenir status of postcards, the photographic images they portray and the messages they hold; postcards are evidence of an individual's presence in a place in the same way that photographs are (Kuhn 2007). Postcards are a complex form of memento because they are not kept by the individual as a holiday photograph might be, but are imbued with memories of noteworthy experiences and sent to an absent other who can only imagine the experiences written about. Postcards, then, are used to recall and record memories which are then

disseminated through the sending of the postcard. They are discursive tools in that they allow the sender to recall experiences, so instigating a type of conversation between the past and present self as all memories do (Kuhn 2007), but the unsolicited and un-answered nature of postcards renders any dialogue with the recipient impossible.

### Image Rationale

Choosing images for the final postcard design necessitated rationalisation of the available images and an understanding of the diversity of the canal landscape in this area. As the wider research focuses on pedestrian experience of the canal landscape the postcard needed to portray the views commonly seen from towpaths and bridges – places that are accessible to the pedestrian and consequently views that are likely to have been experienced by visitors. It was important that the images conveyed a sense of the diversity of the canal landscape in terms of geographical location, viewpoint and content to represent a wide range of landscape identities. Rather than focusing on one area, such as Brindleyplace, the images represent six places along the canal corridor between Gas Street Basin and Farmer's Bridge (Fig.5.17). Some of the images, such as the view of the bridge at Brindleyplace [image 4] and the view of the Malthouse Pub and National Indoor Arena (NIA) [image 5], are perhaps more recognisable than others such as the view of the tower block housing behind Cambrian Wharf [image 2] and the towpath signage [image 1]. Including unusual views of well-known places was a conscious choice, made with respondents' comments on the fact in mind. Indeed, some respondents commented on the "*poor*" views represented in the images of Gas Street Basin [image 3] and Brindleyplace [image 4], on the basis that they did not portray the full potential of the area, with some respondents even suggesting alternative viewpoints or framing.

The postcard images included diversity of viewpoint within the confines of pedestrian experience, such as a view from an elevated position, views along and across towpaths and water, expansive views of horizon and intimate views of canal



details. Ensuring diversity of content was partly achieved through including a range of geographical locations and some unusual views of well-known places, however, the constant of the water and the common canal landscape components of boats, bridges and tunnels made representing diversity of content more challenging. Some images show the canal in modern scenarios, others in a 'heritage' context, some include identifiable local landmarks, while others are less easily locatable. In order to limit the recurrence of common canal components, boats and bridges each appear in three of the six images, water in five images and tunnels in only one image. The universality of those common canal components would be evident in the respondents' choices and comments, and divergences from these components would highlight the diversity of landscape identities converging on the canal landscape.

The arrangement of the images on the postcard owed as much to necessity as to aesthetic choices. My intention was to produce a series of linked but diverse images, none of which jarred but rather invited further consideration. I endeavoured to present the images fairly, making them equally sized and placed to avoid competition from the other images. To aid the fluid movement of respondents' eyes over the postcard, the sunnier images were evenly dispersed, as were those showing deep shadows and reflections. Images with similar depths of horizon were separated to avoid continuation of sightlines between images. The need to keep printing costs low necessitated a small, but reasonably sized format with which respondents would be familiar from previous experiences of using postcards (10.4 x 14.7 cms). Some of the images were cropped and borders were placed around each image to distinguish them from the others. During the process of cropping and arranging images on the postcard some compositional compromises were made, so that photographs that were initially striking when fully-framed were cropped to portray only their most salient components. For example, image 1 of the towpath signpost (Fig.5.10) was a portrait-format photograph depicting the entire signpost surrounded with snow and winter twigs and more of the brick wall behind than can be seen in the final postcard image. Image 3 of Gas Street Basin (Fig.5.12)

originally included a leafy tree, more extensive views of the original buildings and the pink passenger boat in full. The resulting compromise between aesthetically pleasing images and necessary components may have altered the outcome of respondents' choices, but their choices despite the compromise are entirely valid, their comments evidence of their rationales and the diversity of meaning surrounding the canal landscape.

The postcard method encourages a choice without the constraints of physical presence in the landscape, that is, respondents were not required to travel to the canal to make their photographic choice, contingent on the limitations of time, weather and comfort. Respondents were merely presented with a range of options and asked to make a choice, their rationales entirely dependent on their own experiences and imaginations.

### Timing and Distribution

The postcards were distributed between March and May 2010, with a return deadline of mid-June 2010. I explored the potential of various methods for disseminating and returning postcards, but concluded that to take a 'contingent' approach and use existing networks of contacts would remove any complications such as the payment of postage and nominating a secure post box. The postcards were distributed to potential respondents via contacts from groups and organisations, and on one occasion, via a mail-drop through post-boxes in a canal-side residential building. Completed postcards were returned via contacts or, as in the case of the residential building, through the researcher's post-box. A contact from the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS) disseminated a pdf version of the postcard and responses were made via email direct to the researcher. Postcards were also distributed amongst family, friends and colleagues to distribute amongst their own networks. As with much of the research, this method is contingent on others' co-operation and dependent on existing networks for dissemination. By using the method of distribution via contacts, the postcards reached a diverse range of people resident in the Birmingham area (Fig.5.18).

# Responses

## The diversity of respondents

I chose to ask respondents to include their age on the reverse of the postcard, rather than create potentially arbitrary age-range groupings. The majority of postcard respondents included their exact age, while only twenty individuals (12.5%) chose not to share that information. Respondents were later grouped by decade during the process of analysis. Fig.5.19 shows that no children under the age of ten responded (in fact, the youngest was aged 11), and that response rates were low amongst those over 60 years of age. 15 of the 20 respondents who did not include their ages were sourced through the BCNS<sup>3</sup> contact, and so responded via email. If the recorded ages of the remaining BCNS respondents are indicative of a commonality in age, the ages of those 15 respondents were likely to be between 50 and 70 years of age.

The postcards asked respondents to include their 'gender', as opposed to their 'sex', since 'gender' refers to a more inclusive socio-cultural understanding of roles, therefore creating space for trans-gender individuals (Fig.5.20). Over half (56.25%) of respondents listed themselves as 'female' (90 individuals), 42.5% (68 individuals) listed themselves as 'male' and 1.25% (2 individuals) did not answer.

Respondents were asked to self-describe their ethnicity rather than choosing a reductive category from a list. In this way respondents were able to use the terms they felt comfortable with and which were representative of how they perceived themselves (Holzworth & Gauntlett 2006). The resulting information highlights the diversity and individuality of the minds that conceived and shared it (Fig.5.21). Responses included such terms as *"Black"*; *"Arab/Yemen mixed"*; *"White Anglo Saxon"*; and *"British"*. These responses make comparisons and categorisations problematic within a quantitative study, but for the purposes of the wider qualitative research such individualistic responses re-affirm the research outcomes, namely

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<sup>3</sup> BCNS Birmingham Canal Navigations Society

that there exists a diversity in the landscape identities converging on the contemporary urban canal landscape - diversity that is attributable to myriad influences and not merely ethnic identity. Owing to the limitations of the information requested, all of the additional information provided by respondents must be taken at face value (Gauntlett & Holworth 2006). With such data the potential for both over-complication and over-simplification is high. For example, the recorded ethnicities in responses show that 45% of respondents consider themselves 'British' and 21.25% of respondents consider themselves in terms of other location-related ethnicities for example "*Indian*", "*African*" and "*Latvian*", which have been termed 'non-British', although these respondents may have been born in Britain. Almost 17% of respondents consider themselves in terms of race, rather than ethnicity, making grouping with the other respondents difficult. For instance, some used "*White*", "*Black*" and "*Mixed*", and others used the more general term "*Asian*". Finally, almost 17% of respondents did not record their ethnicity.

### The diversity of responses

The postcard images elicited a variety of responses suggestive of the diversity of landscape identities converging on the canal. Some responses were anticipated in the research methodology, while others were not. Many of the respondents' comments fall into themes despite the inevitable differences between respondents' vocabularies. Therefore certain responses are grouped together, as with "*sunshine*" and "*summer*" or "*cafe culture*" and "*continental*", since they are indicative of related ideas. By examining the themes it is possible to gain both an overview of the perceptions relating to each postcard image and the commonality of these perceptions amongst respondents, as some themes are more frequently recognised than others (Fig.5.22). For example, the most popular theme relating to image 3 of Gas Street Basin was that of 'heritage' which was highlighted in 24 responses, while the theme 'modernity' was highlighted only once in relation to this image. A database of responses can be seen in Appendix 6. Figures.5.23 – 5.28 detail examples of the variety of responses to each postcard image.

Many respondents included storytelling, or narrative scenarios, in their responses as evidence of their reasoning. These narrative scenarios tended to be presented in the form of memories and musings. Musings tended to be either speculative, where the respondent may suggest that an area would provide tourist attractions or activities, or historical, where a respondent may muse on how the canal would have functioned in the past. The inclusion of narrative scenarios suggests the presence of opinions and recollections, and a deep engagement with the visual stimulus of the postcard methodology as they highlight the power of an image to trigger a recollection of physical experiences of a place. As with memories, musings are influenced by the respondent's personal experiences and outlook, in the same way that any response would be.

Memories are evidence of personal experiences, the recollection of which were instigated by the visual stimuli of the postcard images. Memory-based narratives can be divided into those relating specifically to the canal landscape, and those relating to other landscape experiences. In both instances the visual stimulus of the postcard image is strong enough to elicit associations which the respondent feels are important enough to share in writing. For example, two respondents wrote; *"I remember these canals when they were rubbish tips"*<sup>4</sup> and *"Born in Hockley, Birmingham and knew Gas Street before it was modernised. It is much better now..."*<sup>5</sup>

Musings are statements or questions and are dictated by a combination of knowledge and deduction based on previous experiences. Speculative musings relate to anticipations or expectations of the landscape i.e. things that a person could do or see such as; *"an inviting scene where you can enjoy the tranquillity of the canal within close proximity of the buzz of the city"*<sup>6</sup>. Historical musings relate to ideas about the landscape of the past i.e. things that a person would have done or seen in the past such as; *"it conjures up the atmosphere of the canals when they*

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<sup>4</sup> White British Female, aged 82, referring to image 3 of Gas Street Basin

<sup>5</sup> Female, aged 70, referring to image 3 of Gas Street Basin

<sup>6</sup> English White Female, aged 59, referring to image 4 of Brindleyplace

*were first used more than a 100 years ago*<sup>7</sup>. In both cases the narrative relates to the 'not-present'.

Some narrative scenarios combined both memories and musing as with this response; *"[I] regularly walk along. Inner city living, not tourism"*<sup>8</sup>. This statement suggests a memory of walking along the canal and also implies future walking-evidence of current landscape usage. Similarly, this response; *"Because the thing I like the most is sitting by the canal with a drink in the sunshine"*<sup>9</sup>, indicates past landscape usage combined with the intention to continue the activity.

## Overall Image Preferences

The six postcard images elicited a variety of responses suggesting the diversity of the perceptions relating to these images, and by extension, to the canal landscape they represent. It was anticipated some images would be chosen more often than others however, the overwhelming majority choice in favour of two of the images was unanticipated. For the respondents who made a single image choice (as opposed to those who chose numerous images), images 3 of Gas Street Basin and 4 of Brindleyplace were by far the most preferred images on the postcard and received a combined value of almost 80% of the vote (Fig.5.29).

The respondents who chose multiple images favoured images 3 and 4 equally. Eight respondents chose images 3 and 4 together, while a further two chose them in combination with others, meaning that for 10 of the 14 respondents who made multiple choices, images 3 and 4 were considered inseparable representations of the canal landscape (Fig.5.30).

The common themes and instances of storytelling returned by respondents in relation to images 3 and 4 suggest a tendency towards the perception of the canal

<sup>7</sup> Female, referring to image 3 of Gas Street Basin

<sup>8</sup> White Female, aged 30, referring to image 3 of Gas Street Basin

<sup>9</sup> White British Female, aged 25, referring to image 4 of Brindleyplace

landscape as a complex and multi-functional urban green-space that offers opportunities for leisure, entertainment and the consideration of heritage. In light of the overwhelming response in favour of images 3 and 4 it would be tempting to overlook the validity of the responses that favoured the less popular images on the postcard. Over 20% of the respondents did not choose images 3 and 4; approximately one in five people perceive the canal landscape differently to the majority view, a potentially substantial number of individuals across the wider population. As discussed earlier, the most common themes relating to images 1,2, 5 and 6 focused on the ideas of traditionalism, the city, the presence and effects of water, and boating respectively. While these themes are not unusual in terms of the canal landscape, they suggest the absence of perceptions of heritage value, leisure and green-space, all important aspects of the current branding of Brindleyplace and the surrounding area by organisations such as Marketing Birmingham, Birmingham City Council, Argent and British Waterways.

### Preferences by gender

The results suggest that whether respondents made a single image choice or a multiple-image choice, males and females were fairly evenly represented in their preference for image 3 of Gas Street Basin; approximately two in every five respondents preferred image 3, regardless of gender (Figs.5.31-5.32). Image 4 of Brindleyplace was nearly as popular with a preference ratio of around 1.5 in every five people. The differences between the genders are starker when considering the other, less popular images. Women were least likely to choose images 1 and 6, while men were least likely to choose images 2 and 5, suggesting that women tended to prefer the images perceived as contemporary and men tended to prefer the images perceived as traditional.

### Preferences by age

Individuals in their 20s comprised the largest group of respondents in terms of age (Fig.5.33) . Groups generally reduced in size for each decade thereafter, however

the respondents who did not record their age generally belonged to the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society and can be regarded as 50 years of age or older. The available data show that images 3 and 4 were the most popular across all the age groups, except for the 10+ age group who preferred images 4 and 5. Respondents under 30 were more likely to choose the less popular images (1, 2, 5 and 6) than those over 30 years of age. Respondents in the 20+ group liked images 3 and 4 equally, while those over 30 years of age tended to favour image 3 over image 4. The data suggests that respondents in the 10+ age group perceive the most diverse range of canal landscape identities, while those over 30 years of age possess a stronger perception of the canal landscape's identity focused on the complex notion of heritage and modernity.

### Preferences by ethnicity

The largest proportion of respondents consider themselves 'British' (45% of respondents) and were in favour of image 3 of Gas Street Basin, closely followed by image 4 of Brindleyplace (Fig.5.34). The next largest group (over 21% of respondents), dubbed here 'Non-British', consider themselves in terms of other location-based ethnicities and favoured image 4 of Brindleyplace. The respondents who consider their ethnicities solely in terms of colour displayed no trends in favour of certain images, with the exception of the 'White' group for whom image 3 of Gas Street Basin was most popular. The respondents who did not record their ethnicity favoured images 3 and 4, as did the respondents who made multiple-image choices. The majority of the respondents who did not record their ethnicity belonged to the BCNS group and can be regarded as 'White British'. The data suggest that images 3 and 4 are universally popular, although image 3 of Gas Street Basin is perceived slightly more positively than image 4 of Brindleyplace amongst the 'British' and 'White' groups. Image 4 of Brindleyplace is perceived a little more positively within the 'Non-British' group.



## Observations

Whilst choosing images to include in the final postcard, I made a number of hypotheses derived from data from the early studies and participants' individual narratives. I hypothesised that respondents would find image 1 *"Traditional signage"* (Fig.5.10) pleasing because of the presence of snow, but that owing to the lack of water, it would not be a popular choice. Around 5%, or 8 respondents, chose this image, making it one of the least popular images on the postcard. Respondents referred to this image in terms of 'beauty' and this was chiefly related to the presence of the snow. Contrary to my hypothesis, respondents did not mention the lack of water and they found the lack of buildings positive. The notion of 'tradition' was commonly elicited by this image, but respondents did not make the cause of this clear, suggesting that the printed title of the image prompted some respondents to make the association with 'tradition'. Rather than invalidating their responses, this outcome suggests that for these respondents, the idea of traditionalism is a fundamental aspect of the canal landscape, whether or not components which signify traditionalism are readily visible.

Image 2 entitled *"Birmingham skyline"* (Fig.5.11) was chosen by around 7%, or 10 respondents, and a further two respondents included this image in a multiple-choice response. I hypothesised that respondents would respond positively to the presence of water, blue sky and reflections, but the negative connotations of tower block housing were thought likely to diminish the popularity of this image. I anticipated that respondents would strongly associate this image with Birmingham owing to the presence of the local landmark British Telecom building (or the 'BT Tower'), leading them to identify this as their preferred choice. Respondents chose this image for its composition, reference to the city and its beauty, which was chiefly related to the presence of the water and the reflections therein. The perception of *"beautiful natural scenery"*<sup>10</sup> in this image was surprising since it lacked components such as

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<sup>10</sup> Iraqi male, aged 18, referring to image 2 *"Birmingham skyline"*

greenery, birds and animals, suggesting that the water itself elicited these associations.

I hypothesised that image 3 of “Gas Street Basin” (Fig.5.12) would be popular amongst older respondents in particular; that they would positively associate this image with the heritage value of the area, would comment on the presence of the iron bridge and share heritage-based memories and musings of the associated landscape. As the image chosen by almost 45% of respondents, this image was the most popular on the postcard. Respondents favoured this image for its associations with heritage, including the bridge, but also for its associations with leisure and the ‘balance’ between modernity and tradition; many of the memories and musings elicited by this image were complex, supporting the common idea of the juxtaposition between the pre-development and post-development canal. Contrary to my hypothesis this image was preferred by a wider range of age-groups; it was most popular with respondents over the age of 30.

I hypothesised that image 4 of “*Brindleyplace*” (Fig.5.13) would be popular with respondents who would favour it for its composition, sunny aspect, and specific landscape components such as greenery and the narrow boat. I anticipated that the title of the image would elicit recollections of summer dining in the nearby restaurants, but that this connotation, combined with that of modern architecture within an historic landscape, would be viewed negatively by the older respondents. This image was the second most popular as it was preferred by around 35% of respondents. Responses commonly referred to the leisure aspects of the area and although it elicited as many recollections as image 3 of “*Gas Street Basin*”, the majority of the narrative musings it elicited were speculative, relating to the opportunities for leisure and relaxation in the area.

Favoured by around 5% of respondents, image 5 of the National Indoor Arena (NIA) (Fig.5.14) was one of the least popular images, as anticipated. I anticipated that respondents’ comments would focus on the juxtaposition between the NIA building and the adjacent older pub, set against the still water, but this was not the case;

rather, those who favoured this image generally did on the basis of the modernity of the iconic NIA. Respondents also favoured this image for the reflectivity of the water and they liked the juxtaposition between the “soothing”<sup>11</sup> water and the associations with the city.

As anticipated, image 6 of “*Cambrian Wharf*” (Fig.5.15) was the least popular first choice image on the postcard with around 4%, or 6 respondents choosing it, although a further two individuals included this image as part of a combined choice. The few respondents who reacted positively to this image referred to boating and the canal water (“*the best canal-themed picture*”<sup>12</sup>), suggesting that for these respondents the historic functionalism of the canal is important.

The *Postcards from the Cut* study offered quantitative data on a larger scale than any other of the research studies. Images 3 and 4 were universally popular across different groups, although ‘White’ and ‘British’ respondents tended to slightly favour image 3 of Gas Street Basin (perceived in terms of heritage value and leisure) and ‘Non-British’ respondents tended to slightly favour image 4 of Brindleyplace (perceived in terms of leisure and green-space).

Men and women were fairly similar in their preferences for images 3 and 4; however men were more likely than women to choose images 1 and 6, while women were more likely than men to choose images 2 and 5. Respondents under the age of 30 generally chose the less popular images on the postcard and those over the age of 30 generally chose images 3 and 4.

The popularity of images 3 and 4 of Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace above all other images is a striking result of this research study; around 80% of respondents chose one or the other, with some respondents finding these images so inseparable that they chose both. The common perceptions and instances of storytelling returned by respondents identify a tendency to regard the canal landscape as a

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<sup>11</sup> Indian female, aged 21, referring to image 5 of the National Indoor Arena

<sup>12</sup> White British male, aged 50, referring to image 6 of Cambrian Wharf

complex, multi-functional urban green-space which supports leisure and the consideration of heritage. These images were favoured for their complexity and for portraying a balanced vision of the city:

*"Nice combination of items - trees/boat/canal/ the town. The others don't have this sort of balance"*

(Female, aged 30 referring to "Brindleyplace")

*"bridge; people sitting having lunch/dinner or drinks; I am kind of person who likes coffee shops/restaurant out door"*

(Kuwaiti female, aged 27 referring to "Gas Street Basin")

The less popular images on the postcard elicited less complex responses with reference to fewer landscape components, suggesting that for the majority, images 1, 2, 5 and 6 portrayed narrower, less complex perceptions of the canal landscape.

Around 80% of respondents chose either image 3 of Gas Street Basin or image 4 of Brindleyplace, but over 20% of respondents chose a different image. Approximately 1 in 5 respondents perceive the canal landscape differently to the majority view; evidence of a diversity of perceptions of the canal landscape, and suggestive of a potentially substantial number of individuals across the wider population. As discussed earlier, the most common themes relating to images 1, 2, 5 and 6 focused on the ideas of traditionalism, proximity to or escape from the city, the presence and effects of water, and boating respectively. These themes are not unusual perceptions of the canal landscape, but they do suggest an absence of perceptions relating to the juxtaposition of modernity and heritage, (retail and dining) leisure, and green-space - all of which were common positive perceptions of the most popular images.

The inclusion of narrative scenarios indicates strongly-held opinions and recollections, and a deep engagement with the visual stimulus of the postcard methodology as they highlight the power of an image to trigger a recollection of

physical experiences of a place. The most popular images on the postcard, image 3 of Gas Street Basin and image 4 of Brindleyplace, each elicited five instances of memory-recall whereby respondents shared a memory instigated by seeing the postcard image. These two images include different components, for instance “*Gas Street Basin*” shows older canal buildings, a tunnel, a cast-iron bridge, towpath, people dining and walking, a modern pink boat, a little greenery and a Victorian-style lantern. “*Brindleyplace*” shows a narrow boat, the canal, a modern bridge with people walking across it, some trees and the modern International Convention Centre. Despite their visual differences, the images elicited some similar memories relating to walking the towpaths, enjoying canal-side dining during the summer and their visual appearance pre-development. For example, two respondents shared similar recollections of these areas:

*“So nice in the summer; eating lunch outside [...] a pleasant way to walk through the city”*

(White female, aged 26 referring to “*Gas Street Basin*”)

*“Hidden just behind is All Bar One where I spent quite a few hours with great friends. A beautiful walk along the canal was always enjoyable /memorable”*

(White female, aged 30, referring to “*Brindleyplace*”)

“*Gas Street Basin*” was slightly more conducive to recollections of the area prior to its redevelopment (“*it truly was Dickensian [sic] back in the 60s/70s*”<sup>13</sup>) however, pre-development memories of both areas were often juxtaposed with how the areas have improved. For example, these respondents remembered the areas’ pasts, but prefer the post-development sites for their leisure potential:

*“Born in Hockley, Birmingham and knew Gas Street before it was*

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<sup>13</sup> Male, referring to “*Gas Street Basin*”

*modernised. It is much better now with a cosmopolitan atmosphere"*

(Female, aged 70 referring to "Gas Street Basin")

*"I remember these canals when they were rubbish tips. I pick number four because last year my family enjoyed a 60th birthday party on the barges it was a wonderful day out. After these years it's wonderful to see all the changes that's happening."*

(White British female, aged 83, referring to "Brindleyplace")

Images 3 and 4 may both be regarded as memory/musing 'hotspots' in the canal landscape as they both elicited relatively high numbers of memory recall and musings in respondents. As each image shows a recognisable visitor attraction (Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace), such responses were anticipated, both in terms of popularity of the images and in the types of recollections they instigated; chiefly recollections relating to leisure and 'memorable' instances of landscape engagement such as dining with friends and family on holidays and special occasions. As these two 'hotspots' are within a few minutes' walking distance of each other, it is conceivable that visitors would walk around both these places as part of a 'day at the canal'.

Many respondents included narrative musings on the 'not-present'; historical musings of the canal landscape ("*it conjures up the atmosphere of the canals when they were first used more than a 100 years ago*"<sup>14</sup>), and speculative musings ("*you can enjoy the tranquillity of the canal within close proximity of the buzz of the city*"<sup>15</sup>). The majority of responses take the form of reasoned statements ("*It has snow on it and is pretty*"<sup>16</sup>), but some of the speculative musings relate specifically to either real or imagined visitors, suggesting that these respondents specifically

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<sup>14</sup>Female, referring to image 3 "Gas Street Basin"

<sup>15</sup>English White female, aged 59, referring to image 4 "Brindleyplace"

<sup>16</sup>White British male, aged 25, referring to image 1 "Traditional signage"

considered individual characters and the images they might like to receive. For example,

*"..these are the two that I would choose to send to my penfriend in the USA"*

(Female, referring to images 3 and 4)

*"[...]looks good on the eye which would cause a lot of attraction to the people who receive this postcard"* (British Pakistani male, aged 17, referring to image 4)

*"[...] anyone [...] seeing it for the first time, would be intrigued to study it more carefully."* (English male, aged 73, referring to image 3)

Returning the 'research postcard' is a familiar performative act, redolent of choosing a holiday postcard based on its cover image(s) and sending it to a friend with a holiday story on the reverse. I hoped that the postcard would mimic the performative ritual of writing and sending a postcard, and would elicit the sharing of information in the form of experiences and observations. I anticipated that the commemorative aspect of postcards, as a complex form of souvenir that is not kept by the individual recording the memories, but sent to an absent other imbued with association-laden narrative, would lead more respondents to share memories of the canal landscape than did. The invitation to choose was an important aspect of the methodology, as we spend time on holiday choosing a postcard that represents our own perception of the holiday landscape, and crucially how we would want it to be perceived by the receiver. So the postcard mirrored this activity, in that respondents chose an image they felt representative of the city's canal landscape and which they would like their imaginary receiver to see. The postcard method differs to the others explored in this research study in that it does not require presence in the landscape, rather it relies on the respondents' prior experiences of the landscape and their imaginations in considering the scenario. Many responses referred to walking in the landscape, either through memories or musings and the majority related to the Brindleyplace

and Gas Street Basin areas, which are popular visitor attractions. In the same way that indoor conversations with participants in other studies suggested the notion of 'locomotion-by-proxy'<sup>17</sup>, the prevalence of walking narratives in the postcard responses suggests that respondents recalled their prior experiences of walking in the canal landscape, instigated by seeing images of places they had visited, hence the popularity of images 3 and 4 of Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace.

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<sup>17</sup> 'Locomotion-by-proxy' was observed in conversations with participants in indoor, seated contexts. Participants drew maps and diagrams of landscapes they had visited. As they talked, they traced 'walking routes' around the images with their fingers and narrating their 'passage', recalling the landscape components they had experienced. In this way the physical act of moving their fingers around a representation of a place created an equivalent experience or 'locomotion-by-proxy'.



## The Sensory Walk

The Sensory Walk method was developed from the findings of the 2007 Sound Walk pilot study, the 2008 Representation Walk, and the Walk-and-Talk method used throughout the data acquisition phase between 2007 and 2010. The Sensory Walk method combined phenomenological, performative and narrative aspects and marked the culmination of the data acquisition phase.

The Sensory Walk used a tri-partite structure, comprising an initial personal written exercise in the form of an 'Identity Sheet'; followed by the walk itself which was individually narrated by participants using a voice recorder; followed finally by a group discussion session three weeks after the walk. The Sensory Walk was a group exercise with an individual focus, that is, the participants were briefed as a group, then they walked and narrated separately, but within sight of one another, along the suggested circular route. Finally, they re-grouped in a university seminar room for a post-walk discussion session three weeks after the walk.

The aim of the Sensory Walk method is to combine the performativity of the walking 'constant' used throughout the wider research, with the narrative element of the Walk-and-Talk method, and the phenomenological, sensory experience which was approached, but not completely realised during the 2007 Sound Walk. The Sensory Walk method encourages participants to be aware of their 'whole-body' sensory experience, or 'multi-modalism', including any associations, musings or memories which they experienced during the walk in addition to the standard Western five-sense sensorium of sight, sound, taste, touch and smell (Pink 2009).

In Richard Long's text work *'One Hour'* (1984) (Fig.6.1), the artist explores the notion of representing sensory experience of the landscape through a visual expression of a one-hour long circular walk in a field. Arranged as a clock face, for each minute he walked Long chose a word that represented his sensory experience at that point in time and space. Long's model is based entirely on the Western five-

sense sensorium and as discussed elsewhere, this research study recognises the effect of cognition on individuals' landscape perceptions (Gray 2003; Pink 2009; Adams & Guy 2007; Woodiwiss 2001). The Sensory Walk method aimed to develop Long's method to include associations and memories<sup>1</sup>, that is, the things people muse on as they move through the landscape, as with Proust's sudden recall of childhood memories triggered by a sensory experience; that of tasting a madeleine cake dipped in tea in *Recherché du Temps Perdue (In Search of Lost Time)*<sup>2</sup> (Proust 1913 [2003]:47-50).

The act of walking in the landscape is consistently used in the wider research to instigate responses in participants, however capturing those responses has consistently required a combination of planning and experimentation. During the 2007 Sound Walk the participants spoke whilst walking, an action which was recorded by a single microphone carried by the group leader. Although this approach yielded some insightful results, responses were potentially limited by the group dynamic, that is, participants may have been unwilling to make certain responses in a group context. During the 2008 Representation Walk participants made visual representations by sketching or taking photographs as they walked. Whilst photography offers an immediacy in representation-making, albeit after the participant has taken a moment to frame the shot, producing sketches in situ, even in monochrome, requires a considerably longer time and distraction from

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<sup>1</sup>The Sensory Walk study method developed from a combination of previous studies and the text-works of the artist Richard Long. It was my original intention to be able to produce individual models of multi-modal experience and narrative, to demonstrate the development from Long's use of bodily sensory experiences to include musings and memories. I later concluded that it was not viable to produce such models as Long's method employed single words to describe a sensory experience at a precise time, and it was felt that truncating participants' responses in this way would have been an unfair representation of their nuanced perceptions.

<sup>2</sup> "[...] I carried to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had let soften a piece of madeleine. But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake-crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening in me. [...] Undoubtedly what is fluttering this way deep inside me must be the image, the visual memory which is attached to this taste. [...] And suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray [...] my Aunt Leonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime-blossom.[...] immediately the old grey house on the street, where her bedroom was, came [...] and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, [...] the Square, [...] the paths we took." (Proust 1913 [2003]: 47-50)

experiencing the landscape is likely. The Walk-and-Talk method uses a conversational approach, with the researcher and participant talking together as they walk, prompting one another through dialogue. This method yields solid individual responses, but is dependent on the creation of a rapport between the researcher and the participant to uncover deeper insights, and it is very time consuming. The Walk-and-Talk method supports the idea that memories are discursive, not only in the sense that we enjoy sharing our memories with others, but also in the sense that through memories we engage in a type of conversation with ourselves, in a 'loop' of experience and reflection based on the present and the past in time and space (Kuhn 2007). This method also highlights the narrative quality of many peoples' experiences, in re-presenting experiences through the written or spoken word, or even through image-making (as in the case of journey maps), people tend to organise information as a story, with definite context-setting, plot, characters, complications and conclusions (Low 2000; Fludernik 2007). The Sensory Walk methodology needed to incorporate all of these aspects to produce an environment in which participants would feel comfortable both walking and talking, be able to speak freely, and be able to immerse themselves in both the experience of landscape and in its representation, without feeling under pressure to focus on either aspect.

## The Participants

Participants for the Sensory Walk were sourced from the wider university community, and comprised a combination of staff, students and their friends or partners (Fig.6.2). As discussed elsewhere, the participation of university staff and students supports the individual-focused ethos of this research, in that each participant may feel they belong to multiple social groups and so possess numerous identities, all of which will be implicated in their responses and help form their notions of landscape identity. The group represented an ethnically, gender and age-diverse cross-section of the urban community in Birmingham and comprised UK-born, post-migration (those born elsewhere, but permanently residing in the UK)

and newly resident individuals (those residing in the UK on a short-term basis for work or study)<sup>3</sup>.

## Part One – The Identity Sheet

The first part of the tri-partite method involves uncovering information about the participants relating to how they perceive their own identities and how they currently perceive the canal landscape. A similar method was used in both the 2007 Sound Walk (through an initial group conversation) and the 2008 Representation Walk (through image-making detailing individuals' notions of an ideal landscape) and can simply be regarded as the first stage of a 'before, during and after' process of investigation. The first stage necessarily establishes a baseline of data, both quantitative and qualitative, for each participant. In order to ensure retention of the data the Identity Sheet was emailed to participants, which also reduced their physical commitment to the study (through meeting with the researcher) to around 3.5 hours across a three-week period.

Firstly, participants were asked to describe themselves, including any information they felt was relevant to their identities as unique individuals (Fig.6.3). In responses to similar exercises performed for the 2008 Representation Walk, participants tended to create stories or narratives in their conversations with me, often starting 'at the beginning', that is, where they come from in the world, where their ancestors came from, and their beliefs. Thus I anticipated that participants would firstly detail where they were born before detailing their age, profession, likes and dislikes; in this way I believe they hope to justify their current identities in terms of provenance,

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<sup>3</sup> Birmingham City University is a modern institution with strong community links and a diverse intake that offers learning across a range of theoretical and vocational, traditional and more recently relevant subjects, at various teaching levels ([www.bcu.ac.uk](http://www.bcu.ac.uk)). The student body is a convenient source of participants from diverse backgrounds. Whichever way individuals respond, their responses are valid, and whatever individuals' backgrounds are, their participation is valid.

portraying their pasts as inevitable, teleological paths to their present identities. Through these narratives they succinctly describe complex series of both familial and personal histories, demonstrating that individuals' landscape associations spread across time and distances, and may include references to landscapes never personally inhabited but still 'known' through memories passed down through generations (Kuhn 2007; Bender 1993).

Secondly, participants completed a blank circular diagram by inserting a representation of themselves (not necessarily figurative) at the centre (Fig.6.4). Participants then inserted key words which they felt expressed their identities, to uncover and reiterate what they felt were the key aspects of their identities. This task afforded participants the opportunity to represent how they would like to be perceived in the research (Gauntlett & Holzworth 2006)

Finally, participants answered four direct questions relating to their experience of canals (Fig. 6.5):

- 1) *"Have you visited any UK canals, and if so, where?"*
- 2) *"If you have visited a UK canal, what was your reason for visiting?"*
- 3) *"Have you visited any canals outside the UK, and if so, where?"*
- 4) *"What do you expect the Birmingham canal to be like?"*

These questions establish the extent of the participants' experience of canal landscapes and their anticipations for the forthcoming walk. The 2007 Sound Walk methodology uncovered a dichotomy between participants' expectations and the reality of the canal landscape, which in the majority of cases resulted in disappointment. The final question regarding expectations was included to uncover preconceptions about canals; information which helped determine if a similar dichotomy existed in this group of participants' responses.

## The Identity Sheet Responses

The first part of the Identity Sheet asked participants to write a description of themselves, including any information they thought relevant to their identities as unique individuals. The broad parameters of this exercise ensured diverse answers and resulted in a complex matrix of qualitative data. Table (Fig.)6.6 details the participants' responses relating to their self-representation. Interpretation of these answers was influenced by the Grounded Theory method (Glaser & Strauss 1967), in which key words and phrases in the participants' narrative texts are highlighted. Grounded Theory stresses that the text itself will guide the researcher, that is, meanings, patterns and divergences will emerge through the reading (Glaser & Strauss 1967) (Appendix 7). Undoubtedly the inherent bias of the researcher is implicated in the final reading alongside the voice of the participant however, the tri-partite method helps reiterate the voice of the participant, through repetitions of phrases, subjects or viewpoints expressed throughout the narratives.

The participants initially described their identities in terms of where they were born and grew up (variously including Italy, Kashmir, Leeds and Birmingham). Some also mentioned their family and friends, more still talked about the landscapes of their homes and the landscapes they like ("*mountain environments for relaxation*" or "*countryside and green environment*"). Many of the participants listed outdoor activities as hobbies (including walking, skiing and polo), which is unsurprising as the participants were self-selecting and knew the research involved walking. Some of the female participants included their educational and occupational achievements where the male participants did not, but with a small group (5 females: 3 males) this distinction cannot be said to indicate a wider gender-specific trend.

The visual representations that participants included differed greatly. Two (Carlo and Lucia) of the five participants who included visual representations of themselves chose photographic self-portraits, whereas the others used images that expressed important aspects of their identities, for example, Nasreen's Iranian heritage (an image of Iranian Nourouz / New Year), Kasim's (avid) personality (a

book cover- '*The beast that ate the earth*'), and Annie's occupation as an artist (an image of her own glass artwork). The key words participants used to describe themselves largely expressed personality traits rather than facts or physical descriptions ("*friends*"; "*charity*"; "*reserved*"; "*considerate*" and "*stubborn*"), suggesting that the participants related the notion of 'selfhood' to character, and not place or external signifiers. It is clear from the key words used that the participants were aware of their multiplicities of identities and their own idiosyncrasies and contradictions. No single personality 'type' dominated; the group comprised a mixture of gregarious and introspective individuals.

The responses to the direct questions suggest varying degrees of previous canal experience of both UK (including Durham, London and Norwich) and non-UK canals (including Italy, Bruges, Normandy and Pakistan). With the exception of one participant, Shabana, all members of the group had previously visited Birmingham's canal landscape. Their reasons for visiting canals in the UK varied greatly from the activity-based "*to walk*" (Shabana) and "*walking or on holiday*" (Annie), to the more abstract "*the curiosity of seeing, experiencing*" (Carlo) and "*it reminds me of home*" (Kasim) (Fig.6.7).

Participants' expectations of the canal varied. Some talked of the atmosphere they hoped to encounter, such as "*tranquil*", "*serene*" and "*soothing*"; and others simply hoped for a "*quiet*" time and "*clean*" surroundings. Two participants were aware of the changeable nature of canals; one talked about the usage of the canal, saying that it can be quiet or "*busier with boats moving through locks*"; while another talked about how sensory experiences alter how he perceives canal landscapes in the difference between paved (connoting the 'city') and dirt track towpaths (connoting the 'countryside'). One participant simply said that she expected "*to like it, particularly if it is sunny*", while another was expecting to see greenery and architecture. From the table of responses (Fig.6.7) it is clear that some participants were describing their prior experiences of the landscape and expected to be able to replicate those experiences during the walk.

## Part Two – The Walking Route

The Sensory Walk took place on a fairly warm and sunny day in April 2010. The group met in the regenerated Brindleyplace canal-side development at the same starting location as was used for the 2007 Sound Walk and 2008 Representation Walk methods, that is, next to the large fountain within the Central Square and through which pedestrians are encouraged to walk along a stepped path. The participants were each given a sound recorder and microphone and asked to narrate their sensory experiences of the walk, including their thoughts and feelings. They were also given a map of the area upon which the route was highlighted, and on the reverse, a series of written route instructions. Prior to the walk, I timed the route (Fig. 6.8) at around 35 minutes in duration. In reality the walk took between 40 minutes and an hour, depending on how fast participants walked and the route they took<sup>4</sup>. The route mirrored Richard Long's circular walk method, leading participants in a circular walk beginning at Brindleyplace, then moving to the Farmer's Bridge locks and doubling back to Gas Street Basin, before finally returning to Brindleyplace. At some points the route involved leaving the towpath and the sight of the water.

### The Walking Route Responses

Brindleyplace's Central Square, with its large fountain, green and open spaces, restaurants and surrounding large-scale, corporate buildings offers sensory juxtaposition to the canal corridor, and for this reason was used as the starting point in each of the group walking studies. Brindleyplace offers the sounds of water, chatter and footsteps on cobbles and paving, the sight of people at work and leisure, varying architectural styles, greenery from grass and trees, reflections from water, varying levels and textures, semi-enclosed walkways and open space. The square is a popular visitor destination and the "*continental*" atmosphere creates

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<sup>4</sup> Most participants strayed from the suggested route at certain points and later agreed that this was the result of forgetting they were walking to a plan and instead allowed the towpath and their own interests to lead them.



contrasts with the canal corridor that passes so closely by. Participants' reactions to this space were diverse. Some perceived this area as *"not the canal"*, therefore outside the remit of the walk, and either did not narrate their experience at all, or did so in a perfunctory manner, while others' responses were very strong and implied attachment.

*"[...] I love this part of Birmingham as I have seen it grow. My memory of this part especially is when it was Chinese New Year [...] and I came with friends and family and we spent the whole day here and the blend of all the new buildings was amazing."* (Nasreen)

*"We're not on the canal yet, so... [silence]"* (Carlo)

*"Greenery is necessary I think...These concrete jungles are not good."* (Kasim)

At the edge of the square the group walked up the steps and along the walkway through the fountain (Plate 19). The sound of moving water at this point is strikingly loud, fading to a quieter level very quickly after stepping away from the fountain, so that within moments the loud volume of the water is a memory. The participants responded to this sensory experience with varying degrees of surprise and pleasure. Some commented, while others found it so uncomfortable as to make speech impossible.

*"[...] we're just walking past the fountain now...it feels like you're not in Birmingham, like you're in a different city"* (Shabana)

*"The water is so peaceful [...] my dream is one day to have a place near water, I guess this just goes back to the memory of growing up by the seaside."* (Nasreen)

*"Hum of people talking. Sound of water taking over. It blocks out everything else."* (Annie)

Almost immediately after leaving the fountain the walkway leads visitors through a narrow passageway between restaurants, before opening into a smaller, more intimate square overlooking the canal and filled with restaurants with outdoor dining

areas (Plate 19). As the participants moved through this space, the bars and restaurants were filling with lunchtime diners and pedestrian traffic was increasing. The contrast between the sound experience of the expansive Central Square with its pervasive fountain sound, and this smaller space with the sound of chatter and cutlery on plates is clear on the recording, and was commented on by participants, although the visual experience of the large number of restaurants and people, set against the canal itself was also strongly felt.

*"There is a Chinese restaurant with the sound of water and fountain in the background, strange. It makes you forget about where you are actually."* (Lucia)

*"I can see lots of people sitting near Cafe Rouge...yeah, I love it, it reminds me of Mughal Gardens in Kashmir...although there is no greenery here."* (Yasmina)

*"I've just passed All Bar One. The noise has changed from Brindleyplace where I can hear the water, but I'm drawn to the canal, the sight of the water, the reflection of the water and leaning on the railing."* (Graham)

From this area visitors may walk down steps onto the bridge leading to the International Convention Centre (ICC), or continue further down to the canal towpath, reiterating the popular notion of urban canals as sub-urban spaces<sup>5</sup> (Plate 20). The sudden change in sound experience is quite dramatic, in that the lunchtime sounds heard at the top of the steps are not heard as clearly at the lower level. Participants commented on the lack of sounds and the sudden quiet after the multitude of sounds above and behind them.

*"The canal seems kind of, as if it's not present. It doesn't make any sound, any noise. So its presence is given mostly by its visual context, at least it seems."* (Carlo)

*"Noise has changed again. There was quite a hum of the air conditioning unit previously."* (Graham)

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<sup>5</sup> Participants throughout the wider research have commented on the low level of the canal landscape relative to the surrounding streets. In fact, canals in the city centre run at, under and above street level at different places, dependant on the topography of the land.

*"These steps are much steeper. Breeze by the canal front, rippling water, dappled light. Calmer here."* (Annie)

The linear route led participants along the towpath towards the Sealife Centre. This section of the route was linear and led the participants until they reached a point where two canals meet. During these few minutes participants' walking paces slowed down and the sensory experiences they narrated were broader than the visual and aural experiences they narrated whilst in Brindleyplace. Narration of tactile experiences increased, as did musings and recollection of memories.

*"Quite a strong breeze on my face. Easy walking on the surface. More air conditioning breaks into the peace. People using the walkways for different things. Reflections of the water under the canal bridge. Interesting patterns, like cell formations. Worn edges of the bridges, boats must have passed them many times."* (Annie)

*"Is there any comparison between River Jelum and this? It's very green, you know only thing lacking here is greenery."* (Kasim)

The towpath splits in three directions in front of the Sea Life Centre and the participants were unanimous in their confusion. The suggested route led the participants over a bridge towards the National Indoor Arena (NIA), but the majority continued along what perhaps seemed the most logical route in terms of ease of movement, rather than turning right to cross the canal (Gehl 1996). Only one participant stayed on the route, despite feeling that it was an unnatural action.

*"I'm really drawn along the canal towpath rather than wanting to go over the bridge."* (Graham)

Most participants turned back towards the converging paths when they realised that their surroundings no longer resembled the route map or directions.

*"Just walking back on ourselves...probably just got carried away. It's really scenic and pretty so..."* (Shabana)

*"[...] the water doesn't seem very nice to me. I have no invitation at all. Possibly [Graham] was right in saying that...the canal was leading me."* (Carlo)

However, two participants (Yasmina and Kasim), who happened to be a married couple, continued to walk 'off-route' in an act of *dérive*, that is, they allowed their surroundings to lead them (Debord 1957). For these people, focused on experiencing, narrating and their own conversation, the suggested route was less important than the performance of walking and talking. When they realised they were 'lost', they seemed not to mind, possibly owing to the knowledge that the linearity of the towpath would return them safely. Kasim and Yasmina's narratives for the remainder of their journey are littered with mainly visual sensory experiences in the form of descriptions of what they see, but also the musings instigated and memories recalled by their observations.

*"We are about to reach...two bridges actually...and I saw three ladies who are walking round the canal maybe exercising and I just saw a duck who is sleeping."* (Yasmina)

*"You know all the canal which passes me in my village, it's a lot bigger than this. We used to swim across it. Its water was very clean, not dirty. And flow was very quick."* (Kasim)

*"Any lakes remind me of Dahl Lake. Any canals remind me of Dahl Lake."* (Yasmina)

*"[...] there are lines of trees on both sides, and so nice grass, so beautiful! And people are fishing, taking bath in there [...] Maybe I would have appreciated this canal a lot more if I would have not seen canals like that."* (Kasim)

*"I think everybody is enjoying the sunshine, it is very good. We should come more often."* (Yasmina)

The other participants made their way back to the NIA to continue the suggested route. After crossing the canal via a bridge the route became linear and participants were able to focus on their sensory experiences once more.

*"[...] the sun is again behind us [...] I love the sound of water, you can close your eyes and feel...wherever you want to be." (Nasreen)*

*"Well I was talking about the Milan canals...people go there to relax, nice walking, or sit, and I think it's the same here." (Lucia)*

*"Just looking back [...] the canal turns and goes out of sight. You don't know what might be round the corner." (Annie)*

The route passed through a tunnel, then ran alongside a basin with moored boats at Cambrian Wharf where a narrow boat was slowly navigating some locks (Plate 21). The participants were interested in water in its various forms in this canal landscape - the sounds it creates when moving, the silence of still water, reflections and smells. The participants each noticed the boat at various points on their walk, commenting widely on its visual attributes, the sounds created by the actions of moving the boat through the canal and locks, and musing.

*"The boat's engine just ticking over...music drifting from the inside...the smell of diesel fumes [and] bubbles on the water. Slowly the boat's rising. Two levels of water almost the same now." (Annie)*

*"We're reaching [a] lock and I want to take the time to sit on the thing to manoeuvre the lock...to hear this kind of stream" (Carlo)*

*"We are watching the passage of the boat...it's the first time I see one (sic). It's a strange sensation, like she's born from nothing, it is just appearing – nice." (Lucia)*

*"...at the seaside when the water go against the rocks, the sea, I have that image. But now it disappeared, I'm back in Birmingham." (Carlo)*

A little further along the route the instructions led participants off the towpath and up a ramp onto the road, marking the point where the suggested route turned back towards Brindleyplace. The sight and sounds of traffic were keenly felt after the relative peacefulness of the canal.

*"We're approaching the city...so it's like a little piece of haven (sic) that you're leaving behind."* (Shabana)

*"The sound of the water is try to contrast (sic) the sound of the bus...nature and city I guess."* (Lucia)

Participants were to cross the canal using the road-bridge and walk along a short passage on the other side of the canal. At the end of the passage there is a small park area with trees and seating, at the end of which lies the canal basin the participants passed a few minutes earlier (Plate 22). For visitors to the park the canal is partially hidden from view behind a retaining wall. The majority of the participants reached the park, or at least the steps up to it, but then turned back.

*"I've slowed down because I don't know where the others are going [...] we're not on the canal any longer, we should be heading back."* (Carlo)

*"I think I'm going back. Flower buds are very closed...long winter this year."* (Nasreen)

Only one participant followed the route all the way through the park and onto the small basin they passed earlier. From here the canal can be crossed via a small bridge, back onto the towpath.

*"Very different perspective because I'm quite high above the water [...] quite keen to get back to Brindleyplace now [...] I'm in the gardens now, quite nice and tranquil and I'm drawn towards the railings to look at the canal."* (Graham)

The other participants retraced their steps towards Brindleyplace, commenting further on the boat they saw and quite glad to be back on the canal after walking alongside the busy road. For the return journey through this section some did not narrate their experiences as extensively as they had the first time, perhaps feeling that they were repeating themselves.

*“Quiet. I can hear the birds singing. Running footsteps. The smell of somebody’s aftershave. Crunching of feet on gravel. Boat is high in the lock now.” (Annie)*

*“I’ve enjoyed the walk, it’s quite soothing...I’ve kind of already said everything I’ve seen.” (Shabana)*

Upon reaching the bridge linking the International Convention Centre (ICC) with Brindleyplace, participants were given a choice; to either cross the bridge and walk back to the starting point by the fountain, or continue along the towpath and pass through the Broad Street tunnel thereby adding around 10 minutes to their journey (Plate 23). The reason the participants were given a choice related to timing, as although the entire route was originally timed at 35 minutes, individual stamina levels and walking paces vary, and with the addition of narrating their journeys, participants could conceivably run out of time.

*“The ICC Birmingham...I remember photographs I have taken with my kids...” (Nasreen)*

*“Other sounds of machinery, equipment, getting busier now, back near all the waterside cafes and bars...the busyness of the street has come down onto the canal-side.” (Annie)*

For those who continued, the final few minutes of the route took participants under the busy Broad Street, through the longest and darkest tunnel they had yet seen on the route. Some participants were interested in the sensory experience of the tunnel, but others were quiet as they moved through.

*“It’s darker and sometimes you’re too tall...there is the echo and dark.” (Lucia)*

*“Towards Broad Street which I’ve heard of but never visited...it’ll be interesting to see what’s over there...[silence through the tunnel]...just seen the Mailbox over there...the canal’s definitely widening, it seems a lot bigger now.” (Shabana)*

*“Looking up from [the] tunnel to Broad Street...watching the buses go past, always reminds me of one of the Michael Cain films [...] where he comes out of this building and thinks he’s in somewhere like Russia and sees a London bus going past.” (Graham)*

The next stretch of the route took participants around Gas Street Basin to the opposite towpath and back under the Broad Street tunnel to Brindleyplace (Plate 23). The basin provoked varied responses from the participants, not all of them anticipated. Gas Street Basin contains some of the oldest canal buildings in the city centre and is a mooring place for narrow boats. It is the widest stretch of water on the walking route and, although tactile interest is present as the towpath rises and falls over bridges and different surfaces, the opportunities to leave the towpath in this section are limited. Taller, modern buildings are visible behind the surrounding buildings and participants on other walks have tended to think of the area as less sunny than Brindleyplace.

*"I didn't think it would be this long, but the canal is very long...Seeing a lot of boats...and the variation of colours is nice. It reminds me of the programme Rosie and Jim."* (Shabana)

*"Boats linked up down here...All different sizes and shapes...The water's quite still, so again where the diesel fuel's escaped there are shapes and patterns sitting on top of the water. Dark shadows cast...smell of food."* (Annie)

*"I'm going faster than others...but I feel like I'm escaping from this because I don't like it...shadow, dirty, probably not the best place in Birmingham."* (Carlo)

*"I'm gonna go have a look at the boats [...] There's a little springer boat called Amy and my boat's a springer [...] We're surrounded by old buildings which is really rather pleasant. Just wandering off slowly."* (Graham)

*"The different sound of the shoes on the pathway...a strong smell of food everywhere."* (Lucia)

*"They're so clustered together is it any different to living in one of the tower blocks? They have all the freedom to move but they just live on them [...] a big garden, I would really miss that."* (Annie)

*"It's hurting my legs. Definitely need to be equipped to come out here to walk. Can hear sirens overhead."* (Shabana)



Finally, the participants reconvened near the fountain in Brindleyplace. Some felt that narration was unnecessary after leaving the sight of the water, while others continued until they reached the group.

*“The canal...takes you away from all the hubbub and the busyness of the city, but definitely back to reality now.” (Shabana)*

*“Frenetic Brindleyplace...it is not the canal any longer so I stop recording here.” (Carlo)*

*“The noise from the fountains [...] very noticeable now. Nice water, nice reflection, bit like a swimming pool.” (Graham)*

*“I should put some money in this wishing well to wish for good health...I’m going to relax...enjoy the silence, meditation in front of the fountain” (Nasreen)*

## Part Three – The Group Discussion

The Group Discussion was the final phase in the tri-partite methodology, whereby the participants re-grouped in a university meeting room for an informal discussion of their memories and opinions of the Sensory Walk. Three weeks after the walk, five of the original eight participants met for lunch and a discussion lasting 1.5 hours. Participants were not asked to complete any re-capping work prior to this meeting, as part of the aim of this discussion was to uncover which aspects of their experience they were able to recall, and possibly therefore regarded most importantly. The discussion enabled participants to reflect on their perceptions of the canal landscape in a way that remembering alone does not do; as this was a group activity the participants were able to prompt, and be prompted by, others and to understand how their own perceptions differed from others’.

## The Group Discussion responses

With one exception, all of the participants who took part in the group discussion had visited the canals around Brindleyplace prior to the walk. Carlo uses the canals regularly as an alternative route through the city, both Annie and Graham use them as a place to spend time whilst waiting, and both Annie and Nasreen use them as places to take visitors. I asked them what their expectations had been prior to the walk:

*“the expectation in my mind was this is going to be a well-being promoting venture, which sort of immediately captured that and I came in that frame of mind and it stayed with me”*

(Nasreen)

*“I don’t remember if I had an expectation, even canals in Milano, I’ve grown there, it’s difficult to say what sort of expectation I could have of them...”*

(Carlo)

*“When you said ‘what did you expect?’ obviously I’d walked it before so I knew what I was going to walk, but looking at it with all the senses open...”*

(Annie)

Some participants reiterated their answers from the Identity Sheet by saying that they already knew what to expect from the canals. Carlo’s idea that having grown up in a place makes understanding one’s own expectations difficult was reiterated by Annie who said *“I knew what I was going to walk”*; both of these statements refer to the remembrance of physical actions, namely appropriating space through movement around it, turning it into a ‘known’ place. Nasreen did not refer to her prior ‘knowledge’, rather to the notion of what she intended to take from the experience of walking, namely a feeling of *“wellbeing”*. Annie started to talk about the difference that thinking about a place *“with all the senses open”* makes, suggesting that her expectations were challenged by the process of the walk.

The idea of the canal as a place of escape was a key theme of the group discussion. Participants talked about using the canal as a place to access peacefulness away from the city and to forget everyday responsibilities.

*"I suddenly realised how much it was a little sanctuary" (Annie)*

*"[...] just one level up and you're back in the city, it is a little sanctuary, it's something to take you away for a short while to think or relax or to do something that's a bit scenic outside of what I know of Birmingham high street [...] somewhere you could go for a couple of hours and switch off." (Shabana)*

*"I use the canal really as an alternative route through the city" (Carlo)*

*"There were no televisions, no phone ringing...there was nothing telling me, you've got to move on and get back and do all these different things. So I think you do just step down there and leave it all behind." (Annie)*

I asked the group if they remembered slowing down or speeding up at any points along the walk. The participants all found that the walk allowed them to slow down.

*"I felt more slowed down in a reflective way" (Carlo)*

*"it has a different meaning, it has a different impact on you because you are calm, you are using it as leisure time. When you are rushing you do not pay attention... you may not observe the beauty" (Nasreen)*

Some participants remembered disliking the traffic sounds near the road bridge, because the sounds forced them to abandon the tranquility they had previously felt. Carlo felt that in the quieter places along the walk, *"though the noise was not present necessarily all the time, there was this visual reminder"* of the city.

*"For me the noise when we went to the far end [...] was actually quite unpleasant, and again you're used to traffic and this, but it's a different place and a different mood and a different time maybe, so I wanted to come back quickly, for the water." (Nasreen)*

*"I wanted to get back to the experience, a bit like when you're dreaming a pleasant dream and you wake up and you try and get back to the dream and you can't" (Graham)*

I asked the participants why they had strayed from the suggested route at the road bridge and the small park; they did not recall straying from the route, but remembered not wanting to leave the canal to walk along the road.

*"I think we assumed [...] we were going to walk around that...forget about instructions, the idea was walking alongside canals, and that was as much information as I guess as we were able to register" (Nasreen)*

*"[...] when you popped up out of the canal network, I didn't know where I was and went down quite quickly" (Graham)*

The majority of the participants recalled the water in the landscape fondly, with the exception of Carlo who felt that the water of the canal was too closely integrated with the city it passes through. Others talked about water's life-sustaining properties, the pleasure of seeing and hearing water move and how it makes them feel *"better"*, whilst Graham clearly liked water, but could not explain his fascination, saying that it was *"magical"*.

*"I do like being by water and even more so to be on the water is quite magical. The better the quality of the water, the more of it there is, the better I feel" (Graham)*

*"[...] you get revealed what is often hidden, because as the water goes down you see those mossy walls, because I'm a texture-y, hands-on sort of person I enjoy seeing that." (Annie)*

*"I was quite surprised by how much I am drawn by the water... sometimes it was a bit of a wrench to cross over because I didn't really want to." (Graham)*

*"Maybe it's that [...] you don't feel hemmed in by rules when you're by water" (Annie)*

*"It's life isn't it? I think that part is magical, you can survive without food for a number of days, you cannot do it without water, but also there is a serenity in water which is very difficult to explain."* (Nasreen)

*"I was actually detracted from this kind of water and this kind of canals...that doesn't necessarily coincide with it being dirty or more clean or whatever, I think it's from the surrounding environment"* (Carlo)

*"the noise of the fountain drowned out the noise of the people, we hear that noise as opposed to talking or mobile phones going off which was nice"* (Graham)

Some participants commented on the greenery present in the canal landscape. Their responses and their recollection of these components suggests surprise that the urban canal includes greenery (Plate 24).

*"I remember noticing the greenery, 'cos where they literally cut through the countryside where I live, it's hedgerows all the way [...] but in the city specifically they're almost encompassed, trapped in so it's different"* (Annie)

*"I liked actually that garden which I had seen, water garden [...] and it was the first time I saw it and I was really surprised [...] it's just a small water garden with lilies, so I'm hoping that in a couple of month's time when the water lilies are out it will be quite nice"* (Nasreen)

The memories and associations with other landscapes which participants recalled during the walk were reiterated to some extent during the group discussion, but one type of recollection is particularly notable. Shabana and Graham talked about how the walk transported them to *"the north"* and *"the south"*, respectively.

*"I found it really nice, 'cos I'm from Leeds... I felt it took me back to the north, to somewhere like Ilkeley [...] or Harrogate [...] York"* (Shabana)

*"It takes me back to the south [...] it's the Grand Union canal specifically that has that connection [with] messing about"* (Graham)

The associated landscapes to which the participants were transported differ from one another in terms of location, topography and architecture, and although Graham's is a water-scape, Shabana recalled numerous historic towns and cities which are not necessarily associated with large bodies of water. Both participants' responses suggest the recollection of 'home' and, by association, 'youth'.

For the majority of participants who took part in the group discussion, feelings associated with mental restoration and physical well-being were recalled. Shabana and Annie each spoke of the canal landscape as a 'sanctuary' at different times during the discussion and others referred to it in terms of its therapeutic benefit.

*"[...] sometimes I just need that connection [...] how much time to I actually need for a little bit of therapy? [...] Ten, fifteen, twenty minutes and back is enough. And then you lose the immediate impact" (Graham)*

*"It was quite therapeutic actually" (Nasreen).*

*"When we sat down for coffee afterwards I think we were all in a very good frame of mind, if you'd measured our blood pressure it would have been down" (Graham)*

The 'therapeutic' benefit of the walk was an unanticipated outcome of the research process, one which deserves further enquiry which is unfortunately unfeasible within this research study. From the variety of responses the participants made during and after the walk, there seems to be a correlation between the walking, talking and multi-modalism, which this research method encourages, and feelings of well-being in participants.

## Observations

It was not the aim of the Sensory Walk to uncover individuals' experiences of the canal landscape, rather it was aimed at uncovering the landscape experiences

those individuals chose or were able to express. The eight participants' individual narratives demonstrate the diversity of landscape identities converging on the urban canal landscape at any point. As with so much of the research study, this methodology is open to interpretation, contingent on the understanding and co-operation of the participants. As individuals with multiplicities of identities, their narratives are not easily compared; while they share a common language, English, they each express themselves individually, choosing different bodily sensory experiences and musings to narrate.

### The Identity Sheet

As the first phase of the tri-partite methodology, the Identity Sheet provided a combination of personal 'facts' and opinion-based information. The resultant data are diverse, individual and subjective, and are representative of the multiplicities of identities convergent on any contemporary UK urban landscape.

When describing their own identities through the initial written narrative, participants tended to begin with an introduction to their origins, namely their place of birth. For some participants this was the country of their birth, for others the town or city. The implication of placing natal information before any other is that participants regard the land of one's birth as one of, if not the, most important aspects of their identities. Shabana alone referred to her ethnic and cultural identities in her written narrative, and this information was listed after her birthplace of Leeds. This may suggest that an individual's natal land may be regarded more importantly than ethnic or cultural identities. Alternatively it may suggest a degree of assumption on the participants' part, in that by first sharing their place of birth, ethnic and cultural identities are inferred. For example, perhaps Carlo assumed that by describing his identity as an Italian, the reader would infer he is also a Catholic of Caucasian origin? Participants may also have felt that their ethnic and cultural identities are so strongly implicated in their natal lands that they do not perceive a separation between these aspects of their identities (Fludernik 2007). Of the three participants born in the UK, Shabana

alone referred to her ethnic and cultural identities; Annie and Graham (both White) did not.

The participants admitted to varying amounts of prior experience of canal landscapes – some had visited canals in the UK and others had also visited canals across Europe (Amsterdam, Milan and Venice for example) and Pakistan. Shabana, Kasim and Yasmina had not visited the canal in Birmingham prior to the walk. Lucia had previous experience of this area of the canal network, but did not visit often. Nasreen, Graham, Annie and Carlo were more regular users and throughout the research process discussed visiting for a variety of reasons, including for short periods of relaxation, as an alternative route through the city, to entertain visitors, or to spend time whilst waiting for performances at the nearby theatres and concert halls.

In the direct question relating to expectations, the use of the word ‘expect’ resulted in some un-anticipated responses, as some participants who had prior experience of Birmingham’s canals felt that their previous visits precluded the possibility of forming expectations. For example, one participant responded - *“Actually I know what they are like”* - suggesting that for this individual, expectation of a place is superseded by ‘knowledge’ of that place, so that once visited, a place and our perceptions of it are unchanging. The wider research and literature suggests that landscape expectations are the result of prior experience, whether it is of the landscape in question, a different landscape, or even media representations related to that landscape (Birksted 2000; Bender 1993). For example, before an individual visits Birmingham’s canals his or her expectations may be based on literature, experiences of other canals, hearsay and images in the media (Plate 25). After visiting, his or her expectations for any subsequent visits will also be based on personal experiences of the city’s canals. This particular participant’s response implies that, once visited, a place is somehow objectively ‘known’ and unchangeable in the mind of the individual.



The responses to the 2007 Sound Walk pilot study suggested that there is a difference between soundscape expectations and soundscape experiences, the ‘expectation-experience dichotomy’, resulting in disappointment when expectations are not met and elation when expectations are exceeded (Millman et al 2008). The participants in the Sensory Walk study differed from previous research participants in that they displayed no notable expectation-experience dichotomy, that is, their expectations (with both positive and negative connotations) were generally met during the walk. For example, Shabana hoped the canal would be “*serene and clean and soothing*”, and during the walk she commented that the canal was “*a little piece of haven*” [sic]. Carlo ‘knew’ that the canal is “*usually narrow [and] brick/paved*” and this would make it seem like “*part of the city, a sort of extension of the city streets*”; during the walk he made reference to the city and being in Birmingham where others felt that they were no longer in Birmingham. During the group discussion session I asked participants if they recalled experiencing anything unexpected, and their responses suggest that if they did experience an ‘expectation-experience dichotomy’, they did not recall it to any notable extent.

### The Walking Route

The participants’ responses to the walking method are as diverse as their walking narratives; although they were given the same brief, some focused on narrating their experiences in relation to the five-sense Western sensorium, some solely on their musings and recollected memories, while others simply described what they saw. The walking route itself was perceived and performed differently by each participant, and although they each received a map and instructions, each participant’s journey was exploratory as they strayed from the route and found their own way according to their unique interests and tendencies. There was no evident correlation between the participants’ identities, as they related to age, gender, occupation or ethnic/cultural background, and the focus of participants’ narratives. For example, both Yasmina (a 23 year old, Asian Kashmiri-born female social worker) and Annie (a 55 year old, White UK-born female artist and teacher) focused

on the narration of the traditional 5-sense Western sensorium, with some musings and memories (Fig.6.26).

### Narration of sensory experiences

The frequencies of participants' comments on individual senses within the traditional five-sense Western sensorium were as anticipated, based on data from previous participants. The most regularly narrated sensory experiences were visual and aural. Tactile sensory experiences were more frequently narrated than olfactory experiences, while the sense of taste was not referred to at all<sup>6</sup>. Certain sensory experiences were narrated by all participants, such as the sight of the narrow boat, and the sounds of water and traffic. A few of the participants had not seen a moving narrow boat prior to the walk and in this case it may be regarded as a novel encounter. The universal appeal of the water and traffic sounds may also be explained by their novelty and relative impact, in that they were suddenly experienced in relation to the surrounding sound-scape.

The visual experiences participants narrated were the most pervasive by far and related to both fleeting and continuous sights. In particular the sight of the boat moving through the locks appealed to all who saw it, and all the participants lingered in that area in order to watch the passage of the boat.

The aural experiences participants narrated related to both fleeting sounds, such as the water in the fountain and from the locks, boat engines, a clock chiming and music from bars and boats; and more continuous sounds such as air conditioning, people chatting and road traffic. These sounds varied in source and function, but

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<sup>6</sup> Examples of participants' experiences of the sense of taste are a notable omission in the wider research data. Despite the lack of tasting opportunities within the parameters of this research, the canal landscape does offer opportunities for tasting in the many bars and restaurants found in the Brindleyplace area and along the towpath at various points. Many participants recalled memories of dining in the area and also commented on the smells of food at certain points. Taste and smell are linked in the appreciation of foods, so despite the lack of comments relating to taste in particular, it is feasible that some participants experienced memories of tasting the food they smelled.

were linked by their relative impacts, for example, participants commented on the traffic sounds in relation to the tranquillity of the towpath.

The tactile experiences participants narrated related to the effects that moving through the landscape had on their bodies. They commented on their aching legs, changes in temperature, the wind on their faces and the feel of paving textures through their shoes. As with the aural experiences, the tactile experiences were narrated in terms of their relative impacts, that is, when participants became suddenly aware of changes in their own bodies, such as when legs and feet became sore.

The olfactory experiences participants narrated related to sudden smells, deemed both pleasant and unpleasant, such as food, the canal water and diesel fumes. Food smells were experienced near the Brindleyplace and Gas Street Basin areas where the restaurants are located. The smell of the canal water was noted at various points, while fleeting smells, such as diesel fumes and aftershave, were experienced as relative to any existing surrounding smells that did not prompt comments.

### Narration of musings, memories and associations

Participants narrated some musings along common themes, such as imagining living in a boat, musing on other users' reasons for visiting the canal, and the functions of the canal and canal furniture. This correlation can be partly explained by the commonality of the sensory experiences which instigated those musings, such as the sight of boats and other people, and the tactile experience of walking along paving and under bridges, however, despite the similarities in some narrated sensory experiences and musings, each participant's recollections, (recalled memories and associated landscapes) were entirely individual.

For example, Kasim narrates recollections of his home in Mirpur, Pakistan, and in particular the canal that runs through his village. Kasim's narrative is generally

instigated by seeing the water in the canal and the greenery on the banks. His is an extended, descriptive narrative of all that he has seen and done on 'his' canal, presumably over many years, but his description truncates time. Kasim is caught in a reverie for a few minutes, seeing and hearing the canal in Birmingham between the National Indoor Arena and Ladywood, but imagining the canal of his home in Mirpur (Fig.6.27).

The participants' narratives support many of the theories discussed in the literature, particularly those relating to memories in the form of associated landscapes (Tolia-Kelly 2004; O'Neill & Hubbard 2010; Bates 2001). The majority of participants' recollections related to other landscapes, such as Pakistan, Kashmir, Milan, Iran, Northern and Southern England and North America. The majority of these other recalled landscapes can be considered 'water-scapes'. Participants variously spoke of the canals of Milan, England and Pakistan; the lakes and rivers of Kashmir and Iran; Niagara Falls in Ontario/New York; the seaside in Italy and the public water gardens of Kashmir. The participants who narrated the broadest range of recollections of other landscapes and experiences were Nasreen with eight instances of recollection, Graham with six and Yasmina with five. Although Nasreen's recollections were the most varied (relating to different landscapes, events and people), Kasim's were the most vividly narrated, suggesting that his personal reverie was extremely evocative.

The recollections of these associated landscapes were elicited by bodily sensory experiences. With nine instances of recollection, the sight or sound of water (either in the canal, moving through locks, or fountains) was the direct cause of more recollection-narratives than any other sensory landscape component. The sight of boats instigated four instances of recollection and the 'general' canal instigated three. Visual stimuli then, seem to be more conducive to recollection-narrative than any other sensory experience, at least for these participants.

The majority of participants narrated instances of ‘involuntary memory’ or sudden recall whereby bodily sensory experiences cause the sudden recall of memories (Proust 1913). Carlo, Lucia, Graham, Kasim and Nasreen in particular all talked about the sudden recall of memories and associations with other landscapes. Common reactions to this phenomenon included surprise, often evident in their tone of voice and abandonment of their narrative in order to describe their memory; fondness for the recalled memory, again evident in their tone of voice; and juxtaposition of their memory with their current surroundings, followed by disappointment. For example, Carlo’s involuntary memory was of the seaside and was recalled as he was watching the narrow boat pass through the locks with its attendant gushing water sounds:

*“...at the seaside when the water go against the rocks, the sea, I have that image. But now it disappeared, I’m back in Birmingham.” (Carlo)*

### Narration of multi-modalism

The range of multi-modal experiences that participants commented on varied during the route, so that some places seemed more conducive to narration of experience than others. Regardless of the amount of individual narration, the range of participants’ references to multi-modal experiences increased in certain areas on the route, such as Gas Street Basin, Farmer’s Bridge locks, and on the towpath adjacent to Brindleyplace.

For each of the five participants who walked the additional route around Gas Street Basin, this section was one of the sites that offered the broadest opportunity for the narration of multi-modalism or whole-body sensory experience. Annie, Carlo, Lucia, Graham and Shabana each narrated their experiences of three or more senses in addition to musing while in this area, with Annie, Graham and Shabana also recalling memories of other places or experiences. The towpath between Cambrian Wharf and Farmer’s Bridge locks was equally highly conducive to the narration of

multi-modalism. Both these areas were return-points requiring participants to walk around them, both contain water basins, and are within sight and/or hearing-range of a major road above. Although the range of narrated sensory experiences increased at each of these sites relative to the rest of the walking route, participants' comments on the sight of boats and signage, and the sounds of the city or traffic were the only correlations.

For Nasreen, who did not walk the route around Gas Street Basin, the area between the International Convention Centre and the fountain in Brindleyplace was highly conducive to narration of whole-body sensory experiences, including musings and memories. Annie responded similarly. Both women are in their mid-50s and displayed strong links with Birmingham in their Identity Sheets, however, the universal appeal of the sight of boats and sight and sound of water aside, the two women's narratives contained only one other notable similarity in that they both commented on how pleasant it was to take time for a walk. The participants' responses support the notion that although certain places on the route are more conducive to the narration of multi-modal experiences, those experiences, including memories and associated landscapes, are individual in theme.

### The Group Discussion

Many of the experiences that participants narrated during the walk were reiterated during the group discussion three weeks later; the sight of the boat passing through the locks, the sight and sound of the water at various points, and the quality of the light in terms of reflections on surfaces and in the sunshine. Some memories and musings were also reiterated, such as associations with certain other landscapes, although participants tended not to speak so freely or evocatively in these instances, suggesting that the act of walking and talking in the landscape is important in accessing involuntary memories at least.

Two themes emerged during the discussion session which were not as evident in the participants' narratives during the walk, namely, the notion of 'home' and the

feelings of mental restoration experienced by many participants. All of the participants mentioned their childhood homes at least once during the Sensory Walk process, and for a number of the participants the phenomenon of recalling these homes was particularly strongly experienced. Kasim's recollections of his home in Mirpur, and in particular the canal which passed through his village were evocatively narrated during the walk. During the group discussion session Graham and Shabana both recalled the experience of being transported to other (childhood) home landscapes, namely *"the south"* and *"the north"* respectively. Whilst Graham's 'home' landscape refers in particular to a canal landscape and the childhood games he took part in there, Shabana's does not, but refers to a more general northern landscape, suggesting that something within the process of walking the canal caused Shabana to be 'transported' back home.

*"I found it really nice, 'cos I'm from Leeds... I felt it took me back to the north, to somewhere like Ilkeley [...] or Harrogate [...] York"* (Shabana)

*"It takes me back to the south [...] it's the Grand Union canal specifically that has that connection [with] messing about"* (Graham)

The participants' feelings of transportation are supported in the literature relating to the cyclical, rather than linear, nature of time and the confluence of past and present via a sensory trigger; in these cases the multi-modal experiences of being in the canal landscape (Connerton 2002; Thoma 2006).

Many of the participants reported feeling calm and relaxed during the walk and they attributed these feelings to the pleasant weather, having seen things they liked such as narrow boats, escaping the busy and noisy city, and having time away from a daily routine. During the group discussion session the theme was re-visited, and participants now recalled the experience in terms of its *"therapeutic"* (Nasreen) benefit.

*“When we sat down for coffee afterwards I think we were all in a very good frame of mind, if you’d measured our blood pressure it would have been down” (Graham).*

The participants’ feelings of enhanced positive well-being are supported in the literature regarding the restorative capacity of nature or green space (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989) and the aesthetic pleasure that humans take in environments which are conducive to their survival (Appleton 1975). The canal landscape in the study site area includes varying amounts of green space, so that the participants moved through a changeable landscape in terms of their contact with ‘nature’ (excluding water, which was a constant). In light of this the participants’ feelings of restoration may be attributed to the idea of ‘nearby nature’, in that the knowledge that green space is even visually accessible helps produce a positive affect (Kaplan & Kaplan 1989; Bussey 1996). From the responses that participants made on their Identity Sheets prior to the walk, it is evident for at least two individuals, their expectations of the walk related to tranquillity and peacefulness - feelings which they both reported experiencing during and after the walk. This may suggest an element of self-fulfilment, in the sense that the participants experienced what they hoped to experience, however other participants experienced similar feelings without expressing a prior expectation. The ‘therapeutic’ outcome was unanticipated and requires further study which is not possible within this research, however it is my belief that the process of walking in the landscape triggers sensory associations with (fond) places and events, and narrating those experiences as they occur helps the individual make sense of and retain the experience, resulting in positive feelings of well-being.

## The method

The walking route itself was both necessary and problematic. It was devised to limit the walking time and reduce the potential of losing participants and causing them stress in an unfamiliar setting. Starting the route at Brindleyplace also ensured that participants experienced some of the regenerated canal landscape in line with the wider research aims. The route also added an element of control, since participants



walked individually with the only indication of their location being their own descriptions and some background noise, however, the majority of participants strayed from the suggested route detailed in the map and written instructions. Some of the female participants realised their mistake and commented on their own inabilities to read maps, while other participants deemed the map poor. Two participants did not realise their mistake and continued along their own route, deciding to return when they had walked for around twenty minutes so that they might return within the 35-minute walking time suggested in the brief. As neither of these participants came to harm or got lost, the *dérive* method, that is, letting the layout of the urban surroundings lead the walker, is arguably a valid alternative to the planned route.

The implications of unintentionally walking 'off-route' are two-fold. Firstly, it demonstrates the difficulty of following maps and instructions whilst engrossed in walking for a purpose, in this case, the purpose of experiencing. Secondly, it supports Gehl's notion that people tend to follow the easiest route, that is, the route that seems most conducive (sub-consciously) to their undisrupted locomotion (Gehl 1996). The majority of participants left the suggested route at two points, namely the point at which the towpath diverged into three paths, and the point at which the route moved away from the water and through the small park. The first instance can be attributed to Gehl's notion, which is generally a tactile and visual response. The canal corridor has a strong visual linearity and the divergent canal arms were evidently confusing, so participants walked in a straight line. The second instance can also be attributed to a visual disturbance, that is, the loss of the sight of the water and uncertainty at where the route led, however, during the discussion session many of the participants recalled that at this point they felt that leaving the towpath was wrong, despite the instructions and map suggesting otherwise, because they were participating in 'a canal walk'. Throughout the research I referred to the notion of a 'sensory' rather than 'canal' walk, which not only suggests that the participants' expectations of the walk incorporated the method, but that their perception of the canal landscape is strongly linked with the sight of water.

*"[...]the idea was walking alongside canals, and that was as much information as I guess as we were able to register" (Nasreen)*

The act of narration itself was also necessary but problematic. In the 2007 Sound Walk, I recorded the whole group using a small digital voice recorder; however, the individualistic nature of the Sensory Walk necessitated individual recordings. Responses were originally intended to be recorded by participants making written responses; however, this would have resulted in less flowing and abundant responses, and may have caused frustration as participants focused on writing rather than experiencing the canal. In earlier studies some participants were unwilling to write owing to fears of poor spelling, so spoken language was felt to be the preferable mode of expression for the Sensory Walk. Problems with sourcing small recording devices resulted in the use of a number of larger recorders of the sort used by television journalists. Many of the participants' narratives include comments relating to being watched by other canal users; they mused on this experience, wondering aloud what other users thought of them and if they thought the participants were reporters. After some initial wariness, the participants were co-operative and regarded the microphones with good humour, some saying that they actually forgot they were recording as they became involved in narrating their experiences.

*"It made me think just about me and the environment actually having to talk about it into the microphone, but it was really quite good because that was just for me and how I was reacting, rather than walking and chatting to people, it was how special it was to me and it did make me notice these extra things that I wouldn't earlier. It was a good experience."*

(Annie)

*"It made me more aware of what I was actually thinking....It was one of the best days I've ever walked along the canal"*

(Graham)

*"I generally try not to be so analytic, but I felt that I needed to as part of the walk"*

(Carlo)

I asked the participants if talking into the microphones caused them to feel they were talking for my benefit, and they generally agreed that this was not their primary concern.

*“Funnily enough no” (Nasreen)*

*“Sometimes, ...but most of the time it was self-talk” (Carlo)*

*“I think I was describing the experience for the benefit of somebody else, but also for my benefit” (Graham)*

The Sensory Walk method was well-received by the participants who were unanimous in their enjoyment of the process. The most important finding regarding further use of this technique is that many participants felt the method challenged them to think of the canal landscape in a different way; the result of having to narrate their passage whilst moving through the landscape and considering all their bodily sensory experiences including their musings and memories.

## Individual landscape narratives

In addition to the performance of the pilot study (2007), the Representation Walk (2008), the *Postcards From the Cut* project and the Sensory Walk (both 2010), the ongoing focus of the research was amassing personal narratives from which individual landscape identities could be identified. This chapter relates to a small selection of the research interactions that lie outside the main four studies, including Conversations<sup>1</sup>, Walking-and-Talking<sup>2</sup> and auto-ethnographic narratives<sup>3</sup> in the form of written diaries and visual responses. Whilst the methods of interaction between these approaches differ, they are united by their common outcomes – narratives of landscape identity created through participants' experiences and recollections.

The individual narratives explored within this chapter demonstrate the multiplicities of meanings converging on the contemporary urban UK canal-scape. In this chapter I make particular reference to three individuals; Kareema, Farzana and Ian. These individuals represent a selection of the participants with whom I worked during this research study and were included here for their individualities and to demonstrate the three main methodological techniques of Conversations, Walking-and-Talking and auto-ethnographic, or self-reflexive, exercises. In this chapter I briefly refer to a selection of other participants in order to demonstrate similarities and divergences, namely Bob, Hans, Luke and Tazeem.

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<sup>1</sup> Conversations were seated and generally performed indoors at various locations to suit participants including participants' work places and homes, university buildings and cafes. Conversations were semi-structured around general questions, but the bulk of the talk was collaborative, negotiated and allowed to develop as organically as the constraints of the researcher-participant relationship would allow (Low 2003; Norrick 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Walking-and-Talking, while often preceded by a short seated, indoor conversation, was predicated on a joint walk around the canal landscape, during which time participants 'led' the researcher, describing and explaining as they walked. The Walking-and-Talking technique developed from a phenomenological concern with the bodily sensation of the landscape (Wylie 2005; Tolia-Kelly 2004; Pink 2009; Edensor 2010), but crucially allows the moving body to express the multi-modal processes of experiencing the landscape through narrative.

<sup>3</sup> Diaries were open methods of recording personal landscape narratives, through auto-ethnographic writing or photographic representation and were collected via email.

Kareema was born in India and moved to Birmingham as a child in the 1960s. Her narrative strongly relates to her memories of growing up near the pre-development canal landscapes of the area as she tries to reconcile the current landscape with the landscape of her past. Farzana is a Somali Muslim woman in her late 20s. She was born in United Arab Emirates and moved to Birmingham less than ten years ago. Her narrative is filled with references to associated landscapes which she recalled as we walked around the Brindleyplace area. Finally, Ian is a White British man in his 70s who originally comes from Liverpool, but who now lives in Staffordshire. He is an avid boat owner who regularly moors at Tipton in the Black Country. Ian's narrative strongly relates to his identity as a boater; it is a mobile narrative which changes in accordance with Ian's surroundings, so that he is simultaneously interested in heritage and regenerated canal landscapes, he is both a tourist and a resident, but he is always pragmatic about his changing landscapes.

## Conversations

Some of the participants from the 2008 Representation Walk pilot study agreed to talk with me further on a one-to-one basis. The 'interviews' took the form of informal dialogues which were termed 'Conversations' to help stress the informality of the scenario to participants. Conversations allow both researcher and participant to share personal narratives to create negotiated, collaborative narratives. Participants were left alone for fifteen minutes prior to each conversation, having been asked to sketch what they remembered of their canal visit, turning these into Conversations-with-visual-aids. Each Conversation lasted around one hour and each session began with the participant describing and explaining their drawings. Each participant drew further maps as we spoke, not all of them relating to Birmingham, current landscapes or even canals.

## Kareema's narrative

Kareema is around 50 years of age. She was born in India and moved to the UK as a small child. Her family home was in Smethwick in the West Midlands. Kareema's perception of Brindleyplace is based on a few encounters over a number of years, meaning that her perceptions of the area have changed over time. Her first encounter with the area was as a child in the 1960s when she accompanied her parents on errands to the utility offices and clothing warehouses in the surrounding streets before its redevelopment. As an adult in the 1980s she visited bars and restaurants on Broad Street, which was not the highly developed leisure area it is today. In 2000 Kareema visited the developed Brindleyplace and Mailbox area with her adult daughter and finally, in 2008, she re-visited the area for the purposes of participating in this research study.

I asked Kareema to draw what she remembered of the canal landscape, but rather than drawing Brindleyplace as she remembered it from her recent visit, she chose to draw the canal as it figured in her childhood memories of growing up in 1960s Smethwick and Birmingham. The first drawing Kareema showed me was a plan of the street where she lived and played, and its relation to the nearby factory, houses and canal (Fig.7.1).

*"We lived here on the corner, 396...and I even remember that! And we used to have an alleyway [...] and this was all open so we'd go there [...] [W]hen factories used to close at five, six in the evening children, all of us, used to get together and we used to play around here in this area."*

The canal ran along the ends of the gardens on the street, and although the children never played on the canal, Kareema recalled the trees and shrubs that bordered the canal. The canal was implicated in their games and represented a forbidden and confusing place to the children.

*"I remember bushes and trees and then we had to...hold the bushes apart and [...] that was our hideaway"*

*("Did you ever go down to the water's edge?")*

*"Erm...I think we all stayed away, all the children stayed away because we weren't quite sure what it was about, because we used to see boats going up and down and I think we didn't really want to get in trouble."*

I asked whether Kareema remembered the boats on the canal and the extent of the canal's use for freight and leisure, but as she was a child during the time in which her memories are rooted, such details were vague in her recollection.

*"No, there were no leisure boats, no."*

*("So there were people living on them?")*

*"I can't recall that. Cos all I saw was they went up and down and that was about it."*

Realising that Kareema's experiences of this time were more easily recalled through the frame of her childhood, I steered the conversation back to this subject. In this way Kareema shared more about her life at the time.

*"We used to play hopscotch and all the...rounders and cricket and everything [...] I think there must have been about 10 or 12 of us. And in those days it wasn't just one family per house, you used to have two, three families in one house."*

*("And did your parents ever say anything about the canal?")*

*"No they just said to keep away from the water and obviously we did that."*

*("I wasn't allowed to play in the street")*

*"We only did because there was a courtyard there and it wasn't being used. To us it was like the park."*

In recalling the local shop Kareema inadvertently revealed a secret of which nobody else at the university was aware, namely that her family had moved to England from Delhi as a child.

*"I remember the shop [...] run by English people. I remember mom sending me out to go and get some bread. And I said obviously in Indian, I said "what do I say?" 'Cos I didn't speak English and my dad used to say "bread and milk." 'Cos obviously we spoke Indian, it wasn't English."*

I asked Kareema how she felt about growing up away from the place that her parents were born. Kareema's answer was characteristically pragmatic, and I realised that she had probably been asked this question before. Kareema has been 'at home' across three continents during her life. She later tells me that, although she visits, she would not live in India and that her sons would like to return to America, where they were born.

*"Zoe, it's funny, I mean two of my boys were born in America, daughter was born here. You know because you've got this facility there, you do it. I mean, when Dad came here, he initially just came for 6 months because he was a civil servant in India and you could only get six months off, the maximum. But he ended up staying here. [...] And when he wrote back to mum and said "I'm not coming and would you make the girls start attending English lessons"...could we pick up English in India? No!"*

Kareema's next drawing focused on Broad Street and Sheepcote Street – two roads adjacent to what is now Brindleyplace. Her recollections of this area are more fluid than those of Smethwick; because Kareema's experience of this area spans almost five decades, her memories of the place merge and she seemed to jump between eras in an instant. Again, recollections of the area unveiled new information about Kareema's family that she was willing to share with me, and her comments demonstrate the importance of place in the creation of identity, in this case relating to family and formative experiences (Fig.7.2).

*"That was Sheepcote, how I remember it. I even remember going on the bus with dad...that way, the bus used to be here and we used to walk to...the Severn Trent Water office used to be there and the tax, vehicle tax office used to be there"*

*("And this was where they had the Indian weddings?")*

*"The receptions, yes."*

*("You mentioned the Severn Trent office before")*

*"It still exists ...I checked up on it on the internet, and you will find information that they did used to exist there. [...] Mom had a clothes shop, so I remember going into warehouses on the Broad Street...that only went in the late 80s, that was still there in the 80s[...] And the other thing I remember is I often look at that building...'cos someone took me out for dinner in that place."*



Kareema goes on to talk about her difficulty in navigating around the area post-development and the sense of confusion and displacement this elicited in her (Fig.7.3).

*"I used to drive down here sometimes and just go take it this way, right, the car. Now you can't do any of this[...] When I went back I felt really weird because I couldn't ...it was all new to me and I thought where have all the roads gone? I knew how to get in and out of it, now I don't."*

As she traced her old and new routes around her drawing, her exasperation was clear. Kareema displayed a similar emotion whilst talking about the Severn Trent Water offices, which are no longer in operation as public offices. Kareema spent time researching the fact of their existence in that place, as though she doubted her own memories of accompanying her father to pay water bills there. Her contentment at finding evidence of the offices' existence was clear. Kareema's inability to access the area in the same way that she did in childhood and early adulthood are akin to the sense of loss that one feels when a familiar building is demolished (Leger & Van Hoof 2005). It is perhaps unsurprising that in re-visiting the area for the 2008 Representation Walk, Kareema focused her representations on the familiar aspects of the landscape; the paving, canal furniture, bridges and the Malthouse pub; these aspects helped root Kareema, so whilst much of the landscape had changed, there were constants to keep the dialogue between past and present open (Treib 2005). I asked Kareema why she had photographed the Malthouse pub during her recent canal visit.

*"I don't know, I think I was just walking. I took quite a few photographs...to me that was...the best one. It's had a facelift obviously, which to me makes it stand out, it's the old with the new, combination of it."*

In reference to the *Postcards From the Cut* project, I asked Kareema what sort of image she would choose to represent the canal landscape. Her answer focused on the National Indoor Arena (NIA) and International Convention Centre (ICC) buildings.

*"..you know it's going back to this, I hate that building! [the NIA] I detest it!"*

*(“What is it - the materials?” [Kareema nods])*

*“And the other one [International Convention Centre].. I’m not so keen on...to me that’s just boxes stacked up. [...] To me it just doesn’t go with what’s there”*

*(“So it’s just too contemporary?”)*

*“Hmnnnn” [nodding]*

Kareema’s answer suggests a strongly felt opposition to the 1990s-built NIA and ICC buildings, and a similar opposition characterises her feelings about representations of the area. Rather than choosing an image from the postcard that she felt positive about, Kareema took an ‘anything-but-this’ approach, making her dislike of the contemporary structures in the area clear on the basis of their incongruity with the historic value of the older buildings. Kareema’s attachment to the Malthouse pub is founded on her childhood memories of the area – this building represents a tangible link with her past landscape identity that suffered diminishment through the re-development of the area during the 1990s. Kareema referred to this building as *“original”* during our conversation, suggesting she believes it is contemporaneous with the construction of the canal landscape during the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Despite the older appearance of the pub, it was erected during the 1990s, but Kareema is not alone in her assumption<sup>4</sup>.

Kareema’s landscape narrative supports many of the arguments discussed within the research literature, particularly those relating to memory. The canal was implicated in Kareema’s childhood games as a forbidden and confusing landscape, hence her vague recollections of the activity of the boats compared with her clear memories of hiding in the vegetation, playing hopscotch and other playground games in the evenings. Her memories of her childhood are based on the street where she grew up, her crowded home, her family and playing in the street

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<sup>4</sup> Another participant, Bob (aged 60) is a city planner who was involved in the regeneration of the area; *“the Malthouse Pub [...] was actually built in the early nineties, but it doesn’t look like it [...] I can show you a book that features [...] a photograph of this scene and it describes it as a pub built in the 1840s, so it’s even fooled people like that”*.

bordered by the canal and factory<sup>5</sup>. Although she visited the Broad Street area for its warehouses and utilities offices, she doesn't mention the canal in this location during her childhood because it did not fall within the scope of her experience until later. 'Kareema's canal' is not the canal at Brindleyplace, it is the canal at Smethwick with all the familial and childhood associations she has attached to it; more evidence of the power of landscape to evoke recollections and even 'transport' the individual to associated landscapes (Bender 1993)<sup>6</sup>. Brindleyplace only became a 'place' for Kareema at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ten years after its re-development. The area around this was a childhood place for her, linked to her family's errands, the simple functioning of all families, and this landscape identity extended into her young adulthood when she ate at a restaurant on Broad Street on a date. The difference between these two eras is the presence of the canal; in her early encounters with the area, the canal was inaccessible and fairly unobtrusive, certainly not the tourist and entertainment destination it was in her later encounters.

Kareema's sense of loss of the place she once knew "*how to get in to*" is apparent in her narrative relating to her recent visit, and although the re-development of the area enabled her to access the canal in Brindleyplace, she has lost the routes around the surrounding streets that figured so clearly in her memory. The 'presence of absences' Kareema perceived is evident in her search for proof that the Severn Trent Water offices were once located in the area, as though she doubted her own memory (Leger & Hoof 2005; Treib 2005). The ways we walk or forge routes also create routes around our memories of people and experiences, much like the Roman memory-house, so that in being unable to physically re-create her early routes around the area where she has placed her memories, Kareema may feel that

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<sup>5</sup> Another participant, Tazeem (aged 22), grew up adjacent to the canal in Winson Green, Birmingham. He also recalled childhood games located on the canal, such as "*treasure hunting [...] walking up and down with a shovel*", and he recalled using the canal as a teenager; "*we used to go there for fags*".

<sup>6</sup> Other participants, Luke (aged 19) and Tazeem (aged 22) have their own conceptions of 'their canal'. Both men have created 'place' around these canals, incorporating them into their lives and imbuing them with personal significance. For Luke, who is newly resident in Birmingham, his canal includes the route between his student residence on Curzon Street and Brindleyplace. For Tazeem, who grew up near a canal in Birmingham, but does not visit the city centre canals, his canal is at the end of his garden.

she has lost the ability to properly recall her parents as she remembers them from her childhood in that area (McGuffey 2007)<sup>7</sup>. Her dislike of the newer buildings is understandable as they represent the changes that have occurred in the area. When I asked what exactly Kareema disliked about the NIA building, she found it difficult to express her reasons, but emphatically reiterated her dislike – “*I detest it!*” Finally she decided that they were not in keeping with the area, so from an aesthetic perspective she sees an incongruity with the canal, but the canal in the area between the NIA and The Mailbox retains many of its original buildings, most of which are found in the Gas Street Basin area. Kareema focused on the Malthouse pub as the “*best*” representation of the canal landscape, but overlooked the older buildings around Gas Street Basin<sup>8</sup>.

My conversation with Kareema supports the notion of ‘locomotion-by-proxy’ in that as she talked she traced routes around her drawings with her fingers, narrating her ‘passage’ and recalling landscape components and events as she did so. In this way Kareema was able to imagine moving around the landscapes of her memory, her fingers acting as a proxy for her body, and the drawing a proxy for the landscape<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Luke’s narrative contains references to the notion of ‘making place’ whilst walking around the city, with the undiscovered city being “*a blank canvas*”; Luke was aware that as he walked around he was able to familiarize himself with his surroundings, appropriating spaces “*like a spider diagram with these different ways you remember a place and they link together and that’s how you make a map, yeah your own mental map*”.

<sup>8</sup> Both Luke and Tazeem also referred to the notion of memories in their narratives. Luke found that recent visits to the woods near his childhood home are disappointing; he noticed that they are not well maintained and he has “*decided they’re not as good any more*”. Tazeem referred to how his father started taking his family for walks along the canal because “*he loved water*”. He and his cousins still use canals “*because it was a family thing we used to go there, like a memory thing, so we still go to the canals*”.

<sup>9</sup> Luke (aged 19) also displayed ‘locomotion-by-proxy’; like Kareema he drew maps and traced walking routes around them with his fingers as he spoke. This behaviour has been observed throughout the wider research with diverse participants.

## Walking-and-Talking

Walk-and-Talk exercises were performed in the Brindleyplace area as in-situ mobile conversations between the researcher and participant in the canal landscape. The Walk-and-Talk method is similar to the Conversation method in that they are both negotiated, collaborative narrative techniques (Norrick 2007), equally influenced by the researcher and participant alike. The Walk-and-Talk differs in that it allows physical movement through the landscape to influence the shared narrative that is created – each individual responds to the landscape, to things they sense and recall, and they share their experiences and recollections with each other.

### Farzana's narrative

Farzana is a Somali Muslim woman in her late twenties. She was born in United Arab Emirates and moved to Birmingham, with her parents and siblings, in 2004. A mathematics graduate, she now works for a charity and in her spare time leads a Somali youth group called *The Guiding Stars*. Farzana spoke about the canal landscape in terms of its beauty, which was directly related to the presence of water and the combination of contemporary and older architecture, and how her understanding of the function of canals has changed during her time in the UK. As we walked Farzana recalled other landscapes and experiences, both places she was familiar with and those she could only imagine.

As we crossed the central bridge near Brindleyplace Farzana told me that she learnt English at the nearby language school and would come to Brindleyplace during her breaks or to walk into the city centre to catch her bus home. She was amused by her initial response to the landscape, before she learnt about the history of canals.

*"I came here my first week in UK, in the summer, beautiful, and it reminded me of Finessa [Venice], Italy. The same idea where people are living next to the canal, with the boats [...] it's not like Finessa of course, those boats are to be hired, not for transportation, it's for entertainment. So this doesn't remind me of Finessa anymore."*

As we walked along the towpath under the bridge Farzana was again reminded of Venice, although it became apparent that her association was not based on physical experience (Fig.7.4).

*“Back in UAE [United Arab Emirates]... This is how I always imagined Finessa [Venice] to be, with the bridges above the canal. I’ve never been there, but I’d like to [...] I dream about it, like when I read about it or hear about it...”*

*(“This is what you imagine?”)*

*“Yeah, this is Finessa”*

Farzana told me that she doesn’t visit the canal here because *“not so many Muslim people come here”* and I asked her why she thought that was the case;

*“Many bars and pubs, so it’s not a place that we would really come to. [Y]ou look at the place and there are so many bars and places selling alcohol”*

*(“Do you think it’s something that a Muslim person would think has no relevance to them?”)*

*“ Yeah, yeah. [...] I really wanted to rent an apartment here, but for this I was told not to...Although they are so beautiful and new and comfortable from inside, but I think for the same reason not so many Muslims live here. And use these facilities. But I’m not surprised about that because Small Heath canal, which is just behind the bridge that they use every single day for I don’t know how many years, they didn’t know that under it there is a canal. And that they can walk next to it. You know what, let me not say Muslims, let me say Somalis.”*

The canal at Brindleyplace was the *“first water”* Farzana saw in the UK. I asked her what her impressions of the water were at that time.

*“We always had the impression that waters in Europe are rivers, rivers are flow, beautiful, running in the greenery countryside, which I didn’t see here. And I didn’t know is not a river, is different. So I was wondering why it is not blue and there is no green at all? [...] Like this...is it running, and if it is running where does it come from and where is it going? [...] I was a person who came from a desert, never saw really water, running water”*

Later, Farzana took up the subject of water again, in particular the confusion that somebody would feel upon seeing a canal for the first time.

*“...for a person who doesn't know that it's a canal and locks and all the history behind it, you would wonder why they built this. Why would they separate those two buildings for example with green water?”*

*(“And before you knew about the history of canals what conclusion did you come to?”)*

*“Again that it was made as part of building the place...architecture. Accessory. It was a very common thing to do in UAE. Water was not available, so to show water and to put water is like really something great and beautiful. So all the public gardens or parks [...]they will make a lake or something, artificial one of course, to add beauty to the place.[...] Ma'a va khazra [an Arabic phrase] - water and green is beauty.”*

Farzana's expectations of water in Europe were confounded by the canal – she did not understand its function and when compared with her memories of the artificial, ornamental lakes of United Arab Emirates, she concluded that the canal was built as an ornamental water feature. As Farzana's experience of the canal at Brindleyplace was limited to the linear 'trench' running between the NIA and The Mailbox, her perception of the landscape was of just that – a strip of water separating the buildings to add interest to the city centre, i.e. the canal as a linear pond. At the time of Farzana's first encounters with the canal landscape, the 'canal-as-pond' offered enough appeal to encourage repeat visits. Farzana talks about the canal *“running”*, meaning that the water flows like a river, but this is most likely a response to the linearity of the canal, rather than the water which does not move except at the locks. Farzana explained that she learned about canals by reading a novel set on a narrow boat and her interest grew from there. As we walked past some geese paddling through the water, she was reminded that;

*“[...] of course it was also first time I see such birds here”*

*(“What kind of birds do they have in UAE?”)*

*“Not many and...not water birds. They have water birds in Egypt because they have the Nile, but they eat them there [...] and Egyptians who live in UAE used to go to Egypt to holiday and always used to bring them back.”*

Farzana's perception and appreciation of the water is strongly associated with her Muslim faith and as we walk her narrative is sprinkled with Arabic sayings relating to the importance of water. In a previous conversation Farzana spoke of a 'hadith', or saying of the Prophet Mohammed, that she recalled when she visited the canal. The hadith related to the universality of certain natural resources, namely that fire, water and grass for the animals is free and public.

*"Water, I love it, it's beautiful. [...] It's a gift from God. And we are blessed to have it. There is another saying that means from water we made every living thing. So look how these green things [algae] there's life living in it, I don't like it but it's life."*

As we walked through Broad Street Tunnel Farzana was distracted from our conversation about Islamic hadiths by the structure of the tunnel:

*"I just think, it is more than hundred years ago – how did they built it? [...] They are strong that I trust that even if a train goes over like the one in Small Heath, I can still stand under it. A train is going above your head!"*

*("Lots of people get under here and mention the echoes.")*

*"You are right - there is an echo. [...] Ok I'm so used to open spaces - I don't know why I didn't notice that."*

We walked along the wooden jetty where the narrow boats are moored in Gas Street basin and Farzana was delighted by the names and colours on the boats (Fig.7.5).

*"The colours... And they have names! [...] But you know the colours are not very British colours [...] yellow and green and red. This is more British for me [pointing at a dark blue and green boat]. And white [pointing at another]. Then blue, that's fine, but that's strange - the red and [...] it's more African. African flags and colours are always like yellowish, greenish, red."*

Standing on the small bridge over the Worcester Bar, we looked at the flat roof of the Canalside Café, which is used as a storage area but may have originally been used for pot plants (Fig.7.6).



*“It’s like a secret world. Secret garden – are they plants or only weeds? This look like plants but this looks like weeds.[...] We used to have our houses in UAE, this is the first time I see a roof which is flat, not pitched, because of the rain I think it has to be like this. But in UAE it was dry [...] and we used to sit there when the weather at night becomes a little bit cooler...with your neighbours.”*

Farzana’s recollections of other landscapes flowed easily throughout our walk, and she seemed to enjoy not only recalling them, but sharing her recollections with me. Only a few moments later the cobbled paving reminded her of Turkey (Fig.7.7).

*“I am not wearing the suitable shoes. Have you been to Turkey? The roads are all like this”*

Farzana’s narrative supports many of the theories discussed in the research literature, most notably those relating to memories of associated landscapes. Without the experience of growing up with canals, Farzana’s canal landscape identity was initially predicated on the experience of other familiar landscapes in United Arab Emirates where she grew up, particularly “*water places*”, however Farzana also associates the canal at Brindleyplace with her imagined ideal of Venice, which she has not visited (Bender 1993; Kuhn 2007; Tolia-Kelly 2004)<sup>10</sup>. The influence that growing up in a desert landscape has had on her perception of the canal landscape is evident in her appreciation for abundant water. The emphasis she places on ‘water’ rather than ‘the canal’ in her narrative suggests that Farzana regards this landscape in terms of its natural appeal, rather than the industrial associations that one who grew up with canals may cite. Indeed, the canal at Small Heath where she took her youth group for a visit with British Waterways staff was notable for its greenery above all else<sup>11</sup>.

Farzana’s perception of this landscape has evolved during the time she has lived in Birmingham, and now includes notions of heritage and life on boats, however, this new knowledge does not supersede her initial landscape identity based on

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<sup>10</sup> Two other participants, Hans (aged 27) and Bob (aged 60) perceive the canal very differently to Farzana. Hans recalled associated landscapes including the canal in Small Heath and parks in Germany (his home) as we walked. Bob did not recall any associated landscapes as we walked.

<sup>11</sup> Hans (aged 27) regards the water in terms of its usage. For example, in Germany Hans uses a dinghy; “*My dream would have been to come here with my dinghy in the evening [...] I was wondering why more people are not out on dinghy or something like that?*”

associations with other places; rather she has incorporated both identities into a single, nuanced landscape identity. Her current landscape identity retains the wonder and confusion of a newcomer, but overlays it with the acquired understanding Farzana has found in researching the history of the canals. In revisiting the canal and recalling her initial perceptions, Farzana remembered her original expectations and discoveries, noting how she had changed. The associations with other landscapes Farzana recalled as we walked around the site, combined with her recent memories of learning about canals suggest that the canal at Brindleyplace has become a 'memory place' for Farzana (McGuffrey 2007).

Farzana's Muslim faith and culture also influence her landscape perceptions, evident in her repetition of Islamic hadiths relating to water. The lack of belonging that Farzana feels in this landscape is not diminished by her appreciation for its beauty and public space. Farzana admits that her feelings of 'otherness' stem from the commonly-felt concern of not seeing those whom she resembles, i.e. other Muslims or Somalis (Isajiw 1993). Jacobs wrote that individuals are attracted by the sight of other people, but Farzana's narrative suggests that this idea may be revised to include the sight of others *like us* (Jacobs 1961)<sup>12</sup>. The abundant bars and restaurants, with their associated alcohol, were the main reason that Farzana and her new husband decided not to buy a canal-side apartment, despite her desire for a modern, well-located home. In choosing not to access the canal at Brindleyplace, Farzana perpetuates the "*loop of the performative*" whereby Somalis continue to avoid this area, because they historically have not accessed this area (Ahmed 2004:32). Farzana is "*[...] not surprised about that because Small Heath canal, which is just behind the bridge that they use every single day [...] they didn't know that under it there is a canal. And that they can walk next to it.*"

As we walked Farzana often interrupted our conversation in order to share an involuntary memory or sudden recollection, elicited by a bodily sensory perception

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<sup>12</sup> Hans (aged 27) does not visit the canal at Brindleyplace because he finds it "*artificial [like] living in a shopping mall [...] When I was a kid we used to go to a Disneyland type of park and [...] they try to imitate reality,...and now that I visit this place I have the feeling that I'm back there, it's like reality imitating the cliché*".

(Bales 2001; Jordan 2001)<sup>13</sup>. For example the sight and feel of the cobbled paving in Gas Street Basin caused her to recall an associated landscape; that of the cobbled streets of Turkey. Work with other participants has shown that involuntary memory is far more likely to occur whilst participants are moving through the landscape, as opposed to looking at pictures for instance, because these memories are triggered by a bodily sensory experience which allows for the congruence of past and present. Had we not been walking together in the landscape, Farzana would probably not have recalled the associated landscape of Turkey as she would not have felt the sensation of walking over cobbles.

## Reflexive exercises

Throughout the data acquisition phase (2007-2010) I found individuals to participate in a number of reflexive, auto-ethnographic exercises such as keeping 'canal diaries' or annotating their own photographic representations. Participants reflexively re-presented their experiences through words and pictures, but my influence in later reporting the narratives created also makes this process a collaborative one between participant and researcher (Pink 2009). My own early lone canal walks also form part of these reflexive exercises, from which I developed a method of analysis, highlighting themes, instances of sensory experience (five senses), plus the notions of memory ('I remember when...'), musing ('I wonder what...'), feeling ('I feel...'), and factual expression of actions, such as descriptions

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<sup>13</sup> Hans also displayed evidence of sudden recall elicited by bodily sensory experience, namely that of seeing a barbecue in the front yard of one of the apartment buildings we passed; "*You know I was really desperate nobody here is going into the park and having a camp fire or a barbecue in the park, which is something I really missed. I had a friend here from Berlin [...] and we went into her garden and just imagined that we were in a nice park with a lake. That's what I thought about when I saw that.*"

of routes (Appendix 1). This method of analysis produces a picture of individuals' processes of experience based on their bodily and cognitive senses together.

## Ian's narrative

In 2009 I asked for volunteers from the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society to participate in a pilot study by keeping a canal diary<sup>14</sup> for one month. Ian and his wife, Jane, split their year between living on their narrow boat and living in an apartment. Ian agreed to keep a diary for one month that charted his summer holiday from Staffordshire to Liverpool via Wales. His diary took the form of written daily entries which he emailed to me at the end of each week.

*"Interesting cruise towards Llangollen brings back many memories of waterways pleasures, some no longer there. At St. Martin's Bridge, there used to be the smell of fresh bread from the adjacent bakery, now a private house and in Whitehouses cutting, the smell of chocolate from the factory long since gone"*

Ian's narrative on this day is heavily influenced by the 'presence of absences' in the landscape, that is, the knowledge that some of the landscape components that were once present are no longer (Treib 2005; Wylie 2005). He focuses specifically on the smells of chocolate and bread which he remembers from the nearby factories, but that he can no longer experience when passing through the landscape. Ian describes these sensory experiences as "*pleasures*" and there is sadness at the loss of these landmarks which are now a "*private house*" and "*long since gone*".

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<sup>14</sup> The rationale of the canal diary method was to use reflexive written and visual representations to build a personal narrative of the canal landscape. In addition to factual information, participants were to record their thoughts and opinions, as any information helps to produce individual canal landscape identities, that is, the meaning participants attribute to the landscape and its relevance to their lives. Participants could choose to record during or after a canal visit, which would elicit different responses. Diaries could be kept as written notes, photos with notes, sketches, poems, videos and collected items from the canal landscape –the word 'diary' was used loosely as it was most important that participants used a method they were comfortable with.

*“Classic English rural scene from the canal bridge- A coppice, field with crops, cattle and sheep, the oddly assorted buildings of a farm, the river and a small village around its church. What could be better.”*

Ian emphasises certain landscape components which he feels create a “*Classic English rural scene*”, including fields and farm animals, a village and church, the river and some trees. Ian displays a strong canal-scape identity, based around heritage and function;

*“Funny being in a place like this, makes us feel that our boat is one of the attractions as visitors like to come and see the variety of boats there. I always say that a canal without boats is nothing, so perhaps they should pay us for being there.”*

In the Castlefields area of Manchester they moor at “*a popular area with pubs and restaurants near to the Science and Industry Museum [and] answer the usual questions.*” Ian understands why visitors are so interested in their boat, but his comment that they should be paid suggests unease relating to being watched. Ian’s final entry relates to his final destination at the Liverpool Docks and his emphatic language suggests that this is also the highlight of the journey and something he has been keenly anticipating:

*“A day to remember, one of the best waterways experiences. Taken down Stanley locks [...]and out into the wide expanse of Liverpool Docks. [...] We cruise through very choppy water [and] sight the Pier Head and we are nearly there! Then into Albert Dock, the finest example of dock architecture now regenerated [...] with magnificent views all round, excellent safe mooring but right in the middle of everything.”*

During the course of the journey, Ian passes through a variety of landscapes, from the pastoral idyll of the English countryside, through the post-industrial areas at the outskirts of cities, to regenerated urban waterside developments. Ian’s canal landscape identity changes as the journey progresses, so that some places elicit memories of previous visits and the days of his old “*haunts*”, while others leave him musing on the regeneration of an area and its future success. Although Ian clearly takes pleasure in the rural idyll he describes seeing in one entry, he also finds aesthetic pleasure in being in the busier urban regenerated canal landscape of

central Liverpool. In line with the literature, Ian describes the rural landscape in terms of viewing (della Dora 2008) and the urban ‘taskscape’ of Liverpool in terms of the activities that a visitor can undertake whilst there (Ingold 1993).

His good-natured comment that he feels like an “*attraction*” supports the idea that Ian has created an identity for himself as a custodian of the canal, but it also inverts the notion of the ‘gaze’ running through his narrative. Ian writes of views and scenes in many of his diary entries, and many of the couple’s favourite spots are predicated on the view available; in these entries Ian and Jane are the gazers, experiencing, appropriating and imbuing meaning in the landscape from the vantage point of the canal (della Dora 2008; Lucas 1992). That gaze becomes subverted when Ian and Jane become an attraction and the object of the ‘tourist gaze’, and again when their usual ‘mobile’ gaze becomes a ‘dwelling’ gaze as they walk around Stone as apartment residents rather than boaters after “*14 years living afloat*” (Jamal et al 2009; MacNaughton & Urry 1998; Ingold 1993; Wylie 2004).

Ian is aware of ‘the presence of absences’ in his disappointment that he can no longer smell the food smells he used to at certain places, but he also actively creates new memorable moments (Leger & Hoof 2005; Treib 2005; Wylie 2006). For example, at their final destination Ian emplaces a memory by writing “*A day to remember, one of the best waterways experiences*”, before detailing their passage through the Liverpool Docks. Ian’s use of photos to help him remember his journey is indicative of the notion that photography helps create memories (Thoma 2006; Tuan 1974; Treib 2008; Kuhn 2007). When I visited the couple on their boat some months after the journey I was shown a logbook full of photos and descriptions; an almost daily record of their experiences and a document in a state of constant flux and memory-making.

## Observations

The individual narratives explored in this chapter demonstrate the diversity of both the landscape and the people who use it; they show that the landscape is polysemic and multi-modal. For example, Farzana's narrative is based in her changing perceptions of the landscape and its comparisons with the associated landscapes she so evidently recalled as she walked. Her recollections were instigated by multi-modal stimuli, in the form of visual, aural, and tactile sensory experiences in the main, so that for Farzana memories of absent places are strongly implicated in the physical canal landscape, overlaid and entwined with the present in a confluence of time and place (Proust 1913).

Kareema's narrative derives from a seated Conversation undertaken after she walked the study site alone. Although both women visited the same area around Brindleyplace, Kareema's narrative is based on her changing perceptions of the area over forty years of intermittent usage. Her unease at the apparent loss of those places she remembered from childhood is evident throughout our dialogue, but the loss of the places themselves also represents the diminishing capacity to recall the memories Kareema has emplaced there, so that her memories of visiting nearby streets with her father are elicited by the absence of those places (Treib 2005). Unlike Farzana, Kareema's landscape identity in this area seems to be continually self-referencing, in the sense that she returns to familiar places without the desire to explore and create new meanings there.

Ian's narrative is self-reflexive, derived from his personal diary over a number of weeks of contact with the changing landscape. Each of the individuals discussed here enjoys the action of gazing at the landscape, but it is evident from Ian's narrative that 'views' are an important aspect of his mobile landscape perception (MacNaghton & Urry 1998). Like Kareema, Ian's perception of the canal landscape includes an appreciation of its heritage and the passage of time, yet like Farzana he is comfortable with its alterations and accepts the regeneration process.

As an example of Walking-and-Talking, Farzana's narrative demonstrates this technique's ability to elicit involuntary memories which are not as apparent during more conventional forms of interview. As an example of the Conversation technique, Kareema's narrative demonstrates this method's slightly less effective capacity for multi-modalism, however it is a strong example of this method's ability to elicit instances of locomotion-by-proxy, and the memory-recall that arises from this phenomenon, based on the drawings Kareema created and used during our dialogue. As an example of a self-reflexive exercise Ian's narrative effectively demonstrates the usefulness of this technique in capturing responses over a longer period of time than the relatively short timespans possible in the other forms of data acquisition. Although the approaches discussed in this chapter differ, they all encourage memory recall and multi-modalism to varying degrees.



## Group landscape narratives

The majority of the research focused on individuals' landscape identities as they unfolded through the use of Conversations, Walking-and-Talking, self-reflexive exercises and through the studies detailed in the previous chapters. The *Postcards from the Cut* study also focused on individuals' responses however, two group narratives were uncovered from the data. Two groups with distinct identities emerged, namely the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS) and Guiding Stars. Both are not-for-profit organisations based in the Birmingham area, but with differing remits and membership bases. The limitations of the *Postcards from the Cut* study necessitated dissemination and return of the postcards through contacts' networks. As earlier contact had been made, and subsequent relationships formed with leading representatives from each group, their assistance in this project resulted in a similar number of respondents from each group (31). The nature of these responses is analysed in this chapter.

### Image preferences

The relatively large number of responses from each group further directed the overall image preference to images 3 of Gas Street Basin (Fig.8.1) and 4 of Brindleyplace (Fig.8.2). Responses to the images suggest group trends in relation to preferences and common themes (Fig.8.3). The BCNS group comprised around one third of the total response in favour of image 3 of Gas Street Basin, and similarly individuals from the Guiding Stars group comprised around one third of the total response in favour of image 4 of Brindleyplace.

### Gender, age and ethnicity

The personal information obtained from the respondents resulted in some notable data relating to gender, age and ethnicity. A higher proportion of BCNS respondents

were male, and a higher proportion of Guiding Stars respondents were female (Fig.8.4). These figures support the wider gender trends observed in each group. From contact with both groups over a number of months it became apparent that the BCNS' active membership base comprised more males than females, whilst that of the Guiding Stars comprised more females than males. Image 3 of Gas Street Basin was the first choice for more male (11) BCNS members than female (8), but if the respondents who made multiple-image choices are included (all of whom chose image 3 plus one other image), then the numbers become more equally split between male and female responses, with males choosing image 3 on 13 occasions, and females on 11 occasions. Similarly, image 4 of Brindleyplace was fairly equally preferred by male (7) and female (8) Guiding Stars members. The results suggest that there is little difference between males' and females' preferences within either group.

The Guiding Stars respondents were generally younger than those from the BCNS, which may account for the higher return rate of age-information amongst that group. The Guiding Stars respondents ranged from 11 years old to 35 years old, with the majority of respondents (29/31) being 20 years of age or younger (17 of these were children aged 11 to 17). This group includes the youngest people who participated in this study. Image 4 of Brindleyplace was generally preferred by Guiding Stars respondents over the age of 16.

In contrast, the BCNS respondents did not always state their ages, but as around half of the respondents (17/31) did state their age, a common age-range can be estimated for the group. The recorded age-range ran from 20 to 73 years of age, with the majority (13/17) recording ages of 50 or older. Therefore the estimated general age-range of the BCNS respondents can be placed at 50-79, making them some of the oldest respondents in the postcards project. Image 3 of Gas Street Basin was generally preferred by BCNS respondents in their 50s, 60s and 70s. The youngest recorded BCNS respondent (20 years old) is an anomaly in this group and

her narrative supported this idea, as it focused on others' expectations of the age and outlook of the group's membership:

*“none [sic] boaters see boating as old fashioned and more for the older generation of people, they don't see nor understand that the canals are now very up to date, including pubs and clubs on the canal side”*

(BCNS member, White British female, aged 20)

Respondents were less likely to record their ethnicities and ages than their genders. As discussed in the methodology, respondents were given the opportunity to express their own idea of their ethnicity (Gauntlett & Holzworth 2006). All of the BCNS respondents who recorded their ethnicity wrote variations on *'White British'*, including *'White'*, *'English'*, *'British'* and *'White English'*. These descriptions mirror the exclusively White membership observed at meetings over a number of months and although no definite statistics can be drawn from this, the BCNS can be regarded as having a White British membership (by no means should this be regarded as intentional, merely interest-led). The BCNS can be regarded as a generally U.K.-born and U.K.-resident group. The respondents from the Guiding Stars group recorded more varied ethnicities, although the largest group were *"Somali"* (9/31). Some of the respondents chose broad descriptions such as *"African"*, *"Asian"* and *"Black"*, while others were more specific with *"Arab/Yemen"* and *"Mexican"*. Five respondents from this group included *"British"* either alone or with another descriptor such as *"British Bengali"*. Guiding Stars can be generally regarded as a post-migration multicultural 'Black and minority ethnic' group.

### Diversity of themes

The BCNS respondents who preferred image 3 of Gas Street Basin referred to its heritage value, that is, its historical relevance to the city of Birmingham as the *"heart of the old working canal system"*. The notion of the balance between *"old and new"* and the sensitive development of the area was also important, suggesting that the

BCNS generally perceive the canal landscape as an historical landscape with special local relevance, but that they are aware of the usefulness of its re-development:

*"Captures the best of the old and the new and reflects the wonderful efforts of Birmingham to open up the area... not so many years ago Gas Street Basin was a hidden world accessible to the public only through a little known "hole in the wall". Only a few of the last surviving boatmen lived on their boats there and in a way it was sad that the revival of the area displaced them. However, the regeneration has been a boon to modern day "pleasure" boaters and the general public alike, and has put Birmingham on the canal map, right at the centre where it belongs."*

(BCNS member, male)

When considering all of the memories relating to image 3 of Gas Street Basin it is evident that the majority belong to members of the BCNS, which is perhaps unsurprising given the common age-range (50-70 years of age) of the group's members. Other respondents offered memories in relation to this image, but those belonging to the BCNS tended to relate to the area's pre-development era, as opposed to the recent memories shared by other, generally younger, respondents. The BCNS respondents' memories relate to heritage, whilst the others' recent memories relate to experiences of the contemporary, post-development landscape.

The Guiding Stars respondents who chose Image 4 offered more diverse rationales than the BCNS, with the most popular themes focusing on the positive, aesthetic qualities of the view, the presence of greenery in the form of trees and the peaceful atmosphere elicited by the image. Few references were made to the heritage value, modernity and leisure opportunities of the area, suggesting that Guiding Stars members generally perceive the canal landscape as a pleasant, green haven within the city and an opportunity to access nature in the form of water and plants:

*“Nice trees and attractive to the eye cuz [sic] of bright colours,  
relaxing and nice scenery”*

(Guiding Stars member, Algerian male, aged 18)

When considering all of the memories relating to image 4 of Brindleyplace it is evident that they generally comprise recent memories of the post-development landscape and focus on the themes of leisure, cafe culture and summer-time. Instances of storytelling by the Guiding Stars group were low in relation to this image, however the single respondent from the group who shared a memory focused on recent experiences, focusing on the opportunity for relaxation that the area offers. This perception differs to the more commonly cited memory-themes from other respondents outside the Guiding Stars group who tended to focus on the leisure aspects of dining, drinking or strolling.

## Observations

The findings discussed in relation to the *Postcards from the Cut* study support the findings of the wider research. The two groups each display certain shared perceptions of the canal landscape which are evident in their individual responses (Plate 26). The Guiding Stars (GS) group favoured images of the canal which portrayed modernity, green space and the notion of beauty, with particular reference to water and the reflections therein. By contrast, the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society (BCNS) favoured images which portrayed a sense of the heritage the area offers, combined with its more recent usage as a commercial leisure area based on the activities associated with the local bars and restaurants. My contact with Farzana, a GS group leader, suggests that the associations of the Brindleyplace area with the consumption of alcohol would not encourage Muslim Somalis to visit the area, hence their focus on the beauty of image 4 and the potential for accessing

green space, as opposed to the wider responses to the same image which related to the potential for dining and relaxing at the bars and restaurants.

These findings support the notion that experience determines landscape perceptions. From the responses, the BCNS can be considered a UK-born and UK-resident group; they have shared values regarding heritage and regeneration of the canal landscape (Plate 27). By contrast, the GS can be considered a post-migration group, so that their experiences of British canals are different to those of the BCNS. The GS have different perceptions of the canal landscape which are drawn from other experiences, such as familiar 'water places' (Plate 28).

# Discussion

This chapter explores the research findings discussed in the rest of the thesis. Discussion focuses on general questions, such as ‘how do individuals perceive the canal landscape?’ and on dissecting notable findings, such as the evidence that the canal landscape is used as a “*repository of memory*” and that it possesses transformative properties which result in a confluence of time and place (Tuan 1974:97).

## What is the significance of the focus on the individual?

The focus of the research has been on how individuals perceive, construct meaning around, and express their perceptions of the urban canal landscape. This individualistic approach was determined early in the research process by virtue of the polysemic nature of the participants’ responses. For example, during the 2007 Sound Walk pilot study (Appendix 2), participants engaged in a group walk through the canal’s changing soundscape. Their responses suggested a trend for individual, rather than universal perceptions of the soundscape, which differed from both the digital sound recording and one another’s perceptions. For instance, where one participant focused on listening for birdsong, another focused on hearing the sounds of water. During the subsequent discussion session, participants recalled hearing different sounds and others not at all. In reality, many of these recollections were contrary to the evidence of these sounds’ presence on the recording. Some of the participants concluded that their differing perceptions were the result of their individual interests and experiences and the related literature discussed in Chapter Two supports the notion that perceptions are a personal, cognitive process based on experiences (Pink 2009). These results suggested that an individual focus would yield notable differences of landscape perception, as individuals exposed to the same landscape notice or experience different aspects of the landscape,

subsequently processing (understanding) those experiences according to their personal proclivities.

### What is the significance of the focus on narratives?

The research used a variety of methods for eliciting and recording participants' narratives, including written and spoken language, and visual representations in the form of drawings and photographs. The focus on narratives is an important aspect of the individualistic nature of the interventions; if individuals perceive the canal landscape differently it is only meaningful from the researcher's viewpoint if those perceptions can be shared and hopefully explained. Additionally, the related literature suggests that in expressing their perceptions, individuals actually complete their perceptions. Talking, for instance (although any form of expression is valid), enables the participant to reflect on their experiences - to 'name' something, gives that thing a meaning, an identity (Gray 2003). This notion is represented in my model, 'the reflexive cycle' (Fig.9.1). So narratives are both an expression of the individual's landscape perception and a performative, self-reflexive method, by which the individual dissects, completes and represents his or her own understanding. In this sense, the narrative focus of the research helps both create and record landscape perceptions.

My early lone walks, taken in various canal landscapes as a familiarisation technique, emphasised the problem of the lone walker's inability to immediately share thoughts and observations, necessitating the use of written notes or, less likely, talking aloud. The related literature and contact with participants demonstrated that people often feel compelled to share their narratives, particularly through the spoken word, as a way of representing themselves and their identities to others. By naming and calling out our experiences we call our thoughts into existence, re-affirming our own identities (Ingold 2010). The Walking-and-Talking method (participant and researcher talking together as they move through the landscape) and the Narrative Walking method (lone participant talking into a



recorder) used in the 2010 Sensory Walk (Chapter Six) developed out of the desire to voice thoughts.

### How is the landscape perceived?

The findings of this research, supported by the related literature, suggest that the landscape is not perceived in a common universal way, but rather in terms of multiplicities of meanings which are the result of multi-modal sensory experiences, often including memories (Pink 2009). This means that the canal landscape, as with any other landscape, is polysemic, meaning that different meanings are projected onto them by their inhabitants. The polysemic nature of the landscape is evidenced through the sheer volume of different meanings attributed to the landscape by different people; it follows that if landscapes were universally experienced and understood, then each of the participants would have expressed the same responses.

Commonalities do exist between participants' perceptions of the landscape, for example in the *Postcards from the Cut* study there was a common perception of the canal landscape in terms of its heritage value, most notably in participants over the age of 30 (Chapter Five). Although these commonalities are apparent when considering the wider trends in responses, the differences between responses become apparent when they are considered at an individual level. It is evident that although participants sometimes arrive at similar, general perceptions, their associations with the landscape are more complex and individual. For example, Kareema shared many of the feelings of dislike of the regenerated canal with many of the *Postcards* respondents and also with Hans, but crucially their reasons for this dislike differ (Chapter Seven). Hans disliked the regenerated Brindleyplace and Gas Street Basin areas because he viewed them as commercial pastiches, a sort of residential theme park. Hans felt these areas represented exclusion, in that accessing the landscape here for leisure and residential use implies a high level of financial status which is potentially exclusionary to many local residents. Kareema

disliked the same buildings because she felt they were incongruous with the visible heritage of the canal landscape. During her visit, Kareema did not recognise the landscapes of her past in the regenerated landscape; she has become displaced now that she cannot trace the routes of her childhood memories of the area.

What are the key methods by which individuals construct landscape meanings?

The research findings, supported by the literature, suggest that participants construct landscape meanings through a combination of physical experiences (sensory perception) and through cognition (understanding based on associations with previous experiences, or memories). Together these methods can be termed ‘multi-modal’ and neurological studies have found that multi-modalism is the norm, not the exception, in our experience of our surroundings (Pink 2009). So the whole body is implicated in the process of constructing meaning, including all the bodily senses plus the various aspects of cognition.

The 2007 Sound Walk (Appendix 2) and the 2010 Sensory Walk (Chapter Six) each demonstrated that individuals perceive the landscape using more than just their ocular sense i.e. sight. In each study the participants experienced difficulty in separating their sensory experiences. For instance, participants’ experiences of the water in the canal landscape often related to the senses of both sight and sound, but smell and touch were also implicated at different points.

It became evident early on in the research, and was subsequently reaffirmed through contact with participants, that sensory experiences may instigate the sudden recall of memories, generally of associated landscapes, so much so that memory can be considered “*a part of the landscape*” (Tolia-Kelly 2007:335). For example, for Farzana, walking across cobble stones in the Gas Street Basin area caused her to involuntarily recall the associated landscape of Turkey, where the paving is similar and where she had been on holiday (Chapter Seven). For Carlo,

the sight and sound of water moving through a lock caused him to recall a 'vision' of the seaside near his home in Italy (Chapter Six).

The findings have shown that sensory experiences have induced the recollection of involuntary memories, but some individuals also consciously emplace memories in the landscape for later retrieval during visits. For example, Nasreen talked about how she takes her visitors to the Brindleyplace area in order to tell them stories about the city and about herself (Chapter Six). In this way, the landscape in this area has become a "*repository of memory*" for Nasreen, which she visits in order to recollect and also share her memories (Tuan 1974:97). In the case of Nasreen, sensory stimuli in the form of the buildings she saw as she walked, provoked the recollection of the memories she associates with those buildings, but memory recall can also be instigated through an absence of sensory stimuli – the 'presence of absences' (Treib 2008). For example, Kareema was reminded of the places she visited as a child when she realised that they no longer exist in that location (Chapter Seven).

The research participants' narratives suggest that they consider the meanings they attribute to landscape to be the truth of that place. For example, many of the responses from the *Postcards* study referred to the 'true' meaning of the canal landscape or a 'real' representation of the city (Chapter Five). Farzana was unique in her understanding that as a first-time visitor to the canal landscape, hers was a different interpretation of the landscape, based on her understanding of water - places in other countries (Chapter Seven). Her subsequent reading caused her to change her original perception so that she now understands the 'true' meaning of the canals as historic transport routes, but she retains the memory of her original perceptions.

How do the meanings that participants create link to their identities?

Participants' narratives in the 2008 Representation Walk study suggest that individuals create personal identities around the landscapes they inhabit. The self-

reflexive methodology uncovered the types of landscape associations that individuals use to help construct their identities. For example, participants were asked to complete a sheet of sentences that began *“My name is...and I...”*. The first information participants tended to share was the town or country of their birth, suggesting that home landscapes are an important aspect of identity creation, as in *“My name is Luke and I am from High Wycombe”* (Chapter Four). A similar effect was observed in the responses to early exercises used in the 2010 Sensory Walk (Chapter Six), in which participants were asked to describe themselves. They did so in terms of their origins, placing themselves in a landscape as a way of representing themselves and acknowledging the effects of inhabiting a place, as in *“Born and lived Moseley for 25 years, an area of Birmingham which has left influences in my life”*. The meanings individuals attribute to the landscape both influence and are influenced by their associations with the landscape, even when the landscape is not one they are physically familiar with. For example, Shabana had never visited the canal at Brindleyplace before our visit together, but during her walk she recalled familiar landscapes of towns and cities in northern England. Graham found that he associated the same landscape with his childhood in London, and that recollection prompted him to recall his childhood activities and *“messaging about”*. Since landscape perceptions are founded in experiences and associations, it follows that individuals’ identities, which are also based on experiences and associations, are implicated in the landscape and the activities they engage in there (Gray 2003).

What is the significance of walking through the landscape as a method of experiencing?

The practice of walking was used throughout the research as a method of exposing participants to the landscape in order for them to experience sensory stimuli; sensing the landscape as a place in flux is more easily achieved whilst moving through it, as individuals perceive by contrasts (Leger & Van Hoof 2005). Through walking the body is able to physically engage with the landscape, sensing its

surroundings. The rhythmic action of walking enables the landscape to be experienced at a human pace, rather than at speed as it would be with mechanical or motorised transport. The repetitive action of placing one foot in front of another creates a rhythm which, in a more demanding environment would require concentration, but in the generally flat canal landscape was conducive to a loss of focus on the body's movements, allowing participants to fall into reverie that is conducive to the evocation of associations (Edensor 2010; Wylie 2005). For example, participants in the 2010 Sensory Walk found that during flat and fairly linear sections of the walking route, they were able to more easily forget their movements and focus on their perceptions of the landscape (Chapter Six).

Combining the experience of walking with the action of talking about that experience created a method for experiencing changing sensory stimuli and understanding it. The Walking-and-Talking technique developed out of the notion that sensing a place helps us 'make sense' of it (Feld 1996). Walking-and-Talking is a 'discursive' technique (Kuhn 2007) that highlights our desire to share our thoughts and recollections with others and can be linked with the notion that as we walk, we name our surroundings, as if calling them into existence and consequently reaffirming our own, since our ability to experience, and express that experience, helps construct meaning (Ingold 2010: Chatwin 1987). Talking during these interventions was unstructured, in the sense that it was intended that the dialogue would emanate naturally from the performance of walking in the landscape with a companion. The ease of conversation depends, like much of this research, on the relationship between participant and researcher. Some participants, such as Bob, approached the task with pre-conceived ideas of what they would discuss and treated the walk much as a tour leader would, pointing things out to me and recounting amusing or interesting anecdotes or facts. Other participants, such as Farzana and Hans, approached the task with more fluidity and allowed our conversation to develop naturally in response to our shared experiences of the landscape.

Participants' narratives from Walking-and-Talking in the landscape differ to the narratives they created during indoor Conversations. We have already discussed how in-situ physical movement through the landscape exposes participants to the fluxus of sensory stimuli, affording more opportunities for the recall of involuntary memories (those memories suddenly recalled via the 'trigger' of sensory stimuli). However, participants' narratives during indoor Conversations do not contain any notable occurrences of involuntary memories. Participants in ex-situ scenarios do recall memories, but they are generally related to the natural progression and subject of the dialogue and seemed more easily accessible by the participants, as though these are commonly-recalled memories or reminiscences. Tazeem's memories of playing by the canal as a child (Chapter Seven) are an example of the type of reminiscence observable in ex-situ dialogues, whereas the participant who suddenly recalled seaside piers whilst she was walking across a wooden bridge in the canal landscape is an example of the involuntary memories more commonly associated with in-situ dialogues (Appendix 2).

The use of participants' own 'memory maps' of the canal landscape during ex-situ Conversations uncovered a notable phenomenon, namely the notion of 'locomotion-by-proxy'. These quickly-drawn maps were employed to act as a conversational aid and a landscape 'proxy', as ex-situ Conversations were undertaken in a room at the university and not at the canal (Chapter Seven). By drawing their memories of the canal landscape and 'guiding' me round the drawings they made, participants performed a re-creation of the walk, albeit in the imagined landscape of their visualisations. The participants each traced routes around their maps with their fingers, recalling landscape components as they did so and often making additions to the map as a consequence; they were engaging in an imaginary journey around the landscapes, with their fingers acting as stand-ins for their own bodies.

Participants tended to narrate similar responses in these scenarios as those engaged in Walking-and-Talking, in the sense that they made observations about the things that could be seen from certain places for instance.

Throughout the research participants have reported having been reminded of other landscapes during their walks through the canal landscape and this phenomenon is also referred to in the literature (Chapter Two). In fact, in the majority of cases the memories participants shared within this study related to other landscapes. These other, or 'associated landscapes', have been elicited by various participants in different ways. For instance, through sensory stimuli resulting in sudden recollections or involuntary memories, as with Hans who recalled picnics in his favourite park in Germany after having seen an unlit barbecue in one of the canalside apartment's front yards (Chapter Seven); or they may be purposefully elicited by the individual who emplaces memories in the landscape in order to re-visit and recall them later, as with Nasreen who enjoys visiting Brindleyplace with visitors so that she can share her memories with them (Chapter Six); or they can be elicited in negation, the result of the individual's inability to find the (memory)places they are familiar with, as with Kareema's search for the canalside water utility office of her childhood in the 1960s (Chapter Seven).

In some instances participants have narrated such evocative landscape perceptions relating to associated landscapes as to suggest they are engaged in a 'memory loop'; a confluence of the past and present (and sometimes the future) in which the individual is momentarily caught in a self-reflexive cycle of remembering an absent landscape whilst experiencing the current landscape, so that the boundaries between both are blurred (Proust 1913) (Fig.9.2). The word 'loop' is actually deficient as a representation of this phenomenon, since the confluence of past and present is not necessarily cyclical. Kasim and Yasmina in particular displayed such momentary 'transformations' wherein they were effectively transported across time and space to the landscapes of Kashmir (Chapter Six).

Are some places more conducive to the evocation of memories than others?

The findings have demonstrated that individuals each experience and therefore perceive the landscape differently, and that although many participants share similar general perceptions of the canal landscape (relating to heritage or leisure for instance), their personal experiences of this and other landscapes result in different associations and memories linked to the sensory stimuli of the canal landscape. Evidence suggests that certain places in the Brindleyplace area are commonly linked with the expression of the evocation of memories. During the 2010 Sensory Walk it became evident that the Gas Street Basin area and the Cambrian Wharf/Farmer's Bridge locks area were eliciting more memories and landscape associations than any other places on the route (Chapter Six). A similar effect was observed in the *Postcards* study, in which the images of Gas Street Basin and the central bridge at Brindleyplace elicited far more memory-based responses than any other image on the postcard (Chapter Five).

The reasons for the concentration of emplaced memories and involuntary memories at these 'memory hotspots' is unclear, but one hypothesis is the idea that as a high - traffic, 'destination' area which has undergone regeneration, Gas Street Basin possesses the potential for attracting more visitors to emplace memories there, however, this does not explain the high number of instances of memory-recall at the Cambrian Wharf/Farmer's Bridge area, which is less well-known. Another hypothesis is the notion that water is particularly conducive to the emplacement of memories. Participants throughout the research have been drawn to the water to the extent that they dislike leaving the sight of it when directed to (Chapter Six). Water in the canal landscape is a popular attraction and there are high instances of memory recall within the sight of water. These two 'memory hotspots' are based around the two basins in the immediate area - large bodies of water which are redolent of lakes and as Farzana and Nasreen suggested, the potential for life.



Despite the concentration of memories at these sites, the memories participants recalled differed according to their personal identities. For instance, the same sensory stimuli trigger different memories in individuals, so that for Farzana the sight of the coloured boats in Gas Street Basin caused her to recall familiar African boats (Chapter Seven), whereas the same boats caused Graham to recall his own boat, and by association, a specific instance of boating with his daughter (Chapter Six).

What is the effect of participants' expectations on their perceptions of the canal landscape?

Evidence from the research suggests that individuals hope to re-experience the things in the landscape they have already experienced or expect to find based on their prior knowledge of the landscape or similar landscapes. When participants' expectations are not met, they are forced to self-reflexively re-evaluate their preconceptions, with differing results. For instance, Kasim had not visited the canal landscape in Birmingham prior to the 2010 Sensory Walk and his expectations of the canal were founded in his experience of living near the Upper Jelum Canal in Pakistan. Kasim was disappointed by the canal in Birmingham as it did not correspond with his memories of Pakistan; an 'expectation-experience dichotomy'. This resulted in an extended instance of transformation for Kasim, whereby he walked alongside the canal in Birmingham, but narrated his passage around his familiar canal in Pakistan (Chapter Six). By contrast, a participant who lived near the rural canal in Welshpool expected to be able to replicate her experience of nature in abundance in the form of extensive greenery and birdsong (Appendix 2). Upon experiencing the canal landscape in Birmingham, she was disappointed that it did not meet her expectations; she subsequently re-constructed her memory of the Sound Walk as a "*dead*" landscape, despite evidence to the contrary on the sound recording.

For each of these individuals, the 'expectation-experience dichotomy' resulted in entirely different perceptions of the urban canal-scape. Kasim's extended period of transformation allowed him to re-visit a fond and familiar landscape and his final perception of Birmingham's canal-scape was a positive one, re-constructed into a memory-place layered with associations with home. The other participant's experience re-affirmed her connection with the rural canal at Welshpool and she perceived Birmingham's relatively fewer 'natural' sounds as a complete lack of the sounds associated with nature, so that her re-construction of the urban canal-scape was a negative one of a landscape devoid of life.

Participants' expectations have led to their absence from the urban canal-scape. For example, the phenomenon dubbed 'my canal' leads participants to create strong affiliations to certain sites, so that they are unwilling to experience other sites or different activities within their familiar sites. On a number of occasions I approached groups with a view to undertaking walking-and-talking or representation-making exercises in the Brindleyplace area, but was told that this area did not constitute their idea of a 'proper' canal, or that such activities were not what they normally engaged in. Some groups happily allowed me to act as a participant-observer during their usual activities at familiar locations (Titford Pools in Oldbury, or the canal at Tipton in the Black Country). In the case of Kareema and Tazeem who engaged in ex-situ Conversations, when asked to draw what they recalled of the urban canal-scape they actually drew 'their' canals, that is, the canals they used as children and which ran past their gardens.

In the case of 'performative loops', individuals perpetuate their own absence from a landscape which they deem unsuitable or not aimed at them or people like them (Ahmed 2004). For example, Farzana actively avoids Brindleyplace because she does not feel welcome there, despite the evidence that she has emplaced memories there, as discussed earlier. Her avoidance even extends to not buying an apartment there, although she would like to live near the canal. Farzana said that as a Somali Muslim, she feels her identity is at odds with the emphasis on alcohol in the bars and restaurants in the area, consequently she does not see other Somali

Muslims there. Through her absence, Farzana helps perpetuate the 'loop' that discourages Somali Muslims from accessing the canal-scape (Chapter Seven). It was anticipated that the Walking-and-Talking methodology would challenge this behaviour by helping to create new interactions with the landscape, however, as we have discussed, participants respond to this challenge in different ways.

Are certain landscape components considered more iconic than others?

Certain visual components within the urban canal-scape were commonly highlighted by the respondents in the *Postcards from the Cut study* (Chapter Five). These included images of water, which was the most commonly cited, followed by narrow boats and bridges or tunnels, and these common components are generally supported in the narratives taken from the wider research. The scenario of the *Postcards* study was complicated by the knowledge of the respondents' residency in Birmingham. As residents, respondents may have wanted to portray a positive representation of their city and for some respondents this caused a dichotomy; they personally preferred one image, but chose another as the best representation of the area. The instruction on the postcard was carefully worded not to suggest who the recipient might be, other than "*someone who's never visited*". Some respondents created an imagined narrative around the postcard by assuming a recipient (for instance one individual chose an American pen friend) and making image choices either on the basis that the recipient will be visiting or that the postcard should be sent to encourage a visit. In such cases, the image chosen was generally done so for the inclusion of certain visual components; components which then become the iconic images of the canal landscape for both the respondent and the (imaginary) recipient. Some respondents' narratives were purely personal recollections of their own experiences of using the canal landscape, generally for leisure purposes, with outdoor dining during the summer months being a popular memory. This suggests that in addition to iconic visual components, there are common themes of interaction- leisure and the pleasure of a beautiful scene being particularly important.

There is some evidence to suggest that there are certain commonalities of perceptions surrounding the canal landscape. Some participants' narratives included perceptions redolent of the picturesque tradition of landscape painting and design. For example, participants in the 2008 Representation Walk commonly referred to the canal landscape in Brindleyplace as "*picturesque*" or "*classic canal*" and chose to represent the landscape in the same style, that is, older buildings seen from an elevated viewpoint, with partially hidden views (views through vegetation or through tunnels) (Chapter Four). Some *Postcards* respondents also favoured images that evoked an urban picturesque and spoke of these images as "*ideal*" or "*idyllic*" canal landscape, while other *Postcards* respondents did not perceive the canal landscape in terms of its picturesque qualities, but saw beauty in its modernity and the presence of water and greenery (Chapter Five).

# Conclusions

The research contributes to the discussions relating to landscape and memory studies, supported by the findings. For example, the research reiterates the importance of multi-modal perception in the construction of landscape meanings or identities, which combines all the senses and cognition in the form of memories. Memory is the store-house of the sum of our experience, continually shaped and re-constructed through new information, the passage of time and changing opinions. As such it is insecure, but the only reference tool we have of our pasts. It is through memory that we are able to attribute meaning to any landscapes, since those meanings are drawn from our experience of places in general. Experiences of landscapes in their broadest sense, that is, the environments we inhabit and pass through, are crucial to the formation of memories as our memories are always emplaced. The research also supports the use of narratives as a method for understanding the construction of narratives in a diverse society. If narrative i.e. if storytelling is the main way we organise information and our feelings about ourselves, then this research is really an exploration of the stories that exist in a diverse society, how they are formed and maintained and the role of landscape in those stories.

The research demonstrates the polysemic nature of the canal-scape through a series of ethnographic case studies derived from individual narratives. These narratives highlight the differences between individuals' landscape perceptions and the importance of experiential determinants, i.e. experience shapes perception, and generalisations relating to group identities may not acknowledge the complexities of the individuals therein. Research participants have variously perceived the canal-scape as: an urban oasis; a place to escape from everyday concerns; a place to re-connect with their pasts or to be reminded of other fond landscapes; an example of good urban design; an example of exclusionary urban design; a place to connect with industrial heritage; a landscape ideal for spending leisure time; a place of quintessential British-ness; a beautiful part of the city; a surprising aspect of an

industrial city; a water-place; a place to enjoy boats and boating; a continental place; an alternative commuter route; an example of inner-city living; a place for tourism; a place to celebrate in; a place to avoid. The responses to the canal-scape in central Birmingham are predicated in individuals' construction of meanings and identities, so that categorisations according to commonly-used determinants such as gender, age or ethnicity are generally meaningless.

It is difficult and contrary to the aims of this research to define the identity of the regenerated urban canal-scape, because it is a polysemic landscape, that is, it means different things to different people, based on the sum of their experiences and identities. Despite the differences between individuals' perceptions of the canal-scape there exist certain general commonly-held perceptions of the canal-scape, in the sense that many of the participants have commented along similar themes. The presence of water is a particularly important aspect of the canal-scape for the majority of users, but for differing reasons. Participants have variously commented on the life-giving properties of water; on their pleasure at seeing the reflections therein, its movements and sounds; on the compelling idea that it is part of a network, but is man-made; on their interest in the idea that it was once used for transport; on their pleasure at seeing the canal furniture in use, as with boats moving through locks; and on their pleasure at the possibility of travelling on it. Similarly, participants have responded positively to the general sight of greenery and the general notion of relaxation and leisure-time activities.

Some common, general landscape perceptions were observed within groups, for example with the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society members' appreciation of heritage in the canal-scape (buildings, furniture and notions of history) and the Guiding Stars members' appreciation of nature and modernity (greenery, water, buildings) however, narratives suggest that, at an individual level, individuals within groups create personal landscape narratives determined by their unique experiences. In other words, although participants sometimes hold similar, general perceptions of the canal-scape, their associations with the landscape are more complex and personal. For example, both Kareema and Hans disliked the buildings

of the regenerated canal-scape, as did many of the respondents in the *Postcards from the Cut* study, but their reasons differed. Kareema thought the modernity of the buildings did not reflect the heritage of the location; Hans felt the same buildings were commercial pastiches which represented economic exclusion; *Postcards* respondents variously found the buildings characterless, too dominant, or at odds with the notion of escape from the city.

Many of the narratives collected fall outside the regenerated canal-scape's popular image of industrial heritage and restaurant-based leisure (including ideas relating to nature and green-space, the enjoyment of water, modernity, relaxation and escape). For example, whilst some of the *Postcards* respondents favoured images that evoked a notion of the industrial, urban picturesque or recalled fond experiences of dining by the canal side, other respondents saw beauty in its modernity and the presence of water and greenery, or liked to think of the canal-scape in terms of the potential it offers for escaping the city, as a remedy for the behaviour and activity instigated by the city on an everyday basis.

## Evaluation of methods

Further research would enable the testing and honing of techniques, however this research study enabled the development of the following useable 'narrative' methods, designed to acknowledge multi-modalism and the expression of individual identities through the elicitation of personal landscape perceptions. Any of the methods developed for this research could be applied to numerous situations and agencies, for example in consultation with residents and visitors relating to proposed regeneration plans in order to understand what people feel about a place and why.

## Sound Walking

The Sound Walking methodology developed from existing literature on the subject, but was modified in reference to the literature relating to sensory perception, in particular the evidence that multi-modal perceptions are the rule and not the exception. For example, the methodology allowed the group of participants to walk through the landscape as they would in any other group context, that is, not in blindfolded silence (as the established sound walking literature suggests), but with the potential for conversing, and with their eyes open and all their senses able to perceive. In this way the Sound Walk methodology allows for multi-modal perception and acknowledges the presence and effect of the participants' moving bodies in the landscape, so that rather than merely perceiving and recording the soundscape, the sound walking participants become active contributors to the soundscape. The results suggested that multi-modal perception is unavoidable and the recall of memories and associations with other landscapes was worth further investigation.

The pilot study was vital in developing the later studies and the focus on multi-modalism, but it did have some limitations. For example, the walk was recorded by a single microphone and although the recorded range was fairly wide, some speech and other sounds were obscured at times by more dominant sounds such as wind and moving water. Participants may also have been unwilling to make certain responses in a group context, suggesting that if done again, at least one stage of the study would need to be performed on an individual basis to give participants an opportunity to express individual opinions or share personal stories. The Sound Walk demonstrated that sound is an important aspect of individuals' perceptions of their surroundings, and that further interventions in the canal-scape could be arranged to enhance the existing soundscape or introduce new sounds.



## Walking-and-Talking

The research enabled the refinement of the Walking-and-Talking method, whereby the participant and researcher engage in a collaborative walking conversational-interview in which sensory stimuli from the landscape, and each other's responses, help the conversation develop. This method further supported the notion that perception is multi-modal and provided more evidence of memory recall based on sensory stimuli. Further research is required to determine the reasons for the effectiveness of the method, but emergent findings suggest reasons include;

- 1) that walking allows the individual to become aware of all physical senses (in the tradition of the Western five-sense sensorium);
- 2) that talking allows the person to express their perceptions, completing them in the act of narration;
- 3) that walking exposes us to changing stimuli that are conducive to memory recall;
- 4) that talking helps the individual attribute meaning through the act of naming and calling the landscape into existence as a method of appropriation;
- 5) that walking allows the body to enter a eurhythmic state that is conducive to a state of reverie and the loss of focus on the passage of time, which is conducive to memory recall.

The limitations of this method relate to its conversational foundation: a successful interview, i.e. one which yields insightful narrative, is dependent on the creation of a rapport between the interviewer and the participant which may be difficult to achieve; and individual interviews are very time consuming as they require a slow-paced walk around the study site with only one participant, which may represent a great deal of organisation across a large number of participants. It is a semi-structured, collaborative endeavour, so the researcher's role as participant-observer could be considered a drawback if the research depended on the primacy of the participant's voice. In the context of this research, the researcher's role is a valid example of the types of interaction an individual may have with another in a similar walking situation.

As a phenomenological interview method this works well at exposing people to a landscape and its inherent sensory stimuli and recording their responses to it. It is a mobile technique which produces a narrative in flux, creating new experiences for the perceiving participant and researcher alike, so that any narrative created is situated in that space and time. A potential future development would be to re-visit the landscape with participants at intervals to track how their perceptions and memories change over time.

## Narrative Walking

The research also enabled development of the Narrative Walking technique used in the final 2010 Sensory Walk study. Narrative Walking, in which the participant walks alone in the landscape whilst narrating their passage into a sound recorder, elicited the narration of multi-modalism (a combination of sensory experiences and cognitive perceptions, that is, memories and musings). The Narrative Walking methodology developed out of a need to allow participants to experience and express their perceptions of the landscape, but without the negotiated, collaborative aspect of the Walking-and-Talking method or the potentially limiting group context of Sound Walking. The method allowed participants to make individual, self-reflexive recordings in the form of a mobile monologue or diary, and the participants reported that they became so focused on narrating their experiences that they forgot they were using recorders. As with the previous method, further research is required to determine the reason for the success of this method, but emergent findings suggest;

- 1) talking to oneself enables greater self-reflexivity (as with a personal diary for example);
- 2) a freedom to narrate without the inherent constraints of the negotiated conversation, that is, without the need to manipulate conversation, consider another's viewpoint or feel the need to emulate another's opinions;

- 3) the Narrative Walking participant is able to focus on their own landscape perceptions.

At times the participants' reveries were interrupted by the need to check their maps as they were walking a pre-determined route, suggesting that in future supplying participants with a map for their peace of mind, but allowing them to wander freely within a set time may increase their feelings of absorption.

## Research Postcards

The research postcards were, although a remote method for eliciting landscape responses, no less performative and successful for a number of reasons. For example, the postcards were by far the most popular of the methods I developed for the research, largely owing to the familiarity of choosing and sending a holiday postcard. Respondents shared their narratives, demonstrated diversity of perception, mused and recalled memories as they did in response to the other methods. The results suggested that individuals respond not only to the visual aesthetic of an image, but to their personal associations and memories instigated through viewing it.

The limitations of the postcards were chiefly logistical, relating to their dissemination and return, but by taking a network-based approach the postcards reached a wider audience of city residents than I envisaged. Some of the responses included disappointment at the content of the images and for example suggested other views available that included the aspects they most associate with the canal-scape. This made their responses and the method no less valid, but it would be interesting to attempt a similar investigation using respondents' own photographs.

# Contributions to knowledge

The research contributes to knowledge in the discussions surrounding landscape theory and memory studies:

- in providing new and useable methodologies for eliciting landscape narratives in both in-situ and ex-situ scenarios;
- in demonstrating the polysemic nature of the canal-scape;
- in highlighting congruencies and divergences in individuals' landscape perceptions;
- and in demonstrating new models and phenomena relating to the construction of meaning.

The research enabled certain phenomena to be uncovered and new models relating to the construction of meaning to be developed. For example, '**memory-hotspots**' are places where individuals either commonly emplace memories for later retrieval of which commonly elicit instances of involuntary or sudden memory recall. The research findings suggest that in the case of the urban canal-scape of central Birmingham, Gas Street Basin, the Cambrian Wharf/Farmer's Bridge area and the central bridge area of Brindleyplace can all be considered 'memory-hotspots'.

The '**reflexive cycle**' is a model which represents the action participants undertook whilst constructing meaning in the landscape and was referred to in the methodological process;

Reflection  $\Rightarrow$  experience  $\Rightarrow$  reflection  $\Rightarrow$  expression  $\Rightarrow$

Participants first reflected on their existing landscape perceptions before experiencing the landscape during a visit. They then reflected on their experience and expectations, before representing their re-constructed landscape perceptions, either through language or visual media.

The '**memory loop**' is a similar model which represents the self-reflexive re-construction of memories, acknowledging the literature and research findings suggesting that past and present can combine via a sensory trigger; a confluence of time and space represented as:

Recollection  $\Rightarrow$  (re)experience  $\Rightarrow$  re-construction  $\Rightarrow$  expression  $\Rightarrow$

For example, a sensory trigger causes the individual to recollect a past experience, resulting in a form of (re)experience, this causes the individual to reflect on the memory and to re-construct their perception of the present or past in relation to this memory. In the case of locomotive-narrative methods, this results in the expression of the memory and its sensory trigger as the individual is compelled to narrate its occurrence.

The concept of '**locomotion-by-proxy**' was observed in participants engaged in ex-situ, indoor conversational interviews, whereby participants had been asked to draw a quick sketch of the canal-scape from memory. Individuals used their fingers to 'walk' around the map whilst describing it, even narrating their imagined passage through the landscape, and making observations relating to views and associations similar to those observed during in-situ walking interviews with other participants.

The '**expectation-experience dichotomy**' describes the phenomenon whereby individuals possess preconceptions relating to the landscape which they expect to be confirmed upon visiting. Where those expectations are not met during a visit or experience, individuals are forced to re-construct their landscape perceptions based on their new experience. The findings suggest that individuals approach this re-construction with differing results, for example, one participant who superimposed his memories of a fond, familiar landscape over the urban canal-scape re-constructed his perception of the canal-scape to include his expectations. Another participant who, despite evidence to the contrary, did not hear any sounds in

support of her expectation of canals as natural, rural landscapes, was unable to perceive any experiences which did not support her (unmet) expectations.

**‘Transformations’** describe the phenomenon of feeling ‘transported’ to a familiar, but absent landscape and were observed in the narratives of a number of participants. In such cases the participants moved through the urban canal-scape, but narrated their ‘passage’ through the imagined, remembered, absent landscape.

The **‘my canal’** phenomenon describes the observation that individuals are sometimes reluctant to consider the canal-scape in unfamiliar terms, so that the canal-scape becomes an immutable, unchanging landscape that does not invite interpretation, but merely ‘is’. Evidence of this can be found in the various groups and individuals who declined to participate because they *“do not visit canals”*, and also in the narratives of participants who refer to the *“true”* meaning of the canal-scape, suggesting that their own perception is the only perception.

## Implications for future research

The research was focused on the urban canal-scape in the West Midlands as part of the remit of the collaborative funding partnership of Birmingham City University, the Arts and Humanities Research Council and British Waterways, however the findings suggest that the methodologies developed during the course of the study may be applied in a number of other situations and within a variety of professional fields. For example, it would be interesting to progress research relating to the link between narrative walking and feelings of well-being away from the canal-scape. Further research would help determine if the reported ‘therapeutic’ benefits are felt in different contexts, for example an inner-city neighbourhood and high street, or if the specific stimuli of the canal-scape are key to these feelings. In working with a specific local community group the method could be tested regarding its feasibility for use as part of a structured well-being programme, i.e. whether or not the

participants would feel comfortable sharing the narratives they produce, how narratives would be presented, and the logistics of the group context.

Narrative walking could also be further explored by extending the mobile aspect to include other forms of transport, to create mobile narratives of individuals' commutes to and from work for instance. By extending the scenario away from the reverie created through walking, the links between rhythm and memory recall could be investigated, as could the potential therapeutic benefits of different types of travel. Links could be made with transport-related agencies such as public transport organisations, city councils or sustainability groups, with analysis of the narratives focused on moving perceptions of landscape, selfhood and mood.

The notion of the recall of associated landscapes was an early and profound result of interactions with participants. It would be interesting to explore specific instances of the phenomenon, perhaps with migrant residents, to create a layered perception of a specific UK landscape, not necessarily the canal-scape, perhaps including an element of visual representation such as a website of illustrated narratives, an exhibition or publication. Also, the phenomenon of 'locomotion-by-proxy' was a small but significant observation during in-door interviews where participants drew maps. Further exploration of this could be achieved through incorporating indoor interviews and map drawing into other research.

The use of research postcards yielded 160 responses over a two-month study period and subsequent conference presentations courted positive reactions and interest from my peers, suggesting that the method could be used successfully in a similar way to elicit landscape perceptions from large numbers of respondents. It was clear from the responses that some individuals found the images on the postcard under-representative of their favourite aspects of the canal-scape, so that for example, as part of an investigation of city residents' perceptions, residents could be asked to submit their own annotated photographs in an 'open response'.

The research findings suggest that within a diverse society any interventions that acknowledge the multiplicities of meaning converging on the canal-scape would be recommended. From encounters with participants it seems that individuals expect different experiences from the canal-scape which could be emphasised, including an urban oasis (nature, tranquillity, a slower pace), leisure (opportunity for different activities and attractions), visible heritage (information relating to canal usage and architecture), less commercialism or less emphasis on drinking-related commercialism (more family orientated, less alcohol, less dependence on consumerism), a more varied experience (aspects of all of the above), or a more public space (Brindleyplace is privately owned and highly controlled through the use of security guards and CCTV).

Importantly, canal-scapes are highly supportive environments, in that individuals may project any personal meaning or method of interaction onto them. Evidence of this can be seen in the various groups and agencies that use the canal-scape at different locations to suit their own needs. For example, the Heartlands Ring Project (Birmingham City Council) uses the urban canal-scape to encourage local enterprises; the Guiding Stars used the canal at Small Heath to encourage feelings of ownership and local pride in post-migration Somali children; the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society uses the canal at Oldbury/Smethwick to reaffirm the canal's heritage through its website and workshops, but also to keep it navigable for boat users; and Aston University use the canal at Aston/Digbeth for well-being enhancing walks. The crucial aspect of the canal's nature as a supportive environment is that individuals need to feel welcome in the canal-scape in order for these interactions to occur, as with Farzana who talked about how the Somali community have lived alongside their local canal for years, but did not visit it until British Waterways and the Heartlands Ring Project invited them to it. In light of these findings, any interventions or schemes that enhance users' enjoyment or interaction with the water in the urban canal-scape, enhance the opportunities for seeing greenery or provide additional scope for (non-alcohol related) leisure activities are recommended. Additional work may be required to emphasise the



‘open invitation’ to the canal-scape with under-represented communities and age-groups, perhaps including a series of focus groups or narrative walking studies with targeted groups.

## Plate 1 The central Birmingham canal-scape

**Fig. 1.1 The fountain in Brindleyplace's Central Square.**

Brindleyplace sits adjacent to the BCN Mainline canal in central Birmingham. It is a mixed-use development based around a number of squares and includes office buildings, restaurants and bars, and visitor attractions including the Ikon Gallery and the Sea Life Centre. This image shows the water feature, surrounded by office buildings in various architectural styles. The canal is not visible to pedestrians from this square.



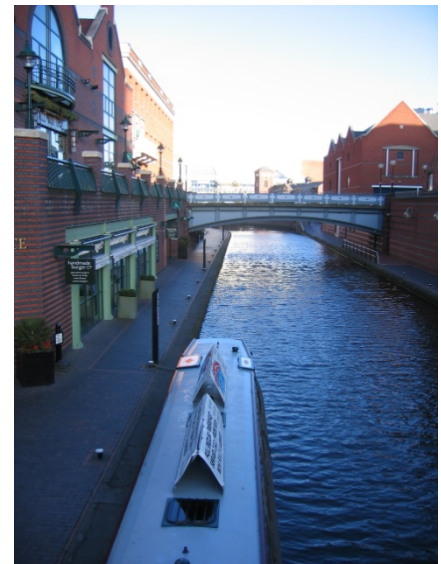
**Fig. 1.2 The Water's Edge.**

This is an area of bars and restaurants set around a small square, with steps leading to a bridge across the canal and steps down to the canal towpath.

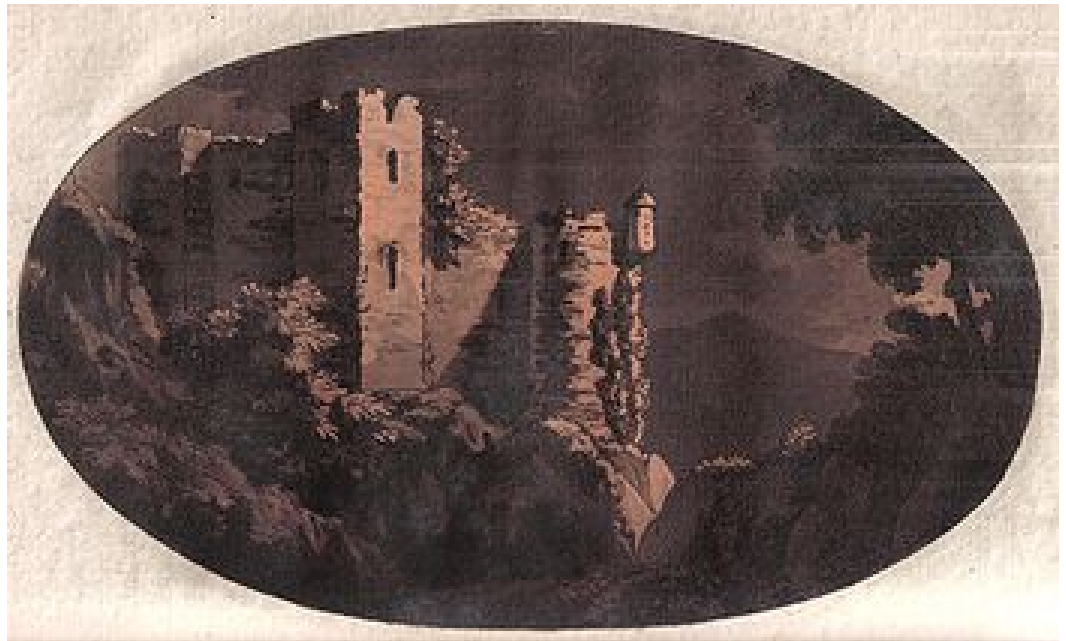


**Fig. 1.3 The canal as seen from the central bridge.**

Brindleyplace is located above and to the left of this view. To the right of this view is the International Convention Centre and the attractions of central Birmingham. Although Brindleyplace is the name given to the regenerated complex of businesses and visitor attractions shown in the images above, participants in this study have tended to refer to the canal and towpaths that run past Brindleyplace by the same name, suggesting that the canal in this section and the adjacent squares are perceived as part of a whole.



**Plate 2 Examples of picturesque art**



**Fig. 2.1 'Penrith Castle'** by William Gilpin, 1772 (Gilpin 1772: 85)



**Fig. 2.2 'Furness Abbey'** by William Gilpin, 1772 (Gilpin, 1772:165)

**Fig. 3.1 Network of contacts and participants.** The diagram represents the network of contacts and participants amassed during the research, and their relationships.

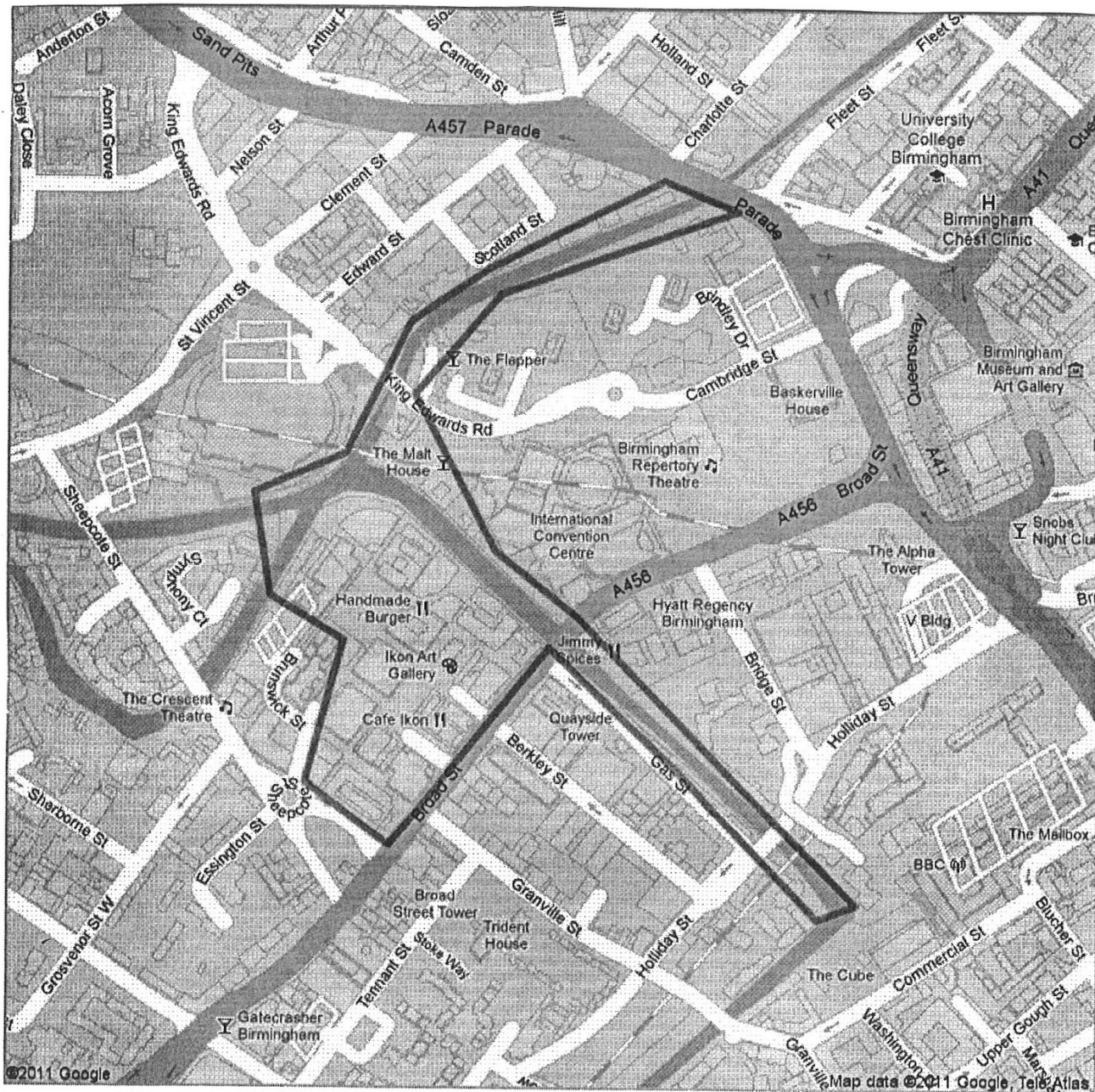
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graph TD
    BPGM[Birmingham Photographic Grid members] --- GL1[Group Leaders]
    BPGM --- BPG[Birmingham Photographic Grid]
    GL1 --- GL2[The Guiding Stars]
    GL1 --- GL3[The Guiding Stars members]
    BPG --- LI[Landscaper Interpreter Red Kite Environment]
    LI --- PM[Project Manager Stourport Forward]
    LI --- CM[Committee Member Stourport Civic Society]
    LI --- FFC1[Family, friends and colleagues]
    LI --- UDC[Urban Designer Birmingham City Council]
    FFC1 --- ZKM[ZKM]
    FFC1 --- FFC2[Family, friends and colleagues]
    UDC --- ZKM
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**Fig. 3.2 The Birmingham study site**

The area demarcated by the line represents the general study area focusing on the central canal in Birmingham.



**Fig.3.3 Projects and their participants.**

Various participants were involved throughout the research period 2007-2010. Some studies were undertaken with student participants and enabled testing of the methodologies and subsequent development. Some studies involved relatively small numbers of participants, while the *Postcards from the Cut* project was the largest study with 160 remote respondents.

Project / study	Data collected	Methodological typologies / theoretical frameworks	Participants	Location	Year of study
Pilot study: Sound walk	A group walking narrative, sound recordings and written notes.	Performative and phenomenological (process of group walk and focus on sensory perception)	Students of BIAD's <sup>1</sup> Landscape Architecture BA	BIAD and the canal-scape between Brindleyplace and the Jewellery Quarter	2007
Representation walk	Individual narratives from visual representations and written notes.	Performative and phenomenological (process of group walk and focus on sensory perception), auto-ethnographic (production of individual responses)	Year one students of BIAD's Landscape Architecture BA	BIAD and the canal-scape bounded by Brindleyplace, International Convention Centre, the Mailbox and National Indoor Arena.	2008
<i>Postcards from the Cut</i> project	Individual narratives and landscape preferences in the form of anonymous comments written on postcards.	Performative (the activity of completing and returning) and auto-ethnographic (individual narratives)	Individuals from various organisations / locations in Birmingham including: BCNS <sup>2</sup> ; The Guiding Stars; Birmingham City University; British Waterways; residential canalside apartment buildings; family, colleagues and friends of my own contacts.	Remote / various locations	2010

<sup>1</sup> BIAD Birmingham Institute of Art & Design

<sup>2</sup> BCNS Birmingham Canal Navigations Society

Sensory walk	Individual walking narratives, self-recorded verbal commentaries and initial written responses.	Performative (the process of talking and recording), phenomeno-logical (walking and focus on sensory perception) and auto-ethnographic (personal narratives)	Various staff and students from Birmingham City University plus their friends – all responded to a call for participants.	BIAD and the canal-scape between Brindleyplace, Farmer's Bridge Locks and Gas Street Basin.	2010
Conversations	Interviews with individuals; sound recorded and transcribed.	Performative (process of talking), participant-observation (collaboration in producing a narrative)	Selected BIAD students; regeneration staff from Birmingham City Council and British Waterways; artists in Coventry and Stourport; leader of Stourport Civic Society and manager of Stourport Forward.	Various locations including BIAD, participants' homes and workplaces.	2007-2010
Walking-and-Talking	Walking interviews with individuals; sound recorded and transcribed.	Performative (the process), phenomeno-logical (walking) and participant-observation (collaboration in producing the narrative)	Individuals from the following organisations: Stourport Civic Society; Stourport Forward; British Waterways; Coventry Canal Society; The Guiding Stars; Birmingham City Council.	Brindleyplace (Birmingham); Stourport-on-Severn; Coventry Canal Basin and Trail; Fradley Junction (Lichfield).	2007-2010
Canal diary	Individual written responses to a 4-week long narrow boat journey with some imagery.	Auto-ethnographic (individual narrative)	A retired couple from BCNS.	Remote study – participants emailed their responses to me.	2009
Photographic responses	Written responses to individuals' own photographs (produced for an external project) of the canal-scape in Birmingham.	Auto-ethnographic (individual visual responses)	Individual members of Birmingham Photographic Grid Project.	Remote study – participants emailed their responses to me.	2009

Aston Well-being Walk	Individual walking narratives and self-reflexive narrative.	Performative and phenomeno-logical (process of walking with group) and self-reflexive participant-observation(recording my own impressions)	Around 20 members of staff from Aston University	Canal-scape between Aston and Digbeth (B'ham).	2010
BCNS Work-Day Party	Individual and self-reflexive narratives from a boating and canal clean-up day.	Performative and phenomeno-logical (process of working in group) and self-reflexive participant-observation(recording my own impressions)	Around 6 members of BCNS.	Canal in the Smethwick / Oldbury area of the Black Country.	2009
Tipton Civic Society Heritage Walk	Individual and self-reflexive walking narratives.	Performative and phenomeno-logical (process of walking with group) and self-reflexive participant-observation(recording my own impressions)	Around 25 members of Tipton Civic Society and members of the public.	Canal-scape around Tipton in the Black Country.	2009

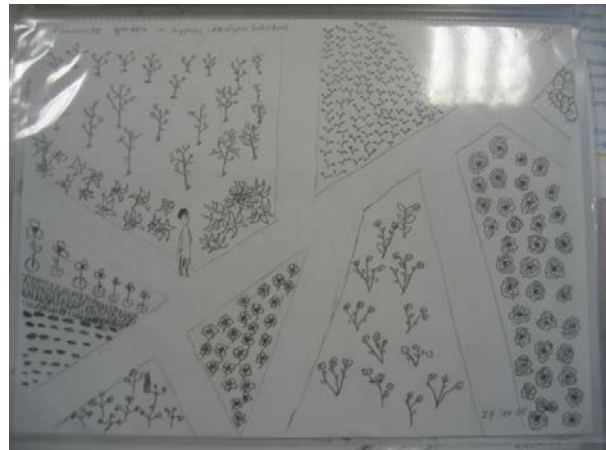


### Plate 3 Participants' responses to the self-reflexive 'Ideal Landscape' exercise.

**Fig. 4.1 Simon's 'Ideal Landscape'.** Each of the idealised images participants produced in this exercise feature rural or garden landscapes. Simon clearly states that this landscape is an *"imaginary place"*, his ideal of the landscaped outdoors.



**Fig. 4.2 Christos' 'Ideal Landscape'.** This image shows the participant's favourite public garden in Cyprus. Like the others, Christos has included a self-representation in the image, making it clear that he visualises himself there.

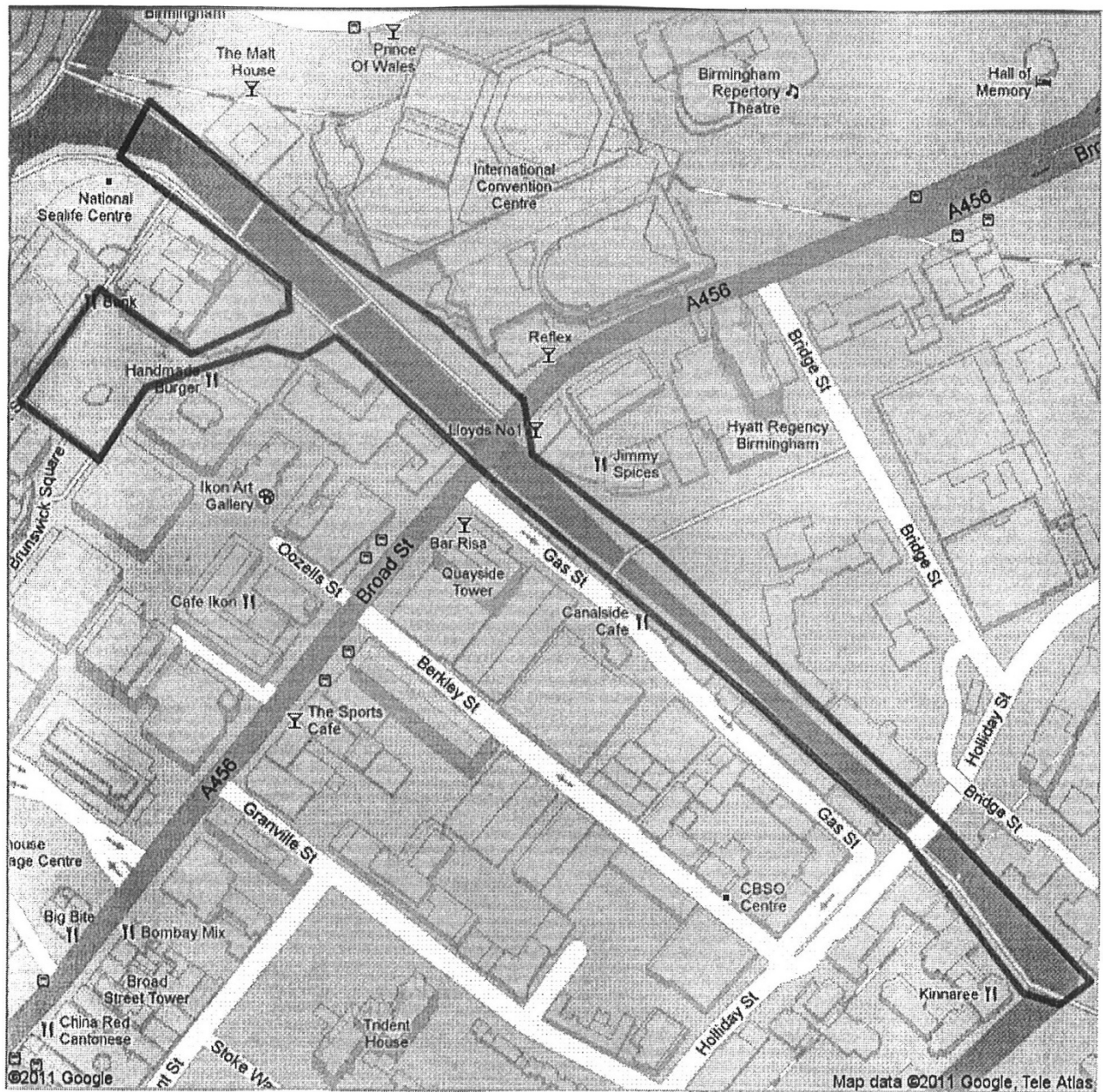


**Fig. 4.3 Tazeem's 'Ideal Landscape'.** This image shows one of Tazeem's favourite places in Saudi Arabia. Many of the participants produced images of fond places, such as holiday destinations or favourite places in their hometowns.



**Fig. 4.4 Representation Walk area**

During the first half of the visit participants walked around the area demarcated by the line as familiarisation. During the second half participants were free to explore the site.



## Plate 4 Gas Street Basin – opportunities for changing viewpoints

**Fig. 4.5 Gas Street Basin viewed from the bridge over the Worcester Bar.** There are a number of opportunities for changing viewpoint in this area. This viewpoint demonstrates the size of the Basin and juxtaposes the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century buildings with the modern ones surrounding. The tunnel runs under Broad Street, linking this area with Brindleyplace.



**Fig. 4.6 Moored boats seen from the wooden walkway.** Narrow boats moor on both sides of the wooden walkway that runs part-way across the Basin. Visitors are able to cross the water here and access towpaths on each side of the water.



**Fig. 4.7 A view across the Basin.** This view can be seen from the towpath that runs around the curve of the Basin. The view emphasises the fact that the canal-scape is located within the city, with the younger and larger buildings of the surrounding streets dwarfing the canal buildings.





## Plate 5 Behaviour in the canal-scape

**Fig. 4.8 The Water's Edge.** This area includes bars and restaurants set around a small square overlooking the canal. Participants entered the square and moved to its perimeter in order to stand next to the railings and look over and down towards the water. They displayed similar behaviour on all bridges.



**Fig. 4.9 The Mailbox bridge.** This bridge accessed via a ramp is located at the far end of Gas Street Basin and enables visitors to access the Basin (and Brindleyplace) from the Mailbox and Cube developments. Without being directed to, participants walked up the ramp and onto the bridge, rather than staying on the towpath which turns to the right at this point.

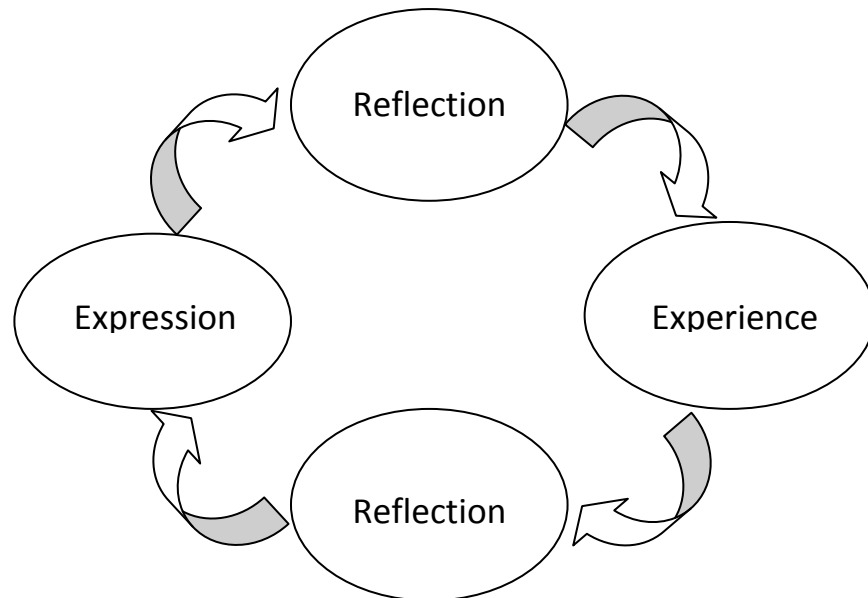


**Fig. 4.10 Narrow towpath.** This narrow towpath adjacent to Brindleyplace caused participants to walk quickly and in single-file. They did not want to stop in the narrower places in the canal-scape, and if they did, they stood to one side.



**Fig.4.11 The Reflexive Cycle.**

This model represents the process of experiencing the landscape. Participants reflect on their perception of the landscape (their expectations), then physically experience the landscape during a visit. The physical experience of the landscape causes participants to reflect again, re-constructing their original perceptions according to their physical experience. Participants then express their perception through language or visual media, causing new reflections. Thus the cycle is repeated, enabling continued reflection and re-experience through memory. Findings suggest that the cycle is repeated with each new experience.





## Plate 6 Christos' individual landscape identity.

Christos' responses highlighted the differences between Brindleyplace and his home landscape of Cyprus, a landscape

*"encompassed by the blue sea...with sandy beaches, by forest mountains, by the voice of birds, by wild vegetation and dry landscapes".*

Nature is a key aspect of Christos's landscape identity and his narrative and visual representations are dominated by green space. His 'Ideal Landscape' sketch portrayed Christos walking through some public gardens in Cyprus with footpaths, flowers and cacti (Fig.4.2). The focus in his representations of the canal landscape is on greenery and the opportunities for social interaction. He was one of the few participants to include people in his representations. The social aspects of the area remind him of other landscapes;

*"the bridges, the restaurants [...].conjures up memories of the past from my recent visit at Venice".*

The buildings, boats and expanse of water in Gas Street Basin may conjure associations with industrial heritage and boating life for some people, but for Christos

*"there is no green and the water is dull and completely polluted [which] produces negative feelings.[...] Unsafe and unsheltered"*

Christos re-presented the towpath at Brindleyplace (Fig. 4.12) and Gas Street Basin (Fig. 4.13) as green and social spaces by overlaying photos with tracing paper upon which he added trees, benches and planting in bold colours. For Christos the urban canal landscape was an oasis in the city, a green space that offered opportunities for social interaction. Where these things did not exist, Christos re-imagined the landscape to include the components he favours most.



Fig. 4.12 The towpath near Brindleyplace



Fig. 4.13 The towpath in Gas Street Basin

## Plate 7 Peter's individual landscape identity.

Peter's response focused on a rationalised comparison between Brindleyplace and the Norfolk Broads where he spent many childhood holidays. Brindleyplace was

*"accessible [with] artificial changes in level [but an] enclosed area with few views [and the] contact with nature – minimal".*

Whereas the Norfolk Broads had

*"natural changes in level [with opportunities for] relaxing, sailing, eating camping, lots of views and scenery [with] miles and miles of broads and areas to explore. Contact with nature – abundant".*

Peter referred to his favourite canal-scape at South Walsham Broad, citing the potential for picnics and boat mooring. He makes a distinction between the two places' relative soundscapes – in Norfolk he heard boats, wind and animals and crucially *"not all the traffic noise you would hear in central Birmingham"*.

Photographs of the Norfolk Broads (Fig. 4.14) and Brindleyplace (Fig. 4.15) overlaid with tracing paper emphasise what he felt were the most iconic components i.e. those relating to nature and heritage. At Brindleyplace he reiterated the majority of the visible components, but made the modern buildings less prominent (Fig. 4.15). At Norfolk he reiterated only the components that supported his perception of the place as a natural landscape, such as the trees, grass, water and path, but ignored the modern boat and signage board clearly depicted there.

At Brindleyplace

*"the trees help you feel you are no longer in the busy hustle and bustle of Birmingham",*

Peter's rationalisation is based on ideas relating to heritage and nature. In both images he removes components which he feels do not support this perception of the canal-scape, and reiterates those components that do by tracing over them in felt-tip. In Brindleyplace the narrow boats are deemed important, but in Norfolk the modern power-boat is deemed unimportant.



Fig. 4.14 Peter's perception of the Norfolk Broads highlights 'natural' aspects

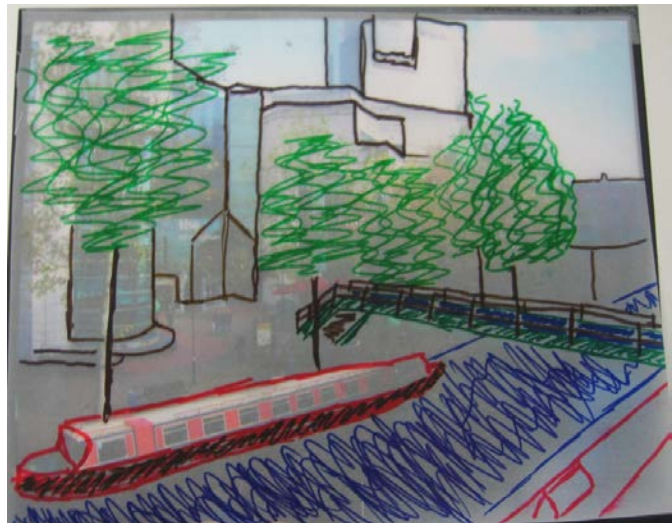


Fig. 4.15 Peter's perception of Brindleyplace focuses on the 'natural' elements, whilst the narrow boat and bridge are iconic canal components.



**Fig. 4.16 Commonality of the narrative themes (language-based) within participants' responses**

REFUGE / ESCAPE III  
**SOCIAL / INTERACTION / WATCHING PEOPLE VII**  
FAMILIAR III  
**COMFORTABLE / RELAXED V**  
**GREENSPACE / NATURE VI**  
**SAFETY / DANGER / DARKNESS VI**  
CONTINENTAL II  
TRANQUIL / PEACE II  
COMMUNITY I  
ARTIFICIAL I  
VIEWS / PICTURESQUE IV  
INFORMATION I  
**BUILDINGS VIII**  
LANDMARKS I  
BRIDGES III  
DESIGN / GENIUS LOCI III  
**JOURNEYS / ROUTES V**  
**NIGHT-LIFE / BUZZING / RESTAURANTS / BARS V**  
CONTRAST OF OLD AND NEW I  
HERITAGE / INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE / HISTORY OF CANALS IV  
WATER / FOUNTAINS II  
POLLUTION / CLEANLINESS / MAINTENANCE III  
SEATING III  
INVITING / WARM III  
ACCESS POINTS I  
**BOATS V**  
**CHILDHOOD / CHILDHOOD HOLIDAYS V**  
GRAFFITI I  
**OTHER CANALS VII**  
SQUARES IV

\*themes with 5 or more instances in bold

**Fig. 4.17 Commonality of the narrative themes (visual) within the participants' responses**

REFUGE / ESCAPE  
 FAMILIAR  
 COMFORTABLE / RELAXED  
 CONTINENTAL  
 TRANQUIL / PEACE  
 COMMUNITY  
 ARTIFICIAL  
 INFORMATION  
 LANDMARKS  
 DESIGN / GENIUS LOCI  
 CONTRAST OF OLD AND NEW  
 HERITAGE / INDUSTRIAL HERITAGE / HISTORY OF CANALS  
 POLLUTION / CLEANLINESS / MAINTENANCE  
 INVITING / WARM  
 ACCESS POINTS  
 CHILDHOOD / CHILDHOOD HOLIDAYS  
 GRAFFITI  
 SQUARES  
**BUILDINGS V**  
 VIEWS / PICTURESQUE I  
 SOCIAL / INTERACTION / PEOPLE (the overt presence of people) III  
**GREENSPACE (including trees, flowers, gardens) XII**  
 SAFETY / DANGER / DARKNESS I  
**BRIDGES / TUNNELS VIII**  
 JOURNEYS / ROUTES I  
 NIGHT-LIFE / BUZZING / RESTAURANTS / BARS II  
**SEATING V**  
**WATER / FOUNTAINS VI**  
**BOATS V**  
**OTHER CANALS V**  
 STREET FURNITURE II  
**PAVING / BRICKWORK VI**  
**LEVELS V**  
 ART III

**Commonality of the visual themes (by viewpoint)**

FROM HIGH PLACES / BRIDGES IV  
 FROM GROUND - ALONG IV  
 FROM GROUND – UPWARDS I  
 COMBINATION V  
 VIEWS ALONG VII  
 VIEWS ACROSS I  
 COMBINATION V  
**ALONG BRIDGES III**  
 THROUGH TUNNELS VII  
 AERIAL VIEWS VII  
 FROM SEATING I  
 ANGLED VIII  
 REFLECTIONS I  
 FOREGROUNDED VEGETATION VIII  
 MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVE I  
**UNDER BRIDGES I**  
 PRESENCE OF SELF IN 'IDEAL LANDSCAPE' IV  
**LOOKING AT FLOOR III**

\*themes with 5 or more instances in bold

## Plate 8 Viewpoints in participants' responses

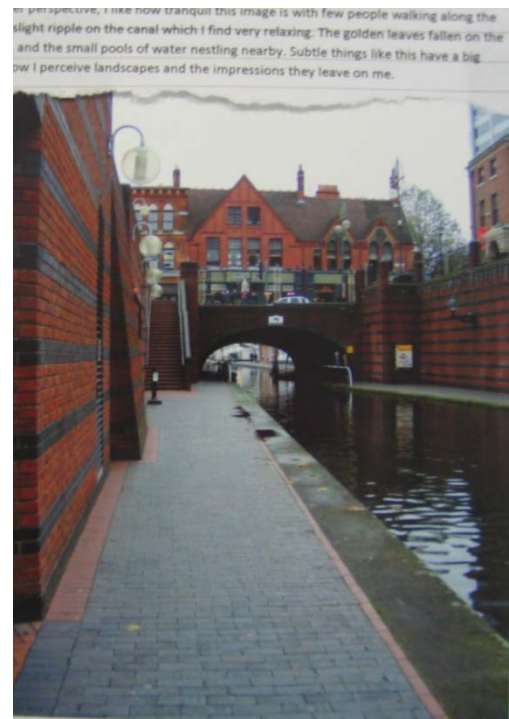
**Fig. 4.18 A view from an elevated position**

Christos' sketch of the central bridge at Brindleyplace is drawn from a position above the bridge, standing next to a restaurant at The Water's Edge. Participants commonly represented the canal-scape from elevated positions.



**Fig.4.19 A view along the towpath**

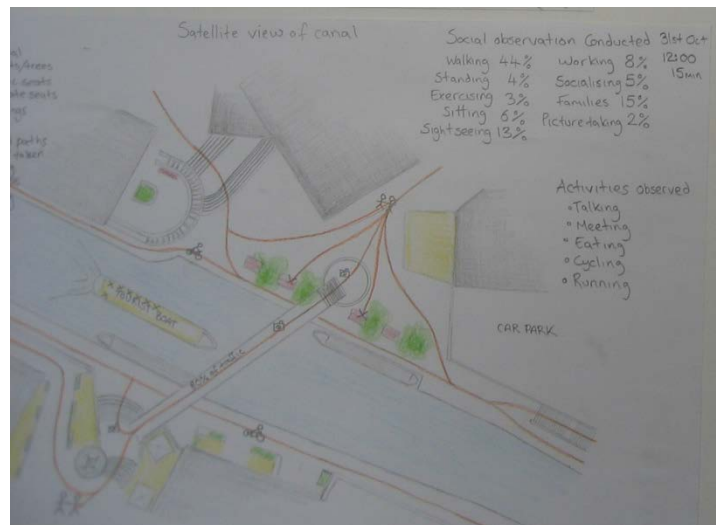
Adrian's photograph of the towpath near Brindleyplace is an example of the trend for representing the linearity of the towpaths as views along their length.



## Plate 9 Aerial views of the canal-scape

**Fig. 4.20 Aerial view**

Simon's aerial view of the site includes his walking routes. Participants commonly included maps and site plans in their representations.



**Fig. 4.21 Map view**

Tom's cut-out map is a stylised version of the site plans many participants included. Tom's map is on a smaller scale than most participants' maps, and he has included a sense of the canal extending beyond the study area they visited during the walk.



## Plate 10 Representations of tunnels

**Fig. 4.22 Phoebe's tunnel.**

Participants tended to represent tunnels from a viewpoint which allowed them to depict the water running through. Phoebe refers to the Broad Street tunnel seen from Gas Street Basin as "*the deep end*".



**Fig. 4.23 Simon's tunnel.**

Simon's representation of the same tunnel was made from within the tunnel, and incorporates the bridge and trees near Brindleyplace.



**Fig. 4.24 Adrian's tunnel**

Adrian's representation of the Broad Street tunnel is viewed from the Brindleyplace side, with Gas Street basin visible in the half-circle of light at the end.





## Plate 11 Views foregrounded with vegetation

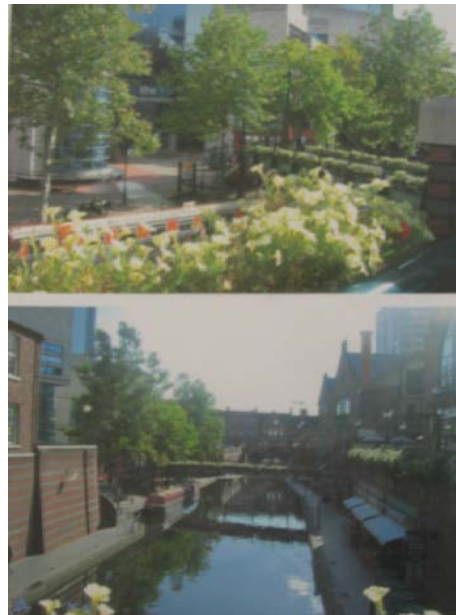
**Fig. 4.25 Phil's view of the central bridge.**

Phil chose to photograph the central bridge at Brindleyplace through the frame of the flowers on the nearby railings. This is a common feature in picturesque paintings.



**Fig. 4.26 Claire's use of vegetation.**

Claire pasted these two views of the central bridge next to each other in her portfolio. In the lower image, rather than avoiding the flowers totally, she decided to capture a few of the flowers to allow space for the buildings and trees further along the canal.



**Fig. 4.27 Christos' use of vegetation.**

Christos photographed flowers on a bridge through a frame of flowers on an adjacent railing.



## Plate 12 The use of colour in sketches

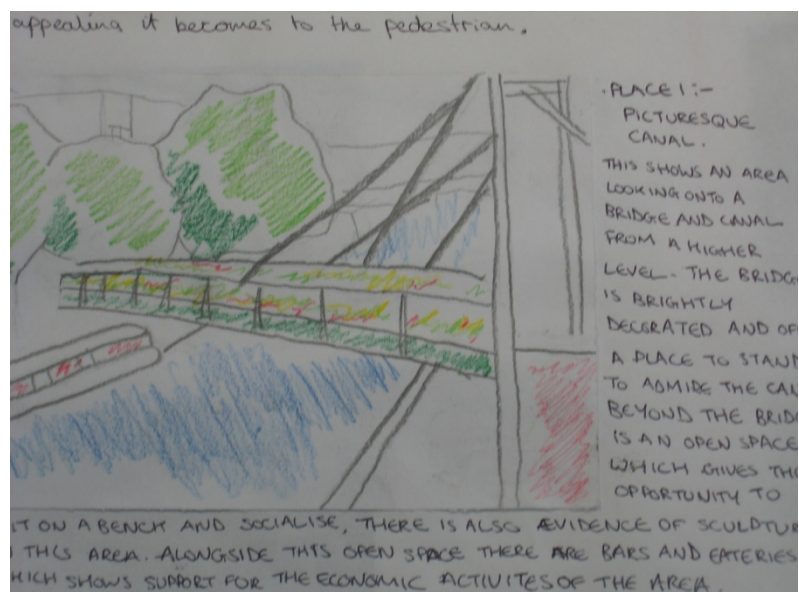
**Fig. 4.28 Phil's sketch**

Like many participants, Phil used stylised colouring when representing the canal-scape. The use of block colours with no tonal differences was common.



**Fig. 4.29 Barney's sketch.**

Many participants used blue to colour the water in sketches of the canal, despite their inclusion of photographs showing the water as black or brown.



## Plate 13 Claire's representations

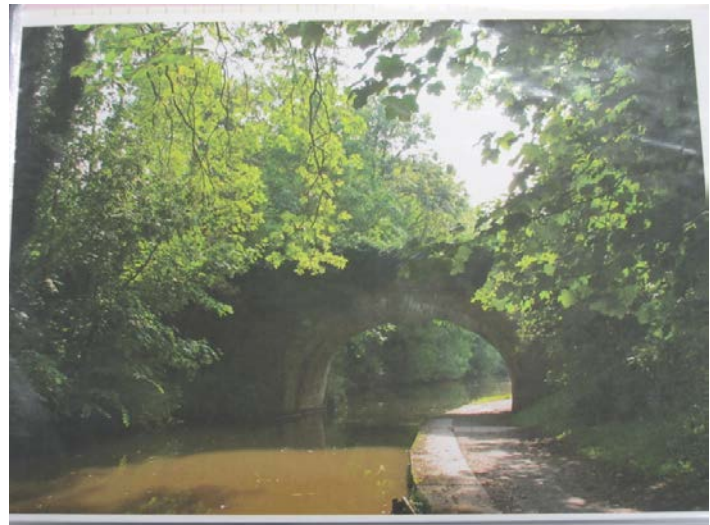
**Fig. 4.30 Architectural images**

Claire grew up in a northern canal town and is interested in the architecture of Brindleyplace. She focused on representations of buildings and structures, and actually included very few images of the canal at the study site.



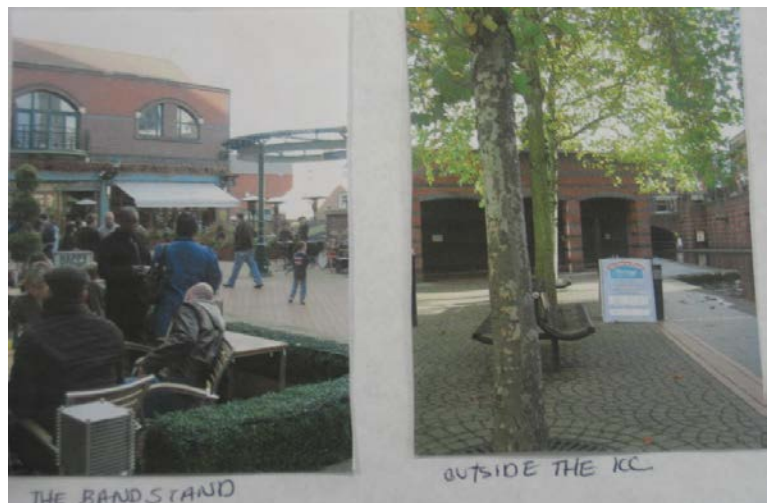
**Fig. 4.31 Claire's local canal.**

Claire included very few images of the canal at Brindleyplace, but made comparisons between that and her local canal near Lancaster. Claire likes her local canal for the evidence of its industrial past.



**Fig. 4.32 Social spaces**

Claire was one of the few participants who depicted people in her representations. In the right hand image she depicted evidence of visitors in the seating and in the board advertising boat trips.

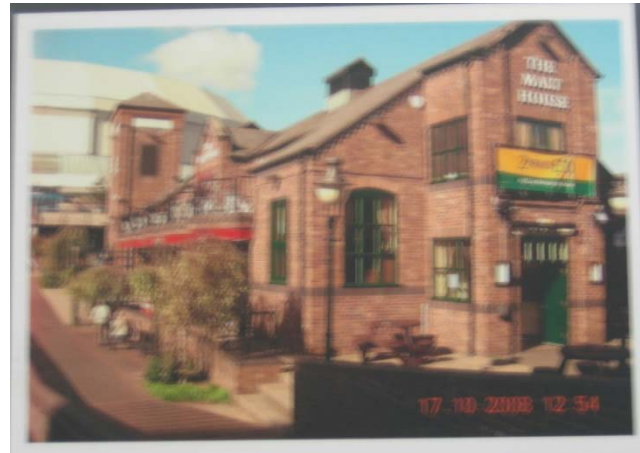




## Plate 14 Recollections of associated landscapes

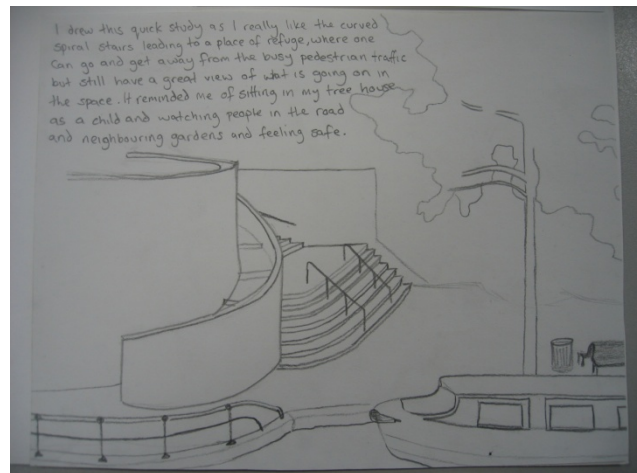
**Fig. 4.33 Kareema's childhood**

Kareema referred to her childhood in Smethwick, near Birmingham. She recalled visiting the area near the canal as a child with her parents. She included this image of the Malt House pub as it reminded her of the buildings she liked as a child.



**Fig. 4.34 Simon's childhood**

Simon drew this image of a set of steps near a tree because during his visit he sat on the steps and it reminded him of his childhood treehouse.



**Fig. 4.35 Tom's childhood**

Tom included this sketch of a Venetian canal because visiting the Birmingham canal-scape reminded him of a favourite childhood holiday.



**Fig. 4.36 Phoebe's response**

Phoebe and Christos both come from Cyprus and had no prior knowledge of British canals. Both participants depicted the canal-scape in terms of its green-spaces and social spaces. In this collection of images Phoebe photographs the bars and restaurants of Brindleyplace and emphasises the green-space by drawing in additional trees and flowers.



**Plate 15 The front and reverse of the final *Postcards from the Cut* postcard.**

The design mimics the common layout of holiday postcards in which different views of a place are shown together in a montage. Respondents were invited to choose an image and write their rationale on the reverse, before returning it.



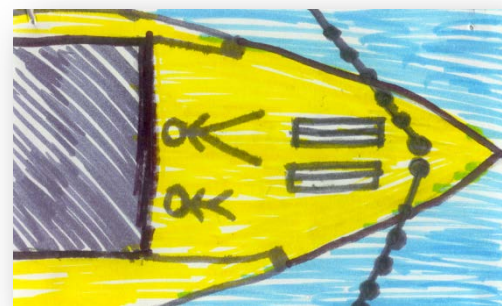
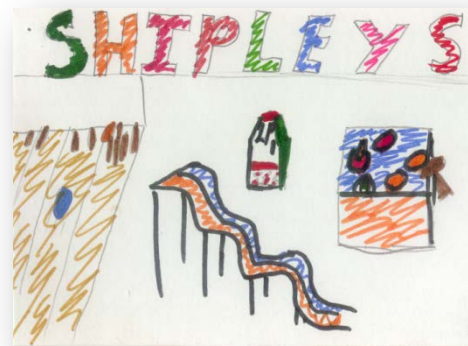
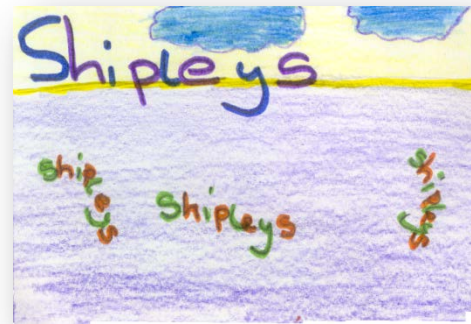
Fig. 5.1 The front of the postcard featuring 6 canal-scapes images

<p><b>Write your choice and reasons here...</b></p> <p><b>Thank you for your help.</b></p> <p><small>B. Rose</small></p>	<p><b>To help us in our research please include the following personal information:</b></p> <p>Age:</p> <p>Gender:</p> <p>Ethnicity:</p>
	<p><b>Please return to:</b></p>

Fig. 5.2 The reverse of the postcard requesting an image choice and personal information



**Plate 16 (Figs. 5.3-5.9) Children's postcards of Stourport-on-Severn canal basins, emphasising boats and water, green-space and the amusement park. Courtesy of Red Kite Environment.**



**Fig. 5.10 Image 1 ‘Traditional signage’ rationale and hypothesis.**

This image of a towpath signpost near Brindleyplace was included in the final postcard because it portrays a common piece of canal furniture and it is a close view that may be seen when walking along a towpath. It is the only image on the postcard that signifies, rather than shows, water i.e. an individual who is familiar with the canal-scape may associate the signpost with the canal. The photograph was

taken in January 2009 and portrays the canal landscape as it can be seen during the quieter winter months. The places indicated on the right-hand side of the signpost may be more familiar to locals of the Ladywood area of Birmingham, although the places indicated on the left-hand side, the “Convention Centre” and “Gas Street”, are more widely recognised. The



acronym “BCN” visible at the top of the sign refers to the Birmingham Canal Navigations – the name of the network of canals in this area. Despite the extensive cropping of this shot, it remains a striking image rendered almost monochrome by the presence of the snow covering the usually brown and green vegetation.

I hypothesised that respondents would find this a pleasing image, owing to the presence of snow and the striking black-and-white tone, but perhaps too abstract for a common first choice because it merely implies the canal (water) rather than shows it.

**Fig.5.11 Image 2 'Birmingham Skyline' rationale and hypotheses**

This long-view of the canal basin at Cambrian Wharf was included in the final postcard because it combines expanses of blue sky and water with iconic city architecture. The building shown on the left-hand side is the British Telecom building (BT Tower), a local landmark which respondents



familiar with the city may recognise. The buildings on the right-hand side are high-rise flats, which are also synonymous with city living. The reflections in the water reiterate the proximity of the city to the canal landscape, while respondents may associate the vastness of the water with lakes or ponds as opposed to the linearity of the canal.

I hypothesised that respondents would perceive this as an aesthetically pleasing image owing to the presence of water, blue sky and reflections, although the negative connotations of tower block housing were thought likely to diminish the popularity of this image. I anticipated that respondents would comment on the presence of the landmark BT Tower and that this recognition would lead some respondents to identify this image as their preferred choice.



**Fig. 5.12 Image 3 ‘Gas Street Basin’ rationale and hypotheses**

This long-view of the Gas Street Basin area facing Broad Street Tunnel was included in the final postcard owing to the presence of original canal buildings and the black-and-white iron bridge passing across the middle-distance. It is the only image on the postcard depicting a view directly along a towpath, as opposed to across or at an angle, so it suggests a ‘walking view’ with which many respondents may be familiar. The image includes visitors; in fact it is the only postcard image which portrays people. A pink ‘Water Bus’ passenger boat is visible at the edge of the frame, which was included as a local signifier of tourism. Aesthetically, this image is not very successful as it is confused by multiple layers of depth and clumsy cropping at the edges, however, it includes a variety of components that respondents may associate with an atmosphere of heritage combined with modernity.



I hypothesised that respondents would find this image redolent of the heritage value of the area and that they would comment on the presence of the ‘original’ iron bridge, which is actually a late 20<sup>th</sup> century pastiche of the earlier Horsley Ironworks bridges built in the 1820s that can be seen further along the canal near the National Indoor Arena. From contact with the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society and many others of a similar age and UK-resident background, I anticipated that this image would be a popular choice with older respondents, that they would comment on associations with canal heritage, and that they would share heritage-based memories and musings of the associated landscape.

**Fig.5.13 Image 4 ‘Brindleyplace’ image rationale and hypotheses**

This image shows the bridge linking the International Convention Centre (ICC) and Brindleyplace. It is a complex image combining green-space (the trees and flowers) with heritage (the narrow boat and brickwork) and modernity (the ICC building and bridge). During the earlier 2008 Representation Walk participants referred to this area as “*picturesque*” and “*classic canal*” and it is for this reason that this rather picturesque-ly angled and layered image was included. I intended to include an image depicting greenery as contact with participants in previous studies suggests that participants favour the presence of greenery and its connotations of nature.

This image is entitled ‘Brindleyplace’ on the postcard, as opposed to ‘ICC and bridge’, because even though it does not depict the bars and open spaces of Brindleyplace, it does show a well-used crossing point on the canal which for many users signals the border of Brindleyplace. I anticipated positive responses to the word ‘Brindleyplace’ in conjunction with a view from the



elevated ‘Water’s Edge’ area of Brindleyplace. The sunny aspect and picturesque composition, in addition to the landscape components, suggested this would be a popular choice amongst respondents. I anticipated that the entertainment value of the area, connoted by the bars and restaurants within the Brindleyplace development, would instigate recollections of respondents’ experiences of summer afternoons spent dining and watching the water at one of the many water-side bars and restaurants. From contact with the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society I hypothesised that this group in particular would respond least positively to this image owing to the connotations of late night drinking and modern architecture within an historic landscape.



**Fig.5.14 Image 5 'National Indoor Arena' image rationale and hypotheses**

This complex image depicting the National Indoor Arena (NIA) was included in the final postcard owing to the juxtaposition of the old bridge with the massive, modern building behind. The Malt House pub on the right hand side of the frame is a pastiche of earlier canal buildings, but contact with participants during earlier studies suggests that visitors perceive this as an 'original' building, compounding the disparity between the modern NIA building and the canal-scape. The image



includes references to nature in the trees and shrubs visible on the far towpath and the affects of sunlight on the water and buildings. The image was shot on a sunny afternoon, which is evident in the long shadows in the foreground.

I hypothesised that this image would be amongst the least popular images on the postcard, largely owing to the negative

aesthetic associations of modern architecture within an historic landscape and negative mass-leisure connotations that participants in previous studies had displayed.

The frame is divided into three layers which also occupy fairly equal portions of the space; the background layer consists of the NIA set against the blue, summer sky; the middle-distance includes the Malt House pub, bridge and water full of reflections; and the foreground consists of the towpath set mostly in shade except for the patch of sunlight on the left-hand side. Despite the fairly equal ratios of the layers within the frame, I anticipated that respondents' comments would focus on the juxtaposition of the modern NIA building against the older Malthouse Pub and the attractive, calm water and reflections.

**Fig.5.15 Image 6 ‘Cambrian Wharf’ image rationale and hypotheses**

This image of Cambrian Wharf was included in the final postcard because it focuses on narrow boats. It successfully depicts the proximity of moored boats to one another and the towpath. The mossy towpath and dull-coloured boats offer an alternative to the well-maintained towpaths and brightly coloured boats seen in other images on the postcard. I hoped the lightly rippled surface of the water and boats lined up as if in storage would convey the stillness and sense of dormancy I perceived whilst walking around this area during winter. The simple red and white border decoration on the near boat offers a hint of the canal art tradition with which I anticipated respondents would be familiar.

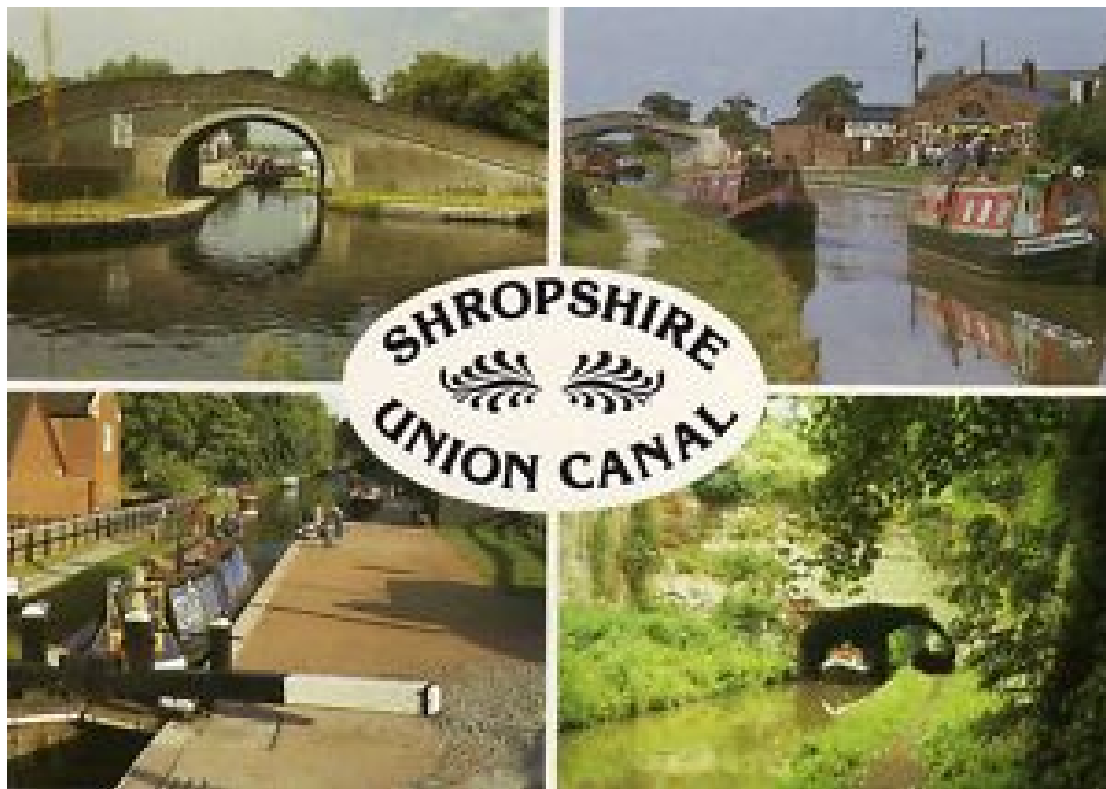


As a representation of moored boats I hypothesised that this image would be considered unusual and unpopular; there are far more pleasing and abundant views of highly decorated boats moored at Gas Street Basin, but the reflections in the water, the mossy ground, limp tow rope and unadorned building in the distance suggest a quiet functionalism that is not present in the other images.

I anticipated that for those respondents who reacted positively, they would find this image lacking the spectacle of their experiences of narrow boats, but that the reflections and intimacy of the shot would instigate fond recollections of boating.

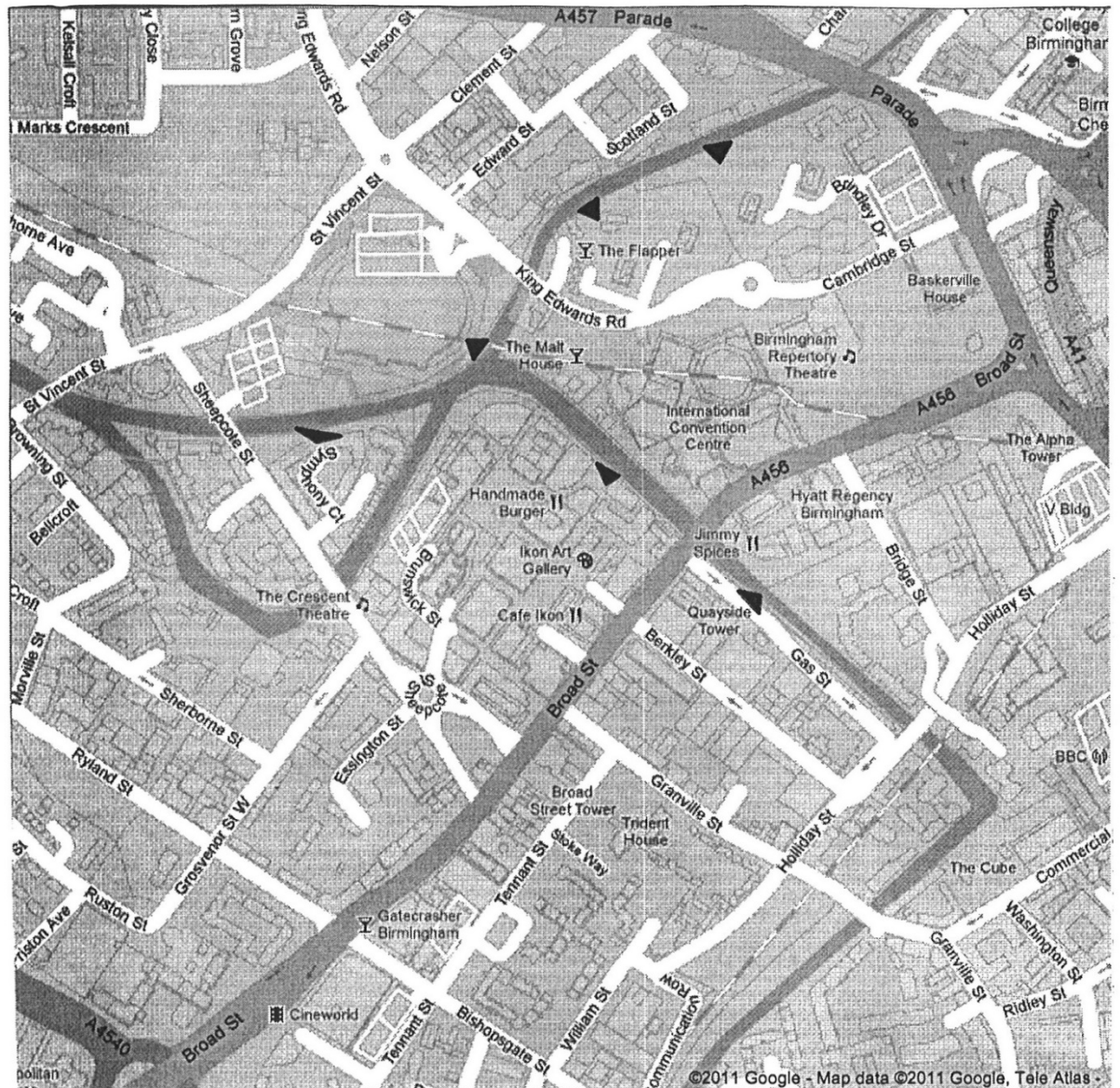
**Fig. 5.16 Traditional canal postcard.**

An example of the postcards commonly seen in gift shops depicting numerous views of local canals. The design of the research postcard hoped to mimic this familiar object.

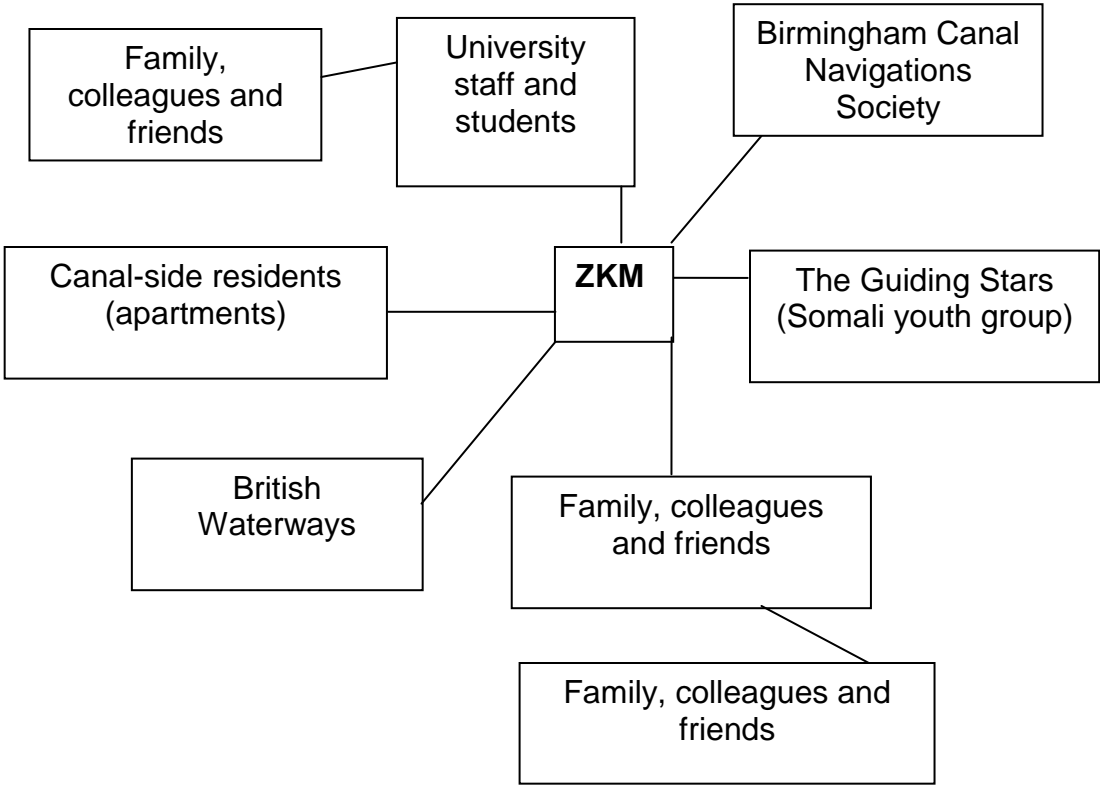


**Fig. 5.17 Map of places depicted in the postcard.**

The shaded areas represent the places portrayed on the postcard.



**Fig.5.18 The network of respondents.** Postcards were distributed and returned by contacts within organisations to whomever they chose, ensuring that postcards reached a more diverse range of people.



## Plate 17 The diversity of *Postcards* respondents

**Fig.5.19 Postcard respondents by age in decades.** Of the respondents who stated their age, those in their 20s were most common, while people over 80 were least common. No children under the age of 10 responded. 75% of respondents who did not state their age were sourced from the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society.

Respondents by age (decade)	0+	10+	20+	30+	40+	50+	60+	70+	80+	Not stated	Total
Number of respondents	0	27	42	23	20	19	5	3	1	20	160
% of respondents	0%	16.9%	26.2%	14.4%	12.5%	11.9%	3.1%	1.9%	0.6%	12.5%	100%

**Fig.5.20 Postcard respondents by gender.** The majority of respondents were female (56.25%).





Respondents by gender	Male	Female	Not stated	Total
Number of respondents	68	90	2	160
% of respondents	42.5%	56.25%	1.25%	100%



**Fig.5.21 Postcard respondents by ethnicity.** The majority of respondents who stated their ethnicity think of themselves as British (72%).

Group	Number of respondents	Percentage of total
British (including White-, Black-, and Asian-British)	72	45%
Non-British (nationality-based)	34	21.25%
Black	4	2.5%
White	14	8.75%
Asian	6	3.75%
Mixed	3	1.875%
Unrecorded	27	16.875%



**Fig.5.22 The diversity of themes in postcard responses.** The table shows the various themes (and their frequencies) included by respondents in the *Postcards from the Cut* project. Images 3 and 4 were not only the favourite choices of the majority of respondents, but they were also the images which elicited the most diverse ranges of comments.

<b>Image 1</b>  <i>"Traditional signage"</i>		<b>Image 4</b>  <i>"Brindleyplace"</i>	
Themes	Frequency of comments	Themes	Frequency of comments
Beauty Heritage / tradition Snow Absence of buildings Simplicity Atmosphere Information Special things	4 3 2 2 2 1 1 1	Greenery Composition Sunshine / summer Water / canal Balance /old + new Boats / boating Modernity Iconic Tourism Colourful Positivity People / vibrancy Inviting The city Buildings Bridge Sensitive development Peace Cafes / continental Heritage / tradition Pleasure Walking Fresh air Sky Business Space Reflections Freedom Beaches	20 14 13 11 10 10 9 8 7 6 6 5 5 5 5 5 4 4 4 3 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1
<b>Image 2</b>  <i>"Birmingham skyline"</i>		<b>Image 5</b>  <i>"National Indoor Arena"</i>	
Themes	Frequency of comments	Themes	Frequency of comments
Composition Reflections The city Beauty Tall buildings Nature Peace Modernity Light quality Water / canal Tourism	3 3 3 2 2 2 2 1 1 1 1	Water / canal Reflections Iconic Buildings Peace Light quality Composition Intimacy Space Not-city Heritage / tradition Modernity People/vibrancy Greenery Universal appeal	4 3 3 3 2 2 2 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1 1

<b>Image 3</b>  <i>"Gas Street Basin"</i>		<b>Image 6</b>  <i>"Cambrian Wharf"</i>	
Themes	Frequency of comments	Themes	Frequency of comments
Heritage / tradition	24	Boats / boating	6
Cafe culture /continental	15	Iconic	3
Bridges	13	Water / canal	2
Buildings	12	Buildings	1
Balance / old + new	12	Heritage / tradition	1
People / vibrancy	10	Life	1
Water / canal	9	Composition	1
Not city	7	Old and new	1
City living	7	Bridges	1
Boats / boating	7		
Walking	6		
Iconic	6		
Inviting	5		
Tourism	4		
Sunshine/ summer	4		
Sensitive development	3		
Greenery	2		
Relaxation	2		
Composition	2		
Clean	1		
Modernity	1		
Tunnel	1		
Colourful	1		



**Fig.5.23 Responses to image 1: 'Traditional signage'**

*"It shows that Birmingham still has its traditional things  
and they are special things to the people of Birmingham"*  
(Somali female, aged 11)



This image of a towpath signpost was one of the least popular on the postcard, but seems to possess one of the strongest landscape identities owing to the fact that it elicited such a narrow range of responses from those who chose it. Common themes included 'beauty', 'heritage / tradition', 'snow', the 'absence of buildings' and the 'simplicity' of the composition. Other responses related to the 'atmosphere', the amount of 'information' visible on the signpost itself and also that this is of "special" local interest. For some respondents the beauty of the image directly relates to the presence of the snow and the traditional atmosphere this evokes, although why snow should equate with tradition is never made clear – perhaps because for many people snow is a fondly-remembered part of childhood? The absence of "massive hostile buildings", as one respondent wrote, was reason enough to choose this image. This image elicited one instance of musing (above) on the subject of what the "people of Birmingham" hold dear, namely the "traditional things" including canals, signified by the signage.

**Fig.5.24 Responses to Image 2 – ‘Birmingham skyline’**

*“Beautiful natural scenery which  
you may enjoy as your [sic]  
riding on the boats”  
(Iraqi male, aged 18)*



This image, showing the large expanse of water at Cambrian Wharf with residential buildings behind, elicited more common narrative themes than image 1 (Fig.5.10), suggesting it was deemed a more complex image. The strongest narrative themes related to the ‘composition’ of the image, references to ‘the city’ and observations about the reflections in the water. Some respondents found this a beautiful image and referred to the “*natural*” aspects visible, which is surprising given the lack of environmentally-themed components such as birds, animals and greenery. On close inspection the silhouettes of trees are visible, but could be easily overlooked, which suggests that the “*beautiful natural scenery*” one respondent highlighted refers to the water itself.

Despite the presence of the tall apartment buildings, there was only one reference to modernity from a respondent who chose this image as an example of the capacity of the canal landscape to challenge preconceptions – she felt that too many people regard the canals as historic landscapes for the enjoyment of older people, and that this image is evidence of the opposite. Some found this a very peaceful image, and although they did not elaborate on their reasons, this perception is perhaps a result of the stillness of the water, the clarity of the reflections therein and the associated silence that stillness suggests. The theme of peace was unanticipated given the presence of signifiers of the nearby city streets (the buildings and British Telecom building on the left-hand side) and their associated sounds.

This image elicited musings on the theme of the potential activities available to a visitor, namely boating and entertainment, specifically “*pubs and clubs on the canal side*” as one respondent suggested. In both instances the potential activities suggested are not apparent from the image – no pubs, clubs or boating are shown, meaning that the respondents imagined these scenarios from personal experience or hearsay, based on the visual stimuli the image offered. It may also suggest that the respondents think of the canal landscape as a corridor, that each of the images are merely places within a wider landscape designed for moving through, perhaps in order to reach the area of restaurants and bars at Brindleyplace

**Fig.5.25 Responses to image 3 – ‘Gas Street Basin’**

*“Not so many years ago Gas Street Basin was a hidden world accessible to the public only through a little known ‘hole in the wall’”*  
(Male respondent)



This image of the towpath at Gas Street Basin elicited a very strong response in relation to the narrative theme of ‘heritage’. The image also evoked a diversity of other narrative themes that ranged in recognition amongst respondents, the most popular after heritage being the idea of “continental” ‘cafe-culture’, ‘buildings’, ‘bridges’ and the ‘balance between old and new’. The references to “old and new” seem to refer to the new usage/function of an historic landscape, evident in the presence of the canal-side cafes and bars juxtaposed with the older architecture and bridges. In light of this, the general narrative returned by respondents is one of a complex, modern-functioning but richly historic landscape.

Instances of memories and musings were common in relation to this image, but as with all the images, musings were more common. The memories respondents shared support the idea of the ‘balance between old and new’ in that they related both to how this part of the canal appeared prior to its re-development (“it truly was Dickensian [sic] in the 60s/70s!”) and more recent memories of pleasant leisure-related experiences (“so nice in the summer, eating lunch outside...a pleasant way to walk through the city”). Respondents’ musings related in the majority to the heritage value of the area as an icon of the city (“it screams heritage” and “it shrieks ‘Birmingham!’”) and to the surprise that first-time visitors may experience, particularly given the often negative portrayal of the city in folklore and the media (“shows a different side to what people imagine Birmingham to be like” and “historical view of what is often thought to be a modern and sadly somewhat ugly city of concrete”). A common reason for choosing this image of Gas Street Basin is as a proof that Birmingham retains its heritage and is more appealing than it is commonly portrayed to be; by ‘sending’ this image respondents are hoping to re-educate the recipient. Respondents’ reactions to this image are interesting when we consider that little of the heritage-value of Gas Street Basin is depicted in full; the original red-brick buildings which straddle the water are partially obscured by the small black and white bridge (itself cropped by the frame and actually a 1990s pastiche of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Horsley Ironworks bridges), the traditional narrow boats which moor at the basin are out of the frame, as are the original towpath-side warehouse buildings. The responses that this image elicited then are not the result of an iconic image comprising multiple identifiers of local canal heritage, but rather the result of respondents’ prior experiences of the area producing a strong landscape identity related to heritage and the desire to share that heritage with their postcard ‘recipients’.

**Fig.5.26 Responses to image 4 – ‘Brindleyplace’**

*“Last year my family enjoyed a 60<sup>th</sup> birthday on the barges – it was a wonderful day out”*

(White British female, aged 82)



This image of the central bridge at Brindleyplace elicited the greatest diversity of narrative themes from respondents, with a very strong recognition relating to the theme of ‘greenery’ which included references to the presence of trees and flowers. The composition of the image was notable as many respondents commented on how well-framed the image was, while the ‘summer’ atmosphere, signified by the visible light on the scene was also strongly recognised. As with image 3 of Gas Street Basin, the balance between ‘old and new’ was a common theme, although the theme of ‘modernity’ was more strongly expressed than ‘heritage’ in relation to this image than in that of Gas Street Basin. The theme of ‘continental cafe-culture’ (that was so commonly recognised in relation to image 3 of Gas Street Basin) was one of the least frequently mentioned in relation to this image. This response was unanticipated as I hypothesised the opposite response, namely that comments would relate to alfresco dining because the pictured bridge leads to an area popular for its restaurants and bars (just out of shot) and the name ‘Brindleyplace’ is commonly associated with leisure and dining in the city.

The image was highly conducive to narrative storytelling in the form of musings and memories. The majority of the musings were speculative (*“a lot to explore beyond the trees”*) suggesting respondents perceived the potential for activity in the area more strongly than heritage-based landscape perceptions. Similarly, the memories shared by some of the respondents related to recollections of recent, pleasant canal-side experiences, rather than memories of the area’s pre-development era; as one respondent wrote *“Because the thing I like the most is sitting by the canal with a drink in the sunshine and this photo reminds me of this”*. Despite respondents’ awareness of the heritage value of the canals, the narrative storytelling elicited by this image of Brindleyplace is strongly related to the post-development era of this part of the canal landscape, with an emphasis on leisure. Respondents perceive this area as an indicator of ‘time-off’ – weekends and holidays, particularly during the summer months. In this regard the canal landscape in this location may be perceived as a type of resort in the tradition of the British seaside holiday, but with the *“continental”* atmosphere of cafes and restaurants associated with popular British holiday destinations (*“you could feel freedom and pretend to be on the beach”*).



**Fig.5.27 Responses to image 5 – ‘National Indoor Arena’**

*“Provides a more intimate and comfortable view of Birmingham”  
(Asian female, aged 18)*



This image of the National Indoor Arena elicited a strong landscape identity in recognition of the presence and effect of water in the landscape. As with image 2 of the ‘Birmingham skyline’ which also features a large expanse of water, the most widely recognised theme was ‘water’, followed by ‘reflections’, and as with the other image, some respondents commented on the evocation of feelings of ‘peace’. This image was viewed by some respondents as an iconic and unsurprising indicator of the city, particularly of the city’s modernity and leisure potential. The rationale for the inclusion of this image was the juxtaposition between the modern NIA building and the original bridge in front of it, however, this theme was not universally recognised amongst respondents, with only one individual commenting on the balance of ‘old and new’ components.

Instances of narrative storytelling in relation to this image were limited in number, but took the form of speculative musings about the area’s universal appeal and the potential for tranquillity as with the respondent who wrote; *“open space ends up giving a calm feeling and lets you get away from daily rushed up life in the city”*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Indian female, aged 21.

**Fig.5.28 Responses to Image 6: 'Cambrian Wharf'**

*"Obviously a canal [...] the well known shape of a narrow boat"*  
(English male, aged 55)



This image of the basin at Cambrian Wharf elicited wide recognition of one common theme amongst respondents – ‘boats’, which was anticipated owing to the close-up framing of the shot. Other common themes related to the ‘iconic’ nature of the boats as signifiers of the canal landscape, and the water which was also seen as a metaphor for life by one respondent.

Despite being the least popular image choice, this image did elicit some instances of storytelling in the form of both musings and memories, with particular focus on boating. One respondent simply wrote *“memories of boating”* while another recalled the boats she was familiar with from her homeland, writing *“the boats are different from my country and interesting”*. The latter response suggests the image was chosen for its ability to trigger the recollection of another place, as a way of recalling the object of the past, or the other, through its very absence.

## Plate 18 Participants' preferences

**Fig.5.29 Overall postcard image preferences (single image choices).** 144/160 respondents chose a single image above all others. Almost half of these respondents preferred image 3 of Gas Street Basin.

Image	Frequency (the number of respondents who chose the image)	Frequency (as a percentage %)
1 Traditional signage	8	5.6%
2 Birmingham skyline	10	6.9%
3 Gas Street Basin	62	43%
4 Brindleyplace	50	34.7%
5 National Indoor Arena	8	5.6%
6 Cambrian Wharf	6	4.2%

**Fig.5.30 Overall postcard image preferences (multiple image choices).** 14/160 respondents made multiple image choices. These respondents' choices mirror the overall favourites: images 3 of Gas Street Basin and 4 of Brindleyplace.

Image	Frequency (the number of times the image was counted amongst respondents' favourite images)
1	0
2	2
3	11
4	11
5	4
6	2

**Fig.5.31 Postcard image preferences by gender (single image choice).** 142/160 respondents made a single image choice and stated their gender. An almost equal percentage of males and females preferred image 3 of Gas Street Basin (around 43%).

Gender	Image 1 Traditional signage	Image 2 Birmingham Skyline	Image 3 Gas Street Basin	Image 4 Brindley place	Image 5 National Indoor Arena	Image 6 Cambrian Wharf	Total responses
Male	5 (8.1%)	1 (1.6%)	27 (43.5%)	22 (35.5%)	2 (3.2%)	5 (8.1%)	62 (100%)
Female	3 (3.75%)	8 (10%)	35 (43.75%)	27 (33.75%)	6 (7.5%)	1 (1.25%)	80 (100%)

**Fig. 5.32 All postcard image preferences by gender.** When the preferences of all respondents who stated their gender are considered (including those who made multiple image choices) an almost equal percentage of males and females prefer image 3 of Gas Street Basin (around 42%).

Gender	Image 1 Traditional signage	Image 2 Birmingham Skyline	Image 3 Gas Street Basin	Image 4 Brindley place	Image 5 National Indoor Arena	Image 6 Cambrian Wharf	Total responses
Male	5 (7%)	2 (2.8%)	30 (42.3%)	24 (33.8%)	3 (4.2%)	7 (9.9%)	71 (100%)
Female	3 (3%)	9 (9%)	43 (42.5%)	36 (35.5%)	9 (9%)	1 (1%)	101 (100%)

**Fig.5.33 Postcard image preferences by age (decades).** Image 3 of Gas Street Basin was preferred in the majority of age groups, except in those under 30 years of age. Teenagers preferred image 4 of Brindleyplace and respondents in their 20s liked images 3 and 4 equally. Image 4 of Brindleyplace was almost as popular as image 3 of Gas Street Basin in most age groups.

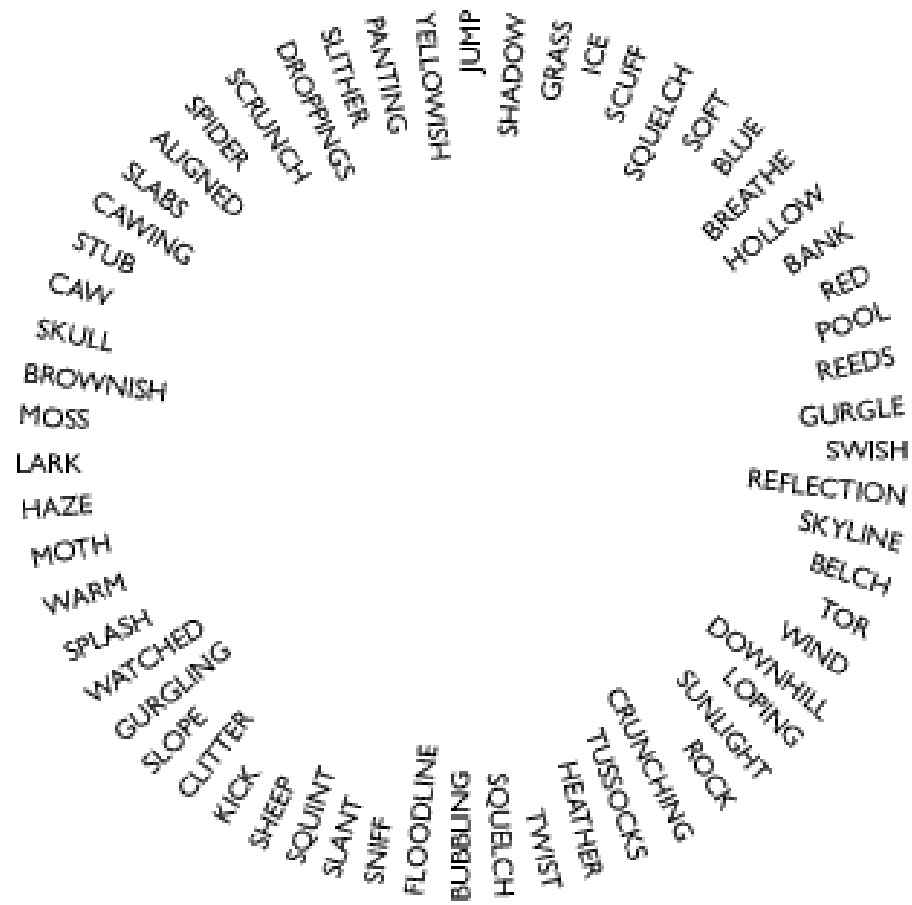
Image	10+	20+	30+	40+	50+	60+	70+	80+	Age unknown
1 Traditional signage	3	3	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
2 Birmingham Skyline	4	6	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
3 Gas Street Basin	2	17	13	11	11	4	3	0	12
4 Brindleyplace	12	17	9	8	5	1	0	1	8
5 National Indoor Arena	6	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	1
6 Cambrian Wharf	1	2	1	1	2	1	0	0	0

**Fig. 5.34 Postcard image preferences by ethnicity.**

Image	British	Non-British	Black	White	Asian	Mixed	Unknown
1 Traditional signage	3	3	1	1	0	0	0
2 Birmingham skyline	3	5	1	0	0	1	2
3 Gas Street Basin	35	6	1	12	2	2	15
4 Brindleyplace	33	13	2	2	1	0	11
5 National Indoor Arena	2	7	1	0	1	0	1
6 Cambrian Wharf	5	1	0	0	2	0	0



**Fig.6.1 Richard Long's text-work 'One Hour' (1984).** Arranged like a clock-face, each word represents Long's sensory experience during each minute of an hour-long walk (Malpas 1995)



## **ONE HOUR**

*A SIXTY MINUTE CIRCLE WALK ON DARTMOOR 1984*

**Fig. 6.2 A table of Sensory Walk participants.** The participants comprise a cross-section of residents in the urban context; males and females of diverse ages and residency status participated (UK-born, post-migration and newly resident individuals). All participants' names have been changed

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Source</b>	<b>Residency Status</b>
Graham	61	Male	University Staff	UK born
Annie	55	Female	University Staff	UK born
Kasim	36	Male	Student	Post-migration
Yasmina	24	Female	Partner of a participant	Post-migration
Carlo	23	Male	Student	Newly resident
Lucia	21	Female	Friend of a participant	Newly resident
Nasreen	57	Female	University Staff	Post-migration
Shabana	26	Female	Student	UK born

Fig.6.3 A completed Identity Sheet (page 1). This excerpt shows Annie's response.

## **“Sensory-walk 2009-10**

**We are interested in how you perceive the canal landscape using all your senses, but we would also like to understand how you regard your personal identity. Before we perform the sensory-walk at the canal site, it would be useful if you could complete the following information and return this sheet, preferably as an email attachment to [REDACTED]@bcu.ac.uk**

**1. In the space below please write a description of yourself** – include whatever you think is relevant to your identity as a unique individual (this could include where you were born, your ethnic and cultural identity, likes and dislikes, family ties, experiences, aspirations, interests and hobbies etc)

Born and lived Moseley for 25 years, an area of Birmingham which has left influences in my life -

I lived in a 1900's house, most architecture in the area was built in a style influenced by Arts and Crafts, Moseley was originally a wooded estate with several notable houses, this was reflected in how the area was laid out, still very green and wooded, large gardens. It was also multi cultural before the term was used.

Family came from country areas, Worcestershire, which is where I now live.

Several family members a couple of generations ago were craftworkers/manufacturing of one type or another – stained glass (Bromsgrove Guild) brass/metal workers, nail making, art education, also long connection with working on the land.

I am a craftmaker in ceramics/glass/textiles, demonstrate craft skills at museums along with research into techniques and practices, and visiting tutor at BIAD.

Apart from my craft work, my other interests include folk art and traditions (I'm a Morris dancer!) history, archaeology, walking, countryside, gardening, wide range of music

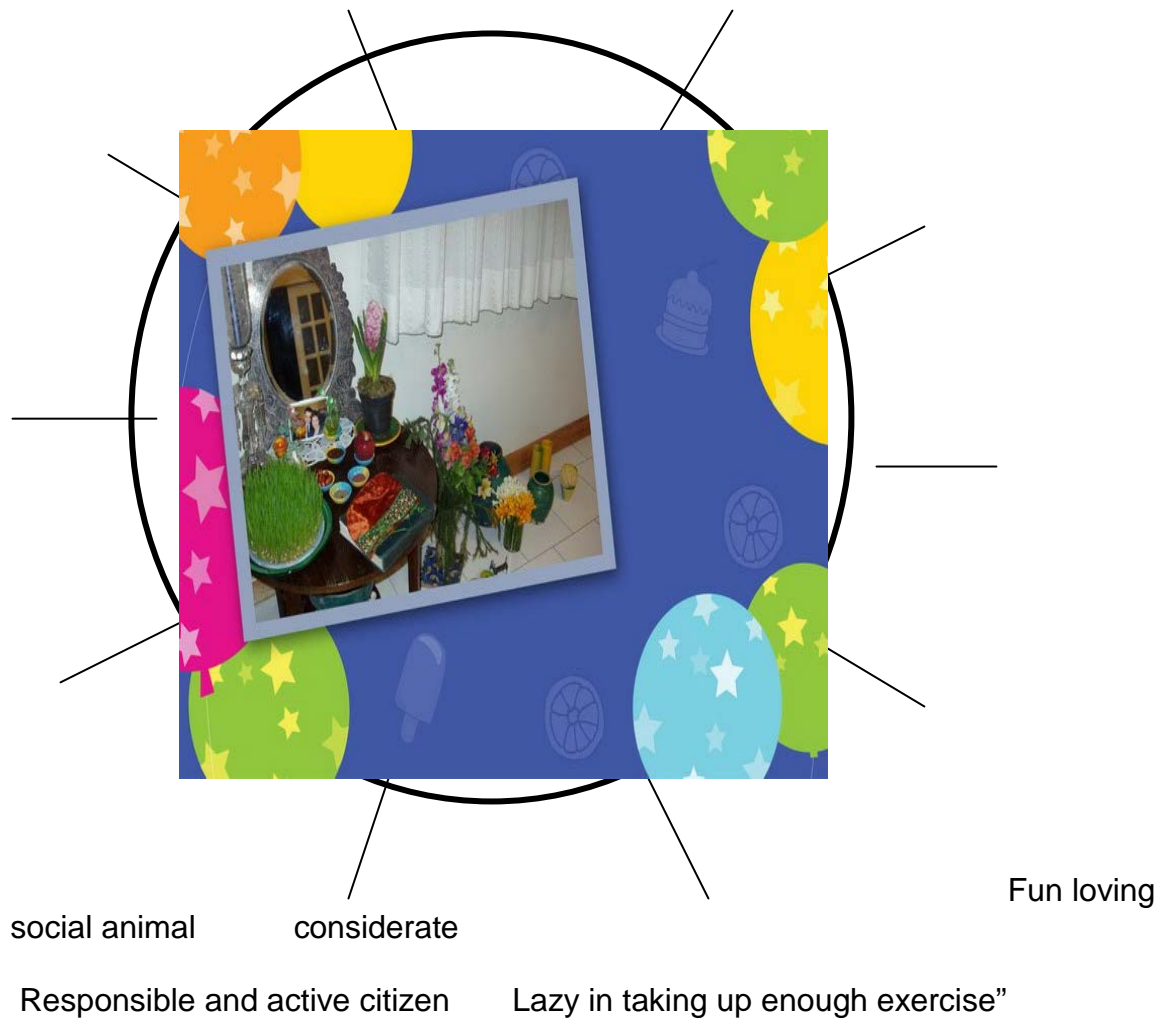
As a teenager I attended Ruskin Hall, Bournville for Foundation course in art and design, and this was the start of a chance link with working in buildings associated with the Cadbury family, namely Uffculme Clinic ( I taught crafts as part of the clients psychotherapy treatment) Hampstead House (craft teaching) and currently at Stokeheath, Bromsgrove where I am tutor and potter in residence. All these buildings were again in the style of Arts and Crafts set in wooded grounds.

I am often engaged with several areas of work at a time, I enjoy the contrast and variety, often finding links and complements between them.”

**Fig. 6.4 A completed Identity Sheet (page 2).** This excerpt shows Nasreen's response.

**“2. Please complete this diagram by a) inserting a representation of yourself inside the circle (a sketch or photo will do, but it doesn't have to be figurative, just a representation) and b) writing some key words that express your identity around the outside – this can be based on what you wrote in part 1.**

Iranian, Nourouz; Iranian New Year



**Fig. 6.5 A completed Identity Sheet (page 3).** This excerpt shows Carlo's previous experiences of canal landscapes and his expectations of the canal at Birmingham.

### **"3. Finally, a few questions.**

- Have you visited any UK canals, and if so, where? Durham, London, Birmingham, Statford-U-A
- If you have visited a UK canal, what was your reason for visiting?

The list above is given in temporal order. Durham's canal were the first seen in this country (being from Italy), so there was the curiosity of seeing, experiencing those canals, which indeed are very different from the notion of canal I was used to. London in Little Venice was again seen in comparative terms from others I saw in the past overseas. Birmingham's become part of the city now that I live here and possibly I have a different view of what a 'canal' is.

- Have you visited any canals outside the UK, and if so, where?

Milano is a city built on 'canals' despite the fact that most of them have been covered up and water can no longer be seen. The main 2 canals left are the Naviglio Grande e Naviglio Pavese that run along the city and go outside in the 'countryside'. The canal plays a different role within the city, cannot be navigated, is a place of attraction & social gathering for the high presence of bars & restaurants & posh shops within its city boundaries. As it goes outside town is totally different.

Canals are very much present in the Milanese hinterland, with bigger water basins/streams and the use of them varies to walk, bike ride, water sports & day out which to some extents may resemble to UK/Birmingham, though the image I have of them & as such the potential use is very much different.

Venice canals

Amsterdam canals

Brugge/Bruges (Belgium) canals

- What do you expect the Birmingham canal to be like?

Actually I know what they are like. I have a certain view of them which is somehow difficult to put down in words but I feel very different when the usually narrow walkway along the canal is brick/paved or when is rough terrain. In the first case I feel like the canal is integrated & part of the city, a sort of extension of the city streets. A different thing from the ground you find in the north of the city for example towards StarCity. This difference marks also the soundscape expected along different segments of the canal."

**Fig.6.6 The Sensory Walk participants' self-representations**, as detailed in their Identity Sheets. Some participants did not enter responses for all questions. All names have been changed.

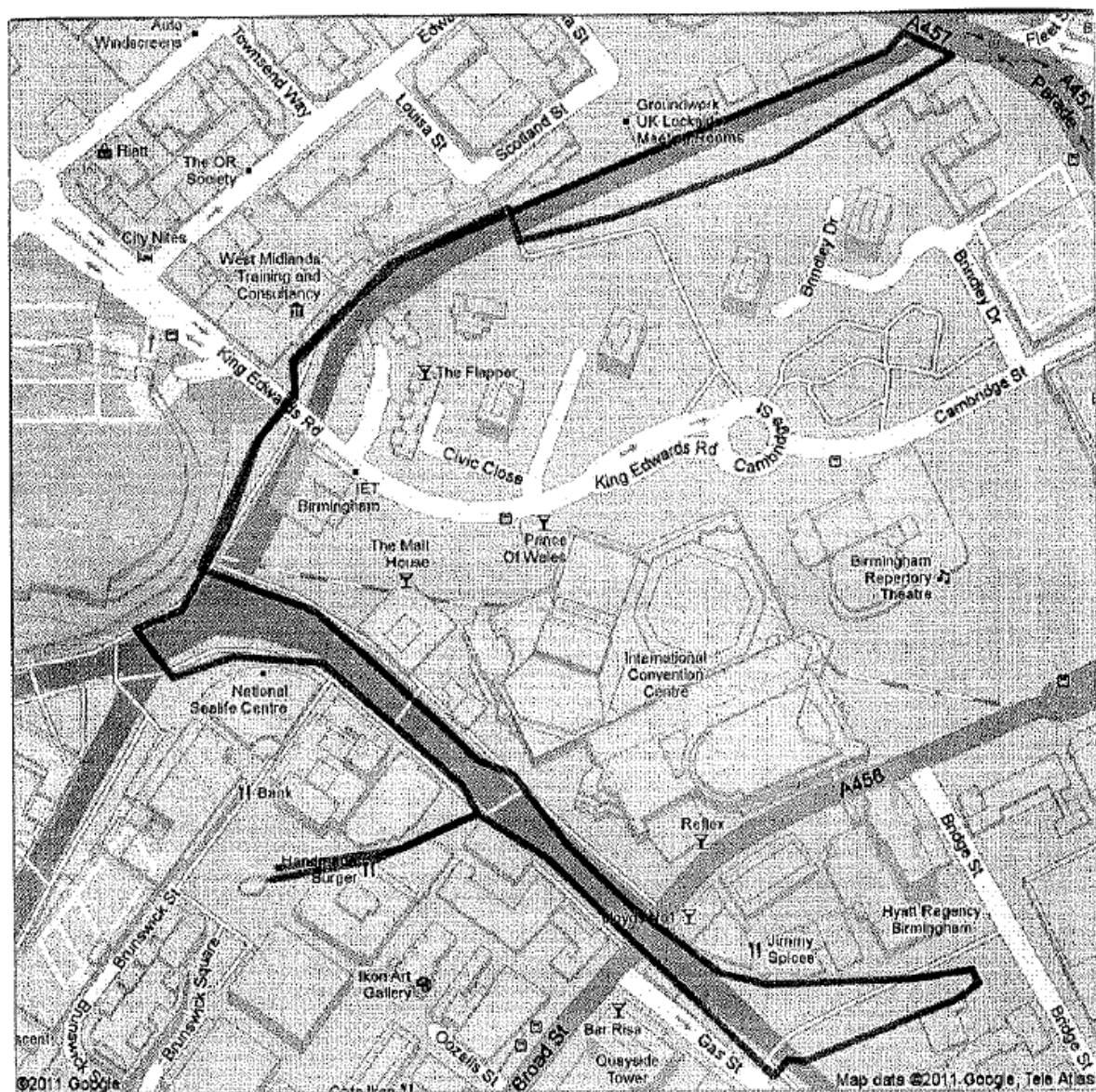
Participant	Self-description	Self-representation	Key Words
Carlo	Italy; prefers mountain environments for relaxation, water-places less so; likes skiing for "contact with the environment".	A photograph of himself on a ski-lift in a snowy landscape	"Experiential; open to previously unexplored/untested activities; evaluative; determined; stubborn; strict; precise"
Yasmina	Kashmir; Muslim; British Kashmiri; "Like cricket"; "Travelled most of Europe"; "love green environment"		
Kasim	Kashmir; Muslim; British Kashmiri; "like polo"; "travelled most of Europe and some Asian and African countries"; "likes countryside and green environment"	A picture of a book cover; <i>The beast that ate the earth</i> by Chris Madden.	
Shabana	Leeds; Muslim British Pakistani woman; PhD and highly educated/aspirational; strong family ties; "multi-lingual" does charity work; likes the outdoors. A strong awareness of her multiplicity of identities.		"Daughter; family; friends; career; social activities; charity; relaxing; shopping"
Lucia		Photograph of herself standing in a snowy, rural landscape	
Annie	Moseley, B'ham; affinity with nature and the Arts & Crafts movement; personal/family history of making; artist/teacher. A strong landscape identity focused around extended contact and imagined past-landscapes.	Close-up image of her own abstract glasswork in blues and yellow.	"Reserved; self-reliant; patient; determined; creative; imaginative; reflective; flexible; adaptable; inter-disciplinary; multi-faceted; enquiring; investigative; empathy; insight; sensitivity"
Nasreen	Iran; "lived in Birmingham for most of my adult life"; "active citizen, making contribution to a range of social cause"; "love nature, though not spending enough time in nature and using facilities around me"; "love entertaining, socialising and dancing"	Photograph of a table laden with food to celebrate Iranian Nourouz / New Year	"Social animal; considerate; responsible and active citizen; lazy in taking enough exercise; fun loving"
Graham		A sketch of himself fishing by a canal	"English; fishing; nature; remembering childhood; boats; outdoors; camping; being y the water; White; middle-class"

**Fig.6.7 The Sensory Walk participants' prior canal experiences**, as detailed in their Identity Sheets. All names have been changed.

Participant	UK canals	Reason for visit	Non-UK canals	Expectation of Birmingham canals
Annie	Birmingham; Black Country, Worcestershire; Cheshire; Yorkshire	"Walking or on holiday, and saw Anderton boat lift in Cheshire"	Normandy	"Have walked by it several times, sometimes quieter, sometimes more people and more boats moving through locks"
Carlo	Durham, London, Birmingham, Stratford-upon-Avon	"the curiosity of seeing, experiencing"; "London in Little Venice was again seen in comparative terms from others I saw in the past overseas."	Milan, Venice, Amsterdam, Bruges	"Actually I know what they are like"; "when the usually narrow walkway along the canal is brick/paved...I feel like the canal is integrated & part of the city, a sort of extension of the city streets."
Lucia	Birmingham	"I was with a friend and he showed me all the city, even the canals."	Venice, Stockholm	"I've already seen it and I like it, especially in a sunny day!"
Graham	Grand Union, London; Coventry, Birmingham; Worcester.	"Childhood, fishing, mucking about, boating holidays"	"Holland when v. young [and] little memory"	"Like all other UK canals"
Shabana	Leeds	"To walk"	Italy	"I hope serene and clean and soothing"
Kasim	Birmingham	"It reminds me of home because I was grown up living in a house very close to canals"	Pakistan	"I want people to use them more and enjoy living by their side, I want people to swim in them, but these are not very clean!!!!"
Nasreen	Birmingham, Norwich, Sheffield	"To enjoy the nature and its beauty and to relax"	Can't remember	"Clean, tranquil, green surroundings or buildings which are pleasing to watch!"
Yasmina	Birmingham			

**Fig. 6.8 The Sensory Walk route.**

Participants were given a route map (not this one) and a set of instructions. The walking route began and ended at the fountain in Brindleyplace. Participants walked in a clockwise direction.





## Plate 19 The first stages of the Sensory Walk

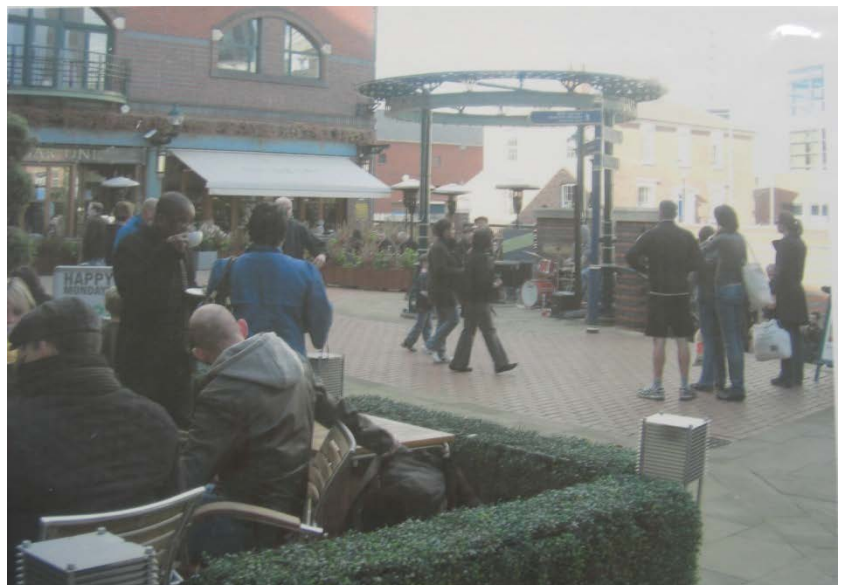
**Fig. 6.9 The fountain in Central Square, Brindleyplace**

This was the start and end point of the Sensory Walk. Visitors may walk through the fountain along the walkway. The fountain comprises a shallow area with water jets at the higher level, and a deeper pool area at the lower level. During the summer children often play in the fountain and people sit around its ledge as a form of secondary seating (Gehl 1996). Visitors also sometimes throw money into the pool, as with 'wishing wells'. The sound of the water from the jets can overpower all other surrounding sounds as one walks through them, as some of the Sensory Walk participants commented.



**Fig. 6.10 The restaurants at The Water's Edge.**

Participants walked through this section before walking down the steps onto the canal towpath.



## Plate 20 The towpath begins

**Fig.6.11 The central bridge and steps down to the towpath.**

This image shows the Water's Edge – an area of bars and restaurants that overlooks the towpath. Note the split-levels of the steps leading from the flower-lined bridge; one set leads up to the restaurants of the upper level, while one set leads down to the towpath. Turning right at the bottom of these steps leads the visitor to Gas Street Basin;



turning left to the National Indoor Arena. The Sensory Walk participants walked towards the Sea Life Centre and National Indoor Arena.

**Fig.6.12 The Sea Life Centre.**

The Sea Life Centre is located opposite the National Indoor Arena and is on the same side of the canal as Brindleyplace. It is a popular visitor attraction with families. The open section visible at the top left of the building houses a display with an accompanying soundtrack of animal noises including birdsong. The towpath splits here; half remains on the level and half leads up a ramp to a number of bridges across the canal, which also branches into two arms just out of the frame.



## Plate 21 The route to Cambrian Wharf

**Fig. 6.13 The towpath leading to Cambrian Wharf.**

The image shows the right-hand arm of the canal along which the Sensory Walk participants were directed. The building on the right is the Malthouse Pub. The towpath here is wider than the route through Brindleyplace and becomes linear with no opportunities for the participants to cross the canal for a few minutes. The participants walked at a slower pace through this section and resumed their narratives.



**Fig. 6.14 The passage to Cambrian Wharf.**

This image shows the towpath further along. After rounding the building on the right, the canal widens into a wharf.



**Fig. 6.15 Cambrian Wharf**

The canal widens into a basin at Cambrian Wharf, with space for mooring and turning boats. The residential housing blocks behind the basin are set in a small area of parkland; the park that participants were later directed to walk through, but which they avoided.



**Fig. 6.16 Moored boats at Cambrian Wharf**

To the left of the basin there is a lock which marks the start of the Farmer's Bridge flight of locks; this was the first lock the participants saw on the walking route. The trees behind are part of the small park. This was the widest expanse of water the participants had seen by this stage of the walk.





## Plate 22 The park area

**Fig. 6.17 The parkland area seen from the towpath.**

This small park overlooks the canal at the start of the Farmer's Bridge lock flight and provides green space for the residents of the housing blocks behind. The participants were directed to walk through this space, re-joining the route at Cambrian Wharf. Only one participant, Graham, actually walked through the park as he was familiar with the area. The remaining participants were uncertain of the route through this section and disliked leaving the towpath, that is, they liked walking alongside the water and felt that to 'leave' it was contrary to the ethos of the walk. This image was captured at the end of summer.



**Fig. 6.18 Inside the park.**

This image shows the park area in winter. The residential housing blocks are clearly visible during winter, but when the Sensory Walk participants visited they were obscured by the leaves on the trees.



## Plate 23 The final stages of the Sensory Walk

**Fig. 6.19 The towpath adjacent to Brindleyplace**

As participants neared Brindleyplace (to the right of the canal) the route became linear. Participants made a choice to continue towards Gas Street Basin when they reached the central flower covered bridge (visible under the grey bridge in this photo).



**Fig. 6.20 Gas Street Basin**

Some participants continued the route around the Basin before returning to the meeting point in Brindleyplace. This image shows the tunnel through which participants entered the Basin on the right hand towpath. They crossed the Basin using the walkway and bridge from which this image was captured. Participants then exited the Basin through the same tunnel on the left hand towpath.





## Plate 24 Green-space on the Sensory Walk

**Fig. 6.21 The water garden.**

Many participants were surprised that the urban canal-scape contains green-space in the form of trees and planting. Nasreen commented on seeing this small water garden during the walking route. The boat is a miniature version of the narrow boats moored along the canal.



**Fig. 6.22 Green-space in Cambrian Wharf**

Some of the green-space visible on the walking route is inaccessible, like this planting on the opposite bank of the canal. This planting is for the benefit of the residents who live in the apartment blocks visible through the trees.



**Fig. 6.23 Towpath planting.**

Some of the green-space visible in the canal-scape consists of low-lying shrubs and planting alongside buildings. Here, planting next to an apartment building near Farmer's Bridge Locks helps to soften the appearance of the building.



## Plate 25 Media representations

**Fig. 6.24 Representing leisure**

This British Waterways advert represents the Birmingham canal-scape as a place to exercise. Joggers and cyclists are a common sight on the towpaths in the central canal-scape.



**Fig. 6.25 Representing city-life**

This British Waterways advert represents the canal-scape as part of the daily commute and an escape from walking through the city streets.



**Fig.6.26 Participants' narrative foci during the Sensory Walk.** There was no evident correlation between the participants' ages, gender, occupation or ethnic/cultural background, and the focus of their narratives.

<b>Focus on the traditional five-sense Western sensorium, with some musings and memories:</b>	
<b>Yasmina</b> focused on narrating the bodily senses, in particular sound and sight. She also mused about other users and imagined living on the canal. Yasmina's narrative was very descriptive, but walking with her husband and responding to his musings and questions perhaps instigated musings and memory recall of places in Kashmir for her.	<b>Annie</b> focused on narrating the bodily senses with some musings about other users and memory recall of her garden.
<b>Focus on the traditional five-sense Western sensorium with a large number of musings and memories:</b>	
<b>Lucia</b> narrated her bodily senses, but focused on musings about other users, life on the canal and her current home in the UK. She also recalled memories of her home in Milan and the canals there.	<b>Shabana</b> tended to muse about and describe other users, the boats and buildings. There was a strong sense that she was enjoying the walk as a break from the city. She recalled memories of English northern villages and a childhood television programme.
<b>Focus on musing and memories:</b>	
<b>Kasim</b> focused on musings (about other users, imagining life on the canal and the functions of the canal) and recalled memories of Pakistani canals. He tended not to describe what he saw or heard, as Yasmina his wife did, but rather mused on it.	<b>Nasreen</b> narrated some of her bodily senses, but focused on musings about other users and life on the canal. She mused a great deal, instigated by the visual stimuli of The Malthouse pub, the ICC, the boat passing through the lock and the water. She recalled memories of her life in Birmingham with her family, with some reference to Iran.
<b>Carlo</b> spoke quite freely – his was the densest narrative. He mused a great deal about the walking method, canal functions and other users. At some points his narrative was suddenly arrested by descriptions of visual stimuli (and the associations they instigated) such as the boat, locks and other people. His memory recall referred to Milan and his life in Birmingham.	<b>Graham</b> narrated his musings about other users, nature and boats, and recalled memories of other places relating to work and hobbies, generally based on visual and tactile stimuli. There was a real sense that he enjoyed watching other users and enjoyed high places.



**Fig.6.27 An excerpt from Kasim's walking narrative.** The evocative language and detail Kasim recalled suggest that he was 'transported' to the associated landscape of Mirpur during his walk through the canal landscape in central Birmingham.

*"If anyone really wants to enjoy a canal walk, I would suggest they come there and they will look what is a canal walk. I used to walk there every morning for an hour, I used to cycle round as well, it was very nice. It is called Upper Jelum Canal, it is very big and very clean and very beautiful. You know summers are very hot over there, Upper Jelum Canal is in Mirpur. Like temperature is like forty plus, and there people just jump into the canal and it's very, very cold, very cold and [...] you know people put their fruits inside, you know watermelons and this kind of thing inside the canal for some time and when they get cold they eat it. People put mangoes inside the canal as well, that canal is very clean, that's the reason people use it like that. They put their mangoes in for some time [...] You know there is lots of grass, people can just lie down in the grass in summer under the shadow of a tree and by the side of canal. And then people do poetry and different kind of things. I haven't seen many birds, have you seen any birds? [...] We use them for agriculture. We use all canals for agriculture. They make small canals from them, then more, smaller canals and then more, just like our trees' veins and that kind of thing, and then they go into land."*

(Kasim, aged 34, male)

**Fig. 7.1 Kareema's childhood canal**

Kareema drew this sketch of the canal-scape near her childhood home. She talked about playing in the courtyard behind her house and remembers seeing narrow boats on the water.



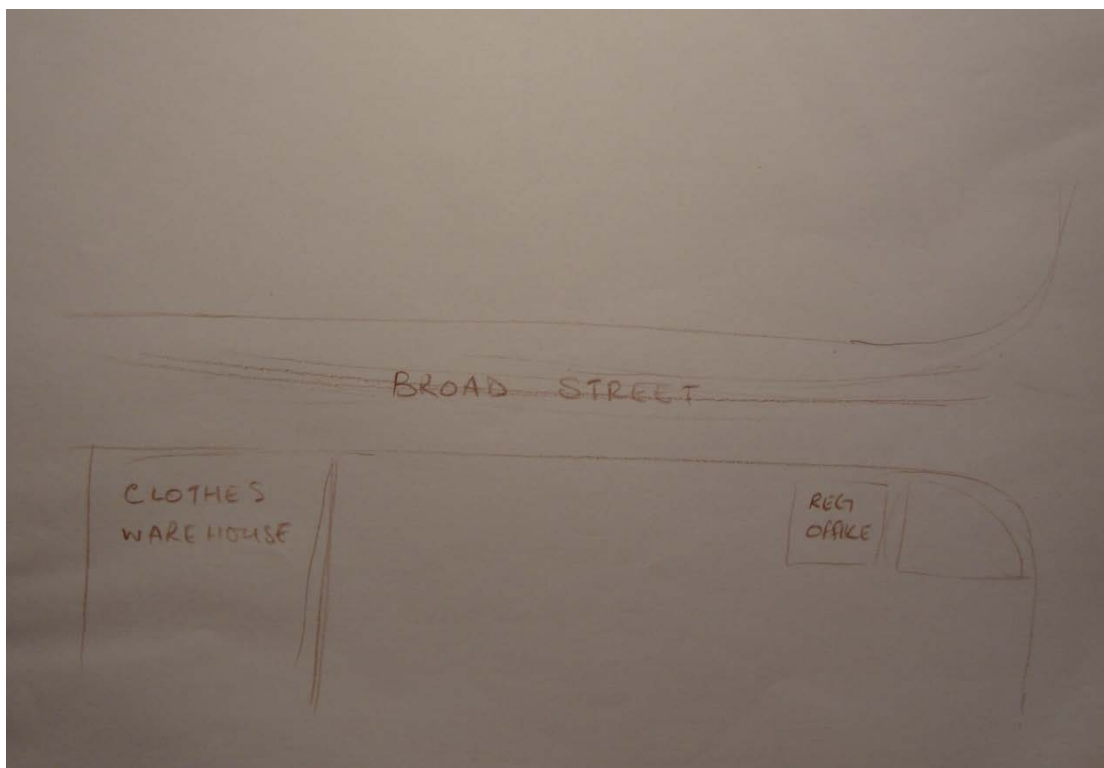
**Fig. 7.2 “How it was”**

Kareema drew this quick sketch of the streets surrounding Brindleyplace. It is a sketch of how she remembers the area during the 1960s, before the canal-scape was re-developed. She talked about visiting the area for errands with her parents.



**Fig. 7.3 Kareema's city centre.**

Kareema's final sketch shows Broad Street how she remembers it from her childhood in the 1960s. The register office and clothes warehouse she visited with her mother are no longer there. Kareema used to know how to drive around these streets, but when she visited as part of the research she realised that she no longer knows how to access this area of the city.



**Fig. 7.4 The central bridge at Brindleyplace**

The Walking-and-Talking exercise with Farzana began at this bridge. Seeing the bridge caused her to recall her idea of the canals in Venice, although Farzana has never visited Italy.



**Fig. 7.5 Moored boats at Gas Street Basin**

Farzana was surprised by the colours of the moored narrow boats, as she imagined British boats would be less colourful.





**Fig. 7.6 The Canalside Café**

When Farzana saw the roof of this café, she suddenly recalled the roof garden of her childhood home in United Arab Emirates.



**Fig. 7.7 Cobbled paving**

Walking across the uneven paving in this area of Gas Street Basin caused an involuntary memory, or sudden recall, in Farzana. She remembered walking across similarly uneven paving in Turkey whilst on holiday.



**Fig.8.1 Postcards from the Cut study image 3**

This image was favoured by the Birmingham Canal Navigations Society. Their group narrative indicated a strong preference for images which portrayed the heritage of the canal landscape, combined with the potential for leisure in the form of bar and restaurant usage.



**Fig.8.2 Postcards from the Cut image 4**

This image was favoured by the Guiding Stars group whose group narrative suggested a preference for images which portrayed the modernity and natural elements of the canal landscape.



**Fig.8.3 The groups' postcard image preferences.**  
\*BCNS Birmingham Canal Navigations Society

Group	Multiple choices	Image 1	Image 2	Image 3	Image 4	Image 5	Image 6	Total image choices	Total respondents
Guiding Stars	1	3	4	2	15	7	1	32	31
BCNS*	5	1	1	24	7	2	1	36	31

**Fig. 8.4 Group respondents by gender**

Group	Male respondents	Female respondents	Total respondents
Guiding Stars	12	19	31
BCNS*	17	14	31



## Plate 26 Consensus Clouds.

The Guiding Stars' and Birmingham Canal Navigations Society's responses to their favourite images. Responses were colour coded into themes (see below) and sized according to the popularity of the theme they fell under; the larger the text, the more popular the theme was as a reason for choosing for this image. Themes are derived from participants' written responses and include: **beauty**, **peacefulness**, **heritage**, **modernity**, **weather**, **green-space**, **water**, **positivity**, **tourism**, **old and new**. The difference between the dominance of certain colour-themes between the two groups' responses is striking. The theme of 'old and new' does not appear in the Guiding Stars response, suggesting it is not a perception they hold. It is interesting to note that 'beauty' is the GS' most popular theme and the BCNS' least popular theme, whilst 'heritage' is the GS' least popular theme and the BCNS' most popular theme.

**Fig.8.5 Guiding Stars' responses to image 4 of Brindleyplace.** The most popular theme was that of 'beauty' and the least popular was the theme of 'heritage'.

“  
 nice trees **pretty site** well developed  
 relaxing have a fresh air canal Express feelings of happiness  
 nice sunny greenery shows the canal Close to Broad Street  
 historic places I would recommend everyone to go there lovely weather **view**  
 Gives a great feeling a place for relaxation **looks good on the eye**  
**attractive to eye cuz of bright colours** It's busy! Looks populated with lots to do  
**looks appealing** It expresses the true nature of Birmingham's canal  
 bright nice scenery Restaurants and attractions like Sea Life Centre modern buildings  
 nice green scenery instead of congested buildings and sites peaceful  
 Positive look on Birmingham **beautiful scenery**”



“Traditional landscape in the modern city

Some original buildings left old and new It is much better now

best of the old and new History of the canal Canal infrastructure Cosmopolitan  
Has put Birmingham on the canal map, right at the centre where it belongs

a reminder of what Midlands craftsmen could do Looks active

Needs to be a balance between some old and new Picturesque

Architecture Canal Older Birmingham and its industrial history

anyone seeing it for the first time would be intrigued to study it the atmosphere  
of the canals when they were first used more than 100 years ago

a living part of Birmingham Boatmen lived on their boats Sympathetic improvement  
wonderful efforts ... to open up the area modern life and traditional furniture

Boats Friendly and relaxing

Knew Gas Street before it was modernized  
it truly was Dickensian Shrieks Birmingham Nostalgia

Boon to modern day “pleasure” boaters Recognizably Birmingham

Ancient urban industrial scene”

Fig. 8.6 Birmingham Canal Navigations Society's responses to image 3 of Gas Street Basin. The BCNS members regard the theme of 'heritage' as the most important aspect of this view.

## Plate 27 The Birmingham Canal Navigations Society

*"The [BCNS] was formed in 1968 and has been promoting the areas canal system for forty years. In the early days it fought campaigns against the closure of many canals, but now thankfully it can help promote restoration and awareness schemes."*

*(BCNS leaflet, April 2008)*

The BCNS exists to "conserve and improve the canals of the West Midlands" (BCNS:2008), namely the Birmingham Canal Navigations which consist of around one hundred miles of canal network in Birmingham and the Black Country. The society is a registered charity organised and run by a committee of volunteers from their headquarters at the restored Tittford Pump House, Oldbury Locks in the Black Country. "Complete with residential moorings and full facilities, the Pump House is a fine example of the aims and achievements of the BCNS" (BCNS:2008). The society organises two main events each year- boat rallies in the summer and winter, and holds monthly social meetings where members meet and listen to a lecture. The society also organises regular 'work parties' whereby members use the society-owned "work boat 'Phoenix' and open-boat 'Crow'" (BCNS:2008) to remove the large items of rubbish that accumulate in the canal. The society also gives talks to other organisations to promote their work and the canal network and work with community groups. Their website<sup>1</sup> contains personal histories of the canals with members' memories of growing up nearby, often accompanied by old photographs:

*"My Grandfather, Enock Mason, worked for British Waterways, as did his father before him. Previously the family lived at a canal house in Pear Tree Lane, Dudley, and the family, along with all their furniture, had to 'leg' the narrow boat through the Dudley tunnel to a new life in Perry Barr...I eventually found just one picture of the cottage which I took when I was about fourteen, to remember that it really did exist."*

*(Janet Lane, 'Childhood Memories in Lock House 83 at Perry Barr', BCNS website, 2009).*

In early 2009 I began an email conversation with the society's Chair, who invited me to "attend our meetings" and also "help on our workboat and see the canals from a different perspective"<sup>2</sup>. I attended a meeting in early April where I spoke to some members and listened to the lecture:

*"Mark has been boating for 25 years and a member for 10...His parents took him to the Llangollen Canal as a 6 year old child on holiday...Loss of the canals, like the one that was filled in [at Tipton Green] means a loss of character to Mark. He has walked through the 'park' that used to be the Tipton Green Lock and said that you can't tell it used to be a canal."*

*(Excerpt from my post-meeting notes, 2 April 2009)*

*"Shall I tell you where it is? It's on the Walsall Canal taken by the junction. That cast-iron bridge, that's still there. On the left had side just out of view is Ockerhill power station and those chimneys are Randalls' Ironworks [...] But if we go to the next [slide] this is where it starts to get really interesting [...] notice the boat, it had the name Worcester, but of course we're in wartime now so all the names were removed weren't they?"*

*(Keith Hodgkins' lecture: 'Wartime Boatwomen', 2 April 2009).*

I also saw some of the society's maintenance work first-hand when I helped at a canal 'work-party' day a few weeks later:

*"We travelled as far as Tipton Pools and back again, using nets and grappling hooks to lift debris from the water into the boat and butty. The route passes two pubs and various housing estates...the towpath was fairly well used and our activity courted a decent amount of attention from passers-by [...] Various items were pulled from the canal including builders' materials, tree branches, shopping trolleys, a bath panel, various items of clothing and*

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<sup>1</sup> [www.bcn-society.co.uk](http://www.bcn-society.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Excerpt from email, 2009

*coconuts. [...] The members [...] regularly find floating coconuts, especially further into Smethwick, [...] often wrapped with silk with money inside. One man saw a fleet of floating lanterns on the canal.[...] We passed a number of birds' nests containing eggs and chicks (coots and moorhens), some nesting geese on the far bank [...] and a number of herons. The members were fairly sensitive to the needs of the birds and were able to identify them easily. Later George broke a coconut for the birds to eat."*

*(My notes, 18 April 2009)*

One man, Ian, volunteered to keep a written diary, with photographs, for one month. The weekly email entries detail his and his wife's narrow boat journey from their home in Staffordshire to Liverpool.

*"On to Anderton through a landscape which is much changed thanks to man's intervention, the salt mining has left large flooded areas so the canal sometimes widens out, with much wild life to be seen. Several herons follow us, moor hens and coots. Arrive at Anderton [...] a popular centre and a good day out for people, important to bring the waterways experience to everyone and a trip boat takes visitors down the lift. Have a walk along the river and nature park, dragon fly lake with a superb wooden sculpture in its centre, but no dragon flies to be seen."*

*(Ian's Canal Diary, 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2009)*

The BCNS convey a strong sense of the canals' identity as a link with the industrial past of the region, evident in the heritage-based nature of the articles found on their website and the lectures they host. Whilst the group accepts the canal landscape in its current state, which varies along the Birmingham Canal Navigations from the barely-used to the recently developed, there is also a sense of the group's identity as 'guardians' of canal heritage. This is evident in their aims and objectives related to the conservation of the canal structure (as with the clean-up day), use of the canals and traditional methods (as with their boat rallies and general canal boat ownership amongst the members), and furthering knowledge of canals and canal history (as with their work with schools and groups, their website and lecture series). The members' written pieces of canal memories and old photographs suggest a certain degree of memorialisation, that is, keeping the memory of the canal alive. These memories are inseparable from the historical aspects of their work, resulting in a personal history of local canals.

The BCNS were welcoming and happy for me to both observe and participate in their rolling diary of events and activities. I was conscious that in my role as a researcher I should not try to impose my research agenda and expectations on the existing dynamics of the society, rather I should try to understand the members' perceptions of the canal landscape through participant-observation.

## Plate 28 The Guiding Stars

*"The Guiding Stars is a vibrant youth-led non-profit company which organises various activities and events to empower and support the achievements of Somali individuals in Birmingham."*

*(The Guiding Stars Facebook page, August 2010<sup>1</sup>)*

The Guiding Stars (GS) focuses on the education of young Somalis as a newly-arrived community. The organisation was established in May 2008 by two friends, Farzana and Farida, in response to reports stating the educational under-achievement of Somali boys and a newspaper report which dubbed them *"The Lost Boys"* (Conversation with Farzana: July 2009). GS has forged strong links with the West Midlands Police Community Cohesion Team and their Equality and Diversity Unit in order to tackle gang and drug culture. I visited Farzana at her home in Birmingham to find out more about the organisation:

*"The group organises monthly workshops and visits to universities... heritage sites and museums. Farzana organised a recent debate on identity which was aimed at Muslims from all backgrounds (European, Asian and African Muslims attended). They are interested in trying to help integrate Somalis into British life through focus on heritage, but there seems to be a debate about the appropriateness of this amongst the community. Some Somalis believe that focus should be on Somali heritage and identity, while others believe that understanding British identity is the way to progress in this society. Farzana said that it is important to work with local communities including the Pakistani Muslim and African-Caribbean communities because: "We are black but we are Muslims, we are Muslims but we are black"."*

*(Notes from meeting with Farzana, July 2009)*

In collaboration with the Heartlands Ring Project<sup>2</sup>, WM Police and British Waterways, the group participated in a canal 'clean-up' day in April 2009. In addition to painting over graffiti and litter-picking, the children (aged 11-18) learnt about the history of the canals.

*"They were really interested in the fisherman, who showed them what he was doing and the fish he had caught. The children were very excited to know that by way of thanks, they will be allowed a boat trip on the canal. Farzana would love for the kids to find out more about the history of the canals and speak with some people who live on them. She described [boaters] as nomads and sees a resemblance with the Somali community who are nomads in their own land as they move around with their cattle, and since the civil upheaval have moved around Africa, the middle east and Europe."*

*(Notes from meeting with Farzana, July 2009)*

I met Farzana in July 2009 through a mutual contact, Hans, from the Heartlands Ring Project based in Sparkhill, East Birmingham. I had asked Hans to introduce me to newly resident groups who may be interested in participating in my research as I had already found that perceptions of the canal

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<sup>1</sup> [www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=57958761022](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=57958761022)

<sup>2</sup> \*The Heartlands Ring Project is based in Sparkhill and is run by Birmingham City Council through its Enterprising Communities initiative (Heartlands Ring leaflet 2009). The project focuses on the loop of canal that runs between Bordesley and Gravelly Hill, passing through some of the poorest districts with some of the largest ethnic minority populations in the city. The project aims to "increase the awareness of local residents" [to] "increase use of waterways for recreation and health[...]provide education and learning opportunities[...]improve the environment[and] reduce vandalism and antisocial behaviour" (Heartlands Ring leaflet 2009).

landscape were fairly universal across UK-born individuals, regardless of ethnicity, and wondered how newly resident individuals may perceive the landscape.

*“Farzana’s interest in the canals is based around heritage and identity (British) and encouraging the Somali children in the group to learn about the culture of the country they have emigrated to [...] Current thinking in equality and diversity is about celebrating cultural difference and making information accessible on a group’s own terms (producing literature in different languages, talking about issues and histories that are considered relevant to certain groups). So it seems that there is a tension between what British organisations wish to portray and what the Somali group wish to gain, as new-comers to Britain.”*

*(Notes from meeting with Farzana September 2009)*

As with any group, GS’s group identity is complex, as the aims of the organising committee may not be shared in their entirety by all of the group’s members and it seems that there is a debate within the community regarding what form ‘integration’ should take. GS organises a summer rural retreat in “*Somali-shire*”<sup>3</sup>(somewhere in the English countryside) where young people live in the nomadic style of cattle herders in order to experience Somali tradition, suggesting that GS’s ethos lies in learning about British culture, but reiterating Somali culture through heritage and tradition.

Farzana spoke of the difficulty that the Somali community has in engaging adult males, something which she attributes to the usage of the plant-based drug ‘chat’, which is chewed by Somali men, but which is deemed inappropriate for use by women and which GS is currently campaigning to be made illegal. The gradual separation of boys from girls as they enter adulthood also contributes to their lack of engagement, since the majority of social and cultural events are led by the women of the community, as with GS. Farzana has noticed that whilst boys are young they participate in the heritage-based visits GS organises, but that older males are not interested. Indeed, a Facebook entry of April 2009 entitled “*Canals Project*” and inviting members to attend, elicited one written comment from a young man that read simply “*So what dear?*” [GS facebook:2009]. It seems the core of members interested in the heritage-based work of GS comprises girls, boys and women. Attendance of men at the April 2009 conference ‘*Who Do You Think You Are?*’ was high, suggesting that for these individuals discussions relating to Somali culture are more appealing than those relating to British heritage.

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<sup>3</sup> The Guiding Stars’ facebook page, 2010

**Fig. 9.1 The Reflexive Cycle**

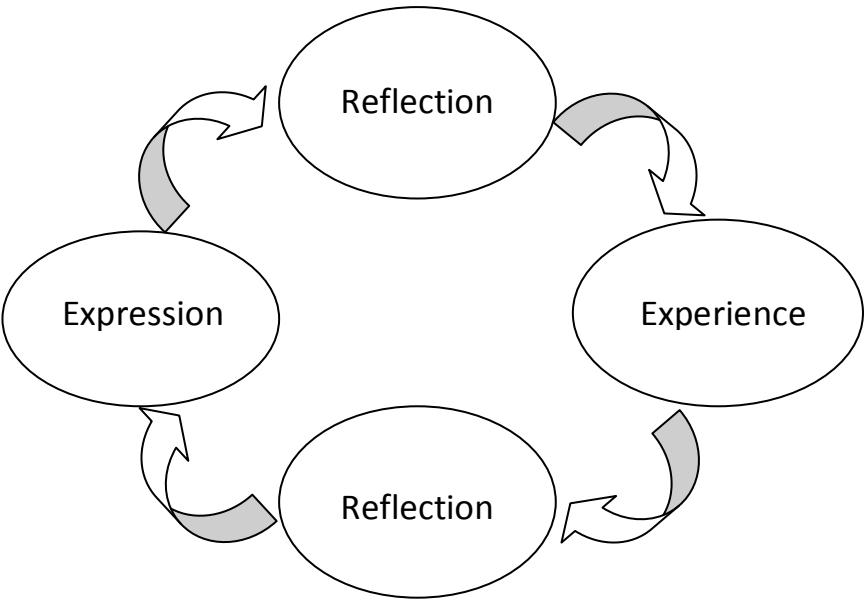
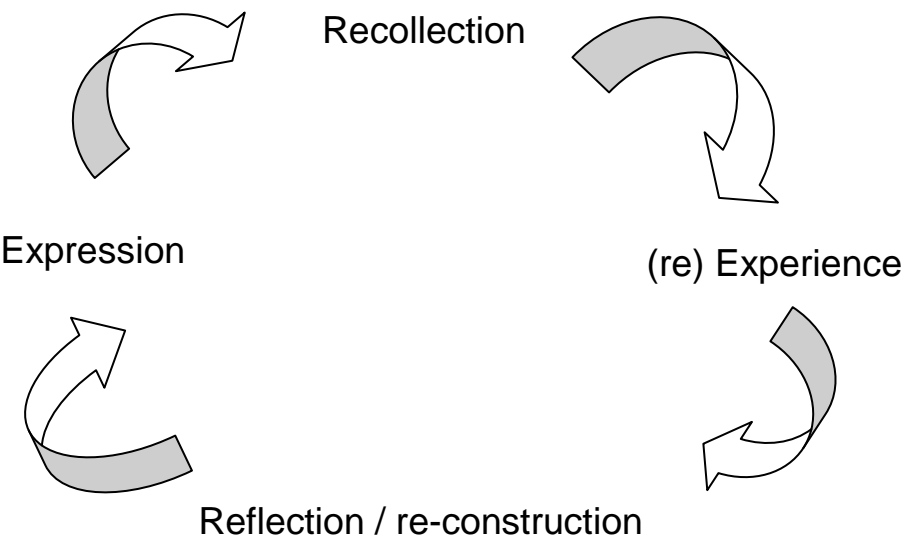


Fig. 9.2 The Memory loop



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## Appendix 1

## Lone canal walk, 22 March 2010 – textual analysis notes.

Going through the notes from the walk, I codify the main components in terms of sensory experience including memories; sight, sound, touch, smell, taste, memory, and assign a colour to each. I then further categorise these by theme; colour, subject.

### Key

touch sound sight smell taste memory musing feeling action

NB: Where a phrase is related to more than one sense, it will be repeated in brackets in the appropriate colours.

NB: Where speech occurs this will be counted as sound, since it is intended for auditory purposes. Eye-contact with others is counted as sight, since this is a visual experience.

### Analysis:

*Lone canal walk, Mailbox to University of Birmingham's 'The Vale' student housing village, 22 March 2010, 2.30pm.*

*I decided to go for a short walk towards Brindleyplace in order to feed some stale bread to the ducks on the canal. I was taking a break from writing and even though it was raining I decided I needed to leave the flat. I wore a hat, raincoat and boots, and took my large umbrella, although soon realized it was too windy to use it. I left the flat and turned left up through the outdoor section of the Mailbox development, past the restaurants and bars and over the silver metal bridge. At the bottom I turned left instead of carrying on straight towards Brindleyplace – I don't know why exactly, except that maybe the thought of returning home after a quick visit to the ducks didn't fill me with joy. There were quite a few people around despite the rain and perhaps some part of me wanted to be alone. It was at this point that it occurred to me I was exploring a section of the canal (towards Edgbaston) that I had never walked down alone before, and certainly never all the way to The Vale. This would be a little bit of Situationist *dérive*; I would let the city take me wherever it wanted me to go! I was subsequently reminded of my forthcoming Sensory Walk around the Brindleyplace area and thought that this would be a useful test run if only I had brought my recorder or just a notebook to record my experiences. However, I resolved to continue and write my thoughts down as soon as I got home. The rest of this will be written in the form of first-person present-tense, quick-succession bullets and sentences as I recall the journey and the salient sensory experiences.*

*Rounding the apartment building. [Rounding the apartment building] with the Malaysian restaurant on the corner – the wind and rain hit my face – I do my coat all the way up the neck.*

*Building noises from the Cube, men in yellow jackets in my peripheral vision. I wonder if they are watching me?*

*The first bridge – no birds, just the sound of rain and smell of stagnant water, disturbed.*

*Pass under – momentary dry, then out into rain again. On the other side Matiss and I once disturbed some obvious dealers, got scared and left the towpath up the steps – no-one there now though.*

*The towpath is brick, then gravel – crunch, crunch, puddle, wet boots [wet boots].*

*The backs of buildings with trees and shrubs. Water drips from the banks. I see geese on the path and ducks in the water.*

*Feeding. Honk, honk, splash, quack, quack – one takes bread from my hand, I feel it tugging. No, I don't have any more bread – goodbye! Honk. I side-step an insistent bird and splash in a puddle. Stupid goose.*

*Crunch, crunch, crunch. [Crunch, crunch, crunch]. I walk fast, with purpose. This is exercise too. Dawdlers always look suspicious.*

*Another bridge. Dry, dripping, then wet. In the distance blurry human shapes (I'm not wearing my glasses). Scared – start to turn back. A bike is coming in my direction, yellow jacket – a man. I walk past him, then turn back around and walk towards the shapes; his presence has strengthened me.*

*Birds singing – lots of them – I am surprised. There is so much nature around me in the middle of the city. I side-step some puddles, big ones with milky gravel-water in them. I pass the couple and say "alright" and smile- the man frowns, the woman smiles. I wonder what they are doing. What do they think I am doing? To the left the backs of houses with cute little jetties behind their back fences – some have seats and planters. They look old and well used, I am reminded of Welshpool and then Tipton where I have seen this before.*

*A red jumper? T-shirt? Screwed-up in the grass, soggy. What happened?*

*Train tracks. Another bridge. I hear a car door and drilling from behind the wall – what is it? A person who is so close to me, but who I cannot see. On the other side I look behind me and see a yellow-coated man up a ladder. Whistling and brick scraping.*

*Cold hands.*

I hear the train before I see it. Then the rush of air as it passes. The sound fills the world, no more birds or wind, just train and the hee-honk. Now gone, the birds rush back and scare me. I look behind – somebody could have jumped me during the train noise.

Sound of quick footsteps then a man running towards me round the corner, very close, I am startled and jump slightly – he looks at me and I smile – he frowns. This is a theme I think. Maybe he thought I was a weirdo?

Signs tell me there is danger – overhead cables. So close to the train tracks now. The towpath is narrower, trees rustle. The rain still. [The rain still]

Yellow lights ahead. I am scared. Shall I turn back? I turn. A runner behind me, puffing. I step aside and he passes. He doesn't thank me. I continue, spurred on by the presence of another human. Swishing behind – a cyclist. I step aside and this time he thanks me very kindly. I am surprised.

Mud. [Mud][Mud] I approach the Edgbaston Tunnel. 26 metres it says. I go in, I can still see the cyclist. It is light for a few metres. The path is dry, narrow, uneven. I stumble and am thankful for the handrail. [handrail, handrail] Not halfway yet. It is an old tunnel, the bricks are red and worn. I reach out to touch them. Crumbly. Dripping from the roof. Dark water with green. A musty smell. I am uneasy. Legendary water daemons? I recall the Netherton Tunnel, so dark and long [so dark and long]. The Tipton Civic Society told me people were found hanged in there once. Hairs standing. I stop and look behind. Nothing. I continue, faster. Should I turn back? Am over half way now, and I don't want to walk in this more than I have to. 26 metres? Seems longer to me. Nearing the end, light. Green reflections in a half circle at the opening – trees and bushes. The sound of birds and out!

Relief. I won't walk back along the canal. I will use the roads from Edgbaston.

Trees. Dripping water. Crunch, squelch. [Crunch, squelch]

A cyclist behind, swishing wet wheels... a runner in front, panting breath. The towpath widens and I see a cute red bridge and a path leading round the side. Yellow flowers in clumps. Am I here already? I walk up and over. A sign – University of Birmingham. Graffiti.

I stand on the bridge and look back the way I have come. Pleasure. Birds singing. I am wet and cold. My foot is sore. I leave the canal and head through The Vale. Guilt for not walking back, but I cannot face the tunnel again. I think that it is a shame that I will never again experience the thrill of walking that section as I have now discovered it.

## Appendix 2

# THE CANAL ENVIRONMENT SOUNDSCAPE IN BIRMINGHAM – A PILOT STUDY

Z Millman      Birmingham City University  
R Coles        Birmingham City University  
G Millar        British Waterways

## 1 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The aims of the study were to examine the sound experience of Birmingham's canal-side landscape and to investigate soundwalking as a methodology that could be used in future research. Thus this study forms part of the basis for primary research gathering in the wider area of landscape perception related to the evolving and regenerated canal landscape and the responses of a culturally diverse, 21<sup>st</sup> century UK society. The soundwalk approach was set in the context of the canal network in terms of its focus for urban regeneration, the strong identity of the canal corridor, including the emphasis on heritage, and as a unique part of the pedestrian public realm. Particular focus in analysis was placed on the sound identity associated with the chosen section of canal, sounds as signifiers of place, that is, whether any of the sounds heard were specific to the canal or whether a combination of sounds signified the canal landscape, and included dominant sounds; the group's ability to identify sound origins; the identification of changing sound scenarios as the journey progressed through different regeneration scenarios; and the impact that the soundscape had on the group's associations.

## 2 EXPLANATION OF PROCESS AND RATIONALE OF THE METHODOLOGY

The soundwalk was organised in three stages. The initial starting point, located within the pedestrian space of Brindleyplace, was chosen as a familiar location to the students with a strong (designed) sound identity relating to its water feature and no direct association with traffic. Brindleyplace is set in the general sound scenario of a pedestrian area within a busy urban centre and is also a typical meeting point where a journey might start. Secondly, the soundwalk itself, moving from Brindleyplace to the canal corridor, exposed the group to a range of place identities already visually defined, but yet to be defined in sound terms. Finally, we held a discussion session two weeks later to explore recollections of sound and to review the sound experience in terms of individual and group perception. The walk involved a group of eight students from the second year of Birmingham City University's BA Landscape Architecture programme, consisting of three female and five male participants, aged from their early twenties to their fifties, and two researchers. All were familiar with this part of Birmingham, but unfamiliar with this section of canal.

In both the soundwalk and the discussion session a combination of digital sound recording and note-taking were used to capture the sounds experienced and the group's verbal responses. There are limitations with this approach, as with any. Although the digital sound recorder was fairly adept at recording the nuances of background sounds, a few minutes of recording were obscured by the loudest sounds such as water and wind, which meant that some potentially insightful comments could not be heard on the recording during the transcription phase. In this respect, note-taking was valuable as an auxiliary recording technique, but again, not comprehensive. The discussion session was very useful in re-affirming responses the group made during the soundwalk, and in the more controlled sound environment of the seminar room, the recording was clearer and note-taking less

fraught. The time between the two sessions was specifically identified to allow the group to reflect on the soundwalk.<sup>1 2</sup>

As identified, the soundwalk route began from Brindleyplace, the main square of Birmingham's regenerated, canal-side, city-centre development. Brindleyplace is a mixed-use area of upmarket bars and restaurants, corporate headquarters, shops, galleries and other leisure attractions. The area contains the Ikon Gallery of contemporary art and the Sea Life Centre, and is linked to the International Convention Centre, Symphony Hall and National Indoor Arena by pedestrian routes over the canals that separate them. From here, the group descended to the canal towpath and continued past the Sea Life Centre, crossing to the opposite towpath at the National Indoor Arena. From here the walk continued in a straight line, past the Farmer's Bridge lock flight at Cambrian Wharf, where canal boats are moored and a combination of residential and office premises surround the canal, and on through some emerging development areas still under construction. The route ended on the canal towpath under Ludgate Hill in the Jewellery Quarter area, approximately an hour after the group convened at Brindleyplace (Figure 1).

We suspected that it would be difficult, artificial, and undesirable for the group to separate their aural responses from their visual ones, thus comparisons between the lure of the visual environment and its sonic counterpart were included, choosing to start the route at the main square of Brindleyplace as it is a designed space with a strong visual identity and sound environment. The fountain in the square is the main visual and sonic focus of the space and pedestrians are directed to walk through it by the channelling of the walkway and the draw of the water sounds. It was anticipated that the group would find the contrast between this soundscape and that of the changeable canal landscape, as it passes through developed and developing zones, distinctive and that this would lead to comparisons between levels of engagement and their effects on the soundscape along the walk. The route was entirely pedestrianised. Brindleyplace is a car-free zone and the canal towpath is only accessible by foot or bike, making this a controlled aspect of the soundwalk. It also meant that traffic noise would be an external, background sound in all stages of the walk.

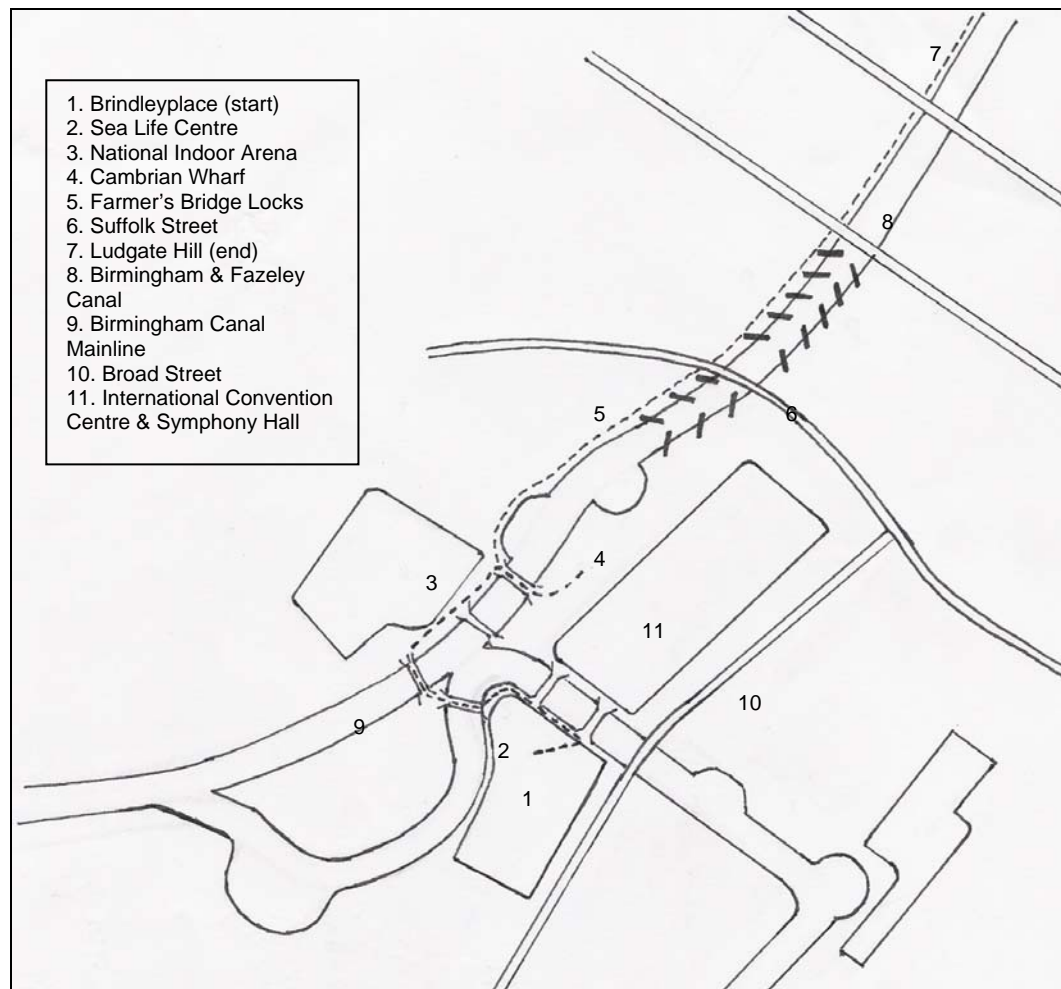
The forty-five minute long follow up discussion session was held in the group's timetabled seminar room two weeks after the soundwalk to allow the group time to reflect on their experiences. By timing both the soundwalk and the discussion session to coincide with their timetabled weekly seminars, the existing routine and dynamics of the group relationships created as realistic and relaxed an experiment as possible.<sup>3</sup>

One of our major concerns with the notion of the soundwalk was the creation of an artificial user engagement. Many of the soundwalk guides and artists who employ soundwalks in their work<sup>4</sup> state that participants should not communicate with each other, but listen and then discuss the sounds they heard, before moving onto the next stop in silence.<sup>5</sup> However it was felt that this method denied the presence and effect of the body in the environment<sup>6</sup>, creating an artificial situation and making the act of the soundwalk an abstract one. For this reason the group was allowed to behave as they normally would when out walking with friends; they contributed to the soundscape through their interactions with one another and their explorations of the landscape.<sup>7</sup> For example, at one point a participant consciously used the physical structure of the canal to produce reverberation, by whistling under a bridge and creating echoes. As one of the participants remarked during the discussion session, *"it's lovely to think that you leave a memory of yourself in sound."* In this way, our soundwalk not only recorded the participants' responses to the soundscape, but contributed, albeit fleetingly, to the soundscape of the canal.

Limiting the soundwalk to an hour in length was designed to ensure that the group stayed focused, that we did not walk too far away from the familiar starting point and that we did not over-run the allotted seminar period. Also, because this research was undertaken in January, we did not want the group to become too cold or be too far away from warm shelter in the event of rain.



A discussion at the start of the walk introduced the concept of a soundwalk and the topics of analysis including the identification of sounds as signifiers of place and dominant sounds. A questionnaire was not used, rather, we let the participants make observations, prompting when they



(Fig. 1) Shows the soundwalk route, indicated by the dotted line.  
*Drawn from a map produced by British Waterways.*

strayed from aural to visual responses. It was felt that letting the participants chat amongst themselves would uncover greater insight into their moods and perceptions in reaction to their surroundings, as opposed to responding to potentially leading questions. The digital sound recorder was an invaluable tool in this respect.

### 3 CHRONOLOGICAL ROUTE SYNOPSIS

The sound experience is summarised below in terms of the group's interaction with the location and feedback in respect of the sounds experienced.

We begin our route near the fountain in the main square of Brindleyplace. The group notes the dominant sounds; a background fuzz and whoosh of water, people's chatter and footsteps. They mention a background traffic noise, but say that it is very quiet considering how close we are to Broad Street (a major route into the centre).

*"The water's overbearing – I can't hear..."*

*"I think it's relaxing."*

*"I think it's romantic."*

They make visual responses about how the looming buildings make it a corporate square, but say that the sounds created by the paving and speech bouncing off the buildings contributes to this. They talk about how the sound would be dampened by planting and the use of softer materials. We walk on through the fountain and then a narrow passageway into a small open area of restaurants that overlooks the canal. The sound of the water becomes very loud and dominates for a few seconds, but before and after this point, the sound of the group chatting can be heard on the recording.

A participant notes that the sound of the water has almost disappeared. There is some disagreement on where the sound changed, but we have stopped where it is 'appropriate', which is a visual and social response.<sup>8</sup> They remark that the space, rather than the sound gave direction, leading them from Brindleyplace to this area. They think it is easier to talk without the water sound and speculate on how uncomfortable it must be to sit on the terrace of the nearby Café Rouge. There is an underlying rumble, but they cannot identify it, saying it could be traffic or air conditioning units. Again, they mention how close we are to Broad Street and how quiet the traffic noise is. The group discusses relative sound levels and whether the soundscape here would be louder during times of higher usage, saying that we'd *"picked the wrong time to be here"* as *"everyone's gone back to work."* The group talks about how much busier it is here during the summer months and how there is a *"European vibe."* They cite the music and smells of the bars. The consensus is that there is too little sound to keep them here and we walk down the steps to the towpath. Whenever we walk, there is the sound of the trolley-bag that one of the participants brought with her, its wheels clattering on the paving bricks. The group chatters constantly.

Fifteen minutes into our soundwalk we stop on the towpath next to the Sea Life Centre because the sound has changed. The group notices the sounds of music from a nearby pub, the sound of birds and some background traffic.

*"It has changed. It's quiet."*

The sound of the bird-recording from the Sea Life Centre is strong, but the group feels that this does not 'count' as a bona fide part of the soundscape because *"none of it's natural."* They also think *"it's so annoying."*

*"There's a bit of a rumble."*

*"It's the traffic."*

*"I think the only place you're gonna escape that is when you're by the fountain."*

There is some disagreement about whether this spot produces more echoes than Brindleyplace, although they agree that the towpath between was more "echo-y" than both.

We continue across the canal and towards Farmer's Bridge locks. We stop on the towpath next to a bridge because the sound has changed again. The NIA is above us. Before the sound of the wind dominates, louder traffic, some bird noises and what may be an aeroplane can be heard on the recording. The group cite the wind and the cars *"coming and going"*, but feel that *"there's no dominant sound"* and that *"if you were to look at sound percentages...it would be fairly even."* The group disagrees about the frequency of the sounds, some saying they are intermittent while one participant talks about an *"underlying rumble"*, but explains *"maybe it's me, because I live in the country and I notice it more."*

We continue towards the locks and cross the canal to a residential area of high-rise flats around a small park area. We have been walking for approximately thirty minutes. The chatter in the group becomes more exuberant as some of the participants cross over the lock instead of the bridge. We hear a distant rumbling and look to see some boys on skateboards near the moored canal boats. The group cites traffic noise, the skateboards and *"the water from the locks"* as dominant sounds.

*"It sounds quite different to down there. It sounds more 'city'."*

We hear the increasing sound of an unidentified machine, and look to see it is a City Council street cleaning vehicle. The group comments on the fleeting nature of many of the noises. We cross back over the bridge and continue along the towpath.

*"There are a lot of water sounds here...this is the first place we've heard water, apart from artificial, artificially agitated."*

As we near the tunnel underneath Suffolk Street, bordering the Jewellery Quarter, traffic noise becomes louder and combines with the water sounds from the overflows of the locks. A car alarm sounds. There is loud traffic noise from the street above. Again, the group thinks it is more 'city' here. As we pass under the bridge echoes and the noise of the trolley as it passes over the cobbles can be heard on the recording.

We reach a section of towpath flanked by a construction site on the near side and a recent office development on the opposite bank. There is a wooden walkway accessing the office buildings and we walk part way across before turning back. For one participant the sound of the walkway is particularly evocative, and she says *"walking across this, the sound of it does remind me of the beach, you know when you go out on the pier."*

One of the participants whistles and it echoes. Construction sounds of banging and drilling dominate and as we pass through a tunnel, they and the group's voices echo. Water sounds are heard under the tunnel.

We have been walking for about an hour and have reached our final stop under Ludgate Hill in the Jewellery Quarter. There are building noises in the background, some water sounds from the lock-overflows behind us and background traffic sounds. The group notes the contrast between the continuous *"hammering"* and *"construction sounds"* and the intermittent bird sounds. There is some discussion about time being a *"key part of the sound"*, both in terms of frequency and also the time of day. They note that traffic noise and pedestrian noise will change depending on the time.

*"You're very aware that things have encroached on this space."*

*"Yes, encroaching sounds."*

## 4 ANALYSIS OF THE SOUND EXPERIENCE

The group's responses during the soundwalk and their reflections during the discussion session resulted in two initial observations. Firstly, in this location, the Birmingham canal soundscape is not a strong one. The majority of the sounds we encountered were external urban sounds and there were no specific signifying sounds. Secondly, the group's 'ideal notion' of a canal soundscape and the reality of the Birmingham canal soundscape experience are different.

The sounds that the group cited as 'dominant' at different points along the soundwalk included water, wind, traffic and construction. The most dominant of these, occurring at the start of our journey, was the (water sound) fountain at Brindleyplace. The consensus was that the sound was so dominant as to be uncomfortable at times; it annoyed one participant who usually enjoyed beginning his route into the city centre in that square and another commented that *"the water's overbearing...I can't hear."* The only other water sounds were those heard in the second half of the soundwalk near the lock flight at Farmer's Bridge. The water overflowing the locks made a pouring sound, but this was fleeting and dominated by the loud traffic noise as we neared the main road at Suffolk Street. Traffic noise and the more general sound of the 'city' were cited at other points; on the towpath near the NIA where *"the cars [were] coming and going"* and in the small park area near Farmer's Bridge where one participant remarked that *"it sounds quite different to down there. It sounds more 'city'."* The group noted how *"you can hear the wind"* near the NIA, but felt that despite its brief dominance, that it was *"sufficiently infrequent not to dominate"* and that the relative volume of the soundscape in this area was *"fairly even."* Towards the end of the soundwalk as we passed into emerging areas of urban regeneration, the group also cited the *"construction"* and *"hammering sounds."*

The soundwalk led the group through areas of differing sound experience, in terms of the types of sound present and the group's ability to distinguish them from other sounds. At some points the group qualified the sound as being 'city', notably where the sounds of traffic and general urban buzz

were dominant, but they never qualified the quieter or more 'natural' sounding areas as being 'rural' or 'country,' restful or relaxing.<sup>9</sup> While the canal route we walked was definitely part of the urban pedestrian route associated with 'lo-fi' soundscapes, its sound environments were both 'lo-fi' and 'hi-fi', in that we passed through areas where it was difficult to identify individual sounds and others where sounds were clearly distinct from one another.<sup>10</sup>

In the follow-up discussion session it was apparent that the group had discussed the soundwalk and revised their earlier reactions, or else forgotten some of the sounds they had cited during the soundwalk. One participant spoke on behalf of the group saying, *"We didn't really consider the sounds to be that dominant except the water [at Brindleyplace]...it was too loud."* A little later the group disagreed on the dominance of the water overflowing the locks, with one participant feeling that *"it stayed with you the whole way through, because it's always stepping down, there's always an overflow"*, but then revised this by saying that *"it turned into a constant and became like the traffic and you just forgot about it."* Other participants said they didn't *"remember that"* and *"I really wasn't aware of any water noise at all, and when I did hear it, it was quite fleeting and disappointing."* Despite the presence of this range of sounds, the group felt that the route was generally *"quiet."* All the sounds we encountered were fleeting, either because we moved out of hearing range, as with the water sound at Brindleyplace and the construction sounds later on, or because they were intermittent, as with the traffic noise and the wind. This led us to the belief that the urban canal soundscape is fairly neutral and it is the journey that creates a soundscape, comprising external sounds that are *"superimposed upon this canal."*

In the discussion session we uncovered a consensus of an ideal canal soundscape, based on the participants' associations. This ideal soundscape included the sound of a *"gravelly path"*, birds, *"rustling reeds"*, working locks, boats *"chugging"*, echoes and wind noises. From the recording and the comments the group made during both sessions, it is evident that some of these ideal aspects were present in Birmingham's urban canal soundscape, for example, the group cited the wind, overflowing locks and echoes along the towpath at various points during the soundwalk, but still felt that this did not constitute an ideal soundscape. This suggests that while not all of the ideal elements must be present, a different combination of ideal sounds to the ones identified during the soundwalk are more preferable and indicative of 'canal.' The group discussed the notion of sounds as indicators of place, agreeing that despite the presence in the soundwalk of some of their ideal sounds, those sounds, without the visual context of a canal, were not sufficient place indicators and could be mistaken for *"a river or even a drain."*

Several issues arise from this study. Participants tended to assess the soundscape of the canal in relation to their life experiences, in that they expected sounds based on previous (childhood) encounters with the landscape. Thus comparisons were made between the soundscape experienced and the soundscape expected. This included the level of reminiscence that the participants demonstrated during the soundwalk. They discussed visiting Brindleyplace in the summer evenings, trips to the Sea Life Centre when they were younger, and for some of the parents in the group, associations with their children on boating trips. One participant associated the sound of the wooden walkway we crossed with visiting the seaside. The majority were memories they associated with the places we passed rather than the soundscape, but we decided to encourage the group to explore their experiences of canals during the discussion session because it was such a striking and unexpected aspect of the soundwalk. Each participant had different prior experiences of the canals, including the Black Country Museum *"where the men stick their legs up on the side of the tunnels"*, the wildlife of the canal at Henley, which is *"a very different experience"*, fishing on the Grand Union Canal; walking the towpaths at Worcester; and walking country canals where *"when we'd see a boat going through all the kids would help push the locks open."* This led us to question whether memories of childhood experiences informed the participants' perceptions of the urban soundscape as adults, and also the types of sounds that they remembered. The group themselves believed that they sought the sounds they most wanted to hear. The participant who opened locks as a child was the same man who remembered the sounds of the water overflowing the locks during the soundwalk and accepted that he *"was the one who actually went and looked at the overflows and...was a bit more involved in it."* The woman who lived near a rural canal felt that the urban canal soundscape was *"dead"* because nothing lived there and believed that *"years ago*

*there would have been the sounds of horses,”* but stated that *“I like birds and wildlife so maybe I’m more susceptible to it.”* The notion that it is essential to consider ‘the interaction between people’s characteristics and their perception of sound’<sup>11</sup> was further supported by the participants’ reminiscences and could form the basis for further study.

The group were unanimous in their disappointment with the sound experience because *“it wasn’t as good an experience”* as they had expected and because of *“the lack of sounds.”* They also agreed that they did not *“feel safe”* on the towpaths, but attributed this to physical factors such as being *“trapped by wall or trapped by water”* and a lack of engagement in some areas, a consequence of which being a quiet soundscape. One participant likened the canal to a tomb and felt that *“if they were being used again, that would bring with it all these different sounds.”* When asked if there were any sounds that made them feel more secure, the group suggested *“the bird sounds maybe”*, which may suggest that visual, rather than aural, environments primarily affect our notions of safety.<sup>12</sup>

## 5 CONCLUSION OF THE PILOT STUDY

It was possible to broadly divide the soundscape into different components – internal sounds produced by a specific aspect of the canal, and external sounds produced as part of the interaction passing through different canal side elements. The internal sounds i.e. those produced by the water or specific aspects of the canal architecture were weak, contrasting with the visual elements of heritage that is such a strong aspect of canal and city regeneration.

Internal sounds included those produced by interaction, such as echoes and the sounds of walking. These varied in nature and were commented upon, but were still weak compared to the visual experience, the physical interaction with the texture of the paving or the encounters with locks, bridges and tunnels, which invited touch, and also in comparison to the sound experience of Brindleyplace.

External sounds were varied. There was a general buzz of urban noise, and although it was not dominant it did characterise the canal corridor as an urban /city pedestrian area, while other sounds were fleeting but dominant while they lasted. The strongest of these were the sounds of traffic passing over the bridges.

We identified the specific sounds generated by the canal as weak and understated, in contrast to the visual and tactile elements that were strongly stated and reinforced in regeneration, which although they produced sounds, tended not to signify place identity on their own.

The stronger sound experience related to encounters with adjacent activities, further emphasising the weak nature of the sounds associated specifically with the canal. These external sounds could be defined as sound encounters as part of the journey, facilitated by the canal route. We call this ‘sound voyeurism’ by virtue of the nature of interaction i.e. the sound is experienced as adjacent to the canal, not part of it.

The participants held associations of the canal soundscape generated by expectations i.e. the participants associated the canal structure with sounds and actively listened for them; there was a sound expectation which was not forthcoming.

It is suggested that while the visual, heritage and tactile elements are all emphasised in the canal regeneration, the sound elements are largely neglected. This is in strong comparison to the designed public space of Brindleyplace (the start of the soundwalk) where noise (of the water feature) is a strong and dominant aspect of the design upon which the whole square is focussed.

We consider that the use of soundwalking as a methodology for investigating the user experience and perception of the canal landscape’s identity, highlighted the poor emphasis on sound as part of the regeneration process, although it was identified that there was potential to utilise the inherent

canal sounds (to mainly emphasise the noise of water) to create a strong sound identity, but that this would require additional intervention.

## 6 METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Several issues arise from the pilot study regarding the use of an existing student group as test subjects. As a test group they have previous experience and expectations of the canal landscape, which are re-visited whilst forming perceptions of the new experience of the soundwalk. The use of a group with a shared identity and existing relationships was both pragmatic and appropriate, as it was important to test our methodology on willing participants before contacting potential focus groups comprising people from the local community. Future potential participants include groups from a diverse range of cultural, ethnic and social backgrounds mirroring the diversity of the urban context. In this way we could further investigate the importance of prior experience of the canal land/soundscape in forging responses to new soundwalks. Using different focus groups would also identify potentially new shared responses to ideal canal land/soundscapes.

There are potential limitations. The pilot study was based on the (correct) assumption that the focus group had prior experience of the canal landscape and as such would be able to draw on their memories and associations in perceiving the soundscape. However, other focus groups of individuals without prior experience of canals (non-visitors or people with no cultural tendency/history of canal engagement) will draw on different experiences to those of the research team in responding to the new experience of the soundwalk. It may be useful in future focus groups then, to follow a three-stage methodology, comprising the soundwalk and post-walk discussion, with the addition of a pre-walk discussion to ascertain the group's existing experience of canal landscapes. In this way, the methodology would follow a 'before, during and after' pattern, to enable us to chart any changes in perception more accurately.

Acknowledgements – This study forms part of a wider study jointly funded by British Waterways and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

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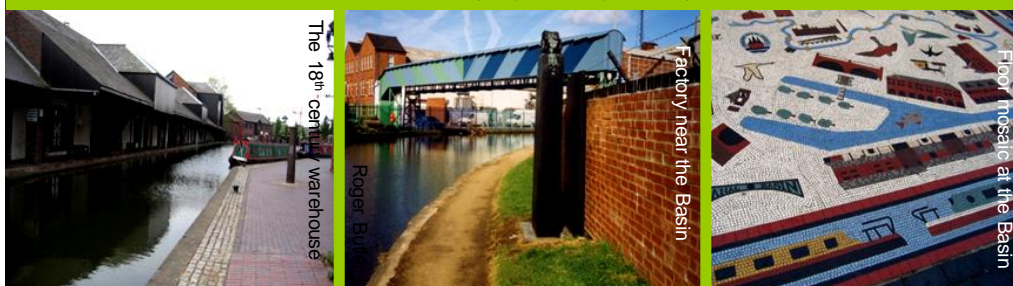
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## Appendix 3





1. Choose a photo of Coventry Canal Basin and the '5 ½' and, on the blank side, say something about it. You could say why you like or dislike it, share a story, memory or opinion - we're interested in any thoughts you have.
2. Include your age, gender and ethnicity to help in our research.
3. Post the card back to us or hand it in where you picked it up. Thank you!



The unused (draft) Coventry (above) and Stourport (below) postcards for the *Postcards from the Cut* study (Chapter Five). Both sites underwent re-development programmes, emphasising heritage through the use of art. These sites were used for early familiarization, but a lack of participants required a focus on the Birmingham study site.



1. Choose a photo of Stourport Basins and, on the blank side, say something about it. You could say why you like or dislike it, share a story, memory or opinion - we're interested in any thoughts you have.
2. Include your age, gender and ethnicity to help in our research.
3. Post the card back to us or hand it in where you picked it up. Thank you!





## Appendix 4

## **BA Landscape Architecture design Project – Place Identity and Place Making AMR49306**

### **Observation notes from Session 2 – Canal Walk**

Of the 15 students in the group, 13 were present today. We met at Brindleyplace's Costa Coffee near the iconic stepped-fountain at 11am. The session lasted 2 hours, after which the students did not return to university. We decided that we would let them have the week, without a discussion, to prepare individual, fairly informal, presentations to be carried out in Session 3.

The section of canal that we considered ran between the NIA and The Mailbox, and included the bridges and towpaths, Gas Street Basin and Brindleyplace near the ICC.

#### *1. The bridge near the Sea Life Centre.*

*This was our first stop. The students noticed the abundance of flowers (part of the City Council's Floral Trail), but felt that they obscured the view of the canal. Many felt that they were too short to have a decent view of their surroundings, and felt that there was little to keep their interest. They liked the view of the buildings on Broad Street that runs across the canal.*

#### *2. The Water's Edge.*

*This is the 'bandstand' style structure next to the steps that lead down to the towpath. The group didn't understand what this structure was supposed to be – it's not raised, so isn't quite a bandstand. However, it is a useful meeting point and there is an invitation to walk to the railings and look over at the bridge and the ICC and at the canal below that. There is a real sense of the levels of the development here.*

#### *3. The bridge to the ICC (main thoroughfare).*

*The group liked this bridge. They liked the paving, the flowers and the feeling of being in the treetops (there are trees on the ICC side of the bridge). They mentioned the bars on the Brindleyplace side and looked down to the towpath. They thought it was a very clean space and well looked-after. Many students leant on the railings and looked over. One student said that she didn't feel as though she could stop here and probably wouldn't come here again. A few students were interested in the management of the site. They commented on the lack of graffiti in comparison to the canal we visited [at Aston] during Session 1. A few students noticed how wobbly the bridge is when people walk across it.*

#### *4. The towpath on the Brindleyplace side.*

*The group generally did not like this spot. One student said that when she was on the bridge, she thought it looked nice, but now that she was on the towpath, she felt uncomfortable and that it was unpleasant. They all thought the water was dirty. They*

*commented on the lack of space. A few students were interested in the original canal features.*

#### *5. Gas Street Basin.*

*The group felt there was a feeling of space here and they spread out to fill it. They took more photos. They commented on the old buildings and the bars.*

#### *6. The bridge to The Mailbox.*

*The students at the front of the group automatically walked up the ramp to the bridge. When asked, they said that they hadn't made a conscious choice, it just seemed the only place to go. Many students didn't like this bridge. They commented on the temporary feel and the material (metal grid). They were interested in the building site next to The Mailbox and discussed what it would be used for. The group split into two to allow people to walk through and leant on the railings.*

Here we left the group for an hour to walk back along the route, taking photos, making notes and sketching aspects of the canal. We encouraged them to take advantage of the levels and the space. They tended to spend less time at the Gas Street/Mailbox end of the development, preferring the area around Brindleyplace. Many students photographed each other within the landscape and it will be interesting to see whether they sketch each other within the landscape.

I was surprised that nobody mentioned the presence of boats as there were quite a few moored and at least two moving. This may be because they expect to see boats in this context, or because, as landscape students, they don't regard boats as relevant to their study. It will be interesting to see whether boats are included in their imagery.

Cleanliness and the appearance of the place is important to the group, and comparisons with the other canal we visited [in Aston] were stark. Fewer students were interested in the heritage of the place than I expected, or if they were interested, they didn't mention it or ask about it. Nobody asked what the canal was originally used for (they may already know, or don't care) and nobody asked about, or seemed to notice, the original canal furniture dotted around the development. I suspect that their imagery will be long views, views through and self portraits.

## Appendix 5

2008 Representation Walk table of participants' responses

	<b>Narrative Themes</b>	<b>Associations</b>	<b>Visual Themes: Subject</b>	<b>Visual Themes: Viewpoint</b>	<b>Visual Themes: Material/colour</b>	<b>Notable observations</b>
<b>SIMON</b>	'Place of refuge', familiarity, 'warm, safe, social', danger, escape, 'in touch with nature'	Childhood treehouse, rural canals, father and bike riding	Trees and greenery, curved stairs, bridges, brickwork, levels, people, boats, street furniture.	Elevated views from bridges and tunnels, views angled to the horizon, views along rather than across, aerial views. He was present in his Ideal Landscape.	Pencil crayon/line sketches, some photos. Red, green.	'Less water = safer' [area near ICC]. 'Space too big, too few people, clean-no litter/graffiti, barren, dull.' [Gas st Basin near Holiday Inn. 'In touch with nature and free not only physically but in spirit also.' [Central bridge across to ICC]
<b>TOM</b>	Social', 'comfortable'/ 'uncomfortable', 'familiar', 'semi-private', 'warm', 'continental'.	Childhood holidays in Italy and France, continental squares.	Combinations of buildings and greenery.	Ground level. Views along and angles. Aerial map of area in relation to Broad St. Views through tunnels. Present in ideal landscape.	Photos, some sketching and a relief model. Green and red. Canal is blue in his model	Bars as the reason for the 'warm feeling' - these are 'semi-private areas' where he 'felt safe and comfortable standing still.' 'I think the fact that Brindleyplace mirrors many of my early memories and interactions makes me feel comfortable in the area.'
<b>ADRIAN</b>	The canal/bridge as a route to the bars. Presence of views adjacent to canal and height of the walls, peaceful, reflections, looking around, interaction, 'community.'	Industrial rural canals near Gloucester.	Water, boats, walls and brickwork, levels.	Views along, mostly ground level and views through tunnels.	Photos, some watercolour and computer manipulated images. Red.	Noted how people described the route from ICC without mentioning the canal. His ideal canal is 'overgrown, well worn, traditionally English cottage, close community'. Brindleyplace has 'no views except along the canal.'

<b>PETER</b>	Norfolk Broads as comparison, greenspace, natural v. artificial, tranquility and relaxation, the presence of 'views'.	Childhood holidays in Norfolk Broads, traditional pubs, boating	Greenspace, water, boats, seating	Ground level or views from bridges. Views along and across. Foregrounded vegetation.	Photos and some felt-tip sketches. Green, red boats, blue water.	Brindleyplace as a 'small enclosed area' in contrast to the Norfolk Broads' 'miles and miles of broads to explore.'
<b>PHOEBE</b>	Safety, information, vegetation and relaxation	None mentioned	Restaurants, flowers, buildings, lights and paving, boats, retail and bridges.	Ground level, views along. One aerial view. Foregrounded vegetation. Views through tunnel.	Photos with some colour sketches. Brown and green. Blue water.	The Gas Street area described as 'the deep end.'
<b>ROB</b>	I felt very comfortable...they present a familiar scene.' '...seclusion and retreat from the hectic city.' 'Nicely framed views.'	General association with canals near his home, but different to these.	Bridges and tunnels, vegetation particularly flowers along bridges	Views from bridges, views along the towpath, views from under bridges looking up, aerial views. Views through tunnel and along bridges. Foregrounded vegetation.	Mostly photos with some crayon sketches and watercolour. Layered tracing paper to give depth to one image. Green and brown are main colours in sketches. Red also figures a lot.	Would not necessarily associate Birmingham with canals, rather roads and 'hectic' city.
<b>PHIL</b>	Socialisation and communication', 'darkness' (Gas St), 'landmarks' (bridge and art), levels, tree coverage of buildings, safety and landmarks.	None mentioned	Seating, vegetation, levels, bridges particularly central bridge	Views along and across, views from bridges and high places, views through tunnel and along bridges. Foregrounded vegetation.	Mostly photos, but some felt tip sketches using hatching and block colours. Uses negative colours on one photo image to emphasise the tree coverage. Green, bright blue water, red boats.	The central bridge as the 'main identity' of Brindleyplace. The Gas St tunnel as the 'most underused and neglected' and this area as an 'ideal place for muggers to conceal themselves.'
<b>LUKE</b>	Design features, relaxation, journey and derive, night-life and socialisation.	Narrowboats owned by his family, going for walks, his home around Bucks and the idea that as he hasn't lived away from the family home before, getting bearings in the city was 'an odd experience.'	Light and dark, water, trees and vegetation, the central bridge, levels and paving.	Combination from high places and ground level. Views across in general. Aerial view. Foregrounded veg. Views of ground. Angled views.	Combination photos, sketches, rubbings, collected water, computer manipulated images, some maps and marketing material..Main colour is green in sketches, but yellow/orange in photos (of night).	Brindleyplace as a 'cosmopolitan night-time destination.' 'Brindleyplace wouldn't be the same with a strip of grass, or a gravel track or a road down the middle.' Would have liked a 'more historically accurate perspective'.

<b>KAREEMA</b>	Old and new and contrast between, heritage, bridges, Malthouse Pub and other bars in general, blue and white collar workers, maintenance of the area and night-life.	Childhood canal experiences at Smethwick, paying the water bill at the Severn Trent office, tv studios nearby, errands with parents to clothing factories.	The journey around Brindleyplace - not including Gas St. Buildings, water and fountains, trees and vegetation, outdoor seating by restaurants.	Views from bridges, views from seating, views along and across. One aerial view. Angled views. Views of ground.	Final piece all photos with white borders. Support material mostly line drawings, quite detailed but 'sketchy' strokes. Main colour is brown/brickwork.	Her favourite view is across the water to the Malthouse Pub - 'the Malthouse is on an island...the island [signpost] is the stepping stone.'
<b>CLAIRE</b>	Genius loci, buzzing, industrial heritage, iconic buildings, 'unity in design'.	Industrial canals near Lancaster.	Trees, buildings, sculpture, water and fountains, populated walkways, boats.	Mostly views along, reflections in curved mirrors, ground level. Many views include flowers in the foreground around BP or are angled slightly in the picturesque style. Views of ground.	Green trees and red boats in sketch. Combination photos and sketches. Some writing in 'canal-art' style.	Brindleyplace as 'a unique space, solely for the public, as a place to escape traffic and noise.'
<b>CHRISTOS</b>	Vegetation/green space, Cyprus, buildings, water, restaurants, pollution/cleanliness seating.	Memories of the landscape of Cyprus, holidays in Venice, childhood memories of boats and water.	Trees and flowers especially organised into gardens and beds, water, people, bridges, seating.	Views from high places, views of bridges, views along. Line sketches are without colour but show detailed bridge structure and people - few others included people in sketches. In the small sketch he represents a bridge from above in perspectival image. His mountains and trees are stylised - very humpy/round. Present in ideal landscape. Aerial view. Angled. Foregrounded vegetation.	Combination photos and sketches, with some tracing paper with additions such as trees and flowers in Gas St area. Green trees, yellow/red flowers	Gas St Basin - 'there is no green and the water is dull and completely polluted'...it 'produces negative feelings...you feel unsafe and unsheltered...there are fewer ways to move around the environment.' Small sketch shows past experiences (sun, mountains and sea) and present (canal, rain, buildings and bridge).

<b>BARNEY</b>	Social, picturesque, inviting, natural, 'classic canal.'	None mentioned	Greenspace, outdoor seating, 'quirky' brickwork, picturesque views, bridges and Gas st tunnel..	Combination views across and along. Views with fowers in foreground. From high places and ground, also looking up to Water's Edge.Angled. Views through tunnel.	Photos and colour sketches. Black tunnel. Blue water, red boats, green bridge. Pencil crayon sketches.	The central bridge as 'picturesque canal.' Observation study showed that the tunnel between sites is least used.
<b>TAZEEM</b>	Green scenery, graffiti, people watching/being watched, access points/routes	Saudi Arabia, Birmingham as a place to live, Winson Green prison	Greenspace, architectural form, bridges, level, paving.	Combination along and across, views from high places. He is present in his 'ideal landscape' as a muscly man. Main image is from second bridge with flowers in foreground, taking in central bridge and Broad St buildings. Angled views.	Mostly photos, some line sketches and one sketch in pencil crayon. Colours in this are stylised - blue water, red seating and green trees, flowers as scribble, trees as downward hatching, seating area in red, individual seats not shown.	The canal near Aston Science park has 'graffiti indicating some sort of trouble.' 'I prefer staying at home most of the day'. Ideal place is a Saudi motorway running through desert with a tree and tumbleweed - 'deciding where to go next.'



## Appendix 6

**2010 Postcards from the Cut responses**

image	age	gender	ethnicity	reason
1	23	f	White English?	graphically attractive; striking; old fashioned type gives it atmosphere ( a pleasing one to me). The others are pretty impersonal
1	30	m	White British	"It is simple - only 2 colours black + whitw - and unfussy"; "I don't like the other photos and the buildings included"
1	25	m	White British	it has snow on it and is pretty. More delicate than others
1	11	f	Somali	"Birmingham still has it's traditional things and they are special things to the people of Birmingham"
1	15	m	Somali	a lot of information is given in the signpost
1	29	m	Spanish	canals are one of the most beautiful parts of Birmingham
1	12	m	Black	"I fink dat da 1st one os great as it has pretty snow on there. It makes it look traditional"
1	54	f	White	"I don't like the massive hostile buildings that surround the canal in Birmingham"
2	20	f	White British	people who have not had the experience of being on the canal have the wrong perception of what boating and what the canals are about. None boater's see boating has old fashioned and more for the older generation of people, they dont see nor understand that the canals are now very upto date, including pubs and clubs on the canal side.
2	24	f	British	well composed
2	18	m	Iraqi	beautiful natural scenery which you may enjoy as your riding on the boats through the canal
2	18	f	Somali	it shows the beauty of Birmingham
2	22	f	Indian	reflection of the buildings in the canal looks beautiful'
2	25	f	Lebanese	looks great; looks professional
2	27	f	Black	it's a bit of illusion of the city'
2	12	f	Mixed	pretty reflection from the tall buildings; calm and peaceful
2	24	f		nicely framed picture
2				reflection; city + nature
3	47	m	English	the mixture of modern life and traditional furniture
3	59	f	English	"We still have some original buildings left there. The iron bridge also a reminder of what midland craftsmen could do."
3	64	f	English	"depicts the history of the canal and Birmingham. It also looks active"
3	73	m	English	"shrieeks 'Birmingham!"; "...the very name evokes an ancient urban industrial scene and palces it firmly in the north or the midlands. The view of the cast iron over bridge and the deep tunnel under the buildings above are so unusual that anyone...seeing it fir the first time, would be intrigued to study it more carefully."
3	46	m	White British	"traditional landscape in the modern city...a friendly and relaxing area, away from the hustle and bustle of city life but still in the city."
3	51	m	White British	canal; architecture. 2- 'not really a canal picture"
3	60	f	White British	"recognisably Birmingham"
3	33	m	WAS [white anglo saxon?]	people; boats; distinctive architecture; "and a lot of people know the name Gas St Basin"
3	27	f	White British	"Traditional Birmingham, iviting photograph"
3	42	m	British	important historical part of Birmingham
3	27	f	White British	"This image has lots going on. It is more visual compared t o the others"
3	34	m	White English	shoes a different side to what people imagine Birmingham to be like
3	47	m	White/British	gives a traditional view of life in B'ham
3	55	f	English	interesting architecture; pleasing lines; shows canal, boats and buildings and café; culture - taste of Birmingham
3	26	f	White British	atmosphere; bustling; "very picturesque eg the bridge"
3	26	f	White British	"it makes Birmingham look quaint and historic, as opposed to concrete and dirty!"
3	36	m	White British	"I love the old bridge and heritage-y things"
3	33	f	White English	relaxing
3	27	f	White UK	it's the most attractive, looks the most fun and interesting, and also makes Birmingham lookk a nice place the others look too built up and crowded'
3	47	m	British	"Shows both site I recognise in Birmingham + canal"
3	33	f	White British	"the juxtaposition of historic features (i.e. the bridge, buildings in the distance and the canal itself) & contemporary 'canal life' features (i.e. the canal-side pub) show that Birmingham can offer a wide range of options to a new visitor to the city."
3	26	m	White British	"historical and cosmopolitan"
3	32	f	White British	"quaint image of bridge and canal. Also includes people showing the vibrancy of Birmingham"

3	23	f	White British	nice old building and bridge over canal; nice place to walk or enjoy a drink
3	52	f	English (White British)	continental atmosphere; sunshine; outdoor dining
3	61	m	Welsh	unexpected and lively; only one with people; others are cold
3	33	m	White British	people in it, it feels human; depth; range of architectures; café culture; an ideal of canalside drinks, strolling, boat life; better image
3	40	f	White British	bridge as a great focal point; lovely buildings; people at tables
3	51	f	White British	continental; cafes and sunshine; holiday destination
3	53	f	White British	continental atmosphere and café culture; enjoyable walks; friendly people
3	12	f	Pakistani	shows that England still has it cultures
3	25	m	Indian	shows it has some history
3	25	f	Indian	happening; many vista; traditional architecture
3	27	f	Kuwaiti	bridge; people sitting having lunch/dinner or drinks; I am kind of person who likes coffee shops/restaurant out door
3	44	f	Black Caribbean	It is not perfect in representing what it should but it is the only picture which shows that the canalway encourages "life". It shows commerce, living and socialising. In other words the canal is not just there, but it plays an important role in the lives of people. Additionally, the environment is included as there is a bit of "green".
3	55	m	White	"sympathetic improvement to exisiting architecture"; people- suggesting a "living part of Birmingham"
3	50	m	W	"because many people may not realise that in the heart of Birmingham is a historic and vibrant canal environment that retains its heritage and is accessible!"
3	47	m	White	shows a canal; attractive bridge; shows people having a good time; includes barge
3	55	m	White	history; older buildings; alive, vibrant and well used
3	31	m	Caucasian	industrial heritage
3	26	f	White	so nice in the summer; eating lunch outside; boats; a pleasant way to wlak through the city; architecture - bridges and archways.
3	29	f	White	shows the Canalside Café which I love and 'olde' rather than 'nouveau' canal
3	46	f	White	"It screams heritage and is relevant to Brum's true history. Also the bridge is very attractive and a place where tourists can chill out and have a coffee"
3	58	f	White	"obvious canal + bridge with the implication of a vibrant city setting"
3	30	f	White	regularly walk along; inner city living, not tourism
3	55	f	White	"several elements- walker on towpath, café, boat, canal, bridges, buildings, even the small bit of greenery! I like the composition."
3	26	f	Asian	represents the British architecture and it looks more like UK'
3	35	m	Asian	more complex and informative
3	30	f	White/mixed/Arab	historical view of what is often thought to be a modern and sadly somewhat ugly city of concrete. Also photo 1 but 'could be anywhere'
3	12	f	Mixed	"really nice and sunny, and it makes me want to go there!"
3	70	f		"older Birmingham and its industrial history"
3	70	f		Born in Hockley, Birmingham and knew Gas Street before it was modernised. It is much better now with a cosmopolitan atmpshere
3		f		
3		f		"some nostalgia - there needs to be a balance between some old and new - just boats and new buildings does not do it"
3		f		"it conjures up the atmosphere of the canals when they were first used more than a 100 years ago and it's a picturesque place"
3		m		
3		m		boats; canal infrastructure
3		m		
3		m		"captures the best of the old and the new and reflects the wonderful efforts of Birmingham to open up the area... not so many years ago Gas street Basin was a hidden world accessible to the public only through a little known "hole in the wall". Only a few of the last surviving boatmen lived on their boats there and in a way it was sad that the revival of the area displaced them. However, the regeneration has been a boon to modern day "pleasure" boaters and the general public alike, and has put Birmingham on the canal map, right at the centre where it belongs."
3		m		A good example of what the area was like pre the developments, it trully was Dickensian back in the 60/70's
3		m		interesting mix of the old and new
3	25	m		
4	53	m	British	"interesting angle, trees, space, high quality, would encourage a visit"

4	59	f	English White	"contrast between traditional narrowboat and modern buildings"; flowers, people; "still water and blue sky combine to make for an inviting scene where you can enjoy the tranquility of the canal within close proximity of the buzz of the city."
4	29	m	British	"best illustrates the colour and vibrancy of Birmingham's canals. I find the other options none discript"
4	32	f	British	"best illustrates the colour and vibrancy of Birmingham's canals. I find the other options none discript"
4	24	f	White British	"Birmingham looks best in the sunshine. Photo is of an instantly recognisable place in Birmingham"
4	25	f	White British	"Because the thing I like the most is sitting by the canal with a drink in the sunshine and this photo reminds me of this. Also, I like the tress reflected in the water and the composition of the picture with the bridge across the middle."
4	30	m	White British	"the impression of a sunny, vibrant city centre"
4	42	m	White British	"Combines the old traditional view of canals (nice bridge, Victorian buildings in background) with the modern (ICC). Trees in full leaf add a green element"
4	38	f	Black British	inviting; sunny; a lot to explore beyond the trees
4	50	f	British	colourful picture; shows greener city; sunny day
4	50	m	UK	fantastic canal system; café bars, restaurants and concert halls
4	40	m	WBRI	because it has trees!
4	17	m	Black British	"It's busy! Looks populated with lots to do. Nice green scenery instead of congested buildings and sites"
4	18	f	British	view; historic places
4	16	f	British Bengali	nice and peaceful
4	17	m	British Pakistani	catches the attention; looks good on the eye which would cause a lot of attraction to the people who receive this postcard
4	18	f	British Somali	pretty site
4	29	m	White British	old and the new; history; industrial roots; new era
4	26	f	British	Birmingham is actually very pretty; canal boat, greenery and modern buildings shows how vibrant and modern Brindleyplace is
4	57	m	British White	shows the canal, a bridge and new buildings - combination of various elements
4	25	f	WB	"Birmingham + canal + sunshine = [tick sign]"; "2= depressing- like a council estate"
4	27	m	White British	composition; "canal-heritage has been preserved, but integrated in the area's redevelopment."
4	29	m	White British	"Most canal-y"; "presents Brum in a good light"
4	49	f	White British	canal, canal boat and city centre buildings - "shows the city as it is"; trees- "Birmingham is quite a green city"
4	43	f	White British	"it's the prettiest!"
4	33	f	White UK	truest and nicest representation of the area which I live in, especially contrast of old barge and quite modern ICC
4	82	f	White British	"I remember these canals when they were rubbish tips. I pick number four because last year my family enjoyed a 60th birthday party on the barges it was a wonderful day out. After these years it's wonderful to see all the changes that's happening."
4	29	m	Latvian	Its greenery is a contrast to the urban jungle
4	18	m	Algerian	"nice trees and attractive to eye cuz of bright colours, relaxing and nice scenery"
4	18	m	Arab/Yemen	express feelings of happiness
4	35	f	Black Afrcian	shows the canal; restaurants and attractions like Sea Life Centre. It is a beautiful scenery and also close to Broad Street
4	13	f	Indian	well developed
4	16	f	Mexican	"lovely weather + greenery + modern buildings + canal"
4	18	m	Somali	sunny and gives a great feeling
4	19	f	Somali	bright and positive look on Birmingham
4	20	f	Somali	"I have done a case study on Brindleyplace and I really enjoyed writing everything about it. I would recommend everyone to go there, a place for relaxing and to have a fresh air"
4	22	f	Indian	see how the canals are still maintained and there are many people who visit it still now'
4	27	m	Kuwait	you could feel freedom and pretend to be in the beach'
4	46	f	Black Caribbean	highlights canals; centre of Birmingham; good architecture and landscaping
4	20	m	Black	looks appealing
4	30	f	White	represents Brum to me. Canal with canal boat...greenery/flowers; hidden just behind is All Bar One where I spent quite a few hours with great friends. A beautiful walk along the canal was always enjoyable/memorable.
4	42	m	Asian	looks nice; best location on the canal

4	30	f		"nice combination of items - trees/boat/canal/ the town. The others don't have this sort of balance"
4		f		shows actual canal; scenic; business aspect
4	19	m		"it express the true nature of Birmingham's canal, it speaks a lot"
4				"very nice place to visit"; city and canal; accessible; dynamic; flexible; "both of best worlds"
4	40	f	?	beautiful sunshine; green leaves; reminds me of the smell of beautiful summer days
4		m		"the trees remind the recipient that canals are often a 'green corridor'."
4		f		"incorporates images from several of the other pictures. It shows a nice bit of greenery- and everything looks better with the sun shining!"
4		m		"a bit of everything"; brightest and most positive; sunny and colourful
5	32	m	African	combines both an iconic building and the canal system in Birmingham
5	12	f	Indonesian	very shiny and the water glimmers
5	14	f	Somali	the reflection of the building above in the water
5	12	f	Somalian/Dutch	the best of Birmingham
5	12	f	Zimbabwean	"light shining view to watch"
5	21	f	Indian	open space ends up giving a very calm feeling and lets you get away from the daily rushed up life in the city. The water has that soothing effect as well'
5	18	f	Asian	provides a more intimate and comfortable view of Birmingham
5		m		"it is clear what it is representing. Only a montage can do better"
6	55	m	English	"obviously a canal, shows the old and the new, back end of boat is the well known shape of a narrow boat
6	50	m	White British	"best canal themed picture - it is a photo of a canal...it is a canal wharf, it has canal boats on"
6	39	m	British Pakistani	canal boats on the water and some buildings
6	40	m	Persian	traditional British; good composition; symbolising the life with the water
6	16	m	Asian	shows canals clearly in the water
6	26	f	Asian	the boats are different from my country and interesting'
2 + 6	61	m	UK White	2- tranquil; water; urban scene is "diminished because of the light". 6- bridge; "memories of boating"
2+5	12	f	Pakistani	both look nice; 5 looks sunny; they look nice to visit
3 + 4	60	f	White British	3 + 4 - attractive and colourful...show two very different aspects of the present canal. 3- shows the old more original sight; the bridge over the canal is relatively new but built in the style of the Horseley iron bridges. 4 - shows the modern aspect of the canal and is attractive in a different way
3 + 4	49	f	White British	3- historical features, café culture, bustling and lively. 4- "modern city and a green place"
3 + 4		f		3- "it is the heart of the old working canal system, and that view with Broad Street Bridge in the background has lots of atmosphere, and this changes with the weather, and the boats and people that are around". 4- "heart of the modern canal system, which again alters with the time of day and the different people that are there for the boats and the sunshine, or going to concerts in the evening." "...these are the two that I would choose to send to my penfriend in the USA"
3 + 4		m		3- captures "essence of the canals around Brindleyplace". 4- modernised (but 3 has an old bridge)
3 + 5	42	m	White English	the history of the area and also the liveliness and modern side of the area suggesting Brindleyplace has something for all ages
3,4,5	30	f	Black	nice view
3+4	23	f	Indian	3- historical relevance; good to see no cars; 4-exploratory and engaging
3+4	30	f	White	more likely to know or recognise
3+4+6	23	m	British Indian	3-culture and tradition through the canals and architecture; 4- modern adaptations; greenery; 6- boats, proving their use and activity
4 + 3		f		"boats, bridges and a part of Birmingham not usually seen but definitely Birmingham canals"
4+3	26	f	White British	most aesthetically pleasing; one of the nicest places in the centre...that a tourist can visit; Gas Street would be second but the photo seems a little dark
5+4	26	f	WBR	sunny, vegetation, clear architecture. " I like the canal boat on picture 4 but the trees cover the buildings too much"
	40	f	Persian	None; typical English photos of English landscape
		m		"I can't say that I was impressed...don't think they portrayed a true sense of juxtaposition of the old B'ham and the new and I think this is where the secret of the new canal landscape is."

## Appendix 7

## **A textual analysis of a participant's pre-walk 'Identity Sheet'.**

Annie is a female artist in her fifties who grew up in Birmingham and also teaches at Birmingham Institute of Art & Design (BIAD).

"1. In the space below please write a description of yourself"

Annie firstly places her origins in Moseley, Birmingham. It is an area that "left influences in my life", suggesting she is aware of the importance of place in the formation of her identity. Annie details the ways in which Moseley has influenced her, including pieces of personal information to gradually build her narrative, creating a piece of thematic writing. "I lived in a 1900's house...a style influenced by Arts and Crafts", suggests the main theme will be architectural history and decorative arts.

"Moseley was originally a wooded estate with several  
notable houses...very green and wooded, large gardens."

Annie knows that Moseley is an old area of the city with fairly grand connections, and that this is reflected in the amount of green space still found in the area. "It was also multi cultural before the term was used" does not suggest a time period or an indication of the various peoples that populated this area, although it does suggest that despite the grandeur, Moseley was, and possibly still is, a progressive and liberal area.

"Family came from country areas, Worcestershire,  
which is where I now live."

Annie makes it clear that her familial origins relate to the landscape of Worcestershire, which is where she has returned to. She creates a strong vision of her family as artisans with a local connection, cementing her ancestors as:

"craftworkers/manufacturing...stained glass (Bromsgrove Guild)  
brass/metal workers, nail making, art education, also a long  
connection with working on the land."

Annie next shares her own occupation, in a seemingly natural progression from those of her ancestors; she is "a craftmaker in ceramics/glass/textiles" and she also teaches in "museums [and at] BIAD".

She continues her themes relating to heritage and being outdoors when she groups her wide-ranging hobbies by genre, such as "folk art and traditions (I'm a Morris dancer!)", history, archaeology", followed by "walking, countryside, gardening" and ending with a "wide range of music." Annie categorises Morris dancing with traditional pursuits, rather than the other physical activity of "walking", which

suggests that Morris dancing appeals for its heritage value. Walking, grouped with the other outdoor pursuits, appeals for the joy of being outside or away.

Annie returns to her main theme, drawing on her local, artistic connections when she writes; “I attended Ruskin Hall, Bournville for Foundation course in art and design”. She continues this theme when she details her “chance link with...buildings associated with the Cadbury family” and we learn that she has taught crafts in a series of institutions once owned by this local, upstanding family, but which now function as hospitals and schools. She reiterates “all these buildings were again in the style of Arts and Crafts set in wooded grounds.”

Annie’s narrative portrays a strong, local landscape identity relating to heritage and green space, including gardens and the countryside. She considers her own identity the product of familial and local influences. She does not mention her immediate family specifically, or share information about her current residence. Annie references her childhood in the context of Arts and Crafts, as a teleological phase in the progress of her own, and her family’s identity, rather than through anecdotal memories.