

THE FLUIDITY OF HOME ON LONDON'S WATERWAYS

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ABSTRACT

Through an exploration of the lives of boaters in London I will look at the experiences and forces that combine to form a sense of home. I will explore through interviews and observations the fears, joys and necessities of this way of life. To understand how lives are formed in a modern globalized urban environment, it is necessary to look at the wider power relations that are at play, which shape and threaten existences. The canals and rivers that cross London provide not only a particular view of the city from the water, but are a unique use of space that pass through a broad range of social and economic situations, winding through the metropolis taking no notice of borough or neighbourhood boundaries. The perspective from the bankside is sometimes in stark contrast to that of the boaters. It is my intention to open up the social, personal, economic and political relationships that exist.

A sense of home is an important narrative in the world today. With increased movement and communication across the globe and rising property prices it is never far from peoples minds. I suggest that there is a gap between what we perceive to be our understanding of home, which is a culturally learnt definition through education, government and media, and how we tell our story of what home actually means, our personal narrative of home. In this paper I look for an alternative understanding of 'home' to suggest that a wider, and constantly evolving, spectrum of ways of finding a personal sense of belonging, both physically and mentally, through our lives journeys needs to be welcomed. Talking about relationships, memories and desires opens up the possibility for multiple and complex alternatives of this construction, which I discuss through the lives of boaters who do not have a residential mooring, so continuously cruise through the canals of London with no fixed home. Drawing on a phenomenological line of thought I use lived everyday experiences of the city and canals to open up an exploration of a way of 'being-in-the-world' through the freedom of movement, and how this shapes the world around us.

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INTRODUCING LONDON'S WATERWAYS

The canals of London are part of ever fewer places to live an alternative lifestyle within the city, based on more personal aspirations than those provided by the property market. This is not to say that there are no market forces or regulations played out but different relations and cultural practices become significant. The water provides a home for the boats and is a living, breathing space shared by rowers, working boats, wildlife and the occasional brave dog; it is crucial for wildlife and is in constant motion. The towpath which runs alongside is used communally by boater's as an extension of their homes, dog walkers, fishermen, blackberry pickers, amblers and the homeless, who all work their way around and through each other's lives. It is a sociable place full of chance encounters and provides a breather from the pace of the city. Public and private lives merge as passers-by glimpse a snapshot of life on board, while conversations float across the water. An awareness of the importance of the canals and other inland waterways has increased over the past 20 years, but inevitably along with this has come the desirability of flats and offices fronting the water, so increasing the numbers of canal side developments. Although these exist side by side it is sometimes like two worlds that overlap but take little notice of each other.

History of England's Canals and their management

The extension of the inland navigation system in England took place in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in tandem with the industrial revolution, and was almost entirely funded by private means. Parliamentary sanctions were necessary under the 1720 'Bubble Act' to 'incorporate the intending proprietors and to grant (and regulate) the powers which they required to make compulsory purchases of land, levy tolls etc.' (Ward 1974:18). The incentive to invest was driven by financial and economic reasons as the canals were used for transporting goods up and down England. Back then there was a small community of people who lived on boats, usually families of the men who worked the boats, but they were seen as on the margins of society, poor and poorly educated.

With the rise in popularity of the railways, transport of goods by canal became slow and expensive. Some canal companies merged to combine sections for transportation, while railway companies bought up others. Some railway companies deliberately stopped using their canals to destroy competition, while others filled in and built over them, so that by the Second World War they were drastically underused and many had fallen into a state of disrepair. When the railways were nationalised in 1942 the canals were also transferred to state control. Under the transport act of 1962 the waterways, docks and harbours were transferred to the newly

established British Waterways Board (BW), which was a public corporation with a statutory responsibility for operating and maintaining the 2,200 mile network of waterways in a suitable condition for the craft that use them (Hadfield 1969). In 2011 Parliament granted the right to transfer all statutory functions of BW to a new charity called the Canal and River Trust (CRT) which also took over all property, assets rights and liabilities of BW in England (Scotland waterways remain under government management). BW owned a commercial property portfolio worth around £460 m which has been transferred to CRT. A Trust Settlement has been established which means that canals, towpaths and locks (this does not include the property portfolio) must be maintained in good condition, CRT cannot sell any of these without the Secretary of States prior permission, which can only be granted following a public consultation. Byelaws operated by BW have been transferred to CRT, such as the right to remove unsafe, abandoned or unlicensed boats from the water. Although CRT has a duty to manage the waterways, there have been concerns raised over their ability to raise the funds to do so without the government grants that currently make up 50% of their income, and comparisons with the struggling accounts of The National Trust have been made. CRT will receive a core grant from Government of £39m per annum for the first 15years, after which it will be reviewed as to whether any grant is required.

Life Aboard

To live on a boat on the inland waterways all you need is a river worthy boat with a license. Boats can either registered on a residential mooring, where there is likely to be a mains power supply, mains water, refuse and sanitary disposal, a postal address and secure entry, or alternatively the boat is registered under the continuous cruiser license. This means that it does not have a permanent mooring, so no fixed address, and continually moves around the canal and river system. It is the continuous cruising way of life that I am mainly writing about in this paper. In most places boats can moor in one location for a period of 14 days, and then they have to move on and not return to the same spot before 2 months; the distance they must move is not fixed and the byelaws explain that the boat should be 'bona fide used for navigation throughout the period of [the licence]'. There is a community of continuous cruisers within London (and the rest of the UK) who legally cruise all year within zone 2, moving every 2 weeks. This does not mean that they do not go further afield but London remains their base. Along the canals at certain points there are facilities for boaters providing water (which fills a tank within the boat providing water for 2-3 weeks), bins, toilet disposal and sometimes toilets/showers; continuous cruisers rely on these. A boat without a mains electricity supply uses the engine, a generator or solar panels to charge a bank of batteries, which provide power in the boat. Heating and hot water is usually either gas or diesel run, and many boats use wood/coal burning stoves during

the winter. Supplies such as gas bottles, diesel and coal can either be collected from a boat yard as you pass (infrequently within London) or from one of about 3 coal boats which operate in London travelling across the city dropping off and picking up supplies to boats. So these are the essentials to live a self sufficient, transient lifestyle within London or as far a field as the canal network and your time will take you.

A note on situating others and myself

The subject of this paper comes from a very personal place as I live on a narrow boat in London, and with no permanent mooring I wind my way east to west along the canal. I moved onto a boat just over a year ago and so, although a relatively new boater still, I have experienced the life first hand, making good friends within the community and surviving my first winter aboard. I had my own reasons for wanting to move out of rented flats onto a more transient lifestyle on the water, some of which I have found to be fairly common amongst other boaters and will become clear through this paper, but I do not want to make generalisations as everyone's experience is unique and I can only hope to give a fair impression of other's outlooks, as such although I draw together commonalities or highlight differences I also let individuals speak in their own words as much as possible. My insights and conclusions are therefore based upon my observations from both the land and the water, and some formal interviews. I have found the boaters community to be open and welcoming so chance meetings along the cut, a few locks shared with another boater, or an invitation for a quick coffee while waiting at the water point all provide chances to chat with other boaters. Although I have not been actively pursuing interviews at every encounter, conversations often lead in to shared experiences on the water and through learning the ropes (quite literally) I have been able to understand some of the tensions, difficulties and joys of life on board.

I undertook three formal interviews within the course of my research, two with boaters who I have got to know well (David and Millie) and one with someone whom I had recently met and was interested in chatting to me (Matt). During these I had a rough outline of questions to keep the conversation flowing and on topic, but I tried to let it run its natural course. Although they were all happy to take part and were very open during our conversations I have changed their names in the interests of confidentiality. During my year on the waterways I have had many brief conversations, and sometimes it is simply an off hand comment that has sparked my interest and been particularly informative so I also include these in places.

THE PRODUCTION OF THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

Power Relations and Global Capital

An exploration of the development of the urban environment within the framework of the neoliberal form of capitalism has been undertaken by authors such as Harvey (2008), Massey (2007) and Sassen (2008). Harvey shows how, through the two inextricable themes of accumulation and class struggle, city life is continually produced in an unequal fashion dominated by the powerful elite. In 'Social Justice and the City' (2008) Harvey explores the way the Marxian concepts of use-value and exchange-value explain the domination of the built environment, as land becomes a commodity for exchange and profit. The built environment includes roads, rivers, canals, shops, houses, offices and squares, which cover a broad range of uses and include multiple investors, therefore cannot be combined into a single category and as there are numerous actors in the market their use-value's do not necessarily equate.

If we argue that rent can dictate use, then this implies that exchange values can determine use values by creating new conditions to which individuals must adapt if they are to survive in society...The capitalist market exchange economy so penetrates every aspect of social and private life that it exerts an almost tyrannical control over the life support system in which use values are embedded...Therefore, the evolution of urban land-use patterns can be understood only in terms of the general processes whereby society is pushed down some path (it knows not how) towards a pattern of social needs and human relationships (which are neither comprehended nor desired) by the blind forces of an evolving market system' (2008: 190).

Auge (2008) describes a condition of this supermodernity as the 'non-place', 'A space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place.' (2008:78). These non-places are created for unmediated commerce; they can be quantified and classified. He describes the proliferation of these throughout our everyday lives as leading to a condition of disorientation and a sense of homelessness, synonymous with contemporary life. Castells (1989) also discusses this disconnectedness through his work on the informational city.

London is a city that has changed from a centre for industrial production to a centre focused on financial capital. Much of the centre of the city is in the hands of private owners, and international developers have moved in, buying up land cheaply to develop and sell at a profit, thus out pricing and displacing the old inhabitants for the creation of wealth and economic growth (Smith 2010). These relationships cause rich and poor to live at close quarters and class struggles are intensified (Lefebvre 1996) as contrasts between the rich and poor, or powerful

and oppressed, are highlighted. This dominant neoliberal order creates uneven development, not only within modern globalized cities but also between states across the globe (Harvey, Smith, Sassen). Harvey draws on Lefebvre to show that space is produced through outside forces that are out of the control of the individual. From this theoretical perspective the image of the city is a reflection of the ideology of the ruling class, and the form of the city is very much shaped by market forces. It follows that this has a fundamental effect on society and the individual as 'we fashion our sensibilities, extract our sense of wants and needs, and locate our aspirations with respect to a geographical environment that is in large part created.' (2008:310)

BW¹ is responsible for managing nearly half of England's inland waterways, and of those that it manages it also owns 50%². Along with the canal, the adjacent towpath, locks and bridges they also have a large property portfolio, which brings their net assets to a value of £452m. Income from commercial activities accounts for 60% of their total income (the rest being government grants and third party donations), of this the income from property rentals, wayleaves and premiums accounts for 40%. CRT has a strong interest in the commercial value of waterways and waterside development. Their website makes numerous mentions of the need to create 'a sense of place' by developing a personal 'identity and character' along the waterfront. Many of the developments that occur along the towpath are large commercial offices or blocks of flats as can be seen throughout London along the Regents canal in Islington, Hackney, Paddington and most recently Kings Cross. All the land along the Thames within London has now been developed with the exception of Battersea Power Station, which has just been bought by a Malaysian developer to be transformed into a multi purpose luxury development of flats, shops and green space. As this land is prime real estate the prices to buy or rent these properties are high, and the ground floor level is often leased to restaurants, cafes and shops, which can also charge premium rates. This highlights a stark divide between waterside living and life on the water, where purchase of a boat is often seen as a cheap way to live on a low income. Therefore with BW/CRT actively involved in partnerships and planning canal side they have a very real impact on forces which shape the physical and social life of the city.

¹ BW was transferred to CRT in June 2012 but as the data used here was taken from previous BW documents I will continue to refer to them as BW in this instance.

² When the waterways were nationalised in the 1940's, all land that was privately owned by canal companies and rail companies was transferred to BW, much of this land was gained through compulsory purchase orders.

(Social) Space

An understanding of the social formations of space and place, are fundamental to any study of social, economic or political life in an urban, globalised world. As Crang and Thrift wrote '[s]pace is the everywhere of modern thought' (2000:1). Harvey echoes this sentiment, 'The question "what is space?" is therefore replaced by the question "how is it that different human practices create and make use of distinctive conceptualizations of space?" (2008:13). Although literature is abundant, I would like to draw on two particular strands; this is not to categorize and group diverse theoreticians but by understanding these perspectives I hope to open up a useful dialectic for my thesis. A Marxian perspective has read the production of space through power structures of global and local capital. All space is seen as social space and the human subject is produced through this. From this developed an experiential and phenomenological reading of place, which emphasises the subjective experience through a bodily, personal and multi sensory understanding of the formations of place. As Low (1996) emphasises, it is necessary to understand both the social *construction* of space, that is the social, economic, ideological and technological factors that go into constructing the physical space, and the social *production* of space, which are the social processes of exchange, conflict and control, 'as tools for understanding how public space in urban society becomes semiotically encoded and interpreted reality' (1996:861).

Lefebvre's abundant writings on everyday life and the production of space cover so much ground that they can only be touched upon here, but suffice to say are essential to any study of contemporary society, and hugely influenced academic discourse from the late 1940s on. In the assertion that all '(social) space is a (social) product' (1991:26) he shows that space cannot be understood on its own, it does not exist on its own but is a social production and is bound up with our understanding of reality. This spatial production is explained through the three way dialectic of spatial practice, representation of space and spaces of representation: social space appears through the everyday practices of social life which exert their influence on the environment, these are represented through language, image, media and so on as a discourse to explain space, but which themselves help to determine and organise social practices as symbols and signs emerge which dictate the norm. Schmid explains the importance of this dialectical thinking as 'the recognition that social reality is marked by contradictions and can be understood only through the comprehension of these contradictions' (2008:30).

The production of home

The terms house and home are often conflated in the media, which privileges the physical structure and promotes 'home' ownership. Rykwert (1991) has traced the etymology of the terms to show the development of the word 'home' being linked to house or dwelling in many languages. When the phrase 'The Englishman's house is his castle' was popularized in the nineteenth century, 'house' (private property) and 'home' became inseparable. The modernist architecture movement, which sought to build a utopian lifestyle in line with the technological advancements of the time, further conflated the two terms. Particularly within design and planning, as the meticulously planned housing projects sought to solve an array of perceived social problems. Modern ideals of housing, as can be seen in many lifestyle magazines and ideal home shows further reproduce standard images of what a house-home should be and do for us. Chapman and Hockey (1999) offer an analysis of The Ideal Home Exhibition to highlight the difference between the imagined ideal home and the lived ideal home. They dismiss the advertisers idea of the house-home as a private, enclosed and secure space away from the unpredictability of the outside world where we can truly be comfortable in ourselves. Instead showing that there are always incursions, or the possibility of incursions, which affects the image of ourselves we project through our bodies and our houses.

Mallet shows how this is taken further:

While the building and real estate industries clearly gain from a community's valorization of home ownership, so too do governments with particular social agendas. In fact, as some researchers note, governments of advanced capitalist countries such as Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand have actively promoted the conflation of house, home and family as part of a broader ideological agenda aimed at increasing economic efficiency and growth (2004:64).

Guy Debord (1994), and the Situationist International movement, drew on Marx and Lefebvre to argue that our everyday lives are so steeped in the linear progression of capital that they have become a representation of themselves rather than a reality. Because we can no longer inhabit the present, but only remember the past or look to the future, we do not participate in life but observe it as a spectator. The spectacle is capital itself, but it proliferates through media and technology.

The housing market, which is a major part of the UK economy, is driven by accumulation, and for it to continue to profit we must continue to want houses and flats, and continue to aspire to upgrade. As shown by the 2008 economic downturn and subsequent revelations of the

American sub prime market (Schwartz 2009), governments have a vested interest in keeping the housing market afloat. This is where I suggest an idea of 'home' retains its fixity as we are bombarded with messages of the ideal life by estate agents, landowners, property developers, advertisers, banks and governments. Foucault (1981) wrote that power is not only exerted coercively, but is also extended by the adoption and internalization of social norms, therefore naturalisation of the whole process perpetuates the cycle that we play out. However, with the large increase in homelessness since the economic crash, the disparities are being highlighted, and although the commodity of 'home' continues to be sold as essential to a modern life, it seems that traditional conceptions are being adjusted.

Home ownership

The notion of private property is intrinsically connected to the development of the modern neoliberal state. Hardt and Negri (2009) assert that it is the cornerstone which capitalism revolves around and, as Hirsh (2010) explained, with the spread of the neo liberal state across the globe so private property rights also spread to new and imaginative corners of society. Protection of private property is also embedded within laws, and as such Engels saw the state as the 'instrument which makes the dominance of private property possible' (1998:25). Abrahamson writes, through tones of alienation, of the effect of this: 'As a relation of ownership, the property relation implies a hierarchical relation of subjects over objects and, before that, logically, the physiognomic separation of owner and owned. Culturally speaking, therefore, ownership presumes disenchanted, disembodied land.' (1999:13)

The right to private property is held within the human rights act, along with the right to a home, but for many this is in a precarious state. The reduction in social housing in the UK since Margaret Thatcher first initiated the right to buy has changed the social makeup in inner city areas drastically. With rising rental prices in London the cross section of people able to afford to live and work in the central area is becoming less and less diverse. Lower income families are priced out of an ever widening sprawl of gentrification and development (Smith 2010). The government's lack of intervention, through a rent cap or integrated inner city social housing, is only speeding up this process. Further division is being created by the increase in exclusive gated communities which restrict access to large areas of the city, as described by Low (2003).

Many boat owners see their boat as an affordable way to live in the city. Besides the price of the boat, which in itself is minimal compared to land property, the outgoings can be kept to a minimum. For some it is the only thing keeping them from homelessness, as there is no other viable alternative. David said, 'I would be on the streets without my boat. The boat keeps me

alive, and I am always aware that I am one step away from homelessness. Because of the unreliability of my work and other financial commitments I can't afford regular rent.'

We talked about how the changes that have been made to BW have affected him and he said that it is the threat of changes that bothers him. As CRT will be relying less on government grants there is gossip of how they will bridge any shortfall through potential fee increases. We also discussed the animosity felt towards Continuous cruisers both within BW and the boating community which brings about worries of changes to mooring rules. 'To have this fear always hanging over your head is terrifying. People talk but no one knows. The river is our home and the management of it is under threat.' BW (now CRT) grants the privilege to keep boats on the rivers and canals; it is not a right, and I think there is a widespread fear that these could be revoked or changed. In 2011, BW proposed an alternative mooring arrangement on the River Lea, which provoked a large number of negative responses from both boat owners and other canal users. They proposed changing the cruising rules from 14 to 7 days and making the distances required to travel much further, therefore making it very difficult for families and individuals to be able to go to work, doctors and school. Following consultation, BW was forced to revoke their plans. This highlights the precarity of life on the water as there are fewer safety nets for live aboard boaters than for landed renters or owners. There is often talk of how BW has the right to seize boats that they deem not to be operating within the rules and there have been cases of entry and forced removal from the water by BW. I do not want to question the legality of their actions here but highlight how the threat and concern can affect people's lives. Foucault wrote that power relations come from within society, rather than society being dominated entirely by external forces, 'Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (1981:93).

BEING AT HOME

So far I have discussed home as being a bounded entity, fixed in place and a production of the current hegemonic neoliberal turn. I would now like to turn to a more personal and fluid reading of the idea. Through talking to different people about their ideas of home I have been reminded of the absolute relevance of the subject, and pleasantly surprised in the varied and unexpected directions discussions have taken me. It is a very emotional topic, which touches on personal histories, emotions and desires, both painful and joyful. Home is of both the private and the public realm. Often our idea of home encompasses a desire to belong and to feel comfortable either in ourselves or next to others. It is also bound up with our identity, either through our past or for the things we desire and hold dear to us. Therefore the way we understand our surroundings and react to events around us can affect and be affected by our sense of home. Continuous Cruisers do not have a fixed place as home but are continually moving through the waterways, so although the boat itself offers a private space inside, the changing relationship with the external environment provides an alternative perspective on the things we value.

I have shown that there is a certain ideal of home that is portrayed in popular culture, through advertising and by governments, which may be different to the actual lived experience. I would like to extend this further, and to also explore how there is a gap between the way *we* describe home and our lived experience of home. I suggest that the popular narrative of home often dominates over our lived experience in the way we talk about it, but beneath this is a more complex experience.

Talking about home

Home can be an attitude, a sense of freedom, where certain people are or an emotion. Wise (2000) writes that we mark out spaces to create places of comfort. This could be through humming to ourselves, arranging objects around us or the placement of our bodily form which leaves traces of our lives everywhere we go; it is the territory created that marks a sense of home. Markers invoke memories and feelings of lived experiences or the imaginary, and it is the effect of these rather than the object itself that is important in making one feel at home. 'Home...is a collection of milieus, and as such is the organization of markers and the formation of space. But home, more than this, is a territory, an expression' (Wise 2000:299). He writes that the thing that marks one territory as home over another is that home is a living temporalized space which connects us to our identity. Within this territory we feel comfortable, and in this sense home could also be the resistance to negative feelings, a coping and comforting strategy.

During my interviews there was an overwhelming sense of home as comfort and safety. This does not always mean locking oneself away from the outside world, but creating a sense of comfort around oneself. For Millie, there is a firm need to be able to close her doors and know that she is in her own safe place where she can control events. She is a very practical person who has spent a lot of time working on her boat and thrives on the feeling that if something goes wrong she can fix it. She feels proudly that the boat is a product of herself, and has created a safe haven around herself. However, within this there is also a strong need to know that there are other people around who can help. Although she talked about being enclosed and safe she also talked about being able to step outside and have people near by. For me this shows how the outside is always present on the inside, and they cannot be contained and separated; just the thought of the outside means it penetrates your feelings about the inside.

Massey describes this intermingling and ever changing conception of place:

First, what is specific about a place, its identity, is always formed from the juxtaposition and co-presence there of particular sets of social interrelations, and by the effects which that juxtaposition and co-presence produce. Moreover...a proportion of the social interrelations will be wider than and go beyond the area being referred to in any particular context as a place. Secondly, the identities of places are inevitably unfixd.' (1992:12)

The identity of a place is not internal to that place but derived from its relations with others, which are continually being produced and reproduced.

I can give numerous examples of how people describe home through the relationships they have with people. When I asked Matt, 'What do you think of when you think of home?' he answered,

Well, it's where me and my husband live. It is us, it is the boat, it is all of the moorings. Everywhere we stay is home, everywhere, you know throughout all of the miles of canal I think of as this is my home...At Kensal Green there's this great launderette with this man and woman that run it, and so when I'm there they're like 'oh you're back'. That's my local launderette there. I have other local launderettes but that's kind of special 'cos they know me and they see me. So in the larger sense all of the moorings are my home. So wherever the boat, Mark and I are, that is home.

The first thing he describes is a relationship, a feeling of love and comfort, which can travel anywhere. In describing his relationship with the couple in the launderette he also shows the importance we put onto social interactions and relationships that give a place its identity.

When I was talking to David about what home means to him I was reminded that it is not just about the present, but about the past and future as well. These all form part of how we identify ourselves. A past loss can change or strengthen our desires for the now and future, so home is not a fixed idea for anyone, it evolves as we evolve through life. Berger (1984) writes that if everyone is on a journey then home must be seen in the rituals and practices that people create for themselves, or the habitual social interactions. Rapport and Dawson (1998) write of the stories and experiences that each of us carries with us everywhere we go and suggest that it is in this internal narrative that home is really to be found. David described his family history as being fragmented and something that he could not rely on. He said, 'Your family history, obviously, is the first port of call in terms of what you see as home. The things you lack, strive for, the things that were given to you, the things you never had. The trusts that you had, and probably more importantly that were broken within the family that you grew up in. That's where it all starts'. He talked about how he tries to build a sense of home around him, when I asked what home would be for him he replied, 'Home would be all the things that... I'm striving towards keeping together. That being my children...all the things I'm trying to make work'. And when asked about where he had previously felt home, 'What made it home was being in love with someone and being with them...and moving forward in your life. Having a place where you felt comfortable, where you felt solid, and having someone with you there who was standing beside you'.

Creating home around us

In creating our sense of home we often carry certain objects with us. Georges Perec, a French author who was a close friend of Lefebvre, was occupied by an interest in how 'life can be apprehended from the objects that people desire and acquire' (1996:15) and made endless, fascinating lists (1987). In Bachelard's phenomenological study of the poetics of the house he discusses how the house can appear to become an image of the self, 'Not only our memories, but the things we have forgotten are "housed". Our soul is an abode. And by remembering "houses" and "rooms", we learn to "abide" within ourselves. Now everything becomes clear, the house images move in both directions: they are in us as much as we are in them.' (1994: xxxvii)

While speaking to Millie we discussed her experiences that have led to her current sense of home. She explained that at times in the past she had been homeless and learnt that many of the objects she had carried around with her were useless and more of a burden. There were a few important items, which she couldn't let go of and kept with her in a small bag that went everywhere. It was for practical reasons that she didn't keep much for fear of losing them or

having them stolen, but the objects and pictures she kept gave her strength and comfort. She still has them now, in her boat somewhere. This desire to connect to a past or a person, through a material object, I think shows more about the emotion we want to recreate in ourselves than the object. The object does not have to be immediately accessible, or it may be lost in a drawer somewhere, but just to know it is there is enough. Being from our past they form part of our identity, so the thought of them strengthens our sense of self.

David talked about having his things around him. Although his emphasis was on the books and belongings, underlying this was the relationship they were able to help create with other people, or the memories they bring.

I haven't got my artwork or my books. Because I made a decision not to clutter this boat with my world, obviously I've got some pictures up, there are some things that are very important. But just being able to pick up my art or cook books and being able to leaf through them, just having them to hand. If someone comes by that is something that you would do...whether it's talking about recipes or pictures, and I've really missed that. I pine for it. I want to get my boxes out and go through them. That's part of home, just the things that make you feel comfortable.

When he talks about the artwork that he does have on the walls it is about who created them and his memory or relationship to them, where he was personally and physically when he got them.

As David is refurbishing his boat to sell, he explains that he has made a conscious effort not to bring his belongings in and to treat it as an investment rather than a home. Although he has lived on it for a year he has fought against the desire to make it a home and so has never felt entirely comfortable there. 'Being on the boat...having to do it up to make money...therefore my home so to speak becoming a saleable, marketable concept. I'm living on the boat therefore it's home, but it's not home 'cos I'm just doing it up to sell. Therefore I can't afford within my heart to get attached to it.' This reminds us that even the place we live in may not feel like home.

A long line of theorists has challenged the notion of home as haven and security. Doreen Massey quotes Bell Hooks in her exploration of 'a place called home' (1992) and I think it is poignant to quote her here also. Speaking about her struggle of identity in a racist world, while trying to retain a sense of where she came from that remains integral to her sense of self Bell Hooks writes emotionally and lyrically,

Indeed, the very meaning of “home” changes with experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows only extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and ever changing perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. (1990:148)

Extending a phenomenological approach

Merleau-Ponty teaches us that the body is not simply a container controlled by the mind from which we view the outside world, rejecting the Cartesian mind-body split which generates a conception of the world that is ‘a distorted reflection of the things it describes’ (2011:35). For him consciousness is not separate from the world but is embedded within it so that the world cannot be understood in any other way but through the body. ‘The world is inseparable from the subject, but from a subject which is nothing but a project of the world, and the world is inseparable from the world, but from a world which the subject itself projects.’ (2002:499-500) Anthropologists who have drawn on this, such as Ingold (1995), Jackson (1995) and Gurney (1997), describe the experience of ‘being-at-home’ in the world. Rather than trying to define each individual’s understanding of home they concentrate on the practice of doing and feeling home through everyday lived experience. Ingold proposes that our senses provide us with a way of being in the world, not of looking out upon it. He suggests that instead of an understanding of the world through drawing on a culturally informed analysis of the external bodily experiences which separates the senses, we need an exploration ‘of the common ground’ in order to gain a ‘more generous, open-ended and participatory understanding of thought.’ (2000:287)

The act of living on a boat is very different from living in a flat or house. You are much more aware of your environment, the weather, the seasons, the sounds and sensations around. The wind and rain are brought into your aural environment; your occupied space becomes much larger than the walls of the boat that surround you. You can feel when a lock nearby has been opened because the boats all drift in one direction, similarly when a boat goes past, especially if it is fast. The sounds from the towpath penetrate your consciousness and you become aware of other people’s movements. A nearby boat running its engine or generator signals that they are home. The topography of the landscape is acted out physically and sonically through the opening and closing of locks, the movement of other boats and the weather conditions. I remember the most incredible sounds in winter when the canal and boats were frozen over. Being inside what is essentially a metal box you hear the sounds within and on the water amplified and distorted, so as the ice on the roof of the boat melts and cracks during the day

there is an overwhelming sound reverberating inside. Similarly when another boat goes past, breaking the ice as they go, the cracking sounds travel into your own environment. All year round there are moments lying in bed quietly when I hear something above me and realise it is a duck plodding along the roof.

I find that the descriptions people gave of their environment show the importance of this connection. In David's words,

The sensations of being on a boat, the reflections of the sunlight on the water, on the roof. All of those beautiful bits. The sounds of the ducks eating the barnacles and the moss off the boat. Just the sound of the water, that wonderful sound of the rain on the roof. Those are the sounds. That's the thing, we're just that little bit closer to...if you walking down the street in the snow you're aware that nature has a hold on you...if you're taking your boat through the ice its much more frightening its much more immediate.

It is not only the weather and noises penetrating inside that you become more aware of but also what you produce. Without being an avid environmentalist you have to be aware of the things you use up and the things you get rid of. When asked if he relates differently to his environment being on a boat David answered,

Yes. I think because you're living more in tandem with nature and because you're consumption of things like electricity, water, toilet, all of those things. You have to make more of a direct effort...you're much more aware of what you use and where you are because by nature of being on the boat you're close to perhaps a more pastoral kind of life.

But then clarified this by saying, 'I think that's not so much related to the boat, I think that's a personal thing. Some people are aware of what's going on around them and some people are blissfully unaware'

I asked Millie if she relates differently to her environment living on a boat. She answered,

Certainly, I'm much more in tune with it. The weather is central to our lives on a boat. When mentioning I live on a boat, two common responses are "I bet summer is lovely" or, "aren't you cold in winter?" Well, I'm certainly not cold inside in winter but I'm no fan of it either....because my other home, outside, on the towpath, is too cold and therefore it is less social...I'm really looking forward to cruising in the early morning, with the mist still settled atop the canal, through the burnt colours of autumn in Tring. Winter is lovely too....for a

fortnight. Curling up in front of a fire with a book is a real luxury at first. I find myself hibernating in winter and it's restful

The self as Home

Ahmed (1999) necessarily complicates the notion of home to open up an enlightening critique of literature on home as understood through migrants and nomads. If leaving home opens up possibilities for new ways to view the world or encounter strangeness then the reverse of this, which is being at home, would logically suggest a sense of stasis where nothing is desired and everything is familiar. However, this is not the case as home can encompass all the strangeness of being away. This does not deny that there is a difference but that 'we need to think about ways of understanding this difference without identifying home with the stasis of being' (1999:340). Similar to Massey she shows that space is not already constituted but, 'Rather, the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers. The lived experience of being-at-home hence involves the enveloping of the subjects in a space that is not simply outside them: being at home suggests that the subject and space leak into each other, inhabit each other' (1999:341). She beautifully describes this as a second skin where 'the boundary between self and home is permeable, but also that the boundary between home and away is permeable' (1999:341).

Deleuze and Guattari (2009) describe how the individual conceives of their reality through their body, which enacts a series of habits, both perceptible and imperceptible, developed to sustain oneself. They describe these as milieus; we have both internal and external milieus, which each have their own repetitive patterns. The different chaotic rhythms interact to create a kind of space within which life becomes sustainable. We create a home within our milieus, out of which come life's possibilities. Deleuze describes his concept of smooth space (in opposition to striated space) as where the individual is open to all possibilities, actual and virtual, so that there is no one single path but always a multiplicity of events which are always all possible; just because one action was acted out in reality this does not cancel out all the other actions which still exist in the virtual. The 'nomadic subject' is the individual who is able to remain open to the virtual where, 'In the chaotic realm of the virtual, all movements are related to other movements' (Lorraine 2005:165). Deterritorialisation privileges difference and the unexpected so that space is not allowed to be fixed and measured by the bounds of conscious perception. The individual's process of becoming other within this 'is an exponential expansion of a body's repertory of responses' (Massumi 1992:100). It is also important to note that although this seems to emphasise the individual, the virtual space is a network of everyone's milieus which

cross, intensify and depart. Smooth space cannot exist with only one individual but must be a communal 'becoming other'.

MOVEMENT

Freedom through movement

Movements of people, objects and information around the globe have hugely increased in recent times. Movement within the local sphere is also a large part of many people's lives. Migratory movements, tourism, education, access to information, finance, organisation, family life and culture are just some of the things that are having a changing effect on our lives. Much has been written of the 'deterritorialization' associated with 'liquid modernity' as Bauman (2000) terms it, and some of these I have already touched upon. However, there is also a freedom that comes with this movement and I will explore how this is expressed within the boating community.

'The freedom of movement remains the freedom of life itself, not merely the mundane necessity to make a living but the freedom to truly live. (De Genova 2010:58-58)

The configuration of identity through movement has been written about variously, particularly in Walter Benjamins (2002) writing of the Flaneur in late nineteenth century Paris, where the drifter is able to enjoy the freedom to consume the modern metropolis. Guy Debord and the Situationist International movement also proposed the subversive 'derive' through the city to illuminate the active and collaborative experience of the city. Casey (1999) wrote of how 'our living-moving bodies serve to structure and to configurate entire scenarios of place.' (1999:48) and how the rhythms of our movements interact with those of others so that 'places show themselves to be remarkably non-static. They are the foci of flow on the pathway of the journey.' (1999:280) Rapport and Dawson (1998) also write anthropologically about the fundamentality of movement through the material and immaterial world in establishing relationships, which enable us to understand the world.

A common theme amongst the people I have spoken to is the sense of freedom that comes with movement. The continuous cruiser's way of life is not always something that people aim for, sometimes it is a necessary way to start off living on a boat because of the poor availability and cost of permanent moorings in London, but it quickly becomes part of the joy of living aboard and the ability to move around freely becomes essential to wellbeing. As Matt said, 'I love it, being in all these different places, I get nervous being in a spot for too long. I lived in my last flat for 10 years but now I'm like "we gotta move!"' Once this way of life is experienced, people often say that going back to living in a flat or house is unimaginable. When I asked David to explain why he found it so liberating he found it hard to put into words, first mentioning finances and then he said, 'the main thing is...as you know...the things that you see...the sky, the constant

beauty...like tonight the sky is like just...the moon coming up over the weir...exquisite...unbelievable...never stops'.

I also felt voiced a tension between having to be in the city for work or family, and the desire for space and freedom outside of the speed and noise. The space of a flat or house was described as worse because it is closed off from the world and therefore isolating. The need for our own space is not always about a private space to be able to shut out the world, but rather a way to connect back to the world. When David discussed leaving central London for the Thames he said, 'I needed to get out on the Thames, I couldn't deal with London anymore, I needed to get out. I found it claustrophobic, the city not the boat. It can be quite claustrophobic. It's a vibrant city but it can be a soul-less city. Nothing goes very deep.' This touches on the non-place described by Auge (2008) and many others along this trajectory of thought.

During several of my conversations I was struck by a sense of feeling out of place in the city. Moving onto a boat seemed to give a sense of belonging somewhere, having your own personal space while being within a community that is open and accepting. Finally feeling at ease through the freedom of movement. David said,

People just don't respect what they have around them enough. We need the time to think. The world we live in, water gives us space to think and breath and be. Being on the water gives us space to relax. It's a choice between time and money, we need to take advantage of being able to do things and enjoy where we are. I bought a boat to live cheaply and because I'm open to what's around me it opened my eyes to something magical.

It was hard for anyone to pin down exactly why they felt they needed to move but it was clear that it formed part of their understanding of themselves and was intrinsic to their comfort of home. Millie, perhaps touched on it, 'I am a traveller. I feel cramped and ill at ease when I can't move at whim. I can't imagine living in a land house ever again, certainly not for the period of a tenancy let alone the time it takes to pay a mortgage!' Often people ask about how you manage when you have to continually move but Millie poignantly said, 'It's not a big decision to make.' Showing that rather than a burden movement is instead liberating. De Certeau (1984) writes of movement as a subversive act that counterbalances the imposed order of the city to appropriate space in its own way. Often the people on the ground do not understand why or how they do things but acts take power back. The 'tactics' of everyday life are seen as a political act, and Jensen et al (2009) take this conception to consider the *spaces* of movement and flows, the 'armatures' of the city, as political and meaningful:

Urban mobility is much more than transport. Furthermore, we would argue that not only does a large part of our contemporary urban everyday life take place in armatures and

between nodes but also that the quality of the interaction (or its potential) is underestimated, both as a social environment of meaningful interaction, but also as a new public domain creating cultures of movement. (2009:149)

Therefore identities and relationships are reciprocally built through the movements of the individual and the city. As Knowles writes, 'People are the sum of their journeys' (Knowles 2010:375).

An image of the city through movement and navigation

Massey argues that as static time is impossible due to the continuous production of the new, then the space that describes that time cannot be static either. The possibilities of new technologies have compressed space-time and 'The link between culture and place, it is argued, is being ruptured' (1992:5). This does not act to homogenize cultures but to link local cultures more directly to the global. If the identity of a local place is formed out of the specific interrelated social connections, which are able to take place at that particular location, and these social relations spread wider than that specific place, then the continual production of those relations is inevitable (Massey 1994:168). We always understand and identify a place with elsewhere because of these interrelations so a place is never a single spot and identity. Place becomes the social, political and economic relations which are fluid, multiple and contested rather than geographically fixed units. Home is not simply a fixed place.

The rivers and canals are like a street or neighbourhood, with their own personality, that stretch from east to west. The image of the city that is formed through moving up and down as it passes between boroughs, through parks, London Zoo, past mansions or through council estates, the backs of industrial areas or new developments fronting the water is unique. The act of navigating through the city requires particular skills for each journey as we must negotiate people, transport systems, weather, and we each build up a repertoire of coping strategies and mind maps. The spaces of these movements become just as important as the destinations and the city is (re)created by the everyday acts of the journey. The journey *is* the neighbourhood, and movement is an integral part of dwelling, not its opposite.

Matt explained his discovery of London during his first year on the boat,

I didn't grow up in London, but I can help people get around. It took probably the greater part of a year piecing together all the different neighbourhoods I lived in. The canal is connected...Piecing that all together, living in different areas, you know more of the city than

people that grew up in the city. When you go to a mooring spot for the first time you gotta find your launderette, you gotta find where you can do your shopping, you gotta find your station. So I had to do that search every time we moved to get around. I've learned and pieced together all of these neighbourhoods going through the north part of London on the canals. I love it, being in all these different places.

Not only do we piece together the different neighbourhoods in London, but knowing where facilities are, such as water points, bins and sewage disposal points, is key and affects the journey. Knowing distances between locks and tunnels, as well as how to use the locks and navigate through different sections of canal, separates the city into sections of time. For instance, Islington tunnel separates the East End from central and west London. And a knowledge of where you are able to turn your boat around for a return journey dictates where you may go next. Although not so important on the canals, being able to read the rivers current is crucial to your safety on the Thames. So you build up a set of skills, which allows you to navigate the city and life on board. Matt explains it like this:

So you have to be able to adapt and be strong enough to live without some of the comforts that you've grown accustomed to when living on land. You gotta be able to manage your life and manage your power just to survive, to live. A friend of mine described it as in life its either time or money. So to live in a flat in London you spend a lot of money, to live cheaper in a boat, in the canals, you gotta spend a lot of time, you gotta be able to spend the time to do the things you gotta do in life.

Recreating community

Within work on movement, the 'nomad' often comes to the fore as the contemporary subject in constant flux and flow, often drawing on the work of Deleuze and Guattari. Fuller even wrote of the difference in mind-set between the 'sailor' and the 'landlubber' where 'to the landsman "the East" and "the West" are places, to the sailorman they are directions in which he may move' (1963:120). However, this nomadic theory has been criticised as raising the nomad to a heroic figure free from all ties. Ahmed highlights the point that some literature seeks to combine the actual experience of migration/nomadism with the metaphor of migration/nomadism. Migratory subjects may not simply defy law and convention by living outside of it, but find themselves reclaiming 'space and identity in their refusal to inhabit a particular space, in their very transgression of the law of home.' (Ahmed 1999:336)

Work on mobilities often fall into categories of either the sedentary or the nomadic but the reality is not so clear-cut. Avtar Brah (1997) highlights the different ways 'home' is spoken about in diaspora studies where it is both 'a mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination' as well as 'the lived experience of a locality. Its sounds and smells, its heat and dust...as mediated by the historically specific everyday of social relations.' (1997:192) It is useful to understand how 'the concept of diaspora places the discourse of 'home' in creative tension, inscribing a homing desire while simultaneously critiquing discourse of fixed origins.' (1997:192)

This tension is evident in the community that has built up on the waterways, but the intersections of leaving and returning journeys have combined with the sociality of life on the water to create a sense of community. A two week stop in a crowded area can be enough to form friendships, and you will inevitably pass again. With a diverse range of people on the water the thing which brings a sense of community is of course life on board, and understanding the difficulties and practicalities. Millie spoke of her enjoyment of this,

On boats we'll eat breakfast together, be offered tea or a glass of wine as we moor up – and as a result, friendships grow, friendships that are both utterly solid and yet....transient....because we move as individuals according to our own plans and whims – and meet again as friends the next time we are nearby. I'm happy to lend a hand or an ear to many but I need their help too! Someone to look out for Roe [her boat] whilst I'm away, someone to help lift something I can't manage on my own or to pull her into a difficult mooring when I've done ten hours at the helm and am shattered. I think my mum perhaps put it best when she said "I don't have to worry for your safety anymore."

"Why not?"

"Because you all look out for each other, if you scream, I know someone will come running."

Of course it is not one cohesive community, and not all desire such strong associations with neighbours, but despite this there is an overwhelming sense that there will always be someone nearby to help. With modern technology many communities now are not physical, and the ability to remain in contact through phone, email, Facebook and mailing lists is important, particularly in this transient way of life. Many connect to stay in touch, pass information about canal or lock closures, and more frequently at the moment, boat break in's.

Control of Movement

With an increase in mobilities has also come an increase in control mechanisms. The borders of nation states have become sites of security and the access to free movement has become highly unequal. The modern nation state defends its boundaries in order to retain its resources, its individual characteristics, its labour power and ultimately it's 'most cherished ideal: social order.' (De Genova, 2010:58). The global fear of terrorism since 9/11 has further restricted movement and given states a legal framework for this control. Control of movement is also encountered within state boundaries, as high levels of surveillance and tracking are employed (both physically and electronically) so are devices to control the way we move and linger in public places increasingly installed.

The freedom of movement, as an inherently unpredictable and definitively open-ended precondition for human self-determination, can only ever be a perpetual and troublesome affront to the self-anointed sovereignty of state power. It manifests a restless and inassimilable alterity busily working both within and against state power's most cherished ideal: social order. Thus the freedom of movement supplies a defiant reminder that the creative powers of human life, and the sheer vitality of its productive potential, must always exceed every political regime. (De Genova 2010:58-59)

As I mentioned earlier, the possibility that the mooring regulations will change is constantly on people's minds. At present, most mooring spots along the towpath (excluding private marinas) in London permit a 2 week stay, although some such as Paddington basin only allow for 1 week. There are mooring officers working for BW/CRT, who regularly patrol and take note of the movements of boats, and issue penalty notices if they feel a boat has not been fulfilling it's licence agreement. Sometimes this is consistent, sometimes not. For example over the winter there were few patrol notices issued in certain areas so people became complacent, and then a flurry arrived in Spring. The mooring rules were also changed during the Olympics and an exclusion zone was created through central London stretching from Little Venice (Paddington) in the West through to Clapton in the North East, under the auspices of controlling movement for security. No movement without prior permission was allowed for a 10 week period (with a fine for non compliance threatened), and the moorings which are usually freely available for all boats were instead sold at a cost of between £100-£300 a week. Random boat searches took place on several occasions. This meant that a large number of boaters who usually live within London were forced to move outside of this exclusion zone where there were fewer facilities (the nearest BW water supply and rubbish collection was over an hours cruise away) and, due to the large numbers being concentrated in a small area, boats were cramped and moored three

abreast. Although boaters still had their physical homes to live in, the way of life that I have been discussing was prohibited for a period of time.

CONCLUSION

With freedom of movement comes a freedom of spirit and mind, an ability to think outside of the social norms and react to circumstances in a way that embraces difference rather than relying on habitual responses. We are not bounded bodies looking out onto the world, but are part of our environment, formed by the social and physical relationships between self and other, self and place; in turn affecting the world around us through our actions and thoughts, so that our struggles against any restraint of freedom influence the environment. Places and people are fluid, never returning to the same place and never being the same person to return. But we need to be aware of this three way dialectic.

I have been constantly reminded that we all desire a place of comfort and strength. The way we go about creating this is individual to everyone but is made up of our past, our relationships and our desires. Our identity is formed by a constant wandering mentally and physically, and by the crossings and interactions with other people's meanderings, so the story of our lives is constantly moving. We each have favourite places to be, favourite objects or favourite people. Somewhere amongst all of these we can hope to find something to call home. I agree with Jackson when he writes, 'at-homeness suggests an elusive balance which people try to strike between being acted upon and acting, between acquiescing in the given and choosing their own fate. And this existential struggle always entails political questions of equity and justice' (1995:123).

There is a traditional perception of home as a fixed and bounded house but this is a very singular Western perspective. In the UK this is perpetuated not only by the state and media to continue the path of neo liberal capital accumulation, but also through an expectation of social norms. The forces of global capital have an impact on all areas of our lives, sometimes visibly and sometimes hidden. Within the management of the inland waterways these can be seen in the impact on the towpaths and surrounding environment by building and development, which alters the atmosphere and accessibility of the resource: A space for human interaction and enjoying a breather from the city. Invisibly, the lives of boaters are affected, particularly continuous cruisers, who rely on the waterways for survival. Sometimes decisions are made which have a great impact on a way of life, without an understanding of the importance of what makes up that life.

Boaters live both within and outside of the cities flows, they create a space of their own to inhabit. From their perspective London becomes a very different city as its rhythms and changes are felt through the movement of water, the progression of the seasons and the sounds

of the neighbourhood all infiltrating a 'kind of home'. The complexities of life on board and the people who make up the community have a positive impact outside of their homes as they strive for an enjoyable way of life in the city. However, the sometimes difficult relationship between boaters and other towpath users highlights how alternative ways of life are not always accepted and appreciated. Matt spoke about it like this, 'Well it varies with the knowledge of the people on the other side. We all know about the world out there but they don't all know us, they don't understand us...they don't always understand or equate our house and our living with theirs. And I think if they did the relationship would be a lot better.'

There are wider ramifications of extending a more open discussion of home as people struggle to find their way across cities and continents. Hardt and Negri (2009) see the metropolis as 'the site of biopolitical production because it is the space of the common, of people living together, sharing resources, communicating, exchanging goods and ideas...Biopolitical production is transforming the city, creating a new metropolitan form'. Combining this with Jackson's thoughts that, 'Home is always lived as a relationship, a tension. Sometimes it is between the place one starts out from and the places one puts down roots. Sometimes it is between the experience of a place when one is young and the experience of the same place when one is old. Home, like any word we use to cover a particular field of experience, always begets its own negation' (1995:122). Social reality is complex and scattered with contradictions, but a fuller attempt could be made to capture the multiplicity of the world.

'Every time you pull the ropes up and start the engine to move off you just feel so lucky.' David

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